

Wineskins Magazine

Hold Hands With God

Volume 1, No 1 – May 1992

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Wineskins: A Purpose Statement

By the Editors

The three editors of *Wineskins* commit to the production of a Christ-centered magazine with thought, balance, and challenge in abundance each month. We affirm our intent to write practically for a broad audience and not technically for a handful of academics. We promise to undergird our efforts with earnest prayer. And we covenant with our readers to be positive rather than reactive in tone.”

Jesus Christ establishes the impetus and sets the limits for this new monthly journal. *Wineskins* is essentially a magazine devoted to reform and renewal in the church. Since the church is the body of Christ, however, *Wineskins* is not a “church growth” or “church methods” paper that will derive its primary insights from sociology. To the contrary, it is designed to be a theological publication whose goal is to foster renewal in the church by sharpening its attention on Jesus as Lord.

No insight from sociology, psychology, or any other discipline will be scorned. Each will, in fact, be both sought and welcomed. But the guiding star of this enterprise will be nothing less than Christocentric study of scripture that can challenge the church to act out the meaning of Christ for this age.

***Wineskins* is committed to the stimulation of bold but responsible change in the church of God.** The very title is taken from Jesus’ parable about the ever-fresh gospel and its always-frail containers. He warned against putting “new wine in old skins” lest the skins burst and waste the contents. In his metaphor, the skins are the culturally-conditioned and time-bound experiences of the people who form the covenant community of God. When those receptacle-carriers of the heavenly message become fixed and inflexible, they no longer serve God’s purpose effectively.

The gospel never changes. The redemptive message of God’s work in Christ at Calvary is needed by people in every sector of today’s global village. Europe and Africa, yuppie and homeless, sedate and trendy, “boomer” and “buster” – everyone needs the Good news. But the communications vehicles for that message may – no, must – adjust to time, place, and need. The church is a “communication vehicle” for the gospel, as much as television, printing press, or one-on-one evangelism methods. It is the oldest and most important vehicle for communicating Christ to the world. It achieves its end by reading and responding to its environment – just as any living organism does.

As the living body of Christ, the church’s mandate is to be his faithful presence in the world. A “faithful presence” in Europe may well be an inappropriate one in Africa; an effective witness to yuppies would almost surely be tasteless and self-defeating with homeless persons; what touches the sedate will leave the trendy stone cold; and the concerns of a “boomer” are so often in conflict with her “buster” neighbor that what reaches her will miss the person next door by light years. The church must be light on its feet. It must address the spirit of time and place without

absorbing it. The body of Christ must be an elastic wineskin for the gospel wine rather than a brittle liability to it.

We have no desire for this magazine to go where it is not wanted. It begins with a two-year commitment to publication and indeed may not extend beyond that. Just as churches need to discover a way to discard programs a methods that no longer work, so we begin *Wineskins* with a method already in view to terminate the magazine if its attempts prove to be unappreciated or counter-productive. Not one of us involved in starting this project needs something else to do. We believe there is an unmet need, and we hope to address it. Only if interest and support have brought us to a point of being self-sustaining by April, 1994 will there be a 25th issue of the paper.

We hope to allow a variety of constituencies and points of view to be heard in these pages. One need not agree with the editors of *Wineskins* on a litmus-test set of issues. We want to hear from people to our left and right, for we believe that discussion between too-narrow parameters cannot stimulate either the intellect or the soul. A man or woman need only be possessed of a genuine love for Christ to qualify for submitting articles to this journal.

Our background and commitment is to the Church of Christ that was born of the American Restoration Movement. Our goal is to move that group closer to the church of Christ revealed in Scripture. Restoration is a never-finished project, and we hope to stimulate its pursuit in our generation. Our list of writers will not be limited to our own heritage, for one of the most helpful things to a clear vision of ourselves will be to hear others' perspective on us and receive their counsel-rebuke humbly.

The three editors of *Wineskins* commit to the production of a Christ-centered magazine with thought, balance, and challenge in abundance each month. We affirm our intent to write practically for a broad audience and not technically for a handful of academics. We promise to undergird our efforts with earnest prayer. And we covenant with our readers to be positive rather than reactive in tone.

We ask for your assistance. Be aware of this project. Pray for God to direct it to his end and glory. Help us secure as wide a subscription base as possible. And read these pages with an unyielding commitment to the goal of revitalizing the church for today's challenge of lifting up Christ to the world.

Introductory Editorial: Does Change Frighten You?

by Rubel Shelly

May, 1992

Jesus Christ has never allowed it to be an optional part of discipleship. Anyone who is a Christian is called to constant and *bona fide* change. “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

The root idea of repentance is always change: a change of mind resulting in a change of behavior. Both John and Jesus preached the necessity of it (Matthew 3:2,, 4:17), and Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the same message (Mark 6:12; Luke 24:47). Indeed, unless we repent, we can have no place in the kingdom of heaven (Luke 13:3, 5).

As a matter of fact, we do change constantly – sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. Our churches have changed over the years as the challenges from our environment have forced us to change. The question, then, is not whether we will change but the nature and direction of it.

Entering the 21st century, we must change in order to confront the world with a kingdom agenda. The changes we are called to make must be characterized by two features.

First, we must be bold in the changes we make. The work of God does not allow half-hearted trifling. Local churches must live at the cutting edge of the kingdom of God and challenge a lost, confused world with the gospel. Business as usual is not getting the job done. Defending the *status quo* is driving away our own. Rigidity and inflexibility are making us an irrelevance to God’s redemptive work in the world.

This is not a call to change the gospel. It is a once-for-all endowment from God, and the message of the cross meets the deepest need of broken lives. The changes needed are in the areas of our identity as Christ’s body in the world, our mission as an outpost of the kingdom of heaven, and our methodologies for worship, ministry and outreach.

Second, we must be responsible in making changes. We must certainly be theologically responsible, and that simply means grounding everything in solid biblical exegesis. We cannot change to be whatever we wish to be. And we must also be practically responsible, for not every change that needs to be made can happen on the day we see the need for it. To the maximal degree possible, leadership must bring along the entire body by demonstrating the legitimacy, feasibility, and usefulness of the envisioned change.

People who lead in the spirit of Christ do not coerce change. They present the biblical challenge for change. They nurture an atmosphere of flexibility and openness to the Spirit of God. They bring about change by consensus rather than forcing their wills on the group.

Each of us must search his or her soul to identify a personal level of commitment to Christ. That commitment makes us receptive to change, growth, and progress in spiritual things. To whatever

degree our churches are made up of individuals with that sort of commitment, to that degree alone will our churches be able to first tolerate, then accept, and finally appreciate the change God wishes to implement among us.

Medieval alchemists sought a process of transforming lead into gold. A living God is the master of a process of changing darkness into light, death into life. But he must have willing subjects to do his work. It is time to move beyond our fears into the excitement of partnership with God.

Rubel Shelly preached for the Family of God at Woodmont Hills in Nashville, Tennessee, from 1978-2005. During that time he also taught at Lipscomb University and Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. He holds a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University, and is the author or co-author of many books, including *The Jesus Community: A Theology of Relational Faith* and *The Second Incarnation*. He presently lives in the Greater Detroit area where he teaches philosophy and religion at Rochester College. He is known as a community leader in Nashville and has served with such groups as the AIDS Education Committee of the American Red Cross, a medical relief project to an 1100-bed children's hospital in Moscow called "From Nashville With Love," and "Seeds of Kindness."

He is the author of more than 20 books, including several which have been translated into languages such as Korean, Japanese, Portuguese, Italian, French, and Russian. He has published widely in religious journals. He is co-editor with Mike Cope of the online magazine *New Wineskins*. Shelly has lectured on Christian apologetics, ethics, and medical ethics on university campuses across America and in several foreign countries. He has done short-term mission work in such places as Kenya, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Bulgaria, and Russia. He was educated at Harding University (B.A.), Harding Graduate School of Religion (M.A., M. Th.), and Vanderbilt University (M.A., Ph.D.). He is married to the former Myra Shappley, and they are the parents of three children: Mrs. David (Michelle) Arms, Tim, and Tom. [RubelShelly.com]

Why Another Journal?

by Mike Cope
May, 1992

A new periodical has been launched every day in the past decade. While many have quickly capsized, others continue to float. The survivors include: *Elvis International Forum*, *Triathlete*, *Harley Women*, *Log Home Living*, *Musclecar Classic*, and *Contemporary Urology*. Wouldn't you love to see the names of the ones that didn't make it!

Perhaps you could be excused, then, for asking, "Why another religious journal?"

Our best answer would be that we want to provide a well-amed forum for church renewal among Churches of Christ. And true church renewal means a refocusing on the God who has redeemed us in Jesus Christ. It means a fresh awareness of the power of the Holy Spirit.

To help inch us toward the winds of revival, *Wineskins* will spotlight seven features each month in addition to the theme articles.

Leonard Allen will edit a column on our religious roots, reminding us of the piercing insights from our distant voices.

Joy McMillon's column will feature contemporary stories of faith among the people and churches of our fellowship.

Lynn Anderson's monthly newsletter will help us survive, initiate, and thrive on change.

The column Jeff Nelson edits will challenge us to be a people whose lives are worship-filled.

Rubel Shelly, in addition to co-editing *Wineskins*, will edit a column that brings contemporary issues before the scrutiny of God's word.

Reviews of books, movies, and television programs that help us listen to "the marketplace" will be edited by Larry James.

And Thom Lemmons will oversee a special page devoted to creative writing. (We wanted someone whose first name is misspelled to handle the right-brained section!)

Maybe *Wineskins* will be another journal that comes and goes. Our commitment is for only two years. We believe it will be well-received; but if it isn't, we're prepared to offer a eulogy on April 30, 1994, thanking God for what good he might have accomplished through it.

May all the glory of this project go to the God whom we have seen most clearly in Jesus Christ!

Mike is the preaching minister for the Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas. He and his wife Diane have two sons, Matt and Chris; their daughter Megan perished at age nine. Chris survived an automobile accident, with serious injuries, in 2004. Mike has written a number of books, teaches Bible at Abilene Christian University, and is a frequent speaker and guest lecturer. [[Mike Cope's Blog](#)]

The Core Curriculum

by Dan Anders
May, 1992

I have spent the last seven years on the campus of a Christian university. During that brief time, I have seen several educational trends come and go. Academics seem always to be inking with what and how students learn.

One of the ongoing battles in academia is over a “core curriculum.” what courses should be required of all students? How do you decide what is the irreducible minimum that every person needs to know? Who determines those essential requirements? Believe me, the battle over these issues rages “hot and heavy” in the larger academic community.

Similar debates are often waged in that faith community we call the church. People wonder what ought to be the focus of Christian life in the church. Differing, sometimes opposing, views get expressed. All kinds of pressures – personal preferences, research studies, practical experiences – get stewed into the mix. The mix sometimes becomes volatile as members push to see their own perspective prevail. Well, is there a core Christian curriculum? Can we know what really matters to God? is there one primary message that stands at the heart of Christian faith and life?

What is First?

Ian Pitt-Watson, a seminary professor, has a piece on the theology of preaching. He calls it “What is First.” he begins by noting that sentence is a declaration, not a question. it’s not “What is *first*?” but “*What* is first!”

I think that’s right on target. Before any consideration of rhetorical style, before any discussion of worship format or educational models, before any gimmicks and marketing techniques, we’d better settle on content. What *is* first! The message is more important than the medium, Marshall McLuhan’s dictum that “the medium is the message” notwithstanding.

There’s a slim book by John Killinger with a title any preacher would love: *The Centrality of Preaching in the total Task of Ministry*. He argues that the church’s total ministry revolves around what happens in the pulpit. The sermon is the hub of the church’s wheel.

But there’s a title I’d suggest that is even more decisive: *The Centrality of Good News in Preaching and Ministry*. Until we settle on this core curriculum, nothing else matters. Here is the heartbeat of God.

First of All

When the Bible says something is first, I believe it’s first. There are two crucial times where Scripture makes such a definitive declaration.

The Gospels record an occasion when Jesus spoke about things of first importance (see Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28). Matthew and Mark both make it quite clear that Jesus defined the “first” commandment by citing Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

A standard Greek wordbook says that “first” (protos) can mean “first of several” or of any group (as in Matthew 21:31). It can also mean “first, earliest, earlier” (as in Philippians 1:5). Or protos can mean “of prominent” (Bauer, *Lexicon*, 732, 733). Jesus’ “great commandment” saying is among the texts cited to support this third meaning.

Jesus obviously did not mean that the instruction to love God supremely was the first command in chronological sequence. It clearly was not. Instead it is the “foremost” divine directive. It is “most important.”

Jesus’ aim to love God most brought him to this Earth. “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor ...” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

God could have revealed himself in blazing flame across the sky, but that would have been too impersonal. He could, and did, send prophets and angels – but that was too aloof. Only when God drew near to us in the flesh-and-blood Jewish manner of Jesus could we begin to grasp the depth of his loving. Then we knew with-us-God, “Emmanuel.”

There is no way to say “Jesus” (“the Lord saves”) without confessing the salvation he came to bring. Boldly engraved across the whole gospel story is the sign of the cross. All four Gospels unite around this single theme: The God-man came to die. From conception to ascension the message rings loud and clear that we are saved by Jesus’ dying.

Consider as evidence one paltry line from each evangelist. “You are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected ... and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Luke 9:22). “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32).

Of First Importance

There is another key text where that word “first” occurs. Paul wrote his fractious church in Corinth: “Now I remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you ... For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared ...” (1 Corinthians 15:1, 3-5a).

Why did Paul center his missionary preaching in the cross? Why did he determine “to know nothing among [the Corinthians] except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2)?

The answer, I think, is obvious. The story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection came first in Paul’s preaching because it is first in significance. It alone is the powerful, saving word of God

(1 Corinthians 1:18). No other message can compare in importance. “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Key to Renewal

If we wish to see the faith and hope and love of God’s people renewed, we must start where Jesus started, where the gospel starts. And we must end where it ends. No human cleverness can compete with Calvary. No marketing strategy can lift up like the cross.

That is the core curriculum for our faith and life. To preach anything else is the kiss of death.

How Worthy is the Lamb?

*by Sonya Colvert
May, 1992*

How worthy is the Lamb of God who was slain. Praise and honor is due him for his sacrifice is
for all.

He alone is worthy. He alone is holy.

How worthy is the Lamb of God!

How worthy is the Lamb of God who reigns forever at the Father's right hand,

To come to a world full of sin and death.

he alone was worthy to be the sacrifice for our sin.

How worthy is the Lamb of God!

How worthy is the Lamb of God who hung on a cross,

Who was held between Heaven and Hell because of your sin and mine.

He alone died, totally separated from the Father in our stead.

How worthy is the Lamb of God!

How worthy is the Lamb of God who rose from the grave,

Who conquered death and sealed our pardon.

He alone is to be exalted and praised by the nations.

How worthy is the Lamb of God!

How worthy is the Lamb of God who reigns forever at the Father's right hand,

He who the angels bow down before and worship with songs of praise.

he alone is worthy. He alone is holy. He alone is the Savior.

How worthy is the Lamb of God!

The Hidden Tomb

by Max Lucado
May, 1992

The road to Calvary was noisy, treacherous and dangerous. And I wasn't even carrying a cross.

When I thought of walking Christ's steps to Golgotha, I thought "meditation" and "imagination." I envisioned myself meditating on Christ's final hours and imagining the final turmoil. I was wrong. The quiet meditation I didn't get and the turmoil I didn't have to imagine.

Walking the Via Dolorosa is not a casual stroll in the steps of the Savior. It is, instead, an upstream struggle against a river of housewives, soldiers, peddlers and children.

"Watch your wallets," Joe told us. "I already am," I thought to myself.

Joe Shulam is a Messianic Jew, raised in Jerusalem and held in high regard by both Jew and Gentile. His Rabbinic studies qualify him as a scholar. His archaeological training sets him apart as a researcher. But it is his tandem passion for the Messiah and the lost house of Israel which endears him to so many. We weren't with a guide; we were with a zealot.

And when a zealot tells you to guard your wallet, you guard your wallet.

Every few steps a street peddler would step in my path and dangle earrings or scarves in my face. I had come for inspiration; instead, I was getting tugs on my sleeves and shouts for my attention. How do you meditate in a market?

For that is what it is. A stretch of road so narrow it bottlenecks body against body. When its sides aren't canyoned by the tall brick walls, they are lined with centuries-old shops selling everything from toys to dresses to turbans to compact discs. One section of the path is a butcher market. The smell turned my stomach and the sheep guts turned my eyes. Shuffling to catch up with Joseph, I asked him, "Was this street a meat market in the time of Christ?"

"It was," he answered. "To get to the cross he had to pass through a slaughterhouse."

It would be a few minutes before the significance of those words would register.

"Stay close," he yelled over the crowd. "The church is around the corner."

"It'll be better at te church," I thought to myself.

Wrong again.

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is 1,700 years of religion wrapped around a rock. In 326, Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, came to Jerusalem in search of the hill on which Christ was crucified. Makarios, Bishop of Jerusalem, took her to a rugged outcropping

outside of the northwestern wall of the city, a 20-foot jagged cluster of granite upon which sat a Roman-built temple to Jupiter.

Helena demolished the pagan temple and built a chapel in its place. It seems that every visitor since has had the same idea.

The result is a hill of sacrifice hidden in oration. Beneath an altar is a gold-plated hole in which the cross was supposedly lodged. Three crucified icons with elongated faces hang on crosses behind the altar.

Gold lanterns. Madonna statues. Candles and dim lights. I didn't know what to think. I was at once moved because of where I was standing and disturbed at what I was seeing.

The traditional burial spot of Christ is under the same roof as the traditional Golgotha. To see it, you don't have to go outside. You do, however, have to use your imagination. Two thousand years and a million tourists ago, this was a cemetery. Today it's a cathedral. The ceiling domes high above are covered with ornate paintings. I stopped and tried to envision it in its original state. I couldn't.

An elaborate sepulcher marks the traditional spot of Jesus' tomb. Forty-three lamps hang above the portal and candelabra sets in front of it. The Czar of Russia donated the edifice and did so at no small expense. It is solid marble, cornered with golden leaves.

An elevated stone path led into the doorway and a black-caped, black-bearded, black-hatted priest stood guard in front of it. Fifty-plus people were standing in line to enter but he wouldn't let them. I didn't understand the purpose of the delay, but the length of it he spoke in a language I could understand.

"Twenty minutes. Twenty minutes."

The crowd of people mumbled. I mumbled. I came as close to the door as I could. The floor was inlaid with still more squares of marble, and lanterns hung from the ceiling.

The sum total of the walk began to register with me. Holy road packed with peddlers. The cross hidden under an altar. The entrance to the tomb prohibited by a priest.

I had just muttered something about the temple needing another cleansing when I heard someone call. "No problem, come this way." It was Joe Shulam speaking. He must have known what I was thinking, because what he showed me next I will never forget.

He took us behind the elaborate cupola and guided us into a plain room. It was dark. It was musty. It was unkempt and dusty, obviously not a place designed for tourists.

While our eyes adjusted to the dark, he began to speak. "Six or so of these have been found, but are seldom visited." Behind him was a small opening. It was a rock-hewn tomb. Four feet high at the most. The width about the same.

“Wouldn’t it be ironic,” he smiled as he spoke, “if this was the place. It is dirty. It is uncared for. It is forgotten. The one over there is elaborate and ornate. This one simple and ignored. Wouldn’t it be ironic if this was the place where our Lord was buried?”

We walkd over to the opening and stopped like the Apostle John did to see in the tomb. And, just like John, we were amazed at what we saw.

“Go in,” Joe invited. I didn’t have to be told twice.

Three steps across the dusty rock floor and I was at the other side. The low ceiling forced me to squat and lean against a cold, rough wall. My eyes had to adjust a second time. As they did, I sat in the silence, the first moment of silence that day. It began to occur to me where I was. I was in a tomb. A tomb which could have held the body of Christ. A tomb which could have witnessed history’s greatest moment.

I hadn’t noticed it, but on the backside of the wall were two openings. Two holes hewn into the stone each deep enough to hold a body.

I walked over to the openings and squatted down. “Would you like to go in?” Once again, I accepted Joe’s invitation. I slid my legs into the hole and laid on my back.

“God put himself in a place like this,” someone said softly.

He did. He put himself in a dark, tight, claustrophobic room and allowed them to seal it shut. The Light of the World was mummied in cloth and shut in ebony.

We didn’t dare speak. No one could. Anything spoken seemed shallow.

After a few moments the silence was broken with a spontaneous prayer which a co-traveler could contain no longer. “God, thank you that you got out of here.”

The elaborate altars were forgotten. The priest-protected sepulcher was a world away. What mad had done to decorate what God came to do no longer mattered.

All I could see at that moment, perhaps more than any moment, was how far he had come. More than the God in the burning bush. Beyond the infant wrapped in a feed trough. Past the adolescent Savior in Nazareth. Even surpassing the King of Kings nailed to a tree and mounted on a hill was this: God in a tomb.

Nothing is blacker than a grave – as lifeless as a pit – as permanent as the crypt.

But into the crypt he came. Why? Because he would never ask us to go where he hasn’t been first.

The next time you find yourself entombed in a darkened world of fear – remember that. The next time pain boxes you in a world of horror – remember the tomb. The next time a stone seals shut your exit to peace – think about the empty musty tomb outside of Jerusalem.

It's not always easy to find. To see it you may have to get beyond the pressures of people demanding your attention. You may have to slip past the golden altars and ornate statues. To see it, you may even have to bypass the chamber near the priest and slip into an ante-room and look for yourself. Sometimes the hardest place to find the tomb is in a cathedral.

But it's there. Past the peddlers. Beyond the altars. Somewhere behind the elaborate gifts of earthly rulers is a simple tomb. And when you see it, bow down, enter quietly and look closely. For there, on the wall, you may see the charred marks of a divine explosion.

Senses of Worship, Part 1: Holding Hands With God

by Jeff Nelson
May, 1992

“OK, I’ll hold hands with God.”

This was the unspoken worship language of four-year-old David Vanderpool, as he raised his hands in the air. At his “ripe old age,” he had outgrown holding hands with his family during meal-time prayers. His mother gently negotiated, “Either hold hands with us or hold hands with God.” Quick as a flash David’s hands reached upward! The family smiled, bowed their heads and gave thanks – probably for more than their food.

And this was not to be the last “hand-holding” for David. He kept holding hands with God at every prayer-time – even at school when his class prayed! “Yes,” his teacher confirmed, “most of the kids bow their heads and fold their hands, but David raises his hands and says he’s holding hands with God.”

I think David is on to something big and beautiful!

Worship, simply stated, is holding hands with God. God reaches from his sovereignty to the heart of humankind and invites us to come as close to him as we will allow him to come to us. “Come near to God and he will come near to you” (James 4:8). The more we sense the presence of God, the more we want to be in his presence.

God’s presence cannot be manipulated. We can only acknowledge it and choose to live in it. Life reaches its intended height when we grasp the reality that God is constantly with us – and wants to be. A favorite hymn states our potential relationship with him:

*My God and I go in the fields together.
We walk and talk as good friends should and do.
We clasp our hands; our voices ring with laughter.
My God and I walk through the meadow’s hue.*

Can you imagine – a God so near you can hold his hands? Michaelangelo’s breathtaking painting shows the hand of God touching the hand of the first man he created. The touch of the Almighty. God “holding hands” with humankind.

A precious three-year-old boy in our church suffers the rarest type of cancer. A tumor the size of a grapefruit was removed from his stomach, along with a kidney. His prognosis was uncertain but somewhat promising at the time of his surgery. His grandmother, a godly woman, was extremely concerned about her grandson, but life was following a relatively normal course several months after the surgery.

While on a weekend outing with close friends, she dreamed a perplexing dream. The place and the faces in the dream were vague, but the experience was most vivid. She sat in a group of

people gathered for worship. As they praised God she felt strength come into her body at the simple mention of his name. The more she said his name in worship the more strength she felt. And the more strength she felt, the more she wanted to worship.

Next morning, she shared the dream with her friends and asked if they attached any special significance to it. That afternoon at five a phone call informed her that her grandson's cancer had reoccurred. Three spots showed up on his lungs. Although grieved by the news, she felt the significance of her dream. For her it meant she was to praise and worship her sovereign God in the face of this unfair tragedy. He would supply the needed strength for her and her family.

A group of believers gathers every Monday evening in earnest prayer, expecting the hand of God to touch and heal this child. Her strength and insights are teaching us powerful lessons in praise and worship and prayer. We believe the hand of God still touches and heals those who are willing to "come near."

Four-year-old David stands in a long line of worshippers who lifted up their hands to God:

... *For strength* – "As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning. Aaron and Hur held his hands up so that they remained steady" (Exodus 17:11-12).

... *For joy* – "Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy" (Psalm 47:1).

... *For worship* – "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer" (1 Timothy 2:8).

... *For healing* – "People brought their sick to him, and all who touched him were healed" (Matthew 14:35-36).

... *For equipping* – "They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6).

Why hands? Hands speak eloquently! Without hearing someone we interpret conversation simply by watching their hands. Hands rival faces as the most expressive part of conversation. Some people literally could not talk if their hands were tied.

Hands express emotions. Have you ever seen a touchdown when hands weren't thrown into the air? Did you see any hands expressing victory or defeat in the recent Olympics? When you see someone giving a "high five," you see celebration for the glory of that moment. A child who needs attention instinctively thrusts hands toward the parent. A loving parent can scarcely refuse to respond. I wonder if God uses his hands when he talks about us?

Assessment – When we come together to communicate with God as his body, we tend to "sit on our hands." Is it the fear of man standing in the way? Do we have nothing to express?

A few Sundays back as I led a lengthy period of praise and worship, the church stood. A time of high-spirited praise songs shifted toward a more reflective and worshipful mood, so I motioned for the people to sit down. One man remained standing on the second row with his eyes closed

and his hands raised, unaware that everyone around him had sat down. He was deeply involved in the worship he was offering. All eyes were on him as he continued standing through another song. His wife, seated by his side, chose not to disturb him. A few of the teens giggled a bit; then they stopped. The entire church seemed to sense a “teachable moment.” Without saying a word, our new preacher had taught a strong lesson that will make a difference in shaping this church.

Proposal – In the privacy of your home, worship the Lord using your hands. Clap for joy as you sing songs of praise. Raise your hands as you pray, giving him honor and receiving his touch. See if your communication with him is not enriched.

Peek into a church sometime where you hear silence. You may think nothing is being said, but the hands may tell a different story. Hands touching eternity bring into focus a God who has come near. You may never raise your hands in a public assembly, but to feel the release in your heart to do so is to celebrate the freedom of Christ and to sense the nearness of a Father who reached farther than you’ll ever understand to touch you.

Hands are for giving and receiving. Hands may respond when words are not appropriate. God’s touch is as real today as it ever was. He’s as close as he’s ever been. God’s hands are extended. Are yours? Are you “holding hands with God”?

Once Upon a Cross

by Thom Lemmons
May, 1992

This is an excerpt from the forthcoming novel *Once Upon a Cross*, ©1992 by Thom Lemmons, published by Questar Publishers, Inc., Sisters, Oregon.)

*There's a call comes ringing o'er the restless wave;
Send the light, send the light!
There are souls to rescue, there are souls to save;
Send the light, Send the light!
Send the light, the blessed gospel light;
Let it shine from shore to shore!
Send the light, the blessed gospel light;
Let it shine forevermore!*

For almost as long as I can remember, I've hated that song. When I was a little kid, wedged into the pew between my mother and one of my brothers, my legs dangling from the edge of the battle-scarred oak, I thought the song was about some woman named Cinda Light. Today, as the congregation trots out the saddle-sore old war horse one more time, I don't think the song makes much more sense with the right words than it did when it was about Cinda. The tattered tune lopes along the pews in its sterile six-eight gallop of righteousness with nary a glance to the right or the left. The pious horseman, his face clenched in a grimace of duty and faith, brings a message of hope to the souls of the foreign unwashed. To the souls, I said: who cares about the bodies? And why do we send the light instead of taking it?

The last prayer is over now; time to go home. I shove the hymnal into the rack and stand, amid the relived bustle of the released worshippers. I step into the center aisle, keeping my eyes on the slightly threadbare, sculptured cranberry carpet which leads me toward the back door. I'm trying to avoid eye contact with anyone, but not quite able to do so. An older woman, her hair pulled back in a severe, almost disciplinary bun, nabs me before I can manage three shuffling steps toward the exit.

"Don't believe I've seen you here before, have I?" she says.

"Well, I ... ah ..."

"My name's Barton – Maude Barton."

Maude. Why am I not surprised? She sticks her hand out, and I take it gently between my thumb and the first two joints of my fingers. How old will I be before someone starts shaking my hand this way, I wonder? I give her the most noncommittal smile I can muster.

"And who are you?" she asks, tilting her head back to get me in bifocal range.

“Janice Thompson.” There. I’ve said it. Now can I go?

“Good to know you, Janice.” Good to know you. She knows my name now, so she knows me.

I can tell by her expectant pause that she’s giving me an opening, a chance to hold up my end of the conversation. So I let the silence widen, widen, and

“Well, Janet – ”

“Janice.”

“Oh, yes, Janice, I’m sorry. Anyway, it’s nice to have you here, and I hope you’ll come see us again next Sunday.”

“Yes, well Thanks.” I duck my head and make for a narrow opening in the aisle. A few more shuffling paces and I’m safely out the door and onto the sidewalk.

Why do I do this to myself? I wonder as I start my car and back out of the parking space. What twisted notion of duty or guilt forces me to get up early on a Sunday morning when I’d rather sleep, shower and wash my hair, when I’d rather lie on the couch and eat Cheerios, and drive to a body building filled with strangers to hear words that leave me – as far as I can tell – completely unaffected? Is this any way for an enlightened adult to act? And was it my imagination, or did I see faces around me in the pews this morning which looked just as confused, just as wistful to be somewhere else?

Maybe the human psyche is God’s idea of a joke. Or maybe my ecclesiastical remorse is a vestigial throwback – like wisdom teeth, or the wings on ostriches – to something I used to be. Long on form and short on function. An evolutionary dead-end which creates intermittent discomfort and will eventually atrophy, since it is no longer needed.

Is that all church is for me – a habit which makes me restive if ignored?

What is it I’m looking for, anyway? And why do I keep expecting to find it despite repeated disappointment, and keep going back to lookin the same places? Like a junkie searching for his next hit?

Boy, oh boy – I’m really negative today. maybe I’ll do some work on the manuscript. That should take my mind off my ambivalence toward organized religion – at least for a while.

Going up the stairs to my apartment, I realize that next week is Dad’s birthday. Guess I’d better find a card and get it in the mail. This is his first birthday since my move. My hand pauses on the doorknob. Oh well – at least you can’t get in an argument with a birthday card.

Going inside, I glance at the mail on the kitchen table – still lying where I threw it yesterday. Unopened, except for a rejection letter from a publisher. I will myself not to dwell on this last in

a long line of similar exasperations. One of these times, it's going to work ... I sit down in front of my word processor.

The sounds and sights of the crucifixion entered Linus' consciousness as echoes, visions which scarcely penetrated the cloak of confusion which enshrouded him. He saw, and yet did not see the dejected, half-dead prisoners looking on as the guards nailed together the beams of their death-racks. Through a numbing curtain of pain and perplexity, he saw the hammer rise high above the cruel spike held in place on the Nazarene's wrist, saw its downward stroke. He saw the spine of the prophet arch, heard the weak, ragged scream of pain which tore from his tortured throat as a ringing hammer blow – then another and another – drove the iron pin fiercely home.

At last, the crosses were raised upright and dropped with dull thuds into the holes prepared for them. Most of the spectators began to drift away, leaving behind only those whose loyalty or spite held them fast.

The sound of keening came from a knot of bedraggled peasants gathered near the foot of the Galilean's cross. In their midst was an old woman, wailing in northern-accented Aramaic, "My son! My son! Why, oh why, my son?"

The sound of snickering came from a group of Saducees and chief priests. "Look at him!" one of them was saying as he pointed at the Nazarene, writhing in pain upon the cross their silver had paid Linus to build, "the Messiah! What a deliverer he is! If he truly saved others, let him use his power on himself, now!"

It was too much. Overcome at once by shame, confusion, anger and fear, Linus wheeled and ran pell-mell down the side of Golgotha, blindly fleeing the looming wall of emotion which threatened to fall upon him, to crush his sanity in its rubble.

Only when he entered the mouth of the street where his shop was located did his senses begin to rein in the runaway horses within his mind. Panting heavily with the exertion of his near-mad sprint from the hill outside the city walls, he entered his shop and sat down heavily on the nearest bench.

The silver denarii – his payment for building the Nazarene's cross – still lay on the table where he had tossed them earlier in the day. Now he scooped them in a fist and flung them through the doorway, scattering them in the dust of the street.

He suddenly felt that Jerusalem was strangling him, crushing him beneath the weight of her centuries of unfulfilled expectations.

Somehow, the tragic death of the Nazarene had shown him that there were no answers here; only questions and disappointments. Even in Jerusalem, a life of unadorned purity and truth did not suffice: the cross crowning Golgotha's summit gave mute, stark testimony to the helplessness of the simply good. The unnatural gloom settling over Jerusalem matched the twilight in Linus' heart as he turned north up the oddly quiet street. Walking past the pool of Bethesda, he left by the northeast gate, along the Damascus road. He trod steadily northward, and did not look back.

I slump in my chair and look at what I've just written. As I read, I feel tears stinging the corners of my eyes. Is this maudlin, or what? A skeptical child of the Me Generation, wooed to repentant sighs by her own recounting of the crucifixion. Camera closes to full-frame shot of the wet-streaked face of Our Heroine, then a fade-in of an open Bible. Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings* hums poignantly in the background. Fade to black and roll the credits.

Make all the fun you like – I still have to go find a box of tissues.

The fact is, I realize as I wipe my eyes and blow my nose, that try as I might, I don't have it within me to jest about the death of Jesus. It's the one thing I truly want to – wish I could – believe in. Even when I was in high school, going through my most rebellious times (on the sly, of course) – trying out all the swear-words, drinking and smoking and acting cooler than I felt around the drugs and sex that seemed to be everywhere – I could never, unlike most of my friends, use Jesus' name as a curse or a joke. Maybe this sounds corny, but, even then, it seemed ... disloyal. After all, if the Bible is true, he became one of us, even though he didn't have to. That's worth something, isn't it?

No, I very much want to believe in Jesus. The problem lies with the people I meet who expect me to believe they believe in him. I could see myself trusting somebody like Jesus, but there's no way I can ever trust the church. Not after being on the business end of some of its tender mercies.

It's tough when you're a kid who asks all the wrong questions. You see, those who are snug and warm inside the house dislike any insinuation that there might be a leak in the roof. Especially from a snot-nosed girl with an attitude. Especially when she's the preacher's daughter.

So, Linus, where do we go from here? Like ol' Thomas Wolfe said, you can't go home again. And they probably don't want you back there, anyway. They moved, or you did, and left no forwarding address.

Oh, well ... I guess we'll burn that bridge when we get to it.

Thom Lemmons writes novels and manages ACU Press/Hillcrest Publishing. His works include the bestseller *Jabez: a Novel*, published by WaterBrook Press; *Mother of Faith*, *Woman of Means* and *Daughter of Jerusalem*, published by Multnomah Books. Other works include *He Who Wept*, *Sunday Clothes* and *King's Ransom*. He has three children.

The New Birth and Christian Unity: David Lipscomb

by Douglas A. Foster
May, 1992

“There is no one thing taught with greater clearness in the New Testament than that the new birth precedes and qualifies for baptism. Faith unites and makes us one with Christ, and such believer is a Christian, and saved, not with a conditional but with an everlasting salvation.”
~ David Lipscomb, “Baptist Queries and Answers,” *Gospel Advocate*, 1873, 702

The Restoration Movement faced serious fragmentation in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Progressives and conservatives alike focused on issues that provoked violent controversy. The most volatile conflict centered on the use of instrumental music in worship.

At a more profound level, however, baptism and its relation to the new birth and church membership became a matter of serious intent to many. Some progressive disciples questioned whether immersion was essential to salvation and suggested that unimmersed believers be accepted as members. At the other extreme, a growing number denied even the validity of immersion if not performed with what they deemed the proper knowledge by both candidate and administrator.

David Lipscomb feared the sectarian, divisive effects of both positions. On one hand, the editors of the *Christian Standard* and *Christian Evangelist*, while rejecting open membership, took Alexander Campbell’s position that the pious unimmersed were not lost. Lipscomb thought such a position was inconsistent. After all, why reject from membership those one claims God has accepted and saved?

On the other hand, several people associated with the *Firm Foundation*, a Texas paper begun in 1884, taught that immersion simply to obey God was not enough. They believed the candidate must understand explicitly, prior to baptism, that one received forgiveness in that act. By implication, only persons immersed in churches of the Restoration Movement could be properly baptized, since only those ministers taught adult immersion for remission of sins. Anyone previously immersed but associated with another religious group had to be “rebaptized” in order to become a member in a true church of Christ.

Lipscomb waged a vigorous fight on both fronts. The matter was crucial largely because of its implications for Christian unity. Biblical baptism puts believers into Christ. Christian unity can be achieved only in Christ. Downplaying the essential nature of biblical baptism would mean that people in Christ were attempting to achieve Christian unity with people outside of Christ – an impossibility. Yet refusing to recognize as Christians those who had been scripturally baptized would perpetuate division and frustrate God’s intentions.

Lipscomb saw himself occupying a position between the two extremes. He began his teaching with the clear statement that the faith which precedes baptism marks the point of salvation. “The person who believes is just as much the begotten of the Father, the child of God, before it is baptized as it is afterwards.” Yet he believed that baptism was the necessary next step. One

became a child of the Father before completion of the birth process, but if proper birth did not occur the child could perish.

Lipscomb maintained that if a person believed in Christ, repented of sins, and was immersed to obey God, that person was added to God's kingdom. It made no difference where or by whom the baptism was performed as long as those scriptural components were present. Such simple obedience secured all the blessings and privileges promised the Christian regardless of the believer's knowledge of them. Lipscomb thus readily admitted that Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and other believers who had repented and been immersed had been added to Christ's church. At the same time he believed that sectarian loyalties, wherever found, displeased God.

To those who thought unimmersed believers were saved, Lipscomb replied that God's law required all who should be saved to believe, repent, and be baptized. Christians simply must teach what God had commanded. Christians must associate with and treat unimmersed believers kindly, yet they should use every opportunity to urge them to complete their obedience.

Lipscomb argued just as strongly, however, that acts of obedience to God's law should not be rejected simply because one has not learned all the blessings and promises connected with the obedience. The rebaptism group countered that those receiving "sect baptism" often believed that their sins were already forgiven and that baptism was to join a particular denomination.

Lipscomb admitted that perhaps this was often true. But neither was "sect baptism" restricted to those outside the Restoration Movement.

"Baptist baptism is a baptism submitted to in order to get into the Baptist Church, or it is done in obedience to Baptist teaching. If a person is baptized to obey God, it is not Baptist baptism no matter where or by whom performed. A rebaptist baptism is that which is done to please those who believe in rebaptism. Many of the rebaptisms are done to please the preacher or church who require it. It is not unusual for a person to say: 'I will be rebaptized if you think I ought.' When one is then baptized, it is rebaptist baptism. Both these baptisms ignore the authority of Christ or the Scriptures, and are not acceptable to God." ("What Is Baptist Baptism?" *Gospel Advocate*, 1907, 265.)

Lipscomb pointed out to the proponents of rebaptism that it made no sense for a person who had travelled a long way on the right road and then taken a wrong turn to return all the way to the beginning of the journey. So it was with those who had been immersed, yet found themselves in sectarian establishments. Such a wrong turn did not undo their faith, repentance or baptism. "We only return to the point at which we erred and there begin aright," he insisted. To demand rebaptism by a minister in the Restoration Movement of one who had been immersed into Christ already was almost a sacrilege. As for those born again, immersed, and added to Christ's church who then became part of "human folds," Lipscomb left the matter to God – the only one who would know what allowances to make.

Both of the extremes on baptism were wrong, Lipscomb claimed. Both exalted one of God's commands above others. Failure to follow God's biblical mandates concerning baptism would

destroy the only basis for true Christian unity and create even more sectarian structures. There were, Lipscomb firmly believed, some “who belong to nothing but the church, which includes all Christians.” Lipscomb saw himself as one of those people.

For further reading on this subject, see the following by David Lipscomb:

“Queries On Baptism.” *Gospel Advocate*, 1873, 1146.

“Apologizing for the Lord.” *Gospel Advocate*, 1893, 548.

“Queries.” *Gospel Advocate*, 1898, 87.

“The Holy Spirit.” *Gospel Advocate*, 1898, 397.

“Sectarians in the Worship.” *Gospel Advocate*, 1907, 265.

Dr. Doug Foster is a Professor of Church History in the Graduate School of Theology at Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas. In addition to teaching, he is also the Director of the Center for Restoration Studies at the University. Dr. Foster’s scholarly work has concentrated on the place of the Stone-Campbell Movement in American Christianity and the nature of the idea of Christian unity. His book *Will the Cycle Be Unbroken? Churches of Christ Face the 21st Century* analyzes the current and future shape of Churches of Christ. Other works include *Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ* (ACU Press, 2000) and *Seeking a Lasting City: The Church’s Journey in the Story of God* (ACU Press, 2005). He serves as one of three General Editors of the *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Eerdmans, February 2005).

An Interview With Sylvia Rose Cobb

by Joy McMillon
May, 1992

“I knew when I took that first violin lesson in the fifth grade that I was hooked. Music was going to be my life,” said the soft-spoken woman. “I used to drive my family crazy, dragging home a different instrument from school every two or three weeks. But I wanted to learn how to play all of them.” And indeed she did.

Today Sylvia Rose Cobb has blended a lifelong passion for music and a vibrant faith into an active career of writing religious music. Her work includes a 50-piece collection of gospel songs, of which she has written about 170, nine cassettes of *a cappella* choral music, a handbook for choral directors, and a musical based on the life of Martin Luther King.

Her life, however, has not been one grand symphony. The daughter of a minister and youngest of 12 children, she was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1954. When she was 10, her mother died, and older siblings took over her rearing.

Their large family struggled all her life on the edge of poverty. Often the children couldn't participate in school activities because of the expenses involved. “Our father couldn't give us all the things that some others had, but we didn't suffer, and it didn't seem to bother us,” said Sylvia. “He gave us what really mattered – a spiritual home and an introduction to faith.” From him she later realized came her commitment to excellence. “My father wasn't always impressed with any small efforts by us kids. He felt we should give everything our best.”

Family members were close, Sylvia said, and their home swarmed with life, punctuated by the presence of friends and traveling ministers. “People always wanted to come home with us after church on Sunday afternoons. My older brothers and sisters and I would laugh because they could have had a much better dinner at their house, but they wanted to come to ours,” said the 38-year-old Detroit native.

She credited this early emphasis on relationships rather than upon things with instilling a distinctive set of values and priorities in her. “I guess I am like Paul. I have learned to be content with what I have. We didn't have a lot, but we entertained each other and our love was strong. So the things that many others aspire to just don't tempt me very much.” Regular visits are a hallmark even today among the close family with 11 of the 12 children living in the Detroit area.

When Sylvia was 15, her father remarried and moved to Valdosta, Georgia. She went to live with a brother who was a minister in Toledo, Ohio. In high school she added marching band to her many student activities. “By this time, I was in love with God and the church, and I was stuck on the saxophone.”

Always a strong student, she was offered a full scholarship to a local college, but when a student-directed chorus from Southwestern Christian College sang at her congregation, her life direction

changed abruptly. A spellbound Sylvia was so impressed she forfeited her scholarship to attend the Terrell, Texas college.

At Southwestern Sylvia became devoted to her music, and her personal struggle with finding the best place for her musical talents began. She laughingly recalled marching into the office of the head of the music department and naively asserting, "I'm here to be your student director." Despite her exceptional ability – including learning all the parts for the musical groups – she was not given the opportunity to direct. Hurt and confused by the rejection, a persistent Sylvia would not give up, however. Administrators appointed her the first woman student director of the college chorus her sophomore year.

As student director, her music writing career began in earnest, where she was inspired by talented voices and "a need to express my own love and adoration for God." An urgent need also existed to create fresh material for the popular chorus, whose repertoire often was duplicated by other singing groups.

If the years at Southwestern were fulfilling musically, they were also difficult financially as she struggled to stay in school and meet her expenses. An outstanding academic record earned her a Ford Foundation scholarship to Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in music in 1977.

She gave enjoyable performances, got along well with everyone and was a good student. later, she brought a choral group here, and it was obvious they responded well to her and she knew her business," said Dr. Earle Moore, the now-retired chairman of Harding's music department.

Upon graduation, Sylvia returned to teach in Southwestern's music faculty and direct the chorus for three years. Afterwards, she moved to Detroit where she has taught, directed singing groups, and served as a music consultant for the past 15 years. It was at the Inkster, Michigan Church of Christ where she met and married her husband, Lanza, in 1980. He works at General Motors and is active in several singing groups, some of which she has directed. "I asked God for a cook and a tenor, and he gave me both," she said.

Through the years, Sylvia said, her directing talents occasionally have placed her in awkward situations, so she decided to concentrate on writing. "I have learned it takes too much out of you when you are fighting these small battles. So I have chosen to write and rechannel my energies into something positive."

Rough times began again when she stopped working in order to devote herself to writing a small hymnal for the church. "I told my husband this is what I wanted to do, and I would make the personal sacrifices necessary if I could be allowed to stop working and just write. I knew it would not be a money-making project. That doesn't matter. I felt if nobody ever sings a song I write or ever knows I exist, that's okay. I will be happy."

But Sylvia's talents are becoming known. Although she has never had the time or money to advertise it, *Songs of Faith*, a collection of 50 gospel songs, was published first in 1985 and is

now in its eighth printing. Congregations in Texas, Illinois and Michigan use it, including her home congregation, Oakland Church of Christ, in Southfield, Michigan.

“Sylvia is a deeply spiritual person, and a very faithful Christian who does so much of what she does at great personal sacrifice,” said Oakland minister and friend Vernon Boyd.

Where does she get her ideas? Sometimes a Bible verse, a thought from a sermon or a Negro spiritual, an idea from her husband, or her own emotions inspire her as she sits down at the piano to compose. A song may take her as little as 15 minutes to write, or it may take many days.

The dialogue for her largest work, *Long Live the Dream*, was drafted in two days, but the lyrics and music took almost a year to complete. It is a musical she wrote and directed in 1989 based on the civil rights movement and its leaders. At first Sylvia said she felt “over my head” directing a 25-actor production backed by \$40,000 in corporate and private sponsorship. But after 3,800 people saw the show in Toledo and Detroit, and it was enthusiastically received by local media reviewers, she dreamed of launching the production in an off-Broadway show. Unfortunately, she hasn’t located the necessary capital to make her dream a reality.

She plans to return to full-time writing in June when she officially “retires” as the interim principal for Lockett Christian Academy in Taylor, Michigan. Through the years she has spent much of her time and effort serving on the board of directors and teaching at Lockett where she has great rapport with children.

“They gravitate to her,” said Boyd. “She is someone to whom troubled children can tell their problems, and she will give them good advice and encourage them.”

Sylvia has a strong vision for the vital role music plays within the public worship experience. “In the church, traditionally, we have put our focus almost exclusively on teaching and preaching, and that’s important, but we haven’t understood how much music can strengthen and support that. Music is actually preaching and teaching in song. Building up the role of music would result in more people touched with the gospel and more inspirational worship experiences.”

Song leaders need to take their responsibility for leading worship seriously, she contended. “They need to be committed to doing more than flipping through the book and getting five songs five minutes before worship starts,” said Sylvia. “They need to approach their task with prayer, study and fasting. When they are casual about their music, it isn’t going to inspire the rest of the congregation.”

Edifying the church through music varies with the congregation and the occasion, she said. “We ought to sing songs that correlate with the sermon’s dominant idea or that relate to what is going on in the life of the church.”

In addition to writing, Sylvia has taught Bible classes at Oakland and frequently speaks at women’s programs and lectureships around the nation.

For Sylvia Rose Cobb, music is a gift from God to be treasured and used. The job of using that gift has enriched and strengthened her through periods of discouragement and financial difficulties. “I have grown so much through the study and the writing of gospel songs. I believe deeply in prayer. So much of what I write is open, public prayer to God. It’s my way of communicating with him and praising him.”

Her unshakable commitment to the ministry of music makes it clear she intends to continue as an energetic, prolific force in contemporary church music.

Movie Review: The Prince of Tides – Family Secrets & the Grace of God

by Larry James
May, 1992

Secrets destroy families. Barbra Streisand's latest film based on Pat Conroy's brilliant novel, "The Prince of Tides," uncovers the crippling secrets of a poor, white, South Carolina family. Tom Wingo, played brilliantly by Academy Award nominee Nick Nolte, along with his twin sister, Savannah, and his older brother Luke, grew up on Melrose Island, one of sixty sea islands in Colleton County, South Carolina. Raised by a violent, inattentive father and a deceitful, manipulative mother, the life of Tim Wingo flashes back and forth across the screen from childhood to the present as he and his sister's psychiatrist, Dr. Susan Lowenstein (Barbra Streisand), attempt to save the life of suicidal Savannah Wingo.

Just beneath an entertaining, romantic story line, which violates all rules of doctor/patient decorum, viewers encounter the essence of life's struggle at the end of the twentieth century. Luke, Tom, and Savannah grow up scarred by the cruel brutalities of an incredibly dysfunctional family. Forced into the role of "protector" of his younger brother and sister, Luke Wingo intervenes on several horror-filled occasions with courageous, and personally costly, acts of life-saving heroism. Continually doing battle against incredible odds, Luke ultimately loses his life in a battle with the United States government over a river project destined to destroy his beloved tidewater homeland. Savannah barely survives a nightmarish childhood to become a psychotic poet who writes about her life and the South utilizing metaphors and subjects drawn from Auschwitz and the Holocaust. Savannah's pain prods Tom to function as his sister's memory. In the process of remembering the childhood they shared, Tom Wingo discovers dark secrets about himself, his parents, childhood abuse he suffered, and the real nature of "the Southern Way of Life."

While working through his own and his family's "issues," Tom Wingo discovers sickness in his doctor's life and family. Tom contracts to play football coach to Susan Lowenstein's teenage son whose mostly absent father insists that his son become as accomplished a violinist as himself. The illicit web of intimacy woven by Tom Wingo and his compelling physician leads to pain, honesty, rebirth, and regret for both doctor and patient.

Apart from its passion, suspense, roller coaster emotion, and Oscar-caliber performances, the strength of "The Prince of Tides" lies in how accurately it reflects the real-life struggles of ordinary people today. While viewing this film I experienced an almost overwhelming encounter with human pain. The agonizing memories of Tom Wingo seemed to parallel almost perfectly many stories shared with me in counseling situations in my office at church. Every week I meet with fathers who do not have a clue about how to communicate love to their children. Intimacy in marriage and family life presents an almost insurmountable challenge to most modern men and women. People expend incredible amounts of personal, psychic energy keeping family secrets safely buried. As a result, depression, adultery, child abuse, addictions of various sorts, and self-destruction flourish in our world and in our churches. Far too often the religious community, the church, does more to enable the keeping of secrets than it does to free people from the pain of denial and cover-up.

“The Prince of Tides,” probably unwittingly, displays the awesome power of cosmic Evil in our world. The only adequate explanation for the pain forced upon and endured by the Wingo children is the existence of an objective force for evil in the world. The irony and cruel power of this insidious evil can best be seen in the manner in which it not only assaults its victims, but then follows through by sucking those who suffer the most into sinful behaviors themselves. The movie shattered my own self-righteousness by making me aware that no one can stand against the darkness alone and unaided.

What does a world like ours, a world so accurately and brilliantly understood and captured in Pat Conroy’s novel, need? I found myself turning this question over in my mind during the movie. What does a world so captive to the power of evil and so full of pain need most?

Our world needs relief from pain in the form of grace. Suffocating, irrational shame, like that which almost snuffed out Savannah Wingo’s life, spreads like an epidemic through our society today. Only in an environment of pure grace can crippling shame of this magnitude be relieved. Family secrets can be released and unlocked only in an environment of unconditional acceptance. Tom Wingo’s painful memory resuced his sister because Dr. Susan Lowenstein expressed and demonstrated love and grace again and again to both of her clients. In the face of such unrelenting evil our world needs the powerful grace of God more than anything else.

Second, people today need meaningful relationships as never before. Grace must move from the abstract to the concrete if pain is to be relieved. The hidden pain in Tom Wingo’s heart prevented him from trusting anyone enough to share intimacy or to develop a relationship of any real depth. Tom lived as a distant joker while his marriage crumbled before his eyes. Tom could not express his feelings about anything or anyone, even his wife. Only as people encounter grace in community can health, hope and feelings be rediscovered.

Third, people today need reality. Tom Wingo found his way back to life and sanity because he faced reality about himself and his family. In the safety provided by grace and a supportive relationship, Tom came to grips with who he was and what he wanted. Prior to therapy he resigned from teaching because he felt like a failure. In a touching scene at the end of the movie, Tom stands again in a high school classroom teaching English. After school he coaches football. Reflecting on his return to the career he loves, Tom confesses, “...I am a teacher, a coach, a well-loved man.” Considering his parents and his therapy, Tom concludes, “In New York I learned to love my father and mother in all their outrageous humanity.” At movie’s end Tom Wingo enjoys peace because he faced reality about his life.

Human pain finds relief and hope in grace, satisfying relationships, and reality. The church will discover renewal as it redefines its mission in these terms. To be faithful and effective in our pain-filled world we must reevaluate our priorities. “The Prince of Tides,” forces me to ask myself, “How can I and my church reach someone like Tom Wingo with the liberating truth of Jesus Christ?”

Hope Network Newsletter: To Dream Again...

by Lynn Anderson
May, 1992

After 55 years of living, 35 of them in ministry, I know plenty of shattered dreams first-hand. Have you noticed how few of my age peers are still preaching? Soe say they were driven out; others, burned out. Maybe. But as William Willimon says, "Burn-out in ministry is not usually from over-work, but from under-meaning." A lot of us simply lost our dream. We can live with the work, the flack and the furstration, but we can't live wout dreams.

*We are all of us dreamers of dreams
on visions our childhood is fed*

but the heart of a child
is undaunted it seems,

by the ghosts of dreams that are dead.

Somewhere along the way our fellowship lost its dream. Our dreams began early. In 1865 *The Baltimore American* said of us, "they had their origin in this country only about forty years ago, but they number now, in the United States alone, over six hundred thousand communicants." Just think – from zero to six hundred thousand in only forty years!

Up until the 1960s we believed it could be done again. We said we were still the "fastest growing religious group in the country." My buddies and I dreamed of "taking the world." Our missionaries were on the march. It was the "Dawning of the Age of Aquarius," and we were changing the planet!

Somewhere around 1965 our statistics flattened, then headed down hill on a collision course with oblivion, until a slight upturn around 1986. Mac Lynn reports three percent growth between 1980 and 1990. Rather than changing the world, we fell behind population growth and weren't even keeping our own kids. In some states, we ended the decade smaller by scores of thousands. In 1991 Flavil Yeakly said, "I don't know of any of our older, larger mainline churches that are growing by evangelism!" Our dreams were shattered.

I spotted an old friend leaning against the wall, alone in a crowded room, staring at the floor, his eyes as vacant as last year's bird's nest. He slowly dragged his eyes up from the floor to mine. Then he spoke for a lot of us, "Lynn, I've lost my dream. What do you do without dreams?"

*He may live on by effort and plan
when the fine bloom of living is shed
but God pity the little that's left of a man,
when the last of his dreams is dead.*

What went wrong?

Whatever it was, it is not just a problem with our fellowship. Lyle Schaller says that fewer than five percent of all local churches in America which are 25 years old are growing by evangelism.

Some of our wrist-slashing is misguided. "We are too narrow. Too broad. Too materialistic. Don't love the lost. Lost our distinctiveness. Too sectarian . . ." Whack! Slash! While there may be some truth in this, not all the good Christians lived in Bible times, or in the '50s or whenever the golden age was. Lousy Christians lived a long time ago, too. For starters, check Corinth!

No! I believe something more recent and pervasive lies behind our declining growth and shattered dreams.

The wine of the gospel didn't run out. The wineskins quit stretching. We froze and the culture moved off and left us. Or, as someone has said, "They put my church on auto-pilot in the 50's and haven't been back to the cockpit since!"

In his book *Unleashing the Church*, Frank Tilapaugh reminds us that prior to the American Revolution, churches in this country were mostly cultural branch-offices of European denominations, clustered on the eastern seaboard. They did not connect with the new culture. With the Revolution, America headed west. New churches sprang up all across the frontier. Baptist plow preachers knew how to communicate with the pioneers. Methodists employed effective "methods." These pioneer church planters were strategists who designed ways of "doing church" that connected with the culture. Growth exploded!

Then frontier communities evolved into cities. The grandchildren of the pioneers graduated from the universities, settled in the cities and brought their faith with them. However, in so doing they transported rural, frontier church styles to modern, urban settings. After all, these formats had worked back in Farmerville, and "if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

But urban culture kept changing radically and swiftly. And those strategies which served so well in the rural nineteenth century, simply did not fit today's cities. For example, I used to "hold gospel meetings" in rural churches and baptize 10 or 20 people a week. Few city churches attempt this strategy today, however. They understand it was designed for a cultural setting that no longer exists.

However, not all "strategies turned dogma" die so easily. Old wineskins resist stretch. What the plow preachers designed as "strategy" became "event." "Event" became "tradition." "Tradition" became "identity" and finally "dogma," and in our fellowship "the biblical pattern."

The early leaders of our movement, however, were in touch with the culture. Some of our preachers helped draft state constitutions, built universities, designed communications systems. Their hands were on the levers which drove the culture. So our movement exploded in those early years.

However, in more recent times what happened to churches in general happened to us as well. Strategies have become institutionalized. Many congregations hold as sacred mere forms and methods which were designed only as strategies for another place and time. Like other groups,

we turned inward, equated “modernity” with “liberal theology,” and “change” with “apostasy..” We stopped developing, and the culture moved on without us.

Sure we are hampered by narrowness, legalism and loss of commitment on the one hand and materialism, secularism and liberalism on the other. But I believe our greater problem has been our preoccupation with the past – attempting to duplicate nineteenth-century (or first-century) church patterns, rather than projecting the biblical Christ into twentieth-century experience.

Did I hear you shift in your chair and ask, “Lynn, why call this column the *Hope Network Newsletter*? Sounds more like *The Doom*.”

Good. Now we are ready to talk hope! I am more excited about the future of our fellowship now than I have ever been in my life. If the Lord would let me choose any slice of history in which to live my life, I’d choose now, with our people.

Why? Because of some specific, observable realities going on right now.

Global Action

First, the Global Action. In 1974 Billy Graham and John Stott, alarmed at cut-backs in world missions, called a global congress of 2,500 Christian leaders in Lausanne, Switzerland to address the crisis. Fifteen years later, 1989, they convened Lausanne II in Manila, to assess progress. Over 4,000 delegates attended Lausanne II, including seven of us from churches of Christ. Progress was astounding. The global “Christian community” had more than doubled, nearly tripled in 15 years.

The numerical locus of the Christian faith has shifted from North America to Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa. For example, in Seoul, Korea, three congregations number over 100,000 each. A math teacher from Ghana who attended Lausanne I went back home and started a Bible study in his house. Now it is a congregation with 50,000 members which has started approximately 1,000 daughter churches.

Great things are happening globally in our movement, too. In Ethiopia, despite communism, civil war, persecution and famine, and no on-site missionaries, the membership in churches of Christ has grown from roughly 15,000 to 50,000 in the last 15 years! In Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia growth is amazing. Malawi has nearly 1,000 congregations. Solid growth flourishes in Brazil. And watch Eastern Europe!

North American Action

Second, the North American Action. You might say, “But nothing much is happening here.” Wrong! Many churches in this country are growing at record rates, mostly through new church plantings. The Southern Baptists have started several hundred churches per year in each of several states. And look at the Bible church and community church movement.

Two years ago, I picked up a car at Chicago's O'Hare Airport and headed out through snow, wind and 21 degree weather, to visit a Wednesday evening church service. Five thousand people showed up 30 minutes early for 90 minutes of worship and Bible teaching. On the weekend over 12,000 showed – and that church was started only 13 years earlier with less than a hundred people.

My first reaction was, “This stuff must be a mile wide and an inch deep. Of course if you cater to self-interest and dazzle people you can gather a crowd. But if you ask people to stand up for Jesus and the Bible, like we do in the Restoration Movement, that crowd would soon scatter.”

Upon closer examination of a number of these growth stories, however, I've been amazed at their substance. Most claim the Bible as their only rule of faith and practice, require baptism, and follow scripturally qualified leaders. They call people to high levels of moral, financial and ministry expectation. Most expect accountability and practice firm church discipline. Of course I don't agree with all I see, but my point is this: nothing in the message or demands in our congregations would make them any less “marketable” than the message and demands in their congregations. In fact, a lot of our folks would scream bloody murder if called to similar standards.

I am convinced that it is not our message, but our methods and models that “market” so poorly. There is no inherent reason why churches of Christ cannot reach people with amazing effectiveness. I sing in the shower about what is ahead.

Leadership Action

Third, the Leadership Action! I love our older preachers. Fact is, I am one of them. But it's our growing army of young ministers who lift my hopes. In the last decade or two, our rapidly improving schools are turning out preachers who are light-years ahead of where I was at their age. They come out with academic tool sfor Bible study far surpassing mine and most of my preaching peers. They love the Lord and the Bible and preach expository messages. They walk in the spirit of the early restoration leaders by being in touch with the culture. They know the times. Most of them read widely, and many are trained in more than one field.

Also, our younger ministers are earning deep respect outside of our fellowship. An organization called Leadership Network hosts cross-denominational resource retreats for ministers. A number of our finest have participated in several of these conferences. Twice I have heard executives of Leadership Network say, “After visiting with all kinds of ministers, I think the guys from your fellowship are among the brightest and the best.” Every Sunday more than 40,000 of our people hear the preaching of these “brightest and best” ministers in some of our largest pace-setting churches. A bright new day is dawning.

Church Plantings

Fourth, church plantings. Some of our older churches definitely are changing format and strategies to be more effective, and some are showing signs of new growth as we are learning how to manage change without splitting churches. In one graduate class I taught recently, well

over half of the 19 students aspire to be church planters. This is a new and exciting trend. We are dreaming again!

I expect to see dozens of new congregations planted in the next few years – churches which will be rooted firmly in scripture but at the same time connect with our times because they will be:

- Spiritually renewed
- Structurally re-organized
- Sociologically targeted
- Strategically intentional.

A God Of Surprises

Finally, my optimism is rooted in Our God of Surprises! All of God’s major movements in hisotry have been surprises. The people of God could see no way out of Egypt. But God surprised them and parted the Red Sea. Who would have planned this route or anticipated this mighty act of God? Again, in the first century A.D., Israel lost hope under the iron heel of Rome. But God surprised them with a manger, a cross, a resurrection, and Pentecost – and scattered hope across the world.

Only Rip Van Winkle could miss the most recent surprises of God: the Berlin wall scattered to knickknack shelves around the globe; the spread of the gospel in Eastern Europe; the spectacular and swift dissolving of the Soviet Union. Surprises! But then God is full of surprises and capable of anything! What next?

Who knows what the the God of surprises will do around our next corner? Who will be the next Moses, or Paul, or Luther, or Campbell! maybe he or she is sitting in your Sunday school class. Maybe it is you! To paraphrase Joshua, “consecrate yourselves and tomorrow the God of surprises will blow your doors off!”

The God of surprises is a God of hope. So, for as long as *Wineskins* lets me, this column will traffic in hope! We will network with visionaries, risk-takers, and thinkers to track what the Spirit is doing on the cutting edges of the Kingdom. I invite you to network with us month to month for hopeful things God is doing, the hopeful people he is raising up, the hopeful skills he is giving us, and the hopeful developments on our horizons. In the tradition of the men of Issachar, we will attempt to “understand the times” so that we will “know what to do” (1 Chronicles 12:31).

Send us your signs of hope!

For the twenty-five years Lynn has served as an adjunct professor at Abilene Christian University, teaching missions, ministry, and leadership courses. And through those years he has been called on increasingly by scores of minister and numerous churches—as they sought encouragement, resources, and counsel in the midst of the challenges of church leadership. Lynn Anderson is an author, well-known speaker, and founder of the San Antonio-based Hope Network Ministries, a ministry

dedicated to coaching, mentoring and equipping church leaders.

<http://www.mentornetwork.org/>

AfterGlow: Wright Brothers, Beatles and Bathtubs

by Phillip Morrison
May, 1992

You have reached the end of the first issue of *Wineskins* with, we hope, a good taste and a thirst for more. Wherever we have told the *Wineskins* story, people have been wonderfully enthusiastic and encouraging. It is obvious that there is both a need and demand for this kind of Christian journalism.

Wineskins is about change – bold and responsible change. Historically, we have responded to change either by refusing to acknowledge the need for change or by accepting uncritically whatever change someone proposed. One reaction produces slavery to form and tradition while the other produces slavery to one's own wishes and desires. Neither is acceptable.

Simon Newcomb, who died in 1909, six years after the Wright brothers flew 820 feet in 12 seconds, asserted that "Flight by machines heavier than air is unpractical and insignificant ... utterly impossible." In 1962, the Decca Recording Company refused to record a group: "We don't like their sound. Groups of guitars are on their way out." The group? The Beatles. The point? Change is not easily tolerated.

The first bathtub in the United States was installed in Cincinnati in 1842 by Adam Thompson. Newspaper editors predicted the bathtub would undermine the national ideals of democratic simplicity. Doctors warned of rheumatism and pneumonia. Clergymen talked about the vanity and sinfulness of daily baths. Philadelphia prohibited the use of bathtubs between November 1 and March 15; Boston required a doctor's certificate of need; Virginia sought to discourage their use by taxing bathtubs \$30 per year.

We have not always taken kindly to change, yet change has continued to come. Rather than fight change, *Wineskins* seeks to direct it in biblical channels.

We are not so naive as to think everyone will like *Wineskins*. When criticisms come we will try to bear them gracefully and gratefully, for we can learn from everyone.

We welcome letters to the editor, but we will not have a *Letters to the Editor* column.

We welcome submissions of articles, photographs, and other materials to be considered for publication. We cannot be responsible for the safe keeping or the return of unsolicited materials.

Wineskins is a non-profit enterprise qualifying for tax deductible contributions. We subscribe to the code of ethics established by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability. And we will share complete financial information with any reader or contributor on request.

As editors, Mike Cope, Rubel Shelly and I approach our task with no expectation of reward except a "Well done" from the Father.

We share the sentiments of John R. Sizoo: “Let it never be forgotten that glamour is not greatness; applause is not fame; prominence is not eminence. The man of the hour is not apt to be the man of the ages. A stone may sparkle, but that does not make it a diamond; a man may have money but that does not make him a success”

We have just one purpose: to honor God the Father and to glorify the blessed name of Jesus Christ.

Phillip Morrison was, for many years, managing editor of *Wineskins Magazine* and wrote the column “AfterGlow” opposite its inside back cover. He was also the former managing editor for *Upreach* magazine, and worked as a fund-raising consultant and conducted study tours to Bible lands.