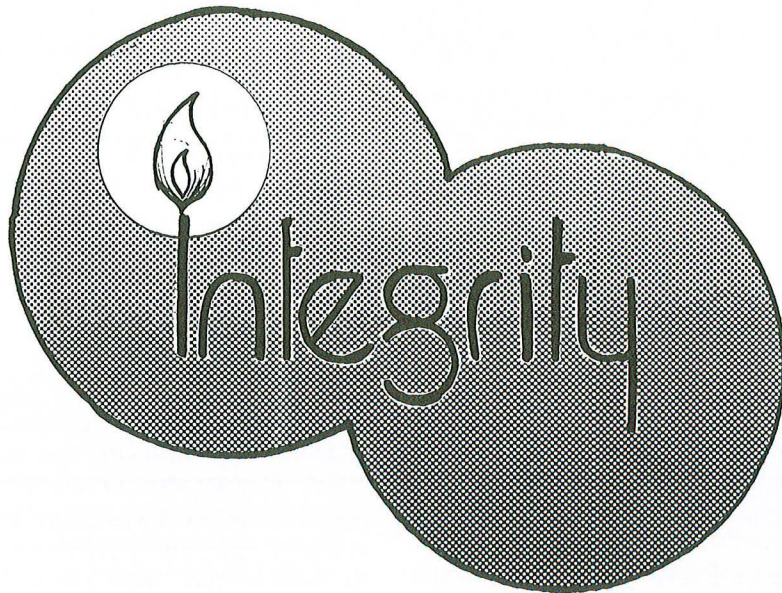


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*Artwork by Jan Green, Waterford, Michigan*

# Integrity

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## What Are You Thinking?

How many of your activities, actions, and decisions today were thought out and planned? What was the basis of many of your actions? What dictated your methods at work, at school, at home, or at church? Was it tradition, the way everybody is doing it, force, unconscious habit? Or, was it a conscious plan, empowered by God?

If you read a newspaper today or heard the news on radio or TV, how did you react to today's news? What was the basis of your reaction?

Reaction instead of action has become the habit of our fast-paced age. There is little time to think out a plan of action for our day-to-day decisions, let alone our entire life.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, **mind**, and strength (Mark 12:29-31). Paul warned in several of his letters that our minds could become hardened, veiled (II Cor. 3:14-15; 4:4), estranged, hostile (Col. 1:21), puffed up (Col. 2:18), depraved (I Tim. 6:5), and corrupted (II Tim. 3:8) by the spirit of the age rather than being redeemed by the Spirit of life. (See Rom. 12:2; Phil. 2:5; Col. 3:2; II Cor. 10:5; and Col. 2:3.)

For Christians to be salt and light in the pluralism of today's world, we must *think!* David Gill points out in his book *The Opening of the Christian Mind* that ignorance disguised as simple faith is a deformity of Christian discipleship. Instead of berating or fearing the pluralistic ideas of our time, we should meet the ideas head on with thoughtful, empowered responses. It is easier to fall back on tradition, or "that's the way it used to be," instead of thinking with new minds and not according to human tradition (see Col. 2:8; II Cor. 5:16, 10:3-5).

Today and tomorrow as you meet the demands of family, work, church, school, and neighborhood, meet them with the mind of Christ. Take time to pray about and plan your actions. Though God is absolute, and right and wrong do exist, there will be grays. There will be times when you are unsure about your actions, even as you are sure that God is. You may have to choose the lesser of two evils, but you will know that there is one good.

(Continued on page 10)

## Discrimination in the Assembly

### HOY LEDBETTER

Way back in my Christian salad days I resolved that I would never be able to leave a church service saying that nobody had spoken to me. So far I have kept that resolution, but it has not always been easy. In some cases, I have evaded failure only by grabbing some detached disciple's hand and forcing him to speak to me.

I feel sorry for the minister in a church where the visitors must seek out the members, since he or she has a lot to overcome. Even people who do not know that Paul listed love as the very first fruit of the Spirit naturally expect churches to exhibit love in the form of a friendly welcome, and it is hard for all of us to see how the Spirit can be active in a church which is indifferent to anyone who comes. God, we are sure, cannot be so selective.

### Favoritism

But as disconcerting as it is for us to find ourselves in a church where other people are warmly welcomed and we are ignored, it could be a great deal worse. Instead of merely ignoring us, they might make it plain by some overt act of discrimination that they do not consider us worthy of courteous treatment. That unhappy possibility is pictured in the second chapter of James, which says:

'My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' and you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,' have you not made distinctions

among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?'

If we could fly across the years and enter that ancient assembly, it might look surprisingly familiar to us. As the folks gather for the church service, there are among them visitors which span the whole socio-economic spectrum. One of the visitors is a rich man. The Bible does not actually say he is rich, but it is obvious to the usher that he has all the earmarks of wealth. He has a gold ring on his finger, a definite sign of higher class. And he is dressed in a splendid outfit, which seems to say that he is really somebody. The usher, judging him strictly on the basis of appearance, decides to give him one of the best seats in the house.

Next there arrives a poor man in dirty clothes. And are not dirty clothes always a turnoff? We have trouble respecting a fellow so careless about his appearance. After all, if he were any good, and not so obviously destitute of ambition, he would clean himself up. These thoughts crowd out alternative ones: that he might only have this one outfit, and had not had an opportunity to launder it; or that the man has no money to send his suit to the cleaners. But the usher in James' picture puts the poor visitor in a negative light, and offers him a sorry choice of seats, for which he has to trade either dignity or comfort or both. He can either stand or sit on the floor.

This ushering decision, which apparently meets no resistance from the rest of the congregation, who for that reason must share its consequences, is condemned by James as sinful discrimination, and those who make it are indicted as judges with evil motives. Four reasons are given why Christians should view such prejudiced behavior as intolerable, and they still apply today.



## Reflecting True Glory

In the first place, they were practicing favoritism as an act of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is here called quite literally “the glory.” How incongruous that in the presence of the glory of the Lord, the divine essence, the sham glory of the wealthy should receive special honor among God’s people! Since glory is the biblical word for the divine mode of being, and since the Bible repeatedly insists that God is no respecter of persons, the church which pretends that its discrimination represents faith in practice is both insulting God and telling the world a lie about his nature. From the standpoint of theology, the idea that people who live under his lordship can show partiality is utterly ridiculous.

Not only do we have in the Bible all of those assertions that God is no respecter of persons, but the same claim is made of Jesus who came to reveal him. Discrimination is not an act that can be made in Christ, for Paul insisted that in him “there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freedman, but Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:11). If Christ is in all, then a slight to anyone is a slight to him. No room is allowed here for preferential treatment because of race, nationality, religious background, culture, or social status.

Another strong statement to the same effect is Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” It would be hard to find a more emphatic way of saying that no person has either a superior or an inferior position in the church because of nationality, gender, race, class, or religious upbringing.

But if that is so plain, how come the church has had, at times, such an embarrassing record of discrimination? I believe there is a definite answer to that question, and that it is revealed in Paul’s writings to the Corinthians. When they went ahead and ate the Lord’s Supper without waiting for some of the poor members to arrive so they could share their meal with them, Paul said they “despised the church of God and shamed those who had nothing” (1 Cor. 11:22).

He further charged them with failing to discern the body. What this means is that they had lost sight of their brothers and sisters as those whom God had called into fellowship with themselves and as members in whom he was pleased to dwell.

The reason for this heresy was, as the rest of 1 Corinthians indicates, that they had removed God from the center of their religion and had replaced him with themselves. When that happened, God ceased to be the lord of every decision and became a mere instrument of their selfishness. Of course, they did not see themselves that way; as far as they were concerned, they were fruitful in service and strong in spirituality. They put great emphasis on using the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and especially speaking in tongues. But their interest in these matters was not the edification of the church, but their own self-enrichment. In their religious exercises they were so concerned about themselves that they could not properly honor God, much less those people whom they thought of as their inferiors.

Now this shift of the center of religion from God to ourselves can happen to all of us, and we may not even realize it has occurred. A good way to check up on ourselves is to ask if there is anybody whose position in the fellowship we would limit because of race, social status, or gender. Or, on the other hand, do we think of ourselves as properly having higher standing than other members because of those conditions?

### Who is My Neighbor?

James’ second objection to discrimination within the assembly is that it is contrary to the royal law, which says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Those who showed partiality were breaking this law, he said, and therefore were committing sin and were convicted by the law as transgressors. The Old Testament condemned all judgment based upon social status. The law said, “You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly” (Lev. 19:15).

This obviously rules out the idea that we can make up for past partiality against the poor by showing partiality for them. Fair judgment can never be tied to a person’s economic situation.

Since the royal law, as James called it, is so prominent in the Bible, and in the teaching of Jesus who cited it six times in the gospels, how can anybody claiming to serve God be a respecter of persons? The fact is, people have been very creative in coming up with ways to get around the law.

In his parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus told about a man who had fallen among thieves, who left him beside the road wounded and half dead. First a priest, and then a Levite, came along, saw him in that condition, and then passed by on the other side without offering to help. Why? Why did those men, religious leaders who were supposed to be models of compassion, prove to be so insensitive to another person’s distress? How could they, with their knowledge of God and his law, pass by on the other side and ignore the wounded traveler?

I am afraid it was shockingly easy, because what they did was, in their understanding, no violation of the royal law, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” for they had defined neighbor in such a way that this man did not qualify. They had ruled him out of the circle of people they were required to love.

We do the same thing. If we want to stop short of extending full fellowship to someone, we somehow develop a rationale for deciding that person is not the neighbor we are required to love as ourselves. The good Samaritan became immortal because he recognized that true love is not selective, and instead of worrying about who was his neighbor, he became neighbor to anyone who needed one. And so must we.

### God’s Choice of the Poor

A third reason James objected to discrimination among his readers was that it contradicted God’s choice of the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which God promised to those who love him. As far as God’s choice is concerned, it matters not

whether a person has dapper duds or dirty denims. The poor person may not look chosen, but she is. She may not appear to be an heiress of immense wealth, but she is. There can be no doubt about it, because that is God’s choice.

Of course, we are not always happy about that. It does not fit in with our lingering opinion that we somehow deserve to be saved when others do not. Jonah had that problem. The reason Jonah wound up in the whale’s belly was not because he was afraid the Ninevites would not welcome his preaching. On the contrary, he fled from the presence of the Lord because he did not want to be around when God saved his national enemies. He was prejudiced, and he knew that God did not share that prejudice. Listen to Jonah’s own angry words to the Lord: “Lord, didn’t I say before I left home that this is just what you would do? That’s why I did my best to run away to Spain! I knew that you are a loving and merciful God, always patient, always kind, and always ready to change your mind and not punish. Now then, Lord, let me die. I am better off dead than alive.” And why this death wish? He cannot stand to live with a God who is totally impartial. The implications of that are just too much to take. Unfortunately, Jonah was not the last to feel that way.

### Practical Approach

James’ final argument against discrimination is a very practical one. Since rich people, as a class, were the ones who exploited the Christians and dragged them into court and blasphemed the fair name by which they were called, to give special honor to the rich would be in effect to aid and abet their persecutors. To defer to such people would be as stupid as it is unscriptural.

While we may never face that exact situation today, there are some good practical reasons why we should not practice discrimination. Consider, for instance, what happened recently to a church located inside one of our large cities. It was a powerful church, with a large membership. But the neighborhood in which it was located began to decline, and the local people became increasingly poor. The church, however, did not welcome that constituency and



so was composed more and more of people who commuted from the suburbs. The neighborhood people, not feeling especially welcome, did not come, and gradually the commuters quit coming in large enough numbers to pay the church's bills.

Finally, the church property was sold to a new group with a more inclusive outlook. The result was that within a short time the church building once again housed a dynamic, growing congregation. That transition might not have occurred if the original congregation had ac-

cepted the opportunities the Lord had placed before them. In failing to be a community without respect of persons, they lost their community. The Lord still walks among his churches and can remove the candlesticks from those who prove to be faithless.

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Hoy Ledbetter, founding editor and editor of *Integrity* for 15 years, has served churches within the Stone-Campbell movement all his years of ministry. He presently ministers to First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Albany, Georgia.

## Ledbetter's Daughter Dies

As the present issue of *Integrity* was going to press, we learned of the death of Priscilla Ledbetter, twenty-five years of age, daughter of Hoy and Lillian Ledbetter. Priscilla has suffered with Friedreich's Ataxia disease since she was about five years of age, but her frail body finally yielded to the ravages of this disease which destroys certain groups of nerve fibers. Priscilla's life was a constant witness to the glory and grace of God; and though being dead, Priscilla's faith and beauty as a young Christian will continue to live. Funeral services were held in Albany, Georgia on February 4, and burial was in Atlanta. The Ledbetters have three other adult children - Ronald, Greg and Karen Coleman. Our prayers of Christian caring and comfort will continue for Hoy and Lillian and for the entire family. Cards may be sent to the Ledbetters at their address:

2702 Brittany Road, Albany, Georgia 31707.

Joseph F. Jones, President  
*Integrity* Board of Directors

## The Beginnings of a New Movement

KEN HENSLEY

I love the church I grew up in. I was one of the fortunate children who slept in the same bed, in the same house, for an entire childhood. Mom and Dad's roots in Central Illinois allowed me to grow up in roughly the same pew every Sunday. I consider myself very fortunate.

Our church. . . I still consider it my church though I now minister to my own church, on the other side of the country. I follow the weekly bulletin to see what's new, who is sick, who has moved, what's happening. Mom and Dad keep me informed on the latest news. Yes, the church that housed my faith for twenty years is still very dear to my heart.

So are all the churches who take seriously the call to being Christ's influence in this world. The churches in Central Illinois gave to me a solid base for seeking to live out that call. My roots run deep in churches of Christ: grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, and friends. This sense of history has been a comforting companion during times of personal crises and upheaval. Why tell you all of this?

First of all, I wish for you to know that I am a child of my heritage and appreciate much of what it has instilled in me. It gave to me a healthy respect for God's word, his church, and his commission. It taught me to take the Bible seriously, to look to it for authority and answers. The search for truth, the quest for understanding, each underlying emphasis in "going back to the Bible," has shaped the way I view God and his world.

Secondly, because I am committed to his church I am also concerned about its future. While I appreciate much of what the church has stood for and why, I cannot help but feel that parts of our past, at times, undermine our future successes. As a person who "mounts" the pulpit week-in and week-out striving to make relevant a biblical message to a modern crowd, I cannot help but feel the tension of transition.

Churches of Christ are at a crossroad, and I believe that's good.

## Why We Need a New Movement

Our Restoration Plea has encouraged us to mine the Bible for truth and knowledge. For the most part, we have done an excellent job. However, simply knowing the truth and knowledge of God's word is not enough. As Leith Anderson mentions in his book *Dying For Change*, "The church has a responsibility to understand people and the culture in which they live" (17). He continues on to say, "evangelical Christianity has done well on revelation (the Bible) but poorly on relevance (the culture)" (17).

That this perceived irrelevance may actually be manifesting itself is apparent in studies done by George Gallup, Jr. Only 16% of those between the ages of 18-24 attend church weekly; 15% of 25-29 year olds; gradually increasing to 38% of those 60 plus (*People's Religion*, page 35). In addition, the percentage of 18-24s and 25-29s who stated they never went was as high or higher than the percentage who went weekly, almost weekly, or 1-2 times a month.

An additional study by researcher George Barna found that 62% of unchurched people (those who claim no church affiliation and haven't been to a church in several months) answered the question "Is the church today relevant?" with a "no" answer *The Frog In The Kettle*, page 138). This is an especially alarming fact for several reasons: (1) This is the group of people the church needs to be targeting; (2) This shows that, in general, the unchurched have not had positive experiences in the churches they've attended; and (3) The number of unchurched Americans increased by 17 million in the decade of the 80's (Gallup, 136).

Here is why I call for a new movement, given the statistics just quoted. While the number of



people with little or no church background (and thus, little Bible knowledge) is on the rise, the church continues to emphasize a brand of evangelism which is tailored towards reaching those in denominations. This is evidenced by personal work studies which assume the reader or student respects the Bible as the word of God, believes the Bible holds life's answers, and wants to belong to a church. Thus, it becomes a matter of simply studying oneself out of "error" and into something better.

This is great if your target audience is composed of Bible-believing people. Even then, the percentages tell us that most of those who are already church-goers will likely remain with their own churches. Why, then, do we concentrate heavily on a segment of society which is shrinking and generally less receptive, instead of on one that is growing and largely untapped?

## The Tension of Becoming Relevant

When I was a senior in high school and wanted a date, I did what most other senior guys did who weren't looking for a serious relationship; I asked out a freshman girl. Why? Being a teenager who wrestled with self-esteem (as most do), this reduced the risk of facing rejection. Senior guys knew freshmen girls would love to be seen with someone older. Less challenge, less fear of losing.

In general, we as Americans don't like the prospects of losing - we like safe bets, sure things, and, please, winners. If we can reduce the challenge, we can lessen our chances of losing. Unfortunately, that mentality often shows up in the church in the form of stretched theological arguments against trying something new in an effort to reach new segments of society.

Take, for example, home Bible study groups which meet on Sunday nights instead of corporate worship. These, and others like them during the week, have proven to be an effective means of reaching out to people who might otherwise be uncomfortable making their first steps toward God in a church building. Groups like these are allowed to be flexible, personable, and add a sense of accountability not often

found in other settings.

That small groups are viable and effective tools for church growth has been well documented. "The congregation which seeks to grow should look at how friendship ties can be increased between individual members and those persons who are not active members of any worshipping congregation" (Lyle Schaller, *Assimilating New Members*, page 75). Or, as Elmer Towns suggests: "The glue that holds this church together is the relationships that are formed in the small groups or cells that make up the Body" (*10 Of Today's Most Innovative Churches*, page 202).

Why would groups such as these which encourage growth be opposed by anyone who desires growth to occur? First of all, it's not that they don't have the desire for growth, many do. So why argue that "it divides the body" or "replaces the church altogether"? Obviously, the biblical case against meeting in homes is going to be weakened on the basis of Philemon 2, Romans 16:5, and others which clearly indicate the existence of churches meeting in homes. Given these texts, the main argument eventually rests on preferences drawn from personal likes, dislikes, and scriptures which are used in a broader sense than originally intended.

So, then, what is the tension of being relevant? It is having to give up comfort zones in church structure, adopting modern styles of worship and preaching which communicate a faithful message in an understandable manner, and giving up sacred cows when they no longer work. Methods which are so inundated with the material and packaging of decades long deceased must be archived in favor of newer, more contemporary methods. This may even mean re-orienting our approach to include the unchurched and nonbelievers, implementing the necessary steps in our classes, worship, and relational life.

If thoughts of including drama or special group music in worship, or having home Bible studies as alternatives to Sunday nights or midweeks, or sponsoring social actions in the community make you feel slightly (or not so slightly) uncomfortable, then you feel the ten-

sion of being relevant. Yet we cannot let our personal discomfort or preferences stand in the way of reaching out successfully to our society.

## Where Do We Go From Here?

First let me say, we have to go somewhere. Too many things are happening in churches across the country, too many changes are occurring in our world, for the church to be idle. Regardless of what we do or do not do, others will make their impact and already are.

Second of all, we must hold tight to our commitment to God's word and allow it to give us perspective and guidance. No victory would be worth compromising the core of the Bible's message and how God wants us to be. There is a place, a definite place, in our world for people who take God and his word seriously and studiously.

Finally, it will take bold leadership and followership to hold steadfastly to God's book and still have the courage to be relevant and contemporary. In some places, this may mean sticking with a game plan that meets opposition, especially if the opposition is biblically unfounded. No victory will ever be won by cowards. If the church of Christ is to be taken seriously as an impact player, then we must face the reality of being contemporary, exciting, and relevant.

Yes, we do need a new movement, one which adds relevance to restoration. The time is now and the need is great.

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Ken Hensley is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman College and ministers to the Allied Gardens Church of Christ in San Diego, California.

## Meditation on John 3:30: Greater and Less

KATHY WYLER

While observing the life of John the Baptizer, his statement in John 3:30 began to preoccupy my thinking: "He (Jesus) must increase but I must decrease."

One night soon after, I dreamed something interesting. In the craziness that characterizes dreams, I was not as I am but I was a photograph negative, standing against a light background, translucent — dark in spots, light in others.

In the morning I began thinking that it wouldn't be too bad being a photograph negative, or like one —

- standing against the Light that is Jesus,
- allowing that Light to shine through me,
- willing to replicate myself,
- a translucent "negative" becoming an increasing "positive."

I like the idea!

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Kathy Wyler is a retired AT&T employee who has been writing since she was 7. Born in Africa of American missionary parents and raised on the campuses of Abilene Christian University and Harding, Kathy calls herself a "Christian-at-large."



# The Church's First Priority

CRAIG M. WATTS

If we were to strip away all of the "frills" and dispense with all of the "extras" in the life of the church, what would be left? What is the indispensable core of the church, beneath the programs and projects, committees and other organizational trappings? If we sift through the important and the trivial of our ecclesiastical undertakings in order to identify one thing that is most crucial, what would that be? **Worship!**

The church is most truly itself when the church is in worship. This is not to say that we can safely dispense with all other expressions of the church's life. But worship is the center of all else because in worship we orient ourselves toward God. If we fail to do this one thing, then all else that we do is futile. In worship, we thankfully acknowledge the worth of God and respond accordingly.

In worship our attention is drawn to a reality that transcends our culture and challenges the status quo. We rehearse the story of God's actions for us as we utter portions of scripture, speak words of prayer, sing our praise, give our offerings, eat the bread and drink of the cup in communion and listen to the sermon. We

deliberately put ourselves in God's hands so that God can mold us in conformity with divine truth in a world of falsehood.

In worship, we learn to see life in a new way, in the light of a God who is characterized by suffering love. As the authors of a recent study put it, "Worship shapes Christians into a people apart, a people living in ultimate contradictions to the world's fundamental opening principles (Robert Webber and Rodney Clapp, *People of the Truth*, p.88)

Nothing can replace the worship of the church. It is the heartbeat that pumps spiritual vitality into every limb and organ of the body of Christ. Involvement in other churchly activities can never be given priority. Church school classes, Christian Women's Fellowship, Christian Men's Fellowship, committees, and fellowship groups are all secondary. Above all else, it is worship that makes the church Christian and that makes Christians godly.

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Craig M. Watts is minister to the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Louisville, Kentucky.

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## What Are You Thinking

(Editorial - Continued from page 2)

We pray that *Integrity* encourages you to think. Your letters, prayers, and support continue to encourage us to bring you the writings of brothers and sisters who are thinking and who are trying to bring every thought captive to obey Christ.

"Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine

power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ" (II Cor. 10:3-5; NRSV).

Bruce Kilmer  
Co-editor

# Intercepted Correspondence

The following "Intercepted Correspondence" is a continuing feature begun in the January/February 1988 issue of *Integrity*. These letters are *Integrity's* version of C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* and Os Guinness' *Gravedigger Files* and are written by two different *Integrity* board members.

To refresh your memory and inform new readers, our imaginary setting has Bruce

attending Word Perfect computer classes, where he accidentally begins intercepting subversive communication between two devils on his computer screen. The *Integrity* board decides that we must inform Christians everywhere of the destructively evil plots of the nefarious teacher Apollyon and his young student Ichabod by publishing the letters for as long as they can be intercepted.

Dear Ichabod,

Your latest communique indicates that you have generally concluded that prosperity and moral laxity are automatically bedfellows, while adversity enhances spirituality. This common concept is generally reliable (with a few notable exceptions). Certainly, you must be aware of the axiomatic, materialistic principle: to increase one's possessions is but to cultivate an insatiable desire for more. Exceptions to this principle are, as some would say, as rare as a snowball down here! Many a naive "Christian" has bartered his soul for the accumulation of mere "things." As Emerson once wrote nearly a century and a half ago, "Things are in the saddle, and ride mankind!" He knew what he was talking about then; his words are far, far more demonstrable today. To our great delight, this present American generation is not willing to sacrifice those things which merely bring pleasure for the "true happiness" our Enemy touts. Find those weakened by materialism and take advantage accordingly!

The fact that some at Broad Way continue to devote themselves to spiritual exercises such as Bible study and prayer represents a problem only in a trivial minority; but it is a problem out of all proportion to the number of individuals involved. We cannot overlook the disproportionate effects produced by this "faithful few," as our Enemy would call them.

We are, to be altogether factual, totally powerless to frustrate the two-way communication system set up between the Enemy and his serious adherents. We are also powerless to prevent the Enemy's providential care and guidance of his people. Rather than exercising in this area of futility, we must strike in other ways, and in other places, where our power and influence is relatively stronger. I would note that if the legion of so-called "prayer warriors" were to understand even minimally what influence they have in their intercessions, we would be at a great loss of power as their requests and petitions are granted. However small and even insignificant their numbers may seem to be, they are most disruptive to our cause.

Regarding your successful instigation of the youth worker's resignation, do not underestimate the potential consequences you may expect to incite in some of the youths at Broad Way. May I suggest that you gather a host of sympathetic, vocal youths to cluster around him to mourn his martyrdom. And, I may say, under such an unrepentant leader they can be led into successively less spiritually-oriented activities until a significant number of them are brought altogether away from any allegiance to the Enemy! It has worked many, many times in the past, and it is still one of our more successful ploys today.



Concerning your political exploits, need I point out that you have entered an arena where strange things can happen, most of which may be readily turned to our advantage. We can produce cold-hearted cynicism and chaos when covert actions of philandering congressmen, mayors, governors — or presidents — can be swept under the rug; when many electors assume bribery and undue influence upon their legislators are simply a fact of life; when those responsible for large financial institutions turn “inside information” into great personal gain with little more than a slap on the wrist; when gigantic corporations, happily with no apparent conscience or concern for anything but profit, dump vast quantities of deadly waste products into the environment; and when abortion is practiced without guilt or remorse.

To summarize it briefly and succinctly, our business of getting humans to embrace evil has always been made easier by those who are already holding hands with it.

Yours in devising demonic deceits,

Uncle Apollyon

Dear Uncle Polly,

It's a beautiful Sunday here (according to my taste, anyway): sort of dark and gloomy, with a cutting kind of dampness in the air that weighs on human spirits and makes them depressed. I went around church this morning ringing up as many terrible, sordid events in the recent news as I could think of and suggesting that it might be a good idea just to go home and find relief in some mindless television program (an absurd movie, or a situation comedy rerun). Now what better combination than that could be found to suit demonic purposes? Not only does it foster murmurings against the Almighty for letting the world get into such a mess, but it ushers the individual into a fantasy world where evil doesn't even matter — or if it does, it is reduced to a kind of perversely fascinating magic. It was a fine day to sabotage any ex-

perience at church that might cause people to look beyond the wickedness of the world (and of themselves) for any hope to counteract these splendid “downers” in human emotional experience. There was not much joy in the worship service this morning, so the faces of the people coming out of the building after the worship were as gloomy as the skies above. That sent me home whistling a happy little dirge!

I continued to see the delightful deleterious effects of money as a deterrent to holiness. It's wonderful to observe the chain of erosional stages in turning people's attention from the spiritual to the material — and all the while they think they're being more realistic! First they voluntarily put in overtime at work, taking time away from both their physical and their spiritual families; then they are preoccupied with the process of buying the goods they are convinced they must have; and finally, when they have acquired their material goods, they have to spend even more time making use of them or taking care of them. On top of all this, there is the contradictory set of worries about the dangers of losing what they have and the need to add yet more to the collection. Once we get our clients in this state of mind, Brother Whitesoul can say all he wants about “treasures in Heaven,” and it will not get past their earlobes.

Our singing group is getting another presentation ready, and it seems that this exercise will once again prove a good antidote to any spiritual lift that might come from the music. Brother Cecil Sharp (“C. Sharp” to most of the singers) is leading the complaints again about how disorganized the rehearsals are. Of course, his being the last to quit joking and carrying on before rehearsals start has nothing to do with the difficulties the director has in getting down to work. Nor does the fact that he has not the slightest hint of the meaning of what he is singing. Brother Sharp is blissfully (and disruptively!) unaware of any connection between his attitude and the improbability of constructive results from this kind of special music. Of course, I keep hinting to him that the director is entirely too serious about the whole thing and should realize that this endeavor is more for fun than for worship, anyway. My objective is to

insure that the singers expend maximum effort depending on themselves, then develop maximum resentment at being expected to work so hard, and finally experience maximum frustration from the overall pressure of being stretched so thin by all their obligations. If things work out that way, the director (who is really a distressingly earnest, sincere, and talented

woman) will vow never to work with a church group again. We can't afford to let Christians start thinking that music in church can boost anything except egos.

Yours in the spirit of disharmony,

Ichabod

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## Readers' Response

Your recent letter (Fall '91 fundraiser) concerning our changing world and the many conflicts it brings to Christians of every background is much appreciated. I read *Integrity* and share it with close friends. Sometimes I copy special pieces from it and send to folks who have special needs. The one I have copied most is Kathy Wyler's *My Jesus*. Kathy is my first cousin and a very dear friend. . . Our grandfather (James Wood) was a young preacher who rode horseback between tiny congregations teaching the Word each Sunday. . . He farmed on week days. He and our dear little grandmother were raising a family of 8 children when he died in his 40's. Grandmother was determined that her children would have a Christian education and cooked meals for the students at Thorp Springs Christian College near Grandbury, Texas.

My parents met and married there in 1916. When Thorp Springs divided over the introduction of an organ into Chapel meetings, part of the group began a Christian college in Cordell, Oklahoma. Grandmother went with them and ran a large rooming house for college students. I was born in that house in 1918 while my father, George Andrew Graham, was in the service, ready to go to fight in “The War to end all wars.” The Armistice was signed 73 years ago this month. . .

I deeply appreciate every issue (of *Integrity*).

Marguerite McSpadden  
Dumas, Texas

Greetings! Still enjoying *Integrity*. The “Women in God's Plan” article (July/August) was great. I'm so thankful there is a forum such as *Integrity* for the non-clergy, which I'm convinced is the only Christian group that can be *objective* about matters of faith. . .

Larry Dotson  
Centerville, Texas

Thanks for sending *Integrity*. The openness to free thinking is a blessing and stimulus to my thinking.

H. Byne  
London, Ontario

For several years a friend has been sharing his copy of *Integrity* with me after he finishes reading it. I've decided I really would like to get my own! Please find a small contribution to the good work that *Integrity* is doing for Christians all over the country.

In the July/August 1991 issue I especially appreciated reading Alton Thompson's thoughts in “Of Sacred and Secular” and your article, Mr. Kilmer, “Women in God's Plan.” And, of course, I couldn't neglect mentioning the “Intercepted Correspondence” — I always turn to read it first. . .

Josie Broene  
San Angelo, Texas



# Final Exit: Whose Decision?

JOSEPH F. JONES

Early in 1991 another of Derek Humphry's best selling books caught the attention and imagination of the nation. Entitled *Final Exit*, the work carried a very descriptive and incisive subtitle: "The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying." This book is the latest effort by Humphry and the Hemlock Society of America to further the euthanasia movement in general, and to build support for legislative action toward physician assisted suicide in particular. While my first intent was only to prepare a critical review of this work for *Integrity*, at the encouragement of board members and especially the nudging of our founding editor, Hoy Ledbetter, I have attempted to treat the subject of euthanasia and the more recent popular emphasis on "the right to die" aspect of the terminally ill in greater depth.

Derek Humphry states the purpose of his book very clearly. "The real question is, does a person have a right to depart from life when he or she is nearing the end and has nothing but horror ahead? And, if necessary, should a physician be permitted to help?" (p. 14). His answer to these questions is equally clear: "Because of what I saw my mother go through, and what I know now about the suffering of others, my answer to those questions is yes" (p. 14). A few observations on this particular book before we address the broader questions which it assumes may be in order.

*Final Exit*, a work of 192 pages, is deliberately set in large type (14 point dutch roman) to assist those with poor sight, since the author assumes that many of those reading it will be older persons, with poor vision, and possibly afflicted with what has been diagnosed as a terminal illness. The book also assumes "the reader's ethical acceptance of the right to choose when to die when terminally ill, and thus the arguments for or against are not addressed."

While Humphry makes the unquestioned assumption which is fundamental to both the euthanasia and the self-deliverance philosophy, it is this very assumption which will subsequently be critically challenged. Interest in the second aspect of the problem — the legal right of physicians to assist the dying to commit suicide — has now become a burning social issue in the state of Michigan, where Dr. Jack Kevorkian, M.D., has actively assisted several persons in the past two years to commit suicide. (Humphry employs a rather interesting euphemism for suicide by calling it "self-deliverance.") While there is no legal crime involved in committing suicide in the United States, it is a legal crime to assist another to self-destruct. The author of *Final Exit* knows this full well; consequently, his efforts along with the Hemlock Society of which he is both founder and executive director, are to bring about societal pressure for the change of what he characterizes as "archaic laws ready to be changed to situations befitting modern understanding and morality" (p. 17).

## Means to an End

Part I of this work, consisting of twenty-three short chapters, is devoted primarily to the multiple ways in which an individual can terminate life. The writer has obviously researched all the various methods and techniques through which a person can bring biological life to an end; and after briefly describing each technique for self-deliverance, Humphry provides for the reader his own personal evaluation of the method's effectiveness, time required for death to occur, and possible complications should the attempt be botched. Detailing the actual specifics for taking one's own life is not pleasant reading; it is indeed morbid and gruesome. It is, in this reviewer's perspective, indicative of an emotionally and spiritually sick individual.

Chapter 23 gives a detailed sixteen point "Check List" for the individual who is "now comfortable with the decision to die," providing specific steps which the person needs to review very carefully as he moves toward the final exit. While the author takes great pain to suggest that self-deliverance for the terminally ill is to be sharply distinguished from impulsive suicide out of despair, anger, hurt, or depression, how can we not be concerned that such persons may read these well detailed procedures and employ them in a state of psychological or emotional irrationality? And this is one of the valid concerns in marketing such a work for the general public to consume. I do not advocate censorship of such material being published and available on the market; but it does seem appropriate to offer rational, clinical, and spiritual warnings about who should be reading it, and under what personal and emotional conditions. Along with the "Check List" the author includes a four page "Drug Dosage Table For Use in Self-Deliverance From a Terminal Illness" (pp. 116-123).

Part II of *Final Exit* contains five chapters focusing on "Euthanasia Involving Doctors and Nurses." Additional materials include recommended further reading, a biographical sketch about the author, Derek Humphry, information about the Hemlock Society of America, and a statement of what the Society's "Death With Dignity Act" will be when passed into law.

## Significant Ethical Issues

When examining books such as *Final Exit* and other works by Derek Humphry, or the philosophy and practicalities of the Hemlock Society about euthanasia, self-deliverance, and physician assisted suicide, evangelical Christians are seriously challenged to formulate and express their positions concerning matters of life and death. Is it ever morally justifiable to abort an unborn child because of anticipated birth defects or the circumstances under which the embryo was conceived? When faced with conditions of human illness diagnosed as terminal, irreversible, beyond realistic medical hope, can life-support systems then be discontinued? Can a physician who is pledged to do

good and no harm, to save life and not destroy it, to alleviate suffering and pain where medically possible, ethically assist another to take his or her own life? The answers to these and many similar questions depend upon the authority which governs one's life and the norms by which a person evaluates situations and makes decisions.

In *Final Exit* the author makes very clear what isn't his authority and what is his authority in the ultimate questions of life and death. In his initial chapter where he talks about this "most difficult decision," Humphry writes, "If you consider God the master of your fate, then read no further. Seek the best pain management available and arrange hospice care" (p. 21). These sentences are set off in parenthesis as though this decision were a rather side option, which some will choose for lack of something better. For he then continues in sharp contrast, "If you want personal control and choice over your destiny, it will require forethought, planning, documentation, friends, and decisive, courageous action from you. This book will help, but in the final analysis, whether you bring your life to an abrupt end, and how you achieve this, is entirely your responsibility, ethically and legally" (p. 21).

It is very evident from these words that Derek Humphry has made himself the ultimate authority in matters of life and death. He is above God, ethics, and the law (and encoded views of society at a given time). Humphry and those of his mental and ethical persuasion are a law unto themselves. Laws which have stood the test of time, rooted in the sacred Scriptures of Old and New Testament, are characterized as "archaic." So his pressing logic toward centuries of human wisdom and divine revelation (for countless numbers who believe in divine truth and revelation), is to discard the wisdom and values of the past. "Aren't these archaic laws ready to be changed to situations befitting modern understanding and morality?" (p. 17). The evangelical Christian must address such arrogance which assumes it has "modern understanding and morality" perfected, and must likewise question what is the source of that which he calls morality. In sharp contrast with



this earthly, humanistic view of man — his life, death, and destiny — Christians must affirm their faith and confidence in the inspired Word of God which is able to make the man of God complete, adequate for life, death, and destiny (II Tim. 3:14-17). John Jefferson Davis offers an incisive insight and summary of the Christian view of Scripture authority when addressing these profound ethical and spiritual issues of our day. He writes, “The Bible functions normatively in evangelical ethics through its specific commands and precepts, general principles, various precedents, and overall world view.”<sup>1</sup> Until the matter of normative authority is resolved, those addressing and debating these issues are like airliners flying in the same general direction, but at different altitudes and with obviously different destinations in view.

### The Morality of Self-Deliverance (Suicide)

Since the stimulus for this particular article was the work of Derek Humphry in *Final Exit*, we must confine our present attention to the two basic issues (assumptions) with which the author has dealt, i.e., the moral right of terminally ill individuals in their rational mind to decide when and how they will end life; and secondly, the medical and legal need for, and the moral right for duly competent and licensed medical professionals to assist these individuals in as effective, non-violent and non-messy methods as possible to make their “final exit.” What shall the evangelical Christian’s response be to this contemporary societal view which apparently is becoming increasingly more acceptable and wide-spread among the young and the old, the educated and the less enlightened, the healthy as well as the diseased?

For whatever divine reason, “the Sixth Commandment expresses a law of life that obligates us both to let people live and help them to live,” so writes Professor Lewis Smedes of Fuller Theological Seminary.<sup>2</sup> “You shalt not kill (murder),” and on the face of it, this prohibition makes no distinction between killing one’s self and killing one’s fellowman. The biblical emphasis certainly tells me that my life is just as precious as any other; and that my life and

my neighbor’s life are both gifts from God. Consequently, I have no right to assault and destroy myself anymore than I do to attack and kill my neighbor. It seems very simple that suicide is basically murder.

But before we become too judgmental toward those who feel a certain justification for suicide or self-deliverance, we need to examine the paradoxical nature of suicide. Suicide appears to be an expression of the ultimate power to determine one’s own final destiny; but in another perspective it may well appear to be the ultimate sign of human weakness and failure. We need, therefore, to exercise much restraint in passing moral judgment when we see this inner contradiction about the act of suicide, which helps explain why serious and thoughtful people hold conflicting attitudes toward the morality of self-destruction.

### Suicide is a Sin

Smedes suggests three basic attitudes toward the morality of suicide which may help to clarify the thinking of our present generation toward this grievous social concern. First, suicide is a sin, a moral wrong clearly forbidden by God. Appeal here is made to the biblical injunction found in both Old and New Testaments. This has likewise been the consensus of theological thinking in the history of the Christian Church, both Catholic and Protestant. Thomas Aquinas summed up the reasons for this judgment in three concise views: suicide is against one’s own nature (i.e., all living things want to exist, to live; and to destroy life is to violate the basic law of nature). Second, self-destruction is a sin against one’s community, depriving the family and friends of the love, care and fellowship they need from the one who terminates his or her own life; and, thirdly, suicide is a sin against God, since God is sovereign in both his right to give life, and in whose power and goodness resides the decision to take life. While this basic attitude and the rationale supporting it gives some direction to our thinking, with Smedes, I would agree that it appears too simple, too abstract, and lacks a “compassionate understanding of the paradox of suicide” just previously discussed.<sup>3</sup>

### A Responsible Option

The second basic attitude sees suicide *justified as a responsible option*. The ancient Stoic notion held that any responsible person had the moral right to terminate life when life’s circumstances were too unbearable, too shameful, or too dishonorable. The narrative in Acts 16 describing the imprisonment of Paul and Silas vividly portrays the jailor as about to commit suicide, since it would have been too dishonorable and shameful for a Roman soldier to allow his prisoners to escape. As the jailor “drew his sword and was about to kill himself,” the shout of the apostle Paul penetrated both the darkness of the night and the indescribable shame and reproach the jailor was obviously experiencing. “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!” (Acts 16:27, 28). And the rest of the story is familiar to those acquainted with biblical history.

Medical science can sustain persons when they may prefer to die; older people may have lost the zest to live, resisting the dependency and disability that often comes with age. Life doesn’t seem worth living. In such circumstances suicide may be the preferred option. From this perspective suicide is seen as a morally neutral decision. But the Judeo-Christian ethic cannot see self-destruction as a matter of mere personal choice when life is burdensome either physically or emotionally.

### Suicide as Tragedy

A third attitude toward suicide is to *excuse it as tragedy*. As we closed the casket on the corpse of a beautiful forty-four year old wife and mother who had terminated her life by breathing carbon monoxide, my long time friend and funeral director who attended school with this person shook his head and said tearfully, “What a tragedy, what a waste.” We may feel at times that an individual is the victim of forces beyond him or herself, and consequently chooses death over life. There can be enormous loss, terrible sadness, total despair which others have never experienced. To sit in judgment on such persons who out of deep desperation commit suicide may border on be-

ing both inhumane and naive about life. For persons experiencing such horrible hopelessness and despair, suicide may be an “escape into the arms of death.” Lewis Smedes writes with a Christlike compassion about self-destruction under the intolerable burden of despair and hopelessness: “If suicide is a tragic wrong more like cancer than murder, perhaps we do better to hold judgment, prevent it when we can, and weep when we cannot.”<sup>4</sup>

### Suicide as Spiritual Collapse

A fourth attitude toward suicide which appears in somewhat striking contrast with two of the previously expressed views is set forth in a work earlier cited by Davis, who reasons that “while the Bible never explicitly condemns suicide, every instance of suicide in the Bible is directly associated with the person’s spiritual collapse, from Saul to Judas. . . . The biblical attitude toward human life is so affirmative that an explicit condemnation of suicide is unnecessary; its evil is self-evident.”<sup>5</sup>

Our conclusion about the morality of suicide may be summarized with much care and compassion, recognizing the complexities of many issues that can be raised about self-destruction. Life and personhood are precious gifts of God, to be loved and cherished (Eph. 5:29). The span of life is a divine trust for which I am a responsible steward to God. Life’s experiences can at times become so burdensome and heavy to be borne, as to make me despair of living; and with limited human wisdom and reason turn to self-destruction in the welcome arms of death. We must encourage life and the fullness of joy, for Jesus came to bring that blessing (John 10:10; 15:11). We must counsel, guide, pray for, and comfort the despairing and hopeless, but we must refuse to assume the role of God to sit in eternal judgment upon those who choose to determine the time of their death.

### Doctor, Help Me Out of It

Part II of Humphry’s *Final Exit* focuses on euthanasia involving doctors and nurses. He assumes that many of America’s half million physicians would be willing to speak publicly and to practice doctor assisted suicides were it



legal to do so. I have no research data or clinical statistics to support my reservation about his uncritical assumption; but my personal persuasion is that most of the physicians who have taken their Hypocratic Oath seriously are committed to providing for the health and well-being of patients; and where there is no medical hope for the patient's future, the doctors will provide comfort and relief from suffering. Maurice Rawlings, M.D., specialist in Internal Medicine and Cardiovascular Diseases, has perhaps accurately stated the medical profession's historic stance, that "the first law of medicine, which shall remain our guide, is *primum non nocere*, which means 'if you can't do any good, at least do no harm.'"<sup>6</sup>

Several aspects of the movement for doctor-assisted suicide can only be briefly mentioned. (1) Assuming that suicide is ethically right, Humphry cites professional and social reasons why physicians should actively help the dying to die. Physicians know better than anyone else approximately when the patient will die, and the manner of death (p. 128). This conclusion may have much truth in it, but physicians are not God, and cannot morally help an individual to kill him or herself because of a projected death date. Physicians have lawful access to lethal drugs, Humphry argues, and know the techniques for administering them; and consequently can avoid toxicological mistakes which the unassisted patient may make (p. 128). All the greater responsibility, therefore, on the physician who has this knowledge, and legal access to lethal drugs, to exercise all caution in the legal and moral practice of administering drugs. If society cannot rest safely on this assumption about our medical professionals, then any reasonable trust in the integrity of the healing profession seems groundless.

(2) Socially, Humphry reasons that by the time the end of life is reached, some people have outlived their close friends and relatives, and have no one to assist them in self-deliverance. Relatives of the patient may have too many emotional problems to help with this final exit; or there may be issues of guilt, unfinished business, or outstanding financial obligations which tend to confuse the person to

whom the patient is turning for assistance. Again Humphry reasons that the patient may be fearful of attempting suicide alone for fear of botching it, only to face the rest of life with shame, and possibly incapacitating physical damage. In a closing statement on the social reasons why doctors should assist patients in terminating their own lives, Humphry writes with a calculated coldness which will make many shudder as they read.

'Alone at this crucial time, the physician is the independent broker, the one not involved emotionally or historically, and possessing the technology and skill to end the patient's life with certainty and gentleness. It has to be a carefully negotiated death, with both patient and doctor sharing the responsibilities it entails' (p. 129).

The reader is asked to examine every word and phrase in this patently inhumane and calloused statement.

Physicians will appreciate the new perspective on their professional calling as "independent brokers" of life and death. Humphry earlier writes that the "role of the physician is both to cure and to relieve suffering" (p. 129). But in the next breath the same physician is perceived as not involved emotionally or historically. He or she is an impersonal being with the technology and skill to end a personal life without feeling or flinching! To suggest that the physician's role is to cure and relieve suffering is not synonymous with actively inflicting death or killing another!

Historical records over a period of four millennia indicate that physicians have taken oaths to practice medicine for the benefit of their patients. (See the "Code of Hammurabi" of the Babylonians; the "Oath of Hippocrates" in Greek culture; and the "Code of Medical Ethics" of Dr. Thomas Percival at the beginning of the 1800's.) The cumulative ethic for all physicians over these 4,000 years was: "I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgment, but never with a view to injury and wrongdoing. Neither will I administer a poison to anyone when asked to do so, nor will I suggest such a course."<sup>7</sup>

The horror of this societal attitude, should it

become increasingly more popular and acceptable, is well expressed by an international medical authority, Dr. Robert Jay Lifton, who after studying the subject of death and dying from Japan to Germany, wrote in his book *The Nazi Doctors*:

'Psychologically speaking, nothing is darker or more menacing, or harder to accept, than the participation of physicians in mass murder. However technicized or commercial the modern physician may have become, he or she is still supposed to be a healer — and one responsible to a tradition of healing, which all cultures revere and depend upon. Knowledge that the doctor has joined the killers adds a grotesque dimension to the perception that "this world is not this world."<sup>8</sup>

### The Church's Witness

The Christian church needs to assert itself mightily today in a society which has sometimes lost its belief in the dignity and value of persons. People must not be valued in terms of social utilitarianism, with their worth being measured primarily by their productivity. In this age of human-centeredness and humanism, it is fashionable for people to take charge of human destiny. Derek Humphry and the Hemlock Society scoff at the belief that God is the master of one's fate, and exult in the notion that humans must "want control and choice over" their own destiny. No matter how poetic it may sound, nor how much compassion may be felt for William Ernest Henley's<sup>9</sup> crippled condition, Christians can never boast that they are the master of their fate, that they are the captains of their souls. The fact of the matter is, we are not our own. By creation and redemption, God says that we belong to him. The fullness of our time is in God's hands.<sup>10</sup> Our days are his to number.<sup>11</sup>

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make no profits and have no salaries. It costs us approximately \$10.00 per year to send six issues to you. Thank you for your prayers and financial support!

### END NOTES

1. John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1985) p. 9.
2. Lewis Smedes, *Mere Morality* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983) p. 110.
3. *Ibid.* pp. 111, 112. (For the reference in Aquinas see *Summa Theologica*, 2a, 2ae, ques. 64, art. 5)
4. *Ibid.* p. 113.
5. Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
6. Maurice Rawlings, M.D., *Before Death Comes* (Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980) pp. 50, 51.
7. Kenneth E. Schemmer, M.D., *Between Life and Death* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985) p. 130.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 131.
9. "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul." William Ernest Henley (1849-1903), *Echoes, IV. In Memoriam R.T. Hamilton Bruce, 1846-99.*
10. Psalm 31:15.
11. Psalm 90:9-12.

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