

Integrity

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THE RESTORATION IDEAL

The Human Flaw

EARL R. DUNBAR

Toronto, Ontario

All of us have heard at least one sermon on "The Restoration Ideal," and most of us have heard many. One Sunday evening not long ago I heard a commendable one with that title, which I felt many people of different positions in our movement could have heard with benefit. At one point I really pricked up my ears, when the speaker said basically this:

I am always very concerned when I hear about a "moving of the Spirit" because I fear that the Restoration ideal will be lost, that we will throw out the pattern for the church.

In one sense I had to agree with him, because he was really saying that people are sometimes caught up in some sort of charismatic and/or emotional zeal in which the scriptures are replaced by "messages from the Lord" as the final authority for doctrine and the first guide for Christian living. If any moving of the Spirit is genuine, it will be in agreement with scripture, reveal the true meaning of scripture, and foster a greater love for and devotion to the scriptures. And this, I think, was the point being made.

But there was also something disturbing about his statement. As a matter of fact, people automatically get upset over the mere mention of the Holy Spirit. They never get upset over the mention of God, even though he (the Spirit) is God, the Holy Spirit. Why this gut-level reaction? I believe it is because a true moving of the Spirit would challenge the traditional Restoration ideal. To see why this is so, we need to look at the following concepts or topics: the early church, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the traditional Restoration ideal, and the Biblical pattern for the church.

First, let us look at the traditional Restoration ideal. It has been this: that Christ instituted one church, and that this church conforms to a specific doctrinal and organizational pattern found in the pages of the New Testament. Over the years this one true church has drifted into sin by laying aside parts or all of this pattern. If a person belongs to a denominational (apostate) church which largely does not conform to the pattern, then he most probably cannot be called a Christian. The Holy Spirit dispensed special gifts for a while, inspired the writing of the New Testament, and then these gifts ceased. Our task today? To plainly explain the New Testament pattern. That, in simplified terms, seems to me to be the Restoration ideal.

Keeping that in mind, let us look at the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In the recent discussion over the alleged renewals by the Holy Spirit, charismatic experiences, etc., one thing has become clear: the large majority within our fellowship lack a definite concept of the ministry of the Spirit today. They may have definite *ideas*, but these ideas are part of no Biblically-based, well-thought-out, much-prayed-about understanding of the Holy Spirit's ministry. The result

has been confusion. The scripture in no way confirms the contention that the Holy Spirit's work was ended with the completion of the canon. But because this has been the widespread belief, people are left confused and often close-minded when pneumatic phenomena occur. If we understood the ministry of the Holy Spirit as presented in the New Testament, things would be far different. This can be seen by looking at the ministry of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles.

As people were converted to Christ during those early days of the church, they were immediately aware of or instructed in the fact that Christians are personally, individually, indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:17, 20; Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9-11, 16; 1 Cor. 3:16, 19; Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27; and others). The Holy Spirit's ministry was many-faceted. He did inspire the writing of the New Testament (2 Tim. 3:16; Eph. 6:17), but he also gave comfort (Jn. 14:16), bore witness and empowered for witness (Jn. 15:27; Acts 1:8), and he gave gifts (1 Pet. 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:7, 11). The giving of gifts had at least a twofold purpose. Rather than just giving the world witness of the Christian faith until the scriptures were completed, the first work of the Spirit was to give gifts to all Christians for the good of the body. "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). "And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10).

These passages, especially when read in their contexts, demonstrate that the Holy

Spirit came to give life and direction to the members of the body, making the body a living organism rather than an exclusive club. The church is the dwelling place of God: "So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22). And as the world sees the church, so it sees the Father (Jn. 17:21). Thus the Spirit not only gives gifts for the upbuilding and health of the body, but also for our individual and collective witness to the Lord.

The True Biblical Pattern . . .

Thus the Biblical "pattern" for the church is that of the body growing together and giving witness by the Spirit-directed and Spirit-empowered exercise of spiritual gifts. This is what it was like in those early days. This is the true Biblical pattern. But the early church was not perfect, even though it generally followed this pattern. The Corinthian church to which Paul was writing when explaining much of the ministry of spiritual gifts had serious problems. And yet Paul engages in no doctrinal sermonizing or searing castigation. He explains how each one ought to exercise his spiritual gift or gifts in love.

Because of the nature of this pattern, it appears to be no pattern at all. Indeed it is not a pattern in the sense of a cookbook type of formula in which we can always turn to a certain page and find out how to deal with a given situation. And yet in our corner of Christendom this is exactly how we act.

We still cling to the notion that all our human spiritual needs can be met by a mere doctrinal check-out. Where do we find a congregation functioning as a body? Where is love the final apologetic? Where is there heartfelt joy over spiritual growth, not just pasted-on smiles and criticism for what *hasn't* been accomplished? Where is there peace among the brethren even though there is disagreement? Where is there patience with wayward brothers and sisters? Where do brethren make more kind, upbuilding remarks than sarcastic jokes, even though the sarcasm is meant in harmless fun among friends? In short, where is the fruit of the Spirit?

Some Proposed Answers . . .

Why have we failed as a body? Why have we not followed the Biblical pattern? Obviously such questions are not easily and simply answered. However, I would like to propose some answers which get to the heart of the matter. If we could begin to solve these problems as outlined below, then we would be well on our way to new life as we have never experienced it before.

1. There are many unbelievers in the churches of Christ and Christian churches. By this I mean that even though many people have had an emotional experience and/or been baptized, not for one minute were their sins washed away, because they did not come in faith. Faith itself does not save us; it is God's sovereign grace which saves us, made available by Christ's finished work on the cross and his resurrection. But it is faith which is the means by which we appropriate forgiveness. As long as a person misunderstands this and thinks that his salvation is conditional upon the merit of his baptism and/or subsequent good works, then I seri-

ously question whether that person has an adequate understanding of the Gospel.

2. Many of our brethren lead carnal lives as Christians. In 1 Corinthians 2:11-3:3, Paul speaks of spiritual, natural and carnal men. Carnal men are explained to be Christians who are living just as if they were natural (non-Christian) men. In other words, they have the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, but their lives are self-led rather than Spirit-led. While they outwardly may be playing the church game, the lasting spiritual results are no different than those of the natural man—"For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly and are you not walking like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:3). Ephesians 5:18 says we are to be filled with the Spirit. That means to be controlled and empowered by the Spirit. One might compare the carnal Christian to the son who was gently told by his father to sit down. The son refused to do so, so the father a little more firmly said, "Son, Daddy said to sit down." When Johnny still did not choose the proper response, Daddy roared, "Son, *sit down or else!!*" Johnny sat down and said, "I'm sittin' down on the outside, but I'm standin' up on the inside!"

3. Following the real Biblical pattern of the "body" ministry would cut out competition, which means no more politics, whether intra- or inter-congregational. My right hand and my left hand do not compete with each other; they cooperate. Brethren under the control of the Spirit minister to and with one another, rather than compete. The Restoration movement would cease to be the small war that it has been for so long. And along the way many would lose their positions and reputations.

4. We would have to swallow our pride and admit that we were wrong about the "truth." We would have to admit that there

may be more Christians in the world than we had ever dreamed and that we have no right to judge who is or who is not a member of "the Lord's church." Our criterion for making such judgments has primarily been doctrinal purity. Yet it is ironic that the weight of theological thought stands against our doctrinal positions. The stock explanation for this, of course, is that these men who write such heresy are not truly of the Lord's body. How can we tell that? Their doctrine is all off. (Which stands to reason, because they are not of the Lord's church, which can easily be seen by looking at their strange doctrine, etc., etc.) This having been our position for so long, it would be far too humbling for us now to admit that we could be wrong. Sin finds its root in pride; indeed it is the "original" sin. The Restoration movement has not escaped it.

5. Finally, with the true Biblical pattern, "too much" is left up to the Holy Spirit. Our leaders have long been guilty of simply *not trusting God* to fulfill the promise in Philippians 1:16: "For I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." In our zeal to protect our young from error we have done worse by quenching the Holy Spirit for them. They cannot help but grow up to be spiritual midgets (even though they may know doctrine), if they stay with the church. This is perhaps the hardest hurdle to clear. In my own personal ministry, I understand that while immediate and solid follow-up of new converts is necessary, only the Holy Spirit can give real spiritual growth. It is often hard to wait patiently and not be overprotective. Can we trust God's Spirit to do *His* job?

If we accept the traditional Restoration ideal, there are certain problems with which

we must deal in the light of the Spirit's ministry. When the canon was completed, did the body cease to need the upbuilding of the saints made possible through special gifts? Did individual Christians cease to need power to witness in their daily lives? If the gifts of the Spirit ceased, then what does the Holy Spirit do *in us* today? Is he idle? Does he help us in resisting temptation but not help us in helping others? What kind of righteousness can we bring before God unless it has been granted in, through, and by the power of the Holy Spirit? If the Father and the Son are active today, why has the Spirit retired?

These questions point to the ridiculous assumptions implicit in the traditional Restoration ideal. In short, it leaves Christians with only one power to live up to the impossible standard of our matchless Lord: that of our own will power—the flesh.

The church does not need restoring. It needs the exercise of spiritual gifts for the upbuilding of the body. In the sense that this may be called restoration, then the church needs it. But it does not need, nor has it ever needed, the type of restoration which sets down words as the guidelines but leaves men Helperless.

The church is the body of Christ no matter how badly it swerves. ("If we are faithful, he remains faithful; for he cannot deny himself"—2 Tim. 2:13.) The Holy Spirit is the dynamic today, the indwelling of the holy, righteous, loving God himself. The pattern—the ideal? For each one to use his gift for "the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, 13). □

THE DESCENDANTS OF DIOTREPHESES

DON HAYMES

Dover, New Jersey

Brother Haymes reminds me of our denominational friends. If he and his owned the church buildings, were the elders, deacons, and members who were in the majority, and we wanted to preach the truth, would he allow us the liberty that he now expects? I doubt it. He would close his pulpit, bulletin, and buildings to us, just as we now close ours to him. The only difference is, we preach the truth, and he preaches error!

—Ray Hawk, *Integrity*, August 1972

I had been developing this essay for some time when the August issue of *Integrity* arrived in the mail to “set the tone” with the letters of Ray Hawk and James D. Bales. Interested readers may wish to read both these letters and the essay (“Simple Trusting Faith,” *Integrity*, June 1972) to which they were responding. These readers may judge for themselves as to who is preaching “truth” and who is preaching “error”; I will say, with all due respect to Mr. Hawk, that the question of preaching truth or preaching error is not the “only difference” between us.

I have no desire to waste the pages of *Integrity* in a running debate between myself and these men. But ludicrous as these letters may seem at first glance, I believe that they were composed in deadly seriousness, if not desperation. They offer excellent examples of a certain kind of attitude. But they are most remarkable for the illusions they employ as a substitute for facts: Mr. Hawk is sure that I would engage in the same activities he enjoys if only I possessed his power; Dr. Bales seems convinced that his use of the pejoratives *modernist* and *purger* has given him the prerogative to serve as prosecutor,

judge, jury, and executioner over Robert Meyers, Warren Lewis, and me; like Mr. Hawk, Dr. Bales seems to feel that if he can make it appear that I am indulging in his favorite pastime, he can then convict me of his own sins and thereby absolve himself. Men as skilled in argumentation and debate as Mr. Hawk and Dr. Bales are usually more sensitive to the defects of wishful thinking as a replacement for rational argument.

In support of what he calls “essential purges,” Dr. Bales cites five Scripture texts. Two of these (Matthew 3:12, John 15:2) refer to direct action to be taken by God and Jesus on “chaff” and “every branch that does not bear fruit.” I can find no authorization in these passages for action to be carried out by men—this work of judgment and punishment belongs to God and Christ alone. The other three texts refer to an individual’s response to the message of the Gospel: faith, repentance, and a new life. Again, there is no basis for bringing political pressure to bear on an individual or institution; there is no justification in these texts for an attempt to get someone fired from his job or thrown out of the church because you dis-

agree with something he has said or written or done, or, as is often the case, because you are jealous of his popularity and his power.

A New Testament ‘Axe-Wielder’ . . .

This sort of activity is certainly *described* in the New Testament, however—in 3 John 9-10:

I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge my authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, prating against me with evil words. And not content with that, he refuses himself to welcome the brethren, and also stops those who want to welcome them and puts them out of the church.

Diotrephes is long dead, but his spiritual descendants are alive everywhere today. John’s incisive portrait has captured for us the psychology—“likes to put himself first”—and pathology—“prating against me with evil words. . . refuses himself to welcome the brethren . . . stops those who want to welcome them and puts them out of the church”—of such a man. It is the spirit of Diotrephes which seems to have been restored as often as any other in the Restoration Movement today. For a time, evangelism and the collection of members seemed to be the predominant motif of most preaching and writing in the Churches of Christ; the bed-rock Biblical texts of this period were Matthew 28:18 and Acts 2:37-38. This is not to say that the descendants of Diotrephes were not present; indeed, they have always been a major factor in the Restoration Movement since the American Civil War. But previously, much of this neo-Diotrephian energy had been directed toward the Disciples, the Independents, and the “denominations.” During the decade of the Sixties, this energy began more and more

to turn inward with abandon, taking as its text the ninth through eleventh verses of John’s *second* letter:

Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; for he who greets him shares his wicked work.

The insidious and dishonest device of making these verses appear to stand by themselves has been one of the Devil’s most effective tools in rending asunder the Church of Christ. But, like every Biblical text, 2 John 9-11 has a context; in this case, the context is John’s battle, in the latter decades of the first century A.D., against the preachers of a sect now called “the gnostics.” A major tenet of the branch of gnosticism which involved itself with Christianity was the denial that Jesus Christ had been a real human being. The gnostics claimed that Jesus had only *appeared* to have a body; an *apparition* had “died” on the Cross and “risen” from the tomb. This denial of the humanity of Jesus offered many attractive possibilities to the gnostic convert—“since we are shackled with our human bodies,” they would say, “how then can God demand that we emulate the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus, who was a God and we are merely human; we can offer our spirits to God, but our bodies cannot be expected to obey his will, since the flesh and the spirit are two separate entities.”

Modern Gnostics . . .

This battle has raged long past the time of John. The Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century declared, rightly, that Jesus was “fully divine and fully human.” But while they give lip service to the dogma, Christians

have rarely dealt with its implications for personal life and ministry. As John says:

Here is the test by which we can make sure that we are in him: whoever claims to be dwelling in him, binds himself to live as Christ himself lived (1 John 2:6 NEB).

Much of the life and teaching of the Church of Christ today is the triumph of gnostic thought, for elders, ministers, and members proclaim with their mouths the "spiritual teachings" of Jesus while rejecting his life in their own lives. Thousands of people die of starvation every day in the streets of Calcutta while cattle roam the streets as sacred and inviolable objects of worship in a cruel and anti-human religion; meanwhile, preachers in the Churches of Christ engage in endless debates about "spiritual" things, such as whether one may address God as "Thee" or "You" in prayer. While American cities disintegrate and the Government spends its substance and moral authority in bombs over North Vietnam, Church of Christ preachers are waging fierce "spiritual warfare" against the use of pianos in worship assemblies and other "denominational doctrines."

There are plenty of gnostics around today, but the men who appropriate 2 John 9-11 as a weapon have other targets in mind. Even so, the context of 2 John 9-11 is right there, in the seventh verse:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the anti-christ.

The attempt by our contemporaries to equate one who denies that Jesus Christ came in the flesh with one who plays the piano in worship, or one who allows "mixed swimming" in his pool, or one who is willing to acknowledge difficulties in the Biblical

text, on the basis of 2 John 9-11, is a rape of the text and a pillage of the context!

Given the context of the letters of John, it is quite probable that the sympathies of Diotrephes were aligned with gnostic thought. Certainly his descendants have made the tenets of gnosticism operative in their own lives. Diotrephes threw people out of the Church, not because they denied that Jesus had come in the flesh, but because they threatened his power and security. In welcoming brethren whom he had refused to acknowledge, they were taking power he had reserved in putting himself first.

Contemporary Attitudes . . .

Dr. John Vanderpool, a psychiatrist on the staff of the University of Texas Medical School, has examined the attitudes of the modern-day Diotrephes in his analysis of the conflict between James D. Bales and James L. Atteberry, a respected and admired English professor who was forced to leave Harding College because of the maneuvers and harassment instigated by Dr. Bales.¹ This analysis by Dr. Vanderpool is applicable to many such incidents:

I believe the real issues involved here are not stated. Briefly, Dr. Bales is quite threatened by Dr. Atteberry's "open" position, as if he himself were being challenged and even insulted. He responds very defensively and aggressively with as clear a logic as he can muster (which is quite clear), with as many Scriptures as he can find and with as many moralisms and adjectives as he feels will be reason-

1 cf. James L. Atteberry, "The Freedom of Scholarship," *Mission*, October, 1969, pp. 8ff.; James D. Bales, "Searchers and Defenders," *Mission*, April, 1970, pp. 9ff.

ably accepted by his readers. He not only discusses the points of conflict as he sees them, but brings in sanity, humility vs. arrogance and rational vs. irrational. It sounds as if he is fighting for his life against some mysterious force which is about to engulf him—and, indeed, he gives himself away even more when he discusses the mysterious influence of knowledge (teachers "soak up" positions and assumptions they are unaware of; he even quotes from a book called *The Mystery of Knowledge*).

Behind their articles, Drs. Atteberry and Bales show more basic attitudinal stances. Atteberry can feel comfortable with a more open system and can trust out-of-the-church "scholars," even say they are believable at times. Bales must have a closed system, knowledge must be absolute and, unfortunately (and even though he will deny it) he cannot really trust others. He must remain defensive, on guard, and eternally alert. Rather tragically, Bales must also hold to militancy; Atteberry can relax with a more peaceful existence . . .²

In the conclusion of my earlier essay, "Simple Trusting Faith," the issue was not whether the three Abilene Christian College professors should remain as Trustees of *Mission*, but whether some self-important party patriarch should be able to dictate the decision of these professors and their employers. I have no desire to throw Roy Lanier out of the Church or out of his preacher-school or off the pages of the *Firm Foundation*. But I will resist Roy Lanier in any attempt he makes to dictate the status or activities of any other member of the Church. If Roy Lanier disagrees with the policies of *Mission* or any other institution, let him air his grievances; the members of the Church are fully capable of deciding the issues for them-

2 John P. Vanderpool, M.D., "Attitudinal Stances," *Mission*, June, 1970, pp. 29f.

selves. Mr. Lanier's bald attempt to bring political pressure on *Mission* Trustees is a portrayal of the weakness of his arguments, the hysteria of his ego, and the moral bankruptcy of his thought. The professor-trustees in question could hardly be described as "liberal," even in the Church of Christ sense of the word. The principal difference between these professors and Roy Lanier (and Ray Hawk and James D. Bales) is that these professors do not possess the spirit of Diotrephes; they do not wish to impose their own ideas by force on the writers and readers of *Mission*.

I want to reassure Ray Hawk that he may continue to "own" all the pulpits, bulletins, and buildings he desires; I neither need them nor want them. But I will resist Mr. Hawk in his attempt to own my soul or anyone else's; he can decide what "truth" is for himself, but he has neither the power nor the authority to make that decision for anyone else. Mr. Hawk's circular reasoning is reminiscent of a worldly inversion of the Golden Rule: "Do it unto others before they can do it unto you." It is evident that Mr. Hawk fears, not the erosion of any real truth, but the erosion of his own power and prestige, as evidenced in his claim of "ownership" of pulpits, bulletins, and buildings—and the prerogative to bar anyone from using them without his sanction. So much for "truth"; Mr. Hawk, like Diotrephes, puts *himself* first.

It is no accident that a resurgence of the descendants of Diotrephes has come during the past decade. The same social upheaval which brought to power and credence a Spiro Agnew or George Wallace has, in the Churches of Christ, made room for all sorts of power-hungry axe-wielders. But we must not respond to them with their tactics of censorship and repression. As free men in

Christ, our mission must include freedom for all men, for:

Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! (Lk. 6:22).

If Christ has freed us, no man can bind us! We need fear no man. I applaud the decision of *Integrity's* editors to publish both my opinions and those of Ray Hawk and James D. Bales. Mr. Hawk, Dr. Bales, and I all have the same right to speak our minds—that

much, and no more: I cannot forbid them, and they cannot forbid me. That is true, of course, only in the pages of *Integrity* and *Mission*; Mr. Hawk's "pulpits, bulletins, and buildings," not to mention other journals affiliated with the Churches of Christ, are another matter indeed. I have hope that this situation will change—that Mr. Hawk, Dr. Bales, and their compeers will transcend the spirit of Diotrefes, and welcome me, as I welcome them, as a brother in Christ. I am praying for them. □

THE BODY BUSINESS

HOY LEDBETTER

My thesis requires some introductory notes that may at first seem irrelevant, but please do not jump to the conclusion that I have started an ante-bellum ghost hunt. The issues of this discussion are as up to date as your last breath.

In my odd translation of Revelation 18:11-13, "the merchants of the earth weep . . . because no one any longer buys their cargo of . . . bodies . . ." The translation is too literal for, although the Greek *somata* always means *bodies* elsewhere in the New Testament, the English versions correctly render it *slaves* here. This is also the only passage in the KJV in which the word *slaves* appears. And these facts remind us that no kind of

slavery can exist apart from a widespread tendency to see people as mere bodies to be used as merchandise. This prevailing notion was one of the greatest challenges to early Christian preaching.

But notwithstanding this challenge, serious students have always been puzzled that the New Testament never directly attacks slavery. Why? Why do the instructions to slaves give them no encouragement to demand their freedom? And why do the petitions to owners include no imperative for emancipation? How could Paul write to the beloved Philemon about his runaway Onesimus and still stop short of urging emancipation, even if, as Lightfoot says, the

word "seems to be trembling on his lips"? Why not, at least within the church, demand that slaves have their rights as human beings?

Various attempts, some extremely naive and others actually libelous, have been made to answer these questions, but it is beyond my purpose to deal with them here. However, it is worth pointing out that standing against our extravagant claim that Christianity has been the only real antagonist against slavery in history is the fact that in our own country, which we have proudly extolled as both "free" and "Christian," the stain of slavery was washed away in a flood of blood only a little over a century ago. And no puffing of our cause can erase the fact that church dignitaries not only tolerated, but encouraged and engaged in, slave trading. If the gospel is such a powerful propellant of social liberty, it may well be asked, how could our ecclesiastical forefathers have been so persistently inert?

I believe their spiritual dereliction is directly related to the indirect—and to some, intolerably slow—approach to the problem taken in the New Testament. Before slavery could be abandoned, (1) each individual had to recognize his dignity and responsibility as God's creation; and (2) there had to be a widespread (but not necessarily universal) recognition by society of each individual's dignity as a personality. Both of these had to occur simultaneously. Seeking to effect social change on the basis of the first without the second would result in revolution and wanton bloodshed. Trying to change things on the basis of the second without the first would lead to anarchy.

So Christianity approached the problem by seeking to get people to see themselves and each other as persons, not as things. In other words, the body business was elimi-

nated by removing the body concept. But this vision has often been too brilliant even for believers, and much more so for pagans. The Lord anticipated this, and he therefore attacked oppressive institutions in such a way that the greatest good could be achieved for society with the least suffering. That is, he provided freedom without provoking chaos. His method was to plant in the hearts of men new concepts which would ultimately bear the fruit of liberty.

New Concepts . . .

Jesus brought to the world a new concept of God—a fundamental revelation. Not only did he introduce God as the Father of us all, but he used a word which theretofore was intolerably familiar and disrespectful: *Abba*, the Aramaic word of a little child for his father, the English counterpart of which is "Daddy." If God is our Daddy, then we must be part of a close family. This was something totally new. Judaism and paganism had regarded God as somewhat aloof from the world, and certainly too much so to make the unknown, helpless and recreant dregs of society the objects of his care. Many could not believe in such a God, and those who worshipped him had to reorganize their thinking so that they could show the same consideration for all men that he did. Attitudes which enforced human oppression could not coexist with worship of the Father. Hence the validity of one's worship could be—and still can be—tested by his attitude toward others.

The gospel, therefore, brought to the world a new concept of man. Astonishment at God's elevation of man as reflected in the 8th Psalm—"What is man, that you think of him; mere man, that you care for him?"—reached a new peak. When God so crowned

us with glory and honor, he did not pick out just a few; all men were included. Consequently, there can be no Jew or Greek, slave or free, but all are "beloved brothers" to be recognized and respected for their intrinsic worth. And if all men are precious in God's sight, that includes the most socially insignificant (although this actuality may be obscured by evil thinking judges, such as those in James 2, who insist on making social distinctions); which brings us to one of the great paradoxes in the New Testament: along with its insistence on humility the gospel gives to the individual a marvelous sense of self-importance. But these virtues are not contradictory; both are essential to real brotherhood.

The new concept of man placed tremendous stress on individuality. Personal independence is of first importance. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves, which means that to us they are to have the same individual identity that we ourselves have. The reason the affection of the early Christians was real was that it discriminated and saw in each brother an individual soul. Such love is urgently needed today. Our talk about loving everybody may really be an excuse for loving nobody in particular. The real test of our love is whether or not it fails when applied to any particular individual.

Unity and Independence . . .

But this involves us in another paradox. How can there be unity without a surrender of individual independence? Are not the concepts mutually exclusive? Given their frame of reference, the pagans were wise in seeing the church as a disintegrating force threatening to destroy the bonds of society forged by the Roman government. After all, the church consisted of men who thought

themselves free, and responsible, ultimately, to God alone. Such men were a threat to the customs and institutions which society in general regarded as essential: women and slaves had received a new status, for instance; and the authority of Caesar was supplanted by another authority. According to pagan logic, whatever encouraged such excesses had to be suppressed.

But the pagans were not the only ones to be bothered by this individual independence. Believing that an organizational unity in which all men must think alike is a paramount desideratum, the church has often persecuted its greatest saints. While suppressing individuality in worship and opinion it has made the same error as the pagans: it has failed to see that there can be no unity that is not spontaneous; that the very nature of man defies all union which threatens his independent personality. Such pagan and ecclesiastical error has correctly recognized that there will always be a conflict between personal and social demands, but has incorrectly tried to eliminate the former. The New Testament takes a different approach.

The gospel brought to the world a new definition of justice. I suspect that nothing about Christianity shocked the ancient world as much as this. To the pagan, justice had to be cold and impartial, and the prototype for a judge was a Brutus who could condemn his own son to death; impartial justice was society's salvation. But Christianity would have none of this. It held that kindness, not justice, was the greatest thing, that love fulfills the law. The individual, not the mass, was important, and the so-called good of the community must never be allowed to obscure his needs. Even the social outcast was to be dealt with kindly. Obviously this could not be carried so far as to eliminate social discipline, but the restoration of the

reprobate individual was constantly in the forefront, and the best approach was always the kindest. Underlying this attitude was the realization that only God can truly judge any man.

These new concepts required a correspondingly new concept of social order, its initiation and maintenance. The gospel gives no encouragement to social movements that provide a mere superficial harmony in which evil, though temporarily suppressed, may revive in new and more dangerous forms. The old social order, therefore, had to go; it had to be replaced by a society which was renewed from within, even if inward renewal was a tediously slow process. In the new society, man himself is primary; social structure, although necessary, is not an end in itself. Social aspiration is not a furious battle for privileges which only a few can realize, but consists in each one seeking his brother's good. The principle of separation in unity is respected. Justice is redefined in terms of Christian love; *epieikeia* (leniency) is the catchword; and the fallibility of all earthly judgment is recognized. The individual is born of and borne along by the Spirit so that he does the will of God from the heart and finds his freedom in joyous and eager slavery to God and his brothers.

Although actual slavery may be a vanishing phenomenon in our time, the body business is far from dead. Let's look at some of our current problems. In our cultural milieu naturally the first to come to mind is that of racism as it relates to blacks and whites. This, I say emphatically, is primarily a religious rather than social problem, for if all the professing Christians in the United States suddenly began worshipping God in spirit and truth, racism would immediately vanish. I say this because one cannot truly worship God as Father without seeing other

people as God sees them; that is, as individuals but without partiality. The fact that two millennia have not been sufficient to wipe the blight of racism from history is indicative, not of the weakness of God's grace, but of the stubbornness of his creatures.

Our Struggle . . .

But what can we do in our little spot in a seemingly incorrigible world to amend this cosmic error? We can maintain our own unrelenting struggle, as a society and as individuals, for each person, as an individual, to recognize his dignity and responsibility as God's creation. Our God is not color blind, but neither does he "receive faces." It is important for the black man to be convinced that "black is beautiful," and that his racial heritage is not intrinsically inferior. But generations of oppression may have blurred this picture, and it will require the full force of the gospel to focus it. It is the church's business to provide that focus.

It is also important for the white man to recognize his own dignity. If it seems silly to say this, remember much racism issues from subconscious feeling of inferiority in the white community. We live in a white racist society where many whites—including professing Christians—desperately cling to the power privileges, critical institutions, white culture, and paternalism. Such people find it extremely difficult to follow Paul's admonition to "humbly reckon others better than yourselves. You must look to each other's interest and not merely to your own" (Phil. 2:3-4). As they cling to the old order, often using the church as a bulwark for it, they are constantly afraid others will take it over and use it selfishly, as they have.

The New Testament appeals to slaves as morally responsible individuals, with no hint

of paternalism. In our ignorance of what oppression will do to a man, we may overlook the significance of this. When people are treated with brutal disregard, they lose all self-respect. They cease seeing themselves as men and become brutalized. This fact is graphically illustrated in William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. We should not be surprised that Turner's rebellion failed; it was doomed long before it began, because of what oppression had done to its participants. The Israelites, after years in Egyptian slavery, were morally incapable of the conquest of Canaan. Today we ignorantly marvel at ghetto morality. We expect too much.

Two students at the University of New Brunswick recently conducted an experiment in which they dressed as economic opposites and posed as customers in 29 stores, noting the treatment they received from the sales people. One of the girls later remarked, "I sure would hate to be poor." The "poor" girl usually faced disregard, and sometimes direct hostility. Such treatment does something to people, and we must recognize it. Add to that the oppression of a racist society, and the problem is multiplied.

When Philemon received Onesimus back, "no longer as a slave, but as more than a slave—as a dear brother," renewal had taken place. The social problem had found a religious solution. A slave like Onesimus could eat at the common Christian table where "there is neither slave nor free." He could even become the respected teacher and Christian leader of slave owners. It was miraculous, but the same thing can happen today. Not that it does always happen today, for the descendants of slaves in our time often fare worse in the church than did the actual slaves in Onesimus' generation.

When poor people, ghetto residents, and ethnic aliens are our "dear brothers," we will be able to truly call on Him as Father. But not before.

Other Applications . . .

But if we deplore the view that slaves are mere "bodies," what about regarding employees as only "hands"? I am really disturbed that so many industrial workers now complain that their jobs dehumanize them. Several years ago the following exchange took place in an auto plant in Detroit: "What are you making?" "C. 429." "What is C. 429?" "I don't know." "What becomes of C. 429 when it leaves you?" "I don't know." "How long have you been making C. 429?" "Nine years." How much this has really changed is an interesting question.

When people feel they are treated as machines to be turned on to get out production and then turned off, it is useless to talk to them about the dignity of labor, because in their labor is precisely where they think they lose their dignity. Free men naturally resist becoming mere robots or numbers. That is why so many people objected when the telephone company went to all-digital numbers. I want to be known as Hoy Ledbetter—a person, not 431-52-8892—a thing.

Computer technology is great; we would lose much without it. Industrial advancement has provided us many material comforts. Good pay and fringe benefits have given us economic security. But we need more than these: we cry out for somebody to recognize our dignity as persons. Industrial management must listen and respond to this cry.

The saddest phenomenon of all is when the body business gets into the church. A

few years ago a friend, an unusually large contributor to the church, discussed with his elders the possibility of moving to another congregation. Perhaps unintentionally the message they gave him was this: "We want you to stay here because your money is important to us. We really don't care much for you, but your checkbook we dearly love." Naturally he was deeply hurt. Like all of us, he wanted someone to tell him, "We love *you*. *You* are important to us as a person." "All they want is your money" is not always an unjustified complaint.

Perhaps we are in the body business more than we realize. What do our attendance and financial drives and our personal work programs really say to people? We may be saying, "We want you to fill our seats so we can brag about how we are growing. We want you to bring your contributions so we can have the largest building in town and get a lot of credit for the missionaries we support and the domestic programs we underwrite." Worse yet, that may be what we mean.

My greatest disappointment in church life has been in learning that, even after years of association, some of my colleagues never loved me as a person.

In the early church everybody counted—not for what he had or could do, but for what he was: God's creation. "Go and tell John . . . the poor are hearing the good news." What wonderful implications in this! Paul said, "Those organs of the body which seem to be more frail than others are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we regard as less honourable are treated with special honour." What harmony, what care, what feeling for each other those Christians had! Each one was *indispensable*. Fellowship really meant something to them. Much of our talk about withdrawing fellowship today is nothing more than a cruel joke. We

cannot withdraw what has never been extended. If we had ever had any real fellowship with our brothers, we could not cast them out so easily. Except for a few wayward individuals who were strongly opposed, the early church was not like that. They never got into the body business. □

THE HARTFORD FORUM

The annual Hartford Forum will be held December 28-29 at the Church of Christ, 137 East Maple Street, Hartford, Illinois. It is advertised as "a gathering of free men in Christ for exploration of twentieth century problems related to the fellowship of the Spirit." Speakers are drawn from all segments of the Restoration Movement. The 1972 program is as follows:

December 28, 2:00 p.m. "What Are the Specific Grounds on Which a Local Congregation May Exclude Brethren from Its Communion?" *Harold Key*, Minister, Central Church of Christ, St. Louis; and *Wayne T. Hall*, Minister, Lemay Church of Christ, St. Louis.

7:00 p.m. "What Is the Nature and Extent of the Work of Women in the Church?" *Grayson H. Ensign*, Professor, Cincinnati Bible Seminary, Cincinnati; and *Leon Fancher*, Evangelist and Businessman, Mena, Arkansas.

December 29, 9:30 a.m. "What Constitutes the Worship Required of Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven in This Dispensation?" *Charles Holt*, Educational Director, Chattanooga; and *Boyce Mouton*, Minister, Fairview Christian Church, Carthage, Missouri.

2:00 p.m. "Is the Current 'Jesus People' or 'Street Christian' Movement a Valid Scriptural Phenomenon, and What Should Be the Attitude Toward It of the Established Church?" *Kirk Prine*, Christian Information Committee, Cincinnati; and *Roy Weece*, Campus Minister, University of Missouri, Columbia.

7:00 p.m. "What Should Be the Attitude of Christians Toward Inter-racial Marriages?" *Hoy Ledbetter*, Editor of *Integrity*; and *Leroy Garrett*, Editor of *Restoration Review*, Denton, Texas.

W. Carl Ketcherside will preside over the sessions. Further information may be secured from Berdell McCann, 127 Donna Drive, Hartford, Illinois 62048, or by calling (618) 254-6454.