

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

THANK GOD FOR THE CHURCH! *(continued from page 82)*

too critical of the church but rather embrace it. The church, first of all, provides us with the message that we need to hear: God's word that he has loved, accepted and forgiven us. We might hear this news in some other setting, but we are not very likely to do so. God communicates to us through the church, through earthen vessels in which he has deposited a precious treasure.

But we need more than just hearing about God's love, acceptance and forgiveness; we need to experience them. There is a problem here, for love, acceptance and forgiveness sometimes seem to be tragically absent in the church. This is why I suggest that we should not be *too* critical of the church, not that we should not criticize at all. The church is more than one congregation, and in extreme cases we may have to find another one.

But it remains a fact that in the church we come to know that God loves us, that he has accepted us, and that he has forgiven us.

And when we come to know such great news, we can love, accept and forgive our brothers and sisters. Paul saw his pre-Christian status as the chief of sinners. But—and this is the significant thing—he learned, and really believed, that he had been forgiven. And this is why he had what we would call today “the ecumenical spirit.” People who have experienced love can love others, even sinners like the Thessalonians. They can accept others, even when they have deficiencies of faith. They can forgive others, even those who “ought to know better.” It is a precious circle in which I need to be involved, and in which I can say, “Thank God for the church!”

—HL

Thank God for the Church!

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DECEMBER 1976

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Number 6

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

EDITORIAL

THANK GOD FOR THE CHURCH!

Although you will read this note a little before Christmas, I must write it before Thanksgiving, which means that right now I am thinking about what I am thankful for. This is a healthy exercise, since the words *think* and *thank* come from the same Germanic root. The thinking person is thankful, and the thankful person is a thinker. I am not much of a thinker, so I have to get most of my stimulation for thanksgiving from somebody else. And that is why I have been meditating on Paul's letters to the Thessalonians. He starts his first epistle, right after the salutation, by saying, "We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers . . ."

I was struck by those words "you all," for I know from having read this epistle many times before that some of the Thessalonian Christians left much to be desired. In fact, I infer from his later statement that he wanted to "supply what is lacking in your faith" that none of them was perfect. Still he repeatedly gives thanks for them, and not for just a few special ones but for "you all."

Paul causes me a little embarrassment, for after reading him I must admit that I tend to be too critical of the church. I lose patience when the church ignores me, or embarrasses me, or irritates me, or fails to give me the help I need. I expect them to be perfect, and I don't like to receive my treasures in such earthen vessels as my brothers and sisters are. I don't think enough about their virtues to give thanks for them, and so I need somebody like Paul to bring me back to my senses.

Christmas ought to remind me that, above all, God has loved me, accepted me, and forgiven me. But apart from a certain context, Christmas is just a meaningless word. And what is it that gives Christmas its meaning? The church! To the church I owe my very faith. I am saved by the grace of God, my faith is my response to his grace, and theoretically I might have faith without the church; but theory and practice are two different things. This is why we must not become

(continued on back cover)

HOW MAY WE BE ONE?

TOM LANE

Cincinnati, Ohio

To the reflecting Christian, the experience of driving through town to attend Sunday morning services offers perplexing scenes. Along the way, a number of meeting-houses may be passed, all of which bear a different name and insignia. Often church buildings variously labeled repose side by side on the same block. Their congregations may be watched simultaneously trooping in, but not so much as waving at one another. And why do we pass any of these, to attend with that congregation still further down the road?

It's not just that different people prefer the different church buildings or different "ministers." Separate assemblies and separate ministry are an expression of a deeper fracture. Also expressive of that fracture are the many different names emblazoned on the different meeting-houses. For the body of Christ is riven into many dozens of sects.

This situation is wrong. Division is contradictory to God's plan for mankind, which is to gather people from all backgrounds and of all personalities into one harmonious family under direction of Christ (Eph. 1:10). Division is contrary to Christ's prayer that those who believe in him "may all be one" (Jn. 17:20-21*). Division is contrary to the smooth advance of the gospel. Christ prayed that Christians manifest unity so "that the world will believe."* The world looks askance at the preachings of a people professing to follow one Lord, yet not agreeing on what is to be preached or practiced.

Division is deplorable; is it reparable?

An analysis of the nature and cause of division between Christians helps us shape a plan for unity.

What Really Is Division?

Division among Christians is a severance of fellowship. The Greek word which the apostolic writers used where our English New Testaments read "fellowship" is *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is sharing. Division, then, is a disruption of the pattern of sharing. Fellowship means that Christians:

1. bear one another's burdens,
2. share one another's joys,
3. accept mutual instruction, exhortation and correction, and
4. labor in common to extend the gospel witness through the world.

Division means that Christians no longer share in these things, but in contrast to them:

1. become a burden to one another,
2. rejoice when another's sect suffers setbacks,
3. consider each other infidels to be upbraided instead of brethren to be encouraged, and
4. wear distinctive party names, and stress party pet peeves as though these were the message about Christ which must be presented to the world.

Koinonia is a life-style commensurate with the fact that Christians have a common spiritual life from God. Disunity arises when Christians cease to recognize

The partisan spirit plays upon the doctrinal differences between Christians so that Christians come to use their opinions to mark lines of fellowship.

what we have in common, and attend to things not held in common.

Cause of Division

Division is a play upon diversity. And diversity there is. Not all Christians are agreed about doctrines, ordinances and procedures. Some Christians, following the reasoning and traditions of men above or in ignorance of the Bible, follow doctrines, sacraments and systems of polity contrary to the New Testament order of things. But even Christians who agree on the primacy of Scripture may disagree on interpretations of its teachings. Nearly all major denominations agree in the cardinal tenets of Christianity: the deity, incarnation and atonement of Christ; the fact of a future life; the necessity of faith and repentance and holiness to man's acceptance by God. These things are clearly, unmistakably taught in the Bible. Other concepts are less plain, and become points of contention: predestination, "eternal security," and charismatic gifts, for instance.

A *spirit* of division is the root cause of the disunity besetting Christ's people. The partisan spirit says, "My opinions are right; yours are wrong; therefore I can have nothing to do with you." This attitude plays upon the doctrinal differences between Christians, so that Christians come to use their opinions to mark lines of fellowship. In fact, apart from this sectarian attitude, the doctrinal differences among Christians pose no more threat to harmony among believers than the differences among scientists over the question of the nature of light (is it wave or particle?) pose to cooperation among physicists.

The emotional disposition even seeps into groups of Christians who are almost completely agreed in doctrine and prac-

tice. Witness the competition among "ministers" within the Restoration Movement for the allegiance of church members. Observe how church members compare congregations and evangelists, berating the efforts of others within the same "brotherhood."

Because it divides even Christians having doctrinal unanimity, and because apart from it doctrinal diversity is innocuous, the spirit of division is the real cause of the disunity racking Christ's church.

Cure for Division

Understanding the cause of division, we may develop an approach to unity.

The doctrinal and procedural diversity that exists among people pledging devotion to Christ should be reduced to a minimum. This may be accomplished by Christians giving full attention to the Bible as sole rule of faith and practice. The additions and distortions which teachings of human origin make to things taught in the Word must be exposed as what they are: man's thoughts, not God's. To this end, the historic Restoration slogans, "No book but the Bible" and "No creed but Christ" should be reaffirmed and publicized.

Even so, different people from different intellectual backgrounds will continue to disagree about some questions of doctrine, polity and observance. God has not seen fit to spell out the answer to every question in his Word, although he has told us clearly all we need to know to live lives pleasing to him. Because there will always be some diversity of opinions within the church, must Christians always be divided?

Not at all. There is nothing inherent in diversity that spells disunity. There are, indeed, examples of Christians of differing persuasions pursuing fellowship

Diversity of opinions and practices is no cause for division if the spirit of division is supplanted by a spirit of koinonia.

with one another. Many benevolent agencies operate on funds from diverse denominations. Several well-known evangelists conduct their "crusades" with money and personnel from across denominational boundaries. High school and college campuses are receiving a Christian witness from such interdenominational groups as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Campus Crusade for Christ, and Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

Diversity of opinions and practices is no cause for division if the *spirit* of division is supplanted by a spirit of *koinonia*. The New Testament portrays a disposition of harmony, a recognition of our fundamental unity as members of the same divine family, and an acceptance of one another as sisters and brothers despite our differences, as true unity. Philippians 2 urges Christ-like humility, in contrast to ambition and factionalism, as the dynamic of "having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind."* Ephesians 4 explains that to restore the "one body" under the "one God and Father of all" we need only to practice *koinonia*:

Be humble, gentle, and patient always. Show your love by being helpful to one another. Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives, by the peace which binds you together. There is one body . . .*

The cure to disunity, in parallel to the cause of division, is twofold. Commitment to the Bible as the exclusive authoritative source of Christian belief and practice provides a common rule of faith for all Christians; enables all Christians to agree about the fundamental teachings of the divinity and work of Christ, man's need for salvation, and godly living; and removes those distinctions between sects which are posed by the traditions of men. The practice of a spirit of fellowship, of loving forbearance and acceptance, as

against a spirit of exclusivism and intolerance, permits us to live with that divergence of opinions which is inevitable between thinking beings, and is the very mode and meaning of our oneness under God.

But What Would It Be Like?

What, in practical terms, would happen within the body of all who profess faith in Christ, if this plan for unity were followed?

Most immediately, Christians would reach in love across denominational lines to touch one another with concern and encouragement, bearing one another up in the pursuit of godliness. Believers would become less hesitant about attending common services; for, church meetings are held for that very purpose of mutual edification (Heb. 10:24-25) which would be the mode of Christians' coming-together.

As all Christians adopted the Bible as sole rule of faith and practice, the traditions distinguishing differing sects would be discarded. Those doctrinal, organizational and procedural differences which currently divide denominations would fall to the minimum with the elimination of human constructions. The spirit of forbearance and all-reaching love characteristic of *koinonia* would render remaining differences of opinion harmless as obstacles to association between believers. Denominations *per se* would become meaningless, and as recognizable entities would dissolve into a single community of believers wearing only the name of Christ.

Significantly, Christians, not ignoring their differences in some convictions, would seek a common ground of belief as a basis for joint evangelistic enterprises. Many sects presently preach their own

version of the "plan of salvation" as though it were the gospel, the *kerygma*, the unique Christian message to which the world must be converted. Pentecostals preach reception of the charismatic gifts as nearly equivalent to salvation. Some legalistic groups preach good works. Many Restoration people preach baptism as though it were the very gospel.

The New Testament, however, defines the gospel as the news of the atoning work of the incarnate Son of God (1 Cor. 15:1-4). On this gospel, all evangelical Christians are agreed. All Christians may join together in preaching this message. If preached properly, it will command obedience such that people naturally will seek the true "plan of salvation" (including immersion for remission of sins) by open-minded study of that Word which

all believers will be claiming as the source of revealed truth. Notice that according to Acts 2 Peter preached not baptism, but Christ; his hearers responded, "What shall we do about it?"

Conclusion

The division which plagues the church is not beyond remedy. By attending to the Bible alone as our guide to belief and life, and by practicing fellowship as the antidote to the sectarian spirit and as the very expression of unity, Christians may be one, a testimony to the sufficiency of the Word and to the love which the common Father has shed into our hearts. □

*Scripture quotations are from *Today's English Version*, 3rd. ed.

REACTIONS TO DEBATE REPORT

Although Jim Sims' report in the October issue on the Warren-Flew debate has received high praise, some have been amazed that he could have failed to credit Warren with having won a great victory for truth, and in their amazement have questioned his sincerity as well as our integrity in publishing his report.

We must confess to having had some misgivings about the debate, not only because of the impossible propositions, but also because we have seen enough embarrassing religious encounters not to have been somewhat anxious about this one. Still we refrained from prejudging the outcome, and since we could not attend the debate we asked Jim, who is a Ph.D. candidate at Baylor and a truly spiritual man, to report for us.

Flew's atheism gets no sympathy from us, but since this journal is not read by atheists or prospective atheists, Jim's comments were rightly directed to Christian readers who need to see their weaknesses in argument and attitude—as perceived by even fellow Christians. His apparent objective was not so much to answer Flew as to evaluate Warren's answer, and to

point out that the two men did not represent the only viable alternatives.

Some have felt that he was too harsh in criticizing Warren's manner, but it is fair to point out that a good many others might have made the same evaluation. And because Warren, our brother, is just one of a whole school of preachers, our constraint outweighs our hesitancy to say that those of us who have been on the receiving end of his assaults against the opposition have a perception which his confreres seem unable to appreciate but from which they might learn a valuable lesson.

It is not a question of good intentions, for we cannot read hearts. But the cues we have received, which are our only basis for opinion, have led us to feel that we have been mistreated, that our dignity has not been respected, that our integrity has been scorned, that our membership in God's family has been essentially denied, and that our worth as persons has been disdained in favor of winning the argument. That debates are never really won, in a coliseum or in a journal like this one, by those who create such impressions is a fact we all need to face. —HL

"BROTHER YOUNG IS A BAPTIST"

W. CARL KETCHERSIDE

St. Louis, Missouri

In January, 1844, John Young addressed a brief letter of resignation to "The Faculty and Trustees of Bethany College." He had been invited by Alexander Campbell to come and teach in the preparatory school of the college where he had apparently performed well. Campbell printed his note of resignation in the *Millennial Harbinger* and subjoined a note to it, in which he said:

"Brother Young . . . has been induced, by the continual solicitations of the Baptist Church in the city of Trenton, New Jersey, to return to that state and to resume his labors in that community. In the selection of our professors and teachers we have not been at all exclusive. Bro. Young is a Baptist minister, from London, of liberal views, and very popular talents as a speaker. He has often during his stay here, spoken in the church at Bethany with much acceptance: and he will carry with him the Christian regards and the prayers of the church for his usefulness and prosperity. We have also a Presbyterian professor in the department of the languages, very highly esteemed for his virtues and for the faithful discharge of his professional duties. We are always pleased to cultivate the most intimate friendship with all good and useful men, of all denominations, reputable for their intelligence and piety, and would be glad to be frequently visited at the College hall by respectable persons of all Protestant denominations."

I have not read anything else in such brief compass, which brings into such sharp focus the sectarian attitude which has gradually enveloped us as a people. Can you imagine such a letter being

printed in the *Gospel Advocate* or *Firm Foundation* over the signature of the president of either Harding College or David Lipscomb College? A few years ago a furor was created when a respected evangelist from Memphis called upon a Baptist preacher to lead in prayer at a "big meeting." The roof almost fell in upon him. Even more recently there was a big hullabaloo over having a "Christian Church preacher" pray to the Father at the annual convention known as the Abilene Christian College Lectureship.

Our own quaint and peculiar theological distillate which can hardly be described as other than "Church of Christism" has led us to the place where we are not so much zealous as we are Zealots. Many of those in our number do not think there are any "good and useful men" in the denominations. We are not pleased to "cultivate the most intimate friendship" with those outside of our ranks, and we seldom think of them as "reputable for intelligence and piety." We are now more exclusive and frequently more bitter and anti-social than those whom we oppose. In most communities our brethren are tagged as the only people who will not show any open concern for those outside their own ranks.

The Egress of Corruption . . .

Like Alexander Campbell, I am opposed to all sectarianism, regardless of type, brand or kind. He wrote in *The Christian System*, "All strifes, contentions, parties and sects grow out of corruption. Sects are the egress of corruptions." I think that any honest thinker

will admit this is correct. Sects are a work of the flesh and not a fruit of the Spirit. So, while I am opposed to sects, even more important, I am opposed to the party spirit out of which all sects spring and in which they "live and move and have their being."

I am opposed to our own sectarianism as well as that of others, and because I believe the restoration ideal, properly understood, is valid, I intend to take it into any gathering in which I am invited or in which men indicate a willingness to hear me. I do not think we have cornered the market on goodness and usefulness. I do not believe we are the sole exemplars of intelligence and piety.

I have been set free from fear and I no

longer fear what men will do unto me. So I propose to cross over borders and go behind lines with the message of "peace on earth to men of goodwill." This was the message with which the heavenly choir announced His coming to share with us in the flesh, and it is the message now which needs to be announced that all who love Him may share with Him in the Spirit. I shall recognize truth wherever I find it, and use it as a foundation upon which to stand with the one who holds it, while sharing other truth. I will seek to be true to Him while trusting in His marvelous grace which has struck the shackles from my soul. His revealed word is my lamp and there is no darkness where it shines! □

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL'S PROOF FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

BILL BOWEN

Skillman, New Jersey

NOTE: This article is a sequel to the author's "Knowledge of God in John Locke, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Campbell" in the July-August issue, to which the reader may wish to refer. See also Jim Sims' "The Debate of the Century?" in the October issue.

Although Alexander Campbell rejected the ontological argument as logically unsound—because it assumed the existence of God rather than gave proof for it, when God's existence is the very question at issue—he did believe there were two areas where proof of God's existence could be found. These two areas are nature and the Bible. "They are two voices," he wrote, "speaking of God—two witnesses of his being and perfection; but neither of them wholly adequate to meet

all the variety of human circumstances without the other" (*Popular Lectures and Addresses*, p. 136). Thus, for Campbell, the existence of God is not to be proved by a single overriding argument, but is an accumulation of evidence which, if seen in its interconnected strength, will be convincing to the most sceptical of honest minds.

In the area of proof from nature, Campbell begins with two common sense assumptions: every effect must have a cause or series of causes greater than itself; and something cannot proceed from nothing. These assumptions enabled Campbell to draw his first conclusion that something must have existed forever, and that something, as a cause, had to be greater than its effect—the universe. A

Ultimately we are driven back to some independent and self-sufficient being who started this whole causal chain of human existence.

further examination of nature shows two distinct possibilities as this creative agent—matter or mind—since the law of excluded middle would tell us the force which created had to be matter, or something which is not matter. Campbell rejected the first alternative, that matter created everything, because this would not explain how intelligence came into being. Since mind is of a higher level than matter, it would mean there was something in the effect that was greater than its cause, and this is logically impossible.

At the same time, there are some empirical facts about existence which lead to further interconnected arguments for God. From experience we know our own existence is contingent; each of us depends on something other than himself for being. In the basic sense this means our parents and their parents and so on can account for our existence, but ultimately we are driven back to some independent and self-sufficient being who started this whole causal chain of human existence. And more importantly, personal existence is the very thing which cannot be doubted; it is certain. This is based on the fact that to doubt it is to prove it. There has to be something existing to do the doubting. Thus if personal existence is a certainty, and if that existence is contingent, then a being has to exist which accounts not only for my existence, but for the existence of everything else as well.

Nature alone, however, will not give us the idea of God. Since God has never been experienced in order for the idea of him to be known, God as an idea in the human mind must have originated in some other way. When we compare the idea of God with our other ideas, we recognize the former as being totally unique. Take the idea of ice, for instance.

It is made up of the simple ideas of cold, hard, wet, and clear, and these simple ideas are then made into the complex idea of ice. For God the story is entirely different; nothing in our experience gives us the singular idea of a perfect Being. Therefore Campbell insists the idea has to be traced back to its source in the first man, Adam, whose experience of God allowed him to form the idea of a perfect being, which was then passed down to his descendants.

This brings us to the final strand of the argument used by Campbell to prove God's existence. The Bible at a basic level can be seen as a mere historical document. It is made up of testimony given by men who experienced the events recorded in it. Now their testimony is true or false according to the reliability of the witnesses themselves. For Campbell the Biblical writers were impeccable witnesses whose testimony could not be doubted. But there is something else unique about the Biblical record in that it contains facts which Campbell insists are supernatural in origin. These "supernatural" facts can be accounted for only by positing the existence of God as their supernatural agent. A fact for Campbell is an event, an action, which has been completed. And all faith is tied to them. Where God is concerned, therefore, our knowledge of him is connected with the facts he is responsible for causing. One such fact is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Nothing else can account for the event other than the supernatural action of God within the context of human history. The testimony of the Biblical writers stands behind it, but more importantly the facts of history confirm it as true.

A supernatural fact is confirmed, according to Campbell, when four criteria are met: (1) The fact must be sensible,

that is, obtained by the senses; (2) these facts must have been "exhibited with every imaginable *public and popular attestation*, and open to the severest scrutiny which their extraordinary character might induce"; (3) certain commemorative memorials must have resulted from them; and (4) the memorial celebrations must have been instituted the moment the event in question was accomplished. The "supernatural" facts, on which the Christian belief in God stands, Campbell believed, met these criteria perfectly. (*Campbell-Owen Debate*, p. 184.)

If we examine the resurrection of Jesus, we know it was a public event; it is testified to by reliable witnesses. A memorial feast (the Lord's Supper) was celebrated as a commemorative event and a special day—the first day of the week—is held as a testimonial to this event. The feast and the day were begun as memorials at the time of the event and they continue even now. Thus, Campbell insists, when these criteria are related to a particular fact, that fact is true and cannot be false (*Campbell-Owen Debate*, p. 185).

As a result, Campbell believed he had adequate proof for the existence of God. This proof was a cumulative, intercon-

nected series of arguments obtained from nature and the Bible. From our experience of nature we learn that everything in it, including ourselves, is contingent—it depends on something outside the series of contingent beings for existence. The Bible informs us that this independent, non-contingent Being is God. Moreover, of all things which we may doubt, our personal existence cannot be anything but certain.

At the same time, Campbell tells us, there are various facts described in the Bible which could occur only if God is their author. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is one such fact. We know it is true because the Scriptural record, based on the testimony of reliable witnesses, assures us that it is. And from the time of the event itself a memorial (the Lord's Supper) has been celebrated as empirical testimony to its factual nature. Again, if "supernatural" events have occurred and we have conclusive evidence to prove that they have, then God must exist, because he alone can be their causal agent. When they are viewed in combination, then the proof from nature and the Bible point conclusively to the existence of God. □

SAINT LOUIS FORUM

The third annual Saint Louis Forum will be held in the auditorium of Saint Louis Christian College, 1360 Grandview Drive, Florissant, Missouri 63033, Monday and Tuesday, December 27 and 28. The theme will be "Renewal and the Restoration Movement." Speakers from the Disciples of Christ, Christian Churches and Churches of Christ will participate.

There will be two sessions on Monday and three on Tuesday, as follows:

December 27, 2:00 p.m.—"Things in Which We Need to Make Changes," Tom B. Loveless, Owensboro, Kentucky; Mike Heston, Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

7:00 p.m.—"Barriers to Renewal," James M. Flanagan, Troy, Missouri; Mike Chambers, Collinsville, Illinois.

December 28, 9:30 a.m.—Open Forum on "Experiences in Renewal."

2:00 p.m.—"Approaches to Renewal," Joe Black, Conway, Arkansas; Kaula (Mrs. Don) Hazel, Durant, Oklahoma.

7:00 p.m.—"Renewal in Relation to Our Original Goals of Unity and Restoration," Hoy Ledbetter, Grand Blanc, Michigan; Bryan Giebler, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Each speaker will present a forty-minute paper and then both speakers will be questioned from the audience. W. Carl Ketcherside and Charles Boatman will preside. Housing can be secured in nearby motels. For information write Charles Boatman at the school address above, or telephone him at 314/741-9898.

THE CHRISTMAS PHANTOMS

The wreath shone bright in the window
As we sang of the Holy Birth;
The bells were ringing across the snow
Of peace and good will on earth.
The town, like a sculptured icon,
Was bathed in the mystical light,
When a host of phantoms pale and wan
Came trooping out of the night,—
Came out of the midnight dim,
And into the festal glare,
With the color of death upon them,
And stood beside my chair.

They came like a mighty army
With the soldier's marching tread,
And on each one I seemed to see
Foul wounds that were deep and red.
They came in their spectral mystery
Like corpse from the grave unbound,
But they looked just like the young men
I see
On the streets of my own home town,—
Some in their coats and ties,
And college boys' ivy leagues;
Some in their faded levis,
And working men's stained fatigues.

Then the fire blazed wild in the chimney,
And the room was blue in its flame,
And the cold fear came upon me
As out of the night they came.
And time seemed lost to sense
Till it seemed an eternity passed,
When one of them broke the silence,
And "Sir!" he addressed me at last.
"Who are you?" I asked him then,
"From where, and why do you come?"
"The ghosts," he said, "of all the young
men
Who died in Vietnam."

"We are the kids, short years ago,
The joy of the season knew;
Who hung the wreaths and the mistletoe,
And sang the carols like you,—
The kids who talked of beauty and truth,
And love for our fellowman,
Before we were called from our carefree
youth
To die in a foreign land,—
At *Ap Bac*, *Bien Hoa*, and *Qui Nhon*,
At *Cam Rhan*, *Ben Trae*, and *Nha Trang*,
At *Buon Brieng*, *Hoa Ninh*, and *Saigon*,
At *An Loc*, *Hoa Da*, and *Da Nang*.

"We are the youths whose 'long, long
thoughts'
Were star-gemmed visions and plans
For lives of good, until we were called
To that far off, strife-torn land,
Where, slushing through flooded rice fields,
Or trudging some jungle trail,
Or guarding some outpost deep in the hills
Or the Mekong's cauldron of hell,
In flaming tanks and ships,
Or clutching the blood-soaked sod,
We died with a scream and a curse on
our lips
And a prayer in our hearts to God.

"We are our country's martyrs,
We died without murmur or fear,
In the hell of war we have won our stars
And now for the rest of the year
We sleep 'neath our crosses of white
In our graves on plain and hill,
*But we cannot rest on this Holy Night
Till the guns of war are still.*"

—DON REECE

A LETTER FROM JOHN QUESTOR

THE LETTER below, which we are publishing under a pseudonym, poses a question of widespread concern. Two of our contributing editors are responding to it in the two articles which follow, but we will welcome contributions from other readers who may have additional insights into the subject.

Dear Editor:

I have a question which I would like to address to you and your readers in the hope that you will have some helpful ideas on the subject.

Paul affirms, in Romans 12:2, that the transformed person can know the will of God. Simply put, my question is: how do we learn what the will of God is? When faced with decisions for which we want, need, and ask God's guidance, we often find it difficult to discern God's will in the matter. We know that we learn God's will from the Bible, but there remains the problem of applying it to specific situations. Are we expecting too much from God in believing that He can work in our lives in a personal way? For example, does he care whether we take that job in Grand Rapids, or does he prefer that we stay with our old job in Detroit? Or, does God sometimes leave the decision to us, planning to use whichever choice we make? Does he have a certain direction for us in small matters, or is it only in the larger issues that we should expect guidance?

A reading of Paul's statement reminds us that it is the transformed person who can know God's will. If I have trouble knowing God's will, does it then follow that I am not a transformed person? Those of us who find ourselves, whether we like it or not, occasionally conforming to this world might find this rather discouraging.

Sometimes I hear people say they will not make a certain decision until they pray about it. That is very fine, of course, as we are expected to pray about all things, but I think I have known people who use this as an excuse to put off a difficult decision. How does one maintain a balance between making decisions for oneself and waiting for an answer from God?

Sincerely,
John Questor

DOING THE WILL OF GOD

JIM REYNOLDS

Arlington, Texas

In response to the question, "How do we learn what the will of God is?" I have no simple answer. God is certainly concerned about all things, great and small. He may very well indicate to us very clearly what his will is by closing doors we thought were open or by opening heretofore closed doors. One may also put a fleece before the Lord, telling him, "I am going to look for an answer in a specific place." The fleece sign may include the attitude of prospective employers, hospitality of a prospective church, etc. The fleece concept is bold, but it is also biblical.

I find that my knowledge of the will of God is most often focused by the *values of Jesus of Nazareth*. For instance, if I am considering a job in Detroit *only* because it pays more money, while my family life is very healthy and our relationship to the church is very edifying in Grand Rapids, I am probably living in defiance of Jesus' values. I certainly am not describing the intricacies of most family dilemmas. Other factors may enter in. But I am indicting our purely materialistic interpretation of God's will. I haven't known of a single layman who moved his family to a lower paying job in order to experience a more edifying Christian fellowship or to give him more time with his family. I'm sure this has happened somewhere in somewheresville!

I also find that if I am not able to function well as God's minister in a certain locale, it is often his will that I move to another location, however unsettling it may be, that I may better function as his servant. Thus the question here is, "Am I doing his will here, at this time, in

this place?" If I am, why move? This question doesn't preclude the possibility of moving but it forces me to move beyond the momentary attraction of a distant ministry. The New Testament concerns itself with the doing of his will—whether it be Ephesus, Antioch or Athens is often immaterial and irrelevant. Great need exists everywhere. Certainly there are a few calls into Macedonia, but that

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was probably the exception in the New Testament church, as well as in the twentieth century church.

Romans 12:2 suggests that the transformed man becomes more God-aware, more sensitive to the work of God in the world. It does not suggest that anyone attains perfect awareness. Misreading God's plan should not create the despair of self-doubt. It should rather be an occasion for repentance. Romans 12:2, coming at the close of Paul's great discussion of God's scheme for liberating man through faith in the crucified and risen Christ, suggests that through the power of His spirit we are to grow in awareness of what God is doing in the world. What God is doing is the uniting of Jew and Gentile together through the proclamation of Jesus as Lord. Thus, discerning the will of God is no guessing game. Paul has been spelling out the work of human liberation. These words (Romans 1-11) can serve as very decisive indications of

what God is doing now. As God's people we are invited to sense his will and to join him as co-workers. Discussion of Romans 12:2 should not continue without reference to the entire Roman letter.

These comments reflect more of my present working relationship with God than they do a detailed biblical study of God's will and the discerning of God's will. Though I talk to God, I think that a glib spirituality ("let's pray about it") often results in irresponsible decisions. Doing the will of God is often painfully difficult and personally agonizing. Doing the will of God can also be a time of joyful anticipation and celebration. The morbidly guilty folks like to make God's

will as painful as possible. The mental health, painless-happiness people always make God's will as painless as possible.

God's active assistance does not necessarily make my decision easy. Did Jesus find Gethsemane easy? God's active presence and my own personal decision-making faculties cooperate in all decisions. All of our decisions involve us in the biblical paradox of God's sovereign authority and human freedom and responsibility. Attempts to flee the paradox at either end involve us either in "spiritual" irresponsibility or the denial of God's practical concern for us.

I can say no more. May the Lord bless you, John Questor. □

RESOURCES FOR DECISION-MAKING

J. HAROLD THOMAS

Los Angeles, California

First, let me reinforce the querist's acceptance of the rendering, "know" the will of God, in Romans 12:2. To know in this case will be distinguished from *to prove* in the sense of *to demonstrate*. *Dokimadzein* carries the idea of discovering or discerning through testing, being assured or convinced as by testing. The Amplified Bible reconciles the AV translation, "prove," by reading "that you may prove (to yourselves) the . . . will of God."

Secondly, I do not know whether or not John Questor writes from a psychological consciousness of those who are bold to be saying constantly that they know what the will of God is in relation to the daily decisions of their lives. But I must confess that I am replying to his questions with a consciousness of this.

Now I would like to address the question in the third paragraph of his letter:

"If I have trouble knowing God's will, does it follow that I am not a transformed person?" The transformation alluded to in Romans 12:2 does not require an instant attainment of perfection—rather a growing toward perfection (being transformed) by the continual renewing of the mind. Reasonably if the transformation were complete the ability to know the will of God would be assured, but as long as the transformation is still in process the ability to see the will of God in every situation would not be assured. That would not mean that every decision about the will of God would be in error—it only means that the as-yet-not-wholly-transformed person cannot have certainty about every decision.

Paul admits to imperfection in Philippians 3:12 and this was late in his life. And there are instances when he discloses

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a kind of uncertainty as to the will of God for him. After writing a letter to the Corinthians he had great misgivings and was reassured only when Titus could report its favorable results. (Read 2 Corinthians 2:1-4; 7:2-12.) He had a conflict in his feeling about dying or living (Philippians 1:19-26). Even when he received the vision of a man begging him to come to Macedonia the language of Luke indicated a human conclusion was drawn rather than a certainty of God's will (Acts 16:9-10). The word *sumbibadzontes* means 1) *bringing together*, 2) *concluding, inferring*, and requires the second sense here. So Paul and his companions from the vision and other circumstances "put it all together."

Our brother acknowledges his faith in the Bible and in prayer as resources for finding the will of God. We all recall familiar passages that justify his faith (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 5:11-14; 1 Peter 2:1-2; Acts 20:32 and Isaiah 40:31; James 1:5-7 and others). He would agree, I am sure, that the counsel and fellowship of our brothers and sisters in the Family are sources of help (Galatians 6:1-2; Hebrews 10:24-25; Philemon 1:7; 1 Corinthians 16:18). He will also acknowledge, I am confident, that the Holy Spirit personally renews us (Ephesians 3:16; Romans 8:9-11, 26-27; Galatians 5:16, 21-22). And God by providential intervention inspires renewal (2 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 12:2-11; Romans 8:28-31).

And so we study the word, we pray, we listen to the counsel of our fellow Christians, we watch for the providential events, we sensitize our hearts to the Holy Spirit's leadings. Thus we are being renewed in our minds and we are being transformed from glory to glory. But all the while we are searching for the will of God in the widest range of matters (I believe we should be concerned about the

will of God in "little" matters). And there then comes a time in every searching when we must make the decision between this or that or nothing at all. And we make the decisions with *our* minds which God has given us. In our being transformed he is not reducing us to programmed robots—he is enhancing our intelligence, our sensitivity and our responsibility. He is making us more persons, not less persons. He expects us to act in the recognition of all the above influences with an ever-increasing spiritual maturity and our actions are themselves exercises that enhance our discernment of his will (Hebrews 5:14).

I cannot elucidate this but I suggest a reading of Acts 21-28 in relation to these questions our brother raises. These chapters present a record of crisis experiences of Paul in which many decisions had to be made by him. He was not completely transformed but he was well on the way and looking at his actions and decisions we are witnessing a whole person confident in his discernment of the will of God. Perhaps we see a point or two where what he did was not perfect (e.g., 23:2-5) but through it all it is very, very high on the scale.

So, perhaps we cannot know that always we have seen the will of God and acted in it. But we are being renewed and we are being transformed and after all the things we have mentioned have had their influence we have to make the decisions as to the will of God and act upon them. If we are in error there are two comforting promises: 1) God forgives and 2) God overrules and even uses our mistakes for his glory.

P.S. And about what I've written. I wanted the will of the Lord. Right now it seems the thing to say. If I've failed you, Father, forgive me, and in some way use it all for good. □