

*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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# Integrity

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### SOME NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

We cannot let this month pass without say a big **THANK YOU** to those who responded to our call for financial help. Contributions have been up considerably during the past several days, and we expect they will put us back in the black very soon. Most of the checks have been small ones, but they are the kind that keep us going. Again we say thanks to all of you who have—and will, we are sure—helped us keep up with the ever-increasing expenses of this work. Speaking of expenses, our circulation department complains that the cost of address correction returns is driving us to bankruptcy. That may be an exaggeration, but they do add up quickly, since the cost is now twenty-five cents each instead of ten. Please try to notify us at least a month in advance when you move.

We are also in debt to the many who have recently written notes of encouragement. They strengthen our sense of fellowship considerably and are therefore very helpful.

Many of our readers will be looking forward to the **FORUM AT SAINT LOUIS CHRISTIAN COLLEGE** on Monday and Tuesday, December 27 and 28, in which the general theme will be "Renewal and the Restoration Movement." The program promises to be a good one, and we hope to see many of you there.

We still have copies of Norman Parks' paperback *Woman's Place in Church Activity*. If you want one, send \$1 (which includes mailing cost) to Amos Ponder, 1269 Pickwick Place, Flint, Michigan 48507.

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MANUSCRIPTS written exclusively for INTEGRITY are welcomed.

WARNING: Readers who fail to notify us of address changes (even very slight ones) will be dropped from our mailing list.

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## LAZARUS REDIVIVUS

(John 11:1-12:11)

My life is a stench to the Pharisees,  
As was my corpse before the call  
Arresting worm and rot.  
Another voice might not have pierced  
The mist of life almost forgot,  
But His was both a plea of love  
And a Lord's command.  
And strand of life was thus reknit,  
And now I sit at home again,  
While those who deem Him neither  
Friend nor Lord embrace decay.

Because He snatched me back,  
And now I limp between two worlds,  
I understand the calm with which  
He faces those who fear the Voice of Life  
And seek to spread their inner rot.  
What they plot to take from Him—and me—  
Is only lost by choice.  
Dear as are my sisters and this home,  
The best of all that's here  
Is but enhanced by death.

Yet a shadow beyond my ken  
Sits deep within His eyes;  
He contemplates a pain beyond the grave,  
Where He must sacrifice awhile  
The vision that brought me back.  
Somehow I know that Voice  
Of Love and Force will speak to all  
Across a greater gulf than spanned for me,  
And men can then from inner rot be free.

—Elton D. Higgs  
July 4, 1976

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## THE DYNAMICS OF RECONCILIATION

TOM LANE  
Cincinnati, Ohio

Nobody's perfect. We all have ambitions, pet peeves, occasional selfish moments. All of us are short on understanding and appreciation of others. We are all different, yet as members of the church are called to work harmoniously together for the common cause of Christ. So, though our overall intentions be the best, Christians are bound to hurt one another now and then. Tearful fact, but fact indeed.

The God who calls us to work together gives us provision for those times when we get on each other's nerves and damage one another's feelings. God calls us to be reconciled to one another. Reconciliation is the salve for the self-inflicted wounds within the body of Christ.

How does reconciliation work?

1. The *rationale* for reconciliation is the concept of the family of God. All who follow Christ are children of God (John 1:12). That makes us brothers and sisters to one another. Our treatment of one another must accord with this relationship we share under the common Fatherhood of God. We preserve our family unity by being patient, humble, and peaceable with each other (Eph. 4:2-4). Should strife arise, we must endeavor to be restored to one another's affection. Reconciliation keeps us one, as our mutual individual reconciliation to God by faith places us in one divine family.

2. The *motive* for reconciliation is love. Love is the summation of and guiding factor in the life of unity which God calls us to share. Love compels us to seek only the best for one another. Love is

patient, unselfish, and does not maintain a record of injuries received (1 Cor. 13:4-5). Therefore love impels us toward peace, toward reconciliation, whatever injury may have appeared.

3. The *means* of reconciliation is open, honest, yet mature and tactful, discussion of our feelings and of our behavior toward one another.

It's a "hung up" world. Ours is a day of alienation and artificiality. While technology and rapid transit have made the world smaller, the distances between people are growing greater. Communication lags. Walls of uncaring are erected. Many people strive to be able to say, with the character of Paul Simon's song, "I am a rock, I am an island." People try to "play it cool." Love is traditionally figured as warmth; anger is said to be "hot"; logically, "playing it 'cool'" means suppressing one's feelings and placing up a front of unconcern.

Popular though it be, "playing it cool" is counter-productive. While it seems to shield one from being hurt by others, beneath a calm facade injury may fester into bitterness and some day burst forth in destructive words and unkind acts.

The better course is straightforwardness. Jesus told us not to suppress our feelings, but to get matters out into the open so that they might be resolved and cease to pose even a repressed threat to our unity. "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault" (Mt. 18:15 TEV).

This airing of grievances should be done tactfully, of course. Humility rather than self-righteousness, gentleness rather than burning indignation, and willingness

to forgive instead of obstinate pride must characterize our interaction. If we maturely and reasonably discuss our grievances, reconciliation may be attained.

4. The *mode* of reconciliation is understanding, contrition, and forgiveness.

Reconciliation means that both parties, offender and offended (often both are responsible for the hurt, so that it is incorrect to place full blame on one), feel satisfied that fullest affection and uninhibited rapport has been restored.

Of the offender this requires understanding and repentance. When made aware that he has wronged another, one must try to understand why the other feels hurt, i.e., what about his behavior needs to be corrected. Then the offender must ask forgiveness, and be careful not to repeat the infraction in the future.

Restoration of affection and harmony demands that the offended party forgive his brother. The injunction is this:

Get rid of all bitterness, passion and anger. No more shouting or insults. No more hateful feelings of any sort. Instead, be kind and tender-hearted

toward one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you in Christ (Eph. 4:31-32 TEV).

5. The *goal* of reconciliation is edification, or, mutual upbuilding in Christlikeness. The exchange of feelings which is necessary for resolution of differences draws us closer together and helps us get along better in the future. Moreover, our capacity for love is increased by our exercising love in the reconciliation process.

All our dealings with one another as Christians have edification as their goal. If we aim toward edification, we will present our feelings tactfully and constructively, avoiding excessive or mishandled outbursts of emotion that may inflict even more injury. By aiming for edification we assure that while losing our "cool" we do not "lose our heads."

Reconciliation is good for us individually, and healthy for the body of Christ. Compelled by love, guided by the goal of edification, and freed from inhibiting fears by honesty, let us learn to communicate, preserving the unity of the Spirit by maintaining a bond of peace. □

## All of God's commands fall within the domain of his grace!

ignored in our application of this dubious "law of exclusion." Shall the command to Noah be extended to include ax and hammer handles, or whatever temporary scaffolding was needed? Does the silence of scripture on the necessary expedients which were common to the ancient building trade prohibit their use? We would be foolish to argue such! The authority for all potential expedients, even those Noah might have invented on the spot, is inherent in the command to build, and they need not be specified.

We have come to apply this so-called law without grace, and consequently our chief use of it has been to exclude other of God's children from our fellowship. Our use of the word *prohibit* in this context betrays an approach which is so legalistic that we would have forced the ark to sink if it had contained one plank of oak, or a six-foot piece of pine quarter round, or if it had been a foot too long. We should at least allow God the privilege of extending his grace to cover extenuating circumstances, as well as to cover human deficiencies. God surely knows if a child is trying to evade his command, or if he is doing his best to obey but just can't seem to arrive at all the correct conclusions. Not all that is unauthorized is necessarily prohibited. *All of God's commands fall within the domain of his grace!* We must allow God to decide when and if his grace covers an unauthorized action or variation which is judged useful in trying to carry out commands.

To use an example that does not arouse prejudice, a command to plant corn authorizes both the planting of corn and the use of every possible expedient, from the wooden stick to the most sophisticated modern machine. The command to plant corn does not prohibit the planting of peas—unless perhaps one should substitute peas for corn, so that the end result is a pea patch rather than a corn field.

The command to plant corn does not even prohibit the planting of a row of peas in the corn field (as is practiced in many areas). Such a planting of peas in every third row might please the farmer or it might not, but we would not know until we allowed the judge to speak. We cannot rightly start with a positive command and through a long process of human reasoning bind a negative prohibition unless we submit our decision to the Judge for ratification. Until the Judge speaks, we have no right to bind our human decisions and exclude other of God's children from the domain of His grace.

Positive commands authorize the thing stated *plus* every unstated expedient that it is possible to use—so long as the expedient is compatible with the result required. This means that we need no specific command, approved example or necessary inference for communion cups, classes, bus-ing, orphanages, radio and TV projects, or for instrumental music as an aid to singing (and we could add many more to cover other issues). Whether we define something as an acceptable expedient or denounce it as an unacceptable addition or substitution depends entirely on which side of an issue we are on.

We are far too selective in our applications of this so-called law. When the exceptions outnumber the applications, we would do well to take a second look. The commands to which we never think of applying such a law are legion. For example, the commands to preach and teach do not exclude other methods and means which have been invented since the first century. The command of Jesus to bring him an ass, on which, among other things, he demonstrated a safe method of travel, does not exclude modern methods. We all have our rationalizations by which we justify our own expedients and condemn our brother's. Our legalism forces us to take far too many liberties for ourselves,

## THE LAW OF EXCLUSION

F.L. LEMLEY

Republic, Missouri

In the course of time, and as a result of polemic discussion, there have crept into the religious vocabulary of many readers of this journal such expressions as the *Law of Exclusion*. This term is not Biblical, and we do not know where it originated or who was its author, but it is very simply illustrated. It is used, for example, when one reasons that God's command to Noah to build an ark of gopher wood had negative qualities—that such a positive order prohibited the use of all other kinds of wood in building the ark. We need a closer look at this reasoning.

In the first place, while it is clear that the end result of God's command was to have an ark built of wood, the assumption that gopher wood was a specific variety of wood cannot be proved, yet without such an assumption our arguments lose their punch. Some translate "gopher wood" as "resinous wood," which is not a specific variety, but would include cypress, redwood, or other varieties. At least one interpreter has hazarded the guess that it could mean wood from a nearby forest known as Gopher.

Many extenuating circumstances are

**The object seems to be to avoid seeing things from your brother's point of view at the same time he occupies it.**

and to impose far too many prohibitions on our brothers. The so-called law of exclusion is subject to far too much manipulation. It would seem that it might have been invented to win an argument.

In this context arguing has become a fine art—a highly developed skill which has found methods of getting the upper hand and confusing the adversary. One approach is like playing checkers in that it uses the “double corners” argument, which makes it very difficult for the opponent to win the game (argument). Let's see how this works. In the spiritual realm (as in the natural) we have processes of reproduction which produce new life, and processes of digestion and growth which sustain and develop life after it is produced. While the processes of reproduction are static and do not change, the processes of digestion and growth are susceptible to many variations. Now some of our spiritual food may be prepared in an unattractive and inferior manner and still not be fatal, but there are those who try to make the processes of digestion and growth as rigid as the processes of reproduction. Thus they ignore a salient fact and at the same time invent a double corner from which to argue.

For example, if one should say, “God expects us to abide by our consciences, right or wrong” (which is a fact in the area of growth and is sustained by Rom. 14), the adversary will counter with, “What about the Jews? They all lived by their consciences!” Or if one says, “We must have unity in diversity” (which is a fact needing no more proof than that the sun rises in the east), the adversary will counter with, “But what about baptism?” Thus while one reasons from the growth and digestion category, his brother answers from the reproduction perspective. And if the former points out that his brother is making the mistake of being

legalistic, the latter will shift to another corner and say, “But we can have diversity . . . of course, in nonessentials.” (But you can depend on it that he will define nonessentials.) So the game never ends! The object seems to be to avoid seeing things from your brother's point of view at the same time he occupies it. Always be in the “other corner.”

The so-called law of exclusion is a companion to other fallacies of logic. Take, for instance, the “black or white” fallacy. Not everything can be forced into one of two categories: either right or wrong. Many things—like matrimony, for example—require a third category: *neither* right nor wrong. The circumstances determine the right or wrong of so many things. But “black or white” logicians talk and write as if they assume that *every* error, regardless of its nature, will condemn the one who holds it. Jesus pointed out that there are weightier matters in the law (Matt. 23:23), but there are also matters of less weight! All truth is equally true, but not all truth is equally related to our salvation. Every word of God is important, but some truths are important to salvation, and some are important for the eradication of ignorance on geography and genealogy. The latter truths are of much less weight, of course. Errors of the intellect should not be equated with depravity of heart.

Strange as it may seem, there are situations in which scholars who are equally qualified and given the same data will differ in their conclusions. Let us take care that we do not use this dubious law of exclusion to exclude ourselves from the domain of God's grace. The question is not, “*Can* we all see the Bible alike?” But the question is, “*Must* we all see every verse alike?” The obvious answer is that variations in some degree are permissible. □

## THE CREATION OF A SETTING

### SOCIAL SCIENCE CONCEPTS FOR NEW CONGREGATIONS

HERBERT A. MARLOWE, JR.  
*Tampa, Florida*

One of the frequent practices of our fellowship is that of starting new congregations. At times we follow the New Testament pattern and do this as missionaries by creating a Church of Christ where no church previously existed. At other times we organize a new congregation by splitting from an established church. Regardless of the validity of these modes of church establishment, it is obvious to the casual observer that churches of Christ are quite experienced in starting new congregations.

But it is doubtful that any of us has ever preceded the establishment of a new congregation with a systematic study of the task about to be undertaken. We neglect the scrupulous examination of those elements which will influence the character and determine the future of our venture.

While there are different reasons which motivate us to organize new congregations, this paper will not attempt to evaluate the validity of those reasons. It is rather the purpose of this author to provide a constructive guide to use in the planning and establishment of new congregations.

Our guide for this endeavor is based upon research by Yale Professor Seymour B. Sarason, who has been engaged in the study of new settings for the past ten years. According to Sarason's definition a new setting is “any instance in which two or more people come together in new relationships over a sustained period of time in order to achieve certain goals” (*The Creation of Settings and the Future Societies*, San Francisco: Jossey-Boss,

1972, p. 3). From Sarason's studies have emerged concepts which will help us to organize new congregations.

There are five areas which are critical when starting a new setting, which, in our case, is a new congregation. These five areas will influence the particular shape and ultimate success of a new congregation. These areas are (1) prehistory, (2) buildings and beds, (3) staff, (4) target populations and (5) the universe of alternatives. In what follows these areas are explained, modified, and then applied to the specific new setting which we term a congregation.

The first of these areas, prehistory, refers to the period of time prior to the actual opening of the new church. Some of the critical questions a new congregation must ask of itself in the prehistory period are: (1) What is the original impulse which is leading to the establishment of the new congregation? Is it a church fight, a missionary desire or what? (2) If it is a missionary enterprise, what has been the history of religious missionary efforts in the locale of the new church? (3) What history do individuals involved in setting up the new congregation have with similar efforts? (4) What are the religious histories of the individuals involved? (5) What are the public expectations of the new setting before its official opening? These and similar questions need to be asked, especially prior to the public commitment engendered by an official opening. If these questions are asked, then issues such as the commitments, expectations, and desires of individuals involved will be surfaced and clarified. The ques-

**The theological positions of the membership must be considered, but not as the sole factor, as is often the case.**

tion of whether the originating impulse is of sufficient durability to help the congregation over the possibly difficult opening period will be addressed. Perhaps even the appropriateness of the entire venture will be questioned.

The second of Sarason's areas is buildings and beds. By this phrase he refers to the impact of a physical structure on a new setting. There are two key decisions about a physical environment which will immensely influence a congregation. One is whether or not to have a building. The second decision, assuming a building is needed, deals with the specific design of the structure.

The first decision must be made with the realization that the meeting place, whatever form it takes, will influence the attitudes and activities of the new congregation and will also help to determine its future. There are both negative and positive aspects to be considered in choosing between a specialized or a non-specialized place of assembly. Before the congregation makes this choice, hidden assumptions and unasked questions must be brought to the surface and resolved. Does the lack of a specific church building give a transitory quality to the nature of this enterprise? To what degree will a specialized building be helpful or be restrictive in accomplishing the aims of the new congregation?

If we assume that a building is needed, we must then make the second key decision: what will be the architecture and interior design of the structure and what specific facilities will it include? The form of the physical structure will shape the life of the congregation and will symbolically publicize its values. Imagine, for example, how the life of a congregation might evolve, how personal interaction patterns might differ, if we did not sit in rows, staring at the backs of each other's

heads. Consider, also, what symbolic statement we would be making if we moved the pulpit to the side and placed the communion table in the elevated central position.

In making each of the above key decisions, the congregation may find it helpful to answer questions such as the following: (1) What are the educational, social, and recreational needs of the members and their children? (2) What worship patterns will the congregation wish to engage in? (3) In what service activities will the congregation be involved?

Sarason's third area is staff. For the purposes of this discussion staff will be defined in two ways—members and professional ministers. First let us discuss members. In many ways the people are the congregation, and the particular people in the pew determine the personality of the church. The individuals desiring to establish a new congregation should determine the compatibility of the group in areas such as (1) age distribution of the membership, (2) sex composition, (3) educational level, (4) socio-economic distribution, (5) particular personality mix. Of course, the theological positions of the membership must be considered, but not as the sole factor, as is often the case. Like it or not, a young, college-educated couple with children may not get the needs of their family met in an older, working-class congregation.

The other segment of the congregation "staff" is the professional ministers. Usually a congregation assumes that professional ministers are necessary. Frequently that assumption remains unexamined. Members should examine their assumptions by candidly defining their own needs and aspirations. They should consider what they will gain by employing a professional and what they will lose by doing so. If the congregation chooses to have a

**In many ways the perceived success of the new congregation is in the hands of the target population.**

professional minister it should then ask pertinent questions such as the following: (1) How similar is the prospective minister to the demographic characteristics of the congregation? (2) Does his growth potential match that of the congregation? (3) How do his strengths and weaknesses compare to those of the congregation? The particular choice of a professional minister is critical since the shaping effect of a preacher on a congregation is a dynamic known quite well.

The fourth area to be considered is what Sarason terms the target population. We will define this to mean the group of people whom the congregation intends to witness to and serve. If a congregation is being established as a missionary enterprise, this area is especially critical. If the congregation is the result of a schism in the church, this area rarely receives the same attention. However, even under the circumstances of a church division, the new congregation should give thought to its target population. The characteristics of the target population may significantly shape the congregation. The physical location of the building and the methods of evangelism selected should be determined with regard to the target population since they will ultimately mold the distinctive form of the congregation. In many ways the perceived success or failure of the new congregation is in the hands of the target population. Some questions a new church may wish to address are: (1) What are likely to be the demographic characteristics of the target population? (2) How have they responded to missionary efforts in the past? (3) What do their unmet needs appear to be? (4) What type of member would be most acceptable to them? (5) What form of witness would reach them?

The fifth area that is critical to Sarason is termed the universe of alternatives. By

this phrase he refers to the capability of a new setting to think in terms of alternatives. Many problems face any new setting, and only the setting which can respond flexibly will survive. In addition to the capability for flexible response, the area includes the ability to conceive of different structures and methods for meeting the perceived needs which have called forth the new church. The exercising of the ability is often inhibited by the hidden or unexamined assumptions which members bring to the creation of a new setting. Some questions a new congregation may ask which will surface hidden assumptions are: (1) Is there a pattern of church organization which is appropriate for all times and all places? (2) Are we assuming that the congregation we are establishing is free of any cultural or sub-cultural bias? (3) Is everyone in the congregation in agreement on all important issues? (4) Does everyone agree on what the important issues are? (5) Are we assuming that all that is required for success are the good intentions of all involved? Any new setting is built on assumptions. It is not a question of an assumptionless approach to congregational development. Instead, it is a question of raising assumptions to a conscious level where they can be explored and alternatives generated.

When any group within the church pursues the task of forming a new congregation, the assignment deserves a thoughtful, methodical approach. The members of the group should be aware of all alternatives available to them. They must attempt to consider all of the ramifications of their decisions. They must then balance each choice against its possible consequences. This essay furnishes preliminary guidelines and raises pertinent questions. It is the members themselves who must determine their own ultimate choices and answers. □

## LETTERS

### A REQUEST FOR REASSURANCE

NOTE: Upon receiving the following poignant letter, the editor, with the writer's permission, asked two understanding women to write the accompanying responses for publication. It is our hope that they will boost the morale of many others in similar circumstances.

My husband and I became members of the church in 1968, gladly embracing Christ. After a while it began to dawn on me, with a sickening feeling, that women in the church of Christ were very restricted. Obediently, I studied the relevant scriptures, vociferously gave my opinion as to their cultural limitations, pointed out the passages mentioning women praying in public, and earned for myself the labels "rebel, liberal, unsound," etc. I felt I was completely out of step, even with my sisters in Christ, most of whom had swallowed the whole deal and were quite content to sit back and have no role in any decision making, or in any worship assembly.

When I read in your magazine an article making the same statements as myself, I sat down and wept. I can't tell you the tremendous feeling of relief, and justification too, in a way, that came by knowing I was not alone. I don't know of a single man in our whole area who has made statements like that from the pulpit. Some of the questions running through my mind are: "Are there congregations who permit women to pray aloud with men present? How did they manage it? Is the church changing and moving toward a freeing of her women? Are those congregations ostracized and branded as "liberal"? Has it been found that a

congregation which uses women more fully (passing communion, reading scripture, prayer, etc.) has gone on to abandon most doctrines previously adhered to?

I have periods when I can accept the restrictions without chafing. To cope with the legalism which is often rampant I have been involved with many interdenominational conferences, Bible studies, renewal days, etc., where I can find a freedom and acceptance not always available to me in the church. (Needless to say, many have been upset by this involvement, but I can honestly say I believe that God led me there. I was certainly strengthened.)

Anyway, to try to be brief, this letter was sparked by a recent incident at church. We only have five men, and three of them are sympathetic to women's struggles. They are also "silent." In the particular midweek Bible study group that I attend we have one man and six women. The women have felt for a long time that our congregation's "prayer power" added up to a big fat "O," and we have prayed together about this. Knowing that joint prayer during a worship service would be completely unacceptable, one of our number asked the man if he would permit a chain prayer at the end of the study the next time we met. He was most agreeable. By the time we met he had done an about-face, and he left so that the ladies could pray together.

I just don't know what to do. How does one change things like this? Am I right in believing they should be changed? Where on earth can I find people like me who have been able to influence their congregations? We have newer members who look to me for answers, and all I can say is, "It's best not to rock the boat." I have become silent at church—I don't press my views any more—but I am saddened, and sometimes angry, at seeing more than half the church neglected.

I don't know what I expect you to do. You must get letters like this all the time. Probably I'm looking for a "personal" contact, as opposed to a magazine article, to reassure me that I am not alone, and that somewhere, somehow, progress is being made.

### A RESPONSE BY BOBBIE LEE HOLLEY

Your letter will strike chords of empathy, compassion, and heartache in the hearts of many of your sisters in Christ. They, as you, have felt the same frustrations, rejection and criticism and have shed the same salty, bitter tears. They continue to chafe in the same binding chains though they want so desperately to know full acceptance and participation in the Kingdom and to bring freely their gifts to the altar. In one questionnaire women were asked, "What are the frustrations in being a Christian woman?" There were many answers such as these:

The desire and need to speak out at times—yet feeling I can't because someone present may be offended because I am a woman.

I feel so unimportant and useless.

We are not looked upon as daughters of the Lord, but only as wives of Christian men, mothers and daughters of Christian families.

No, you are not alone. Women long to be a vital part of the community of faith, to share their feelings, understanding and knowledge, and to use their abilities in the fullest possible way.

I wish I could say to you that I know of ten congregations who have studied and prayed over this problem, who have acknowledged the truth that in Christ there is neither male nor female, who have had the courage to break with tradition in favor of conviction, who are seeking to affirm the place of women as realized in the restoration and reconciliation of Jesus, and who are moving toward the equal participation of women and the use of their God-given abilities in all areas of church life. I can't even tell you for sure that there is *one*. Some time ago, a minister friend told me that he believed that within the year women in the congregation for which he preaches would be actively involved on a completely equal basis with men in every phase of worship,

formal "church" activities, decision-making and leadership. I laughingly told him I'd be the first woman to "hold a meeting" for them. I haven't received the invitation yet, nor have I been back in touch to see what progress is being made.

There are hopeful signs. Women *are* in business meetings; and, in many places, have a full voice and vote. They are heads of committees. They speak in seminars in which both men and women participate. In one congregation in Texas a seminar was planned and executed in every detail by women. Men were asked to be in charge of some of the learning stations but they were asked by the women—and gladly accepted and gladly shared in that framework. All sessions were open to both sexes. Women *do* teach adult classes. In one place an adult class has a committee of both men and women to plan the course of study. It is challenging and varied. Women conduct

#### Women long to be a vital part of the community of faith . . .

sessions as often as men. Describing her situation, a friend from Canada wrote:

We pray, share devotional and/or personal bits about our relationship to the Lord. . . . My "sharing" bit once extended to a 20 minute sermon. . . . We have a Thursday meeting each week . . . which is directed by a man but during the course of study, anyone who wishes may accept an assignment to lead a particular class and discussion and our women participate actively in accepting assignments. . . . Are women chairpersons of committees? No problem! Do women really have a say in decisions? Yes, very definitely.

Are these places considered heretical? Most likely. I do not know of any who have abandoned basic doctrines of faith. That, of course, is always the killing point.

When through much study, prayer and soul-searching, a group or an individual arrives at new understandings and tries to implement them, there are always projections of dire consequences, appeals to emotion and fear. If our church "fathers" in the Restoration Movement had yielded to such pressures, we wouldn't even *be*. It reminds me of a friend who began to serve coffee in his Sunday morning Bible class. What a furor that evoked! "Why," they said, "the next thing you know they'll be having class dances!" Such reasoning eludes me—but, then, I'm only a woman.

That there are men who are sympathetic but silent hurts most of all, doesn't it? How sad your story of the one who could not remain to pray! While I can understand in the matter of public worship why many find it hard to change emotionally and practically even if they do so intellectually, I do not understand the taboos surrounding praying together. In the most dogmatic fundamentalist groups, women have long been permitted to pray.

Even in some of our most "conservative" congregations, women and men have been praying together for a long time. Not in the "formal" worship to be sure but in "chain" prayers in classes or in special prayer groups. Some of these have backed off, though, since the "issue" has come to the forefront. In one community a young adult class had built together a very close, warm and open relationship in Christ. They shared their faith, their experiences, their problems, their doubts; and they found strength in praying together often. One man—in this congregation of several hundred—raised such a fuss that they were forced to stop. He proudly claimed that in all the years of his married life he had never heard his wife pray.

Can you imagine? Husbands and wives can do everything together—laugh, cry, argue, swim, rear children, do "church"

work, make love—but they cannot in the presence of each other talk to their God and Creator? Such a travesty on the redeeming, reconciling work of Jesus Christ who died so that we need be "no longer strangers"!

If it were not so tragic, it would be hilariously funny—but I have discovered that many of those women who think *The Total Woman* the greatest revelation since Patmos are the very ones who *cannot* pray in the presence of men—no, not even their husbands. They can meet him at the door in pink baby-doll pajamas and white boots and sport around under the dining room table. The wife can call her husband at his office and whisper seductively, "Honey, I'm eagerly waiting for

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you to come home. I just crave your body." But, because she must be "submissive" in religious and spiritual matters, she cannot call him and say, "Honey, the problems on my heart are heavy today. Hurry home so that we can pray together."

As I respond to you, my thoughts have been from the heart with no attempt at theological persuasion. I do not ever mean to be "flip" about such serious concerns, but sometimes one has to joke in order to keep from crying out in desperation. It might appear that I am just "assuming" positions because I *want* them to be so, but this is not true. My attitude is always one of prayer and trying to be open to the leading of the Spirit. I believe that there is a "theology of womanhood" in the Bible: "that God intended woman to be a creature of dignity and worth in full partnership with man and given equally the task of carrying on his purposes in the world—whether it be in the marriage relationship, in the family, in society or in the church." These beliefs have come through much study,

struggle and prayer.

I have recounted something of what I know to be going on "among the churches" with the hope that it might give some encouragement. However, the whole matter is far more basic than whether women pray or speak in public or become "leaders." Women want to be listened to; they want to know that *they* matter; they want to believe that the liberating message of Jesus is *really* for them; they want the opportunity to become—in the Body—all that God meant them to be.

More than this, I don't know what to tell you. It is understandable that you are "saddened, and sometimes angry." I am too. So are many, many others. They are hushed and so withdraw "dull" and "leaden-eyed." They drop out in hopelessness; or they go elsewhere, and their beautiful talents are lost where they are most needed. Or, as you, they find compensatory activities; but what a division this creates in one's very person. Each

individual has to decide what is best in her own situation—after much prayer and wrestling "with the angel." I do, however, feel that the boat needs to be rocked sometimes—not just for selfish purposes or for merely making waves but in order for wrongs to be made right, in order for Christ's will to be more perfectly realized, in order for truth to avail. There were times when Jesus stilled the waters and steadied the boat, but there were other times when he rocked it vigorously. Some of those times were when he dealt openly, tenderly, affectionately, respectfully with women—as equals.

Meanwhile, please know that my prayers and those of many others will be for you—that the tender, sensitive spots may be protected, that bitterness will not develop, that you will be able to find your place and give your gifts in an affirming, redemptive fellowship of those who have found their identity as *persons* of infinite worth in Christ Jesus.

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**A RESPONSE BY LILLIAN LEDBETTER**

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I certainly sympathize with your dilemma, and I want to respond to your letter because I too have agonized over the same tension you face. While I can hardly solve all of your problems, perhaps I can at least assure you that you are not alone and that there are a few hopeful signs.

Your desire to relieve your frustration only by doing what is right is commendable. No serious Christian wants to cause trouble in her congregation or to abandon Biblical doctrines. However, it's more a question of discovering *true* Biblical doctrines than abandoning them. God seems to be very generous in giving to women a broad range of gifts, and their talents may qualify them for teaching adults rather than children, for being treasurers rather than secretaries. In some cases women are more sensitive to the needs of the

church than their male counterparts and have superior abilities for planning and leadership. So we do well to ask why they can freely use their gifts to serve the secular realm and yet must keep them under lock and key in church affairs. Why, for instance, can a woman utilize her leadership ability on a Christian college board of directors and not for the Christian congregation?

Even so, I believe the church is changing in its attitude toward women—*slowly*. Woman has come in through the back door, so to speak, having moved from the kitchen and nursery to the Sunday school, then to teacher-training sessions and workshops, and now seminars for women (the apparent purpose of some, maybe most, of which is to see to it that she remembers "her place"). But as women become more involved in the various areas

of church activity, some, I think, will find it unbearably frustrating to get to the door of the business meeting room and find it forever locked against them, or to be allowed in the assembly only as spectators. The discovery that one is discriminated against, because of her sex, in the very place where she has the right to expect the fairest treatment, does indeed produce "a sickening feeling." At such a critical time any member deserves kind consideration and help (and not to be made to feel like a freak) in working things out — especially when an open study of the Bible shows there are other possibilities.

Women's lives are changing rapidly. When I was young our church group held long discussions about whether or not a woman could work outside the home, the

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all members have equal rights.**

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general conclusion being that women should be "keepers at home" except in emergencies. You don't hear that argument much any more. Today they are better educated, have better jobs, and are more involved in their communities than in the past. To reverse this advancement on Sunday seems hypocritical.

Most congregations are delighted to have as members professional people such as doctors, lawyers, professors, or any other well-trained, committed Christian. Such people can be very helpful in the work of the church. In the next generation more and more of these will be women, and only time will tell whether they will be kept on the sidelines or put in the game. If they are not used, the church will suffer, and many will devote their time and talents and desire to serve to other causes.

I only know of one congregation in which women are allowed to be full participants in the church, and that is the one I attend. In our church all members

have equal rights. There are no "men only" restrictions on prayer, public reading, serving (such as passing communion trays), business meetings, or leadership positions. (Incidentally, by what stretch of the imagination can we interpret scripture to rule out women passing communion trays? It is a nonauthoritarian, silent, serving function, ideally suited to the traditional feminine role. The problem here seems to be cultural and traditional, not Biblical: women should not be visible!)

In our assembly one might hear a woman pray, give a reading, ask a question of the speaker, or start a song. I say *might* because not many of our women desire to express themselves in these ways, or else they find the decades of training for silence too hard to overcome. They are more vocal during the open discussions we have after the sermon, and more still during business meetings. We recently appointed seven congregational leaders, three of whom are women. This was done without any overt or undercover campaigns to include women; it was a natural response. Three of our committee chairmen are women, appointed because of abilities and commitment.

This transition was brought about in our group because of an intense study on the subject by the minister and one or two others. The whole body became interested, and the adult Bible class began a study of the topic, which included a panel of women who expressed a wide range of positions from conservative to liberal. This was the starting point. Not every one agreed that women should speak or alter their traditional position. But—and this is probably the most significant and unusual factor in our group—we do not feel threatened by each other's positions. Those who cannot participate don't, and that's fine. Those who can and desire to do so do, and that's fine too. Both positions are respected. All are totally free to grow and change at their own pace.

The question you raise about a congregation that uses women more fully go-

ing on to abandon other doctrines is a vital one. This is part of our fear of change. It is not the case that our congregation has gone on to abandon most doctrines previously adhered to, despite the inevitable rumors to the contrary. We should only change any of our practices or doctrines when we are convinced it is Biblically right to do so. Therefore, the only sensible fear we need have is that we will continue in an un-Biblical doctrine simply because we are afraid to question it, afraid of what someone else will call us.

If a congregation makes any changes that are unusual for its area, it will be labeled liberal by the others. But I hope we can some day overcome our terror of this word, or any other name they might call us, and quit being so worried about

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our reputations that we act like turtles and crawl into our shells. Because, like the turtle, we can only progress when we stick our neck out.

My advice to any woman (or man) who wants to try to change things like this is to get all the material she can on the subject, make a thorough personal study of it and the New Testament teachings, and then try to get the subject opened up in a home situation with a small group where people feel comfortable and free to be honest. And, I frankly add, if the preacher and/or elders are strongly opposed, maybe they should not be invited initially if the people will feel intimidated by their presence. The reason for this is not to be underhanded but to strive for openness.

However, eventually the leading men will have to be won over or all will be lost anyway, because any changes in the behavior of the church during corporate worship or in business meetings will ultimately have to originate in the teaching

program, which is almost universally controlled by men. This is where it must begin, and that is why it is such a slow, difficult process. But, like it or not, I see no other avenue of change than through those who cannot have experienced that "sickening feeling," but sometimes can be made to understand it.

But how can a woman, a non-teacher of adults who is told to be silent and submissive and is excluded from the decision-making process, bring about change? It takes courage, stamina and a ton of patience, but I believe she should try because she believes it is right. However, I personally question whether immediate major changes are ever brought about except by revolution, yet how can we have a revolution without a few of the "radicals" the church so strongly discourages? Our society is changing because of the actions and demands of women far more radical than you or I will ever be. I believe in years to come the church will absorb much of this change, but I would rather see it happen as a result of our reviewing the validity of our position than as a cultural slide.

It is easy to see why your sisters, like many others, sit back. For some it's a comfortable, uncomplicated, "no-fault" way to be a member without the hassles. It is so attractive that many men, like those you mention, have chosen this route. Many women with visions for the church usually work through their husbands as their spokesmen and so avoid any responsibility for their ideas.

In *The True Believer* Eric Hoffer says: "Freedom aggravates at least as much as it alleviates frustration. Freedom of choice places the whole blame of failure on the shoulders of the individual." Can this be the reason most church women are content with the status quo? At any rate, you won't find many women who have influenced their congregations directly. Pioneering is difficult and often very lonely. I pray that the Lord will give you the strength for your task. □