

INTEGRITY is published each month and seeks to encourage all believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and in deed, among themselves and toward all men.

Integrity

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A GOOD SHOW (continued from page 18)

noteworthy contacts could go on and on, but I want to mention this sampling in order to encourage you to take advantage of the next opportunity you have to attend such a gathering.

Many readers will be disappointed to find no letters in this issue, since that is the part they read first. I do not mean to detract from Craig Watts' article, which pushed the letters out, in saying that our printable letters did not add much to the edification of readers. We have received several excellent ones which could not be printed for various reasons, and some which are the opposite of excellent, about which I wish to comment. G. Campbell Morgan once said, "The ultimate sin which any man commits against his brother is

that of the misinterpretation of his motive." Some letters do nothing more than judge the motives of writers, and we do not wish to encourage such attitudes. Others manifest such a mean spirit that they are counterproductive, and it would be unfair to the writers' cause, if not to them personally, to print them. However, we are eager for letters from people with integrity, regardless of their viewpoints.

Speaking of Craig Watts, it has been our privilege to be closely associated with him for some time in the Reference Point Project (a campus ministry in Flint), which he is leaving shortly to pursue his studies. His successor is still being sought, and we welcome inquiries from prospective directors of this good work. —HL

JULY-AUGUST 1976

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Integrity

JULY/AUGUST 1976

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EDITORIAL

SOME GOSSIP

In a recent meeting our board decided to combine the July and August issues into one and mail it a little later than usual. The reason behind this decision was that we should have some time off during the early summer without having to exhaust ourselves making up for lost time.

During our vacation—although I did so with some reluctance, since I seem to have an inborn antipathy to long lines and traffic jams—I took the family on a timely tour of some of the historic spots in the eastern states, but neither the crowds nor the expenses were as large as we anticipated, even in Washington and Philadelphia. With unexpectedly calm nerves and sound bodies we returned home with deeper gratitude for our political heritage.

Next we attended the national bicentennial conference at Bethany College, where Richard Hughes and Hiram Lester assembled an excellent collection of Restoration historians to increase our debt for what our religious forefathers have passed on to us and to help us understand whence we have come and whither we are going. Surely it will occur to a thoughtful person in such a context how much we owe to some modern pioneers who have sought to recall us to lost objectives—men like Leroy Garrett, Perry Gresham, and Norman Parks, who were present and whose salutary influence on the movement will undoubtedly be a topic in some future conference.

But not least among the rewards of such an event are the face-to-face encounters which cannot be supplanted by any other type of communication. In addition to the distinguished historians, we had a chance to discuss matters of common concern with several journalists, including Don Haymes and Norman Parks (two of our contributing editors), Ron Durham and Vic Hunter (present and past editors of *Mission*), Leroy Garrett (whose *Restoration Review* is enjoying a tremendous growth), and several others. The list of

(continued on back cover)

REFORMATIONS OLD AND NEW— SOME HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

DAN G. DANNER

Portland, Oregon

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Christendom was believed to be in need of drastic reform. The movement which started reform was Christian humanism or the *devotio moderna*. This renaissance of new consciousness took the form of academic leadership, stressing the need to return to classical sources and original documents in order to see what clearly was necessary to reform and by what standards. Christian humanism thus became a forebearer of the Protestant Reformation and many humanists became reformers who championed the cause of a more biblical and apostolic representation of Christianity. It is interesting that one of the dynamics of Christian humanism during this period was a very negative reaction to scholastic theology. The latter had become arid and legalistic, without warmth and spirit. It seemingly only entertained the theologians and did very little to spark the renewal which was needed in the church during the renaissance.

The purpose of this sketch is to focus on two rather dissimilar figures during the sixteenth century, Erasmus and Luther, to see how reform was seen by each influential thinker, and also to probe the typology in search for possible models for reforming the contemporary church.

Erasmus epitomized Christian humanism. Characteristically, he learned from the Brethren of the Common Life an appreciation for the classics as well as Paul, Jerome, Augustine and Valla. His years as a monk allowed him to further his interest in the classics, and it was not long

before this protege of Jerome argued that classical knowledge aided spiritual growth. After his fortieth birthday he vowed to follow "none save Christ alone." Along with his German colleagues he sought for a moral and spiritual reform within the church. He did not visualize it as a renaissance but as a restoration of primitive Christianity, based on a union of the scriptures and Christian antiquity with classical antiquity, the former always receiving the primary and functional role. Lewis Spitz notes that he saw the leader of reform as being not a theologian but a scholar, one who by his dedication and love for the sources of Christian antiquity established the "philosophy of Christ." For Erasmus the end was Wisdom Incarnate, the source was Christian antiquity, the instrument was grammar.

Erasmus' ambivalence may not have been altogether his own doing. He was the lamentable middle person, a "heretic to both sides," caught in a fast-moving combination of events not of his own willing and contriving, in which any firm decision was bound to lose him friends and influence. His tolerance and fear of risk made him a neutral person. Luther said of him that he was "as slippery as an eel and only Christ can grab him." Erasmus would doubtless have concurred for he was wary of his own courage to risk his life for truth, even if Luther "had written all things well." In spite of his work on the New Testament (much of which he inherited from Valla), his program for restoration of primitive Christianity and his scholarship in classical and

The basic difference between Luther and Erasmus was soteriological.

Christian antiquity, his presuppositions were basically Medieval, for the ultimate test of dogma was whether it had been approved by the Church. Erasmus saw the divine plan unfolded in the continuity of history, and this was the real appeal of the Roman Church.

That Martin Luther marks the beginning of a new era which broke with its Renaissance and humanist past scarcely seems contestable. Luther did utilize the cultural and intellectual milieu which he inherited but it was continuously subserved to a higher purpose. Thus Luther became the theologian *par excellence* of the Reformation. He contended against the intrusion of philosophy into the domain of theology where it is God's Word which reigns supreme, not human letters. His own religious struggle was not based on his humanist tradition, for he felt he was driving at the heart of humanism but without its form. Cultural achievements were appreciated by him, but the justice and righteousness of God was the highest calling of man. Ironically, there was nothing in man which could facilitate this calling; it came only by faith as a gift. The true nature of man is *coram Deo*, as each person stands always alone before God—and it is the total man who is a sinner. There is no divine spark within him; consequently Luther pursued a less optimistic course of confronting the ugliness and perversity of the world and man with a triumphant faith. To be sure, God was providentially behind the scenes of history but only the eye of faith could detect the workings of a merciful God. For Luther the end was the "Gospel of Christ" (God's revelation in Christ), the source was *sola scriptura*, the instrument was "justification by grace alone through faith alone."

The basic difference between Erasmus and Luther was soteriological—hence the basic difference between humanism and

the Reformation (Lutheran) was anthropological. The confrontation between Erasmus and Luther was inevitable although it lacked literary worth. Gordon Rupp remarks that both men were looking over their shoulders at a listening world. Luther felt inferior about his Latin style; he was reluctant to cross swords with the "prince of letters" concerning an issue which was the heart and core of their differences. Although their views of free will represent a true dichotomy, Erasmus took seriously the doctrine of original sin and its effect on human reason. Salvation for Erasmus was a gift of God, for man was incapable of attaining it himself. God gives meritorious value to human works done in a consciously ethical character although the will to do good works can never be fully free. Trust in the mercies of God was accompanied by good works, but faith also had a cognitive element for Erasmus.

For Luther, however, faith was an existential experience which ultimately involved the whole of Christ. The Christian is inwardly always a sinner but outwardly just, and there is nothing he can do which is "good" — only God's grace imputes "goodness" to human works. Although grace lessens the blow, original sin continues to harden and paralyze the human will. Whereas justification came at the beginning of the Christian's life for Luther, for Erasmus it came at the end. But Erasmus did not really ponder and read widely the theology of Luther and he was appalled by his violence and intransigence. Hajo Holborn says Erasmus could not grasp Luther's "new experience of God," that God is above learning and philosopher, that he produces a new spirit and will in the Christian and that the genuine sign of the true believer is that he always constitutes a minority.

The controversy regarding the nature (and hermeneutics) of scripture was only

It seems that many people are becoming aware that the Bible is being made less than central.

an appendage to the controversy over free will. It forced Luther to enunciate the doctrine that the scriptures could not be understood without the aid of the Holy Spirit. He was appalled that Erasmus would refer to himself as a sceptic who was reluctant to enter the "dark mysteries" of the scriptures. Did this not contradict the very reason for his translation of the scriptures? Was this not neglecting the fact that Christ was the key to the scriptures?

For Erasmus, no. For the scholar had the tools with which to make use of the key. But a "man of the spirit," whose Christology forced him to stress a different level of experience, saw things differently—an experience grounded in a self-understanding which revolved around accepting himself as unacceptable, yet accepting God's acceptance in spite of himself.

Both Erasmus and Luther believed the Bible was the central authority for reform. Both men knew well the decadence of the Church of Rome. Yet only Luther was willing to risk in faith the activities of God beyond the established, institutional Church. Ultimately Erasmus allowed the Church to make his own decisions. The church as an ongoing historical and institutional reality was important for him. Luther, on the other hand, knew the real church existed in the mind of God and that its only earthly visibilities were the preaching of the gospel and the ministry of the sacraments. It would not be the Church which would make his decisions; nothing man-made could be substituted for the infinite power and presence of God, and a papacy was man-made whether viewed as *one* man or a *group* of men. Each individual stood accountable before the Almighty, woefully lacking in self-worth, dependent only on what God would do.

The Churches of the Restoration heritage have stood for the centrality of the scriptures and yet it seems that many people are becoming aware that the Bible is being made less than central by appeals to certain hermeneutical positions *vis-a-vis* the Bible. Ironically, when this is challenged, the challenger is generally accused of being unscriptural. If the Restoration plea is to survive in a meaningful way, we will need some type of renaissance, our own *devotio moderna* in which a new dynamic is evidenced as we attempt to research the classics of our own heritage. Many students are amazed at the remarkable openness and ecumenical spirit of Restoration pioneers, and equally amazed at how far we have moved and how much we have crystallized a narrow fundamentalist hermeneutic. Rather than the latest rhetorical gimmickry or fundamentalist best-seller, perhaps we need a return to our own historical roots. We will need a sensitivity to see our tradition in its own time and place in history, just as we need to be open regarding difficult historical and cultural questions without predisposing ourselves with a certain fundamentalist (and man-made) doctrine of inspiration.

Erasmus believed that the "philosophy of Christ," as he called it, should be restored. Luther was mainly concerned about how a person stood before God. Without being totally irenic, is it possible to see these two dynamics as complementary? Were they mutually exclusive in the sixteenth century and would they be so today? Isn't it true that the Churches of the Protestant Reformation became "historicized" so that they too shared the ambiguities of human ways and human institutions? And, haven't the Churches of the Restoration still interested in the Restoration plea acculturated to the extent that *form* and outward manifestations are more important than *content*

and the inward dynamics of the spirit?

If there is to be reform and renewal of the Churches of the Restoration movement, it probably will be due first to an inward look at ourselves, our historical roots, our own classics. As we view ourselves in our own historicity, we pave the way for self-criticism, for the necessity to change what needs changing, to keep what needs keeping—indeed, to see God's acts in history as revealed in the Bible in a new light, with a new motivation to see

again the Christ, to be born again in Him, to be his resurrected body.

Only in this context can reform take place; if there is a "Luther" in the wings he or she can come to center stage only in a milieu of renewal and renaissance. Alexander Campbell referred to the "movement" as a "new reformation." The term "restoration movement" was a later epithet. It is time we go back to Campbell's more appropriate terms in search for a reformation. □

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN JOHN LOCKE, THOMAS JEFFERSON AND ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

BILL BOWEN

Skillman, New Jersey

During the period of this bicentennial celebration when our thinking naturally returns to the question of political origins, it seems appropriate to look again at the religious foundation on which this country was established. That foundation itself was predicated on a belief in God, and those who wrote the Declaration of Independence were themselves men of faith. The leaders of the movement for independence were influenced by the English philosopher John Locke in their political and theological ideas. And because Locke had much to say on both these topics we will limit our statements to some points he made regarding our knowledge of God; then we intend to point out how Jefferson and Campbell appropriated Locke's arguments into their own ideas.

Before getting into the topic itself, however, it seems best to say something in a preliminary way about what it means to know anything at all. There has been so much controversy over this subject in

the past few years, among religious people, that it always amazes me when no one, as far as I have seen, bothers to explain what he means by "know." It is simply assumed that we all mean the same thing when we use the same word, but this is highly unlikely. In the first place, all knowing is not of the same kind. Look at the following examples:

I know the way to Kalamazoo.

I know $2 + 2 = 4$.

I know how to play bridge.

I know Columbus discovered America.

I know Columbus is a city in Ohio.

I know red when I see it.

I know Jesus is the Messiah.

I know God exists.

The differences among these examples are important, so much so that a person who does not see the distinctions cannot really understand what it means to make a knowledge claim. Basically the different examples may be divided into "knowing how" and "knowing that." In other

Three conditions have to be met before knowledge can be attained.

words, the various claims to know must be determined in each instance by the manner in which they can be verified. Thus some knowledge claims are verified by demonstrations of skill. My knowledge of bridge, for instance, will become apparent as soon as I play a few games. Knowing the color red can be determined by my ability to distinguish it from various other colors.

The second type of knowing, where I claim to "know that" and "know" is followed by some preposition, is much more complicated. Generally it is agreed, however, that three conditions have to be met before knowledge can be attained. Using the symbol S as any knowing subject and the symbol P as any proposition whatever, the conditions might be schematized in the following way:

S knows that P if and only if

P is true

S believes that P is true

S has adequate evidence that P is true

The critical condition, of course, is the third. The problem here is in determining what amount of evidence is adequate. And where knowledge of God is concerned, the problem of evidence is of major significance. What we want to do is see how Locke, Jefferson and Campbell attempted to meet the conditions for claiming to know that the proposition "God exists" is true.

Locke made a distinction between kinds or degrees of knowledge. And again this is a necessary and neglected approach to finding out what it means to know. Locke recognized that we do not have the same kind of knowledge for everything. For instance, he insisted we know in three basic ways: (1) by intuition, (2) by demonstration, and (3) by sensation. And the three types of knowing have to do with different objects. We know our own existence by intuition. That is, we immediately see that our personal existence is

certain. To deny it is to prove that it is true because it is self-contradictory. And the opposite of a self-contradictory statement must be true. Next we know God exists by a valid deductive argument (we will say more about this later). And finally, we know corporeal objects by means of sensation (*Essay*, IV, ix.2). I know that is a red patch because I have a sensation of it, for instance.

Locke's argument for the existence of God is given in a form which has come to be known as the Cosmological argument, because it depends on experience rather than reason for its starting point. The argument is a deductive argument with a number of interconnected premisses. For him common sense and experience revealed two important truths, namely something cannot proceed from nothing, therefore there is an eternal element in the universe, and secondly, every effect has at least one necessary and sufficient cause. Based on these two fundamental truths, therefore, Locke concluded that the universe is not self-explanatory nor is it self-creative. And since only two things are possible as having eternal existence—mind and matter—and because matter cannot account for mind, but mind can account for matter, we must believe mind is eternal. In other words, non-intelligence cannot give rise to intelligence; the effect would then be greater than the cause. Therefore, matter cannot account for the fact that intelligence is a part of the world. And because every effect—including the world—must have a sufficient explanatory cause, we may conclude that the Being who created the world is all-powerful. Furthermore, through observing the harmony evident in the world, with its seasons, process of birth, life and death, combined with all the conditions for the benefit of mankind, we may conclude that the creator is benevolent. All this together with what we

Locke, Jefferson and Campbell were closely united in their basic belief that it is reasonable to claim knowledge of God.

have revealed in the scriptures led Locke to claim that we know that God exists in the same degree that we know mathematical truths.

Thomas Jefferson by his own admission was an advocate of deism, which holds the fundamental belief that God created the world initially, but then put it under the control of Natural Laws by which it has been guided ever since. In a letter to the scientist Joseph Priestly, Jefferson expressed the belief that Jesus had essentially corrected the Jewish conception of the Deity by "endeavoring to bring them to the principles of a pure deism. . . ." In any case, deism relies on some form of causal argument for its belief in God, and we may assume Jefferson, in his reading of Locke, especially, was led to hold some such argument as well.

At the same time, deists generally hold the very highest respect for Jesus as a moral teacher. And Jefferson was no exception. In his opinion the moral teachings of Jesus were far superior to those of any other ethical teacher. Of Jesus he writes, "his system of morality was the most benevolent and sublime probably that has ever been taught, and consequently more perfect than those of any of the ancient philosophers" (Letter to Joseph Priestly). Of course we may take issue with anyone who tries to separate the moral teachings of Jesus from his claims of being the Messiah. And we might even insist to do so is inconsistent. But what we do find in Jefferson is an individual who lived an exemplary moral life, and much in his behavior bears out his serious interest in the teachings of Jesus. Jefferson's example may serve to remind us that we sometimes give mere verbal assent to both the Lordship of Jesus and his ethical principles.

Alexander Campbell, for his part, followed Locke very closely when arguing

for knowledge of God's existence. In his debate with the atheist John Owen, Campbell insisted that we can know God exists and can know it with certainty. Primarily his form of argument follows Locke closely. For instance, Campbell held the two views, of Locke, that something cannot proceed from nothing, and that every effect has at least one fundamental cause. But Campbell, using aspects of Locke's epistemology, particularly the empirical side that all our ideas originate in experience, developed a more sophisticated argument. In the first place he asked Owen to explain how the idea of God originated. Owen could give no adequate explanation, and Campbell insisted the idea came by tradition. That is, the idea could not be innate, based on Locke's argument against innate ideas (not every one has the idea), and experience, alone, will not give the idea of a personal God. But if we assume, Campbell declared, the fact of Adam's existence, then we may account for the universal extent of the idea of God—men passed on the idea from the time of Adam. Furthermore, when we consider the testimony of reliable witnesses inscribed in the scriptures we have more than adequate evidence for claiming to know God does indeed exist. (*Campbell-Owen Debate*, pp. 47, 48, 62-64, 81.)

In summary, therefore, we may say John Locke, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Campbell were closely united in their basic belief that it was reasonable to claim knowledge of God. We do have adequate evidence for his existence. The basis for making such a claim comes from two main sources: through a valid deductive argument and by means of the scriptures. Moreover, each of the men believed that if we followed the path of reason and common sense we would not only know God does exist, but we would attain the high degree of freedom and happiness for which we were made. □

THE ONE BODY

F.L. LEMLEY

Republic, Missouri

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4:4).

"He is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18).

These scriptures, along with others on the one church, have been used as a basis of hundreds of sermons, many of which have failed to communicate our message. The reason for faulty communication just may be that we have not been clear ourselves in just what we are trying to convey. Consequently our hearers come away thinking they have heard us say, "There is *one church* and that church is the congregation known as the church of Christ meeting at First and Broadway. All of God's children in this city are in this congregation and all others are lost." Of course, we have tried our best to keep from conveying such exclusivism, but in spite of our carefulness and skillful wording, this unpleasant and undesired message still comes across. Perhaps we may clarify the problem and propose a solution.

There is only *one body*, and that body is the church of our Lord, which he purchased with his blood. This church, or body, is composed of all of God's children regardless of race, nation, or culture. All who have been children of our Lord from this date back to Pentecost in Acts 2, all who are now in 1976 children of God, and all who by God's grace in the future become children of God constitute this one church. God has only one family and there is no other. This body has a head who is Jesus Christ (Col. 1:18). And it possesses members (1 Cor. 12:27), that is, individuals. We are *individually* members

of the one body. This body has no officers, has no employees, sends no missionaries, holds no protracted meetings or campaigns, has no programs, and holds no worship services. It is not a legal entity and cannot own property or transact business. The only way one can become a member of this one body is by the new birth. One cannot join this body but must be born into it. This body is therefore not an organization but an organism, all members taking directions from the head, Jesus Christ. But this is not the whole story.

As the gospel is preached in a specific locality a number of people may be converted and become members of the body by virtue of the new birth. These individuals having much in common and for the common good begin meeting together as a congregation. This congregation is not the whole body, but it is so entwined with the body that the fortunes of one involve the other. This congregation in time will have officers (elders, deacons, etc.), it can have employees, it does send missionaries, it does hold protracted meetings and engage in campaigns, it does hold worship services, and it is a legal entity and is empowered to hold property and transact business. One is a member of a congregation by virtue of the new birth plus a desire to join the congregation. We usually call this "placing membership." Luke called it "assaying to join himself to the disciples" (Acts 9:26) in speaking of Paul making himself known as a member of the Jerusalem congregation. No congregation in any given locality can or should boast of having all of God's children in its number, nor can any

congregation boast of being the whole body.

While we may make a clear distinction between the body and the congregation and succeed in getting our message across without the usual backlash, still the fortunes of both the body and the congregation are so entwined that when one builds up the local congregation he builds up the body. The body grows as local congregations grow. The body suffers as the local congregation suffers. Members of the body function in their God-given capacities as members of the local unit function.

The boundaries of the body traverse all our sectarian lines. It is the local units that become sectarian and grow into denominations. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that members of the local unit become sectarian and try to exclude other of God's children from their fellowship. In so doing they draw lines that God does not draw. God knows those who are his, and we as finite humans have no business

in God's judgment seat. In Acts 19 Paul found some disciples in need of further instruction. They were not informed correctly on baptism and the Holy Spirit, but they were nevertheless disciples. Our position and influence would be greatly improved if we would acknowledge all true believers who have obedient and surrendered hearts, but who have in some way got entangled in a denomination, as disciples in need of further instruction instead of pagans in need of conversion. Many true, surrendered and obedient hearts have not yet learned all that God would have us do. Apollos taught the things concerning Jesus *accurately* (Acts 18:25), but he did not yet know the whole truth on baptism. So Aquila and Priscilla explained the way of God *more accurately*. It would be incorrect to say that Aquila and Priscilla converted Apollos to Christ. He was already a convert but needed further instruction. So with the twelve in Acts 19:1-6. And so with us all! □

THINKING OUT LOUD

W. CARL KETCHERSIDE

St. Louis, Missouri

1. If you are right about Jesus you can be wrong about a lot of other things and still be saved; if you are wrong about Jesus you can be right about everything else and still be lost.

2. Anyone who loves his opinions more than he does his brethren will defend his opinions and destroy his brethren.

3. You can measure the shallowness of a man's faith by the littleness of the issues which cause him to separate from the saints.

4. We are called upon to receive one another as God received us. We have no more right to make a man's ignorance a test of our reception of him than God made our ignorance a test of His reception of us.

5. No person will be saved because he is right on everything. We will only be saved because we are in the right person with everything.

6. Only a man who is perfect in his thinking has the right to make another man's imperfection in thinking a test of fellowship.

7. It is silly to ignore all that we hold in common in Christ to separate from one another over the few things upon which we disagree. A family should not dissolve relationship over the pattern of wallpaper in the bathroom.

8. Please remember that opinions are our brainchildren and we love them like we do our physical children, but our neighbors may not share our love for either. Both should be kept at home for the peace of the church and the neighborhood.

9. It is never right to be wrong and it is never wrong to be right, but it is wrong to assume that everyone must be right on everything to be saved. Mercy is not required where one is right about everything, and one who thinks that it is, thereby demonstrates he is wrong about one thing at least, and deserves no mercy when measured by his own criterion.

10. Every group which lasts more than one generation has a tradition and the succeeding generations harden that tradition and make it more inflexible and unyielding. Men may depart from the word and be forgiven, but he who attacks a tradition hath never forgiveness, neither in this generation nor in the one to come!

11. In many cases in the brotherhood it appears there are more "hoods" than there are "brothers." When the partisan "Mafia" puts the finger on someone and lets a "contract" on him he will be gunned down if he goes to the remotest corner of the earth. Who needs enemies when he has brethren such as flourish in a lot of locations?

12. Most of the saints exist in a congregation merely to pay and pray. Frequently they pray for what they do not expect and pay for what they do not want. But if they quit praying they think God will not like it, and if they quit paying they know the elders will not like it. In a lot of congregations giving has come to be "taxation without representation." You can be told how much you ought to give but you cannot tell how it ought to be spent.

13. Women who are not allowed to attend "business meetings" ought to "pay attention to their own business" and not turn their finances over to men to dispose of without their consultation or consent. God's word no more condemns women attending business meetings than it authorizes men to hold them. But we have always operated on the basis that if you cannot find a pattern, make one! It is a shame to extort money from a certain class of saints by threatening them with hell if they do not turn it over to you, and then threaten them with hell again if they publicly protest against those to whom they turn their money over. We need to do a little overturning and not so much turning over!

14. I can tell a sister how she can attend a business meeting. Let her casually remark that she has twenty-five thousand dollars from the estate of her late husband which she wants to give to the congregation but she is not going to present it except in a business meeting! She will be invited to the next one and will be visited by more deacons in the intervening time than she has ever seen in her lifetime.

15. A congregation which lays down and plays dead when the preacher snaps his fingers is probably not playing! A lot of preachers are like alarm clocks—they sound off while you are asleep!

16. So long as we continue as we have in the past we will never know whether Christianity will work or not!

17. If you do not like the kind of material featured above, or if it gets your dander up, please skip it, and do not read it. There's no use getting uptight, when you can "hang loose and let Jesus put it all together!" Treat what I have said like a Sunday sermon—and you'll soon forget it! □

REFLECTIONS ON A SERMON PREACHED

—TWENTY YEARS LATER

CECIL MAY, Jr.

Vicksburg, Mississippi

As I write these words I am presently engaged in preaching a series of sermons on the letters to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3. I have just finished preaching the letter to the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7). As I studied for this sermon, I had before me some notes I had prepared on the same text more than 20 years before. In those notes I had written, and I still remember saying, that of all those seven letters in Revelation, the one to Ephesus seemed to me to be the one most apropos to churches of Christ as I knew them then.

Ephesus was commended, you will no doubt recall, for its soundness in doctrine. Jesus' said to them, "I know that you cannot endure wicked men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles but are not, and you found them false" (2:2), and "This do you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate" (2:6).

In spite of its loyalty to the truth, however, the Ephesian church was judged as "fallen" and was in danger of altogether losing its standing as a church of Christ (2:5). Why? Because they had left their first love! And when love is gone, nothing that is left is worth anything (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

I remember commending rather lightly, then, the doctrinal soundness of the church where I was preaching at the time, but spending most of my time showing the sad state of one who toiled and endured and resisted error but lacked love.

When I preached this week at Vicks-

burg on the same text, however, I found myself emphasizing the two parts of the letter, the commendation and the censure, much more equally. I spent as much time showing how the Lord praised them because, while they could "endure" toils and persecutions they could not "endure evil men" (2:3, 2), as I did showing the preeminence of love in the life of the church.

I do not believe that my thinking on the relative importance of love and right doctrine has significantly changed in 20

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years' time, though I do believe I know a little more about both of them now. I believe now, as I believed then, that a church can surely apostatize by leaving either one as well as by leaving the other.

What has changed is my perception of the condition of the church. It seems to me that in the past 20 years we have grown in love, in the sense of showing affection, being kind, being slower to judge and condemn. But at the same time, I believe we have become more tolerant of error and sin in our midst, that we have ceased to "test those who say they are apostles and are not." Now, in my judgment, the letters to Thyatira and Pergamos could be appropriately sent to many

churches of Christ. They had those who held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans among them; they tolerated Jezebel and her teachings. For this cause, the Lord said, "I have somewhat against you." I speak of congregations generally, well aware that there are exceptions in both directions, but it seems to me that, while we have learned not to hate the Nicolaitans themselves, which is good, we have

also come to tolerate their deeds and teachings, which is bad.

Whether my perception of changing conditions in the church is right or wrong, however, I am sure of this: We need both soundness and love. We need to understand that love does not embrace error or sin. And we also need to understand that hating error and sin is not necessarily the same thing as loving Jesus Christ. □

A CALL TO RECONSIDER

CRAIG M. WATTS

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Mr. Watts, as religion editor of the campus newspaper of the University of Michigan-Flint, wrote the following article to appeal to university students to reconsider the claims of Christianity. However, it deals with concerns which are by no means peculiar to students.

A person who is deeply committed to a particular viewpoint or life style can expect to find himself in conflict with others who fail to share his convictions. It's inevitable, especially if one believes that the alternative approaches are not only inferior but actually destructive. For example, any self-respecting Marxist is going to be very uncompromising in his opposition to Capitalism and equally energetic in his support of Communism. Naturally, when such a conviction is proclaimed in the presence of the unsympathetic, friction undoubtedly will arise. But if one truly believes what he claims, then he is obligated to speak out in support of the position he maintains, even if others don't particularly like it.

Unfortunately, most people have a distinct inability to consider minority positions. An even greater tragedy is the fact that so many people seem to be tremendously willing to accept biased and inaccurate information about viewpoints which differ from their own. Many individuals couple their very limited experience with the distorted information they have absorbed to conclude that they know everything they need to know about a given position. What happens too often is that a message is rejected without being seriously considered.

I find myself extremely sensitive to the tendency described above, because I myself am dedicated to an ideology and a life style which is adhered to by a minority. I hesitate to state my position, simply because too often I have come into contact with those who think they know "where my head is at" before I am allowed to get past my first sentence. Nevertheless, I find the position I have chosen to adopt to be the most solid and

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defendable one of which I am aware: I am a Christian.

No doubt many different images come to mind upon hearing the word "Christian." Perhaps some see Christians as being synonymous with defenders of the status quo who view the security of the middle class and the present social order as the highest possible value. Probably others tend to think of the tract passers who confront people on the streets and, like a robot, ask, "Are you saved?" Frankly, I usually walk around a block to avoid tract passers. These are not images of Christianity that I can claim.

Almost certainly my statement that the Christian viewpoint is a minority position will surprise some. But we are living in a post-Christian age. Only those who are very ignorant concerning the nature of Christianity could believe that the norm of the Western world is Christian. There are some ragged remains of Christian morality found in our culture, but even these remains have been terribly distorted.

Accurate information concerning Christianity is not nearly as widespread as is generally assumed. Even among so-called Christians there is a great ignorance. With many, a lifetime of "Sunday School" has left them with no more than sentimentalities and "nice" stories. Some years ago *The Christian Century* printed the results of a "Biblical Literacy Test" that had

Conference Tapes Available

Those who wish to have tapes of the speeches at the recent bicentennial conference at Bethany College may obtain them from J.C. Noblitt, PO Box 174, Mount Dora, Florida 32757. The 90-minute cassettes are \$3 each, or 10 for \$25.

been given to a large Protestant church. A total of 83 percent of those tested proved to be essentially ignorant of Biblical content. I believe this is generally what can be expected.

When I speak of Christianity I am not speaking of any particular denominational expression of Christianity; I am referring to the basic Biblical message as affirmed in the earliest historic creeds. In essence the contention of Christianity is that man was not merely a freak accident of nature, but was a being created by a personal God in an ideal relationship. Man was gifted with what we generally call free will, because God did not want man to be a mere puppet. He wanted man to love him, and obey him freely. Man chose to rebel against God. The result of this rebellion is alienation, not only from God, but also from nature, from other people and from one's own self. This condemnation of man is eternal and, from a purely human perspective, unalterable.

It is furthermore maintained that God has expressed himself uniquely and decisively by becoming a man in the person of Jesus Christ. He lived perfectly and died violently in order that the relationship between God and man might be restored for all who rely upon him. Christians affirm that Christ rose from the dead bodily, and ascended to the Father God. It is the central claim of Christianity that God acted in Christ within a real time-space historical context—not in some mythical "once-upon-a-time" land. Significant also is the belief that Jesus Christ will return to this world again, at which time those who are his followers will arise in a resurrected body like his, while those who chose not to trust him will face condemnation. Of course, all of these things are not provable; however, I believe one can still reasonably believe the aspects which are not verifiable in light of certain

The founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, was always ready to challenge the status quo of the first century world.

key truths which, to a great degree, are verifiable.

It is the common assumption that Biblical Christianity has been utterly refuted and is unworthy of the consideration of intelligent people. This is a myth often fostered by those who are too lazy to seriously examine the claims and basis of Christian belief. I believe it has been correctly said that it is not that Christianity has been tried and found wanting; it has been tried and found difficult.

I don't want to leave the impression that no one has a good reason for withholding his ear from the Christian message. I am well aware of several things which could cause a credibility gap. Some of these matters are worthy of comment.

Many people feel that Christianity is anti-intellectual. I've heard many sermons that could lead one to such a conclusion. Some preachers seem to have a compulsion to condemn everything they don't understand. Too many Christians are quick to make dogmatic assertions, but slow to provide evidence backing their claims.

Also there is a tendency among many sincere, dedicated Christians to assume the authority of the Bible in conversing with others who are not Christians. Sometimes they even resent it when others do not recognize the Bible as having any authority. Personally I view the Bible as the sole legitimate religious authority for the Christian; nevertheless, it saddens me to see other Christians try to cram scripture verses down unbelievers' throats without ever offering any decent reasons why the Bible ought to be considered reliable. Dr. F.F. Bruce, British scholar and Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, has written a short work entitled *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* It is an introductory study that I

recommend to anyone interested in examining the basis for accepting the Biblical message.

Another reason many people tend not to be open to the Christian message is that "Christianity" has too often been aligned with the status quo. I find this especially tragic in light of the fact that the founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, was always ready to challenge the status quo of the first century world. This leads me to believe that when Christianity becomes a tool of the ruling class to keep other people "in their place," it is no longer really Christianity. It makes me sick to know that there are people who claim to be Christian, yet faithfully worship the bourgeois trinity—mediocrity, respectability and security.

It is only fair to note that a minority of Christians have always stood up against the injustices of their culture. Of course, persecution has followed such a course, but that should not be surprising. No one makes a radical stand for right without having to pay the price.

Finally, many individuals resist the Christian proclamation because of bad experiences they have had in past encounters with church members. I must say, I have had more than my share of bad experiences. Still, I am a Christian. I'm not a Christian because I'm fool enough to think the church is perfect, nor because Christianity "feels good." I am a Christian because I believe that Christianity as a whole is true. I have not closed my eyes to the facts; indeed, I believe I am a Christian because of the facts. This article is not the place to expound upon the basis for the Christian viewpoint (books like C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* are a good starting point for that), but I do hope that what I have said will encourage some individuals to reconsider the claims of Christianity. □