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Integrity

INTEGRITY, a journal published by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be 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.

hymn, "God of Grace and God of Glory" our marching orders as we herald the gospel of redemption into the ears and hearts of failing and hurting people:

"God of grace and God of glory,
On Thy people pour Thy power;
Crown Thine ancient Church's story;
Bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage.
For the facing of this hour,
For the facing of this hour.

Save us from weak resignation
To the evils we deplore;
Let the search for Thy salvation
Be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage
Serving Thee whom we adore,
Serving Thee whom we adore,"
Amen.

References

1. Henlee H. Barnette, "Alcoholism," *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, Ed. Carl F. H. Henry. 1973, p. 15.
2. Paul M. Insel and Walton T. Roth, *Core Concepts in Health*. 1982, p. 237.
3. Anderson Spickard, M.D. and Barbara R. Thomson, *Dying for a Drink*. 1985, p. 17.
4. Barnette, *Ibid*. p. 15.

Joseph Jones has served in various capacities with *Integrity* for more than a decade; has served with the Troy Church of Christ for the past eighteen years both as preaching minister and now as elder. He and his wife, Geneva, have six children and four grandchildren. Dr. Jones has taught in three colleges, written widely for various journals. He is a psychologist, marriage and family therapist associated with the Meredith Outpatient Psychiatric Clinic, Farmington Hills, Michigan for the past twelve years.

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"Dying For A Drink"

Few personal and social problems are more subtle or devastating in their nature and consequences than alcoholism and other drug related behavior; yet the Christian churches have generally seemed almost awed and helpless in addressing such behavior either in the church or in society in general. Few congregations have made any serious investment of money, gifts, or programs to attack the problem of substance abuse; rather we have willingly turned it over to the professionals and lay organizations to deal with this monumental task. Why is this so? Has not the church of Jesus Christ some message of hope, help, and direction to those caught up in this tragic life style?

In October, 1985, the Troy Church of Christ, Troy, Michigan, made an initial effort to deal in a modest way with the problem of substance abuse and the church's responsibility. We regret that our primary resource person for that seminar, Mr. John K. Hooper, MSW, Meredith Counseling Centers, Farmington Hills, was unable because of other pressing responsibilities, to share in this particular issue of *Integrity*; but many of his ideas so challengingly presented will be recognized in the present articles by those who were privileged to share his presentations. We offer this initial issue on the subject with the hope and prayer that it may stimulate such response as to necessitate future issues with much more in-depth treatment; and further, may this modest beginning prick the hearts and consciences of many church leaders to reassess their responsibilities to face this national condition with the gospel of redemption.

Jerry and Patricia Moore-Johnson addressed this subject realistically and yet compassionately with their first article for *Integrity* entitled, "Straight Talk About Substance Abuse." Jerry owns and directs a substance abuse clinic in Royal Oak, Michigan, while Patti is an elementary school teacher who has had wide experience in working with children of early ages who are variously confronted with this problem. This deeply committed Christian couple have a real message to share with young people, parents, and the church about our Christian responsibilities in dealing with substance abuse.

Myrt and Dick Martin conducted one of the sessions in the Troy seminar on the theme, "Sensitive Care for Families and

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Straight Talk About Substance Abuse

JERRY MOORE-JOHNSON, M.A.
PATRICIA MOORE-JOHNSON, M.A.T.
Waterford, Michigan

The abuse of mind-altering substances has unquestionably reached epidemic proportions among people of all ages. Whether the abused substances are legal or illegal, the devastating effects on the individual and family are measured in terms of divorce, poverty, crime, mental illness, sickness, and death.

The disease of substance addiction is experienced by families of any race, color, or religious background. Addiction is not determined by an individual's age, paycheck, or social position. Quite simply, the problem of substance addiction involves everyone. Thus, the responsibility of addressing this social illness also involves everyone, including the church.

Substance addiction greatly affects our society. Nearly one in four Americans experience the effects of substance addiction, through personal use, addicted family members, friends, or business associates. Statistics indicate that 67% of all high school students smoke marijuana at least one time per month and upwards of 93% drink alcohol over the same period of time. Of this 93% who drink, nearly one-third drink weekly. Cocaine usage among high school students is at nearly 25%.

These alarming realities do not start when a child reaches high school age. There is mounting evidence suggesting that substance use and abuse begins in elementary school. In a recent survey of high school students by one of the authors, approximately 30% reported taking their first drink or using their first illegal drug by the age of 10. Combine these startling trends with the estimated 20 million adult substance

addicts, and the dilemma we face becomes clear, if not overwhelming.

To the general public several myths have impeded progress in addressing this enormous problem. These myths have been perpetrated over the years and serve to keep the public ignorant of the truth and many borderline addicts out of treatment until the problem becomes severe.

The main myth serving this purpose concerns the class of people at risk to addiction. Many have long believed that only lower class, minority, or the poor are at high risk when in fact, only 3% of the total addict population fits the stereotypical "skid row bum" role. Approximately 40% of the addict population are in the "middle class" and above. Particularly with cocaine addiction, one must have access to large sums of money to indulge regularly. Substance addiction is truly a disease for all people. Nearly everyone is a candidate for addiction, your neighbor, brother, aunt, accountant, boss, or minister. By assuming, "It can't happen to me," or "Not Mary, she has a good family and job," a majority of substance addicts are able to continue indulging unnoticed until sickness or tragedy strikes.

Another myth that stops many from getting involved is that an addict has to "hit bottom" before he or she will accept help. This myth helps many turn their backs and wait for tragedy to occur. While it is true that a person cannot be forced to accept help, there are alternatives to waiting until severe damage is done.

Perhaps the greatest myth that may stop the church from getting actively involved in help-

ing is that only a former addict can effectively help a current addict. While having experienced this painful process can help in relating to an addict, it is not a requirement. If this line of thinking were true, someone could not help a suicidal individual unless he or she had actually been suicidal. This, of course, is not true with suicide, depression, divorce, or child abuse, nor is it true with substance abuse. Obviously, intensive treatments are to be left to trained professionals, but initial intervention and referral can be effectively addressed by the church.

There appear to be three important areas that the church is excellently equipped to address. These are spirituality, prevention and education, and helping the family before, during, and after treatment.

Spirituality

Perhaps the most obvious result of substance addiction is the absolute "spiritual bankruptcy" of the addict. Addicts usually have little or no faith or beliefs that help them to survive. The addict's life becomes based on an alternative belief. This belief is that he or she cannot survive without a drink or a drug. God, church, and prayer are taboo subjects to the addict. This spiritual bankruptcy is best illustrated by the statement, "If God is so wonderful how come I'm in such bad shape?" or "God is punishing me for. . .". Substance addicts mostly view the church as condemning, judgmental, and nonforgiving. To the addict, the only answer for pain is more sedatives or stimulants. Even those addicts outwardly involved in the church secretly doubt the goodness of God, and compound their problem with an intense guilt about not being "good Christians." It is the authors' opinion that the church can become a most valuable tool in helping these addicted individuals and families come to terms with religion and God. It is the duty of the church to be open minded and nonjudgmental towards the addict. Many of these people are agnostic or atheistic. However, a faith in a higher power, God, is the single most important concept for successful recovery from substance addiction. Addicts live with the complex paradox of denying the very principle they need the most

. . . God. It is the church's role to begin addressing this population with acceptance and love, not being concerned with how they believe, how they live, or whether they practice their faith the way the church wants them to. The important point is that the addict and his or her family be exposed to unconditional Christian love, that is most concerned with the goodness of human beings and not with worship style, ethnic background, or financial status. An addict will tell horrifying stories of pain, crime, misdeeds, and sin. However, when trust develops and recovery begins the addict will also enrich with a sincerity and honesty that most have not experienced. This area of spirituality is the one that best fits the many resources of today's church.

Prevention and Education

The church is an excellent arena for public education and prevention activities. These activities need to be directed at the neighborhood and community of the church, as well as the actual body of the church. Without these activities, many of our Christian brothers and sisters will be lost to the devastation of substance addiction.

The church has an obligation to provide appropriate and timely programs for the public. This includes educational seminars, counseling, recreational activities, and spiritual consultation. Our obligation is rooted in the scripture to carry the Good News to the unbelieving. In our times this not only includes the Good News of the gospel, but also the Good News about the issues affecting us all. Today's society is faced with many serious illnesses, and spreading the News must be expanded to include the topic of substance addiction. Many addicts are afraid to approach the professional community or they do not have the money or insurance to provide themselves with the help they require. The church can be an important resource for education and in connecting these troubled individuals and families with the help they so desperately need. Education, prevention, counseling, and referral are all areas that the church has an obligation to address and provide for the community and the body of the church.

Family

Substance addiction affects the family as well as the individual. Everyone in relationship with the addict suffers from the devastating effects of this disease. Family members adapt to the addiction cycle and have their roles, emotions, and activities dictated to them by the addict. Every member of the family suffers with the addict. Help, therefore, must be accorded the entire family. However, many professional and community treatment programs do not adequately address the remaining family members. The family members get "left behind" in the growth process of recovery. This fact helps account for the surprising fact that more families divorce after the onset of sobriety than during active addiction.

The church can become a refuge and growth center for these desperate family members. Though the addict is not normally an easy target for the church, the remaining family members are. They are usually more open to anything that may help ease their pain and calm their confusion. Again, the church has an opportunity to provide nonjudgmental, unconditional Christian love to people in need. Many families can be saved if the church were to utilize the wonderful resources available in a concerned christian community.

Conclusions

It is an obvious understatement that substance addiction is a major problem confronting our

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Friends of Alcoholics;" and they have given us the essence of that informative and challenging session in this article. Both Myrt and husband Dick know whereof they speak in addressing the complexities and hurts of alcoholism; they have themselves been hurt and suffered and healed. Now they are the source of hope and encouragement for many who seek their counsel.

The present writer has attempted a rather broad approach to the problem of substance abuse, but alcoholism in particular, looking at its subtle complexities, the tendency of families

society. It is also obvious that the professional community and other organizations involved directly with the problem are unable to adequately address this problem thoroughly. There are many gaps that the church can begin to fill.

It is apparent that the three areas mentioned earlier are all interrelated and dependent upon the ability of the church to provide adequate outreach in the community. The Good News of Jesus and fruits of a Christian faith and lifestyle are paramount to the successful recovery of individuals and families from the depths of substance addiction. The church has the key to unlocking the secrets of a happy life. These are secrets only because most of these individuals and families actively avoid Jesus. It is the church's job to mobilize the abundant energies of the body and begin addressing this most destructive problem in our society.

References and footnotes can be acquired by contacting the authors at:

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Jerry Moore-Johnson holds the M.A. degree in Counseling, owns and directs the Center For Family Development, Inc., Royal Oak — a substance abuse clinic, where he touches many troubled lives each week. Patricia Moore-Johnson, M.A.T., is an elementary school teacher, with wide experience in helping younger children whose lives or families are involved with drugs and alcohol. Both are members of the Troy Church of Christ, Troy, Michigan.

and the church to enter into what is now being vividly described as "the conspiracy of silence." I have affirmed that the church has at its disposal adequate resources if appropriately utilized to address this social evil, to bring to bear nothing less than the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead—if God's power can raise dead persons, it can surely enable us to overcome alcoholism! Why have we remained so helpless, hopeless, and despairing? We welcome your response.

Joseph F. Jones, President
Integrity Board of Trustees

Sensitive Care For Families and Friends of Alcoholics

MYRT MARTIN

Rochester, Michigan

The worship service was over. People were smiling, laughing, talking and warmly greeting each other as they leisurely made their way from the auditorium to the church lobby. Composing herself, she looked around at all the familiar, happy faces and tried to smile and ignore the ripping sensation that was raging through her mind and body.

During the service she had made a valiant attempt to participate in the singing, thoughtfully observe the Lord's Supper and be attentive during the morning sermon, the prayers and thanksgiving. However, her mind had flip-flopped through most of it. Then, listening to the prayer requests and thanksgivings, the tears, which had been just below the surface, finally brimmed over. It took every ounce of her will power to keep her body from racking with sobs.

This is what she thought. This is what she felt, "Dear God, you're helping all of these people. What about me? Have you forgotten that I'm here? Am I so bad that I'm not worth your time or consideration?" She was filled with anger, jealousy, hopelessness and a whole rash of other feelings that are not considered "Christian."

As she made her way down the aisle, past small informal groups engaged in conversation she greeted them with the usual, short, noncommittal comments, acknowledged those sent her way and then recognized how alone she felt. She had been a member of this congregation for six years and knew most of the members by name. Still, she had this overpowering feeling of aloneness.

One friend, in whom she had confided the cause of her pain, noticed the stress that was behind her false front. Being a perceptive and caring person the friend approached her. "Do

you wonder why God is doing all of this for others and not for you?"

She wanted to clench her teeth and scream, "Yes!!" Instead she gave a controlled nod.

To which her friend responded, "He will, my dear, He will."

The "she" in this personal experience is me.

Did He Hear?

My friend was right. God did hear my cries. He knew my pain. He did help me through a horribly terrible time. He used many good people to deliver his messages and guidance. Many were avowed Christians. Most of His messengers, however, were not from my own religious community and I so desperately needed them, because of our common spiritual background. It wasn't that they didn't want to help, they just didn't know how and I didn't know how to ask. That's one of the saddest things that happens to a person in real trouble . . . they don't know how or what to ask for.

Fortunately, God led me to people who could and did provide what was necessary and they have become friends for life.

Why Not in My Christian Community?

The above personal experience was mine, but it is not unique to me. It could have been that of many people. As God led me through my recovery I became again aware of my need for the understanding and support of those in my Christian community. Why wasn't it here? Certainly not because they are unloving or unaccepting. Perhaps they are not aware of the need that exists. Perhaps they feel they are not equipped to assist in real stress cases. I felt these stop-

pers could and should be removed. If I saw the need and a way to meet it, there would probably be others. . . it might be a mustard seed start, but if only one or two find peace through the sensitivity of fellow Christians it is worth the effort. The Church community can be a place of sanctuary and understanding.

There is a Need

There are more of our fellow Christians than we want to believe who sit through worship services suffering much inner pain and are unable to benefit from the blessings there. In each case the source of the stress may be very different. But there is stress, nevertheless, getting in the way of their lives and their service to God and His people.

In my particular case the source was the effects of having been intimately associated with some primary people in my life who were afflicted with the disease of alcoholism. It is from this vantage point that I submit this article. (It should be pointed out that most of the suggestions offered can be applied, with slight modification, to other areas of deep hurt.)

One does not have to be an alcoholic to be a victim of the disease. Anyone who closely interacts, or has interacted over a period of time with an alcoholic is a prime candidate for its devastating effects. This includes friends, family members, business associates, adult children of alcoholics and so on.

The disease produces effects of such a nature that a velvet trap subtly engulfs all who are close to it. It takes advantage of all the good intentions, love, caring and helpfulness of friends and relatives. It lures them into an impossible entanglement of involvement. Once in the trap, the disease with all of its ramifications becomes the focal point for existence. It is all consuming.

Even though they go about the business of their daily lives, the problem sits like a dark, heavy weight in the back of their minds. "Will they be drinking when I get home? Are the kids all right? Why do they drink if they love me? Am I a bad person? What can I do to get them to stop? Why am I so afraid?"

It is no wonder that it is difficult to give one's full attention to the church services, or anything

else. But especially in church, composure is difficult. It is there we are made aware of God's love and caring. There, it is difficult to understand why one's life is so full of misery and messed up, especially when we believe in Him and are trying to please Him. Hence, the pitiful but very real cry escapes from the heart, "Where are you, God?" And God answers, "I am here. I hear your prayer. I know your pain and I send you help. Look to my son, He speaks to me for you. Look to my Holy Spirit; He will comfort you. Look to my word, it will guide you. Look to my people, they will sensitively support you."

Then, God's people ask, "How can I be sensitive to this kind of hurt when I have no reasonable understanding of the situation?"

We Can Minister

Who of us hasn't had some real hurt in our lives? Very few? None? There is a blessing that follows hurt. We are opened up to a clearer realization of others' pain. This is our preparation for a very special kind of ministry.

Sometimes we have a problem with individual pain. We tend to get too technical about it. We want to categorize it: pain from the death of a loved one, pain from a financial disaster, pain from the loss of a love, pain from divorce and so it goes. Of course, one who has suffered, for example, a death, can relate more specifically with another who has had a similar loss.

However, pain is pain and all pain has some common elements, a few of which are: grief, anger, aloneness, despair, resentment. The recovery from all pain likewise has common elements.

Once we have recovered from our pain it is easy to forget what it really was like. It is important to remember. **An Exercise:** Think of a time in your life when you were experiencing your darkest hour. Allow yourself to re-experience all of the pain of that time as you read the following. Read it slowly. Take time to remember and to feel.

- 1) Remember the desperation and the hopelessness.
- 2) Remember the anger, fear and frustration.

- 3) Remember the mental gymnastics you went through to think of a way to make it right, or better.
- 4) Remember how it weighed on your mind no matter where you were or what you were doing.
- 5) Remember how you would wake up in the morning and the pain would creep back into consciousness like a black smothering cloud.

This memory, this re-experience is part of your equipment for ministry. You can relate to those in pain.

Those who live with, or have lived with the disease of alcoholism find themselves in this state of mind *all of the time*. There is no relief, in and of themselves. Left to their own resources they develop their own methods of coping in order to survive. They lose their identity, sense of purpose, self-esteem and much more. They need help. They need practical Christian loving help.

Here's the How

The following suggestions come from my own experience. They have worked for my husband and me. Consider them and try to visualize yourself as carrying them out.

- 1) Develop a desire to minister. (If you feel you can't, stop here.)
- 2) Know that you can relate to pain — you have experienced it.
- 3) Watch for signs of stress in your fellow Christians: a) tears during services, b) repeatedly leaving the service before it is over, c) gradual but regular absences from services, d) vagueness in communication, as if distracted, e) repeated excuses for not associating themselves with large or small social functions, f) unexplained shortness of temper. There are many more, but as you get accustomed to observing and listening your sensitivity will be sharpened.
- 4) Listen carefully to what is being said and the manner in which it is offered.
- 5) Be sensitively bold. Approach your friend and let it be known that you recognize that they are under stress.

They may be timid about speaking of the real problem, due to the taboo that has been cast on alcoholism and Christianity, so don't expect it right away. You are showing that you care.

- 6) Let them know they are loved. Tell them that God loves them and it's not His plan that His people suffer. Tell them He will help them as He did you and that part of that help is giving us each other. (Romans 15:1; Galatians 6:2)
- 7) Offer to be their special friend. Let them know how important friends were to you during your time of stress and let them know you are willing to walk through this with them. They don't have to be alone.
 - a) **Clarification of a friend:** Being a friend does not mean you will, or should solve their problems. You are there for support, to keep reminding them that they do have choices and that even though it may not seem like it, God is working in their lives. You are there as a child of God being their friend, listening to their cares, providing feedback when it is appropriate until gradually they become stronger with more faith in themselves and ultimately in God. Then, they, with God's help, can plot a course of recovery. You will be there and you will marvel at the wonderful way God works in the lives of his people. You will count it a blessing that He allowed you to be a part of it. I speak from personal experience.
 - b) **A word of caution:** Sometimes a kind word or a hug is all that is needed. However, there are times when more is required. Once the offer of special friendship is made, be prepared to follow through with the commitment. It will involve your time, your energy and your prayers.

If you are not able or willing to

make this kind of personal investment, then, for your sake and theirs, don't offer. Feel no guilt. We all answer to different callings.

8) Maintain your interest.

In many cases when you exercise suggestion 5 you get stopped cold with "Oh, I'm fine. No, there's no real problem. I'm just having a bad day." So where do you go from there? Don't be discouraged. It may be that you are not the right person to help. It may also be that they are being very cautious before pursuing the friendship. They have many fears and trust must be firmly established.

You have opened a door for help. Keep contact with them by phone calls, a coffee date or whatever. Let your interest extend beyond the usual small talk and chatting that occurs on Sunday mornings. Get to know them. It isn't necessary to always discuss the problem. Find common areas of interest. In not too long a time, God will make it known to you if this is a case in which you can minister. He will either open doors or He will close them.

Whether your gesture seems to be accepted or not it is important for you to initiate the contacts. Remember, you are dealing with a person who has been hurt deeply and is not always able to ask for help because of the intensity of the situation. You are the one who can be objective.

9) Reach out to other resources.

As the relationship develops, confidence and trust will naturally grow. You will become aware that more may be needed than you have to offer. For instance, it may become evident that professional counseling is required, or that an association with a self-help group would be beneficial.

Recognize that you will not be able to

fill all of the gaps. Recognize, also, that God works through many sources. Here are a few:

- 1) a professional alcoholism counselor
 - 2) Alcoholic's Anonymous for the alcoholic
 - 3) Al-Anon for those who are friends or family of the alcoholic
 - 4) another person who is associated with A-A or Al-Anon
 - 5) self-help books (Contact a religious book store. There are many good books written by Christian authors as well as others who are very capable.)
- 10) Approach the Church leadership for support. The church is made up of real people living in the real world, dealing with real problems and stresses. If we are to be "the light of the world," we must face issues that have not always been comfortably encountered by the church as a whole.

The church leadership can set the stage for getting rid of many of our taboo subjects. My husband and I are fortunate to belong to a congregation where today's issues are confronted with prayers for guidance in an effort to reach souls caught up in life's dilemmas.

Jesus turned away no one. How can we do any less? Our fellowship must create an atmosphere of acceptance for all people so we can have the opportunity to help them find "a better way" by actively showing them love. If they experience our love they will eventually come to know that it is God's love they are feeling.

The church leadership is in a position to be aware of difficulties in the lives of their parishioners. In addition to the prayers and counseling they provide, a further act of caring would be to put these people in touch with the members of the congregation who have had similar experiences. This needs to be more than just the offering of a name to contact. Damaged souls may be reluctant to approach one with whom

they have only a Sunday morning nodding acquaintance. Arranging a lunch date, or coffee with the church leader and the two parties could be enough to stimulate further involvement. Much is accomplished in informal, unpressured conversation over food and drink.

11) **Avoid "quick-cure" answers.**

"If only you had enough faith in what God can do. . ." or "With more will power you could overcome. . ." or "Just pray and you will get your answers. . ." These are simplistic statements and there is truth in each of them, but they will not gain the results we're looking for. In fact, they can drive the person further into despair. They are already in the throes of guilt, low self-esteem and spiritual inadequacy. David A. Seamands addressed this in his book, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*. In reference to a question that was put to the apostle Paul in Romans 6:1 that had to do with law and grace, which was a new concept for the Romans, Dr. Seamands writes,

" . . . certain areas of our lives need special healing by the Holy Spirit. Because they are not subject to ordinary prayer, discipline, and will-power, they need a special kind of understanding, an unlearning of past, wrong programming, and a relearning and reprogramming transformation by the renewal of our minds." (pages 13-14)

Jesus, Paul and others accepted people where they were and taught them. They didn't expect them to pass the final examina-

tion before they had taught the course; i.e. full acceptance of God's ultimate truths and promises.

A Personal Note

Both my husband and I have lived with the effects of the disease of alcoholism. We know how disrupted life can be. We also know that God and all of His earthly and heavenly resources can transform lives. He did ours.

There is a scripture that gives us much enlightenment, comfort and an answer to "Why" life is sometimes very difficult for even Christian people. ". . . we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." (Romans 5:3-5 RSV.)

God didn't cause our problems, we did, by the choices we made. But He did bring light out of our darkness and gave us a great blessing. We experienced His healing and we have been privileged to watch that healing occur in the lives of others. He has, also, led people to us who have accepted our ministry. He will do the same for you. It is a highly rewarding walk we have with God.

We invite you to seriously consider the ideas expressed in this article. To quote our good friend Joseph Jones, "have the Courage to Care." Then, exercise your God given sensitivity with positive and productive action. You will get back much more than you give.

Myrt Martin is a professional educator, now retired from teaching in the school system of Troy, Michigan. She and husband Dick are involved in the field of substance abuse, and are active members of Troy Church of Christ, Troy, Michigan.

Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside and from former *Integrity* editor, Hoy Ledbetter and current *Integrity* board president, Joseph F. Jones.

Alcoholism and the Gospel of Redemption

JOSEPH F. JONES

Southfield, Michigan

Alcoholism may be defined as "a chronic and pathological condition caused by ingesting too much alcohol into the human body," while an alcoholic may be described as "an excessive drinker who has become so physically and psychologically dependent on alcohol that he manifests mental disturbance, physical deterioration, and the inability to function adequately in society."¹ In their very excellent work, *Core Concepts in Health*, Drs. Paul M. Insel and Walton T. Roth suggest some of the alcohol-related social problems in the United States. We cite these to supplement our initial definition and description of the alcoholic and alcoholism since alcoholic behavior has its undeniable consequences. (1) Alcohol-precipitated cirrhosis is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States; (2) alcohol abusers shorten their life spans by 10-12 years; (3) one-half of all traffic fatalities are associated with alcohol use; and (4) one-third of all homicides are associated with alcohol use. (5) One-half to one-third of all fatal accidents (other than traffic) are associated with alcoholic consumption, (6) one-third of all arrests are for public intoxication; (7) one-third to one-half of all crimes committed are variously related to alcoholic drinking; (8) alcohol abuse and alcoholism drain the economy of an estimated \$15 billion per year; of the total, \$10 billion is attributable to lost work time; \$2 billion is spent for health and welfare services provides to alcoholics and their families; and property damage, medical expenses, and other overhead costs account for the remaining \$3 billion; and finally, (9) one in every five persons is closely related to someone who suffers from alcohol abuse.² Here then is the person, his predicament, and some of the related consequences of his behavior; is there any real hope for the substance abuser? Is there any real help

for his predicament? Does the church of Jesus Christ have any word of redemption, or must despair and resignation reign in the presence of such evil and human hurt?

Without, at this juncture, taking into consideration the answer of the behavioral sciences, medical or clinical views, let me affirm an unqualified Biblical response: indeed there is help, there is hope, to be found in the knowledge, wisdom and power of God. There are over one hundred million persons in our country who drink alcoholic beverages; and it is estimated that ten million of these are excessive drinkers and classified as alcoholics.³ Is God concerned about this vast host of His creatures whose plight is often viewed as hopeless and whose predicament seems so helpless? Is the church simply to turn over these teeming millions to the professionals and professional/lay societies to deal with them while exempting ourselves from any significant responsibility? This is not simply a social problem, although it does have far-reaching social implications and consequences. This is a moral and spiritual problem, a challenge of immense proportions for the Christian community.

It is not the intent of this article to deal with the complicated nature of alcoholism, or to enter into that highly controverted question concerning alcoholism as sin or sickness. A concise paragraph by Dr. Henlee Barnette, however, touches several significant aspects of the problem. He writes,

"Specialists generally agree that alcoholism is a disease or at least a symptom of underlying personality disorders. A moral element is involved for God has created man as a responsible being. Therefore the alcoholic is responsible for his excessive drinking, for his actions,

The next issue of *Integrity* may prove to be a "collector's edition." We plan to feature articles from present day Restoration fathers,

and for seeking to do something about the problem. It is therefore understandable that almost all alcoholics possess a sense of guilt and wrongdoing. Perhaps alcoholism can be viewed as stemming from a cluster of factors involving both sin and sickness.¹⁴

Certainly any attempt to deal with the problem of alcoholism must reflect some basic understanding of the causative factors—the physical, psychological, and socio-cultural. We are learning much more about the biologic make-up of a person and its relationship to drinking. We are clearly aware of the numerous psychological factors present in excessive drinking, such as intense anxiety, emotional immaturity, low self-esteem, compulsiveness, a sense of guilt, a low frustration-tolerance, a feeling of isolation, and social inadequacy. When assessing the socio-cultural factors we must look at the adequacy (rather inadequacy) of family background, peer influences, social pressures, and the difficulty of an individual to adjust to environmental stresses.

But the need to consider the physical, psychological, and socio-cultural factors in no-wise precludes a sound theological approach to dealing with the problem of excessive drinking or alcoholism. Perhaps the church has too often looked for simplistic answers and panaceas to such complicated conditions in human behavior, for some isolated Bible verse which could be easily cited, and to expect that the problem would be gone. The Gospel does not imply that human problems are always simplistically solved or that God hands out cures on a four day basis. The medical model with which we are all familiar may have blurred our vision in approaching behavioral patterns. (That is, some pathological conditions of a physical nature may be diagnosed and medicated, and within a matter of a few days brought under control. Seeing the neatness of such an approach to some physical diseases, we may have concluded that alcoholism should be similarly handled. Unable to bring such a complicated condition under realistic control in a simplistic manner by appropriating a few quoted Scriptures, we may have in frustration turned the alcoholic over to

other sources for care and cure—if possible—concluding that the church really doesn't have a responsibility in such social needs.)

Recognize the Complexity of Alcoholism

It is imperative that Christian leaders recognize the real complexity of excessive drinking, or the complicated pathology of the alcoholic. It is not beyond the Christian leader's sphere of concern or responsibility to search for causative factors. How came this man or woman to drift into excessive use of alcohol? Had the church made known its concern about the total well being of the potential alcoholic—his physical, psychological, or socio-cultural needs—might such a brother or sister have come more readily and with less fear to appropriate spiritual help? Perhaps fearing rejection, or actual condemnation from church leaders, the troubled Christian turned tragically to his very inadequate and eventually destructive source of relief—alcohol.

Are there not gifted members of the Body endowed with sensitivity, perception, and caring that could form a confidential and effective group of ministering servants for the alcoholics and other substance abusers in the church? What a challenge for the churches and their leaders to provide training courses and seminars to equip better those individuals who feel such a calling yet need that additional preparation of both a technical and spiritual nature essential to effective ministering (Ephesians 4:11-12). Indeed the relevance of the Old Testament insight at this point is more than clear, "Where there is no vision (prophecy, instruction) the people perish."

Divine Affirmation of Help

With the corps of ministering servants ready to address the problem, where is the source of help? My answer is clear and resounding: *in the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead!* With great intensity the apostle Paul prayed that believers might experience "what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his

great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead. . ." (Eph. 1:19) Several distinct Greek terms are employed by the apostle to affirm the nature and availability of God's power. It is characterized with "immeasurable greatness" (magelos); here is a source of divine strength too great to measure, yet the believer can experience it in coping with life.

In the resurrection of Jesus from the dead there is God's power (dunamis), reaching into the realm of death and breathing new life into that pitifully bruised and broken body of the dead Jesus. If God's power could raise Jesus from death, can it not enable and empower the alcoholic or drug abuser to overcome his addiction and dependency on chemicals? The apostle further characterizes this power as divine energy (energeia), the Greek word sounds like our English "energy." This is not some theoretical or abstract theological concept, but rather the energy which was active in raising Jesus which is present in the believer's life to energize or give dynamic to him. The believer in the risen Lord is not helpless before the onslaughts of alcoholism, for he is energized by the Spirit of the living God indwelling his life. To the Roman Christians the apostle Paul wrote, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you." (Rom. 8:11) Finally, this power is referred to as "the working of the might of his strength" (kratous. . . ischuos). Here are words which describe the manifested strength of his might.

Having offered a second prayer in this same document, the apostle concludes with a benediction which again affirms God's power at work in the believer. "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen." What professional or human agency can make such a claim? Yet the apostle boldly affirms that power in us, *it is at work* within us. Working toward what end or purpose? Toward any

obstacle or barrier which may have come between the believer and his Lord; to overcoming any temptation with which the Christian is confronted; to providing re-enforcement through which the weakness of the believer might stand against the powers of evil. While recognizing with AA the basic proposition that the alcoholic is confronted with a problem greater than himself, it is not greater than that divine power which raised the Son of God from death to life; and He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world, that is, the evil one (I John 4:4).

Appropriating the Power

The inadequacy of the church in helping its members to cope with alcoholism is not in the absence of a source of power, but rather in our very inadequate means of helping the Christian to appropriate this power in his daily behavior. An individual may have an enormous bank account, but it must be appropriately drawn upon to enjoy its potential. One may literally continue to starve while sitting before a table of food, unless he engages in the process of eating. This resurrection power must be effectively appropriated into the daily dynamics of the believer's life if he is to benefit from it.

Now here is the rub for many Christians, for many ministers and churches; and I dare not claim to have all or even most of the answers as to how the power of God is appropriated to the believer's functioning in daily life. A few modest seminal ideas are offered to stimulate further Biblical exploration.

(1) **Claim** and then **affirm** what is yours by divine promise; for this is an established and well validated principle of life. God has told me that since the Spirit that raised up Jesus from the dead is indwelling my life, that it is at work to accomplish given needs and purposes. Whatever the believer's weakness or inadequacy, let him boldly claim the presence and power of that Spirit of God to experience victory. He may claim and affirm this divine dunamis upon rising from his bed, or arriving at work, upon completion of the day's tasks. He may witness to it in the assembly of the saints, where God may be glorified and other

believers edified by such personal testimony of the working of God.

(2) **Pray for wisdom** that this power might guide one's feet aright during every waking moment. The exhortation of Proverbs 3:3-5 finds an appropriate Christian relevance at this juncture: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your path." For the Christian to disclaim responsibility for his own behavior—whether with alcohol, drugs, or any other un-Christian life style—is to disparage and deny the very promise of God, that if we will acknowledge him in all our ways, he will direct our paths.

(3) Seek God's wisdom and power as it is mediated through the *gifts* and *experiences* of other believers. Only a brief recognition of this concept since it was introduced at an earlier juncture in this article. God certainly uses others as instruments through whom He can accomplish His purposes. The church is indeed a community of servants, equipped for ministering to the needs of one another (Eph. 4:11-14). What divine wisdom is manifested in this figure of the church as the Body of Christ, with many members and multiple gifts, varying in nature, so that all needs may be adequately met. (We have experienced this very kind of ministering in the congregation where my family and I have been privileged to share for almost two decades, where there is the equipping of some members for ministering to others in the area of substance abuse; and it is a beautiful and inspiring experience to witness such caring one for another.)

Unity Meeting

We are pleased to announce plans for a Unity Meeting to be held in Michigan, October 16-18, 1986. Leroy Garrett, author of the *Stone-Campbell Movement* and elder of the Denton, Texas Church of Christ, J. Harold Thomas, minister of the University Church of

What More Can the Church Do?

(1) The church needs to break the conspiracy of silence which has too long shrouded the problem of alcoholism, break it with a solid Biblical, spiritual, rational, and realistic approach. The expression "conspiracy of silence" refers to the very insightful perspective of professionals who treat this problem and the way the alcoholic has been handled by friends, family, and even some professionals. For whatever reasons (and they are many and varied) the alcoholic has been protected to his own hurt. Spouses cover for alcoholics by calling their employer to report them "sick." Medical personnel have given the alcoholic medications upon the drinker's own request, as he described his symptoms; and the clergy have likewise participated either by choice or lack of insight into this same cover-up. But the day has come when **intervention** is now the more realistic and healthy approach; and one which I believe to be far more Christian for the church to encourage. Time and space forbid that I discuss the nature of such intervention here; but those who have participated in such experiences of healthy intervention and confrontation realize the intense pain associated with such an experience. Let us have the courage to break the conspiracy of silence.

(2) The church must focus on the salvation of the whole man, "body, soul, and spirit," as the apostle writes in I Thess. 5:23. Sanctification, a good biblical concept, must perceive both the holiness and wholeness of the entire person; body, soul, and spirit must be kept healthy for the service of God, and anything

Christ in Conway, Arkansas and Walter Zorn, professor of Bible and Bible Languages at Great Lakes Bible College, Lansing, Michigan will be featured speakers. We encourage you to reserve these dates and attend. More information later.

which impairs the person's functioning for the Kingdom of God must obviously be of concern to the church. The apostle's exhortation in Ephesians 5:18 needs to be heard clearly by the church: "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit"; for out of the Spirit-filled life comes worship, praise, and service. The church needs a healthy—not self-righteous—witness about those things which weaken the Christian's spiritual health, his vitality in ministry, his interpersonal relationships in family, community, and church.

(3) The church needs to *proclaim* and *affirm* the spiritual resources available to the excessive drinker, or one tempted to drink without control. Since I have already affirmed the source of divine power to help the drinker overcome, I shall not pursue it further at this juncture, except to encourage Christian leaders to work more diligently at the task of appropriating this divine dynamis.

It is a source of deep encouragement and motivation to the substance abuser to hear the Gospel affirmation that God **loves, forgives, and accepts**; for here is one of the vulnerable dimensions of the alcoholic's life. He neither loves himself, nor feels that anyone else loves him; he lives in much guilt and hostility, belligerent and unforgiving of self and others; and self-rejection is all too evident to those who work with such persons. But the Good News of the gospel of redemption is that God loves, forgives, accepts—and this is often most evident in the compassionate ministry of those who counsel the substance abuser.

In their uniquely titled book, *Dying for a Drink*, cited earlier, Anderson Spickard, M.D. and Barbara R. Thompson issue a "call to action" which combines both professional and Christian concern. They write:

"Every church should have a core of people who have educated themselves about alcohol and other drug addictions. Where possible this group should include recovering alcoholics and persons with past involvement in other forms of drug dependence. Not every church needs to have its own counseling service, but

anyone who does counseling of any kind should be able to recognize the early symptoms of alcohol and drug addiction. They should also know where to take alcoholics and drug addicts for detoxification. Church doors should be opened to groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon so they can hold their meetings. . . . When the core group is adequately educated, they in turn teach their fellow church members and the outside community through films, workshops, Bible studies, and lectures." (pp. 184-185)

The above writers continue their encouragement to churches for creative and constructive approaches by suggesting such resources as "prayer and healing services, the laying on of hands, the fellowship of small prayer groups, and the participation in communion and worship." (p. 186) The church must perceive itself as a community of healed, forgiven, and accepted persons as the apostle Paul affirmed in Romans 15:7; and consequently, it can provide such a ministry to the broken alcoholic and drug user, to disrupted and disturbed families suffering the consequences of such behavior. The church is not a body of people gathered together for self-congratulation, but people who know they have a great need, and who are called by God together to meet that need in forgiveness, worship, and fellowship. "The church is not a museum; it is a hospital," exclaimed the great preacher Sam Shoemaker. It is a place of healing, help, and hope; for it holds out the gospel of redemption to every needy soul.

Grant Us Wisdom, Grant Us Courage

While there may be no simplistic answers to the personal and national problem of substance abuse, the church of God does have at its disposal divine wisdom, spiritual resources, and core members which all combined make for a mighty task force to address this spiritual and social evil. We would do well to make some of the stanzas of Harry Emerson Fosdick's