



## The Mailbox

Letters regarding the contents of the magazine will be considered for publication in "The Mailbox" unless specifically marked "not for publication." Published letters may be shortened to meet editorial requirements. Letters must be signed, but names will be withheld upon request.

**A Better Word?**—I wish to commend the CHRISTIAN STANDARD for its excellence in dealing with both sides of current issues. This is useful in our continuing search for unity.

The article, "Inerrancy—Does It Really Matter?" (November 7) takes up what may prove to be the greatest religious controversy of the last half of the twentieth century. I support everything Mr. Cottrell sets forth in his theme with one exception—his use of the word "inerrant." I have studied under professors who held the Bible inerrant and those who did not hold the Bible inerrant, however, every professor under which I have studied believed the Bible to be the infallible Word of God. This discrepancy points to the problem in using the word "inerrant" in this discussion, for not every believer defends this word in the same manner. Some use the words infallible and inerrant interchangeably while others believe these two words to be different in meaning and use. They point to the fact that "inerrant" means free from error; and while the Bible as we have it today is free from doctrinal error, there are as Mr. Cottrell points out "errors in the transmission of the text." There are no translations, manuscripts, groups of manuscripts, or editions that are totally free of the textual problems. And as Mr. Cottrell rightly points out, the first step to sound doctrine is textual criticism. While the original manuscripts were free from error (unless Moses or other writers misspelled words or used incorrect grammar), the manuscripts we have today, while doctrinally sound, have textual problems, thus in the true sense of the word, are not "inerrant."

It is my opinion that debate over this word is foolish and may damage the unity that we seek. Mr. Cottrell's article may be needed in our brotherhood, however, I wish he would use the word "infallible" and drop the word "inerrant" until all can agree upon its meaning.

—Michael Robertson, Pennington Gap, Va.

**Promoting Division**—My congratulations to you and your editors for allowing Mr. Cottrell to once again climb upon his worn-out soap box and promote division within our churches.

—Stephen D. Carpenter, Charlottesville, Va.

**Naivete**—Thank you for your article by Jack Cottrell on "Inerrancy—Does It Really Matter?"

It seems incredible to me that such an article should

have to be written for Christian church leaders, preachers, and teachers in the first place. But then maybe I've been living in an ivory tower. I just assumed that inerrancy of the Christ and the inerrancy of Scripture went together like a hand in a glove. It would appear that in my naivete and idealistic view of things I failed to take in this difference. I mean according to the view of these preachers and teachers Mr. Cottrell mentions, it is possible to believe in an inerrant Messiah but not believe on the inerrancy of the Book that tells us about the Christ. I ask: How can you have an inerrant Christ and not have an inerrant Bible? . . .

—Mark Sloneker, Cincinnati, Ohio

**Foolish Tests of Orthodoxy**—I was very disappointed by the unjust accusations and incorrect conclusions expressed by Brother Cottrell in his "Reflections" column on inerrancy. . . .

The thing that will bring disaster to our "movement" is not a rejection of inerrancy; but rather "tests of orthodoxy" such as he so foolishly proposes. The strength (keystone) of our movement is that we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. This is our only creed. There is no other written statement or series of questions to which a person must subscribe. The deductions and opinions that each person derives from his or her own study of the Bible must never constitute tests of fellowship. Brother Cottrell should keep his views on inerrancy private and not seek to bind them upon others further than they can personally agree. . . .

—Ralph E. Salzgeber II, Columbus, Ohio

**Very Logical**—This is my first letter ever written to the *CHRISTIAN STANDARD* but after reading Jack Cottrell's article, "Inerrancy—Does It Really Matter?" (November 7) I must express my appreciation for his very logical thesis.

He articulated what I have been thinking every time I see the argument for deciding for oneself which parts of the Bible are true and which are untrue.

If one carries this to its ultimate, one can even explain away the existence of our Savior!

Thank God for this Bible-believing educator.

—Mrs. Robert T. Rigsby, Clarksville, Ind.

**Faults Cottrell's Logic**—I respect Mr. Cottrell's view and honor his opinion on the question of inerrancy, but I find fault with his logic and his conclusions.

In defining inerrancy as being "free from errors and

mistakes," Cottrell implies that there was an original manuscript of every Biblical book, perfect in all aspects: historically, doctrinally, literarily, grammatically, and literally. He then assumes that Jesus taught "inerrancy" (as defined by Cottrell) when He taught that the Old Testament "cannot be assailed or shown to be false" and that He had "absolute confidence in its historicity and truth." Believing the Bible to be historically and doctrinally correct is not equal to teaching grammatical inerrancy. Jesus affirmed the truth and authority of Scripture, not inerrancy.

Finally, I find it very disheartening that a people who claim to speak only where the Bible speaks and to have no creed but Christ find it necessary to make the answer to a question about the book of Genesis or the book of Daniel equal to the answer to questions about belief in Jesus as the Christ.

Sorry to disappoint you, Jack, but I don't hate you. I feel sorry for you that you have so little confidence in your brothers in Christ. Why is it so hard to see that one can totally accept the historical and doctrinal accuracy of the Scriptures and the authority of the Bible for the Christian without swallowing the doctrine of inerrancy of unrecoverable original documents?

—Denis L. Whittet, Portland, Oreg.

**Agrees With Cottrell**—I would like to "second" Dr. Cottrell's "Reflections" for November 7, 1982. The issue to which he has addressed himself is rising among us today in proportions that are staggering and in places that boggle the mind. In substance, the problem has to do with that theological point of view which contends that the historical-critical method has, indeed, made the Bible errant with the reference to some of the history it contains, while still retaining its inerrancy with reference to its religious or theological content. From that point, then, if the position be granted, it remains for the Bible interpreter to decide, subjectively, in the final analysis, what the content of that theology might be. This is Neo-Orthodoxy in classical form. All should read Gerhard Maier's *The End of The Historical Critical Method*.

I further agree with Dr. Cottrell that ". . . we can no longer assume that just because a teacher or preacher is associated with 'our' wing of the restoration movement . . . he will have a consistent commitment to Biblical authority." While this is beyond question true, it is also true that neither can we assume that this teacher or preacher will be committed to the principles of the movement, or to its peculiar theological perspective,

which at its beginning was non-reformational in emphasis.

The restoration movement, at its outset, was non-liberal, non-reformational, and non-ecclesiastical. Our fathers believed that Christianity was supernatural in origin, that reformation thinking was not the norm of Biblical doctrine, and that ecclesiastical structure interlocking local congregations was not Biblical polity. Since the beginning of the century, discussions in each of these areas have changed the complexion of the movement. The cur-

rent debate over the problem Dr. Cottrell has addressed has liberalized a segment of the movement which was formerly generally conservative. Revival of reformation thinking among us has reformationized a rather large segment of the movement. Restructure, which took place in the 1960s, resulted in a segment of the movement ecclesiasticizing itself. . . .

Harold W. Ford, Edmonds, Wash.