

Taylor University

## Pillars at Taylor University

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Milo Rediger Writings & Addresses

Milo Rediger

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### Spiritual Shock-Absorbers

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## SPIRITUAL SHOCK-ABSORBERS

Read James 1:2-8 -- first from New English Bible  
then from Phillips translation.

One of the weaknesses of Protestantism, and especially of the free church movement, is our tendency to be unstable, to be in and out or up and down. To a certain extent, it is a built-in feature of evangelicalism. We sponsor, and we believe in the necessity of, periods of revival and refreshing. There is an extent to which this is good, and we say it is scriptural. I am not sure that we understand clearly all of the scriptural references on which we base our convictions about methods and procedures; however, let it be sufficient now to agree that a time of spiritual emphasis is appropriate and necessary.

The weakness I referred to is the excessive variations which so frequently occur, both in the life of Christian groups and in the experience of individuals. Once the register shows hot and happy; again, the weather-vane points to cloudy and cold. A verbal testimony witnesses to faith and victory in Jesus Christ; then the life in action tells an opposite story. There is a period of apparent spiritual fervor; then comes pre-vacation week or the last half of the month of March and we get so low that we have to look up to see the bottom.

I am not unaware of the psychological implications and complications in group living, and I know there are mood patterns which can be traced by experience. But I wish we were not always so quick to excuse ourselves, rationalize our behavior, and justify ourselves by reference to circumstances. I am interested in staying qualities which minimize the extent of the variations and tend toward a steadiness which engenders confidence and fosters growth. We shouldn't always be starting over again. This tendency has played beautifully into the hands of unscrupulous evangelists who have used the statistics from one meeting to sell their services to the next congregation.

Let me illustrate the tendency in areas other than strictly religious services. Two years ago we had a serious fire on this campus which destroyed the administration-

classroom building. Of course, it stirred the emotions of all of us, and some of us had more at stake than others. The emotionally stable people thought fast at the same time that they were feeling deeply. Consequently, a transitional program was worked out which made the loss as nearly unnoticeable as such a loss could possibly be. And the whole experience became an occasion for the demonstration of almost heroic spiritual qualities on the part of many, many people -- teachers, students, staff, administrators (I hope), townfolk, fire departments, commercial companies, friends near and far.

The unstable people, the people who felt much but thought little, said, "Is this the end of Taylor University? Will Taylor die? Will there be a second semester? Will the alumni have no alma mater?" And then almost two years later, after all the evidence of the January 1960 miracle, some students, at a half-time program during the last football game of this season, were still talking about how Taylor almost died in the Ad Building fire. You see, they had missed the whole point of the experience. They had lived only on the fringes of reality, on the spectacular alka-seltzer fizz around the edges of the truth.

Let me say it with emphasis: Taylor was not about to die! Don't you remember? Not one person perished in that fire! Not the night watchman, not the maintenance supervisor, not a fireman -- and I might remind you, not a student or faculty member! There was no loss of life in the fire -- and Taylor is people! Sure, we lost a lot of papers and beakers and classroom space, and even unreplaceable museum pieces. But it wasn't a dormitory that burned, or Shreiner Auditorium packed with 600 students! Taylor stays because it is people and spirit that do not die, or even vary too much with the vicissitudes of the times. In the fire we lost many important things, but it was all in the realm of material plant; we can even replace the records that represent the living values of past generations of students.

I visit colleges for the N.C.A. Liberal Arts Study -- and, by the way, let me relieve the pressure a little with a humorous bit from my visit to Madonna College last November ----- and in every college I sit for at least an hour with stud-



ents in order to discover how serious they are about education and about their college. Recently, at Illinois Wesleyan, a student asked in all seriousness, "Which is more important, and which should come first in a good college?- a new and expensive plant, or a good faculty and a good program?" Without analyzing the specific situation out of which the question came, let me say that it was an incisive question, representing a pretty mature student mind and attitude. A wonderful plant might be destroyed because it is largely material; a good college stays and goes on and on because it is an accumulation of the best of us and of more than we are. Each of us needs to participate and grow in these staying qualities, and this, in a context of grace and faith, is the purpose of a period of revival.

And this kind of college can be moved! People have said, "How can you leave that beautiful new dining room -- and you can't take it with you?" I reply, "We can build another one like it somewhere else, if it is better for the college to be somewhere else." Do you remember the refugee universities of the second world, and the Korean wars? They left their buildings, but they moved the colleges when the people and their books and their spirit moved! We need good spiritual shock absorbers which will keep us steady when the wheels bump up and down in the ruts and over the rocks of time and circumstance. And this is what spiritual emphasis week is for.

I have tried to point out that one reason for our instability is that we do not penetrate the heart of spiritual reality, but satisfy ourselves and employ our energies in the peripheral and shallow things. I suggest another reason -- too often when we do concern ourselves about the more important things, we fail to exercise the wisdom which would give us proper perspective and keep our attention focused on our business and our proper place in the whole scheme of things. We cannot know everything about everything, and we must test and check our interests and activities in relation to goals and responsibilities within a frame of reference in which God is the head and many, many members make up the whole body.

Do you remember the scripture which says -- (read Phillips, I Cor. 12:16 ff). You know what a weed is, don't you? It is a plant out of place. It may even be a plant which, in other circumstances and surroundings, may be a flower. Likewise, illness in the Christian body is a member out of place, or a member jealous of the function of another member, or one attempting to usurp the function of another, or one failing to find his proper place and gift in relation to all the others. I will draw an example from the field of radio and television commercials, using some of the better ones.

Now, follow my thinking in this illustration -- Standard Oil sings, "Who's got de-icer in the gasoline? Standard, that's who!" Then the advertiser describes how your car stalls on a cold winter morning because the water in the gas line freezes solid. Blue & White comes on the air a little later with a counter-punch: "The gasoline that has no water in it needs no de-icer." Sharp advertising, isn't it -- and generally very effective.

But notice -- neither of these approaches relates directly to the facts. The facts are that, if you do not keep the gas tank full in cold weather, the empty upper part of it, because of temperature changes, condenses the moisture and drips water into the gas -- and, of course, the gas line can freeze solid.

Two points from this illustration are important. First, not all the people are likely to be informed about the scientific data and phenomena involved. Mostly the research people and those who, by training and experience, are able to think it through will be informed. In my illustration, I know less of the explanation than do the science teachers, but I know more of it than do some of you. In fact, the great majority of the people neither will be, nor need to be, completely informed about all the facts in the case. They are served by the people who have prepared themselves to know, and must trust them for leadership in the area of their responsibility.

Second, in spite of this lack of complete information, all the people can profit by the knowledge. Those who do not have direct information may profit indirectly by confidence in those who do. Those who don't know can still drive cars and avoid gas line freeze just as effectively as those who know. As I indicated before, I know less of the explanation than do the science people; but I can go from place to place in the car just as effectively as they do. And note also -- if they neglect to keep the tank full, they will stall on a winter morning and be just as cold and uncomfortable as I would be. (Their only advantage would be the satisfaction of knowing why it happened to them and why they are cold.) Of course, that knowledge probably wouldn't keep their hands and feet warm, nor would it bring help



in the form of a good Samaritan with a two-gallon can of gas. (COMMENT ON LOWELL THOMAS NEWSCAST AND THE MAN WHO RAN OUT OF GAS.) But I don't want to confuse the issue here.

It seems so strange that we can know and trust someone for a long time -- long enough to provide a solid basis for continued confidence. But then some unstable gossip-monger who doesn't bother to check the source of his information or the facts passes on some "bit" that's completely inconsistent with the faith and practice of the individual concerned -- and you would think the five, ten, fifteen or twenty years of consistent living and service were forgotten entirely. The important work of the world -- or of the kingdom of God -- is not done by the unstable people who are "tossed to and fro" by every "wind of doctrine" or "every breeze of gossip". It is done by the people who have staying quality, who have developed spiritual shock absorbers, and who keep moving steadily toward goals of progress and service without being deflected from the course by these influences. Now, I believe in communication, and I know that we never do as well as we should in this respect. But I resent the people who always complain because they haven't been given all the information which is in the minds of those who are responsible for a project and are giving all their time and energy to it. It is a physical impossibility - besides being a presumptuous and impertinent expectation. (USE "RUNNING A COLLEGE" AND "MOVING A COLLEGE" AS EXAMPLES.) Perhaps a "news conference" would be a good idea, but even this leaves much for which the leader must be trusted.

I have discussed only two of many reasons for instability, and have used two rather lengthy illustrations, hoping that each would bear upon several important implications of the subject and of our experience. Next week is spring revival, and God's man will be here to inspire and challenge and lead our thinking. Two weeks from now the leader will be gone; will the revival remain? Will it stay with us in improved relationships and better living? Let me read again from James -----