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efforts to help this particular young woman been aborted, but his entire ministry with the youth group has been seriously compromised by the loud complaints of a number of parents who were already not too happy with his emphasis on the responsibility of the church to show compassion toward those in embarrassing kinds of trouble. His "entanglement" with this soul in danger merely confirmed their argument that one should not encourage such people to hang around the church.

And, finally, there's the delightful trouble of Brother Whitesoul, the preacher. According to his detractors (scum with whom even I would not associate, by the way, were it not necessary), he has the gall to urge from the pulpit that no member of the congregation is to be regarded as inferior. Really, now! Doesn't that fly in the face of common sense? What satisfaction is there in attaining social, economic, or intellectual superiority if one can't be condescending toward others? Doesn't God expect us to be the best we can be, and doesn't that mean that some are going to be better than others? And how can we maintain quality in the

work of the church if inferior people are to be treated in the same way as those with more to offer?

Even though I encourage the preacher's detractors to consider these rhetorical questions to be unanswerable, I laugh behind their backs at the pompous hauteur with which they dismiss people who are a much more serious threat to the Infernal Objectives than they are. I try also to offer the preacher some "comfort" in his troubles by observing that such haughty people are themselves the contemptible ones, beneath his concern and beyond the pale of his pastoral responsibility; but I have heard from some of his close friends that the foolish man insists on praying for his tormentors, invoking some silly doctrine of Jesus the Invader about it's being the sickest people who ought to get the physician's most solicitous attention. I think we'd better get a Job-attack going on this man.

Yours in the spirit of detraction,

Ichabod

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If We Haven't Seen God Lately . . .

. . . Then maybe we're looking in the wrong places. Paul says (in Acts 14) that we can find fingerprints of the God we're looking for, anytime we experience full stomachs, a gentle rain, or unmistakable joy. If we actually want to see God's invisible qualities, Paul tells the Romans and us that we can see them — by carefully observing our world.

Sometimes the clues to God's character have been described as being like a book which has been torn in two, leaving just one inch of printed matter on each page. There's not enough to make a story, yet you have no doubt that there's more to it somewhere. Finding the separated pages and piecing them together to make a whole story becomes like the person who pieces together her collection of clues to what the Scriptures confirm and further reveal about God.

The writers in this issue take us to places where clues regarding God's character are revealed — from complex musical harmony to simple, truthful words; from the sight of the cross to active faith in the unseen; from the marvel of a disciplined tongue, to the unexpected prayer for an enemy. Our authors agree with Paul that God's divine qualities are in sight of all.

Then how is it that we get diverted from unraveling the Mystery's clues? Paul explains (in Romans 1) that some of us exchange the goal of seeing God, for a lifetime of adoring his fingerprints. Others of us reject the privilege of seeing God. Instead, we live our lives intentionally opposite God's divinely gracious nature and encourage others to seek out the tracks of rejectionists who've gone before.

As for me, I like to rub shoulders with those who detect the hand of God in history, who relish the clues in nature, and who see the reflection of God embodied in us people. These seekers exude optimism because they choose to acknowledge the evidence of Reality and thank God for what they've seen.

Diane G. H. Kilmer

The Foolishness of God

TERRY FERGUSON

Twenty-five-year-old Colonel Robert Gould Shaw was given the responsibility of forming and training the first black fighting unit of the Union Army. Shaw molded this unit into a tough, ready-to-fight force called the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment. The Union Army was preparing for a major engagement on the Atlantic coast. The Army's objective was to take a nearly impregnable fortress. Colonel Shaw volunteered the men of the 54th Massachusetts to lead the charge. The unit assembled on the beach and proceeded forward, shoulder to shoulder, advancing over the open ground in the face of enemy fire. The 54th lost half its unit and the fort was not taken. In watching the portrayal of this brutal battle in the movie "Glory," one is quickly struck with the sheer foolishness of 19th century warfare.

The apostle Paul tells us that the message of the cross is foolishness, but it is God's foolishness.¹ Is it really possible for God to be or to act foolishly? It seems that "God" and "foolishness" are mutually exclusive terms, they cannot be brought together. Yet, Paul says they belong together and, in fact, it is God himself who combines them.

Paul notes (in I Corinthians 1:18-25) that the cross is a scandal for the Christian faith. It is seen as foolishness, something akin to sheer madness, if you will. The world, including Christians, especially in this century, have tended to take a very different approach to this idea of the cross being foolishness. The cross is often foolishness to us because we have no place for suffering in our world view. We do not see suffering at the heart of God's character or even at the heart of meaningful, faithful human life.² We tend not to dwell long on the cross. Why?

Paul tells us the reason we do not see things from God's perspective. We want to approach God and the cross from our own perspective and, therefore, the cross is foolishness. Paul's

point is that the cross requires an entirely different way of thinking about God. The cross requires an epistemological revolution. Paul rejects human knowledge and wisdom as a means of coming to or knowing about God. Now, Paul does not reject all human knowledge, wisdom or philosophy. He recognizes their merits within considerable limitations. The problem is, human wisdom can never bring us knowledge about salvation. God chose to reveal this knowledge to us in a new, amazing, and offensive way: the cross. Our problem is, we do not recognize nor acknowledge God or his wisdom, because we do not look for him in the cross nor in the weakness of dying.

Paul gives us two examples of such revelational blindness.³ On the one hand there are the Jews. Paul says they demand miraculous signs. They want verifiable proofs with which to satisfy their preconceptions as to how God ought to behave in a saving event. God must reveal himself in a way that fits their opinions concerning revelation. With such preconceptions the result is not hard to predict — the cross becomes a stumbling block. A crucified Messiah is a contradiction in terms in such a mind set.

On the other side of the issue are the Gentiles or Greeks. They seek a philosophical system to interpret reality. Anything that can confirm or expand such a system is all the better. Thus, God must conform his wisdom to ours. The cross, placed within such a system, quickly becomes an anomaly and is labeled as incomprehensible and ridiculous.

These two groups illustrate the basic idolatries of humanity. We think God must function always in terms of our best interests, with wisdom like ours. We insist that God conform to our own prior views as to how God ought to do things. But the cross is God's word that he does not have to act according to our preconceptions.

Through the cross God transforms all human values. God's weakness is God's power and the foolishness of God is God's wisdom. Human wisdom is seen as foolishness and human strength as weakness. The cross shows us that divine and human values are at complete variance with one another. The cross as a way of salvation seems foolish, yet is actually the greatest manifestation of God's wisdom and power.

God's transformation of all human values is brought out in another way by Paul.⁴ The cross rules out every human means of gaining his favor. Favor is not gained through influence or noble birth nor through knowledge or wisdom. The cross nullifies such values. We are called to trust completely in the living God and this is foolishness to the world that depends on such things for their values. The cross makes us aware of the fact that no one can boast, no one can earn his salvation. We cannot abide such a painful exposure. God is so intent upon breaking down all human pride and transforming all human value that he deliberately acts in such a way as to reveal their emptiness. Only God is so wise as to be so foolish.

In accepting this foolishness of God, we also must note, as Paul does,⁵ that the cross also transforms the standard for ministering to the world. Ministry is not glitz and glamour. The cross itself is our model and that model is sacrifice. Sacrificial ministry is the order of the day! What a radical concept in a world that prides itself on self-assertiveness and self-aggrandizement. We must interpret our lives and our ministries through the crucifixion. The cross humbles our pride and intellect and transforms us into servants.

In the transformation of all human values, we also notice that God is transforming human wisdom.⁶ In the Cross, God outsmarts his human creatures and by that nullifies their wisdom. Human wisdom has been able to penetrate many of the vast secrets of life, but we are unable to discover God himself. The cross strips off our illusions to wisdom and introduces us to reality, to true wisdom. In so doing, God has turned the wisdom of the world into foolishness. The wisdom of the world has been transformed by the foolishness of God.

This foolishness of God, which is the real wisdom, is something that was planned in the secret recesses of eternity. It is a wisdom Paul calls "mystery." The great strategy of God was hidden from the rulers of this age and could not be known or penetrated by their minds. God's mystery, his wisdom, is: Christ crucified; salvation through a crucified Messiah, and a people destined for glory through a crucified Lord of glory. One is reminded of the "deeper magic" of C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*.⁷ Here was a deeper magic that the adversary, the White Witch, knew nothing about; the death of an innocent victim would cause death to begin to work backward. The "deeper magic" of Narnia and the mystery of God are a wisdom beyond our ability to comprehend.

In an interview with Barbara Walters,⁸ General Norman Schwarzkopf was asked how the U.S. military was able to defeat Saddam Hussein so handily. Schwarzkopf replied, "We beat Saddam because he was too predictable." The "rulers of this age" had thought that they could figure out God. They thought he was too predictable. But, as the Psalmist tells us,⁹ "God laughs at them." God is not predictable, the cross shows us that. Divine foolishness is not predictable, not because divine foolishness is irrational, but because human wisdom is unable to conceive of the foolishness of God. Human wisdom is unable to penetrate the mind of God. God himself said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."¹⁰ The minute we think we have God and his wisdom all figured out, he goes and does something foolish, foolish like a cross.

Endnotes

1. 1 Cor. 1:18-29
2. See 1 Pet: 2-4
3. 1 Cor. 1:22-24
4. 1 Cor. 1:26-31
5. 1 Cor. 2:1-5
6. 1 Cor. 1:6-9
7. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.
8. Seen on ABC's 20/20 news program.
9. Psa. 2:4
10. Isa. 55:8.

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Bruckner's Seventh

ALTON THOMPSON

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable — if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, take account of these things.

Paul of Tarsus
(Philippians 4.8, NRSV)

My habitat is the ivy and Gothic of the Florida State University campus. My friends and I inhabit a world of band music, bright colors, and packed stadiums. I am nineteen years old.

My friend John is a record collector. Together, he and I have been discovering orchestral music. It is part of our studies here, but our explorations have gone far beyond our assignments. We are intoxicated. Each new piece is a new friend, an invitation to make better acquaintance. Mendelssohn, Mozart, Schubert...these people penned their music for the discovery of two delighted young men who would come along the next day.

Today John suggests that I would like Bruckner symphonies.

John's recommendation surprises me. Bruckner's name never comes up in my music history classes. The textbook mentions his music, but with a sort of dismissal: "Many listeners feel Bruckner's symphonies are too long."

Nevertheless, John assures me I would like the Seventh Symphony.

The next morning, emboldened by my friend's recommendation, I go to the Campus Co-op to find it. I know precisely where to look for it.

And it is there! The Symphony No. 7 in E Major, by Anton Bruckner. The Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam. Bernard Haitink conducting. My favorite

conductor, my favorite orchestra! Sitting in this dusty plywood bin just waiting for my arrival!

It's a two-record set. That's a bigger purchase than I had expected. But I immediately pay the money; the Concertgebouw Orchestra must be liberated from that dusty bin. I step out into the sunshine with my package, warm in the knowledge that Bruckner's Seventh Symphony is now mine.

But I will have to be patient about getting to hear it. The tryouts for the flag corps are being held today in Montgomery Gym. I walk over after downing a Coke and sandwich.

I enter the muggy gymnasium and take my seat behind a long wooden table. The package is placed to one side.

Several hours are spent watching one young woman after another step onto the gym floor to perform a flag routine as distorted music booms from a tape player in the corner. One girl looks confident, another looks frightened; all look nervous.

Many of these young women are my friends. More than a few of them are people with whom I've wanted to be more than friends. Their roommates, relatives, sorority sisters, boyfriends, neighbors, parents are all in attendance — each one here to support someone's effort to gain a place in the halftime pageantry that is our world.

At one point, between auditions, the student next to me at the table asks if he can see what is in my package. I show it to him.

He looks the record jacket over with some interest. I tell him I just bought it this morning and haven't had a chance to hear it yet.

"Two-record set, huh?" He examines it some more and then hands it back. "Must be long."

The tryouts continue. Now a former girlfriend steps onto the gym floor. She does exceptionally well, drawing appreciative applause. I feel a bittersweet pang of pride.

Eventually the tryouts are concluded. The names are read, and there are gasps and screams and sobs and silence. Participants are surrounded by friends offering congratulations and consolations. Before long the crowd breaks up and exits the gym.

The sun is setting when I finally step through the front door of the apartment. My roommate is out.

The shining black disc crackles with electricity as I pull it from its sleeve. I position it on the turntable. Then I start the player, setting the needle carefully in place.

I put the headphones on. For some reason I remain standing in the middle of the room instead of taking a chair as I usually do.

I close my eyes...

There is silence. Then, without any discernable beginning, a hushed string tremelo simply exists. It hovers there, a quiet, held breath of anticipation in a timeless place...

Then there emerges the warm sound of cello

More Than A Hyphen

ELMER PROUT

G.A. Studdert-Kennedy.* It was that hyphen that first caught my attention. Why would anyone write a name that way? My American experience certainly did not include the custom. I became so distracted by what to me was an oddity that I hardly looked at the words my hyphenated man had written.

But "Studdert-Kennedy" kept turning up in my reading. He was quoted in the text. He was credited in the footnotes. One day I looked past the hyphen and noticed the titles of his poems. "Good Friday Falls On Lady Day," "It's Hard To Be A Carpenter," "The Unutterable Beauty," "What's The Use Of A Cross To 'Im?," "He Was A Gambler Too," "The Comrade God," "The Sorrow of God," "The Suffering God."

The force of those titles compelled me to take

and horn. One sonorous tone becomes another, and the long-breathed line moves. As the tremelo continues in breathless awe, the melody soars heavenward in a wordless canticle.

Time has been stilled. I have been ushered into a spacious world in which great events will unfold in leisurely, magnificent sequence.

Without consciously thinking it, I am aware that I am in the presence of a truly great soul. A soul greater than any I have ever known. And yet a soul dwarfed, humbled...engulfed in the adoration of something infinitely greater.

The room seems to vanish from around me as everything small, local, or mundane disappears far below. The air grows blue and clean as it fills an expanding sky.

No words are needed or desired. The music continues, and I wait.

Alton Thompson is a doctoral student in orchestral conducting at Peabody Institute. He dedicates this article to his friend, John Herndon.

a closer look. Setting the hyphen aside, I turned my thoughts to the content. What I found was a revelation of our human need and of God in his vulnerable power. Perhaps a few samples may move you toward that revelation, too.

In the midst of my Protestant determination not to give undue honor to Mary, it was important to listen to the reminder contained in "Good Friday Falls On Lady Day."

And has our Lady lost Her place?

Does Her white Star burn dim?
Nay, She has lowly veiled Her face
Because of Him.

.....
She claims no crown from Christ apart,

Who gave God life and limb,
She only claims a broken heart

Because of Him.

For years I had used the word "incarnation" and wondered why the humanity of Jesus Christ seemed remote. The impact of the Lord's life in Nazareth was focused concretely in "It's Hard To Be A Carpenter."

I wonder what He charged for chairs
At Nazareth.

And did men try to beat Him down,
And boast about it in the town,

"I bought it cheap for half a crown
From that mad carpenter?"

And did they promise and not pay,
Put it off to another day,

O did they break His heart that way,
My Lord the Carpenter?

I wonder did He have bad debts,
And did He know my fears and frets?

The Gospel writer here forgets

To tell about the Carpenter

But that's just what I want to know.

Ah! Christ in glory, here below

Men cheat and lie to one another so

It's hard to be a carpenter.

In seeking to fulfill the call to be a minister of God's Word, I often find myself speechless in the attempt to express "this love that surpasses knowledge." Speechless — and yet bound to make another effort to give voice to "The Unutterable Beauty."

God, give me speech, in mercy touch my lips,
I cannot bear Thy Beauty and be still,

.....
Thy radiance of glory strikes me dumb,

Yet cries within my soul for power to raise
Such miracles of music as would sum

Thy splendour in a phrase,

Storing it safe for all the years to come.

O God, Who givest songs too sweet to sing,
Have mercy on Thy servant's feeble tongue,

In sacrificial silence suffering,

And grant that songs unsung,

Accepted at Thy mercy-seat, may bring

New light into the darkness of sad eyes,

New tenderness to stay the stream of tears,

New rainbows from the sunshine of surprise,

To guide men down the years,
Until they cross the last long bridge of sighs.

More often than we teachers and preachers realize we get caught up in our use of insider's jargon, blocking the way to hope rather than opening the door to life. A soldier in the trenches during World War I points to the problem by asking: "What's The Use Of A Cross To 'Im?'"

Parsons says I'm to make 'im a cross

To set up over 'is grave,
'E's buried there by the Moated Grange,

And I 'ad a damn close shave,

But 'e were taken and I were left,

And why, it's a job to see,

.....

I can't make much o' what parsons say,

Abah't 'eaven and all them things,

'Eavenly cities wiv gates of pearl,

An' angels wiv shining wings . . .

Who among us has not wrestled with the tension which rises from the fact that although Christ is the Risen Victor, people continue to suffer and die? Are there not days when we may even wonder "What is the relationship of the Victor to a world that seems too often defeated?" "The Suffering God" speaks frankly and hopefully to this vexed question.

If He could speak, that victim torn and bleeding,

Caught in His pain and nailed upon the Cross,

Has He to give the comfort souls are needing?

Could He destroy the bitterness of loss?

Once and for all men say He came and bore it,

Once and for all set up His throne on high,

Conquered the world and set His standard o'er it,

Dying that once, that men might never die.

Yet men are dying, dying soul and body,

Cursing the God who gave to them their birth,

Sick of the world with all its sham and shoddy,

Sick of the lies that darken all the earth.

.....

How can it be that God can reign in glory,
Calmly content with what His love has
done,
Reading unmoved the piteous shameful story,
All the vile deeds men do beneath the sun?

Are there not tears in the heart of the Eternal?
Is there no pain to pierce the soul of God?
.....
Father, if He, the Christ, were Thy Revealer,
Truly the First Begotten of the Lord,
Then must Thou be a Sufferer and a Healer,
Pierced to the heart by the sorrow of the
sword.

Then must it mean, not only that Thy sorrow,
Smote Thee that once upon the lonely tree,
But that to-day, to-night, and on the morrow,
Still it will come, O Gallant God, to Thee.
.....
Peace does not mean the end of all our
striving,
Joy does not mean the drying of our tears;
Peace is the power that comes to souls arriving
Up to the light where God Himself appears.

Joy is the wine that God is ever pouring
Into the hearts of those who strive with
Him,
.....
Give me, for light, the sunshine of Thy
Sorrow,

Give me, for shelter, shadow of Thy Cross;
Give me to share the glory of Thy morrow,
Gone from my heart the bitterness of Loss.

G.A. Studdert-Kennedy wrote in the style of
his era. It is a style quite different from ours.
But he used the common idiom and the
experiences of daily life to probe and illuminate
the saving mysteries of the Lord. His writings
challenge us to engage in the same intensity as
we seek to express the timeless gospel in timely
ways.

*Geoffrey Anketell Studdert-Kennedy
(1883-1929) was an Anglican priest who served
as a chaplain in the First World War. In addition
to his military service, Studdert-Kennedy
worked with various churches and was active
in the Industrial Christian Fellowship. His
books include *Rough Rhymes: The Hardest
Part; The Wicket Gate; and The Word and the
Work*. The poems quoted in this article are
found in *The Unutterable Beauty* (London:
Hodder and Stoughton, first published in March
1927 and reprinted in October 1930.) An
overview of his views can be found in *The Best
of G.A. Studdert-Kennedy*, selected from his
writings by a friend (New York: Harper &
Brothers, 1948).

Elmer Prout has ministered to those in the Restoration
Movement for many years as preacher, missionary, writer,
and reconciler.

sectarian practices within his own
denomination, which prodded him toward the
conviction that a return to the ancient order, as
he called it, would result in a recovery of the
unity in diversity which prevailed in the early
church.

Campbell had much to be disturbed about.
Just listing in reverse order the terms piled upon
his communion to distinguish it as the one true
church — Church, Presbyterian, Seceder, Anti-
Burgher, Old Light — results in a telling outline
of sectarian disputes in his native Ireland.

Moreover, when Alexander Campbell's
father, Thomas, came to this country in 1807,
he found that those disputes had preceded him
here; and when he dared to invite his
Presbyterian brethren to cross those party lines
and eat the Lord's supper together in the little
church where he was preaching near Pittsburgh,
he was charged with heresy. The Campbells'
reaction to such divisiveness prompted them to
discover in the Bible a better way — a way to
have unity in diversity, just as the early church
did.

They faced no lack of suitable texts; there is
one on almost every page of the New
Testament. And a good example of the
abundance of material often overlooked is the
epistle of James, in which, among other things,
the apostle says, "Let everyone be quick to
hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the
anger of man does not achieve the righteousness
of God" (Jas. 1:19-20). We may not know
exactly what James was dealing with when he
wrote these words, but we have so much
unpleasant experience to draw from that we are
not really very far in the dark. "Quick to hear"
points to the need to sharpen their listening
skills, a common need revealed by our own
experience. And when "slow to speak and slow
to anger" are added to this, it becomes clear
that an obsession with speaking and an aversion
to listening had produced an intolerable amount
of anger within the fellowship.

Quick to Listen

Which of us has not seen, for instance, a
dialogue degenerate into two simultaneous
monologues, with every point of contact
between the opponents only spurring them to
louder and faster talking, and the increased
irritation we all feel with people who pay no
attention when we are so eager to speak?

We may be tempted to interrupt the verbal
gladiators and say, "Look folks, the rule is that
everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak

and slow to anger." But on the principle that
one who in another's argument would interpose
may soon be wiping a bloody nose, we will
likely just let them wear themselves out, without
settling anything and without learning anything
from each other because neither of them really
listened.

James' passage not only has something to say
to that situation, but it is the prescribed medicine
for many maladies in communication. Indeed,
being quick to listen and slow to speak often
constitutes the difference between war and
peace in the Christian community.

The first and most obvious application of this
rule is that we should be quick to listen when
God speaks, that his word should get priority
over anything else to which we might tune our
ears. Unless we do that, nothing else is worth
talking about. But that is not always as easy as
we think, for instead of being open to his word,
we invariably approach the sacred page with
our own prejudices and interpretations, and
sometimes the disabling assumption that we
already know all we will ever need to know.

And in this regard we have to be careful about
getting our moral support from comparing
ourselves with ourselves, for those who sit
beside us in church may not be very good at
listening to God. George Gallup discovered in
a poll taken sometime ago that only about 10%
of the population in this country (which includes
those who attend church) can be considered
"highly committed spiritually." He suggested
that the churches should make these religiously
lukewarm folks, rather than the unchurched,
their targets for the future. It seems that quite
a few of us do not take the Biblical declaration
that "Jesus is Lord!" very seriously.

It is also important that we listen to other
people, not only because courtesy demands it,
or that by so doing we may help meet the other
person's emotional needs, but because it is an
indispensable part of the God-given learning
process. We are often surprised at how much
we can learn from people who at first did not
seem to offer much promise of enlightening us.
And all the more so if they disagree with us,
for which of us ever learned anything from
listening to someone who knows just exactly
what we do?

Slow to Speak

The command to be "slow to speak" is directed to "everyone." As a clergyman I need to know that ill-prepared and self-willed ministers who ascend the pulpit to persecute the saints will find no encouragement in the Bible. Neither will that self-serving exhibitionist, to whom James alludes, who sets himself up as a teacher, not because he is dedicated to the Lord's service, but because of pride, and who will inevitably cause more trouble than he is worth.

Furthermore, the words "slow to speak" need to ring in the ears of those brothers and sisters who never seem to know when to shut up, who talk on and on in our meetings without contributing to the needs of the saints who manage to stay awake, and who at best may have only a very hazy grasp of the subject under discussion, and at worst, like some critics Jude mentioned, "revile the things they do not understand." The vanity of such people prevents edification and has a disintegrating effect on the fellowship.

An especially powerful irritant to pleasant relationships, both in church and in the home, is that habit some have of interrupting others, a practice which seems to say either that one is not paying attention to what the other is saying or that his remarks should be dismissed as worthless. Sometimes, of course, interrupting merely stems from excessive eagerness to make a point, but its face never really has a good side. We ought to call it what it is: sin.

Speaking Against Brother or Sister

In the fourth chapter James strictly forbids his readers to speak against one another or to judge one another. It might be said that the point at which brotherly love is abandoned is the moment when brothers and sisters stop talking to one another and start speaking *against* one another. It is the time when objectivity gives way to hostility and malice. People start running one another down, and harsh criticism, especially of the person who is absent, becomes the rule. Surely this can only happen when

people quit listening to God speak; otherwise they could not do it in face of the fact that few sins are as severely condemned in the Bible as malicious gossip.

I have noticed that the peace of the church is often severely damaged by the troubles experienced by just one solitary member. The reason this happens is that when life is hard on us, we like to take it out on somebody else, so much so that when our own patience fails under personal stress, we may destroy the tranquillity of the whole body. At the very least we may become irritable and critical of others and generally make a nuisance of ourselves. If we are among those people who tend to blame trouble on personal sin, we may find relief in crediting our misfortune to someone else's sin rather than our own, and if we fail to find a sin ready at hand, we may be disposed to invent one. It does not take a very lively imagination to appreciate the damage that can do to brotherhood.

There is, of course, a very strong rule against this practice. James puts it this way: "Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door" (Jas. 5:9). The original word for complain here literally means "to groan," and I think the literal meaning makes a great deal of sense. We are not to groan against one another. If, for instance, the person with whom you are talking lets out a groan when you mention another person's name, that groan will carry a substantial load of meaning. It may be poorly defined, but you will not miss the negative implications. In addition, it will invite you to ask for further comment, which will give the complainer a respectable opening to begin explicit verbal attacks upon the person groaned against. Those who are tempted to commit this sin should remember that the judge is at the door, and it is his prerogative, not ours, to draw up indictments against our brothers and sisters and to impose sentences upon them, if and when they are required.

One of the reasons these sins of the tongue are so damaging to community life is that they stir up anger. That is especially true when two of these selfish individuals come face to face.

If I want to talk rather than listen, and you do, too, then your talking interferes with my own ability to speak and, therefore, arouses my resentment. I may try to make my anger look respectable by labeling it "righteous indignation," but that is probably not what it is. It is not righteous at all; it is just indignation. And that is something that does not bring about the right behavior which God demands.

The ease with which even the best people can fall into this sin is illustrated by Moses. Moses, as God's prophet and lawgiver, was at times called upon to manifest the divine displeasure over the rebelliousness of God's people, but there were other times when his indignation was less than righteous. For instance, one day during the Egyptian captivity Moses saw an Egyptian beating one of the Hebrews. So looking around carefully to see that nobody was watching, he killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. That may seem like a noble deed to all who refuse to believe that vengeance belongs to the Lord, but God had something better in mind for his prophet than murdering Egyptian taskmasters. All his rash action accomplished was to force him to leave the country.

On another occasion, while he was leading the Israelites to the Promised Land, the people began to complain because they appeared to have run out of water, and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron and recited a list of gripes which were not only unreasonable but highly uncomplimentary to their leaders. So the Lord told Moses to take his rod and speak to the rock, and it would yield water for the congregation and their livestock.

But Moses, in his indignation, went beyond what God said. He said to the assembled people, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" And he struck

the rock twice with his rod, and the water came out. But God was not happy about it. In fact, he fired Moses. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed me, to treat me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

Are We Honoring God?

You and I can understand Moses' sin, which was a failure to sanctify God in the eyes of the people. As a matter of fact, we may have committed it. We may know from experience what it is like to become so angry with our misbehaving brothers and sisters that we take it upon ourselves to deal with them, and fail to give God the credit he deserves. That is the danger of anger; it focuses on self rather than on God. When Moses failed to sanctify God in the eyes of Israel, or, in other words, when his anger did not achieve the righteousness of God, he had to pay a severe penalty. Notwithstanding all he had done and endured, he still was not allowed to lead them into the promised land.

Anger is almost never viewed positively in the Bible, because it almost always involves selfishness. And selfishness is at the very heart of sin. Anger is terribly damaging to right relationships, in the church, in the home, and everywhere. If for no other reason than to avoid its destructive effects on the Christian community, every one of us should be quick to hear and slow to speak.

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

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Afraid God Works, Afraid He Doesn't

by Terry Rush

Howard Publishing Co./112 pages

Reviewed by WANDA C. HATCHER

In Hebrews we are told it is impossible to please God without faith, and yet so many of those who have chosen the Christian walk are struggling to understand "what is faith?" Is it believing in God and in His Son Jesus? It's much more than that! In his book, *Afraid God Works, Afraid He Doesn't*, Terry Rush gives us an exciting account of his answer to the question. He teaches that where there is faith, there is no fear. Faith is fearless. Believing there is activity in an unexplainable realm is faith. He also defines faith as the capacity to imagine how things could come about, or develop — completely orchestrated by invisible beings.

Rush believes that masses are dying without hope because fearful Christians do not speak up and out for the Lamb of God. Churches are dying because their frightened shepherds hide in meeting rooms. This faintheartedness is driving spikes back into Jesus' hands. Rush reminds us that examples of biblical blind faith (there is no sight faith) are numerous. Abraham believed God could do what He promised when there was no hope for him and Sarah to have a child. Noah proved that faith can't be saddled by binding logic and reason. Esther, Elijah, Moses and Paul experienced things that baffle the human heart but rather than wither in frustration and fear, they chose to look for God's involvement.

The question "Does God Work Today?" is the title of Chapter 3. Rush replies with an emphatic "yes," but charges that aggressive, daring faith has been milked and drained. Many want God to work but are afraid He might do more than our leadership could control. Worldly-wise men under the guise of church leadership seldom call wonders "faith." They

reduce wonders to a more manageable concept and we hear words like "coincidence" and "it just worked out that way." The fact is, he does not work for those who believe he does not work.

The author reminds us that in Mark 5:19 the instruction is to go home and tell what great things God has done for you. In Romans 1:17 we're told the righteousness of God is revealed from one to the other. The disciples told their first-hand experiences, and faith was built and God was glorified. Rush encourages Christians to share their experiences, their answered prayers, and anything that will glorify God and build up faith in the church.

Chapter 7 is titled "Where Will Faith Lead?" It is the chapter I have read over and over and shared with family and friends because it speaks to the problems that so many in the church are experiencing. The warning in 2 Cor. 11:13-15 regarding false apostles and Satan's servants masquerading as angels of light is as timely as today's newspaper. Charles Swindoll is quoted as saying these "angels of light" are usually highly respected, law-abiding citizens who we would never guess are killers. They kill freedom, spontaneity, creativity, joy and productivity. They kill with their words and their pens. They kill with their attitudes far more often than with their behavior. There is hardly a church or Christian ministry where such danger does not lurk. He goes on to say the amazing thing is that they get away with it. Strangely, the same ministries that would not tolerate heresy for ten minutes will step aside and allow these killers all the space they need. Their intolerance is tolerated. Their judgmental spirits remain unjudged. Their bullying tactics

continue unchecked. The bondage that results would be criminal were it not so subtle and wrapped in such spiritual-sounding garb. Disciples' desires to launch into the deep of ministry have been torpedoed by well-chosen phrases that eventually bring one's hope to wearied ruin.

The seventh chapter continues with six sections headed "Faith Needs to Go Beyond..." In the section "Faith Needs to Go Beyond The 5 Steps of Salvation," Rush points out that the high rung on the "salvation ladder" should not be baptism but, instead, the beginning of a life of fellowship with God. In another section titled "Faith Needs to Go Beyond Common Sense," we are reminded of Abraham in obedience of God going out, not knowing where he was going (Heb. 11:8). That's not good logic or common sense, but it was amazing faith and pleased God.

"Faith Needs to Go Beyond...Where Will All This Lead?" According to Rush, when that question is asked, the battle between faith and fear is imminent. The issue is control, not obedience to scripture. Spontaneity scares faithless people. To walk by faith and not by sight implies that the trail can't be seen. But that's the point.

"Faith Needs to Go Beyond...This Move Will Stir Up Trouble..." Terry Rush asks how many attempts at letting God roam through our streets with love and grace are stifled by the fear that such a tactic might cause trouble in the church. My personal answer is: many times! He goes on to say that Jesus is the "c" word

— controversial, and that the reputation of Jesus and his followers is trouble. Rush gives leadership a "C" for church growth because of their hesitancy to confront those who insist we walk by sight. Faith will conflict with fear, especially when fear runs the church. Let it be clear: Jesus rocked the religious boat! Our unity is to be based on the Spirit, not on what keeps the herd from being restless. Faith is betrayed when we spend more effort pacifying unbelieving critics than we do pleasing God.

The author encourages and challenges us in the last three chapters. He cautions us against rolling up our sleeves of human determination in the name of faith. Rather, we should roll up our sleeves of faith in a determined God who calls His followers to be courageous, fearless and confident. We are in an age in desperate need of spiritual heroes. G. K. Chesterton said, "Christianity has not so much been tried and found wanting, as it has been found difficult and left untried." If the question is "How do we try?" or "Where do we start?," Terry Rush answers: "Begin in prayer. Finish in prayer. In between the two? Pray."

I recommend this book, and believe it will be a blessing and encouragement to any reader who is struggling with spiritual discouragement or simply desiring a deeper faith in God.

Wanda Hatcher works in the architectural/construction industry in office management and accounting. She and her husband, Gene, are active members of South Harpeth Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee.

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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 Word Perfect 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 Appollyon and his young student Ichabod by publishing the letters for as long as they can be intercepted.

My dear Developing Demon,

Considering your astonished reaction to my simple action in turning both pro and con of any question to evil, I refer you to your notes in WW 101, (Wondrous Wiles, course 101, subtitled "Evasions and Deceptions"), at Demonic U. The entire concept is easily mastered. Simply grant your intelligence free rein, and develop techniques capitalizing on ambiguities, veiled lies, divisive hypotheses, and similar modes. You have, in fact, already utilized some of the techniques in the past; and, it is hoped, the exploitation of human gullibility will continue to be an often-used, successful element in subversion of the Enemy's plans.

Observations on your annual congregational meeting will, when scrutinized, demonstrate an axiomatic fact in the history of the Enemy's earthly organization, the church. I speak of the observable inclination of the church to duplicate, in its organization, the form of civil government under which it exists. Thus, as you should recall from your indoctrination, the church in Rome duplicated the world-dominating empire-emperor structure of that day; the church existing in various kingdoms, dictatorships, or other nations with various structures, has often raised up human leadership in related form. Widely in America, and specifically at Broad Way, as you have demonstrated, and as can be readily observed, these proud, individualistic people have

managed to democratize the church, giving its governance to the people: *Vox populi, vox Dei!* Strike this one hard! Insist that every issue of any form whatsoever must be decided by popular vote, and it will not be difficult to lead them away, even if gradually, from the very Guidebook to which they claim primary allegiance. You will find more than a few channels in which your efforts of occlusion may coagulate.

Concerning the incipient "class struggle" among the people: Capitalize upon every aspect of the problem — everything from the threadbare, not-always-clean possibility in the clothing of the poor to carelessness in or ignorance of personal hygiene. Goad sophisticated ears to pick up any offensive, improper, profane, ungrammatical expressions of the lesser educated, and make a point of them to all listening ears. Goad sensitive noses to turn up at offensive aromas stemming from flesh or cloth not well cared for, and make the appropriate pained grimace. Seek any pretense whatever as a reason to "keep these people in their place," while hypocritically professing to believe and practice an evangelistic outreach to the world. This may be a tight wire to walk, but it is sure-fire death to evangelism among citizens considered second class. Finally, learn to say "*Those people...*" with just the right tone of voice mixing contempt, disapproval, and

rejection. Believe me, it will work, especially if said where the victims can "accidentally" overhear you.

I'll do my worst to make your venture into entry-level politics successful. This is the soft underbelly of the American scene — the level at which you can learn effective public and private duplicity, concealed self-serving endeavors done in the name of public service, and *quid pro quo* shady dealing.

A word of caution, however: there are *some* serious, honest, patriotic, public-serving individuals on the political scene. You must simply learn to identify them and walk a tight rope in their presence.

The national poll you cite, concerning the discrepancy between the number of those who believe in God and those who believe in the Devil, has fascinated men, as it has you. I am more likely to believe the accuracy of the second element of the poll than the first. That "I believe in God..." shibboleth has become so insipid, vague, and noncommittal as to be, to all practical purposes, worthless. Our Enemy has pointed out the folly of those who say they call him "Lord," but disregard what he has asked them to do; and he spoke of a sizeable component, you may be sure. At any rate, the poll could only be considered good news for our side.

I commend you for your growing recognition and exploitation of the foibles and follies of these gullible human beings.

Yours in successful subterfuge
of the "Saints,"

Uncle Appollyon

My dear Model of Malefaction,

Thank you for all of your encouraging commendations. I must say that much is going our way at the moment. Brother Whitesoul is under attack by several in the congregation for his presumption in telling people how they ought to act toward fellow-Christians for whom they have contempt; Sister Snugrug has stirred

up suspicion about one of the male youth workers who has been counseling a female teenager in danger of being hooked on drugs; and my presence on the City Council (yes, I won!) has brought pressures on the church to exult in its newly-found prestige as a power in the community.

In reference to the last situation, I naturally try to focus the congregation's attention on such issues as whether the uses of the property around the church building are likely to increase or decrease the value of church property. If I can get them preoccupied with the purely material side of their "stewardship for the Lord," they aren't likely to be very receptive to the presence of any land usage that will be of benefit to the poor and disadvantaged, such as low-cost housing, foster homes, or half-way houses for people released from institutions. Fancy shopping malls, expensive housing, and a golf course, on the other hand, will not only increase the value of our property but assure us of the right kind of clientele for the church. After all, if things were to deteriorate too much around the church property, we'd have to move out, wouldn't we?

As to the maligned youth worker (a married young man in his late twenties), no one thought anything about his sessions with the drug-threatened girl until I put a bug in Sister Snugrug's ear about their sitting together in the auditorium to talk a couple of times after services. He has been doing this work long enough to be cautious about meeting with young women alone and in private, and no question has ever been raised about his morals or his sincerity. But the girl has responded to the obvious empathy which he exhibits toward her and other wayward young people, and the combination of her distress and his earnest concern in their contacts with each other are easily misconstrued by those who have nothing better to do than stir up scandal. I had only to raise the possibility with Sister Snugrug that these fairly public conversations between the two might be indicative of a cozier-than-proper relationship between them for her to take to the phone to spread the images spawned by her quite productive imagination. I am happy to report that not only have the young man's