

4051 S. Lincoln Road
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48858

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

INTEGRITY, a journal published bimonthly by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith, but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or the Board as a whole.

I've appreciated your ministry for many years and pray for your continued good work. I hope you'll keep exploring the women's role in the church. That's the next big step for our fellowship. God bless you.

Jennings Davis
Agoura Hills, CA

Greetings! I do enjoy receiving *Integrity* and hope all goes well for it in the future.

Don Cameron
Boise, Idaho

I have recently learned that you publish a booklet entitled *Integrity* and would appreciate you placing me on your mailing list. During the past year I have

done much study on the subject of grace and this had opened up a whole new world of understanding. I feel a new sense of freedom and relief since knowing that you don't have to earn or merit a free gift that was given to us when we were saved. An I also read my Bible with a new understanding, which is almost like reading it again for the first time. But at the same time there are very few people who are willing to converse with me for along on the subject of grace for fear that they might be getting close to someone who has a contagious disease. I look forward to receiving your publication soon and hearing what you and others have to say on the ever timely subject of grace. Thank you.

Richard Graves
Denver, Colorado

Integrity

Editorial: But I Will Be With You

Knocked Around But Not Knocked Out
Alex V. Wilson

A Letter From Westminster
Gary Pearson

Where Two or Three Come Together
Henrietta C. Palmer

Small Church Survival Notes
Preston Hathaway

Spiritual Truths for My "Sacred Journey" (Part Five)
The Sacrament of the Present Moment--Toward a Theology of Time
Curtis D. McClane

Intercepted Correspondence

Book Review:
The Second Incarnation
By Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris
Reviewed by Gordon C. Bruner II

Readers' Response

Editors

Diane G. H. Kilmer
J. Bruce Kilmer

Layout Editors

Karl W. Randall
Natalie Randall

Board of Directors

Brant Lee Doty
Elton D. Higgs
Laquita M. Higgs
Joseph F. Jones
Diane G. H. Kilmer
J. Bruce Kilmer
Curtis Lloyd
Curtis D. McClane
Henrietta C. Palmer
William Palmer
Amos Ponder
Keith Price
Karl W. Randall
Jan Van Horn
John Van Horn

Editorial Advisor

Hoy Ledbetter

Subscriptions

are by written request. There is no subscription charge, but we depend on your contributions which are tax deductible.

Back Issues

Available from
1269 Pickwick Place
Flint, MI 48507

EDITORIAL

But I Will Be With You

One of my favorite Old Testament stories is the saga of Gideon. His "but Lord!" objections to God's call were fueled by doubts and fears that I can appreciate. "But my clan is the weakest!" "But I am the least in my family!" "But how can I deliver Israel?" God's patience with Gideon is encouraging to those of us who feel inadequate for whatever task lies ahead. The Lord answered Gideon with an objection of his own, "But I will be with you, and you shall smite the Midianites as if they were but one man" (Judges 6:16 NIV).

The responses to our request for good news from small churches has spilled over into this issue from *Integrity's* last Nov./Dec. theme. Each report affirms that God is present even when only "two or three are gathered" in his name, and he does strengthen small congregations to fight whatever enemies they face. Authors Alex Wilson, Gary Pearson, Henrietta Palmer and Preston Hathaway describe their "smaller" congregations as spiritual families who have made conscientious, loving efforts to become better servants to God, to each other, and to the community. I appreciated Curtis Lloyd's comment in the last issue when he compares large churches to smaller ones:

"I am enamored with the idea that the largest, the most successful churches, are really small churches. Small churches intentionally, and so successful at doing what the small church does best that they have become medium, large or even mega churches" (*Integrity*, Nov./Dec. 1993, "Small Can Be Beautiful").

Smaller churches offer many advantages, as your responses confirm. Enjoy and appreciate what you have right now...as Curtis McClane's article encourages us to do. Be assured that Satan does not underestimate the strength of small, unified groups...as "Intercepted Correspondence" reminds us.

Whether we are members of a large or small church, all of us are susceptible to the same weaknesses and fears Gideon expressed. May we remember the one great promise that will strengthen us enough to do the will of God:

"But I will be with you."

Diane G. H. Kilmer, Co-Editor

Knocked Around But Not Knocked Out

ALEX V. WILSON

Yes, our congregation is small. On Sunday mornings 100-125 attend. It's an old church, in two ways. It started in the 1870's, and a high percentage of our members are over sixty. It's located in the Portland community, a rather run-down area of Louisville. Lots of folks have moved to other parts of the city. "The few active people are overworked," as *Integrity* said in describing many small churches, and that sometimes hurts our morale. "The youth group is small," too. But, thank God, we do not have most of the other problems listed in the May/June *Integrity*: lifeless singing, tradition-bound leadership, no sense of victory in Christ, and a spirit of narrow exclusiveness.

Background

We are a Church of Christ, but since we are in the small "pre-millennial wing," our heritage has not been so legalistic and sectarian as most of the "mainline" Churches of Christ. (I hate these terms, since they often express walls instead of bridges, but sometimes they are necessary to communicate.) Our best-known minister served with the congregation from 1904-1956. He was an outstanding Bible teacher, and emphasized salvation by the grace of God. He also emphasized love, prayer, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as well as the blessed hope of Christ's return. During the 1940's and 50's, attendance at Portland Church was maybe double what it is now. Our old-timers fondly recall those "good old days."

Though we were not stridently against the widely-practiced "store-bought clergyman" system (if we may call it that), yet the ideal was upheld that the best type of minister is homegrown. And the Lord answered our prayers along that line. Each of our three pulpit ministers since 1956 was a member at Portland for

decades before becoming pastor-teacher there--i.e. the member of the team of elders who was the main teacher of the Word.

Having grown up in this congregation, I returned from twenty years' missionary service in the Philippines to begin preaching in 1983. My two predecessors were still active elders, a situation which many preachers would consider far from ideal. Yet loving harmony prevailed and I didn't feel squelched.

Attendance was 130-150 when I came ten years ago. From the start, I emphasized the importance of the church's "wife"--Worship, Instruction, Fellowship, Evangelism...or, more accurately, Service of all kinds rather than just evangelism. Of these areas, evangelism has been the weakest, at least so far as results are concerned. VBS (for two weeks!) reaches around 100 children yearly. And a Wednesday night Bible Club for neighborhood children, black and white, draws 25-40 of them for Bible stories, songs, cookies and playing in the Portland Christian School gym. But conversions have been few and discouragements many in trying to help these kids. Many are from homes which are broken in many ways.

Worship

One of our goals from the beginning was to enhance our worship. There were some vibrant worshipers there already, but no time set aside specifically for praise. We began to devote at least ten minutes entirely to worship--songs, leading up to the Lord's Supper. I taught a number of times about God's greatness, and the importance of active adoration (rather than passive spectatoritis). We distinguished songs of praise from gospel songs, invitation songs, testimony songs and teaching songs. All of them are

valuable in their place, of course. But sometimes praise songs were minimized, and we sought to change that.

Later we began adding some other songs, not found in our excellent hymnal. Some were golden oldies: "Great is Thy Faithfulness," "Hallelujah! What a Savior!," "Lest I Forget Gethsemane." Others were new: "Because He Lives, I can Face Tomorrow," "For Thou, O Lord, Art High Above All the Earth." Our main worship leader has taught us a number of more recent ones, too, like "I Stand in Awe of You," "As the Deer," and "Majesty." We use an overhead projector maybe 2/3 of the time, which helps us learn new songs more easily and also helps us sing with more gusto.

Besides songs we emphasize praise in other ways sometimes. Responsive readings from great worship passages (Psa. 95 or 103; Isa. 40) are helpful. Or asking the congregation to take a few minutes and mention any biblical names, titles or symbols of our God; "the High and Lofty One; Lamb of God; Wonderful Counselor; Paraclete / Comforter / Counselor; He who sits upon the throne; Spirit of the Living God; the Good Shepherd." This is a great way to prepare for prayer.

Instruction

In preaching we try to be both Biblical and relevant. Sometimes I preach topically. But I intersperse expository series, too. It is important to maintain a balance between basic Bible teaching and important current issues.

Fellowship

It seems to me that many churches, especially in the Restoration Movement, overdo teaching to the neglect of worship and fellowship. The New Testament's many "one another" verses, plus evidence from church history (especially John Wesley's "classes"—actually weekly groups for fellowship and accountability),

and the writings of Keith Miller, John Stott and others, all led to the same conclusion: It is essential that Christians not only listen to sermons, but have regular times of face-to-face sharing of joys, sorrows, and insights. Only in the intimacy of small groups can we know and trust each other enough to bear each other's burdens, exhort and admonish one another, confess and pray for one another, etc.

So in January 1990—after lots of groundwork through sermons, a retreat, and explanations—we began having fellowship groups meet two Sunday nights each month. One met at the church building, for those who didn't feel quite right not being there; the others met in homes in various parts of the city. We didn't try to regiment the meetings into a uniform pattern, but gave the leaders freedom to meet needs in various ways. However, the format we suggested was: give opportunity for members to share any "vibrant verses," any Scriptures that have recently come alive. Then, share recent joys, blessings, answers to prayer. Third, share any current problems, failures or personal struggles. Last, pray for one another. A principle we reiterated was, "Anybody may share, nobody must share."

While some groups are better than others, overall we feel that the church has benefitted a lot. Here were some comments made when we asked for anonymous, written feedback: "We've grown more at ease with each other and shared prayer—requests that we may not have been willing to share earlier—and we've seen answers." "The Lord is central. It has been good to share about everyday—life sorts of things (a dimension lacking with some of us)." "I have more concern for what others go through, and now know more how to pray for specific needs." "I have more joy in reading the Bible, prayer, and personal study than before." "I've grown in understanding others; to be less critical, and less self-conscious."

Another aspect of fellowship we enjoy

occasionally is inter-church in nature. We cooperated in a city-wide evangelistic effort. Also we spearheaded an early morning celebration on Sunrise day (Easter, so-called), in which believers from five other churches joined. This was followed by a breakfast together. In no way did we compromise the Gospel in these meetings, and I believe Barton Stone, the Campbells, and Paul would have rejoiced in these attempts to reach out to other brothers and sisters. The Lord Jesus, too.

Prayer

Undergirding all of these blessings has been the fact that there is a core of fervent intercessors in the congregation. After studying the place of prayer in the

A Letter From Westminster

GARY PEARSON

The request for good news from small churches in the May/June issue immediately caught my attention. This past April marked the tenth anniversary of my and my wife's coming to Westminster, Maryland, for me to serve the Church of Christ here as its preaching minister. For the past decade our lives have been immersed in a small church. This is more than a job. It's a labor of love. This church has become our home. Allow me to share with you what we have grown to love here.

We're Family

Perhaps most important is the sense of family we have. Family is the most common term we use for our congregation. It's more than something nice to say; it's reality. With our closest

ministries of James McGready, Barton Stone, and the resulting Second Great Awakening, we began a monthly prayer-meeting for revival (in addition to our regular times of prayer). Then some began gathering forty-five minutes before Sunday school to pray. And our Father has blessed.

The church is far from perfect. In many ways we fall short of what we ought to be. Sometimes we really struggle. Yet in spite of it all, the Lord shows that he still uses weak and insignificant believers to carry out his purposes. To him be glory.

Alex Wilson edits *Word and Work* magazine, 2518 Portland Ave., Louisville, KY 40212. Write for a free sample.

physical family twelve hours away, Becki and I consider the congregation to be an extended family for us and our five children. The days of having all of one's aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings in the same community are over for most of us. An even more meaningful extended family, though, is available in the church and may seem more real in a small church.

Being family doesn't mean that we always get along and are always thrilled with each other. No, we regularly get on each other's nerves. Our love for each other requires that we often say, "I'm sorry." Being family means that we are committed to each other whether we like each other at the moment or not. Like physical brothers and sisters, our love for each other is more fundamental than the changing ups and downs of our relationships.

Lots of Diversity

Another feature of our life in a small church is that we have had to learn to work through our diversity. We sometimes kiddingly call ourselves the Diverse Church of Christ. We come from a wide variety of religious backgrounds including almost every strain of our own restoration movement. Diversity is not limited to small churches but I think small churches are forced more to face and cope with their diversity. Difference in worship style tastes? The large church can offer a multiplicity of assemblies each tailored to a specific preference. That is usually not possible for the small church. At times we have become quite frustrated in trying to resolve differences caused by our diversity. Yet, in the long term, I see our diversity as our strength. Working through our differences has strengthened our commitment to each other. It has made us a resilient congregation. We may look fragile to an outsider but when it counts most, our fellowship is quite resilient.

I love the emphasis on our corporate worship that we have in Westminster. The days of themeless, hodge-podge, planned-at-the-last-minute worship assemblies are over. We now plan our assemblies a month ahead of time and focus on a different theme each month. We read a lot more Scripture now and read much of it together responsively. Our songs are increasingly chosen for their content rather than for nostalgic reasons. Exuberant praise is more and more a part of our assemblies. You might say that our assemblies are becoming increasingly vertical—more focused on the Lord rather than on ourselves. Yet we do not find this taking away from our fellowship together in worship. On the contrary, the more we exalt the Lord and lose ourselves in praise, the closer we find ourselves being drawn to each other. The horizontal versus vertical issue among us concerning worship is a myth. When the vertical is emphasized, the horizontal is

only strengthened. After all, praising and glorifying God is what we were created for and what we will do together throughout eternity. Our congregational worship assemblies should be a glimpse into what awaits us in eternity.

We Appreciate Who We Are

I deeply appreciate our attitude in Westminster toward our religious heritage in Churches of Christ. We have no desire to jettison that heritage. Why should we? It is an integral part of who we are. We could try to ignore it but we could not erase its formative influence on us if we tried. Our approach has been to build on what is Christ-like and consistent with Scripture in our heritage and to reject what is not. As Leonard Allen's *Distant Voices* shows so clearly, our restoration heritage is not at all monolithic. We can choose what aspects of our heritage to build on for the future to help us become more and more a Church of Christ that is simply Christ's church.

Finally, I appreciate our refusal to be satisfied with the status quo. It's possible to be content without being satisfied. We enjoy what we are and have from God as a small church. We are always looking to the future, however, with eager anticipation longing to discover where God will lead us and what he will do through us. It's easy to be discouraged sometimes and to see ourselves as a small church in a small, old building on an obscure street. But discouragement quickly gives way to excitement when we consider some of the amazing things God has done with some very unpromising groups of his people through the centuries. We long to be used in a major way in our community as an instrument of God's power and grace.

Don't get me wrong. We have at least our share of problems but this request was only for good news! Becki and I can testify that ten years with a small church can be a very happy, gratifying time. We never would have guessed that

responding to a *Gospel Advocate* ad in 1983 would lead to such a precious part of our lives!

Gary Pearson and his family live in Westminster, Maryland.

Where Two or Three Come Together

HENRIETTA C. PALMER

"For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them." Matthew 18:20 NIV

Almost forty years ago our family, along with fifteen other families, was led to begin a new congregation of the Church of Christ in Troy, Michigan. The year was 1955 and Troy was incorporated as a city that same year. We left a large, very comfortable and thriving congregation to begin a missionary work in Troy. God has blessed the Troy congregation throughout the years and it has become a spiritual haven for many Christians. The building has been enlarged and new facilities have been added as classrooms and fellowship areas were needed. And yet, in spite of prayerful planning, God-loving leaders, and faithful believers, the Troy congregation has remained a small church in number—although mighty in spirit!

Since Troy is a northern suburb of Detroit, many of the church members are employed by the automobile industry or by other large corporations. Families are often transferred to new locations and they leave us with our blessings. Their vacant pews are soon filled with new families who have been assigned to positions in the Troy area. Because of frequent moves among the members, the Troy congregation has less than 200 members. Perhaps God is using our small church family to touch the hearts of the many Christians who need the close fellowship of a small congregation. If all the former members of the Troy

congregation came together to worship on the same Sunday morning, we would need a coliseum to house them. But what a joyful song would echo from the rafters!

Worship

Our worship services have always been Christ-centered, but there have been changes throughout the years in the planning. Song leaders and worship planners are now giving careful thought to a central theme for the entire Sunday morning service. Songs and scripture readings are selected to reinforce the Bible message of the day. Hearts and minds are directed to a special theme or passage from God's Word throughout the entire service. Christians truly go to worship and to commune with God on Sunday mornings rather than to just "go to church" because they feel they must.

The younger children also participate in worship in a specially planned "Youth Worship" session which meets during the last half of the Sunday morning assembly. They are in the auditorium with the entire church family for singing, scripture reading, and communion. Before the minister begins his message, the children are invited to assemble with the youth leaders for worship planned for their level of understanding. The little ones grow up loving and appreciating their times of worship.

Giving

When Christians truly love the Lord,

they want to share his love with others. Small churches may have more limited finances than larger congregations, but there are many ways to reach out to others. They can join with other congregations to support missionaries throughout the world. The Troy congregation is currently helping seven missionary families and frequently contributes support for individuals who go out with missionary teams for short-term assignments. This past summer our minister, Joseph F. Jones, and his wife Geneva, traveled to the Ukraine to join with missionary Epi Bilak in a Christian family Bible camp. High school and college age students have received financial assistance so they could go to Russia, Germany, Japan and Central America for missionary work with young adults from other congregations. Throughout the years the members at Troy church have been blessed by their "cheerful giving." We know it is impossible to outgive the Lord!

Benevolence

Small churches, like larger congregations, can open their doors to the community for child-care facilities, for feeding the homeless, for family support groups, for Christian counseling, for Bible studies and for Christian fellowship. When special needs arise, we try to be flexible enough to provide whatever support and assistance is possible—whether it is food and clothing, or financial aid to earthquake, tornado and flood victims. We always try to be sensitive to the hurts and needs within our own congregation and reach out to them in genuine love.

Fellowship

Wednesday evening services are a traditional practice in most of our churches. Several years ago, however, we realized that many of our families were unable to attend the mid-week service

because parents were working and there wasn't time enough to get home, have dinner, and get back to church in time for classes. After surveying the members, it was decided to have dinner at the church building each Wednesday at 6:00 p.m. with classes following at 7 p.m. (which allows parents with children to get them home early). Eight "cooking teams" were set up and each team provides dinner for about 80-90 people every eight weeks. Teams were designed so that members who work outside the home can prepare (or purchase) their part of the meal at their own convenience. Since some members are unable to help on a cooking team, and everyone is encouraged to attend this wonderful time of fellowship, all those who are there for dinner donate \$3.00 for the food costs (maximum of \$10.00 per family regardless of the number attending) and the cooks are reimbursed for all of their expenses. It is the best meal in town for the price, and *Wonderful Wednesdays* are attracting many visitors from other congregations along with friends of our own members who have started attending on a regular basis.

Bible Break is a community outreach which is now in its eighth year. This is a women's Bible study which meets every Tuesday morning (Sept. through May) and encourages women from all religious backgrounds to meet together and study God's Word. Although participants have changed over the years, God has led between 50 and 60 women to the study group each year. About half of those participating each year come from outside our congregation. We have been blessed through these Bible study classes and we have felt a closer, more personal relationship with God and with other Christians.

The Troy congregation includes young marrieds with small children, parents with teens, singles, "empty nesters" and seniors. Because Troy church is fairly small, members have many opportunities for close, personal contacts with others in

the congregation. Classes and activities are planned for all ages but many events include the entire congregation because we enjoy "fun times" together. Pot-luck dinners, corn roasts, hay rides, picnics at the park, song fests, and "informal devotionals" bring members of all ages together.

In our present culture, *big* is often associated with *better*. Small congregations may feel they are less effective than the giant churches so often mentioned in the religious journals. However, Christians everywhere should remember the words of Jesus when he was asked about the greatest of all the commandments. Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with

all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." Matt. 22:37-39. Christians in all congregations can follow these great commands, whether they gather together in small groups or assemble in buildings of grandeur. Regardless of size, we can praise God for his presence in our lives!

Henrietta C. Palmer has served for many years as secretary on the *Integrity* board. She is a retired elementary school principal who takes an active role in Bible Break and other activities at Troy Church of Christ in Troy, Michigan, where her husband Bill serves as elder.

Small Church Survival Notes

PRESTON HATHAWAY

I am a Christian serving on active duty in the United States Navy. In my fifteen years as a Christian I have worked with eleven congregations that had fewer than 100 members and two or three with more. During this journey I have been exposed to a wide variety of acceptable doctrines, styles of worship, evangelism techniques and loving attitudes. Love, expressed in many different and beautiful ways, has proven to be the glue that held groups together and helped them grow and thrive despite differences. Actions based in love are pivotal in how members and non-members view congregations in the church.

A Christ-centered approach to worship, service and life allows Christians who don't believe exactly alike to grow and work together in Christian love. Teach and live a Christian life to glorify God. Paul, writing to Christians, says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever

you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved..." I Cor. 10:31-33 (NIV). Developing an attitude that seeks to build up our brothers and sisters will prevent many problems from occurring.

Congregational leadership must lovingly challenge individuals to take on new responsibilities. Given training, tools and Christian encouragement, Christians can achieve seemingly impossible deeds. When Christians are needed, they will grow to meet new challenges. As work is spread out, the "10% that do all of the work" will no longer be overworked and fewer Christians will suffer from burnout.

It is extremely important that churches back home provide young Christians with a Christ-centered faith and tools before

they leave home. Encourage young Christians to learn public speaking, music and teaching skills. Teach them to pray and serve. Above all, emphasize the importance of commitment to Jesus. These things will prove critical in their Christian survival and prepare them for great works of service in small congregations.

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." 1 Cor. 13:13 (NIV). Faith in Jesus Christ, hope in eternity—a life after

death—and love. These three things, when applied to life in small congregations, make for a very positive and productive spiritual journey.

In the early part of his 16-year Navy career, Preston Hathaway became a member of the Church of Christ. He is currently serving a one year tour of duty in Adak, Alaska—part of the Aleutian Islands—and works with the 9-member congregation there.

Spiritual Truths For My "Sacred Journey": The Sacrament of The Present Moment -- Toward A Theology of Time

CURTIS D. McCLANE

It was one of those momentous occasions that forever changes one's life. We had been waiting for nine months to be a part of this miracle. I had been up late watching a college basketball game between two teams I didn't really know or care about. After the game was over, I settled down in bed for cozy dreams. Just when I entered the twilight zone, Nancy gently nudged me and said it was time to go.

Boy, was I nervous! We were approximately thirty minutes from the hospital and I didn't want to be caught on the road. So I hurriedly packed clothes, suitcases, and expectant wife in the car and sped toward the hospital. I had had one hour of sleep and it was after midnight.

We made it to the hospital quickly and without incident. I suited up in a blue, loose-fitting hospital gown and wore a mask into the delivery room. It was so hot in there I could hardly breathe. But when the birth process began, I forgot how hot I was or that I had had only one

hour of sleep. The miracle was unfolding before my very eyes. Time stood still and the world changed forever. After the birth, Nancy and I hugged and cried together. Then the doctor very gingerly handed me this precious human baby.

I will never forget looking down into the eyes and face of this little bundle in my arms. The experience was so awesome that my brain could not form the questions fast enough. The fingers and toes were so little. The skin was so wrinkled and red. The cry was like none other I had ever heard. How do you freeze time so that this moment would last forever? Never was a moment to me so clearly sacramental.

What Is Sacrament?

We of the "Free Church" tradition (non-state-controlled churches) have historically negated any positive concept of "sacrament." Yet a sacrament is nothing more than some portion of reality that signifies the effects of God's grace.

(Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, New York, New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, (1984), p.24.) The American Restoration Movement reacted against ordained priests and clergy being recognized as the only ones who could administer the sacraments. Additionally, the view that the sacraments were actually the way in which God's grace was dispensed never gained a sympathetic hearing. Instead of baptism, communion and prayer being dispensers of grace, Campbell, Stone, Richardson and other early leaders tried to make it clear that these channels of worship were human responses to Divine grace already appropriated.

If the Restoration leaders were correct, their sacramental theology holds tremendous promise for our spiritual journeys. The "sacrament of the present moment" can then be viewed as a portion of reality that signifies the effects of God's grace. And since every Christian is a priest (the priesthood of all believers being a radical tenet of the Reformers), then we can participate in the fullness of time so that its reality can be experienced in the context of God's grace.

Spencer Johnson illuminates the idea of experiencing the sacrament of the moment in our every day life in his delightful modern parable, *The Precious Present*. The story is about a boy who encountered an old man with a special secret that seemed to make him happier and healthier than most people. The older gentleman told him one day that the Precious Present was a gift that, when properly perceived and received, would make a person forever happy. When the boy heard that, he exclaimed: "Wow! I hope someone gives me the Precious Present. Maybe I'll get it for Christmas."

Eventually the boy grew into a young man who realized that even the joy of Christmas gifts doesn't last. He inquired of the older gentleman just what the Precious Present might be. But the old man replied,

"You already know what the precious

present is.

You already know where to find it. And you already know how it can make you happy.

You knew it best when you were a small child.

You have simply forgotten."

The young man was confused and upset because he could not find the Precious Present. He demanded that the older man give it to him. But the gentleman replied that it was not in his power to give the Precious Present. Only the boy could give it to himself.

The young man packed his bags and set off into the world to discover the Precious Present. After years of searching, one day he finally realized that he was *in* the "Precious Present." He finally understood that "the present is simply who I am...just the way I am...right now. And it is precious. I am precious. I am the precious present." [Spencer Johnson, *The Precious Present*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984.]

Appreciate The Moment

Is it possible then that there are cycles of time in our Christian experience that are indeed sacramental? Don Saliers believes so and has challenged the Christian community to take a rhythmic view of time that takes into account God's movements in human lives and affairs. He maintains that:

The cycles of time and the sacramental sign-actions open us to life with God and neighbor in time and space. This is not a matter of doing "the same old thing." Rather, the baptized community itself is to open up to what God continues to lavish upon us all in Christ. [Don Saliers, "Sanctifying Time, Place, and People: Rhythms of worship and Spirituality." *Weavings*, no.5,2(Sept./Oct. 1987): 29.

I can think of some sacramental moments in my life that were experienced and passed before I could realize each one's eternal significance. The meeting of a new friend. Watching my daughter take her first step. Asking my fiance to marry me. Becoming a father. Turning thirty-nine. Ministering to my family and allowing myself to be ministered to after my father's suicide. Emotional ups and downs. Being a part of a fathers' prayer group.

"Sacramental sign-actions" abound daily. The warm handshake indicates that God's grace is experienced in relational ways. The outstretched arms of my daughter teach me about trust and what God wants me to do toward Him. The special spot and tree on campus where I asked Nancy to marry me reminds me of a lifetime commitment and that God's grace sustains and nurtures such a bold move. The baby blanket with new life reminds me of the Christ-child in Mary's arms. The thirty-nine candles tell me how good God has been to me on this earth. The closed casket and the yellow rose on top cry out for God's grace during the unthinkable. Tears and folded hands recall the Gethsemane scene of suffering begging for grace. The circle of these fathers praying symbolizes solidarity of faith in a world that fractures trust and is wary of grace.

The present moment in which I exist is sacramental. No matter what I am doing, I am doing it to the glory of God in response to the grace I have already received. In struggling to formulate our own theology of time that makes sense and tries to take into account the significant, the mundane, the exciting, the boring, the tranquil, the upsetting--we must always remember that only the present can be fully experienced and appreciated.

Use The Moment Wisely

In the Holy Scriptures the Pauline theology of time includes a recognition of

the value of the present. "Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15,16). "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity" (Colossians 4:5). Making the most of every opportunity is the English translation of a difficult Greek phrase, literally, "to buy back out of the market place time." Some have suggested that the idea of buying back time or paying off the demands of time in view of the judgment and the Parousia are what is at stake here. [Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, sub. "EKSAGORADZO," 271.]

I find it significant that in both Pauline texts an admonition to be "wise" in character is stressed. This is in view of outsiders who will be watching our conduct, and it is in the context of "the days that are evil"--living during a time and in a culture where value systems and priorities are opposed to those of the Christian. So Paul's sacramental view of time takes into account its "preciousness" because of how little time there really is and how foolishly people pursue their interests, oblivious to the Parousia and the coming of the end times in which the "evil days" will be vindicated.

Sanctify The Present

How can viewing time as the "sacrament of the present moment" really make any difference in my life? Time is viewed as a gift not to be squandered away in regretting the past, lamenting the present, and dreading the future. That gift is offered by a gracious God who allows human free will to squander it. But even more tragic is the condition of Christians suffering from the myopic state in which they are unable to discern the spiritual significance of the moment because they lack the wisdom and insight necessary for such a perspective (see 1 Peter 1:8, 9). This sacramental view sanctifies the

present, sets it aside as worship and praise to the glory of God no matter what is taking place in the present. This awareness sensitizes me to the fullest potential of the moment, so that I embrace the "new-ness" of my existence, protecting me from the ever-present danger of self-flagellation over the past and self-deprecation in view of the future.

I can't think of a better way to illustrate the "sacrament of the present moment" than sharing with you a prayer from Michel Quoist. He points out that the daily, "worldly" tasks can indeed be sacramentalized so that the ordinary existence of common people can be fruitful expressions of the nourishing Divine love. I'll close with his prayer:

The Monday Wash

Lord,
today is Monday.
I went out and I saw laundry drying,
hanging at the windows
and on balconies,
here and there in the concrete hollow,
a motley mosaic,
sparkling with colour
against the grey of the buildings.

The wind was making the multi-coloured
notes sing
on the clothes-line,
and whispering in the ear of my heart,
I heard
the song of trouble
and the song of love.

Dirty clothes,
clean clothes,
dried clothes,
ironed clothes, soiled again,
to be washed again,
dried again,
ironed again.

Clothes for my husband,
clothes for my son,
clothes for my daughter,
and my own mixed in with them.

Clothes for one week to the next,
from one washing to the next,
from one drying to the next,
from one ironing to the next.

Lord,
I offer you this evening,
for all those women who don't know you,
or for all who don't think of
praying to you,
this washing which is whiter,
smoother,
softer,
this washing scented
with the love of mothers
and of wives.

I offer you all these daily acts,
repeated a thousand times over,
making up the fabric
of beautiful hidden lives,
the wonderful lives of humble people
who know that to love is to endure,
beyond weariness.

Little one, have I told you?
I'm telling you now
and you are to tell
your brothers and sisters:
"The Kingdom of God is like a woman,
who spends her whole life
turning dirty washing into clean washing,
not through the power
of some miracle detergent,
but through the miracle of love,
given every day."

[Michel Quoist, *New Prayers* (New York, N.Y.: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 17, 18.]

Dr. Curtis D. McClane holds a D.Min. from Drew University, and an M.Div. from Harding University. For more than 15 years Curtis has been a pulpit minister in the Churches of Christ (non-instrumental) and currently serves the Holmes Road Church of Christ in Lansing, Michigan.

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 WordPerfect 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.

My Dear Complacent Kitten,

Before addressing any other matter in relation to your latest epistle, I must emphatically respond to three points introduced in your latest communique.

First, my reaction to your calm statement that "things seem to have been rocking along pretty well without any special effort on my part..." Whatever the situation may be, your analysis and present state of mind sound positively blase. This is not acceptable! You are a precipitator, not a spectator. You are to incite, not vegetate! However favorable the situation may seem, surely there are surly seeds of dissension to be sown, animosities to agitate, feuds to be fomented. One of our Enemy's disciples put it best: you are to "walk about as a roaring lion, seeking whom you may devour!" Has the lion become a pussycat? I trust not! May I never hear such statements from or about you again!

The second problem is your crass dismissal of such efforts as those suggested in the works of the "Safety Net" program. The point: *never, never* underestimate the power of those who are firmly committed to the Enemy's service, even when underfunded, understaffed, or overworked! Incredible as it may seem, some of these workers have achieved substantial results with a minimal expenditure of funds, but a maximal

expenditure of effort. The Enemy may not have countless troops to field in our continuing warfare; but they include numerous individuals who serve with an unswerving, efficient commitment.

The third point relates to that 3% figure—this being the suggested portion of income which the average American contributes to "charitable causes." I simply point out that the Enemy has shown an astounding ability to accomplish incredible results with apparently trivial sums of money. Indeed, many of his followers' most remarkable results have often had no relationship whatsoever to financial expenditures! I have never been able to establish a consistent and reliable relationship between the two factors—financial investment and numerical or spiritual growth among these people.

My words above are intended to remind you of your primary objectives and to urge a total resolution to what you know to be your duties, not to bring any humiliation upon you—you certainly are aware of the principles I have delineated, and I shall assume your words were written in a moment of mental relaxation. Please know, nephew, that I do not intend to report these momentary derelictions of thought to our Supreme Demon. I shall expect them never to be repeated, however. You might lose more than the

present right to wear that asbestos suit on occasion!

In a more pleasant vein, I am ready to propose the adoption of your amended title: NAASSTY for our society of achievers in our Master's Kingdom; and I anticipate a favorable response. They will hear this as *your* suggestion, and not a word about the three matters addressed earlier. If our Big boss can be deceptive, why not I? In our favor, he does not possess the omniscience of Our Enemy. The case is closed.

With reference to my acceptance speech before the Council of the Ungodly, I may say with all false humility that it was a scorcher—a real "barn-burner!" If I recall correctly, it ignited the tape on which it was being recorded...now they use an acetate asbestos!

Scorchingly yours,

Uncle Apollyon

My Dear Devouring Uncle,

I believe I have been suitably chagrined by your avuncular remarks about my laxness in leonine devilry; and in that frame of mind I am especially grateful for your use of my slimy little acronym (though I suppose you will expect a favor from me some of these days in return). I shall not desist from searching for, stalking, and seducing my prey. Nor shall I underestimate how much the Enemy can do with limited resources. I remember the story of that fellow Gideon and his straggly band that the Enemy used to defeat our servants, the Midianites. I suppose that, on the whole, we may be better off having church people who are giving enough to be proud of it than with Christians who are so stingy toward the Enemy as to be defensive about it.

I have another concern to share with you this time. In trying to refresh myself

about that Troublesome Book's advice to these people, I ran across some words that indicate that the Enemy's intelligence on our activities is right there for public consumption! In the Second Corinthian letter, the writer says forgiveness is important "to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs." And in another place, the same writer cautions against maintaining anger, so as to "give no opportunity to the Devil." How are we to function if people take these bits of information seriously? If they don't nurse grudges and feed their anger, they are going to be immune to all sorts of other deliciously hateful perversities of emotion and behavior, such as slanderous gossip, malicious misinterpretation of others' motives, lying, treachery, and playing political hardball? I see I must put more effort into keeping people from examining the Book carefully or taking it seriously. I can only hope that most find the indulgences that make them vulnerable to us so natural and so dear to their egos that they will cling to them even in the face of warnings from their own Lord to the contrary.

What are your observations on the current societal preoccupation with violence—either exploiting it to make money or trying to find ways to bring it under control? I have found it rather disturbing that some who have in the past aided and abetted our cause by an overemphasis on solving social evils by institutional actions (rather than by asserting universal standards of behavior and holding people individually responsible) are now saying that maybe "diversity" in the moral realm has a downside to it. Perhaps strong traditional families (they may venture to suggest) are not so dispensable as the "enlightened" have been telling us they are. This is dangerous talk! Having gained so much ground in the undermining of family structures, we cannot at this advanced point let mere common sense take over again. I take every opportunity to

reinforce the principles of relativity and uncertainty when people begin to talk about finding some common ground for moral instruction in the schools. I trust that the assumptions of humanistic optimism will limit such searchings to futile attempts to identify a remedy for sin that doesn't acknowledge that sin exists. What a truly hellish paradox that is!

I must go now, for I have been invited

to attend the board meeting of some pesky little religious journal that operates on a shoestring and has only a small circulation, but that might do us the kind of damage that the Enemy's "little things" sometimes do, if the people involved are not sidetracked somehow.

Yours in infernal diversion,
Ichabod

Book Review

The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church
Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris (Howard Publishing Co., West Monroe, La.), 1992.

Review by GORDON C. BRUNER II

Where do your spiritual loyalties lie? Are you more church-centered than Christ-centered? Do you view the church as an organization to join or rather as an organism you are part of by birth? Is your faith in religion or in God? These and other critical Christian issues are discussed in *The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church* by Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris.

The title comes from the idea that the first incarnation occurred when God lived among people in the form of Jesus (p. 48) and the second incarnation is occurring while God works in the world via Christians (p. 53). Christians are the body that should perform the will of the head.

The first major section of the book advocates the need for change in the church while avoiding destructive changes. The next two sections focus on the nature of the church, what is it theologically and what it should do on a day-to-day basis. The final section provides a future-oriented look at the church, particularly with regard to the practice of baptism and

communion.

One of the primary tenants of the book is that instead of attempting to replicate "the first century church" we should instead produce the form of Christianity that God would have us to possess for the 21st century. There is no perfect congregation described in scripture from which to model (pp. 62, 78). Further, we must not be reproducing first-century culture but, instead, attempting to determine and uphold the eternal truths and values that were part of Christianity in the beginning.

The authors distinguish between the church as a formal organization and the church as an organism (pp. 241). In contrast to what has been popularly taught in the last few decades, the position taken in the book (p. 36) is that *the Bible does not offer a blueprint for building some organization!* The brave statement is also made that the letters composing the majority of the New Testament were *not* written to us. Though we can learn from them, they were written to specific Christians, in specific places,

with specific problems. This view leads one to apply the New Testament differently than in the past. For example, examples of Christian activity described in the New Testament are not binding in and of themselves. At the other extreme, Christians don't have to have explicit scriptural examples or commands for everything they do.

The need for Christian fellowship is firmly supported but what is questioned is whether true *koinonia* can occur in large assemblies (p. 105). One-on-one and small group experiences are necessary for the spiritual intimacy of burden-bearing and joy-sharing to occur effectively. Further, worship should be a part of everyday life and not relegated to one time or place or restricted with traditions (p. 130).

The authors endorse the growing realization that too many members of the Church of Christ as well as other denominations view the goal of Christianity to be expanding the church (pp. 179, 180). While seemingly laudable, over time this objective leads to "churchianity" rather than Christianity; it is "ecclesiocentric" rather than Christocentric. This tendency has been more harshly referred to as "ecclesiolatry" since it is the church, a man-made organization, that is the object of our service rather than God.

If I have a complaint with the book, it is that, like most of us, I feel the authors misuse the term "church." They do make the point that the term carries meaning not supported by scripture but, possibly to patronize the traditional hardliners, they still say that it "translates the Greek term *ekklesia*" (p. 44). I wish they had taken the little extra space necessary to point out the term has been used to translate *ekklesia* but it isn't an accurate

translation! This deliberate translation "error" began with the King James Version when the King himself ordered that certain terms that were traditionally used in the Church of England, of which he was the head, should be used to describe the ecclesiastic organization and its officers. For example, "church" had to be used rather than "assembly" or "congregation." I would go well beyond the authors, therefore, and call upon Christians to either refrain from using "church" to refer to the followers of Jesus Christ or, at least, use it much like the term "denomination," meaning an organization built by humans but distinct from the body of true believers.

The bottom line is that the publication puts into book form thoughts that have been discussed in limited circles for years. My overall recommendation then is that if one has been privy to these discussions then most of the material in the book will not be new. It would still offer an organization and formalization that would be lacking from an informal collection of articles, sermons, newsletters, and conversations. On the other hand, many in the Church of Christ may not have heard these issues openly discussed in a "church" setting or printed medium. Many of the thoughts are not traditional and require a change in the status quo. Ultimately, the test of whether a person will like the book or not depends upon their loyalty: is it Christ-centered or church-centered? My hope and prayer is that more and more will choose the former!

Dr. Gordon C. Bruner II is a professor at Southern Illinois University. Gordon grew up in the Church of Christ and he refers to himself as a Christian-at-large!

"He who walks in Integrity, walks securely." Proverbs 10:9

READERS' RESPONSE

This past summer I attended the Christian Scholars Conference held on the Harding University campus in Searcy, Arkansas. The conference allows scholars from the Churches of Christ non-instrumental branch to present papers dealing with a particular topic chosen by the host university. This year's theme was "Worship." Unlike lectureships, which usually provide a limited look at a chosen topic, the Scholars Conference discusses all aspects of the topic more broadly. Conference papers are more technical and are read, not sermonized. At the end of each session questions are fielded from the audience.

I considered the highlights of this year's conference to be the special dinner speakers and the discussions during breaks. Lynn McMillon, Jack Reese, and Tom Olbricht were the guest speakers during our dinners and final luncheon. Lynn McMillon presented a paper on the Scottish influence of the Glassites and Sandimans upon our attitude toward worship. Jack Reese presented a paper dealing with the present day concerns about worship in our assemblies. Tom Olbricht closed the conference with a paper that looked at past controversies about worship and how that they did not change the fundamental aspects of worship. The breaks were special because they allowed us to make new friends and discuss the various papers in a spirit of brotherly love.

I believe our scholars should have a platform to present some of their work, but I wonder if the conference affects those in the church pew? Next year Pepperdine will host the Christian Scholars Conference. You do not have to be a scholar to attend. You only have to have a desire to be challenged.

Keith Price
Berkley, Michigan

Your Fall, '93 newsletter is very interesting to me. *Integrity* encourages me for the Church in the 21st century. The legalistic trends which have been present most of my life seem to be fading a bit. I want to say "Thanks again" for the wonderful essays and articles *Integrity* provides.

Marguerite McSpadden
Dumas, Texas

Thank you, Henrietta Palmer, for sending the introduction to your *Integrity* family. I'm enjoying the publication very much and wish continued success with your special family and their excellent thoughts of our journey through life to meet our great and precious Redeemer. God bless you all!

P.S. It would be nice knowing all of you personally—but in a way I do.

Leala Ford
Houston, TX

I enjoy reading all the articles in *Integrity*. I find them both inspiring and challenging.

Jerry Blair
Memphis, TN

The article "Trust and Obey" by Denise Germain was very well written and pertinent. I can believe as she stated that 80% to 90% of families today are dysfunctional and for the reasons she gave: they are taught, more by countless inferences and examples than by direct statements, not to talk, or trust or feel. Such as statements like "it's better to be quiet and reserved—you are perceived to be more intelligent—it's more mannerly or polite—and you need to control your tongue if you want to go to heaven (meaning not talk)." Funny—this only applied to females.

Denise's essay was delightful and I'm glad she broke out of her blindness and denial for a healthier, happier life. I've experienced the same awareness of how I was made to believe things that restricted me, things that weren't true I found out later. But she told it better.

Thanks for the article.

Joan Morrison
Columbus, Ohio

I would like to thank you for sending me the journal. It has been a wonderful tool in my ministry. I have enjoyed reading the many articles and inspiring words written by many of my brethren. Please continue this great work.

David A.V. Wilson

Cecil Hook's article "Does *Baptize* Really Mean to Immerse" in the Sept.–Oct. issue was interesting. He reasons that words evolve, which is true to some extent. However, I'm wondering how much liberty we're allowed to evolve certain words. Inconsistent as that sounds, we still must reason the value of the teaching.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words describes "baptism" as the processes of immersion, submersion, and emergence (from bapto, to dip) . . . Vine describes "baptizo" as likened to "the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another . . ." We can easily conclude, I believe, that baptize should not have been a transliterated word, but instead, a translated word: "immerse."

The KJV uses the word "charity" in the place of "love" (agape) in I Cor. 13:13. Did the meaning evolve or just the word usage? In I John 4:9,10, the KJV uses the word "love" not "charity" (same word: agape). KJV also uses the word "Easter" in Acts 12:4 instead of the proper word "Passover" (pascha). Again, are we looking at word meanings or simply proper translations?

Perhaps the Jewish viewpoint of

"baptism" was a cleansing. This is noted, I believe, in I Peter 3:21, where a definite illustration is given regarding baptism. I'm no Greek scholar and I probably never will be. However, if these scholars who have studied and written and described baptism as "Immersion, submersion, and emergence," then it seems likely that it was its original meaning.

Why, if we should not judge others because they were sprinkled, or poured upon as a form of "baptism," should Mr. Hook "advise all believers to follow that undeniably safe course" of immersion? What does that mean? If his definition of baptism could include sprinkling or pouring, then those are "undeniably safe courses" as well. Mr. Hook said "they feel as scripturally sound as you or I do." So do those who do not subscribe to any form of baptism and regard the sinners' prayer as acceptance into Heaven.

O.K., I'll let God to the judging, too.

Thank you, Mr. Hook, for helping us to think and study.

Don A. Stowell
Swartz Creek, Michigan

In the last *Integrity* I read the article "Does Baptize Really Mean to Immerse?" I cannot in good conscience support *Integrity*. Please take me off your mailing list.

Leonard McCann
Eugene, Oregon

Thank you! We read every word, and appreciate the "concepts" and ideas and mostly agree!

Elaine Perrin
Lubbock, Texas

Please send us *Integrity*. We have enjoyed reading it so much. One of our friends has shared her copies with us.

Mr. & Mrs. B.B. Askew
Groves, Texas