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*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.

## Intercepted Correspondence

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or, to turn one of the Enemy's sayings to our own use, "Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof." I'm going to sit in front of the TV and see what Donahue and Geraldo are doing for us these days. Did they get that sleazy all by themselves, or

did we have a special agent working on them?

Yours for Lower Standards,  
Ichabod

\*\*"Dolor" in Spanish means "pain."

# Integrity

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## The Perfect Teacher

Can we imagine what Jesus was thinking as he sat down on the mountainside and looked out over the crowds that had collected around him? Some faces reflected despair; others, hope; still others showed curiosity, or wonder, or just plain confusion. What words should Jesus speak that would last longer than his short earthly visit? The teaching would have to be practical, but not shallow. It had to reach deeply into the people's pain and discouragement. The sermon must offer freedom to the listeners' spirits and point the way to eternal, abundant life. At last, Jesus opened his mouth and spoke the words recorded for us in Matthew 5 through 7.

Can you imagine how startling his words were? Most people wanted to hear easy formulas that would give them power over their problems—chronic sicknesses, political enemies, economic poverty, victimization, purposelessness, alienation from others and from God. But what they heard did not seem like power answers of any sort: "You'll find blessings in your spiritual impoverishment, blessings when you mourn and when you practice mercy. Happy you'll be if you make peace and exercise meekness even in the face of persecution. Enjoy the blessing of God by seeking him without flamboyance and by loving the unlovable as God has loved you."

"The crowds were amazed at his teaching" partly because it was so different from most anything they had ever heard religious teachers say. And they wondered if what Jesus had said was true. After all, none of the spiritual leaders within their memory had presented such recommendations, much less lived them. How valid was it to look for God's blessing in peacemaking? Or in maintaining a pure and humble heart? Or by loving indiscriminately?

Being the perfect Teacher that he is, Jesus added the visual aspect to his "audio" lessons on the mountain. He demonstrated what it looked like to show mercy where judgment was expected. He modeled how to love our enemies, and became himself the bread and wine that would satiate our appetite for righteousness. He taught his followers that there was no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends, and then he demonstrated exactly what he meant by that. Afterward Jesus

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## Business As Usual?

ELMER PROUT

The crosses stand empty now,  
Silhouetted against the sky.  
They will be used again  
By an economy-minded  
administration.  
No use to throw good wood away.  
Crosses are designed for utility.  
They are made to last.

Who know the names of those  
Who carried crosses on their backs  
Before their crosses carried them?  
Strange irony of turnabout!  
Wayne Saffen

How soon did the crowd who gathered to watch the crucifixion return to business-as-usual? Surely there was a job to be completed in the carpenter shop. There must have been a delivery waiting in the bakery. There were students ready for the next class...Did the folks wait until the next day? Were no meals served that evening? Did the "closed" signs appear in shops all over Jerusalem?

We have no idea of the answers to any of those questions. We don't know how soon the crosses were taken back to the prison yard—nor even if they ever were...

It is a question closer at hand that

faces us Sunday by Sunday. We enter the church meeting place. We greet a few friends. We briefly pass the time of day. We find our comfortable location. Before the singing begins we glance toward the Table. Yes, the communion set is there...The service proceeds. The prayers are spoken. The trays are passed. We break and eat. We lift the cup and drink...

How is it for us—this weekly communion service that we expect to be "in place" every Lord's Day? Is it a sort of religious business—as-usual? Are the key words "efficiency" and "economy?"

Or is there a sharp, painful focus on the Person who paid with his shame the cost of the sin we try to hide? We do not know the names of the countless thousands who carried crosses in the first century. We do know the Name of him who made his cross both altar and throne.

No more Sunday business—as-usual. May the Lord's Table more and more be the place where we see clearly the grace of his glory and the glory of his grace.

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Elmer Prout, a minister and missionary in the Stone-Campbell movement for many years, presently ministers to the Church of Christ in Shafter, California.

## EDITORIAL

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bequeathed his Spirit to guide all generations of friends who choose to follow this new way of living.

I try to begin each day by focusing on The Teacher, just as this issue of *Integrity* begins. You can expect my efforts to live out Jesus' teachings to look a little different from yours, (or a lot!), just as some of the articles enclosed describe a variety of responses from the authors.

Yet, the results of practicing the mountainside sermon is the same for all of us: we have a new power in our lives over sin and fear and isolation. We Christians have joined the "amazed crowds" who follow this loving, spirit-freeing Guide who leads us through life and beyond Time!

Diane G. H. Kilmer  
Co-editor



## The Hollow of My Insufficiency

by Adrienne Rigsby Caughfield

The hollow of my insufficiency  
is filled by you alone, my precious God;  
By you alone, my Savior, can I be  
made whole and pardoned, though by nature flawed.  
For what I hate I do, and what I know  
to be correct and good I leave behind  
To follow what I do not want, although  
I hate it. Yet, in my remorse, I find  
That you are present to make right my wrong.  
My sin you take away and make me new;  
You turn my dirges into joyful song.  
What would I do, my Father, without you?  
Without your sacrifice, where would I be?  
For, giving up your life, you rescued me.

\* \* \* \* \*

## The Great Drama

ALINE EDSON

Let us always hear the distant drumbeat of the ages across the theater of time lest we get caught up in our own little frantic moment--and lose perspective and place in the Divine unfolding of the drama. We all have a part to play, but no one of us, or group of us, is the whole of it. And there is great peace in contemplating that we are part of a wonderfully-ordered, ongoing stream of humanity, life's drama, that will indeed accomplish its Director's purpose in due time, thwarted by no one and no thing.

Every play has a star and so does this one. Its Star appeared magnificently in the East, signalling the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem, Immanuel. The scenes that followed changed the course of the drama. The lights in the theater dimmed and the walls shook as the Star hung on the cross to redeem the mass of throbbing humanity. And then came the climax: the glorious Resurrection Morn. Angels

rejoiced and people of good will bowed in humble adoration and thanksgiving as the Star left the stage with a promise to return to close the drama.

As surely as the curtain rose on time, and the morning stars sang together at the dawn of creation, so surely will the curtain fall on time, its moment of glory spent, and the cast and crew led by the Star will step off the stage into the endless horizons of eternity, each to his own destiny depending on how he related to the Star in the play's unfolding--and the morning stars will again applaud the Master Playwright's splendid production. And there will be no curtain call.

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Aline Edson, who has completed full careers in both teaching and civil service and raised four children, lives in Kerrville, Texas, with her husband. They are members of the Sydney Baker Church of Christ.

## Pursuing a Law of Righteousness

JOHN EOFF

The apostle Paul exposed the folly of pursuing a law of righteousness when he wrote the letter to the Romans. In Romans 10:30-32 he makes this statement: "What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the 'stumbling stone.'" It is my opinion that many of us today are stumbling over the same stumbling stone while all the while congratulating ourselves for having skipped happily over it.

There has been a substantial enlightenment concerning grace--the righteousness that Paul speaks of as coming by faith--among many of us who in times past seemed to have been intimidated by the very word. We boldly speak of the grace of God and proclaim correctly that it is apart from works because we have been bound by conscience to accept Paul's statement to the Ephesians "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9 NIV). Then we fall flat on our face over the "stumbling stone." As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame" (Romans 9:33). We fall because of our failure to trust in this stumbling stone while at the same time proclaiming that we do indeed trust in him. This stumbling stone IS our righteousness but we are obsessed with our own righteousness and overlook the stone in the path. As a result we are crawling in the path instead of walking uprightly on our way.

## Tripping Over Ourselves

Our fall is caused by our self-righteousness. We can't divorce from our pride. We feel we must provide some of our own righteousness through our own right way of living. We do this by claiming our own obedience as the basis upon which we qualify for this right standing. Oh, we have learned to deny it! We claim that the works Paul speaks of refers to the law and we certainly are not trying to be justified by keeping the law! We assert that we must live in strict obedience to the Lord in everything he has instructed us in righteousness and then he will grant us that "right standing" that we are seeking. This obedience, we proclaim, is possible because Jesus has died for us and set us free of "the law" and instead placed us under another system of conduct. This new system is activated by a regenerated fleshly man whose aims are now on heavenly things instead of worldly things. Commands (the law) have been replaced by a mind that is controlled by love and therefore needs no commands to guide one in doing what is right. We believe that we are now under the law of love instead of the law of the letter and there, because we love, as opposed to those under the law whom we suppose failed to possess this same quality of love, we are justified by faith. As long as we express our new "law" as love we think we have escaped the law that in effect kills us because it defines what is sin and makes us aware of sin.

In reality, if the law written on stone could kill us because we could not keep it, how much more so would a law demanding love as a basis for all our actions kill us? Can we love perfectly any more so than we could keep written codes perfectly? Paul points out that if we love our neighbor as ourselves we keep the



law perfectly. The whole law and prophets can be summed up in the words "Love your neighbor as yourself." Loving our neighbor as ourselves is indeed fulfilling the law, not some new liberty we have been called to as a replacement of the law. We can no more obtain the righteousness of God by pursuing a law (of love) of righteousness than could the Jews by pursuing some "inferior" (though described as "perfect") law of righteousness. When we seek it through personal merit, whether that merit is called love, obedience, having the proper goals, putting the Lord on the throne of our lives, or by any other self-promoting title, we are failing to obtain that righteousness that Paul spoke of as having been found by the Gentiles which is a righteousness that is by faith.

### Is Believing Enough?

We read article after article in which authors proclaim the greatness of grace and then contradict it with their demands of self-righteousness in order to qualify for this "free gift." We are told that faith cannot mean simply believing. It has to be a way of life, something that we can accomplish even if such accomplishment can come only by the help of God ("grace"). But Paul showed the Galatians that they received the Holy Spirit (which brought them eternal life) because of what they believed, not by what they had done! He instructed them to continue trusting in their salvation on what they believed (faith) rather than what they were doing. His warning was that if they counted on their obedience for their right standing, they were denying Jesus as the source of their righteousness. The only effectual righteousness (obedience) they could have was imputed righteousness (obedience). That came by what they believed and not by what they did.

Paul continues his letter to the Romans (chapter 10) by expressing his desire that the Israelites might be saved "For I can testify about them that they are

zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." Many of my brothers and sisters are attempting to do the same thing--establish their own righteousness. They are stumbling over the stumbling stone (Jesus) by depending on their own obedience, even while proclaiming their trust in him. They compromise the righteousness of God by trying to combine their own righteousness with it, accepting God's (granted by grace) righteousness as an assistance to their own righteousness, making them perfect only to the extent of their own effort. What a cheapening of grace--actually a denial of it.

### Why Do We Stumble Over This?

Perhaps the reason many cannot accept God's free gift of pardon (grace) at face value is their conception of such grace as being a "license to sin," just encouraging believers to live as they please in direct opposition to God's will. They demand a limit to grace--some excess beyond which grace cannot suffice: actually making grace cheap and inadequate. This attitude categorizes sins and places the burden of imputed righteousness upon the shoulder of humans, denying the power and grace of God. It is much easier for us to understand God declaring people to be righteous when their lack of righteousness is not too great because of their own personal goodness. We want him to grant grace to us who are expending considerable effort to obey him while rejecting those who do not try as hard as we do, or who do not have as much success through their own effort. We demand that God withhold his grace from those who are not even pursuing righteousness.

I implore you that you stop pursuing your own righteousness. If God imputes righteousness, because of what they believe, to those who are not even pursuing righteousness, as Paul assures us--step aside, get out of God's way, stop trying to join your own righteousness to that of God--submit to God's righteousness--righteousness that is for everyone who believes. "Who believes" does not refer to those pursuing the right way of living but refers to those who believe the one most important fact ever

revealed to mankind. The righteousness of God is indeed the gift to everyone who believes "with the mind" that Jesus is the Messiah who was to come into the world and has now actually come in the flesh into the world--the son of God.

All praise and glory to God who gives the gift of perfect righteousness. AMEN.

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John Eoff, a member of the churches of Christ, lives in Kerrville, Texas.

## SPIRITUAL TRUTHS FOR MY "SACRED JOURNEY": Centering Down

Curtis D. McClane

It was 4:00 a.m. in the morning. I remember hearing the lonely whistle of the train in the far distance. I was up at this ungodly hour because my mind was being tormented by some responsibilities and decisions that were hounding me like a puppy yipping at my heels without let up.

The sounds in the early morning--the forlorn train whistle, the dog barking in the distance, a hoot from the barn owl--these are all nostalgic. They conjure up visions of yesteryear. People and places whose shadows lurk in the crevices of my mind, furtively peeking out in my consciousness only to disappear.

As I savored this early morning trek back into time, I became aware of focusing on my past experiences and all the people who had made a difference in my life. It was just during this journey that I strongly felt the need to "center down" and focus on my relationship with Jesus Christ. Something about being up in the morning before the world arises from its slumber that compels us to see our naked

needs before the penetrating eyes of a loving and caring God. For some reason which I cannot explain (probably the moving of God's Spirit in my heart), my heart was crying out for communion with God as I sought divine guidance and direction for my hassled and harried life.

This "centering down" is a specific type of meditation with a singular focus in mind. Richard J. Foster in his book *Celebration of Discipline* says that it comes from the Quaker tradition and "it is a time to become still, to enter into the recreating silence, to allow the fragmentation of our minds to become 'centered'" [Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988; revised edition), p. 30.] I claim neither genius nor expertise in the things I do. Too often they are an accident (or should I say God's Spirit working and moving in my life in ways that are too difficult for my finite mind to grasp). And on this particular morning I was already still,



ready to enter into a "recreating silence" so that the fragmentation of my mind would cease. In short, the time and place were ripe for my experience of "centering down."

## Centering Prayer

Isn't it amazing how God knows just what we need at the time we need it! It was precisely on this morning that God placed in my hands an article written by M. Basil Pennington entitled, "Centering Prayer."

Pennington defines "centering prayer" as a "modern means for a very traditional way of prayer that allows us to dwell with the Lord who dwells at the very center of our being" [M. Basil Pennington, "Centering Prayer," *Weavings*, no. 2, 1 (Nov./Dec. 1986): 34.] This experience recognizes that being in tune with the Lord defines our center of being. We come to see ourselves in a new light: our self-definition becomes identification with Jesus instead of preoccupation with self.

As "centering down" is expressed in "centering prayer," Pennington shares the following six important aspects of the entire process.

\* We sit quiet and relaxed; we close our eyes.

I remember reading somewhere that it is best to sit with your palms face up on your lap. This physical posture symbolizes an openness to receiving what God is offering during this experience. Such posture evidences a basic humility which comes from an inner hunger craving divine sustenance. So, on this occasion I sat quiet and relaxed, palms up on my lap, closing my eyes. At first I wasn't sure what to expect, but I was preparing myself for anything.

\* We turn our attention to the Lord dwelling in us; we embrace our God with faith and love; we rest in the divine love.

I tried to envision the Lord dwelling in me. My inner being wrapped its arms around Jesus and rested in that embrace. I don't need to tell you that at first

visualizing some of this was difficult for me. The imaginative dimension of faith had never been nurtured in my upbringing. And still today I find it strenuous at times to engage the creative side of faith, but I know that it is just this "letting go" of my faith that provides hope and promise of a relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit that will never grow dry and dull.

\* We let a single word—perhaps our favorite name for God—focus our attention and love; we let it repeat itself as it may. My favorite name for God is El Shaddai. In the Hebrew Old Testament this name for God emphasizes not only the omnipotence of God, but apparently it carries the idea of "one who nourishes." Several times in the Old Testament prophets the metaphor of Israel being nursed and nourished at the breast by God is picked up and utilized to describe their dependence upon and growth by God. So I began softly repeating, "El Shaddai...El Shaddai...El Shaddai." I could see with my eyes of faith all the times in the past that God had nourished and nurtured me.

\* Any time during our prayer that we become aware of anything else, we use our word to return gently to our Lord. This proved to be an ongoing struggle for me. I brought to this moment a heart full of anxiety and a mind divided with conflicting responsibilities and emotions whirling in confusion. I was constantly groping to find the "remote control" button labeled "off" in my brain. Being aware of the inner presence of the Lord is the focus of this experience. I was not asking God for anything. I was not praying for forgiveness. I was merely allowing myself to feel Jesus' presence through the nurturing power of El Shaddai. And I had to constantly return to softly murmur..."El Shaddai."

\* We are not to concern ourselves with any creature, whether material or spiritual, or their situation or doings, whether good or evil. To give myself completely to God's spirit dwelling within me was a

unique experience. I am too concerned and pre-occupied with other "creatures." I tend to be monitoring the world with every glance and external response. It is liberating to finally discover that the world will go on without my controlling it. And I become so pre-occupied with the events in the news every evening that the visual images become branded in my memory and there seems to be no space left for good thoughts and moments of meditation. The "creatureliness" of my own existence tends to overwhelm me to the reality of my relationship with God. In spite of this, I was able to make room for God.

\* At the end of our prayer time we let our word go and gently, simply pray interiorly the Lord's prayer, letting each phrase expand into silence, drawing from the Presence we have experienced. "The Lord is my shepherd..." *Adonai ro'i*...Who would ever have thought that these two words (Lord and shepherd) could stand juxtaposed to one another in the Hebrew text in such a meaningful way? For God to be my *Adonai* I have had to learn submission to the divine will. With this submission I have discovered the joy of peace. At this particular time in my life I needed to step back and let God be Lord. For God to be my *ro'i* I have had to learn to trust. My shepherd knows me and what I really need. I did not really want to admit that I was a sheep at the time. After all, being a sheep is not really too good of a sign that I am in control. And a sheep is not very macho either.

## Focusing Down

In addition to this experiential taste of "centering down" with "centering prayer," there is another dimension called "focusing down." This is time spent in evaluating my priorities and asking God to give me a center of focus that will sustain me in difficult times. This past week a congregational tragedy forced me to do this with respect to my ministry. One of the members of my church decided that

the pain of family alienation was too excruciating to bear any longer. One of her closest friends called me Tuesday night, really concerned because "Angela" (not her real name) would not respond. I had to take my daughter to her piano lesson, so I told this close friend to contact me around 9:00 p.m. when I returned home.

The secretary was the first to get a hold of me when I returned. It was not good news. "Angela" had hung herself in her basement. I immediately drove over to the house. The police and the detectives were still there. It was not a pretty sight. Suicide never is.

That haunting image of a lifeless body would not go away. I doubted my own ability to minister to hurting people. You see, "Angela" had been coming to me for counseling and I thought that we had been making wonderful progress. In fact, she had even promised me that she would call me if she had overwhelming suicidal feelings. She broke that promise. Not just with me. With her other close friends as well.

It was an intensely agonizing time of "focusing down" for me. "Effective discipleship depends on a centripetal center" [Douglas E. Brown, *When Past and Present Meet* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1987), p. 67.] Jesus Christ was that center for me. In life experiences that produce seismic shocks in which foundations crumble there has to be a center to come back to. Such focusing reaffirms that the center of our lives can sustain us during the shock waves.

This "focusing down" allowed me to search inward for the stability of God's outstretched hand. He reached out and took mine during the uncertainty of the aftershocks. What is important and sustaining during these times? God is! God is there. God understands.

I am grateful that God has given me the opportunity to share with you these spiritual truths for my sacred journey: the quiet stream underneath, autobiographical



journaling, active-waiting, practicing the presence of God, the sacrament of the present moment, and centering down.

## Our Restoration Heritage

One's internal sacred journey must never be taken lightly. Modern heirs of the Restoration Movement are just beginning to discover the power of the contemplative lifestyle. Even though this interior emphasis seems to be new, such was not the case in the earlier years of our movement.

In 1881 Isaac Errett authored a book with the title *Elements of the Gospel and Letters to a Young Christian*. The last chapter is devoted to "Aids to Devotion." He opens with the observation that "it is one thing to possess the spirit of devotion; it is another to be able to express one's desires intelligently, scripturally, and satisfactorily" [Isaac Errett, *Elements of the Gospel and Letters to a Young Christian* (Cincinnati, O: Standard Publishing Company, 1881), p. 144.] In this chapter he provides examples of various kinds of prayers that enable one to draw closer to God, to commune more effectively with Him.

He provides a paradigm for the time when one would be reading and meditating on Holy Scripture. Listen to his devotional prayer for this occasion:

How thankful should I be that God comes to me in this gentle way—speaking to me by the inspirations of his Spirit, through human lips, in human words; so that here, in my own

retirement, I may hear Him without terror, and commune with Him unembarrassed by any dread of the supernatural! And how careful should I be to understand what has thus been revealed—to learn what there is in it for me, and to accept it reverently and joyfully, that it may effectually work in my believing heart! Has not God promised to dwell with him who trembles at his word? Oh, my soul, be humble and reverent when God speaks; keep silence before Him; hush every uprising passion; keep down all vain thoughts; restrain all wandering desires; and look intently into the perfect law of liberty, to behold wondrous things therein. (Ibid, p. 162)

I sense in our people a stirring for a faith that is more meaningful than just adherence to empty external forms. Our daily walk with Jesus defines our sacred journey. Perhaps something I have shared in this series of articles has opened your eyes to the real potentialities awaiting you with your Lord.

Perhaps your ears have become more attuned to the divine soundwaves. Whatever the case may be, may God be glorified in our lives as we travel on our sacred journey in this life preparing for a confident journey with Him in the life to come.

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Dr. Curtis D. McClane is a Minister of the Word for the Holmes Road Church of Christ in Lansing, Michigan.

### Celebrating 25 Years of Integrity

We are planning a special issue of *Integrity* for September/October 1994, to remember some of the issues that we have discussed in *Integrity* over the last 25 years, and to look at these same issues as they relate to the future. If you would like to share in this special issue, please send your articles or letters to Bruce and Diane Kilmer, 4051 Lincoln Rd., Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858. The deadline is July 1, 1994.

## If I Had But One Sermon To Preach

HAROLD FOX

Some years ago a fellow preacher who was also dean of our summer camp program called to say he had decided not to engage an outside speaker for our evening camp services. Instead, he would have each of the five participating preachers bring one evening message. That sounded fair enough. Then he said he would give us each our sermon title. That would be unusual. Then he said he was assigning all of us *the same* title!

WHAT? Can you imagine 60 or 70 high school kids sitting there for five nights in a row, listening to five different preachers all preaching on the same sermon title?

It was incredible! I asked, "What is the title?"

He answered, "If I Had But One Sermon to Preach."

I thought about it. If I had but one sermon to preach, what would it be? If I knew it was my very last opportunity to speak to a beloved audience, what would I say?

Then I thought of Jesus. On the night in which he was betrayed, he assembled his disciples in that upper room, knowing that before another day had passed he would be crucified. What was uppermost in his mind?

### Jesus' Last Night

John devoted five chapters—almost a fifth of his whole Gospel account—to the events of that fateful evening. It must have seemed highly significant to him! Perhaps it ought to be equally significant to us!

One of Christ's themes that night is stated in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." I wonder how many of us have tried to comprehend what is

involved in understanding and keeping that commandment.

First of all, it is a command, not a wish or suggestion. As Christians we have no choice. We *must* love each other. And what is the nature of this love? And what about that qualification, "As I have loved you"? And how did he love them—and us? He loved them "to the end" (John 13:1); meaning "to the uttermost; to the limit." He loved us, and gave his life for us. Dying on the cross, enduring the taunting curses as well as the physical agony, he could pray, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23-34). Such love is a helping, caring concern, totally unrelated to how the other person treats us, or whether he or she cares about us. That is the pattern for *our* love.

### A New Commandment

Here is a little-known fact about that commandment. Jesus used a very strong word for "new." The same word is used in Hebrews 8:13, in which the writer described the new covenant as totally unlike the old one; and he added, "When he said, 'A new (covenant)', he has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear." The simple fact is that when we love as Jesus said, and as Jesus loved, then we have no need of the other ancient commandments!

If we love God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind, we don't need a commandment saying "thou shalt have no other gods before me." You would not dream of worshiping other gods. You would never bow down to idols, or misuse God's holy name, or desecrate his day, if you loved him as Christ loved you. And if you love your neighbor as you love yourself, you could never murder your neighbor, or steal from him, or break up



his home through adultery; or lie about him, or covet his possessions! And you would not need commandments to remind you!

Clearly, Paul understood this, for he said in Romans 13:8, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another, for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." And again, in Galatians 5:14, "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Jesus spoke about several things that night in the upper room; but surely his prayer in John 17 needs to be mentioned, especially verse 21 in which he fervently prayed "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us; that the world may believe that thou didst send me."

If I had but one sermon to preach, I would stress the necessity of Christian love; the kind of love that gives and gives and gives, and continues to give, of care and concern. This is how the world will know we are Christ's disciples. Our reciting of creeds won't convince the world; our knowledge of the Bible won't persuade them, nor will our church

## A Green Faith? Biblical Affirmations for Ecological Responsibility

CRAIG M. WATTS

The health of our planet is everyone's business. It has to be, since Earth is everyone's home, or at least everyone I know. During the past thirty years, with increasing frequency, we have been confronted with the fact that the planet has a problem. The primary source of the problem is human action.

For generations we have been taking what we want from, and doing what we want to, the earth. We had thought we didn't have to be concerned about the

attendance and religious rituals.

We may not fully understand biblical theology; and we may be wrong about many of the things we think we understand. But if we show by our lives and attitudes that we have self-sacrificing love for each other, the world will know that we are Christ's disciples.

And Jesus' prayer "that they may all be one" will be answered sooner if we demonstrate our Christlike love for each other. Only then will the world believe that the heavenly Father is the one who sent Jesus to be our Lord and Savior.

\*Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard version.

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Through his wife's prayers and the Lord's pursuit, Harold Fox became a Christian at 32 years of age. Thirty of the next 40 years Harold preached in Independent Christian churches mainly across Nebraska and Montana. The last church he served as minister before retiring is the Edgar, Nebraska Christian Church, which is loosely affiliated with the Disciples branch. Harold continues to serve this congregation as an elder.

consequences. Now we know we were wrong. Extracting the earth's riches and dumping our waste in the land, air and water is having an undeniable effect. If things don't change, the effect could prove to be catastrophic.

As Christians, how should we look on the ecological crisis? Do we have any distinctive vision? If we don't, we may as well keep the discussions out of church. I find it tragic that, too often, when we Christians decide to take up some

contemporary issue, we don't do it as *Christians*. Sure, we express opinions, perhaps passionately make a case for one position over against another. We may display a solid grasp of some useful information. But the Bible is nowhere to be found. The gospel is not brought to bear on the issue at hand. The key Christian beliefs are not employed to shed divine light on the topics and concerns. What we find are Christians discussing, but not a Christian discussion. The difference is crucial. A Christian discussion is what happens when we talk about an issue and say things that we otherwise could not say except for the *revelation of God*. This does not mean we need to have a proof text for our every thought. But our viewpoints are to be shaped by the gospel.

Let me confess, however, that I'm just beginning to learn how our faith might speak to us about our responsibility to the environment. I'm not a seasoned veteran, but a novice in this area. All I can do is to ask others to learn along with me. Hopefully, we can further each other's understanding and foster one another's faithfulness.

### Is There Really A Crisis?

I realize there may be a few of you that believe that all the talk about the ecological crisis is part of a fraud. Scientists are just out to get bigger government grants for research. Or it's all just part of a conspiracy promoted by people who want to undermine business interests in our country. I have a neighbor who thinks like this. He's a good fellow. In fact, if we cared for the earth the way he cares for his yard, this world would be a more beautiful place. But he doesn't believe the planet is threatened in any way. Acid rain. Global warming. The breakdown of the ozone layer. Air and water pollution. All fantasy. Or if there is a problem at all, it's mostly due to natural causes. Volcanic dust. Normal climatic change. Things of that sort.

Of course, if you look hard enough you can find a few scientists who support such a viewpoint. But their's is definitely the minority report among the experts in the area. I told my neighbor his view might be right, but that the penalty was too high to take that chance. If we wreck this planet, we don't have a spare one laying around for a replacement.

Assuming, then, that we do face an ecological crisis, how are Christians to look upon it? What does our faith lead us to say and do? I would like to briefly point out several affirmations that are important for a distinctively Christian perspective.

### What Does The Bible Say?

First of all, we confess with the Psalmist, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Ps.24:1). God who made this planet is its ultimate owner. Portions of it are on loan to us, but this world is not finally ours to do with as we please. Care and sensitivity is essential in the way we treat the earth, or whatever little piece of it we have access to. Since the earth is the Lord's, we do not have a right to misuse and mangle it for whatever short-sighted purposes we have.

Remember the story of how Moses was called by God to lead the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery to freedom? Moses was in a field doing a bit of shepherding work when he came upon a startling sight. A burning bush. But not just a run-of-the-mill burning bush with leaves igniting and blackened branches consumed in the flames. The bush burned, but remained unharmed. As Moses looked at the strange sight, a divine voice boomed, "Take off your shoes; you're standing on holy ground" (Ex.3:5).

The Israelites, who had for generations been forced to work to exhaustion and death, forgot they lived on holy ground. The Egyptians that oppressed and beat the Israelites into submission in order to use them for their



own advantage, certainly forget they lived on holy ground. But God who made the earth and every living thing upon it, looked upon the creation and said, "It is good" (Gen. 1). All ground is holy ground. It is God's ground. Unlike Moses, we are not commanded to take off our shoes. But God, who made and owns the earth, certainly does call on us to quit trampling on the beauty and diversity of life-forms on this planet. We live on holy ground for "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it." That is the first affirmation for a Christian perspective on ecology.

The *second* is this: all creation is intended to declare God's glory, so when we mar and destroy the health and beauty of the earth, we commit sin. We diminish the glory of God. David wrote that the heavens declare God's glory (Ps. 19:1). The apostle Paul added, "Ever since the creation of the world, God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God has made" (Rom. 1:20).

I doubt if there are many people who really believe clear cutting forests brings glory to God. Strip mining without careful land reclamation certainly does not glorify the God who created the mountains, valleys and plains. The dumping of toxic waste can do nothing but mar the wonder and wholeness of this planet and detract from the praise that creation is to offer to God. Of course, the needless waste we personally contribute to the landfills and waterways because of our consumption-oriented lifestyles also diminish God's glory. All of this is sin. As much as possible, Christians need to seek the preservation of the beauty of the planet. It is time we call into question a lifestyle that readily sacrifices the harmony and wholeness of the earth for obvious conveniences and pleasures.

The *third* affirmation we Christians need to make is this: humans are not the only species on earth that God loves. Other creatures are valued by God as well. Sometimes we humans have been

destructively self-centered and have done so in the name of God. One of the greatest Christian thinkers ever, Thomas Aquinas, wrote, "By divine providence [animals] are intended for man's use in the natural order, [therefore] it is not wrong for man to make use of them either by killing them or in any way whatever." That view came from Greek thought, not biblical testimony. The Bible displays great concern for non-human creatures.

Recently, I was unexpectedly surprised by a passage of scripture I have read dozens of times, but have managed to overlook its meaning. The passage is from Psalms 36: "Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds...you save humans and animals alike" (vs. 5-6). Sometimes many of us consider animal rights advocates as just kooks--and no doubt there are some extremists. But there are scriptures that suggest that God is an animal rights advocate of sorts.

In Deuteronomy 25:4 we find a command that does nothing to serve human interest, but is intended to protect the rights of animals. It says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading your grain." This is an ancient fair labor law for animals. It insists that an animal working in a field should get a share of the crop it helps cultivate. Farmers can't keep all the grain for themselves and expect the oxen to eat nothing but grass. It must be allowed to share in the fruit of its labors.

There is a sensitivity to other species found elsewhere in the Bible. Proverbs 12:10 reads, "The righteous know the needs of their animals...the wicked is cruel." Not just the legitimate needs, but even the petty wants of humans have led to cruelty to animals and extermination of entire species. Countless thousands of animals have suffered and died--from rabbits to whales--for the sake of cosmetics! Christians who seek to be biblical people need to speak out against insensitive and hurtful treatment of animals. We need to lift up our voices for

the protection of endangered species. God cares for them all.

The *fourth* affirmation we need to make as Christians trying to be ecologically responsible is this: God has given humans dominion over the earth (Gen.1:26), but this dominion must be defined in light of Jesus Christ. In times past, Christians have sometimes justified plundering the resources of the earth by appeal to a statement in Genesis 1:26. In the passage, God begins the creation of humans by declaring, "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over cattle and all the wild animals and creeping things upon the earth." This verse has sometimes been used as a license to justify ruthless domination and exploitation of the planet.

But such an interpretation misses the point of the passage. Dominion is care-giving, not careless taking. Jesus is our model. He was no abuser. He was a nurturer. He did not ravage or pillage. He gave, embraced and cultivated with care. In everything he was sensitive. The only time we find a hint of harshness in him is when he confronted abusers: money changers in the temple, religious power-brokers manipulating others. Jesus fostered beauty. He did not crush it. The sort of dominion over the earth we can support sees Jesus as a model. Rightful dominion creates harmony, it fosters beauty, it calls into question hurtful exploitation.

The *fifth* and final affirmation for a Christian view of ecological responsibility is this: all of nature has a stake in the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. I confess, all my life when I heard the well-known words of John 3:16 quoted I thought only of humans. You know the words. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son and whoever believes in him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life." But that statement is not just about God's love for humans. It has to do with God's love for the entire world.

We live in a world gone wrong. The

Bible teaches that not only are human hearts and lives misshapen, but even the natural order has been affected. There is a brokenness in the fabric of creation. The apostle Paul speaks of the groaning of creation. He writes, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God...in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:19-21). The salvation that comes through Jesus Christ is not just a human affair. It is for the restoration of the health of the entire planet. God has done, and is doing, something to make the world, on every level, a happier, more harmonious place. We need to cooperate with God for the sake of the world.

## Be Gospel-Motivated

Obviously, I have not tried to spell out a list of political policies. All I have sought to do is to offer a gospel-informed perspective. But I think that perspective should lead us to be predisposed to be more "green" in our faith and politics. "Yes!" to rigorous clean air and clean water laws. "Yes!" to action aimed at safeguarding the ozone layer and counter-acting global warming. "Yes!" to greater sensitivity to animal rights and personal commitment to recycling and energy conservation. You'll have to work out the specifics for yourself.

Some time back, in the New Yorker magazine, there was a cartoon that displayed two pictures. On the one side was a picture of the earth. On the other side, was a picture of a man. Below was a single word in large type: "MISMATCH." It sometimes seems that way. But that is not the way God intends for our lives to be. Human interests and the global good do not have to be at odds. By faith we can have harmony.

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## Find the Good and Praise It

STAN PAREGIEN

In the tiny village of Henning, Tennessee, there is a little cemetery. In that cemetery is a tombstone with the normal information one would expect to find: a man's name, his date of birth and the date of his death. But chiseled into that granite tombstone there is also a phrase that summed up the man's life: "Find the Good and Praise It." That tombstone marks the grave of the late Alex Haley, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Roots*. He was the man who often said the phrase, "Find the good and praise it," but more importantly lived it out in his life.

"Find the good and praise it" strikes me as sound advice, Biblically and psychologically. However, the first part of that phrase, "Find the good," implies that it may be hard to find. Sometimes we have to, like the woman in Luke 15:8 looking for a lost coin, search every nook and cranny to find it.

### Find Means Effort

Even God couldn't find ten good people in Sodom, not counting Lot and his family (Gen. 18). Today there is often not much good information on TV or in the newspaper. It may be hard to see the good in a neighbor's teenage kid who roars up your street in a souped-up car. Nearsighted as we often are, we sometimes even miss the good in our mates and our children by becoming hypercritical. Then there are those times when we may be blind to the good points in our fellow Christians, just as Paul was skeptical for a time toward John Mark.

There is some good in almost everyone, if we take the time to dig a little deeper. Job's friends couldn't see his goodness (Job 16:1-5), but only because they weren't looking for it. Jesus often said the good is worth digging for (Luke 10:10). I came to see that point recently when, over a period of several months, I

visited in jail with a man who was facing either the death penalty or, at the least, life in prison with no chance of parole. His lifestyle, from youth, fit the pattern of an anti-social psychopath.

However, he realized he had hit the bottom of the barrel. He had ruined his life. Several Christians, involved in a local prison ministry, studied the Bible with him and witnessed to him. They tried to get him to see that he could still find meaning in this life and hope for eternal life by accepting Christ. They looked for the good in this man's heart and praised it. As a result, he began attending jail church services regularly. He began not just reading but diligently studying his Bible night and day, memorizing passages and underlining hundreds of others. And then one day, he tearfully confessed Jesus as his Lord and was immersed for the forgiveness of his sins and to receive the Holy Spirit.

This man's decision was not a classic jail house conversion in hopes of finding leniency from the court. He admitted he was an accomplice in a murder, made no attempt to obtain a plea bargain, and freely told prosecutors the facts of the case. He is now in the state prison and will die inside those walls. But he is a changed man who hopefully will share the Good News with other inmates, as did another prisoner long ago, the apostle Paul.

Find the good and praise it. It works, and to the glory of God.

### What Is Praise?

We need to stop right here and ask an important question: What is praise? The Greek verb *epaino* (noun, *epainos*) means to commend, to encourage, to approve. It is used of praise directed toward God and praise directed toward people. The praise may come from God

to us (Rom. 2:28-29; 15:4-6; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Thess. 2:16-17). Or it may even come to us from our government (1 Peter 2:13-14). It may be a stronger Christian encouraging the weaker (1 Thess. 5:14; Titus 1:9); but praise is not limited to that, for Paul wanted to see the disciples in Rome so he and they could be mutually encouraged (Rom. 1:12).

Praise should be a common Christian trait, not that we are to seek praise for ourselves (1 Thess. 2:6; 4:18; 5:11). Church leaders and the guy in the pew all need occasional praise. It is good preventive medicine (Heb. 3:12-13; 10:25).

The Bible records many acts of people praising people. Moses told Israelites to encourage Joshua because he would lead them to the promised land (Deut. 1:38). Joab rebuked King David for his initial failure to praise his troops for a hard-fought victory (2 Sam. 19:7). The prophets Judas and Silas "encouraged and strengthened the brethren [at Antioch] with many words" (Acts 15:32). Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus to encourage them (Eph. 6:21-22). Then he sent Timothy to Colossae and to Thessalonica specifically to praise them (Col. 4:7-9; 1 Thess. 3:1-3).

### What Are the Results of Praise?

What happens when you find the good and praise it? For one thing, it builds the other person up. Arthur Gordon, *A Touch of Wonder* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1974, p. 51-52), tells about how a friend of his learned the power of praise. This friend had encountered two different groups of young writers at the University of Wisconsin many years ago. One group of male writers had a club they called "The Stranglers." This group of highly intellectual young men would meet and read their essays or stories to the group, then the group would criticize the writing. They dissected each other's work unmercifully. Meanwhile, across campus, some young female writers formed their

own club and called it "The Wranglers." They met and read their manuscripts, just like the men. But their criticisms, if any, were gentle. They actually looked for good things to say.

Well, the group of brilliant young male writers and the group of brilliant young female writers graduated and established careers. Then, some twenty years later, a researcher discovered that not a single man in the highly critical group had made much of a mark in the literary world. The women's group, the praise-oriented club, had produced six very successful writers. One of those writers was Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, author of the classic novel, *The Yearling*. Praise really does build people up and make them more productive.

Second, finding the good and praising it also builds your own spirituality, because you are concentrating on what is right, not on what is wrong. Barnabas' name means "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36) and he lived up to it. Others of us could be called "Son of Criticism" or "Daughter of Discouragement" because of our habit of looking for the negative.

Third, finding the good and praising it shows the world that we are God's people. Barnabas encouraged the brethren in Antioch, and many people became Christians (Acts 11:19-24). He knew that God calls Christians to a ministry of loving and not of judging (Rom. 14:10-13).

Finally, finding the good and praising it gets more done because praise energizes people to activity. Isn't it wonderful to be around positive, loving Christians? Isn't it amazing how much we can motivate each other with praise and encouragement? Let's all resolve to find the good and praise it, starting right now!

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## 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 Nefarious Nephew,

I had not meant my recent criticism to be misunderstood as a condemnatory attack upon your person or work—you have proved to be a very useful, usually efficiently functional cog in an intricate machine. However, all of us need, at times, to be reminded of the gravity of our functions. For whatever it is worth, I, too, have suffered rebukes and reverses for moments of indecision or seeming nonchalance. I, too, have felt the relatively mild barb of rebuke. Our battle is of supreme importance, and requires constant vigilance, translated into perpetual annoyance of the enemy's disciples.

A glorious statistic came to my attention recently, published in one of the Enemy's many earthly journals. The report affirmed that whereas thirty years ago more than 65% of American Christians were convinced that the Enemy's Book (the Bible) was truly the "Word of God," currently, (that would have been 1993), the figure is said to have been halved to 33%! Although the source of the statistic is not available, even if it suffers some element of question, it does appear that our various efforts are enjoying more than a little success in this area! Take your share of demonic glee in this statistic!

Now I should like to address the topics you have brought up as matters of frustration. The first, that the Enemy is

well aware of our activities; that these activities are, as a matter of fact, often readily predictable, elicits my initial word to you: DON'T FORGET IT! The Enemy is omniscient, confound it! This is a situation we must live with; it cannot be changed. So how can we turn it about to our advantage? Your own question, "How are we to function if people take these bits of information seriously?" provides no small part of our response. The key word here is "seriously." The Enemy's people have learned to parrot phrases we have virtually implanted in the race: "Everybody's doing it..." "Don't be an old fogey..." "Just once won't hurt anything..." "I really *hate* that guy..." "I'll get back at her for..." "Forgive her? Never!" You've heard all these, no doubt; but maybe you forgot they were forged at our own council fires. One little violation of the Enemy's precepts may be the camel's nose under the tent, as it were, with continuing violations multiplying.

In another vein, perhaps my greatest surprise in relation to your work at Broadway is the fact that I do not remember hearing of anyone of the Enemy's troupe there who has fallen to some salacious, seductive sexual scandal. Are these Christian Jayhawks above such aberrational conduct? Do they possess some rare type of immunity to our outpouring filth via suggestive and explicit television, movies, magazine, and other

media? This has elsewhere been a sure-fire mode of attack, even among the "clergy," that we can only suggest it's become a major weapon in your arsenal. And the higher the station of the individual(s) involved, the more glorious the victory at its consummation. Throw a strong temptation at that rascal, Whitesoul. Just *maybe* it might work, under set-up circumstances! Assuming his resistance, which seems probable, try a well-devised entrapment situation. Many an innocent one has been crucified on this cross.

I am quite familiar with that "pesky little journal" you mention. Its personnel have already avoided numerous entrapment efforts; but we must not concede defeat. Should you be struck with a particularly promising conspiracy, please submit it for further consideration before its implementation. We are not dealing with amateur dummies, as you must know.

Yours in perpetual pursuit of plunder,

Uncle Apollyon

Dear Mentor in Misery,

Greetings in the name of the Great Deceiver! I, too, came on a bit of good news (for us) this week. A perceptive news reporter was observing that all of our good work in "openness" and "tolerance" in the society is now paying off in the decisions of juries to acquit people accused of violent crimes, based on "extenuating circumstances" which turned the attacker into a victim. The general public (from which juries are taken, of course) have now bought into the "philosophy" of the TV talk shows that nothing is outside the pale of decency and acceptability; one just has to "understand" aberrant behavior, for, after all, everything is a matter of preference in the final analysis. I like to call this the "Moral Theory of Relativity." Acceptance of this doctrine has had just as great an impact in the social realm as did Dr. Einstein's

theory in the scientific realm. What more could we ask than that wrongdoing always be attributed to circumstances and pressures, not to an individual's decision for which he or she is to be held responsible. Why, we of the Nether Regions are so much out of the picture that people don't even say jokingly any more that "The Devil made me do it!"

You're right; I have neglected the area of sexual temptation lately at Broad Way. I suppose I have taken it for granted that things have gone so far in the population at large that there's not much left for me to do. But in the case of those like Brother Whitesoul, who are among the minority retaining the capacity to blush, I might arrange something potentially compromising. There is a pretty young woman in the congregation having marital problems and I know she is emotionally unstable. Perhaps I could encourage her to go see the minister and pour out her troubles; then I could put Sister Snugrug onto the story and see what develops. Even better, I might let one of the tender young brothers know that the young woman is in distress and suggest that he comfort her—in private, of course. However, there have been some disturbing moves among the church leaders lately to encourage same-sex support groups to deal openly and supportively with their sexual temptations, and even to explore more about the spiritual implications of both positive and legitimate sexual expression and the redirection of sexual desires. If I can just keep alive the trauma-packed ideas that (1) sexual pleasure is the chief good in life, to which everyone has an absolute right, and (2) the Enemy wants more than anything else to deprive his children of sexual pleasure and fulfillment. Ah, the neuroses and profligate flings that have been produced from the interplay of these mistaken and irreconcilable assumptions!

Well, as our Spanish-speaking agents might say, "Another day, another dolor;\*"

(Continued on the back cover)