

# Integrity

2919 Lafayette Ave.  
Lansing, Michigan 48906

Nonprofit Organization  
**U.S. POSTAGE**  
**PAID**  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106  
Permit No. 189

May/June 1990

# Integrity

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INTEGRITY, a journal published bimonthly by an 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.



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### Don't Miss Out

A father discovers he has missed his children growing up because he had been too busy "making a living." A daughter realizes too late that she had been too busy with her own life to care for her aging mother. A husband recognizes that he has lost the wife he loved after chasing an illusive fantasy. We have all seen these sagas sadly lived out among our friends and acquaintances, or worse, we have been a part of them.

What have we missed? Maybe it was not a person or a relationship, maybe it was an event or an experience — but we have all known the sinking feeling of missing out on something. For example, have you ever missed an event that you really wanted to see or participate in? Were you left with an empty feeling which you tried to fill with something else? Could you fill it? Were you satisfied? Both our perspective and the nature of the thing we have missed determine how long it takes to fill the void or if the void can be filled at all.

Our perspective determines the priorities of our values. Is it pleasure we value? Is it success? Is it relationships? Does our perspective include the eternal in all of our values and priorities? Sometimes it is hard to put an eternal perspective on day to day events — washing dishes, raking the yard, getting a corner office, or attending a social event. But perspective is very important in helping us not miss out on the things that are really important.

Advertising is constantly warning us not to miss out on the good life. Our homes, cars, children, and pets are all in peril of being lost, unless we meet their needs by buying the product that is being touted by any of the thousands of advertisements that invade our daily lives. What will we miss if our houses lack a TV screen that is at least 40 inches wide, if our cars lack luster, if our children lack the latest Nintendo game, or if our pets lack the treat that all pets crave?

More importantly, what will we miss if we spend our few years on this planet pursuing these "things"? We will miss a home and a destination where our cars cannot take us. We will miss relationships with others and an appreciation of God's creation that products cannot bring us.

Are there some other things which are not quite so obvious that we may be missing because we have closed our eyes and our minds without realizing that we closed them?

*(Continued on page 43)*

## "Eating and Drinking With Jesus"

Luke 14:15-24; 22:14-20, 28-30

CRAIG WATTS

Not long ago I heard someone say, "I do believe that our congregation eats together more often than any other church around." That very well may be true. Not only do we have frequent pot luck meals, we also sponsor gourmet groups and monthly tour and dine events. There are periodic Sunday School class parties where we do plenty of eating. Furthermore, I suspect that our church calendar reflects only a fraction of all the times our church members get together around food-laden tables.

Some people may think that eating is not particularly a spiritual activity. After all, every one has to eat, be they believer or non-believer, it makes no difference. Fasting is spiritual. Eating is material, ordinary. The abstinence from food has often been seen as being more religious than eating. Clearly this was the case in Jesus' day. Some critics verged on accusing Jesus of being a "party animal" in contrast to his more austere cousin, John the Baptist and to other devout folk. They said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink." (Luke 5:33)

### Jesus and Celebration

Evidently, there were a number of people who found it unseemly that this new, young religious teacher kept on showing up wherever food and drink were being served. When we read the gospel of Luke, every time a feast is celebrated we find Jesus right in the middle of it. And he wasn't always very particular about his company. It seems like he would go to anybody's party. In Luke 14 we find Jesus at dinner with a prominent, respectable Pharisee. But he was just as quick to accept an invitation to eat at the house of the sleepy tax collector Levi. He went so far as to invite himself over

to eat with the unsavory little crook, Zacchaeus. I can't recall a single time when Jesus ever turned down a meal.

### Fellowship Food

Leonardo de Vinci wrote in his notebook, "Man and the animals are merely a passage and channel for food." Jesus certainly would have disagreed. He knew that both people and food have meaning that transcend the merely materialistic. The meaning of human life is not limited to what we can consume in this world. And the meaning of food is not restricted to filling our bellies and providing our bodies with nutrition. People cannot find their highest and most enduring purpose apart from other people and apart from God. And food plays a part in bringing people together and in bringing people to God. Though the Bible often speaks of Jesus eating, it never mentions him eating alone. It was always in a social setting. We always find him eating with other people. And what takes place on these occasions involves more than chewing and swallowing, tasting and drinking. What takes place is communion. I believe Jesus would have agreed with the words of Conrad Aiken's love poem:

Music I heard with you was  
more than music,  
And bread I broke with you was  
more than bread.

Food does more than feed our bodies. The sharing of food and drink communicate something. It expresses a desire to draw near to another in care and friendship. We seem to know this intuitively. My little son Jonathan understands it. After having been hard at play for several hours, he'll unceremoniously burst into the house, dirty face and all, looking for a snack or treat of some sort. "Can I have a

poppsicle?" he'll implore. And on those happy occasions when we say yes, he immediately asks, "Can I have one for Matthew, too?" In his own simple way Jonathan realizes that when we share food, when we sit down and eat and drink with another person, we show our acceptance of and care for that person.

That is why Jesus never turned down a meal. It was not because he was hungry all of the time. He never turned down a meal because he was always ready to accept and link his life with others. However, not everyone was equally accepting towards him. Like the man in Jesus' parable (Luke 14:16-24) who gave a great banquet, our Lord's invitation of love was frequently greeted by excuses and rejections. But that didn't stop him. He reached out to the respectable and the outcast, the rich and the poor, the healthy and the broken, and he invited all of them to share life with him and to celebrate the great and future messianic banquet with him. Jesus envisioned a table big enough to include all and filled full enough to satisfy all.

## Dining With Jesus

Is it any wonder, then, that one of the key ways that Jesus chose to maintain contact with his people through the centuries has been through food? Bread. Wine. We call it the Lord's Supper, or Communion, or the Eucharist. It is a meal. Of course, the way it has evolved makes it rather difficult to see it as a real honest-to-goodness meal. We eat a dry little pellet and drink a half thimble of juice. And too often its done with all the joy of a trip to a cemetery. If someone would get caught taking communion with a broad smile on his or her face, we'd be appalled. If any poor soul would dare slip out a giggle, well, God forbid!

But in fact Jesus instituted what we call the Lord's Supper as a part of a genuine meal – the Jewish Passover meal. The Passover or Seder meal was a celebration of the liberation of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. This was not just an occasion to recall an event in ancient history. Rather, it was a dramatic expression of joy and gratitude that engaged the ears and minds, the mouths and stomachs, the actions and emotions of the participants. It was a serious but not a somber time. As the Passover

practices later developed, it became a time of scripture readings and songs, of questions and answers, of games for children and hope for the future.

The first century church continued to celebrate communion in the midst of a common meal. When the church members gathered, they each brought food to share with the others, sort of a primeval pot-luck. The Lord's Supper was not segregated from the ordinary, hum-drum eating and drinking. It was not considered irreverent to use the same table that held the bowls, dishes and pots from which the people had just filled their bellies. The bread and wine that the earliest Christians used for communion was no different from the bread and wine they had served with their lamb and lentils.

## More Than a Memorial

Nevertheless, the Lord's Supper was and is special. The center of this meal is the body of Christ, given for us. But this supper is not just a memorial. Years ago I thought that when I took communion I was supposed to evoke all the vivid images of the crucified Christ that I could imagine. I would try to concentrate on his agony and torment. In doing this I did my best to ignore everyone else around me and block out every distraction. I would go into myself and through intense introspection I would isolate myself from others. Just me and Jesus.

I remember once when I was growing up I went to have dinner with a friend. Now, in my house when we had a meal we joked and laughed, we talked about what we had been doing all day and sometimes we got into some heated discussions. But at my friend's house no one talked during dinner. Every once in a while someone might say, "Please pass the potatoes." But, other than that, the only noises you could hear was the scraping of forks and knives against the plates and the ticking of the clock. It was a strange experience. It was like we were eating together without eating together. It was almost like every person conspired to pretend that no one else was at the table. It was one of the most miserable meals I ever had.

Too often we approach the Lord's Supper that way. We try to get into our private world with

God and pretend no one else is around. That approach to communion misses the point of having a communal meal. We are in this together. We are to remember the earthly body of Christ but we can't do this properly unless we also remember the glorious resurrection. Our Lord is present at the communion table to meet us and revitalize us, as a community, not as isolated individuals. He works in us and through us so that we as the church might be the body of Christ.

## Community Now and for Eternity

The apostle Paul once criticized the ancient Corinthian church for failing to take communion properly. You see, when they gathered together to eat and to worship, the wealthier members brought plenty of food and drink for themselves, but they didn't freely share with the poorer members. Paul condemned this classism and told the people their celebration was a corruption of the Lord's Supper. He called upon them to "discern the body." That didn't mean he wanted them to meditate on the nail-wounded flesh of the earthly Jesus. Rather, Paul wanted the Corinthians to pay more attention toward each other, to be more concerned, accepting and loving to each other. At communion we are to remember what God has done for us in Christ, but we are also to remember who we are as a community. We are to remember that we have been called to be a community that cares for the hurts of others, that seeks to include those who have been rejected, that seeks to feed those who are hungry.

The very life of the church is to be a sign of the future. The way we practice forgiveness toward one another, the way we include people of every race and nation, the way we live in peace, all serve to announce the kingdom of God. The Lord's Supper foreshadows this grand future. It speaks of the world-embracing invitation of God and protests against the hostile divisions and persistent injustice that plagues humankind. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper he called upon his followers to set their eyes forward to the time when they would eat and drink at Jesus' table in the divine kingdom. And as we eat the bread and drink from the cup, our eyes look ahead as well.

Feast after feast thus comes

and passes by,

Yet, passing, points to the glad feast  
above,

Giving sweet foretaste of the festal  
joy,

The Lamb's great bridal feast of bliss  
and love.

What takes place at the Lord's Table is to influence what happens at every other table. So when somebody tells me that our congregation eats together more often than any church around, all I can say is, "Great!" Let us keep on sharing in food, sharing in life, sharing in celebration and sharing in hope. When we do this our lives are enhanced and God is glorified.

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Craig M. Watts is minister to the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Louisville, Kentucky.

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## Editorial (Continued from page 40)

What about satisfaction, contentment, joy and peace? Habits die slowly. But we can learn to find these things in life.

What about God's care, love, inspiration, and power? Are we missing these also?

The articles in this issue challenge us to not miss out on what is important. What we are missing may be right under our noses or in our midst.

"Therefore we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" Hebrews 2:1-3a.

Bruce and Diane Kilmer  
Co-Editors

# The Greatest Escape

DONALD R. LLOYD

Twenty years ago there was a popular movie called "The Great Escape." Steve McQueen starred in the film. The setting was a German prison camp. In a carefully planned and daring escape attempt, eight or ten American G.I.s "went over the wall." McQueen jumped the barbed wire fence on his motorcycle!

Only one or two actually made it. Some were killed. Some, including McQueen, were recaptured and brought back to the prison camp.

The Bible is the story of "The Greatest Escape!" The Bible is the story of God rescuing His people. Actually it is the story of many, many times that God went to bat for His people, and swooped down and rescued them, and brought them safely to Himself!

## Israel's Exodus

Consider the Exodus story! God rescued His people in a mighty way! It was by His hand, by His supernatural intervention, by the plagues and mighty works of power, that God brought lowly Israel out of captivity down there in Egypt land!

And in *that* escape Moses was God's "man of the hour." And as Moses led that jubilant band out of Egypt, only to look back to see the Pharaoh and his armies bearing down on them, with the Red Sea in front of them, with seemingly no escape — it was Moses who said to the people (Exodus 14.13-14): "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still."

And the Lord said in essence, "What are you waiting for?! Go forward! Moses, lift up your rod! Let's go!" And the waters of the Red Sea parted, so that every last Israelite crossed on dry land! And then the waters "unparted" and wiped out the Egyptian hosts!

In Exodus 14.30-31 we read, "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did against the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord; and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses."

Exodus 15 goes on:

"Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, 'I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea; and his picked officers are sunk in the Red Sea. The floods cover them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy. In the greatness of thy majesty thou overthrowest thy adversaries; thou sendest forth thy fury, it consumes them like stubble. At the blast of thy nostrils the waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.' Thou didst blow with thy breath, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, mighty in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

The Hymn of praise of Yahweh was sung because the Israelites had seen God's mighty power! They saw a change in history! Their life in the world had been made forever different! They had been liberated! They were no longer slaves. God's action in history compelled the song! But then, whenever God's power and majesty are seen, the only appropriate response is one of worship, celebration, and song!

God had acted in history to secure for Himself, and prepare for Himself a *people* — a people of destiny! Exodus 19.4-6 becomes the pivotal passage in the entire Torah because it follows the "indicative" of God's deliverance and precedes the "imperatives" for a delivered and special people. God through the writer says, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you up on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. (The "indicative" — a wonderful picture!) Now therefore (The "imperative"), If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

## The Second Exodus

The Scriptures speak of a second Exodus, this time in the New Testament. Luke (9.28ff) tells us of the time Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went up on the mountain to pray (He did that a lot!). While He was praying His "countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white. And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem."

The word translated "departure" here is the Greek word *Exodos* (the "way out"). First, I think it difficult to "accomplish" a departure, and secondly, I think the original readers of Luke's Gospel would have definitely and immediately thought of the most famous event in Jewish history — the Exodus out of Egypt!

It was only fitting that Moses be at this mountain scene. He had led God's people on the first Exodus. Jesus would, by His willing death, burial, and resurrection, bring about the greatest and final Exodus! Just as Moses had led God's people to freedom from bondage in Egypt, Jesus

would lead God's people to freedom from bondage to sin, and liberate them from the powers of evil!

From that point onward, Jesus set His mind toward Jerusalem. He was captured by the hands of lawless men. He was tried by them. He was pronounced guilty by them, even though no one was ever more innocent. He was crucified by them, *But*. . . that was as far as they could go!!

Once you kill a man, and He won't stay dead, where do you go from there!?! Exactly what more can you do?! In fact, the greatest irony in history took place! When the rulers of this world *thought* they had destroyed Jesus, they had in fact destroyed themselves!!

This might be called "the great backfire!" Paul, in Colossians 2.13-15 records,

"And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Christ, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond of indebtedness which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in the cross."

There is rich imagery here! The victor, who was thought to be down for the 10-count, completely turned the tables, and came back to life! And now the evil powers, who thought they had conquered him, were being paraded around publicly by the victor in shame and nakedness! (It was customary to strip conquered monarchs and lead them through the streets in humiliation and shame — the picture here!) The ultimate irony! Thinking they had nailed *Him* to the cross, they had in fact forever nailed themselves there! The One who would not stay dead was victorious!

## Our Exodus

And now you and I, and as many as so choose, can be made forever alive *with* Him! We are no longer victimized by the powers of evil! Death has lost its grip on *us*! Just as the

grave could not hold our Lord, it will not hold us! And because He lives we too shall live!

God swooped down and bore His people up on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself! He did that back in Moses' day — and He did it again in Jesus Christ!

The Israelites sang their song of victory, because they had seen God act in History and had seen History changed in the first Exodus.

## Metaphors Missed

ALTON THOMPSON

The Bible is a book of riches. It speaks to us of inexpressible things, of things at the core of our being, and reveals to us the One to Whom we owe that being. And it speaks to us in every imaginable way: through song, prayer, poetry, epistle, vision, folktale, epic, and history. Nor are these all.

There can be no question that those of us in the Campbell tradition have been badly served by our interpretational methods. Very often these methods have been inconsistently and prejudicially applied. But even beyond that, it is obvious that the methods themselves have impoverished our view of the revelation they claim to serve. The well-intentioned premise, "The Bible as our only creed and manual of discipline," forced on succeeding generations the reading of the Bible, and particularly the New Testament, as an ecclesiastical procedures manual. It brought us the treatment of the transcendent teachings of Jesus as if they were Leviticus, and the reading of the apostles' letters as if they made up a sort of "Robert's Rules of Church Order." This interpretational strait-jacket has blinded many of us to the real glory of the new covenant, for it requires us to view it as little more than a revised version of the old, rather than as something completely different in kind.

How much more have we seen History forever changed in the greatest Exodus — Jesus Christ!!

Donald R. Lloyd farmed for 15 years before he decided to become a minister, acquiring a Master of Divinity degree and studying classical Greek at Harvard along the way. He and his wife, Lois, presently reside in Rochester, Minnesota, where Don now serves as president of Minnesota Bible College.

### Literalism vs Reality

Hand in hand with this approach has gone a suspicion towards any interpretation not absolutely literal and material. To assert that truth may be expressed metaphorically as well as literally has been considered tantamount to denying the truth of the Bible altogether. For many influential figures in Campbell's movement, "literally true" has been the only "true" there is; "metaphorically true," to them, has been simply an erudite way of saying "false."

What a strange development, when we consider how Christ had to convince people through his entire ministry that the Messiah was to be something more than an earthly king, priest, or warrior. Consider the traps people constantly fell into by taking the Master literally: the woman wanting water, the crowd wondering how such a madman could give them his flesh to eat, and the false witnesses at his trial who told of his tearing down the temple and rebuilding it in three days. Even his own followers mishandled his warning to them about the yeast of the Pharisees. Well might the Teacher say to us, as to them, in frustration: "Are you still so dull?"

Perhaps this impoverishing outlook could have been arrested if our tradition had been blessed with more poets, artists, and real

writers. For people in these fields understand the value, handling, and, above all, pervasiveness of metaphor. They understand that, as a poet once said, "A metaphor is a finger pointing at the moon." The finger is valuable because it points to something beyond it. But the poets were either unavailable or unheard; the result has been that Campbell's movement has repeatedly and strenuously insisted that the finger is the moon itself.

This problem has not been limited to the Campbell tradition, of course. Besides the examples just cited in Christ's own day, there have been many such confusions of the image with the reality in other Christian traditions. For example, the doctrine of transubstantiation is based on a metaphor: "This is my body," is taken as literal truth to the point that some societies in history executed "heretics" who denied it. Another example is the problems that resulted from the confusion of an icon with the holiness of the deity it portrayed. Many today look forward to a literal reign on earth from a literal throne by an earthbound Messiah, in a strange revival of the earthly expectations of the first century Zealots.

The difficulty with all of these interpretations is that, by being so bound up in the literal and the physical, they blind the believer to the larger reality they intend to show. With each one, our concept of the Lord and His nature becomes ever more limited, finite, prosaic, and even petty. Soon we have a God too small for the world He created, and therefore a God in whom many will be unable to believe. We have reduced the moon to a finger. The consequences will be at best an impoverished life, and at worst a loss of faith.

We in the Campbell tradition have been quick to see through the problems listed above. But we have fallen quickly into the same trap in other areas.

### The "Day" of Genesis

It is the Bible, not the scientific community, that makes it clear that the "day" of Genesis is not a literal, 24-hour day. Consider that Genesis never says of the seventh day, as it does of all the others, "and there was evening and there was morning." The seventh day is not said to

have ended. Consider then what we read in Hebrews 4:3-11: God is still in his Sabbath-rest "as long as it is called Today," and we may enter it. God's Sabbath day has been going on ever since His creative work was finished! This makes it clear that the "week" of Genesis 1 is a metaphor for all of earthly time. There is no "eighth day"; only eternity. But God's being in His Sabbath-rest did not prevent His redemptive work through Jesus. "Is it not lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

### The Lord's Day

The "day of the Lord" foretold by the prophets was to be a time of both judgment and mercy; both would be meted out by the coming Messiah according to individuals' standing inside or outside the covenant in which the Lord put people under the protection of His name. This "day" was a metaphor for the era in which salvation could be found in Christ (Acts 2). John was the first apocalyptic prophet who could say his vision had been granted to him "in the Lord's day (Revelation 1:10)." The widespread use of this term to refer to a specific, literal day on the calendar betrays ignorance of a key prophetic idea. It also has the effect of limiting Christ's lordship, for if the first day of the week is "His" it is implied that the other six are someone else's. And how often do people live their calendar lives in just such a way?

### The Lord's Table

This expression (1 Corinthians 10:21) has often been used of the actual, physical table on which the Lord's Supper sits. But "the Lord's table" is a metaphor. "To eat at a king's table" in ancient times meant to be sustained at the king's expense, to have ready admission to the palace, and to be considered a member of the royal family (2 Samuel 9:7-13; 19:31-40). It is interesting to note how often Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven as a banquet. The imagery is richly suggestive.

### Baptism

Yes, "baptizo" means "immerse." But immersion into what? The immersion that saves is the immersion not into water, but into the name of

Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20) and into the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16; John 3:5-8; Romans 8:9-17); the latter is a result of the former (Acts 2:38; Acts 19:1-7). What is immersed into His name is not the physical body, but the conscience, the soul, the inner person (1 Peter 3:21-22). The outward immersion of the body represents it, just as the eating of bread represents the body of Christ and the sustenance we draw from Him, but it is not to be identified with the reality it signifies in a literal sense. To hold that immersion of the body into water and immersion of the soul into the name of Christ are "the same thing" is to hold to a transubstantiation doctrine of baptism. We must believe Jesus when He says that purification takes place on the inside and that the outside will necessarily follow it (Matthew 5:28; 23:26; Luke 6:45). Service to God may take many different and seemingly contradictory outward forms (Luke 7:33-35; Romans 14), but external activities are powerless to affect the conscience (Hebrews 9:9-14). There can be no question that the Transubstantiation Doctrine of Baptism, although

well-meant, has done untold damage to the cause of unity of believers by fostering an attitude in which "unwashed" disciples are regarded as pagans by those in the Campbell movement.

### Moving Beyond Literalism

What shall we say then? Are we still "so dull"? The time is ripe to reclaim the wealth of meaning that we have missed. We can do so by being patient with the Holy Spirit, who, after all, speaks to us in the Scriptures on His own terms. And what if He chooses to speak to us on the terms of a poet, an artist, or a singer? We must be prepared for anything. And we must trust Him. There is nothing frightening to see when we finally look beyond the finger pointing at the moon. There is only the luminous, celestial beauty that is our inheritance.

Alton Thompson is a doctoral student in conducting at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, Maryland.

## Two Sons, One Father

ELMER PROUT

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

Luke 15:22-24

It's still exciting, isn't it? We have heard the story of the return of the prodigal son hundreds of times. But its appeal does not fade — in fact, the impact grows with each hearing.

Our hearts are caught in the tensions of the story. The young man demanding his part of the inheritance. A wild goose ready to try his wings in a flight to his own 'far country.' The father torn between a desire to protect his son from his own folly and the necessary cutting of the ties of control. The risk of putting the inheritance into possibly impetuous hands. The agony of standing by the open door and watching the boy walk out and away. . . And, then, the waiting, the listening, the yearning eyes turned toward the distant horizon. . . But that and all that went between was washed clean in

the joy of return and welcome. The father running, the son's hurried attempt at confession, the father's celebration command. . .

Yes!! It is exciting, exciting as only the story of redemption in terms of gospel welcome can be. We read, think, remember, and rush over to join the celebration. We understand that the gospel is a message of forgiveness and restoration for the wanderers! We do not hesitate, our arms and hearts are wide open to receive and encourage the wild goose who, fallen to earth and with wings drooping, has turned homeward. We want no question to remain — our church receives the prodigal as we have been received by the Christ!

### Where is the Father?

As we congratulate ourselves on the size of our hearts and join in the celebration, we look for the Father — we want to be sure that He notices that we are as forgiving as He . . . We look and look again — He is not in the room. Where could he possibly be? Didn't He himself call for the feast, take the first steps in the dance? What kind of Host is He not to be in the middle of the festivities?

We notice that the side door is ajar. Could He have gone outside? What possible reason would He have had? The older son? Well, yes, there is another boy but he's nothing more than a stiff, self-righteous toad. . . who cares about him? Let the celebration continue.

Who cares about the older son? In the answer to that question lies the breadth of the gospel. Who cares? *The Father cares.* The Father who ran to greet the prodigal now walks to plead with the stay-at-home. Two sons, *one Father* with a heart big enough and a love strong enough to want to bind both sons to himself and thus to one another.

The first part of the story describes the risk

which the Father took when He put the inheritance into the hands of the younger son. The conclusion of the parable presents us with the risk which the Father took when He welcomed the prodigal back home. This is the risk of losing the older son. As we listen to the Father's pleading, we begin to see that if there was the far outer distance there is also the 'far inner distance.' *The Father yearns to cross both the inner and the outer.*

### Where Are We?

We look at ourselves again. We find the excitement of taking part in the welcome of the wild goose appealing. "This is what the gospel is all about!" We make that declaration, nod our heads and think we have come all the way to the Father.

But at that very moment we feel a hand on our arm. We turn. There is the Father: "Come with me. I've another son who needs my welcome, too. Join me." "What! Receive that Toad! He's so stiff in his self-righteousness that he will ruin the whole celebration. He hardly knows how to smile, much less dance for joy . . ."

We make our retort. But as we look into the Father's eyes we realize that He has heard it all before — these excuses for our narrow hearts. . . Slowly the size of the gospel begins to dawn on our consciousness: two sons, *one Father* who will not rest until both of his boys are back together with him. Only one question remains: "Will we join the Father in his pleading as well as in his celebration?"

For more than 30 years Elmer Prout and his wife, Geneva, have served churches in California and Japan. Elmer presently serves as minister to the North Stockton Church of Christ in Stockton, California.

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# THINGS

Mark 7:1-3

DAN MATSON

You were never strangers to me.  
You held me, led me, clothed me, fed me.  
You taught me not to forget God.  
Others guided me too, to a more perfect way. To be clean,  
especially clean.  
I learned to hold vessels, bright and shiny, with clean hands.  
Fine implements, useful and necessary. They were spotless.  
I had washed them many times.

I learned many other things like that. Things that pleased God.  
Things, like giving gifts to Him.  
His need was paramount. I built reserves for Him.  
Things were put away, out of reach.  
Safe from people. He was God.

With clean hands I administered His things.  
I taught others perfectly, too.  
I frowned upon all things deviant.  
How satisfying it was.  
My insight, perception, and manner improved. I became esteemed.  
My cleanliness became Godliness.

Not only was God pleased with me, but I with Him. For he gave me  
increase.  
My things multiplied.  
I saved more gifts for Him.  
My five talents became ten, even though I buried them.  
What reward for keeping them safe, and away from the undeserving,  
in for the right time.

Some said you needed things and even called you destitute, But  
in it was not your way to impose upon our God and His things.  
I honored you for not tampering. Also that I might live long,  
as promised, and enjoy the Lord's abundance.

My parents, how clean, and how right I feel, because of Corban.

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Dan Matson is a private attorney in general practice and is the city attorney for DeWitt, Michigan. He finds time to be involved simultaneously in poetry and painting. Dan is also an active board member and peacemaker with Christian Conciliation Service of Central Michigan. He and his wife, Marleen, are members of the University Christian Church in Lansing.

# Intercepted Correspondence

The following "Intercepted Correspondence" is a continuation of a feature we began in the January/February 1988 issue of *Integrity*. 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 would 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.

Dear Nefarious Nephew,

I sound a word of caution: you must proceed with the greatest care in treating our uncouth 'Brother' Sharp. He is on the verge of being of negligible use to us if he becomes too obnoxious. And the singing group will be totally ineffectual in our cause if they are shut out of all performances, which surely will happen if their discordance escalates. I should rather see their disunity fester, but not boiling; cloaked in a self-commending but superficial attitude of forbearance, but inwardly seething. They must be permitted some degree of effectual singing, or they lose both their credibility and their audience; and we have lost their services. So long as they can sing well enough together to be heard, we must encourage them. The most spiritually sensitive hearers will, in all probability, perceive some sort of subterranean upheaval within the group; the vast majority will simply listen to their music, then detect the inconsistencies between their musical messages and their veiled discordant conduct when out of the limelight. This kind of erosion of the Enemy's message is invaluable to us!

A thrill flooded my heart when I learned of the effects of the knowledge that Brother Tristan had contracted AIDS. We brought this about, you may be sure; we had been working on him (and others, of course) for some time. He is the first one at Broad Way to have fallen to this disease. His promiscuity was well known in certain quarters outside of Broad Way, although he had concealed it well from 'the flock'; but

the identity of his partner being unknown to *him* at present is all to our advantage; he has had more than a few partners in lust, and is not certain which of these has transmitted the problem to him. For my own reasons, I will not let you in on this just yet, although I am aware of her identity; she is most useful to us if her anonymity is at least momentarily guarded. We have been able to lead her effectively in this venture, which the enemy labels 'nefarious,' but which works splendidly to our advantage.

Just you wait. Her looseness has already touched three others, (including her innocent, unknowing husband, of course). In her current frame of mind, she is totally indifferent to the plague she is knowingly transmitting. We are doing everything we can to promote both her sordid secret and her contagious conduct. The situation is a walking time-bomb, and you should witness one tremendous explosion soon, when the matter surfaces to public eye! Meanwhile, do push the two attitudes you have found among the people: the all-tolerant 'glorification of human goodness' you cite — just another way of denying the reality of our weapon of fleshly indulgence — and those hypercritical, self-righteousness head-wagging finger-pointers who don't mind casting the first stone any time they feel the stone will not rebound against themselves.

I suggest that you put Mrs. Snugrug to work spreading her malicious talk with that poison tongue of hers. With the proper kind of en-

couragement, you may induce her to spread this morsel widely *outside* the Broad Way family, dulling whatever efforts are being made to reach out with the Enemy's 'gospel.'

In all this, take a good, long look at the preacher. We should not be surprised if the recent series of reverses among the flock brought Brother Whitesoul to the edge of severe depression. Many a stalwart servant of the Enemy has fallen to less burdensome trials; and this man's amazing personal identification with the deep ways and heavy loads of guilt which have come upon the flock makes him a primary candidate for the quagmire of despondency. These facts, coupled with his previous inclinations toward depression, work in our favor. If you could also renew the less-than-subtle criticisms of his sermons, we might score a major triumph. It's the old 'straw that broke the camel's back' circumstance.

With reference to the 'No judging' program you witnessed on television, the minister who advocated unqualified tolerance rather than divine standards as the proper guideline of conduct is well under our control. And, I am happy to say, he is but one of a large and growing number of 'spiritual leaders' within our grasp. They occupy prominent positions in various denominational circles, thus influencing great numbers of people in our behalf. Quite obviously, they are blithely unaware that their social and moral pronouncements are framed by *our* counsels rather than those of the Enemy, whom they profess to serve. We have no more effective manipulators of the people than these!

I shall be eagerly awaiting your next favorable report.

Devilishly yours,

Uncle Apollyon

Dear Unscrupulous Uncle,

As always, I welcomed the malevolent advice in your last letter, and I stand in awe of your marvelously perverted experience. I am glad to know that I am receiving such efficient

back-up services in regard to the promiscuity of Brother Tristan and his anonymous "fatal attraction." The fact that this partner was a female was a surprise even to me, since it is generally believed that Brother Tristan has little sexual interest in women. But a quiet exterior often hides a tumult of complexity within. The key objective in this case is to keep the "showcase sinner" isolated from the ordinary sinners (who don't think of themselves as sinners at all). I wish you the most terrifying results with the "Time-Bomb Lady," but I shall leave that entirely to you until such time as you choose to trust me with her name. There was no need for me to prod Sister Snugrug, by the way. I saw her talking animatedly in a corner last Sunday with Brother Lingaflap, and since I caught the words "dangerous," "irresponsible," and "disgusting" in regard to what they still quaintly term "social diseases," I'm sure that neither Brother Tristan's reputation nor his chances at salvation will be improved by their conflag.

I have quite enough other matters to keep me occupied. I have been doing some reading and listening lately on the vague set of ideas which has come to be termed the "New Age" movement. Some of the members at Broad Way are quite taken by it, since it seems in some ways to be benevolent and life-affirming. It often decries materialism in favor of "spiritual" development; it speaks fervently of our need to respect and preserve our environment: it deplores militarism and violence. Indeed, since these are positions that could be dangerous to our cause, it is fortunate that what they implicitly deny in their view of mankind — its sinfulness — outweighs the seemingly humane tenor of their rhetoric. With that denial, of course, necessarily goes the rejection of the Bible as having any special authority, for their concerns fit right in with the rejection of authority and the increasingly inbred conviction of this society that truth is not something by which we are tried, but something that we try to find within ourselves. The "New Age" objective seems to be to unify all mankind under the banner of making the most of its potential, with a blithe ignorance of the flawed quality of

the foundation on which they seek to build this benevolent utopian unity. I find much in the church to complement this line of thinking, based on the supposedly enlightened standards of tolerance, privacy, and the warm fuzziness of truth. Consequently, I encourage all comments that question the objectivity of God and His Word, that place all affirmations on an equal footing, subject only to personal feeling and opinion, and that set every person up as his or her own definer of truth. A wonderful concomitant to this "new" doctrine is the careless disregard that most church members have for knowing the Bible. That kind of negligence creates a wonderful vacuum into which the New Age vagueries can be sucked with little, if any, resistance.

I continue to work on Brother Whitesoul, but it seems that crises and adversity put him more to prayer, and when he stays close under the wings of his Master in that way, I can't get at

him. It's a good thing for us that most "Christians" don't really seem to believe in that kind of protection, and that they're often too proud to acknowledge the destitution of their own resources and thus hold back from relying entirely on the only power that can defeat us. Hurrah for both pride and fuzzy-mindedness! May they never be recognized by humanity for what they are.

I have been promoted where I work, by the way. It seems that my methods are much admired in the business world. A natural next step would seem to be politics. I might note that I have been in my apprenticeship here for more than two years. Is there any chance of a promotion in the offing?

In contempt of mankind,

Ichabod



Artwork by Frankie Shanks, Poplar Bluff, MO