

INTEGRITY, a journal published by a independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or the Board as a whole.

Readers' Response

Bruce and Diane, you are doing a great job. I really enjoy the subjects covered — the openness and completeness of their coverage. *Integrity* has been a favorite of mine for many years. Keep up the good work. I look forward to each issue.

Yours in Christ,
Enos O. Moore
Grenada, Mississippi

... Have been taking the magazine for some time now, ever since I was introduced to it by John McRay who lived in my town when he was associated with Middle Tennessee University and with North Boulevard Church of Christ.

Good wishes to you all, I would not want to be without the magazine.

Helen P. Murray
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Many thanks for reminding me to send a check. I enjoy *Integrity* very much. Please tell Bruce and Diane for me that I appreciate them very much. With my 83 years of age, with almost 40 years of heart trouble, I can barely read and write. May our Lord richly bless all three of you.

Fred Engle
Roswell, New Mexico

I have come across a copy of your magazine and would love to have a subscription. . . I was impressed by the presentation "To Judge Or Not To Judge" in the November/December 1987 issue. It answered some questions I had, but was too timid to ask. Bless you all in your work, for it is truly appreciated.

Bill E. Read
Tuscumbia, Alabama

September/October 1988

Integrity

Editorial: Thank You

Through the Valley of Despair

Terry A. Ferguson

When to Sleep in Church

Hoy Ledbetter

Characters in Church History — Polycarp of Smyrna

Michael F. Murphy

"Intercepted Correspondence"

Book Review

The Worldly Church by Allen, Hughes and Weed

Readers' Response

Sept.-Oct. 1988
Vol. 18, No. 5

Editorial Advisor
Hoy Ledbetter

Board of Directors

Brant Lee Doty
Robert Girdwood
Elton D. Higgs
Laquita M. Higgs
Joseph F. Jones
Diane G. H. Kilmer
J. Bruce Kilmer
Curtis Lloyd
Gary F. Mitchell
Foy Palmer
Henrietta C. Palmer
William Palmer
Amos Ponder
Karl W. Randall
Natalie Randall
Kenneth Slater
Jan Van Horn
John Van Horn

Subscriptions

are by written request. Although there is no subscription charge, contributions are necessary for our survival. Since we are approved by IRS, they are deductible.

Manuscripts

written exclusively for INTEGRITY are welcomed.

Please notify us

when you change your address, so you will not be dropped from our mailing list.

Back Issues

Available from
1269 Pickwick Place
Flint, Michigan 48507

Business Address

2919 Lafayette Ave.
Lansing, MI 48906

Thank You

During the last several days we have had the pleasure of receiving envelopes addressed to *Integrity Magazine* containing your checks and notes of encouragement. These envelopes have come from all over the country — from California to New Jersey, from Texas to Minnesota, from married couples, singles, retired persons, doctors, preachers, Christian Church members, Church of Christ members, elders, deacons, teachers, old and young. Some of you we know well, some we have never met, but for all of you we thank God! Together we are involved in a common struggle. The struggle for life in a world bent on death. Together we are involved in a common joy, the joy of life in Christ.

We are encouraged by your response. *Integrity Magazine* and your notes link us together. Miles apart, in different churches, we all are linked even closer in our Lord.

Your generosity in Christ makes this magazine possible. We are excited about the articles we are able to share with you. We believe our volunteer writers are some of the best you can read anywhere. We are privileged to be able to have such high caliber authors in this small inexpensive journal. Our board and editors receive no salary and contribute much of their own resources and time so that this magazine can be sent to you. We still need contributions from many more of you in order for us to meet our expenses for the coming year.

In this issue, Terry Ferguson addresses humanity's common problem: suffering. We heard Terry deliver this message at a community Good Friday service. After you read his article, we think you'll feel, more deeply, as we did, God's concern for our suffering. Hoy Ledbetter is one of the finest writers you will read in any Christian journal, and we are blessed to have his articles in *Integrity* on a regular basis. In this issue he tells us when we can sleep in church! Michael Murphy, a Greek scholar and historian, has written for us before, and we hope to make his "Characters in Church History" a regular feature. We think "Intercepted Correspondence" is thought provoking

(Continued on page 67)

Through The Valley of Despair

TERRY FERGUSON

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"⁽¹⁾ This verse and subsequent passage, from the lament of David, speaks to us of suffering — suffering of unbelievable proportions. It is one verse of many that speak to us of human suffering. We cannot read through the Bible without being touched by the amount of suffering going on in the human drama. From the suffering as a result of Adam and Eve's sin, in Genesis, to the persecution of the saints in Revelation, suffering is an incessant theme. G.K. Chesterton, in his book, *Orthodoxy*, says, "It is said that Paganism is a religion of joy and Christianity of sorrow."⁽²⁾ Certainly, in some sense, we can hail the truth of such a statement. Christianity does speak to us of suffering. George Bennard, in his grand old hymn, reminds us of the suffering that is a part of the Christian message, "On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame."⁽³⁾ The apostle Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, also speaks of the suffering that accompanies the Good News, "We preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called. . . the power of God and the wisdom of God."⁽⁴⁾ In the first century Roman world the suffering of the cross, the cross itself, was a paradox.

As we move to the twentieth century Western

world we find the suffering of the cross is still a paradox. On the one hand, the cross does speak of suffering and aloneness and this alienates many in twentieth century America. In a society where suffering is seen as some sort of absurdity to be avoided at all cost, it cannot and does not mix well with material prosperity and optimistic selfism.⁽⁵⁾ Aloneness is avoided like the plague. We search for the intimacy of relationships wherever it may be found. We like activity, success, profit and progress.

From this perspective, those who suffer are sick; those who weep and mourn show no stamina. The world has nothing more to say to us. It does not touch us. One can do with the world what one wants. No despair need tear at our hearts.⁽⁶⁾

It appears that the suffering of others, be it in our immediate environment or the suffering of one dangling from a cross, makes little or no impression on us. Yet, why is it that in services around the world on Good Fridays and other appropriate times, the crowds are full to capacity? Why does the message of the cross, that which contradicts this officially optimistic society and even the religion of health and prosperity, seem to draw so many people? Is it not because, whether we consciously recognize it or not, we know and existentially experience

Editorial

(Continued from page 66)

and fiendishly excellent. Don't miss the warnings thinly disguised in the letters of these two "devils." Lastly, we have a book review which

should be of special interest to those with "roots" in the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement.

Thank you!
Bruce and Diane Kilmer
Co-Editors

suffering and aloneness? Do we not come searching for an answer to our hurt and pain? Like Job, we want an answer for our suffering. "Do you have an answer, God? Speak to me, speak to me of this!"

My God, My God, Why?

In the lament⁽⁷⁾ of David, in the twenty-second psalm, we hear the poignant cry of a man who suffers all sorts of adversity. The lament begins with a sharp outcry of despair and forsakenness—"My God, my God, why?" It goes to the heart of the matter: God is far off or seems far off. "The one in whom I put all my trust is nowhere to be found." Forsaken, left to suffer alone. The bitterness of David's soul crushes and overpowers him. It is a cry of disorientation, of throbbing alienation. But this is not all. Not only has God left him, but even those who witness his suffering mock and scorn him. Here we see the violence, the animal-likeness, to which the crowd has sunk. There certainly is no sympathy for the suffering and aloneness of this one. In his suffering he stands naked before the world, vulnerable and exposed.

Both Matthew and Mark (Mt. 27.46, Mk. 15.34) record for us that another stood before the world naked, vulnerable and exposed in his suffering. He, too, cried out in his aloneness, in his forsakenness, in his suffering: "My God, my God, why?" This is not the first time we are told of the suffering of the Christ. After the confession of Peter in Matthew 16, a new element is introduced into the teaching of Jesus (that was to become the central theme of much of Jesus' teaching from this point on): the suffering and death of the Christ. His teaching drives us to inquire: "How are the sufferings of Christ to be interpreted?" "What does a suffering Messiah reveal about the nature of God?" "What does the suffering of Christ say about our suffering?"

As one reads through the Bible they will quickly see that the problem of suffering is never evaded in the Bible. The Bible addresses this human crisis and certainly the suffering of Christ must be seen as the hallmark of God's concern to speak to this problem. We also see

that the problem of suffering is a part of the world scene---from the injustice of South Africa, the famine of Ethiopia, and freedom's cry in Central America to the plight of the ghettos of America's inner-city. Is there anyone who can say they have known nothing of suffering? The world suffers, you suffer, and sometimes the hurt is unbearable. The presence of the tragedy of suffering can never be minimized. The Bible never minimizes it---from Job, who "catches every invader of his domain of despair,"⁽⁸⁾ to Jesus Christ, who clothes himself in the suffering of the world, the Bible addresses the problem of suffering.

Surrounded by Suffering

Suffering is an experience that cannot be reduced to a causal explanation. We cannot address the problem of suffering by simply denying its existence, by saying that it is an illusion.⁽⁹⁾ Suffering's reality screams at us out of our pain and torment. C.S. Lewis says that to exclude suffering or the possibility of suffering "is to exclude life itself."⁽¹⁰⁾ The problem is that pain does not just enter, it fiercely attacks, it maliciously abuses us, it cold-heartedly bloodies us without the least concern. We feel and know its constant presence. Nicholas Wolterstorff writes of the brutality of suffering, after his son was tragically killed in a mountain-climbing accident, "One small misstep and now this endless neverness. It's the neverness that is so painful."⁽¹¹⁾ "In the valley of suffering, despair and bitterness are brewed."⁽¹²⁾ Suffering invades our beings and all human experience is disfigured. It surrounds us with the blackness of its presence and penetrates us like an uncontrolled cancer. The pain and suffering have grown into our reality like "thorns and thistles." It overwhelms us and causes us to lose all perspective, everything is in disarray, or so it seems. The world is suddenly turned upside down; the beautiful becomes ugly, joy turns into bitterness, certitude is transformed into doubt. We become numb. Our suffering becomes the justification for irresponsible action or an excuse for inactivity. We withdraw from the world into our suffering. Here, however, our suffering is in-

tensified. Here we realize the fact that we merely don't just suffer, which is bad enough, but we have to keep on *thinking about the fact* that we suffer.⁽¹³⁾

Where is God?

The fact that we suffer is bad enough, but in the midst of our journey we suddenly find ourselves struggling with a Jobian interrogation of God. The pain and the injustice are somehow bearable, but the God-forsakenness is not. Why does God seem so indifferent at our plight? C.S. Lewis says it well,

Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, if you turn to Him then with praise, you will be welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence, you may as well turn away.⁽¹⁴⁾

In our suffering it seems that we find only the solitude of suffering. That is the one thing we fear, even above all our anguish, that God has made a final retreat from our predicament. Lewis goes on to say,

Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not, 'so there's no God after all,' but, 'so this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer.'⁽¹⁵⁾

Suddenly the cry of God-forsakenness becomes our cry and we hate it, we despise it. We want assurance. We want answers and there are no answers---only absolute zero, a vacuum, silence. "Despondency and despair fill our (his) cross-shaped emptiness."⁽¹⁶⁾

Elie Wiesel, in his stirring book about his imprisonment in the death camps of the Nazis, *Night*, tells the story of two Jewish men and a young boy who were hanged. The prisoners were forced to watch the barbarity. The two

men died quickly, but the boy lived on in torture. As the prisoners watched someone from behind Wiesel yelled out, "Where is God?" and later cried out again, "Where is God? Where is He?"⁽¹⁷⁾ In our pain, our suffering, our aloneness, our forsakenness, have we asked the same question? Why is God silent, where is He?

Shattering the Silence

In the cross of Jesus Christ the silence of God has been shattered. The God who allows us to suffer once suffered himself in Christ. The cross of Christ is the proof of God's personal, loving solidarity with us in our pain. God speaks to our suffering and aloneness in the cross of Christ, and once we have seen the vision of the crucified Son of God we begin to see the light which penetrates the darkness of human suffering. Wolterstorff speaks for us when he writes,

You (God) have allowed bonds of love beyond number to be painfully snapped. If you have not abandoned us, explain yourself. We strain to hear. But instead of hearing an answer we catch sight of God himself scraped and torn. Through our tears we see the tears of God. . . His suffering I never saw before. God is not only the God of the sufferers but the God who suffers. The pain and fallenness of humanity have entered into his heart. Through the prism of my tears I have seen a suffering God. . . Instead of explaining our suffering, God shares it.⁽¹⁸⁾

"In the suffering and death of Christ, we perceive(d) the sacred unveiling of the suffering God."⁽¹⁹⁾ In the life of Christ we see God suffering *for* man and *with* man. Jesus does not come giving us answers to our question about suffering. Instead *He* comes, giving Himself on a cross. Certainly the cross is the symbol of undeserved suffering. Take away the cross and our suffering points to an insensitive, impassible God, a God unmoved, uncaring about our suffering. The cross, however, tells us that God is not insensitive. He does care. The cross tells us the way that God loves (Jn. 3.16):

God is love. That is why he suffers. To love our suffering, sinful world is to suffer. God so suffered for the world that he gave up his

only Son to suffering. The one who does not see God's suffering does not see his love. God is suffering love.⁽²⁰⁾

Lewis tells us that the problem we have with this idea of a suffering God is that we look at love from a trivial perspective. We look at love from our perspective, as if man were the center of things. The problem is that man is not at the center of things, God is and he does not exist for our sakes.⁽²¹⁾ In the cross, God displayed his suffering love to the whole world. In the cross we see a full and authentic sharing of the human condition.

As we intellectually comprehend the significance of the cross and God's love for the world, does this knowledge really make our suffering and aloneness easier? Even when we know that Christ suffered, was forsaken, endured the pain of the cross, does that really make a difference for us? Well, Yes and No. No, we still must suffer and the pain is immense, the aloneness seems, at the moment, unbearable. On the other hand, yes, it is easier. We have someone who has been there before us, who knows the hurt and the pain. We have someone who goes with us through the valley of despair.

Meaningless suffering intensifies when it is borne alone. Sufferers then need not merely sympathy, but genuine empathy. They need 'someone who understands' to be there, to stand with them in their hour of trial.⁽²²⁾

We need Immanuel, the Man of Sorrows, the Christ of the cross.

I Am With You

The cross speaks to us where our words often times fail. It speaks to us a "language of the Spirit," with words that we seem unable to express. Through the Spirit, the cross ministers to us and through us.

What do you say to someone who is suffering? . . . Not even the best of words can take away the pain. . . But please: Don't say it's not really so bad. Because it is. Death is awful, demonic. If you think your task as comforter is to tell me that really, all things

considered, it's not so bad, you do not sit with me in my grief. . . What I need to hear from you is that you recognize how painful it is. I need to hear from you that you are with me in my desperation. To comfort me, you have to come close. Come sit beside me on my mourning bench.⁽²³⁾

In the cross of Christ God speaks to us and says, "It is bad. It does hurt. The pain is tremendous. Indeed I am with you in your hour of desperation. I do sit beside you on your mourner's bench." In the cross, and ultimately in the resurrection, there is meaning to suffering, pain, aloneness, and even death.

Tangent Sharing

Finally, it is interesting to note that both C.S. Lewis, in *A Grief Observed*⁽²⁴⁾, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, in *Lament for a Son*, talk about the Lord's Table, communion, almost as a turning point to their own suffering.⁽²⁵⁾ Communion is a sacrament of God's participation in our brokenness. The Lord's Table reminds us of Christ's sufferings on our behalf. The cross, the table spread with bread and wine, comfort us in our brokenness and suffering, in our aloneness. They remind us of his suffering, of his aloneness, and they help "shatter the silence" and speak to us of healing and peace.

Lewis, in his delightful children's stories entitled the *Chronicles of Narnia*, brings the character Digory through a poignant experience. Digory comes to Aslan, the great Lion of Narnia, to ask for some magical fruit in order to help his infirm mother. Digory received no reply from the Lion to his request. Doubt creeps in. It seems that the Lion is unmoved by his mother's plight. Digory approaches Aslan a second time. This time he finds that the suffering was borne by more than himself and his mother:

Up till then he had been looking at the Lion's great front feet and the huge claws on them; now, in his despair, he looked up at its face. What he saw surprised him as much as anything in his whole life. For the tawny face was bent down near his own and (wonder of wonders) great shining tears stood in the Lion's eyes. They were such

big, bright tears compared with Digory's own that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his mother than he was himself.⁽²⁶⁾

The vision of the suffering of God, through Christ, gives us a new perspective. The cross tells us that we can trust God, that we can believe in the goodness of this loving God even though suffering ravages humanity. We can believe this, not because someone told us it was so, but because we have seen, through scripture, the suffering of divine love hanging there on the cross of Calvary. "By his stripes (his sufferings) there is healing to us" (Isa. 53.5).

Endnotes

- ¹ Psalm 22.1a. The New International Version is used throughout.
- ² G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1959), p. 158. Thankfully, Chesterton goes on to say, "it would be just as easy to prove that Paganism is pure sorrow and Christianity pure joy."
- ³ George Bennard, "The Old Rugged Cross", copyright 1913-The Rodeheaver Co.
- ⁴ 1 Cor. 1.23,24.
- ⁵ See Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 103ff.
- ⁶ Jurgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God," *Theology Today* 31.1 (April 1974):8.
- ⁷ See John H. Reumann, "Psalm 22 at the Cross," *Interpretation* 28.1 (Jan. 1974), Walter Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, from Death to Life," *Interpretation* 28.1 (Jan. 1974), Walter Brueggemann, "The Formfulness of Grief," *Interpretation* 30.3 (July 1977), and Claus Westermann, "The Role of the Lament in the

Theology of the Old Testament," *Interpretation* 28.1 (Jan. 1974).

- ⁸ James Strauss, *The Shattering of Silence* (Joplin Missouri: College Press, 1976), p. xxiii.
- ⁹ Contrary to what many Eastern religions and Christian Science tells us.
- ¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962), p. 34.
- ¹¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), p. 15.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- ¹³ C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), p. 9.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ¹⁶ Strauss, p. xxxi.
- ¹⁷ Elie Wiesel, *The Night Trilogy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985).
- ¹⁸ Wolterstorff, p. 80, 81.
- ¹⁹ Charles Ohlrich, *The Suffering God* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1982), p. 87.
- ²⁰ Wolterstorff, p. 90.
- ²¹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*.
- ²² Ohlrich, p. 99.
- ²³ Wolterstorff, p. 34.
- ²⁴ Memoirs that were written after the death of Lewis' wife.
- ²⁵ *A Grief Observed*, p. 75 and *Lament for a Son*, p. 39.
- ²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1955), p. 127.

Terry, a graduate of Lincoln Christian Seminary, has ministered with his family to the University Christian Church in East Lansing, Michigan for the past two years.

He who walks in integrity walks securely. Proverbs 10:9

When to Sleep in Church

HOY LEDBETTER

One night last winter the large peach tree in our back yard was overcome by an ice storm and expired with a startling death rattle. As soon as it was warm enough, we removed the stump, dug up the roots, thoroughly tilled the soil, and then planted a maple tree surrounded with azaleas and flowers. Every trace of the old tree was gone. And yet, not long afterward, two small peach trees emerged among our new plantings.

This example of unseen power at work in nature reminded me of Jesus' parable. "The Kingdom of God," he said, "is like this. A man scatters seed in his field. He sleeps at night, is up and about during the day, and all the while the seeds are sprouting and growing. Yet he does not know how it happens. The soil itself makes the plants grow and bear fruit; first the tender stalk appears, then the head, and finally the head full of grain. When the grain is ripe, the man starts cutting it with his sickle, because harvest time has come" (Mk. 4:26-29).

Every farmer knows there is a time of waiting between planting and harvest when he can do absolutely nothing about the progress of his crop—when he must let the mysterious growth process do its part. If he becomes impatient and tries to hurry his crop along, he will only ruin it. He may plant and harvest, but in between he can only sleep and wait.

According to Jesus, a similar growth process is at work in the kingdom of God. Because it may be entirely out of sight and unattested by observable signs, we in the church, no less than the farmer, must know how to sleep and wait.

I had to come to terms with this truth when I first tried to determine from the Bible how far I could go in having fellowship with people whose beliefs differed from mine. Congregations with which I had contact had begun making uniformity of opinion a condition of communion, and even of salvation. That meant that

the newest member had to be identical in convictions with the most mature, and it was in effect an impossible demand that all members of the body be born full grown. It was therefore a rejection of God's growth process.

According to Jesus' parable, we were wrong in setting up the knowledge level attained by a certain class of members as the standard by which all others were to be judged. Because that practice rested on the assumption that those members would never learn another vital truth, it left no place for either past or future growth.

The minimum level of doctrinal understanding demanded was not merely knowing what the Bible said about the so-called vital issues, although that might have been challenging enough to new converts and slow learners, but it was based upon numerous inferences and deductions which, however important they might have been to the life of the church, were nevertheless the result of human reasoning and therefore potentially beyond the intellectual reach of some members. But that fact did not seem to discourage us from classifying those who did not measure up as "unsound."

The truth is that when we assign to such members an inferior status within the communion, when we inflict upon them any pain or humiliation or isolation, no matter how limited, because they have not yet learned "the truth," or, worse, when we cast them out of the fellowship for failure to remain entirely silent about their peculiar convictions, as we often did, we do so in defiance of powerful Biblical teaching about Christian growth, and are intruding into an area which God has reserved for himself.

Does this suggest that Christians should just let whatever happens happen? By no means, for there is a scriptural limit to tolerance, and, as the brethren at Thyatira learned when they tolerated "that Jezebel," too much tolerance

can provoke the Lord's displeasure.

There is a kind of growth Christians may legitimately interfere with, which is pictured in the Bible under the figure of leaven. Paul denounced the Corinthians' tolerance of sexual immorality within the church with this question: "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?" The remedy he prescribed for this corrupting influence was that they should excommunicate the offender (1 Cor. 5:6ff.).

Another application of this proverbial saying (but dealing with a doctrinal rather than an ethical problem) was made by Paul when he warned the Galatians (Gal. 5:9) to beware of those who were trying to lead them into the bondage of Jewish legalism. The Judaizers represented a leaven—a growth process—which the Galatians were to resist (he did not specify excommunication in this case) rather than wait for it to run its course.

The truth that a little leaven leavens the whole lump should be carefully balanced with the corresponding truth that all believers must be allowed room to grow. The legitimacy of church discipline depends on whether it is an instrument of the Holy Spirit, or, as is often the case, of the party spirit. As a function of the party spirit it can be a handy device for getting rid of people who threaten us because they do not share (and thus provide no moral support for) our distinctive views. Not only does such usage prevent us from "maintaining the unity which the Spirit inspires," which we are specifically required to do, but it also frustrates the real purpose of church discipline.

The danger which we must constantly be on guard against is that when we feel compelled to save the church from disaster, or to make it go forward as we believe it should, we will put more trust in our frail efforts than in God's ever-present even if unforeseen power.

There is a well-worn story about a man who, upon being commended for what he and the Lord had done with his property, replied, "Yes, but you should have seen it when the Lord had it by himself!" This anecdote seldom fails to get a chuckle, but I suspect that one reason it produces amusement (rather than anxiety that

the person thus speaking will be indicted for blasphemy) is that it reinforces our tendency to overextend the bounds of human achievement, especially in the church. This is not to say that man's work counts for nothing. After all, it is he who scatters the seed and finally wields the sickle. But growth, nevertheless, is beyond the range of his labor.

Paul emphasized this when he told the Corinthians: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6). Planting and watering are no small tasks, and may involve severe and exhausting labor, but they hardly require the kind of power that produces growth. The apostles, having done their part, knew how to leave the bigger job up to God. And as God worked in mysterious ways his wonders of growth to perform, they, like good farmers, could sleep and wait. Remembering that fact may save us from committing blasphemy in our hearts when we are tempted to think, "Yes, but you should have seen the church when God had it by himself!"

It might from many a blunder free us, and foolish notion, to put ourselves in the shoes of Uzzah, which may fit us better than we would like to think. When he was walking beside the ox-drawn cart carrying the ark to Jerusalem, he "reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God" (2 Sam. 6:6-7).

That Uzzah made a terrible mistake is obvious from the fact that his punishment was so severe. Many hard-working church members think it was too severe, knowing as they do how easy it is to fall into his sin, and in those moments when the clarity of his condemnation is lost in the haze of their humanism, they can find extenuating circumstances to justify his action. In their minds he could hide his apparent irreverence—his doubt-betraying anxiety over God's welfare—under the cloak of emergency action. The ark, after all, was in danger of being dropped from the cart. A catastrophe was in the making. Would God really want him to stand on rules and regulations when he obvious-

ly had an opportunity to prevent disaster? Many of us know how easy it is to use such rationalization to cover up our fear that God cannot be trusted in such situations.

In *The Waiting Father*, Helmut Thielicke brings up the unfortunate fact that many of us are unable to trust anything to others, not even to God. That not only makes for a miserable old age, when we must become increasingly dependent on others, but it greatly diminishes the joy of living at any age. Thielicke notes how Jesus would depart from the multitudes ripe for teaching and go away and pray to God alone. Could we do that? Could we choose time alone with God over an opportunity to teach a large crowd of people, who might never come together again? In other words, are we really capable of doing nothing in God's name?

There are times when we worry about the church departing from God, both doctrinally and ethically; when all of our hopes for reaching

the world are frustrated and nothing seems to be happening, no matter how hard we work and pray; when we become anxious about the progress of truth and see around us nothing but indifference and hostility and worldliness; when we get in a big hurry and demand quick results (the only results we can see) and are ready to "try anything that will work."

At such times there may indeed be something we can do; and if there is, we should by all means do it. But it is also possible that all that is left for us to do is to believe that God will use what we have already done for his glory, and what he wants is for us to just sleep and wait. Can we do that?

Hoy, founding editor and Editor-in-Chief of *Integrity* for 15 years, has served several a cappella Churches of Christ during his years of ministry. He presently serves First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Albany, Georgia with his wife Jary and daughter Priscilla.

“Characters in Church History” — Polycarp of Smyrna

MICHAEL F. MURPHY

If ever there was a critical time in the history of the Christian Church, it was the first half of the second century. To be Christian then was literally to risk life, as the Roman ban on Christianity became empire-wide. Within the Church itself, power-seeking teachers of heresy sought to lead the ignorant and the discontented away from the apostles' teaching. John, the beloved disciple, had died about the year 100, and with him died the Christian movement's last living source of divine revelation. To the eyes of outsiders, it must have appeared that Christianity could not survive.

Fortunately, God raised up mighty leaders in those days to carry on the work of evangeliza-

tion and to see His Church through the crisis. We know the names of only a few of these heroic men and women today, and of those whose names we have, we know much too little about them. But the few facts we do have about one such leader, Polycarp of Smyrna, give us an indication of the kind of person the Church needed at this difficult time—and the kind of leadership we ourselves could, in our own age, benefit from as well.

A protege of the Apostle John, Polycarp served most of his adult life as elder of the congregation at Smyrna in Asia Minor, that poor but spiritually rich church that John writes so lovingly to in the Book of Revelation. We know

nothing of his early life, but his name, which means "much fruit" in Greek, has obvious Christian allusions and could suggest a Christian upbringing or an early conversion. He spent much time and energy protecting his flock against the weird but temporarily successful heresies of the Gnostic-like Valentinians, who sought to cheapen God by trying to make Him out as a creature, and of the Marcionites, who would not accept that a God of love could also issue commandments.

Late in life, he went to Rome to visit Anicetus, the head of that city's congregation, ostensibly to help resolve the "Easter controversy," but more fundamentally to defend the independence of the Smyrna church. Even at this early date, the Roman congregation and its ministers were beginning to claim a sort of primacy among churches, and as a test case, were trying to get other churches to adopt its Easter date, as determined by the solar calendar. The Eastern congregations, Smyrna among them, observed a lunar calendar Easter, which tracked with the Jewish Passover. Although the Easter controversy would go on for centuries, Polycarp was able to carry his point then, and thus was able to resist the first attempts at domination by the church at Rome.

The account we have of his martyrdom is truly stirring to read, in which Polycarp's godly and heroic qualities come to the fore. A pagan festival is being celebrated in Smyrna, and the revelers decide to arrest the old leader of the city's despised Christians. Polycarp is brought before the city magistrate, who commands him to renounce his Lord. "I've been His servant for eighty-six years," Polycarp answers. "How

can I blaspheme the King who is my Savior?" The magistrate threatens punishments usually meted out to Christians, exposure to the beasts and burning. Polycarp calmly replies that the beasts and flames of hell frighten him more than their earthly counterparts.

At last, unable to shake the aged saint's resolve, the magistrate pronounces the sentence: death by fire. Polycarp's enemies—he has made many in God's service, as effective and courageous ministers sometimes must—bring the firewood. Polycarp is calm to the end, secure in the knowledge that he is going to his Lord.

* * *

The quality of a Christian congregation is reflected in how it selects its leaders. The congregation cheats itself when leaders are selected by the same criteria that are so often used in the business world, where compromise and toleration are prized over fidelity to dogma, "flexibility" over dedication to truth, acting ability over genuineness, organizational skills over personal qualities (such as holiness), and agreeableness over the necessity, now and then, to make enemies for the right reasons. The second-century Christians at Smyrna didn't make such mistakes when they chose Polycarp. May we all have such foresight and luck.

Michael has a strong background in history with a B.A. in classical languages, an M.A. in Church History-late Roman period, and further study at Yale University. He is a professional writer for a corporation; and fellowships with the University Christian Church in East Lansing, Michigan.

Give Your Gift Added Dimension

Your gift to *Integrity* can be designated in memory or in honor of someone or some event important to you.

Some gifts received to *Integrity* are made in the memory of a loved one. Donors find special satisfaction in creating a lasting remembrance that will serve others in a meaningful way.

Or a gift may honor a distinguished milestone in the life of a loved one and support the publishing ministry of *Integrity*.

For information on making a memorial gift or honoring someone, call or write Bruce or Diane Kilmer, Editors.

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 im-

aginary setting where Bruce accidentally comes across these letters in his computer class. Bruce thought he should share these letters with the rest of us, to warn us of what may be going on under our very noses. The nefarious teacher Apollyon continues his instructions to the young devil Ichabod.

Dear Nephew,

Congratulations on your 300 game and its aftermath. It might interest you to know you have succeeded where your predecessor failed: he missed the head pin in the tenth frame! In truth, your ball barely nicked it, and we had to do some real scrambling to make your strike look legitimate; but your bowling mates will never know. . .

Press your newfound honor to the ultimate peak. To preserve its value, we have arranged to prevent the duplication of your feat throughout the city of Topeka for the entire bowling season. Wear your crown judiciously and you will cultivate a prime trait in your team, league, and city—envy. To what end? Next season it will be Elder Striker's turn. Since he's your team captain and also a reputable member at Broad Way Church of Christ, this will open the way for his becoming putty in our hands. His envy will turn to pride, and he is to become a splendid example of your theory that those who avoid the grubbier sins are often susceptible to the wiles of pride. Since your own bowling will slowly disintegrate as his skills increase, we'll have him hooked by mid-season. You will be relegated to anonymity, but for our Cause. *Sic transit gloria!*

You seem to be mastering the technique of flattery. It is of some good when the individual in receipt of the flattery becomes inflated with pride; it is of inestimable worth when one of the Enemy's own is set against another. You might remember, too, that you need not always stretch the truth to make your words effective.

Even the best of preachers will have days when they are less than masterful in their messages. The right words in the right ears at such a time can be devastating. Let Brother Smoothtongue be your puppet to depreciate the preacher's less-than-eloquent efforts. Suggest that maybe you should look for the preacher's replacement and send him on to rural pastures.

You need do little more than you have done to feed the feud between Sisters Snugrug and Outreach. They've been at odds ever since the latter was elected president of the local PTSA over the former. Quite unknowingly you opened an old, rancid wound which now will fester indefinitely. Just throw in a pinch of salt occasionally, they'll do the rest. It's a re-run of Euodia and Syntyche.

It seems as no surprise to learn that you have met with frustration in dealing with the minister. He has been untouchable to all your predecessors, which should make him even more of a challenge. But you have noticed a potential chink in his armor, the "inordinate amount of time" he spends in prayer. Try something like this. Subtly urge him to increase this time, and to increase it again. Now if he has been praying in absolute secrecy, how did you learn of his custom? It is clear that he has shared the facts of his devotional practices with someone. If he were not really conscious of the "inordinate amount of time," I should think our case was hopeless. So long as he *is* aware of it, it is altogether possible that a trace of genuine pride is surfacing from his subconscious. And do not forget the opening suggested by Snugrug's comments about his preaching. Very

few preachers are insensitive to such remarks.

In conclusion, Brother Whitesoul is one of those preachers we classify as the "little red hen" type: what he will not or cannot get others to do, he tackles himself. Encourage his fervency. Discourage others, whose efforts could only be inferior, and you have him set up for a venture in pride—or a nervous breakdown.

I commend you for your progress, and call upon some of my lesser-light imps to assist you at various times and in sundry ways, to the glory of everlasting fire and brimstone.

Sincerely,

Uncle Apollyon

Dear Uncle Apollyon,

Thanks for your advice and commendations. I think I'm getting the feel of my assignment. One kind of pattern seems to be developing: people will finally respond to the most preposterous and dangerous of our suggestions if they can be brought along bit by bit through a series of seemingly harmless but succeeding more perilous steps of compromise. It is especially satisfying to hear someone use the "Well, I've come this far. . ." justification; as in "Well, I've already spent \$15,000 on this car; I might as well go ahead and get the imported leather seat covers and the power backscratcher." Or how about this one: "I've already spoiled my perfect daily Bible reading record; another day won't hurt." Strangely enough, these humans seem to be more ready to add to their sin if they're already in the hole, instead of being more cautious and dependent on the Enemy when they realize how weak and frail they are; and they don't seem to realize that this attitude is the first step on the path to despair, at which point they will conclude that their case has gone beyond their Master's ability to remedy. Casual guilt breeds carelessness, and that in turn can lead to the delicious obsession with guilt that serves to justify surrender to our suggestions and their own desires.

I'm sorry my high visibility in bowling no longer serves your purposes. I was beginning to enjoy the supernatural advantage. I even bowled a few frames with my eyes closed to see what would happen. Those weekly trips to the bowling alley will be less exciting now. Still, I see the necessity of setting up Elder Striker for his temptation. However, I don't relish the gloating he'll do over my diminished performance. He was rather unhappy about a newcomer's getting so much attention, after he'd been a steady member of the team for twenty years.

The current political campaign has raised some issues in the church that I'm trying to exploit. It seems that some of the members feel very strongly that the church is not politically active enough, and that we should identify ourselves with candidates who have the right position on certain limited but very visible issues, like allowing prayers in school. On the other hand, some members believe that all political activity is a part of the corrupt world and should be shunned by Christians altogether. Yet a third group believes that helping to get the right social policies adopted in government is the supreme Christian responsibility, and these people seem to be so absorbed in pursuing the righteousness of their "cause" that they are oblivious to the part that sin plays in the problems they're combating. It's comical to see how these groups castigate each other as misguided, or even heretical. I certainly want to keep the carping alive, or else they might discover that the Enemy wishes to use all of them, in different ways, to attack the divorce we've been so successful in implementing between "social" problems and "spiritual" solutions. Once let them get to exploring how they can harmoniously combine prayer, piety, and protest, and we're in trouble!

I thought I was getting somewhere with Brother Whitesoul, the minister, when, after one of his occasional bland sermons, I encouraged Brother Smoothtongue to tell him about an opening in one of the small churches in a town close by. Brother Whitesoul seemed very downcast and subdued for about a week after that, but then I heard that he got together with some of his support group for a prayer ses-

sion, and that they helped him put it all back in perspective. They, too, advised him to go away, but only for a few days to be "re-charged" by a relaxed and meditative change of pace. His next Sunday's sermon was a sickeningly effective blend of real humility with confidence that the Enemy was using him even (perhaps especially—it's unfair!) in his times of weakness. Boy, did that gambit turn sour on me!

The weather here has been as hot as. . . , well, I can't bring myself to use that word as lightly as most humans seem to. I have enjoyed seeing how unpleasantness in the elements can bring out varied types of the worst in people. Some get perverse pleasure out of blaming the drought on certain kinds of wickedness (like political corruption) that they feel completely separated from. They think, of course, that such an accusation highlights their own righteousness and puts the spotlight of God's judgment on others. Here again it's greatly to our advantage that they don't have the slightest understanding of the Wrath they're so blithely invoking, nor

do they realize that they're sacrificing some of their protection from it by wishing it on others. People hurt directly by the drought (farmers and yard-tenders, for example) fall easily into grumbling about God's mistreatment of them, an attitude which can be deepened into rebellion and unbelief if they don't get distracted from hugging their self-pity. People who somehow profit from the drought will of course tend to assume that they are reaping the rewards of their own virtue or cleverness and will therefore have little compunction for those who are hurt by the same weather conditions. They will forget that if it rains on both the just and the unjust, it can with the same impartiality fail to rain.

Must close and find some water to cool the tip of my tongue.

Yours in the hope of gaining souls,

Ichabod

Book Review

The Worldly Church, by C. Leonard Allen, Richard T. Hughes, and Michael R. Weed; ACU Press, Abilene, Texas; 1988; 96 pages.

J. BRUCE KILMER

With each new luxury purchase, with each move up the economic ladder, it becomes harder and harder for us to relate to the call of Jesus to take up the cross and follow Him, and it becomes easier and easier for us to become comfortable with the world's view of success. Having left the other side of the tracks long ago, have the Churches of Christ joined much of the rest of evangelical Christianity in a fashionable, right-wing, success-motivated presentation of "the gospel"? The authors of *The Worldly*

Church are concerned that affluence and the modern tendency to rely on human solutions to problems has caused secularization to creep into the church causing a departure from a truly biblical world view. It is from this departure from the radical New Testament proclamation of the gospel that the authors want to call us back to a truly biblical renewal.

Allen, Hughes, and Weed point out that, as the membership of the Churches of Christ has changed from the uneducated, poor, and dispossessed to the educated and affluent, our reliance on God has been replaced with self-reliance. We have lost a sense of the transcendence of God. With this loss has come a social club church which is more interested in meeting its own "needs" than proclaiming the transcendent God.

These are serious charges, but Allen, Hughes, and Weed are not the first or only ones to be leveling such charges at Christians today. Richard Quebedeaux in *The Worldly Evangelicals* published in 1978, makes similar charges against evangelicals in general. Jacques Ellul in the 1986 translation of his book, *The Subversion of Christianity* (see review in the Sept./Oct. 1987, *Integrity*), warns of the dangers of worldliness which have subverted the original apostolic message of Christ. But Allen, Hughes, and Weed bring their charges specifically home to the Churches of Christ, churches which claim to be trying to restore the Christianity of the first century. They feel the Churches of Christ have gone the way of much of "American Christianity," and that is: "secularization." By "secularization" they mean a church which "confuses the sacred and the profane, domesticates God, eradicates a sense of sin, reduces salvation to self esteem, and trivializes the Christian faith."

It should be said at this point that the authors, though making serious charges, do so in a spirit of humility. The reader senses, not bitterness or disillusionment, but their love for the church and their desire to warn us of the perils of the seduction of the world. Understandably, such a book has been controversial. In a June/1988 report of church leaders' opinions about the book, the *Christian Chronicle* reported that "neither liberals nor conservatives have been completely pleased. Some church leaders have felt singled out, claiming the book sparked 'big Texas church bashing.' Others seem secretly pleased with its criticisms. Some claim the book is too critical of pioneers or gives too much emphasis on the Holy Spirit." The report goes on to point out that the book is a "prophetic book," and that it is supposed to shock us with its audacity and overstatement characteristic of prophetic literature.

The *Chronicle* reports that some readers of the book from the eastern states are concerned that the authors' criticism of churches, which are involved in helping ministries to the exclusion of proclaiming the gospel to the lost, is a moot point for most Churches of Christ. These readers feel that only in the last few years have

Churches of Christ understood their responsibility "to give a cup of cold water in His name."

There are several weaknesses in this book, some of which may stem from its very short length (only 96 pages). The authors at times over-generalize the problems and the depth of the problems to all churches. This criticism was pointed out in the *Christian Chronicle* article referred to above. There are major differences (other than size) between Churches of Christ in Texas and Tennessee than those in Massachusetts and Connecticut. These differences make it difficult, though not impossible, to address warnings to Churches of Christ in general.

There are sections in the book where one wonders if the authors have a place for benevolent work in the church. However, when one takes the book as a whole, it is fairly clear that the authors do see a place for such ministries.

Some of the broad accusations by the authors were made without specific examples. Despite these weaknesses, the authors raise very important issues for the church, that most of us will probably admit are a problem in our own personal lives and, therefore, must be a problem for the church as a whole.

The temptation to be not only "in" the world, but "of" the world is always there for all of us. Finding the balance of which resources and methods we are to use in the proclamation of the gospel is a task with which we must be constantly vigilant. *The Worldly Church* challenges us where we need to be challenged and as Jesus did:

"And Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

Bruce, a graduate of Abilene Christian University and Wayne State Law School, works for the State Court Administrative Office of Michigan. He serves as co-editor of *Integrity* with his wife, Diane, and serves as an elder for the University Christian Church in East Lansing, Michigan.