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Contents

The Power of the Powerless By Mike Cope
Who Runs the Church By Rubel Shelly
The Focus of Renewal: The God Who Acts By Randy Harris
How to Recognize Child Sexual Abuse By Paul L. Cates
Incest: The Ugliest Word in Our Language By Joy McMillon
Sense of Worship, Part 2 – I Saw the Lord By Ken Young
The Fire Next Time (Reflections on the LA Riots) By Billie Silvey
What Is Success? By Bob Hendren
**Movie Review: Grand Canyon – Staring Into a Canyon of Despair,
Looking for Hope By Larry James**
The Bond of Peace By C. Leonard Allen
AfterGlow: Divine Empowerment By Phillip Morrison

The Power of the Powerless

by Mike Cope
June, 1992

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us (2 Corinthians 4:7).

A strange kind of power – power that can hardly be communicated to our competition-fueled culture – flows out of Christopher de Vinck’s moving account of his blind, mute, crippled, retarded, helpless brother, Oliver. Henri Nouwen’s foreword captures some of the impact:

When I finished reading *The Power of the Powerless* I had a strange vision. I saw our crazy world, full of wars and conflicts, full of competition and ambition, full of heroes and stars, full of success stories, horror stories, love stories and death stories, full of newspapers, television, radios and computer screens, and millions of people believing that something was happening that they couldn’t miss without losing out on life. And then I saw a hand moving this heavy curtain of spectacles away and pointing to a handicapped child, a poor beggar, a chronically ill woman, an illiterate monk, a dying old man, a hungry child. I had not noticed them before. They seemed hidden so far away from where “it” seemed to be happening. But the hand pointed gently to these poor, humble, weak people and a voice said, “Because of them I won’t let this world be destroyed. They are my favored ones and with them I made my covenant and I will be faithful to it.”

The power of the powerless. Christian ministry begins by accepting the relationship God has created with his people through the giving of himself in Jesus Christ. It requires looking deep within to see that God’s mercy, God’s atoning, God’s Spirit have been the transforming powers.

This inward look will discover that the follower of Jesus, while certainly not worthless, is unworthy to carry the banner for him. “Jars of clay” describes well the fragile, weak, sinful life the disciple has to offer. It underscores the daily need for confession and renewal and the need to anchor faith in the faithfulness of God rather than in personal consistency. It pleads for deep reliance on God (the mark of spiritual maturity).

Since *Wineskins*’ purpose is to contribute to church renewal in Churches of Christ, we must begin with this basic Christian conviction: ultimately, renewal comes from the Spirit of God. Our first steps in seeking revitalization are confession and prayer.

A friend of mine visited a church on an evening when an emergency “business meeting” was called. The person he was with asked him to stay, so he was there to witness the explosive emotions filling the room. The heated arguments grew; the air became thick with anger. At one point an older brother rose and suggested the group pause to pray. The minister – showing the deep spiritual sensitivity which we ministry-types sometimes offer – replied, “Has it come to that?”

Yes, it has come to that. Actually, “that” is where it begins. We start with our brokenness, our powerlessness. We begin by remembering that we follow the crucified Christ, not the victorious Apollo. We begin in Gethsemane with “Not our will but yours be done.”

Renewal is coming; we cannot constrain it. But it is being ushered in not by the insights of social observers or religious pundits but by our risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

Who Runs the Church

by Rubel Shelly
June, 1992

It is difficult to be faithful to God without incurring the wrath of people around you. What was true for Jesus was true for the apostles. It is also true for churches. So a church that is seeking spiritual renewal must prepare itself for criticism.

Jesus received this indictment one day:

Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (Luke 15:1-7).

And this angry indictment showed up a while back in the mailbox of a church that tries to minister to hurting people:

For God’s sake, who is running the church?

We are going to wind up with all the gays and divorcees ... If there is not a large turnaround from what we have now, there will not be a church as we have known it in the past.

It’s a good question: Who is running the church? The answer you give tells what you understand the church to be. It indicates what you think its mission is. And it reveals a great deal about the sort of heart you have.

Human beings have been running the church for centuries. Thus racial prejudice has been a problem in every culture, and in our churches in the United States, blacks were unwelcome until the government intervened in the ’60s. Divorced people are treated as lepers in some churches. Ex-convicts are unwelcome. So are alcoholics, people with AIDS, prostitutes, bad-smelling folks, and on and on the list could go.

If Christ is ever allowed to run the church, he will surround himself (just as he did in his earthly ministry) with the people that human-run churches exclude. People who “have it together” don’t need Jesus anyway. Only the lost sheep need a shepherd. Only the sick need a physician.

Come to think of it, we don’t need the church “as we have known it in the past.” Run by humans, excluding the very people who need the church most, rejecting people Jesus died to save –

churches of this stripe ought to pass from existence. From heaven's perspective, one has to think the sooner they become extinct, the better.

Perhaps the time has come to try a bold new experiment. It would be seen as really radical and crazy. Many would think it far-fetched and dangerous. We would have to be prepared, then, for a barrage of criticism. Here is the idea: Let's try letting Jesus run the church for a while.

Who knows? If we seek out the same people he did, have the same attitude toward them he had, and treat them the same as he treated them, our churches might become what we have always wanted to claim we were – genuine New Testament churches.

The Focus of Renewal: The God Who Acts

by Randall Harris
June, 1992

It is one of the unfortunate features of our superficial culture that church renewal is too often understood in terms of flashy, exciting glitz, which never reaches the core of the spiritual man. A new program, a motivational retreat, and a burst of enthusiasm do not constitute spiritual renewal. Church renewal is not achieved by pep rallies in which we get fired up. It results, rather, from an encounter with our God who is a consuming fire. Renewal must begin at the beginning, which is to say, it must begin with God.

Christians long to experience the renewal of mind which leads to transformation and empowerment to resist the world's efforts to shape us in accordance with its warped values. But how does the renewal of mind come about? I think we are helped toward

an understanding of the starting point from a couple of passages in Deuteronomy 6. First, consider verses 10-12.

When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you – land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant – then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Consider the drastic change which takes place in the life of Israel which leads to the warning in the above passage. While they are in the desert the people are *directly* dependent on God for their every need. If God doesn't act, they go thirsty. If God does not provide, they go hungry.

But once they enter the land, God's direct intervention is no longer required, and there is a dire threat of forgetfulness. It is this forgetfulness that is so spiritual debilitating.

Many of us have never really lived in the desert or have not been there in such a long time that we've forgotten what it's like. Living in the comfortable confines of the promised land, we have forgotten our dependence on the one who both rescued us and continues to be our ultimate source of life.

This is one of the reasons that evangelism is so important to the spiritual life of the church. A church of second and third generation Christians needs the new convert to remind us of God's relentless love that has rescued us from the desert, the memory of which has now gone dim.

There is but one theme in scripture – the relentless love of God. Spiritual renewal begins with the memory of the desert of hopeless lostness and the mighty action of the loving God who brought us into the land of life. "Be careful that you do not forget the Lord." Our understanding of the

spiritual life we now enjoy must begin with the remembrance of God's initiative and activity in our behalf. But now to the second passage, Deuteronomy 6:20-25:

In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes, the Lord sent miraculous signs and wonders – great and terrible – upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all the law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.

"But why do we have to go to church?" the little boy asks his parents. Unfortunately, the answer too often given is "Because God tells us to." Even more tragically, we may have no more adequate answer for our own religious activities.

But notice the answer given in the above passage. The *meaning* of religious responsibilities is tied to a relationship with God who acts in our behalf. This, too, is crucial to spiritual renewal. We do what we do because God has graciously invited us into a covenant relationship with him.

I see little hope for sustained spiritual renewal if we are unable to see the connection between what we do and what God has done on our behalf. Too often we read scripture without knowing why we are doing it. We launch into our daily Bible reading program each new year and sprint our way through Genesis and Exodus only to crash in Leviticus. We come to scripture intending to master its contents, hoping we will be transformed by the exercise. But, of course, the point is not to master scripture, but rather to be mastered by the One who is All in All.

May I make one tiny suggestion? For the next year, read the Bible with just one agenda – to find out what God is like and what he has done for you. Then begin to see your life as a response to God's relentless love.

We must give up our worldly desire for the spectacular big deal in church renewal and the quick fix for our spiritual emptiness. We need something more substantive and lasting. We need a relationship with our Father. We begin with the act of remembrance and move forward by seeing the meaningfulness of our activities as secured by God's gracious offer of covenant, not the slavish obedience to pointless commands.

In spiritual renewal the focus must not be on ourselves but on the one who does the renewing. I cannot renew myself. Do you remember David's prayer in Psalm 51:10?

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

God will do for me what I cannot do for myself. He will recreate me. So Spiritual renewal never begins with a method; it begins rather with a word from God.

Genuine, transforming spiritual renewal is sustained only where hearts turn toward God. Beyond the racket of religious exhibitionism, deep searches for deep. In our quest for spiritual life we seek to see our God more clearly and thus to love him more dearly.

After 16 centuries, Augustine's eloquent prayer to the Father is ever true: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

How To Recognize Child Sexual Abuse

Paul L. Cates
June, 1992

In 1986, J.M.K. Bussert wrote about the Lutheran Church's response to the sensitive issue of battering: "Many people respond to the issue of battering with disbelief or denial in order to protect a certain stubborn pride in their church or community. Many clergy, for example, refuse to believe that abuse exists within their congregations."

Recently some Christian psychotherapists have expressed strong concerns about the problem of sexual abuse and incest, along with other sexual sins, in the church. Based on their personal experience in counseling, they are gravely concerned. The number of people they see who have experienced abuse is alarming, and the percentage of those who are from families of ministers and other church leaders is equally startling. The nature of their roles as counselors to those makes it difficult for them to give corroborating evidence, name names, give examples and statistics.

As a marriage and family therapist and college student development counselor working with Christian young people, I must agree with the concern these people have expressed. We know we see only the tip of the iceberg of abuse, and what we see should give church leaders concern.

Unfortunately, newspapers have picked up some of these expressions of concern which were intended to be addressed to the church, and sensationalized them and turned them against the church. Also, unfortunately, some within the church have reacted in strongly defensive ways to some of the opinions which have been expressed as to causal factors which may underlie the problem.

It would be tragic if we lost sight of the real problem of abuse in families within the church in a debate over whether one theory or another accurately explains its cause. We must not stand around and debate why the victim got run over while he lies in the street dying.

The problem of sexual abuse is real in our society and in the church. A recent study indicated that 38% of the women interviewed had been sexually abused by an adult or family member by the age of 18 (cited in Allender, 1990). Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz's research indicated that women from all socioeconomic levels and religions are abused at similar rates. Russell (1986), in one of the best statistical studies done thus far, found no statistically significant differences in incest rates across religions (none 14%, Catholic 17%, Protestant 18%, Jewish 10%, and other 13%).

While not statistically significant, a range from 10% to 18% is noteworthy, with "Protestants" having the highest rate of incest. Huskey (Frame, 1985) surveyed all 247 female students at a Christian liberal arts college and, of the 96 who responded, more than half said they had been abused as children (Frame, 1985).

Ann Hayman, for five years the director of a rehabilitation program for adult female prostitutes, gave the following observations regarding religious backgrounds. One hundred percent of them were victims of child abuse and/or neglect. All but one were raised in a church family. Several were ministers' daughters. Seventy-five percent to 80% were victims of incest. Hayman asserts that incest and spouse abuse are both greater in church-related families than in non-church families (Hayman, 1986, cf. Rush).

Russell observes that some clinical accounts have suggested that men who are highly religious, with rigid or conservative views about sex and the family, are among those most prone to sexually abuse children (1986, p. 112). Her data, reported above, were not detailed enough to speak to this question.

In 1983, Bergin reviewed research on religious commitment and mental health and found that 23% of the studies reported a negative relationship, 47% reported a positive relationship and 30% reported no relationship between religion and mental health. Gartner, Larson and Allen (1991), reviewing more than 200 studies of religious commitment and mental health, have identified some significant contributing factors to those results: (a) Most studies showing a negative relationship between religion and mental health employed paper and pencil personality tests which attempt to measure theoretical constructs, whereas most of the research linking religion to positive mental health is on "hard" variables, real-life, behavioral events which can be reliably observed and measured and (b) Distinctions such as that between styles of religiosity (Intrinsic and Extrinsic) explain some inconsistent findings.

We get into trouble if we start trying to lump all religious people, or all "fundamentalists," or all "conservatives," or all "liberals" and begin generalizing about them. A variation on the old saying, "Figures don't lie, but liars figure" might be appropriate here. Conservative and/or fundamentalist Christianity may not produce sexual abusers, but it might very well attract individuals who are prone toward abuse. People can be dogmatic, closed-minded, rigid, controlling, abusive at any point on the continuum of belief from atheist to fundamentalist or cultic or super-legalistic. The key is not the beliefs held as much as how the beliefs are held.

The few studies which look at styles of religiosity and other more specific characteristics of perpetrators of abuse present some important findings. Seymour's (1987) dissertation research found that subjects sexually victimized by father, stepfather, or other adult relative rated their fathers as significantly more authoritarian than non-victimized subjects rated theirs. Incestuous fathers were rated lower in intrinsic religiousness and lower on Love/Integrity. They were as religious as other fathers on extrinsic religiousness and on Punishment/Conformity.

Intrinsic religiosity is religion as a meaning-endowing framework in terms of which all life is understood. Extrinsic religiosity is a religion of comfort and social convention, a self-serving, instrumental approach shaped to suit oneself. The intrinsically motivated person *lives* his religion, the extrinsically motivated person *uses* his religion (cf. Donahue, 1985). In other words, the abusers were superficially religious, dogmatically so, but it had not been internalized to a degree that it produced internal and behavioral consistency. Jesus spoke of Pharisees who bound heavy burdens of religious tradition on others but did not lift a finger to take up the same burdens (Matthew 23:4).

Gil (1988) studied sexually abused daughters from conservative Christian homes. Sexually abusive fathers in this group were viewed as legalistic, beset by problems from outside the family, poorly bonded with family members and poor communicators. In contrast to nearly all other studies of the broader population, there were significantly more fathers than stepfathers in this group of abusers. Another interesting finding was that the most conservative (fundamentalist) natural fathers were less likely than others to have had actual genital contact or penetration. Gil suggests that the incest taboo may be strongest among these most conservative men. It may be that they represent an adult version of Lewis, Dodd and Tippen's (1989) findings that teens in churches of Christ tend to legalistic righteousness when it comes to sexuality – anything is okay if it stops short of actual intercourse. The father who fondles his daughter's breasts, kisses her on the lips, hugs her forcibly, and justifies it because "he is her father so there is nothing wrong with it because it is not intercourse," is using the same kind of legalistic reasoning to rationalize his actions.

Gil also suggests that conservative Christian fathers who hold strongly to ideals of patriarchy and are detached from involvement in the home may be at greater risk of being sexually abusive because they have not bonded with their daughters through being directly involved in their nurturance. Parker and Parker (1985) found significant differences in incestuous and non-incestuous fathers in their early relationships with their daughters. Inadequate bonding with one's own parents and lack of early physical contact with one's child were the two best predictors of sexual abuse.

Incestuous fathers were more often neglected or mistreated in their own childhood and they spend minimal time in the home during their abused child's first three years and had little involvement in nurturing and caring for their daughters. Fathers and stepfathers deeply involved with their daughters are unlikely to abuse them. The church should encourage more involvement by fathers – in their children's birth, in holding, feeding, diapering, and nurturing them in all kinds of ways.

Studies of alcohol abuse and religiosity have found that Protestants raised in conservative denominations or homes, which typically discourage alcohol use, tend to have rates of alcoholism higher than less conservative denominations. I would hypothesize that those individuals who drink are expressing rebellion against their family and church, creating more separation and more guilt, thus creating a greater likelihood for abuse and eventual addiction. There may be a similar pattern for sexual addiction, resulting in numerous cases of sexual abuse within the family (cf. Carnes, 1989).

The above studies illustrate that there are some reasons and some hard evidence to suggest that conservative religious groups may foster a higher rate of sexual abuse than the average of the general population.

We can't afford to engage in denial that we have a problem of sexual abuse. And we should not waste our energies throwing accusations back and forth and in the process lose sight of the suffering and destruction of abuse.

If we have alcoholism in our churches, if we have divorce, if we have broken homes and blended families, if we have church members who are members in name only, if we have rigid authoritarian fathers, if we have members who have themselves been sexually or physically abused, we have the conditions for sexual abuse.

Has the divorce rate increased in your congregation in recent years? Has the rate of alcoholism increased along with other addictions? Has homosexuality increased? Has the number of affairs increased? Can you continue to tell yourself that sexual abuse is only a problem outside the church when you can see other problems increasing so obviously? Incest has been called “the last taboo,” and in the church we should not expect that families where there is incest, or the children who are the victims of abuse, are going to acknowledge such a family event.

In recent years studies into sexually exploitative relationships between therapists, doctors, teachers, and other men in positions of power have revealed startling statistics: six to ten percent or more of psychiatrists have had sexual contact with their patients, as have similar or higher percentages of psychologists and professors. And a higher percentage of these have had multiple sexual contacts. Fortunately these professions are beginning to police their ranks much more vigorously. Rutter (1989) concluded from colleagues knowledgeable in this area that sexual misconduct among ministers probably exceeds the 10% estimate for male psychotherapists. I mention this for several reasons: (1) This kind of abuse is very similar to incest in its nature and consequences. (2) The fact that statistics are more scarce regarding clergy may reveal a greater need to deny to ourselves that such problems exist among Christian people. (3) if we acknowledge the existence of even a fraction of the incidences that are suspected by those who have studied the problem, we have a serious problem indeed.

If we do not act in our congregations in preventive and healing ways to deal with these kinds of soul-destroying sins, we will find ourselves perpetuating them and/or passing them on to other congregations where the sins will be repeated, probably over and over.

The following letter, written by a real person whose identity is concealed, eloquently describes the depth of this problem.

“A recent article in a respected brotherhood journal ripped through my heart. The essence of the article vilified two men who are Christian psychologists. It also debunked any psychological treatment sought by members of churches of Christ as being totally without merit and basically contrary to the Bible. This letter is not to defend either man as God will judge and prove their works. It is to warn of the continued pain many will suffer as the result of that article.

“You see, I am a victim of sexual abuse by an uncle. He is seen as a model citizen, and has reared his family in strict accordance with the Bible. He is a preacher who has followed a very fundamental course. My father was also a minister and I have been in the ministry myself for many years. No one – my parents, my grandparents, my brothers or sisters, a fellow preacher, not even my wife – knew about the hurt and pain I carried for more than 30 years. Only my uncle and I shared the secret of his abuse. I was afraid to tell and he certainly had never admitted it or spoken to me about it. I was not really aware of how this abuse had figured into my life. I know that it is not the only factor affecting me and my struggles with sin but it has had a major impact.

It has contributed to my distorted views of sexuality. These views have in turn affected my spiritual life, my treatment of my wife, my actions as a father, my work as a minister, my place in the community, and certainly my health both physically and emotionally. Because a counsellor using biblical principles had begun working with me, many areas of my life had become healthier. His treatment covered several months but he still knew nothing of the sexual abuse.

“In the midst of this progress, a younger brother and sister of this uncle asked me a question that I had dreaded to hear. The only honest answer was, ‘Yes, he did sexually abuse me.’ Filled with questions as to why they wanted to know, I soon learned that they were both victims of his abuse.

“The uncle was then confronted in an attitude of love and encouraged to seek help. Some of his victims poured out their hurt, their pain, their anger, their feelings of betrayal with emotions that surpassed the tears at any funeral I have attended. One young woman, a victim of sexual abuse at age five, had been placed in foster care with my uncle and his family. He began abusing her further at the age of nine and continued to age 15 when she left their home. The pain she felt and continues to feel is more excruciating than any physical pain because it is in her very being. This letter cannot begin to express the depth of the pain each of us felt and continues to feel. I wish that no one would ever hurt that much again.

“The terror in my heart is knowing that the attitude expressed in that article will enable another child to become a victim of incest, sodomy, rape or sexual abuse, that even one more person will suffer as I have. It is knowing that it will not be just one but many innocent victims whose cries for help will fall on deaf ears and closed hearts. It is knowing that most will never experience the abundant life Christ promised. It is knowing that many of these victims will lose their faith and their souls.

“No, I have not lost my faith though it has been duly tested and tried. Satan is still trying to claim me as his own. God’s salvation through the redemptive act of Jesus has cleansed my soul and continues to do that. His grace heals my soul just as doctors help heal my body. Christians trained in psychology help soothe my pain and allow me to move beyond its grip. Those who suffered as prisoners of war now enjoy freedom but the painful memories of their experiences remain. The blood of Jesus frees me from Satan’s prison but it does not remove the intensely painful memory of sin committed against me by this relative.

“You and your readers can now see why this letter had to be written. It is not the time to be silent and let a multitude of sins remain hidden. It is not the time for victims to be told to hurt alone and in silence. It is not the time to stand idly by and watch as others fall under the cruelty of sinners who do not care about the pain they inflict on trusting children. With this letter is my prayer that at least one person will be helped. Maybe it will open the door to articles, sermons, prayers, and studies that are needed to help many of our brothers and sisters who have also been hurt. God will be honored by this.”

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Incest: The Ugliest Word in Our Language

by Joy McMillon
June, 1992

They were the perfect all-American family. The father was a gregarious church elder and a greatly-admired Bible school teacher. The stay-at-home mother faithfully served in the church nursery. Their four children were bright, well-behaved, and active in the church's youth group. Who could have guessed this family's powerful secret?

"Saturday nights were always a special time between Daddy and me," says Jane, the second daughter. "Daddy would go to bed with me, and he would read my Sunday school lesson to me." But what happened next sounds more like page out of hell than a Bible school quarterly. "After I would fall asleep," says Jane, "he would wake me up, fondling me and caressing me, and having sex with me."

INCEST. The ugliest six-letter word in the language. It happens in all economic classes, in families that appear completely normal to outsiders. No one wants to believe that parents ever sexually abuse their own children, especially in religious families where the family unit is considered a gift from God. The family is revered as a place of safety, respect, and love where nurturing parents try to meet their children's needs. Unfortunately, however, incest also happens in Christian families.

The number of incestuous sexual abuse cases is either growing rapidly or being reported more often – probably both. Researchers estimate that between 250,000 and 350,000 cases of child abuse occur each year in the U.S. Perhaps 80% of these involve incest. Surveys by psychologist David Finkelhor in California and Massachusetts in the 1980s found that as many as one in five girls and one in seven boys under the age of 18 had been sexually abused by a relative.

Incest with a child is among the most horrible crimes an adult can commit. But it is also one of the easiest to hide. Fear and shame make it nearly impossible for children to tell. When religious families are also incestuous, experts say the impact on the children is doubly devastating.

Even though she is 40 years old now and has recently completed more than two years of therapy, it is still not easy for Jane to talk about her childhood ordeal. But she is determined to speak out since as long as incest survivors keep quiet, the numbers will only increase. It is a crime that thrives in silence and secrecy. "Incest was my secret shame for years," said Jane in a recent *Wineskins* interview.

Born and reared in the mid-South, she had a lonely and isolated childhood. What little outside social life allowed the children was controlled by her father, a strong, patriarchal figure.

He was a handsome, successful salesman and church leader with hundreds of acquaintances. "People thought we were the perfect family, but they didn't go home with us," she told other incest survivors at a recent seminary. "IT was very confusing as a child. I would listen to the

preacher talk about love and forgiveness on Sundays, and then we would go home to all the horror and abusive behavior.”

The children were caught in the volatile crossfire of a dysfunctional marriage. At church, their parents were models of Christian behavior. At home, they argued and fought violently.

During the day, the parents were cold and aloof toward the children. At other times, their violent tempers would boil over into harsh, unpredictable whippings. “Both of them would explode at any time and hit us with anything in their hands. They would call us terrible names and make us feel like dirt,” says Jane.

The weekend sexual encounters with her father began so subtly that Jane didn’t realize they were abnormal. They started when she was four and continued until she was 13. Later, they became a toxic mixture of pleasure, self-hatred and guilt. “The sex was like affection and violation,” she says. “Sometimes I would almost look forward to it because that was the only time I had any closeness to him, and you will do almost anything to be loved as a child.”

To keep the conspiracy of silence, Jane’s father not only controlled her social contacts, but also he warned her repeatedly that if she were not a good little girl, God would take the people she loved away from her. That threat terrified Jane. “As a child, I never thought it would do any good to tell anyone. I was sure no one would believe me. Besides, I just thought this is the way fathers are,” she says.

At some point, Jane began to realize that their relationship wasn’t right because she couldn’t talk about it or tell anyone. “Then, instead of thinking the incest was not good or it was a mistake, I began to think I am not good and I am a mistake,” she says.

During her teen years, Jane’s life grew steadily worse. Her relationships with boys became a problem as Jane struggled with knowing how to handle affection appropriately. Like most incest survivors, she fell victim to extremes. “On the one hand, I wouldn’t let a boy I was dating kiss me for two years. But, then, I let another boy put his hands all over me. I sat there like I didn’t know it was happening. I had learned that when something like that happens to you, you just lie still, and after a while it will go away.”

Troubled by chronic yeast and urinary infections, Jane grew more and more depressed. Finally, at 16, she slashed her wrists in the first of four suicide attempts. Ten years later, after her father died, she tried to kill herself once again. That time she almost succeeded and had to spend nearly four weeks in a hospital’s psychiatric ward. Strangely enough, no one there ever asked her about the possibility of incest.

She got in touch with her abuse only three years ago when she entered therapy to deal with the anticipated loss of two foster children. Still single, she had kept two foster children for nearly a year, a six-month old and a three-year-old, both of whom had been sexually abused. She “freaked out” when she learned that the courts were about to return the children to their abusive home.

“I started to see these flashbacks of memory during therapy. And they kept getting bigger and bigger. I knew I had been abused emotionally and physically, but I had blocked out so much of the sexual stuff,” she says.

Not remembering the abuse until late in life is not uncommon, says writer Laura Davis, who co-wrote *The Courage to Heal*, a 1988 best-selling handbook for survival. The experiences often are revealed when women enter therapy and fragments of memory are triggered.

Part of the recovery mechanism for incest victims is dealing with those parts of the memory suddenly coming into consciousness, says Jane, who is now a therapist herself. She describes the process as agonizing.

Although some experts believe confrontation with the abuse is a necessary part of recovery. Jane did not confront either of her parents. Her father had died 11 years prior to her therapy, and the week she had planned to speak with her mother, she died from cancer. “But I really think she knew. During the last week of her life she told me that she knew they hadn’t done right by me,” says Jane.

Recovery is not easy. Childhood incest has a life-long impact on its victims. “This is something I will never get over completely,” says Jane. The messages her parents filled her with had to be replaced with self-esteem. Even though she quit dating at 26, she believes that trust for men is slowly returning. Still, she feels cautious about relationships. “I get sucked into relationships that victimize me. I still have trouble knowing where boundaries are. I don’t know whether people are trying to be my friends or use me,” she says.

Jane also had to deal with the impact of her experiences on her faith. In her 20s, she threw herself into church work, driving herself to serve on all kinds of committees and programs. Then she burned out. “I realized that I was trying to do the same thing with God I had tried to do with my parents all my life. I was trying to prove I am worthy to be loved.” Because she felt ashamed and hypocritical, she refused to go to church for several years.

Issues of trust have understandably been a significant part of the therapeutic process. “I deal with a lot of trust issues. And this had really hampered my trust in God at times. When you have had a father who wasn’t all he was cracked up to be, and that father is supposed to be a wonderful spiritual leader, it really messes up your mind to try to think of God as your father,” says Jane.

At times she has felt enraged that she had to endure so much pain. Once, while she was listening to a religious tape, a song about God’s love began to play in her car radio. “I jerked it out and slung it so hard that I cracked my back windshield. I screamed, “You don’t love me, God! You don’t love me! You never protected me! You threw me to the wolves!” She feels she isn’t nearly as angry toward God now, and she says she has learned it’s okay to be angry with God. “It’s not really him I’m angry with anymore; it’s the circumstances I have lived through.”

Thanks to Christian friends and therapy she is back in worship services, and she says that she could never have survived without God and without her faith. “I have held on to one scripture like a rock through my dark moments. ‘And the God of grace, who called you to his eternal glory

in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.’

“To me that means that after you have come through those things which the world deals to you, God will be there for you if you will let him. He will pick you up and put your broken pieces back together again in his own time and in his own way,” says Jane.

Today Jane feels hopeful about her future. Because of her own experiences, she is able to help her own clients, many of whom are also survivors of abuse. And she will continue to speak out in the hope that she and other incest survivors can break the cycle of shame and prevent the next generation from suffering.

Sense of Worship, Part 2 – I Saw the Lord

*by Ken Young
June, 1992*

The year was 1985. For those of us with 3-year-old sons it was the year of He-Man and “I have the power!” Like many parents I was concerned with how a hero shrouded in violence and sorcery would impact my impressionable child. On several occasions I contemplated the possibility of isolation as a solution. But He-Man was everywhere! He was on television every afternoon and on Saturday mornings. He was celebrated in toy stores, in coloring books, on cereal boxes, and on T-shirts.

One evening while driving home from work, the Lord led my thoughts to a plan that would steer my son’s heart away from an unhealthy obsession with He-Man and forever change my family’s vision of Jesus Christ. I was thinking about my efforts to persuade my son to see Jesus the Lamb as a much greater hero than He-Man. But somehow the two images had not seemed to match up in his young, action-oriented mind. Then it hit me. Jesus is not just Lamb – he is also Rider on the White Horse.

One of my favorite texts was Revelation 19:11-16:

I saw heaven open and there before me was a white hoorse, whose rider is called Faithful and True ... His eyes are like blazing fire ... The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses ... On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

It occurred to me, why not make a battle song out of this text and let the victorious image of Jesus as Parthian warrior be impressed on my son’s heart?

I went home and started work on the music that evening. It was finished by midnight. That next day I tried it out on my young warrior and soon we were singing it everywhere we went. Fire would burn in both our hearts as we pictured Jesus in all his heavenly glory and might. It must have happened gradually, but several weeks later it dawned on my wife and me that He-Man had become history. Our son’s new hero had become the Rider on the White Horse.

Soon our whole family was singing the song. Harmony was added and the whole church joined in. It became the most requested song of the children in the congregation. Child after child would come up to me after services with elaborate pictures they had drawn of the Rider and his horse.

I then realized that something had been missing in how we looked at our Savior. We had taken him down from the cross, placed him in a tomb, and that was it – he was dead. In every worship experience I could remember while growing up, I had only seen Jesus as dying or dead. I had always been looking down and had failed to lift my sight to heaven and witness the dazzling glory of a resurrected Christ.

I am reminded of John's experience in Revelation, chapter 1:

*I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me.
And when I turned I saw ... someone "like a son of man"
His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow,
and his eyes were like blazing fire.
His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace,
and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters ...
His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.*

The Bible goes on to say that John's first reaction to the glory of Jesus was to be overwhelmed and it seems he fainted. But Jesus didn't let him stay down long. With a tender hand he lifted John to his feet and invited him to enjoy his spectacular glory. I believe this is what my son experienced in his young heart. His new hero captivated his focus with such a commanding presence. And, aren't we all yearning for such captivity?

Throughout the Bible we read of the manifestation of God's presence. It was almost always accompanied by a brilliant display of light. This light was known in Hebrew as *shekinah*, meaning "to dwell or to reside with."

In Exodus, Moses daringly asked God to show him his glory. God granted him this request. The experience had a profound effect on Moses emotionally and physically.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord (Exodus 34:29).

This glorious light was present in the tabernacle, in the temple, and at the transfiguration of Jesus. And let's not forget, it must have also been part of Adam and Eve's experience in the garden. I wonder if their faces, like the face of Moses, were radiant after seeing God's glory. If so, you can imagine how their misery grew even deeper when, after being driven from his presence, they looked into each other's faces and realized a light was fading that would not return?

Something deep within me longs for the day when I will bask in the brilliant presence of God. Paul talks about this deep desire in Romans 8:22-25 and in 2 Corinthians 5:1-5. I want to gaze into his glory as I stand before his throne. I want to not only feast my eyes on the Rider on the White Horse, but I want to embrace him as he welcomes me home.

Until then, I want to enjoy every moment of the Holy Spirit's ministry in my life as I worship God. I may not be able to witness his glory in a physical sense, but Jesus has provided a connection to heaven through his Spirit that carries my heart into his radiant light.

There is great awakening occurring in the church today that is causing people to abandon their fears and guilt and look into the face of Jesus. As a worship leader I am blessed to always be looking at the faces of my brothers and sisters as we worship God together. There is a growing

radiance in an increasing number of those faces. This radiance is most evident in the children. But then, they have always been able to see the Lord with the clearest vision.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14,15).

Lord, like children, let us enter your presence. Let us lift our eyes and see you in your glory. Let us listen as you proclaim to all creation, **"I HAVE THE POWER!"** Amen.

The Fire Next Time: Reflections on the L.A. Riots

by Billie Silvey
June, 1992

The mountain of tinder was there. Letting off the Los Angeles policemen who beat the black man was just the match that set it off. Just like letting off the Korean grocer who shot a black teenager in the back could have ignited a few weeks earlier. Or it could have been as simple as the police pulling over a black motorist. It was in 1965.

Our cities are primed and waiting to explode. Tensions are high. Decades of neglect, injustice, racism, poor education, bad roads and too-many-people-and-not-enough-pie have formed the tinderheap.

Education budgets are being cut and teachers laid off just as the number of languages spoken in our schools tops 80. Classes of 45 students with many not speaking English are common. Bored, frustrated students pick fights. And teachers are supposed to educate students about values, sex, and cultural diversity as well as teach reading and writing?

Our freeways are clogged. A thirty-minute drive easily stretches to an hour and a half as traffic stops, then creeps forward, then stops again. Tempers flare, and people shout, flash obscene gestures and occasionally fire guns.

I've watched at our local post office as a Vietnamese and a black mail clerk struggle to decipher the needs of Hispanics and Koreans and people from India. And the rest of us stand in line, checking our watches, and complaining about how slow services.

"God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!" James Baldwin wrote three decades ago. We didn't listen. How much burning will it take before we wake up to the decay of our cities?

I've just spent a week watching my city go up in flames. "I Love LA" is more than a slogan to me. I came as a student in 1965 and have never thought of leaving. I spent 12 years in South-Central Los Angeles and worship with a church there to this day.

Currently, we live in a racially-diverse area where 85% of the students in our high school district are so-called "minorities." Both my kids graduated here, and my daughter teaches in the district.

I watched the same television coverage everybody else did. But I recognized many of the stores I saw burning. I'd shopped there.

"Why were the looters attacking their own neighborhoods?" many asked. One reason was that holy American icon, Greed. There was more truth than we might like to admit in the political cartoon that showed one looter saying to another, "Just like Wall Street in the '80s!"

Another was poverty and need. I saw people carrying rolls of toilet paper and boxes of Pampers – hardly big-ticket items on the black market.

Janet Clayton, an editor for the *Los Angeles Times*, quotes a friend who explains it this way: “Haven’t you ever been so mad you hit your own hand and hurt it? Why is that so hard for people to understand? It’s like a man who is belittled and put down by his boss constantly, and then comes home and takes it out on his wife and family. It’s not right, but there’s a lot of self-hate involved.”

Wednesday I sat in stunned silence, thankful that my husband warned me about the trouble before I drove in to teach my Bible class just blocks from the intersection where the trucker was beaten. Where were the police? They’re usually thick in the area.

Thursday I struggled to get calls through to see if our church building was still standing and to check on a friend.

Then I had to pick up groceries for the week. We waited in lines that stretched to the back of the building, then bagged our own groceries. We talked and joked with strangers. People have never been so courteous – “Excuse me,” “I’m sorry,” “Could I, please?”

The tensions was so thick you could see it in the air. We were afraid of each other. We were afraid of ourselves if things got out of hand.

Saturday we drove down riot-torn streets that could have been Beirut, or Mexico City after the earthquake – any place but home. We were searching for a place to unload our shovels and brooms and get to work.

Three Unitarian friends from a mostly white suburb went with us. We pulled up beside a van with the words “Normandie Church of Christ” printed on the side.

“Do you know where we can help?” we yelled.

“Just follow us,” they called back.

We all worked together to put things back together. Before we finished, there must have been 50 people in our group alone.

I was especially impressed with the Hispanic workers in their green T-shirts with a company logo. When I asked them what it meant, they explained that they worked for a maintenance service. They cleaned all week and were donating their time to do the same on the weekend!

We worked together – as one friend put it, “showing each other that we trust each other” – a diverse group of races and ages.

Still I was struck by the futility of it all. We were cleaning the sidewalks so people could shop in a neighborhood where most of the stores had been gutted. Next would come the heavy

equipment to level the charred walls that were still standing. Then, hopefully, eventually, someone would build or rebuild. But what would touch real problems?

The next Sunday, John Jefferson preached to us on “Wouldn’t It Be Wonderful ...?” He didn’t say anything new. He just talked about Jesus, about treating each other right, about forgiving. But sitting in that building, hearing the sirens and the helicopters overhead, feeling the devastation around us, his words took on a new and vital meaning.

When he slapped the pulpit to make a point, I must have jumped a foot. Nobody slept through that sermon. We talk about revitalizing worship, but maybe a healthy dose of reality is all it takes.

Now the rioting is over, the curfew’s been lifted, the National Guard has been pulled back, and most of us are back at work and school. But that pile of tinder still smolders. Our cities are just waiting to explode into flames.

What can we do about it? What can we do about Christian people who fear other Christian people because of the color of their skin? How can we reassure people of “liberty and justice for all” when they can’t walk down certain streets without being stopped and frisked by the police? How can we cut through the red tape of loan forms and building permits for people who are only marginally literate? With budget cuts everywhere, how can we promise their children a better chance?

I don’t know the answers. I only know that if we don’t start figuring them out, the whole horror will be repeated with the next match. And this time it might be struck in our neighborhood.

What is Success?

*by Bob Hendren
June, 1992*

Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the LORD" (Jeremiah 9:24).

Everybody loves a success story. Hour-long commercials on cable TV promise you can have the same great successes as the man talking to you from his huge yacht. These successful persons glow down upon you from the balconies of their expensive chateaus. They win you with enticing words promising you the same material success. Thousands bite but few prosper. Seldom do we learn, seldom do we profit. Amid this welter of words, the biblical model of success stands distinctly apart from the worldly model.

The Bible measures success in an entirely different manner from contemporary evaluations. Success-centered schemes which have the "Bottom Line" as their goal are not only foreign to God's Spirit, but destructive of spiritual growth. What is demanded by God is not success, but faithfulness. When secular society lives and dies by the bottom line, it surprises no one. When God's people import the commercial model of success into the Kingdom and judge and evaluate by standards of statistics, material benefits, and performance, the hope for true fruit of the Spirit is minimized.

Imagine you could invite any Bible character you desired to speak at your next Evangelism Workshop. Unfortunately, by the time you got around to inviting them only two were left, Jonah and Jeremiah. Paul, Peter, Luke and Apollos were all taken early on. You had to decide between Jonah and Jeremiah. Now, in the discussion of which you would choose a lively debate emerged. You were all for Jeremiah, but some of the members make cogent arguments for Jonah:

"OK," said Sam, "I admit Jeremiah is an interesting character, but how much enthusiasm can a 'weeping prophet' stir upon at an upbeat seminar like ours? Not only is Jeremiah a downer, but what kind of success record does he have? Why, every time he preached the number of believers seemed to whrink!"

"Yeah!" Joe broke in, "... and how about that Temple of the Lord sermon? Talk about a mood buster! he had his chance to turn things round in a big way, but he really blew it. Ended up all alone in a cistern, if I remember correctly. What kind of track record is that?"

"The bottom line," I heard J.R. say, "is which of the two had the most success? That's the only realistic basis for bringing in a speaker. No matter how much hard work Jeremiah put in, he had so little to show for it. Granted, we could invite him in to do our Grief Survival Seminar next fall. Maybe give him a topick like 'Limping through Lamentations' or something, but the bottom line is clearly weighted in favor of Jonah."

“Yeah,” I heard Sol echo J.R. – like he usually did at all our meetings. After all, J.R. was our best bottom line advocate and Sol worked for him down at the bank. “Yeah,” Sol continued. “J.R.’s right. Jeremiah’s no good for an Evangelism Workshop. Jonah, now, though he was reluctant at first, really got with with the program after the fish thing. With this little ol’ simple sermon he brought the whole city of Ninevah to its knees.”

“Wow! What an Evangelist!” J.R. opined. “A whole city! Hundreds of thousands of pagans falling down before the Lord! Who in the Bible could top that record? Even Paul didn’t convert that many people in his whole career. We’re blessed that Jonah’s still available. I can see the ads now: ‘Come listen to the man who converted a WHOLE city!’”

“The only problem I see,” Don chimed in, “is we know he hates to travel by water, but we can get him an airline ticket by tomorrow night if he’s willing to come.”

“Just a minute, guys!” I found myself shouting. “You’re just looking at success in the wrong way! Sure Jonah reached a lot of people, but he was basically an unwilling evangelist. Don’t you remember the gourd vine? Don’t you remember how he despised God’s grace toward the pagans? God doesn’t demand success from his people; he demands faithfulness! Jeremiah was faithful in a decadent time. In that way he was a big success! Taking God seriously is being spiritually successful. I vote for Jeremiah.”

J.R. looked cynically around the table. “How many for Jeremiah?” I held up my hand. I was alone. J.R. smiled and said, “Sorry, kid; the ayes have it. Get Jonah on the line, Solly.”

This flight of fancy will never occur, of course, but if it does, we can only hope it will not come out as above. But, is it true that Bible success is not defined in the same way as worldly success? Worldly success is often based on the bottom line, not how you got your results, but did you get them? In addition, the worldly success model demands results to the extent that if you must have success you’ll get it even if you have to cheat.

The biblical model points to God who looks for faithfulness in his servants. Sometimes, in the right environment, when the proper preparation has been done, the “fields are white for harvest” (John 4). Sometimes, all one can do is proclaim the truth of God in a decaying atmosphere of faithlessness. Whether many visible results follow is not a human determinative, as Paul wrote: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth” (1 Corinthians 3).

All increase, all growth, is ultimately from God. If a person is faithful to God he or she will be saved regardless of the “bottom line.” Paul illustrates this well in 1 Corinthians 3: His teaching contrasts those building on the foundation of Christ with those who are extremely successful at tearing up the Temple of God and disturbing the Holy Spirit. The first group labor away with various successes. What they have in common is their constructive approach in contrast to destructive workers. Though it is presumed the destructive workers are quite successful in their work all their success gains them is eternal isolation from God.

Among the constructive workers there are varying degrees of permanence in their work. Some build so well that their results are like gold and precious gems. Others do not work as effectively,

and still others have nothing left to show for their work since nothing survives the fire of judgment. We would expect to hear that these latter “unsuccessful” persons would be lost, if for nothing else, their lack of efficiency. Surprisingly, though they are no doubt grieved at the impermanence of work, they themselves are saved! Why? Because they were building on the foundation of faithfulness to God who called them to minister!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer remarked: “to the man in love with success, the figure of the Crucified is an enigma.” “The son of God,” in Thieliicke’s phrase, “came through the back door of the world into a stable in Bethlehem.” Jesus himself said the “Son of man has no place to lay his head.”

From a pragmatic viewpoint, Jesus did not succeed in building a great earthly movement. At the time of his death, even his closest friends had fled from him. The world could have judged the whole enterprise a failure. Yet, in the power of the Spirit, the entire Roman world and beyond would soon hear of the Crucified One.

Perhaps the time has come to admit that human endeavor has gone as far as it can. We have seen some Herculean labors to establish what hard work can accomplish. We have tried to build great churches on our own, by our own wisdom and strength. Can we now move aside and be open to the same Spirit who empowered the disciples of that far-reaching spiritual success?

Movie Review: Grand Canyon – Staring Into a Canyon of Despair, Looking for Hope

*by Larry James
June, 1992*

As the twentieth century rushes to its surprising conclusion, post-modern men and women live with an ever-increasing awareness that no one controls life's uncertain future. The desire and inability to control what life delivers; a sense of the utter smallness, insignificance, and yet, inherent value of each person; the increasing intensity of human suffering; and an ongoing, desperate search for meaning, belonging and purpose in life, provide the thematic structure for Lawrence Kasdan's gripping film, "Grand Canyon."

Kasdan paints a mural of urban life in the 1990s. Set in Los Angeles, the story opens with scene moving quickly from a ghetto game of pickup basketball to front row at the Forum where two old friends take in a Lakers' game. Leaving the arena, Davis, a Hollywood producer of violent movies (played by Steve Martin), comments to his best friend Mack (Kevin Kline), "We live in chaos ... everyone is trying to control their fear."

Mack discovers quickly just how true and personal his friend's words can become. Trying to avoid an after-game traffic jam, Mack gets lost in one of the most dangerous sections of the city. While attempting to find his way out of the unfamiliar neighborhood, his brand new Lexus, as well as his high-tech car phone, fails him. After calling for a wrecker from a pay phone, Mack returns to his car only to be mugged by a gang of street-wise thugs all under the age of 20. Enter Simon, the wrecker driver who undoubtedly saves Mack's life in good Kasdan style (i.e. "The Big Chill"). The film introduces several characters who struggle with what have become the "typical" problems of living in the chaos of our day. By the end of the film, all share a connection to one another forged by their common search for meaning and purpose in life. Apart from its artistic appeal, "Grand Canyon" provides a crash course in identifying and understanding the gut issues faced by ordinary, secular men and women today.

First, life feels out of control. In spite of our best efforts at controlling what happens to us, no one succeeds. Throughout the film, L.A. Police Department helicopters fly overhead, patrolling the unfolding scenes below, yet incapable of intervening in any meaningful or appropriate manner to improve the quality of the life observed from above. These helicopters symbolize both the desire and the inability of people to control the events of life.

Every character tries to gain some control over life. The young gang leader who faces Simon carries a handgun. When Simon asks the young thief the favor of letting him do his job by hauling Mack's car away, the angry youth replies he will grant the favor, but first Simon must answer his questions, "Are you asking me a favor as a sign of respect or are you asking me the favor because I got the gun?" Simon responds, "Man, the world ain't supposed to work like this. I mean maybe you don't know that, but this ain't the way it's supposed to be ... everything's supposed to be different from what it is ... You don't have the gun, we ain't having

this conversation.” With a cynical smile the young thief fires back, “That’s what I thought. No gun, no respect. That’s why I always got the gun.”

The families and friends of Simon and Mack fill the screen with example after example of the fear and the futility of attempting to live in a world seemingly out of control. Each example argues convincingly that modern life promises no control.

Second, due to a growing awareness of helplessness, people live today with a sense of their own smallness and personal insignificance in the grand scheme of things. Simon turns philosopher when he asks Mack if he has ever been to the Grand Canyon. The canyon, from Simon’s perspective, makes people seem so small. “What a joke we people are ... Those rocks are laughing at me and my worries,” Simon muses. What we do just doesn’t seem to matter of this timeless hole in the ground.

Third, in spite of all of the negatives they face, people spend their lives searching for meaning, purpose, and belonging. For teenaged Otis, life’s purpose is found in gang membership until firsthand experience with a violent death pulls him up short. Clare, Mack’s wife, discovers meaning in mothering her soon-to-be-gone teenaged son, Roberto, and an abandoned infant she finds while jogging in her neighborhood. Simon’s family, racked by violence, physical handicaps, and divorce, provides him reason for living; though at times he wonders, like his eighty-two-year old father before him, about the power of “habit” to keep a person going. Career drives and defines Davis. Mack searches for the meaning behind the strange, seemingly random occurrences that link as well as rescue, people from life’s tragic moments.

A real hunger for God lurks just beneath the surface throughout the movie. Simon’s preoccupation with the Grand Canyon reveals an almost universal human longing for spiritual experience. At a critical moment in Clare’s search for direction, she cries out to Mack, “There are babies lying around in the streets. There are people living in boxes. There are people ready to shoot you if you look at them. And we are getting used to it. The world is so nuts it makes me wonder about all the choices we’ve made.” The passion of her call for some sort of shift in basic values makes this rather typical, upper-middle class mother sound like an ancient prophet of justice. Later she argues with Mack about why they should adopt the infant she found beside the road, “I believe there is a reason I found her ... You can dismiss it all you want, but I’ll always believe that ... What if there are miracles, Mack? maybe we don’t have any experience with miracles, so we’re slow to recognize them?”

“Grand Canyon” accurately portrays most of the fears, questions, longings, and battles confronting our contemporaries. The film provides excellent cultural “source material” for anyone concerned to better understand the secular mindset of millions of “unchurched” Americans. Through its horror and bleak nihilism, “Grand Canyon” offers Christians quite a challenge. How do we respond to a culture so gripped by fear and hopelessness? What word should today’s church speak to people like Mack and Simon? The tired slogans of sectarian religion will not gain us a hearing from people living in an out-of-control world. Neither will the naive efforts of some sort of “do-gooder” social activism. The questions posed by “Grand Canyon” cut to the heart of human existence.

As I watched the movie, I thought of how Jesus talked to people caught up in the struggles of life. I remembered what he did with and for those same people. Even more, the film caused me to reflect on how hopeless my life would be without Jesus. People today live with great, gaping holes in their hearts and souls, some as large as the canyon Simon keeps calling his friend to consider. As I watched the brave little band of unlikely friends stare off into the awesome beauty of the amazing canyon at the conclusion of the film, I saw Jesus looking back. For every question this really fine movie raises, Jesus remains the only viable answer. Those of us who know the Answer personally must become more adept at developing meaningful relationships with people who daily ask these contemporary and relevant questions.

The Bond of Peace

by C. Leonard Allen
June, 1992

In 1841, representatives from 29 churches of the Restoration Movement met in Nashville to discuss matters of church policy and teaching. According to the report of the gathering, someone asked the question whether or not the Bible permits Christians to differ from one another.

To this question someone answered that “In the kingdom of Messiah, all the subjects are bound to think alike.” “The Bible reveals every religious duty,” the answer continued, therefore differences among believers “always manifest either ignorance of the law or a determination to rebel against it.” The report noted that “all agreed thereto.”

In the mid 1850s, faced with upheaval and division in the Nashville church, Tolbert Fanning said essentially the same thing. “Everything is a subject of authority and there is no room for debate,” he wrote. “We have complete instructions in all matters pertaining to religion, or we have nothing.” Thus, regarding the “externals, or ordinances” of the faith, he could write that “the least change, whatever, not only annihilates them, but all genuine religion.”

This viewpoint marked a considerable shift away from the movement’s pioneers. The earliest leaders had envisioned a large realm of diversity in the reading of the Bible. Barton Stone, Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, and others had said, “In faith, unity; in opinions, liberty.” They acknowledged that even the most sincere and diligent believers would not agree at many points. But all could agree, they believed, on the basic facts of the gospel – the essentials that belonged to no sect or party.

But by the 1840s and ’50s the realm of allowable diversity had narrowed sharply in a segment of the movement.

In this context, Dr. Robert Richardson, Campbell’s close friend and associate editor, published a small book entitled, *The Principles and Objects of the Religious Reformation, Urged by A. Campbell and Others, Briefly Stated and Explained*. Campbell praised it, noting that it “gives a well-proportioned miniature view” of the movement’s original goals.

The movement rested, Richardson said, upon three basic principles.

First, was a distinction between faith and opinion. The Protestant churches, he said, sought to take the Bible alone, and that certainly was proper. But in their great zeal for pure doctrine they committed a serious error: they went “too much into detail,” constructing elaborate confessional statements and measuring orthodoxy by agreement on a sizeable body of doctrine.

To make a proper distinction between faith and opinion, Richardson argued, one cannot simply say, “The Bible alone is our creed.” For the Bible is a rich, detailed, and complex library that can

occupy the greatest minds for a lifetime. Expecting people to unite by understanding it alike will simply insure continued division in the Christian Ranks.

In claiming to take the Bible alone, Richardson said, many believers fail to distinguish between the Bible and the gospel. The gospel, Richardson believed, consisted of the simple facts of Christ's death, burial and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This was the baseline of faith. Believers would never unite on a broad doctrinal platform – 300 years of protestant wrangling and division had proved that – but they could unite on the simple facts of the gospel.

When one received these facts into one's heart by faith, one was saved; and "that alone which saves men, can unite them." The great confession, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," should therefore serve as the "only authorized test of orthodoxy." "Let the Bible be our spiritual library; but let the Gospel be our standard of orthodoxy," Richardson said. "Let the Bible be our test of Christian character and perfection, but let the Christian confession be our formula of Christian adoption and Christian union."

The second basic principle of the movement, Richardson said, was a distinction between "the Christian faith" and "doctrinal knowledge." What does it mean to believe in Christ? he asked. He answered that it means not simply to receive his doctrine or to believe what he says. Rather it means to be brought into "direct relation and fellowship with Him; to think of Him as a person whom we know, and to whom we are known." It means to speak to him and listen to him as one would a close friend.

"Christ is not a doctrine, but a person," Richardson urged. At its heart Christian faith centers on a person, not a body of doctrines. It does not consist essentially in the "accuracy of intellectual conceptions," but in a certain kind of life – a transformed inner life and a fruitful outer life. The broad expanse of biblical doctrine, he carefully pointed out, must never be discounted, for it serves as an important superstructure. But it does not provide the foundation. That is found only in a deeply personal relationship with Christ – and "the foundation must precede the superstructure."

The main problem behind a fragmented Christian world, Richardson believed, is that people confuse trust in a living savior with belief in certain doctrines. When this happens, faith gets "supplanted by polemics." sectarian belligerence and rivalry mount. Doctrinal creeds, whether written or unwritten, become the basic measure of orthodoxy, and people inevitably grow distant from Christ. They grow distant, Richardson said, because a "syllabus of doctrine has no power to enlist the heart and the energies of the soul in the true work of Christ."

Indeed, what "every true sectary lacks" is this personal reliance on Christ. He stands on the walls of his camp and asks those who seek to enter, not "In whom do you believe?" but rather "What do you believe?"

The first two basic principles provided the foundation for the third: the restoration of "SIMPLE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY" as the true basis for Christian union. Reiterating much of Campbell's original agenda, Richardson said that the movement sought to

restore “the gospel and its institutions, in all their original simplicity, to the world.” This, he thought, was the scriptural basis – and only hope – for the visible union of believers.

But Richardson made a significant distinction. Commenting on Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17, he distinguished sharply between unity and union. Unity, he said, referred to “a spiritual oneness with Christ,” while union was “an avowed agreement and co-operation of Christians with each other.”

Most interpreters of John 17, he said, mistake union for unity. They suppose that Jesus’ prayer for unity has not been answered and thus expect “some future fusion of all religious parties into one, or the creation of some grand overshadowing community” of faith. But Jesus’ prayer has been answered, Richardson insisted. Not in a universal, visible union, of course, but in a spiritual unity. The sinful state of humankind “utterly precludes the possibility of any denominational or organic union among believers in this wide world,” he said, “but the unity for which Christ prayed is always, and has been always, not only possible but existent.” This unity is a spiritual oneness created by the presence of the Holy Spirit for which Christ prayed. It is not a doctrinal uniformity or an ironing of differences, but a oneness given by joint participation in the Spirit.

Of course, Richardson said, believers should pray for visible union, for the breakdown of “the bigotry of denominationalism and the rancor of party spirit.” But such a prayer is always a prayer for the Spirit and should not be “misapplied to so inferior a matter, and one so improbable, as a future, universal, organic Christian union.”

Late in Richardson’s life a correspondent told him about a union overture with Baptists in Virginia and asked his opinion. “We were part of the Baptists in the arly days,” replied Richardson, “and have never wholly separated. There were sharp controversies, to be sure, but “at no time have we separated ourselves, or denied fellowship to a Baptist brother, or refused to receive as a member any one accredited by a letter from a Baptist church. We, in reality, ever claimed the Baptists as our brethren.”

At a time when some leaders in the movement insisted that all true Christians were “bound to think alike,” Robert Richardson held up a different vision – the one that he thought had first launched the movement. The demand for doctrinal uniformity, he believed, inevitably entangled believers in the “bonds of partyism,” while only a unity in the Spirit drew them together in the “bond of peace.”

For Further Reading

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AfterGlow: Divine Empowerment

by Phillip Morrison
June, 1992

In our most optimistic dreams we never imagined that the response to the premier issue of *Wineskins* would be so positive and enthusiastic. Though we will not have a regular “Letters to the Editor” section, we do want to share these reactions with our readers.

A long-time friend wrote,

“As the idea of the magazine began to unfold, and as I received meager information about its emphasis on church renewal, I felt some degree of anxiety and even concern ... I should have ... trusted all of you to remake and refocus the best in church renewal and not the worst of its history. The first issue has done exactly that – remind us that the conversion of the Christian’s heart to Jesus is always the prerequisite to Christian action. Your purpose statement sets forth in every way the best of the hopes for Christianity as we know it. I love the church of my heritage, but I am not blind to its shortcomings, even sins ... I wouldn’t trade our problems as a religious fellowship with the problems of any religious group I know. So it is refreshing to read of your commitment to encourage and help all of us in Churches of Christ.”

A new friend wrote, *“I found a message on every page straight to my heart. It has indeed been a long time since I have heard anyone in the church speak to the needs that I experience every day. I have indeed quite dreaming ... We have closed ourselves into our buildings and formed a circular firing squad.”*

I thought of those two letters in light of this issue’s focus on the power of the powerless. Who is powerless? The abuse or incest victim? The people unable to break out of poverty’s bondage? The people bound by an ecclesiastical system which prevents them from knowing the Father? Yes, these are all powerless, just as we all are.

Even the human Jesus was powerless, by his own testimony: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; ... My teaching is not my own ... I do nothing on my own” (John 5:19, 7:16, 28; 8:28). If Jesus acknowledged his weakness and lack of power by proclaiming that his power came from the Father, can we do any less?

When the powerless, out of despair and frustration, pour out their rage and rebellion, the response is often a call for more law and order. But Paul recognized that even the “law was powerless ... in that it was weakened by the sinful nature” (Romans 8:3). What no person can do and no law can do, God can do!

Weakness and strength are always found together when we are dealing with God. As Paul reflected on the successes and failures of his life, he expressed his fondest hope: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming

like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10, 11).

David spoke for the powerless of every age as he exalted the Lord: “Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now our God, we give ... you thanks, and praise your glorious name” (1 Chronicles 29:12, 13).

Empowerment may be a '90s buzzword, but the concept is as old as man. Adam and Eve sinned when they listened to the wrong voice, chose the wrong power. They were empowered and didn't know it! Even more are we empowered by the Christ in whom we can do all things (Philippians 4:13).