

# The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

September/October, 1993

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## Church Troubles

When the church prays "hallowed be thy name" it is usually pretty obvious that that holy name is far from hallowed in the way we as church members behave. In our travels we see and hear much about church troubles, and I am always reminded of the high-priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus just before He went to the cross. As He prayed for believers ("those you have given me") His petition was, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one" (Jn 17:11, NIV). For those who would later believe He prayed, "that all of them may be one, Father.... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (Jn 17:21, 23).

The answer to that prayer seems yet remote. Ought we not to put ourselves, each of us as individuals, in a position to cooperate with God in His bringing about this unity? How shall the world recognize His love unless we act in love toward one another? No one, I feel sure, would disagree here—in theory. *Love each other*. The obstacle is our selfish, self-determined selves.

Most churches have problems with the choir. Martin Luther said, "If you can confine the devil's work to the choir, do so." But let's suppose that the problem seems to be the pastor. (I confess to a certain bias in favor of these harried souls—I have a nephew, two-nephews-in-law, a son-in-law, and a brother who are pastors.) He's too young or too old, too conservative or too liberal, his sermons are irrelevant to our needs, or too long or too pointed for this congregation, he's a social mismatch, not sensitive to the variety of folks we've got here, he's partial—in short, we got the wrong man, it's a bad mix, the solution is simple: get rid of him. Then all will be well.

Before we take such a position of sovereignty, assuming we *know* the root of the trouble and are warranted in enforcing our "solution," might we not ask

ourselves a few questions? (I do *not* refer here, of course, to cases which unequivocally call for dismissal, such as immorality or heresy.)

1. Who called this pastor? Was it the bishop? The church? Was the decision prayed over? Do we believe in the Holy Spirit's guidance?

2. Do we understand the shepherd of the flock to be one who bears responsibility and authority? "Encourage and rebuke with all authority" was the apostle Paul's word to a young shepherd (Ti 2:15, NIV). To Timothy he said, "Command and teach" (1 Tm 4:11, NIV). "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority...so that their work will be a joy, not a burden" (Heb 13:17, NIV). Have we respected that divine assignment?

3. If the sheep send the shepherd out of the fold, will not the sheep themselves be devastated, as well as the shepherd? Spiritual devastation is often the result of taking things into our own hands. No humility is wrought in us, no more robust faith is born.

4. Have we learned the meekness which understands the power of patience, of quiet waiting on God, and the futility of employing massive methods to get our own way? What about the reverence that trusts God's hidden, seemingly slow, working out of His own mysterious purposes? Impatience hardens.

5. Have we challenged evil with the wrong weapons? "By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you.... Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Cor 10: 1,3-4, NIV).

6. Are we willing to accept suffering? How much do we know of costly action, sacrificial love? Have we been willing to lay down our lives for this man, travail in prayer, accept the cross in the depths of our own hearts? The demands of faith cut across human logic and politics, and often oppose all ordinary methods and even common sense.

7. Have we pondered Jesus' warning not to expect His church to be without spot or wrinkle? The net brings in good fish and bad. The tares grow along with

the wheat. He is at work perfecting His own bride—we'll never manage it ourselves.

8. Are we willing to let the cross cut painfully—humbly to relinquish our grasp of what we believe to be the true nature of the conflict, let go of our certainties of what "ought to be," and of our particular "rights"? Can we, in the spirit of Christ, mortify our whims, accept setbacks, accustom ourselves to misunderstanding, quit asking "What about *my* needs?" Let God take care of those—He promised He would, ALL of them.

"The Christian turns again and again from that bewildered contemplation of history in which God is so easily lost, to the prayer of filial trust in which He is always found, knowing here that those very things which seem to turn to man's disadvantage may yet work to the Divine advantage. On the frontier between prayer and history stands the Cross, a perpetual reminder of the price by which the Kingdom is brought in" (Evelyn Underhill, ABBA).

Perhaps, if we would earnestly and prayerfully consider these things, both pastor and flock might be changed and the severance thus avoided. Perhaps not, but in the process we, the sheep, will certainly have learned to trust the Chief Shepherd more fully, and will have become a little more like Him.

Love divine has seen and counted  
Every tear it caused to fall,  
And the storm which Love appointed  
Was its choicest gift of all.  
(Anonymous)

## Notes from Spain

In April Lars and I went to Spain. The Pocket Testament League had asked me to speak to a student conference in Huesca. We got off to rather an inauspicious start. Had dinner with a Spanish family, thanked them profusely for the excellent meal, but learned too late that it is not polite to do this. When we tried to say goodbye, they explained that it is not their custom to part with guests at the door. They *all* got on the bus with us, rode a mile or two and took us for coffee before bidding us farewell.

Madrid brought back lovely memories of Quito—the ornate white buildings, balconies, flowers, blue skies, warm sunshine, spacious plazas. My Spanish was usable but decrepit, having been learned in Quito in 1952 and never used much since (jungle Indians had their own languages), so I spoke from the platform by

interpretation but enjoyed conversations in Spanish. Our hostess was missionary Debbie Laws from Iowa, one of those warm and candid people we felt as though we'd known forever. She cheerfully chauffeured us, moved out of her bedroom for us, fed us and thought most lovingly of everything we needed.

Feeling very foreign and inaccessible one morning at the conference I had asked God to give access to speak *His* word to someone. A young woman asked for time to talk, said God was speaking to her in *hard* words I had spoken—"Muy difcil, pero fueron Sus palabras," she said. "Very difficult, but they were *His* words." So thank you, you who were praying with/for me.

Talked with a husband and wife, he very gentle and soft-spoken ("She gives me orders!"), she very strong, very angry, eyes flashing: ("He refuses to do anything in the house! I have a seven-hour-a-day job!!"). Would you put them in your prayers, please?

## Teenage Resolutions: For Mom and Dad

**Resolved:** I will obey your instructions and do what I know you expect of me, even when it is not mentioned. I will not force you into repeated reminders, which I sometimes call nagging.

**Resolved:** I will not grumble or complain when I do my chores, but remember what a great thing it is to have a family and a home and clothes and food and running water and electric light and central heating in a world where millions of teenagers have none of these.

**Resolved:** When I think your demands are unfair, I will move to do them first, and after showing an obedient attitude, I will ask if we can talk. Then I will

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explain my side and try to understand yours.

**Resolved:** I will not stonewall you and give you the silent treatment, which I dislike when my friends do it to me. If I am depressed and want to be left alone, I will say, "I'm sorry, I don't feel like talking now. Can we talk later? I'm not mad, I just need to be alone."

**Resolved:** When I do something wrong and let you down, I will apologize sincerely with words you can hear. Something like: "Mom, I'm sorry I didn't pick up the pile of clothes."

**Resolved:** I will call you by affectionate family titles like "mommy and daddy" or "mom and dad." And I won't let other kids pressure me into calling you nothing, or calling you something disrespectful as though true affection were embarrassing or childish.

**Resolved:** I will say thank you again and again for the ordinary things you do for me. I will not take them for granted as though you are my slave.

**Resolved:** I will talk about my feelings. Both the positive ones (like happiness, pity, excitement, sympathy, etc.) and the negative ones (like anger, fear, grief, loneliness, discouragement, etc.). I will remember that unshared feelings lead to estrangement and coldness and even more loneliness and discouragement.

**Resolved:** I will laugh with the family, not at the family. I will especially laugh when my little brother or sister tells a simple joke with expectant excitement.

**Resolved:** I will give two compliments for every criticism. And every criticism will aim to help someone improve, not just belittle or cut down.

**Resolved:** I will enter into family devotions and treat Bible reading and prayer with respect, and do my part to help others in the family enjoy them. When I don't feel spiritually strong, I will pray about this as a personal need rather than pouring it on others like a glass of cold water. I will remember that confessed weakness knits hearts together.

**Resolved:** I will not return evil for evil or try to justify my meanness because somebody treated me meanly first.

**Resolved:** I will read my Bible and pray every day even if it is only a verse and a brief call for help. I know that teens cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God.

**Resolved:** I will come home at the time we agreed on. If something happens to stop me, I will call and explain and ask your guidance.

**Resolved:** I will greet our guests with courtesy and respect and try to make them glad they came.

**Resolved:** I will always tell the truth so that you can trust me and give me more and more freedom as I get older.

—John Piper, pastor,  
Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis.  
Used with permission.

## *Prayer*

Give me, O Lord,  
A steadfast heart,  
which no unworthy affection  
may drag downwards;

Give me  
An unconquered heart,  
which no tribulation  
can wear out;

Give me  
An upright heart,  
which no unworthy purpose  
may tempt aside.

Bestow on me also, O Lord my God,  
understanding to know You,  
diligence to seek You,  
wisdom to find You,  
and a faithfulness  
that may finally embrace You,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

—Thomas Aquinas

## Inner Darkness

The supreme test of our confidence in God lies, perhaps, in those moments of complete inner darkness in which we feel as though we are forsaken by God. Our heart feels blunt; our prayers for strength and inspiration sound hollow.... An impenetrable wall separates us from God.... An ardent belief in His love; a steadfast conviction that *He* is near to us even though *we* are, or imagine ourselves to be, far way from Him; an unbroken awareness that "He hath first loved us."... These must carry us across the chasms of darkness and lend us strength to blindly let ourselves fall into His arms."

—Dietrich Von Hildebrand,  
*Transformation in Christ*

## Correction

Information in the July/August newsletter was incorrect. Gifts for the Dohnavur Fellowship, Amy Carmichael's work in India, may be sent to the D.M. Stearns Missionary Fund, P.O. Box 1578, North Wales, PA 19454. IMPORTANT: Check to be made out to that fund, NOT to the Dohnavur Fellowship. Enclose a separate note designating the gift for Dohnavur.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

## Travel Schedule September-December 1993

**September 13-15** Asheville, NC; Billy Graham Training Center, (704) 298-2092.

**September 16-18** Eagle River, MI; Lois Stout, (906) 482-1435.

**October 16** Bakersfield, CA; Fruitvale Community Church, June Engel, (805) 399-3153.

**October 22-24** Whiting, NJ; America's Keswick, (908) 350-1187.

**November 5-7** Grosse Pointe, MI; Christ Church, (313) 885-4841.

**November 11-12** Charleston, SC; College of Charleston, Ellenor Mahon, (803) 792-5640.

**November 13** Spartanburg, SC; Westgate Family Physicians Training Center, Donald Dunlap, (803) 574-0070.

**December 3-4** Asheboro, NC; First Baptist Church, (919) 629-9191.

## Keep in Touch

Are you moving? Getting married? Leaving school? Don't forget to send us your change of address. The post office DOES NOT FORWARD third class mail like the Newsletter. Please remove your address label below and send it with your new address to: The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, Post Office Box 7711, Ann Arbor, MI 48107-7711.

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