

INTEGRITY, a journal published by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers who seek accurately to reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one.

(Continued from page 34)

lunch about "religion," liked getting to know my family and eventually started going to church on a regular basis.

Jesus said to his friends, in essence: Love me—love my ways. Do them with me. If you're really open to an in-depth kind of friendship, my Father and I will even come and live in your home with you. And that's just the beginning: Our friendship can be a never-ending development of common purpose, true communication, and shared peace.

We have looked forward to offering you this issue! The articles written by Linda Bridgesmith, Ron Davis and Craig Watts will,

we hope, help all of us know God the Father, Son and Spirit more intimately. The articles by Kathy Allen and Bruce Kilmer and the featured "Intercepted Correspondence" all attempt to chip away at characteristics and concepts that get in the way of our being closer friends with God. Please let us know what you think about these articles. Your letters are welcome and may encourage us all to know "the only true God."

Diane Kilmer
Co-Editor
Integrity Editorial Board

May/June 1988

Integrity

Editorial: Getting to Know Him

Blameless Hearts in Any Culture

Kathy Allen

Prepared by God's Peace

Linda Bridgesmith

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

Ronald Davis

The Ugliness of Jesus

Craig M. Watts

Intercepted Correspondence

Alexander Campbell Lectures

At the Root of the Trouble

J. Bruce Kilmer

May-June 1988
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Getting to Know Him

The truth in Jesus' garden prayer is just as powerful to me twenty centuries later as it was that night:

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

John 17:3

Even after Moses had experienced the might of God through the dramatic exit from Egypt, Moses still yearned for a more intimate understanding of God. On Mount Sinai Moses entreated of God: "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may *know* you and continue to find favor with you." (Ex. 33:13a) You can feel Paul stretching toward Jesus more deeply when he wrote: "I want to *know* Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." (Phil. 3:10,11)

A few years ago I invited two women co-workers to my home during our lunch hour. They were interested in the garage sale my neighbor was tending in my yard. But when I naturally asked them in to my home where we could relax and eat our packed lunches, I was surprised by each woman's response. In her own way, each suddenly became very shy, made a quick excuse for why she couldn't come in, and hurriedly left in her separate car! Used to plenty of company in my home, I tried to analyze why these women had had such skittish reactions to my invitation. Both women lived at home, one with her mother and one with her grandmother. Both seemed to have no other activities or friends outside of work. Over the months both women had responded to my friendship and office camaraderie. The only reason I could come up with for their sudden, "Oh, I couldn't do that" response to my hospitality was that they felt some kind of fear of getting to know me better outside of the office context. The idea of being in my home seemed almost too intimate to each of them.

A third co-worker of mine in that same office, Peggy, did become a close friend. She, too, still lived with her parents, but she welcomed my home invitations, enjoyed our talks at

(Continued on page 48)

Blameless Hearts in Any Culture

KATHY ALLEN

The transition from one culture into another is never without incident or adjustment. By "transition," we are not referring to mere tourism—although anyone who has visited or traveled in a foreign country can identify with the reference to the more obvious cultural differences, i.e. language, dress, and food. However, those who enter another culture with the intention of participating in it for an extended period of time frequently undergo some degree of culture shock. Being exposed day after day to an unfamiliar language, suffering the physical consequences of different food and water, adjusting to being a minority—an outsider, as well as numerous other "jolts"—makes us acutely aware of the things we left behind in "our own land."

The interesting twist is that those who return to their homeland after living for an extended period of time in another culture often experience a "reverse culture shock." That is, they must once again undergo a whole set of changes or adjustments to a culture which, quite possibly, is now unfamiliar—a society that has undergone some significant changes, often times in government, dress, values, and morals. Or perhaps, the changes have actually occurred in the person reentering his native country and he no longer fits in with—or even cares to participate in—the culture he once knew.

As my family and I have recently returned to the U.S. after a seven-year absence, I have given much thought to what we have experienced, seen, felt, and thought in the transition from a third-world culture back into middle-class America. We have been ministering for those seven years in Guatemala, Central America and are presently enjoying a one-year sabbatical—reacquainting ourselves and our children with our "motherland." Obviously,

there have been many changes, not only in what is happening in our great country, but also in how we now perceive those changes. If "absence makes the heart grow fonder," it is also true that absence often sharpens our senses and our perception of what we experience in the subsequent return.

Perceiving Differences

Specifically, we are interested in those perceptions as they relate to the church. Do we see significant changes in the church? Have there been alterations, adaptations, or adjustments in the beliefs, forms, and traits of Christ's body—those who have been called out and set apart as His beloved Bride? Obviously, there have been. Even those who have not had the experience of living in a different culture for an extended period of time would certainly recognize that changes have taken place. And while it is true that our perception of those changes may be somewhat influenced by having lived in another culture, it is certain that those changes have not gone unnoticed by others.

There is, however, a danger in attaching certain values to those perceptions. We begin to label them "right or wrong," "good or bad." The tendency to moralize about those differences is especially strong in Christians who somehow use the comparison of various cultures as an indicator of how we "measure up" as Christians. In other words: . . . is it more virtuous to live in a one-room adobe hut with eight other people rather than in a four bedroom split-level house on Main Street U.S.A.? Am I a better person because I till my soil with a primitive hand implement rather than with a fancy John Deere tractor? On the other hand, am I a better, more valuable person because I

have a college education, own a car, and have several changes of clothing?

Comparing cultures in and of itself, however, has little value other than for educational purposes. What is important is to remember that our Christian walk should only be measured against the Word of God, and not against what some person or group of people believes or how they live their lives. If we can keep our eyes on that standard, then we can look with less prejudice at those changes or differences that are most noticeable, and hopefully, not be so shocked by what we see.

Ignoring the "spirit world"

Probably the most obvious difference between the present-day North American church and the church in many other cultures of the world is the lack of awareness of the "spirit world." We have become so sophisticated in our thinking, that our spiritual eyes have been closed. Other peoples of the world are much more in tune with principalities and powers and are acutely aware of those influences in their lives. For that reason, it is much easier for Christians in those cultures to accept and live their lives in accordance with the omniscience and omnipotence of God. We as a refined, educated and self-sufficient people, on the other hand, find it difficult to live our lives in total surrender to a "spirit." Consequently, we have formulated some concrete doctrines. . . some tangible guidelines by which we can judge and evaluate our place and our performance as Christians. We look with suspicion at those who claim that the Lord "spoke" to them, that He is "teaching" them, or that they are seeking to "walk in the spirit." We view those people as fanatics, misinformed, unrealistic. And yet, if we truly understand what God requires of us as His children, we can free ourselves of those misunderstandings, and learn what He truly desires for His church as He prepares us to meet our bridegroom.

Experiencing "Heart Problems"

Whenever a group of people band together with a common goal or purpose, there is a need for certain rules or guidelines. One problem of

the church in our culture, as well as others, is that those rules or guidelines have become the basis for our existence. They no longer serve as a help in the overall effectiveness of the Lord's church, rather they have become the focus, a means by which we can prove to one another and ultimately to outsiders that we are who we say we are. Although Scripture says that the world will know we are Christians by our love, we want to make it more complicated than that. Consequently, we turn away from looking at our hearts, and begin to judge on the basis of law. Jesus devoted much of his personal ministry to freeing believers from the Pharisaical bondage of "doing" the right thing to the joy and fulfillment that comes by "being" the right thing. That is, having our hearts cleansed by and surrendered to Him.

The Lord admonishes us in Proverbs 4:23: "Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." In other words, any issue which is important to the life of the church is a "heart issue." Any time the Lord's church is seduced by the influences and pressures of the world, anytime we do not "measure up," the problem is not our culture, or society. The problem is our *heart*.

If the church is to be a living organism made up of those who have been called out and set apart for His service, rather than a religious organization, then the issue is not how we function or exist within a given culture, or even how we are influenced by that culture, but what exists within the heart. I Samuel 16:7 reminds us that ". . . the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Unfortunately, we do tend to look at outward appearances—at those things we can understand and judge with our senses. For that reason, the concept of *heart* is not made a priority in our daily life. It is unfortunate that our society has become so scientific that we can only deal with issues that can be analyzed, argued, explained, and "proved." And, sadly, that thinking has filtered into the church to such an extent that we no longer even understand the concept of *heart* as it is portrayed in Scripture. The words that are used for *heart* signify man's entire mental and moral activity. It lies deep within

and contains the "hidden man." It denotes the seat of emotions, desires, understandings, conscience, purpose and will. The *heart* is who we really are as creatures made in God's image. It is that part of us which is easily hidden by outward appearances.

In observing and participating in the church as it exists and operates in our present culture, then, the major issue which appears to be affecting the church as it strives to lift up Jesus Christ to the world, is a *heart* issue. It perhaps stems from the influences of our society in drawing us away from focusing on the things of the spirit, and training us rather to trust only that which can be understood and explained by the mind. But ultimately, it is a device of the enemy to render the church weak and ineffectual.

Threatening Influences

It is true that there are several influences which are not only threatening, but often times infiltrating that body of believers which is called to be the pure and holy bride of Christ. They are not new seductions. . . merely the old ones in new disguises: the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, the lust of the eye. They have taken the form of materialism, sensuality, a drive for success and power, self-realization, and intellectualism, to name a few.

Although it is true that the church has become weakened and even divided over current issues and trends, that was not the Lord's intention when He established His body here on earth, nor is it pleasing to Him. Unfortunately, one has only to read Paul's letters to realize that

since its conception the church has always been influenced by the culture of which it was a part. For that reason we are reminded in countless ways throughout the New Testament that we are to be "in the world" but not "of the world."

Scripture emphasizes time and again that our evaluation of and response to what is happening in the world around us is determined by what is in our heart. Consequently, the influences of materialism, sensuality, a drive for success and power, self-realization, and intellectualism are threatening to the church only as they seduce our hearts away from a life of total surrender to Christ and His kingdom.

In future issues, we will be looking at some of the ways in which our culture is perhaps influencing the church as it pertains to the *heart*; the purpose being not merely to identify those influences, but rather to look at them in the light of scripture as we allow God's word to "discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts." "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." (I Thes. 3:12,13)

Kathy, a graduate of Pepperdine University, has lived in Guatemala for seven years with her husband, Averill, and their three sons, while Averill serves as director for the Inter-American School in Quezaltenango. They are presently in the States for a one year study sabbatical.

Prepared by God's Peace

LINDA BRIDGESMITH

Excitement filled our home. My husband Larry and I had wanted a second child and the Lord blessed us. I was feeling good physically, a little tired, but was not experiencing any sickness. Then I started feeling concerned about the health of the child I was carrying. Would

the baby be mentally and physically healthy? My prayers began daily with asking God to keep this baby "completely normal and healthy." I felt no relief or comfort from these prayers, but I continued with them, adding a prayer for increased faith. Yet I still had the troublesome

concern about our unborn child.

I don't know how many weeks went by or what was happening in our lives at the time when the Lord helped me to realize my prayer needed to change. Instead of the insistent prayer for a "completely normal and healthy baby," I began to pray that God would help me accept this child's condition, healthy or not. Those were difficult words for me to say and I think that surprised me. I had always thought I would be a good mother to any child "no matter what." The more I prayed that prayer, the easier it became to say. After a couple of weeks I realized a calm. . . a peace that passes understanding! I continued to experience the peace throughout the remainder of my pregnancy.

It was a sunny June day when our son was born. I guess he decided he wanted to see what this world was like immediately so he was delivered face first (which was difficult for both of us). Larry and I were thrilled that we now had a girl and a boy! Lance's face was so bruised and swollen from delivery that he had some difficulty breathing and they had to quickly take him away, which naturally worried me. I was reassured that he would be fine as soon as the swelling went down. Then I heard the doctors talking about his feet. Lance was born with clubfeet. Both of those tiny feet were turned and twisted almost upside down. I remember still being concerned about his face. The next morning Lance was brought to me wearing casts that completely covered both of his feet and legs. His face looked a little better and he was breathing easier. I was relieved and thrilled to have a son.

Our three year old daughter, Lara, was excited to show off her baby brother as we arrived at the church building. People flocked around

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its with their congratulations and excitement. There were also those who expressed their sympathy to us concerning his feet; those words troubled me.

In analyzing my feelings, I realized I had never thought about being sad or sorry about Lance's feet. What was wrong with me? I began to feel guilty and think that I wasn't a loving mother since I did not feel sorry for this infant with crippled feet. I struggled with that guilt for a couple of weeks until the ever-patient Father brought me to another understanding. You see, God had completely answered my earlier prayer by enabling me to accept Lance's handicap. I felt so ashamed when I realized that I had forgotten why I had such peace. There was nothing wrong with me. . . God had just blessed me with the strength to accept Lance's crooked little feet. After asking God's forgiveness, I praised Him for what He was teaching me about prayer.

Lance is now 15 years old and has few physical limitations. God is still teaching me, and now Lance, about prayer, patience and peace. Lance has had surgery several times, has worn braces and casts and has had to learn to cope with pain. Discouragement stays pretty close and is always ready to invade our lives. The prayer which gave me peace fifteen years ago is still my prayer today. "God, help me (and Lance) to accept his physical handicap and thank you for letting him walk!" Our God is a kind and loving God!

Linda, a full time wife and mother, resides in the Nashville, Tennessee area. She and her husband, Larry, also serve as the Education Department's 5th and 6th grade supervisors for the Madison Church of Christ.

its and have no salaries. It costs us approximately \$7.00 per year to send six issues to you. Thank you for your prayers and financial support!

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

RON DAVIS

One of the great pleasures of life is to reflect on the events of the past. It is a pleasure to be reminded again and again how God's hand affects past events and how the strength of His arm extends out of the past, right through the present, and affects future events. The Scriptures are replete with examples of writers retelling the past glories of God for the purpose of strengthening the faith of the people of God for the present-day glories of the Mighty One of Israel. Psalms 78 is one such account of God's mighty deeds and His guidance of His people. Another is found in Acts 7, where the deacon Stephen preaches to those who are so incensed with his message that they stone him to death during his discourse. His sermon and testimony, like Psalms 78, declare the stages of salvation history from the days of the patriarchs down to the time of that particular writer. It is in the spirit of these accounts that this article is written.

In November of this past year, our oldest child celebrated his 13th birthday. As is our family custom, at each child's birthday my wife and I retell the events leading up to and including the birth and early days of that particular child. It has always amazed me how this custom never grows old and, also, how much it is anticipated at each birthday celebration. The story of each of our children's births is unique and holds distinctive elements that belong only to that particular child, but the story of our oldest is peculiar because of the intense preparation God led us through prior to his birth. In these days of abortion on demand and lack of reverence and respect for prenatal life, our birth stories are evermore important to recount to our children so that they too will see how "fearfully and wonderfully we are made." (Ps. 139:13-14)

During the months of our first pregnancy, the days were spent charting the growth and

development of the little one inside his mother. Childbirth classes, prayer, maternity clothes, painting, papering, baby showers, and prenatal advice were all part of the anticipatory elements of this happy pregnancy. As in the heart of many expectant parents, God places His word upon the developing baby. As He administered it to our hearts in prayer, we knew that this baby was to be a child of destiny.

As the prenatal days came to a close, a couple of events prepared us in a very direct way for the birth of our son. The first happened several weeks before the birth when a baby shower was given. The devotional thoughts were spoken by a new friend of ours who was the mother of three boys. The first two boys were identical twins. This woman of God recounted her own birth experiences and how God had fearfully and wonderfully made her twins especially since they had both been born with identical birth defects, bi-lateral cleft lips and palates. The second event happened two weeks before delivery when our local hospital tabled for 30 days our request for me to be present at delivery. At that time in the hospital's history, fathers were not allowed in the delivery room. As a Lamaze trained, husband-coached, childbirth team, this was, indeed, a major snag in our plans. Nonetheless, we reminded each other that God had parted the Red Sea and was certainly well-qualified to get me into the delivery room.

The Event

On the morning of Thanksgiving Day, it was obvious that my wife was in the early stages of labor. By 11:00 p.m. we were preparing to leave for the hospital. I called the hospital to alert the staff that we were on our way. We were informed that our physician was out of town and someone else would be delivering our

baby. Our physician had assured us that even though hospital policy had not yet changed, he would find a way for me to be present at the birth.

In the eyes of many my chances of witnessing the birth were nil. The labor progressed rapidly and within a few hours the doctor arrived to scrub and prepare for the delivery. I met him at the scrubbing station and respectfully requested that I be allowed entrance to the delivery room. I stated to him that we had prayed and prepared for months for this birth and had faith our prayers would be answered. The attending physician was not receptive to my request and he turned and went into the delivery room. Moments later he came back to the door and ushered me into the delivery room.

Within minutes the doctor and I announced to my wife that we had a boy! She immediately praised God and gave him the name Matthew, the name that had been given us in prayer less than twenty-four hours before. It was not the name we had chosen several months before. The name Matthew means "God's Gift." Within seconds of Matthew's birth the doctor stated very clearly, "Your son has a harelip." It was obvious to me also. My wife exclaimed, "He is a gift of God and all God's gifts are perfect!" The physician, evidently astounded by her answer, repeated, "Your baby has a birth defect, a cleft lip and perhaps a cleft palate." My wife answered again, "Yes, and his name is Matthew!"

Sustained

In the days that followed, God was to bring to mind the words spoken by Jesus to His disciples when they asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God be made manifest in him." (John 9: 2-3). God's word sustained us as we stood over our little son's hospital bed before and after surgeries. "He who dwells in the shelter of the most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.' " (Psalms 91: 1-2) As we have borne our other

children and have been a part of the childbearing of friends and family, the all time favorite prenatal Psalm 139 reminds us that indeed ". . . thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works!" (Psalms 139: 13-14).

As the years pass, we look back periodically to discover who we are. When our children ask, "Who am I?" they will be able to answer for themselves for they will know their past.

WHO AM I?

No recollection of non-existence.
Consciousness always present
Even in sleep.
The mental workings never cease.

Observation reveals that
Life has a beginning
And it has transition
In death.

Spirit, mind, and body
Work together to produce
Joys, thoughts, pleasures
Untold.

The triumvirate resists
Each other and
Sorrow, sin, and pain
Abound.

"Deep calls to deep. . .,"
"Fearfully and wonderfully
Are we made."
A chasm needs filling.

The Creator, the God
Of the Universe,
Seeks out the
Human heart.

A marriage is celebrated.
A sabbath's rest is proclaimed.
Redemption is accomplished.
The old gives way to the new.

Who am I?
In me I see a reflection
Of His glory,
A yearning to see Him fully.

A hope is placed within me.
A partnership is established.
In spite of needed refinements,
I am covered with eternal assurance.

Life is worth living!
Routines are the active ingredients.
Mountain tops are reflections
Of the finished product.

Who am I?
I am
Fearfully and
Wonderfully made!

Ron is a professional organist, a college teacher, and presently teaches vocal music for K through 5 in Corunna, Michigan. Ron and his family live in Owosso and actively serve with the First Church of Christ there.

The Ugliness of Jesus

CRAIG M. WATTS

Not long ago I went into a local Christian bookstore to look at the merchandise that was available. As you probably know, these stores carry much more than just books. There is recorded music, art work, curriculum materials, jewelry and a variety of other articles. What caught my eye were the various images of Jesus that were found on the covers of Sunday school booklets, on posters and in framed pictures.

In some ways they were quite diverse. There were blue-eyed Jesuses, brown-eyed Jesuses, green-eyed Jesuses. There were pictures of Jesus with black hair and beard, and pictures with lighter brown hair. Some of the representatives gave him very long hair, others trimmed him up a bit so that he looked more stylish. In some pictures Jesus seemed to be in a contemplative mood, in others joy was apparent, and in still others he appeared to be in anguish. But despite all this diversity, there was one characteristic that was given to Jesus in every last one of the pictures: he was always attrac-

tive. There was not one homely Christ in the crowd. He was consistently well proportioned and relatively handsome.

Marketing a "beautiful" Jesus

I suppose it is not surprising that Christian artists would depict their Lord and Savior in a way that would appeal to our sensitivities. And yet, in so doing they contradict what the scriptures indicate about Jesus. Because, despite his power to draw people to himself by his words and ministry, there is no reason to believe that his physical appearance was at all appealing. In fact, the prophet Isaiah indicates the opposite, saying, "He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (53:2). The Today's English Version of the Bible translates this passage even more plainly: "There was nothing attractive about him, nothing that would draw us to him." Put bluntly, Jesus was ugly.

The very thought of an ugly Jesus is troub-

ling to us. All of us have seen enough movies that we have come to take it for granted that the leading man will be good looking. Certainly in the divine drama of salvation the leading man ought to be strikingly attractive, or so we imagine. But that is not the case. The beauty of Jesus is not skin deep. And I suspect that there is a very good reason for this. I believe it is to contradict our tendency to mistake the true, the good and the beautiful with whatever happens to appeal to us or strikes our fancy. An ugly Jesus forces people to either look beneath the surface in order to see the underlying attractiveness or else be denied true beauty altogether. I am convinced that God was and is pushing us to reassess our values by revealing the highest and the best in a man who was unappealing in appearance. God wants us to see deeper and not be led by first impressions and superficial appearances. And to that end God is still most profoundly present, not in the powerful, attractive and prosperous people of the world, but in the misfortunate, undesirable and victimized people.

In some quarters Christians have bent over backwards to show that God is working in the lives of beauty queens, sports stars, actors and actresses, business tycoons and prominent politicians. Books, articles and advertising commercials composed by Christians—supposedly for the glory of God—parade out the prominent and successful of this world in an attempt to make our faith more desirable. They seem to be saying, “Come on folks, look who you will be associated with if you become a Christian. Be in with the in crowd!” Not only are Christians part of the acceptable mainstream of society, they are even among those who set the standards of success toward which the rest of us struggle. “Blessed are those who are good-looking, talented, clever, and rich for they have their reward in this world and they will receive more in the kingdom of heaven.” So says the gospel of the Christian marketing genius.

Jesus sought the “marginals”

But Jesus gives us a different message. In a much quoted section of the gospel of Matthew we find a judgment scene described. In it, the

Lord welcomes his true people into the kingdom of heaven with these words: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” The people were perplexed at his words and denied that they had even seen their Lord hungry, thirsty, naked, sick or imprisoned, to which the Lord answers, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me” (25:34-40). It is in the disadvantaged, the outcast, the suffering unattractive victims that Jesus is met by his people. It was not at the top of the social ladder that Jesus was to be found but at the bottom. It is not with the “beautiful people” that God is especially present, but with the unappealing people. How appropriate for an ugly Jesus.

Who Do We Serve?

By so closely identifying himself with the victimized and misfortunate people of the world, Jesus puts us in a real bind. For while we are not cruel and hard-hearted folks, neither do we usually go out of our way to associate with those people who have been nudged to the margins of our society. We are more inclined to attach ourselves to those who radiate a sense of health, confidence and well-being for we want these qualities for ourselves and we would like the good fortune and overall attractiveness of such people to “rub off” on us.

In a similar way we tend to steer clear of mentally deficient, physically impaired, economically impoverished or otherwise socially unacceptable ones. It seems that we are afraid that we will become infected by the undesirable condition that affects these people. Of course we try to keep our reaction under control. After all, we don’t want to be impolite. Nevertheless, we do pull away and keep our distance. And the more serious the suffering and misfortune that afflicts other people, the more we are repulsed by them. Those who need companionship the most are the very ones we are least inclined to approach.

Last year I heard a man interviewed who was

among the very first Americans to arrive to liberate a Nazi concentration camp. He happened to be a black man. He couldn’t believe his eyes when he saw the people. They came shuffling out of the barracks, gray, unearthly stick figures. Some reached out to touch him. He found himself drawing away from them. Their appearance was so appalling that he was sickened by the very thought of their touch. And yet being a man who knew what it was like to be victimized and pushed to the edges of society, he was in turmoil. The soldier’s feeling must have been evident because one of the emaciated prisoners gently spoke to him and said, “I understand. I understand. Don’t feel guilty. I understand.”

Yes, this reaction is quite understandable, but whether or not it is excusable is another matter altogether. For though we do not intend to do so, nevertheless, when we separate ourselves from the ugly, misshapen and unfortunate people of our world, we separate ourselves from God who revealed himself in the ugly victim Jesus Christ. Our responsibility to reach out and care for those who have been rejected is an aspect of our love for God. When we embrace those who do not enhance our attractiveness or prestige before our peers, we love as God has loved us. We need to realize that the value and significance of other people, the weak, broken and unappealing people, is not found in what they can do for us or in what they can contribute to society. We are to regard them as significant because their lives are rooted in God’s care. Through them we are given a call by God and an opportunity to love more selflessly than we are accustomed to do. They are God’s gift to us.

There is in J.D. Salinger’s book *Franny and Zooey*, a passage that wonderfully illustrates the presence of God in the weak and marginal people of society. Much of the book centers around Zooey’s efforts to lead Franny back to health and into a positive relationship with Christ. She had been away from him at college where she had gotten entangled in a strange religious cult. The experience left her disoriented, her beliefs in shambles and her capacity to properly relate to other people destroyed.

Near the conclusion of the book Zooey reminds Franny of the time years earlier when their family had a radio program. Preceding the broadcast their older brother Seymour would ritually encourage them to polish their shoes, straighten their clothes and do their best job for “the fat lady.” Zooey asked Franny what she imagined this lady to be like. He went on to explain that he visualized a fat lady sitting on a porch, swatting at flies that pestered her, with the radio blaring from dawn to dusk. He imagined her to be stifling from the heat of a summer day and suffering from cancer. That is how he would picture her as he did his best on the radio show. For he hoped that if his performance was good enough, the excitement of the program would enable her to forget the anguish that burdened her.

Franny replied that she had also had a similar image when Seymour urged them to do their best for “the fat lady.” The difference was that she didn’t think of the woman being on the porch. She thought of her having thick varicose veined legs and, like the lady Zooey imagined, her’s also suffered from cancer. Franny recalled that she too wanted to give her the best possible performance in order to help the fat lady forget her suffering. It was then that Zooey rose up to drive home his unexpected point, “And don’t you know who that fat lady really is? . . . Ah, buddy. Ah, buddy. It’s Christ Himself. Christ Himself, buddy.”

Indeed, it is! In the fat diseased lady, or skinny oppressed man, or profoundly retarded child, it is Christ that we encounter. For it is with these people, that we are not naturally inclined to associate with, that Jesus Christ resides. It is with them, and in them, that he waits for us, waits for our love, respect and care. We might not think that the outcasts of society provide a fitting place of residence for our Lord. If that is the case, then that just goes to show that we have not yet taken seriously the ugliness of Jesus.

Craig, a well-published Christian writer, ministers to the First Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

Intercepted Correspondence

The following "Intercepted Correspondence" is a continuation of a feature we began in the January/February 1988 issue. These letters are *Integrity's* version of C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* and more recently Os Guinness' *Gravedigger files*.

To refresh your memory, we have an imaginary setting where Bruce accidentally comes across these letters in his computer class. Bruce thought he should warn the rest of us of what may be going on under our very noses. The nefarious teacher Apollyon continues his instructions to the young devil Ichabod.

Ichabod Wiley
666 Broad Way
Topeka, KS 66699

Dear Ichabod:

It is good to know that you are well settled in your apartment, and that you have begun preliminary investigation of projects in our common behalf. Mix freely with all the residents and with those among whom you conduct your daily affairs, as well as the people of the Broad Way Church of Christ. It is imperative that you establish yourself as a solid, respected citizen. Obey all laws of the land, and avoid any conduct the Enemy would label "moral aberration," at least for the present. Although this will require a total inversion of character, it is an absolute, inviolable stricture.

Considering the brief time you have been seen there, your progress must be judged more than satisfactory. The observations you make are perceptive and accurate, if elementary. Now it would be an interesting and helpful study to look at the flip side of these generalizations. In other words, where you have found those who are "oblivious to the real power of the Enemy," search out those of whom the opposite is true; where there are those with weak spots, look for

their strengths; where there are those who would be shaken by a break in tradition [such as altering the order of Sunday morning service], find those who would welcome rationalized changes. You will be able to play upon these strengths and weaknesses repeatedly. Only limitations of your own ingenuity will prevent continuing successes in these respects.

You have suggested a possible appointment to the worship committee. Perhaps you were jesting; or perhaps in your naivete you are unaware of the great improbability of this appointment in the near future. Such an eventuality would be an incredible coup, since, of all committees, this one is sacrosanct. No newcomer may expect such a place, and anyone not indigenous to the local congregation should be prepared to endure a period of 'spiritual probation' before being considered fit for the exalted position. But whatever the case, above all else you must not appear to be over-eager to secure it. Nothing will create suspicion more immediately, believe me!

Now a little briefing and counsel. These people among whom you are working are, in potential, among our most serious foes. Should they ever awaken to their full potential, our total mission would suffer irremedial losses. In theory, they are strong advocates of unity among all of our Enemy's followers. In practice, they have been induced to erect numerous divisive barriers among themselves, leading to a continuing fragmentation; and they have erected impenetrable barriers between themselves and all others who profess to be followers of the Enemy. These are the gargantuan accomplishments of your predecessors; and as long as the people are prone to such divisive isolationism, we may count on them to provide us with numerous victories without major conflict. You must constantly stir up this attitude of self-righteous exclusivism—subtly, of course.

We shall be noting from time to time various anomalies involved in the situation. An example: they have a strong verbal commitment to our Enemy's Handbook. A favorite shibboleth with them is "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent." Through some well-placed agents of the past in high places, we have been able to make this a point of confusion and division rather than harmony and unity. We have even convinced some that the motto actually means "Where the Bible speaks we are silent; and where the Bible is silent, we speak"! It might serve as a good exercise for you to discover the rationalization involved in reaching this conclusion; the principle will stand you in good stead in the future. More of this later.

A final word. Never doubt the Enemy's concern for his creation/creatures; this is one of our most persistently troublesome hurdles. He will be working relentlessly to overcome the incursions we have made upon his hosts in the past, and to prevent any further gains we may plan. He is relentless, wise beyond comprehension, and, quite confident of his ultimate victory. Work, therefore, with all due caution.

Sincerely,

Apollyon L. Pitts

March 5, 1988

The Most Reprobate Apollyon Pitts
Undercover Coordinator
c/o Special Assignments Division

Dear Uncle Apollyon,

I had not anticipated the extent to which the influential job you procured for me would translate into "spiritual capital." People in the Broad Way Church have opened their arms to me, evidently because I told them I was transferred in to take over a responsible management position which requires professional training and pays big money. Such high

standing in my secular job seems to qualify me for important positions in the church, without too much attention to the depth of my commitment to Christ. Already I have been invited to join the finance committee and to be captain of the bowling team, and I am being mentioned as a nominee for deacon when the next appointments take place. You're right about the worship committee, however; I won't get on that anytime soon. I'll have to be content with subtle complaints about the worship services that will keep the pot of controversy and suspicion boiling without my being a visible part of it.

Isn't it marvelous what our fellow-agents have been able to do with the television evangelists recently! Everybody here is talking about it, some with real sorrow, but more with relish. Igneus is going to have to be careful with that preacher who seemed to repent, though. If the old sinner really does take the Enemy's medicine and go through a period of self-evaluation, surrender, and rebuilding, his latter state will be worst than the first for us. He will be much less susceptible to having his head turned by money, power, and people's adulation of him than before, and he will embody a kind of persuasive beauty that enables people to "see right through him" in a quite different way, for they will perceive the Enemy's Son, rather than the preacher. But praise be to our Infernal Father that the sins of most preachers are never revealed to anyone until they've gone far enough to create a scandal. Some of our glorious victories could have been nipped in the bud by regular frank sharing sessions between the preacher and some mature prayer partners. Thank Hell that most preachers are either too proud or too busy, or both, to avail themselves of that kind of support group.

I'm not quite sure about the soundness of your repeated advice that I scrupulously try to lead an exemplary life. Do you mean that I should *really* live according to the Enemy's standards, or only appear to do so? Should I avoid sin, or just avoid being found out? Isn't a facade of righteousness sufficient for my purposes? I'm finding it rather frightening to be reaching out for real righteousness, because that seems to bring strange incursions from the Enemy. Please elaborate and advise.

I have indeed noticed the strange ambivalence these people have about unity. They seem to think that it depends on their relationship to the Bible, rather than their relationship to the One whose Name they profess and wear. Thus, they purport to desire unity and to be working assiduously for it, but then they base their efforts on a kind of intellectual quibbling that assures the more division the more vigorously

it is carried on. In the name of Lucifer, I hope they never discover the unifying power of the Enemy's Holy Spirit. If I can keep them playing their carnal games (in the name of religion yet!), they never will.

In detestation of the Paraclete,
Ichabod

News Release:

Alexander Campbell Bicentennial Lectures

All three branches of the Stone-Campbell movement—the Churches of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the Christian Churches—have a shared heritage in Alexander Campbell. Of all the men who founded this movement, no one had a greater influence than Campbell.

Campbell's influence is being celebrated this bicentennial year by a series of lectures held

in Fort Worth, Texas, Claremont, California, and Indianapolis, Indiana. Planned by the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, these lectures are presented by persons representing all the branches of the movement. The Indianapolis lectures will be given October 10-11, 1988. Speakers and topics include:

"In the Spirit of the Prophets:
Alexander Campbell as a Social Thinker"
Robert O. Fife

"The Gospel as the Power of God:
Alexander Campbell and Experimental
Religion"
D. Newell Williams

"Nailed to the Church Door:
How Protestant was Alexander
Campbell's Reformation?"
Richard L. Harrison, Jr.

"Campbell-Stone On the Frontier:
The Only Ones Weren't the Only Ones"
Samuel S. Hill

"Alexander Campbell as an Educator"
Thomas Olbricht

For more information contact:
Carson E. Reed
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1041 Spruce Street
Indianapolis, IN 46203
(317) 636-2645

"Alexander Campbell as an Advocate of
Christian Unity"
William J. Richardson

At the Root of the Trouble

J. BRUCE KILMER

None of us like to be considered selfish. We think we understand the term, and that as Christians we are enlightened to the dangers and error of being selfish. But how many of our actions are really based on selfishness? How many of our "right" actions are the result of wanting our way?

It's easy to spot selfishness in children. They are not so subtle in disguising their actions. "I want the last cookie," "It is mine!" and "Let me have it!" are phrases we hear from children all the time. Usually adults are a little more subtle, having been taught from an early age to share, to get along, to give, or at least to appear to do these things.

But how does all this square with the messages we are getting from our culture? "You can have it all," "fulfill yourself," "find the good life," "do your thing" and the million-and-one other ads, books, courses, and articles that tell us how we can be happy. We need healthy self-images. We need to feel good about ourselves. But where does self-worth cross the line into selfishness? Where does my way get in the way of God's way?

These are questions that need to be constantly asked in the day-to-day life of the church; because plain, simple selfishness is at the root of many, if not all, of our problems. It is so easy for my way to become the right way or best way in such things as: preferences of worship style, classes, evangelism methods, and even the color of the carpet. Even more devastating, my way can become the path through which such cherished relationships as marriage and family are destroyed. How many

times have we heard from a spouse who is trying to end a marriage that "another person is more appealing. . . will understand me. . . will fulfill me more"? And, as that person is "fulfilled," a mate, children, friends, and church can be damned! "I have to look out for me."

We have all seen a church split or a family split because someone had to have his way. "It's mine!" and "let me have it!" are not just the words of our children. They have become the words by which we live in this latter half of the 20th century. It did not start here. It has been with us since Eve and Adam went their own way. And the trouble is that this way destroys. When God commanded that it cease — "Though shalt not covet" — the sin only increased. When God provides the way out — His Son — we somehow apply his words to someone else or to some other situation.

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." John 12:24-26.

The man that spoke these words not only spoke them, he lived and died them.

"And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." II Corinthians 5:15.

Probably most of us know these things, but will we choose to live like it?

He who walks in integrity walks securely.

Prov. 10:9