

# **Wineskins Magazine**

## **Creativity**

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## Coloring Outside the Lines

*by Mike Cope  
July, 1992*

Jesus of Nazareth might have been a tough kid to teach in Sunday school. Besides being precocious (how's that for Christology?), he undoubtedly was a colore-outside-the-lines kind of child. I don't picture him connecting the dots or doing number painting. I imagine this boy marching to a little different beat – more like rap than 4/4.

As a man he was always coloring outside the lines, charging forth with bold steps. he brought crisp air into stale rooms. he ushered light into dark, dank caves. He called for new wineskins. he challenged – no, he rebuked – the inside-thelines, by the rules religious authorities. He welcomed lepers, ate with hookers, and gathered a rag-tag team of followers.

He told stories that made people laugh, then smile, then frown, then scream. He overturned tables. He spoke of winning by losing.

And, of course, he was promptly killed. Slaughtered. But that isn't so surprising. It often happens to outside-the-liners who challenge the status quo. H. Eugene Johnson has put it so well:

*We need our rules and games  
The comfort of shapes defined,  
That mark our boundaries,  
We are frightened by those  
Coloring outside the lines.*

*We think in terms approved  
By leaders revered of mind  
Whose standards are challenged  
By the nonconformists  
Who reason outside the lines.*

*The culture we have labored  
For must not suffer decline,  
Far better to crucify  
The disturbing prophets  
Who call us outside the lines.*

Churches of Christ are desperately in need of more boundary challengers. We must experience a renaissance of creativity. We need to burst some conventional, convenient wineskins; the new wine of the gospel demands something better, more elastic.

Mindless creativity isn't our goal. Rather, we need imaginative ways to address the ever-increasing challenges of a new world, a new century. The bad news, in a nutshell, is: 1954 is

gone and it isn't coming back. We must not be an eight-track church in the age of CDs, a pony express church in the age of fax, a peck-peck-peck manual typewriter church in the age of word processing. Tom Sine has described the challenge well:

“As we approach a new century, we will need not only a renaissance of Christian imagination, but an army of creative Christian scroungers who are marvelously imaginative in doing more with less.”

While the message of God redeeming us in Jesus Christ can't be altered or mollified, our context has changed – is changing. Some of our methods, programs, styles, ways of thinking, and traditions need to be buried with honor. As Carol Childress has said, “If the horse is dead, take off the saddle.”

May God bless us with an explosion of creative energy and of responsible change as we seek faithfully to serve Jesus Christ.

## A Kingdom Agenda vs Institutional Maintenance

*by Rubel Shelly*  
*July, 1992*

William Aramony headed United Way of America for 22 years. As leader of the nation's largest charity, he was known as a creative, hardworking man. Somewhere during his career, however, he lost his way. As one writer put it, "power and perquisites apparently captured his soul" and he became "a man who lost his moral compass."

His story in a nutshell is this: he violated the public trust by financing an extravagant lifestyle for himself with money people thought they were giving to help the poor.

Over a recent four-year period, he charged \$92,265 to United Way for limousine services, \$40,762 for Concorde flights across the Atlantic, \$37,894 for 29 trips to Las Vegas, and \$33,650 for trips to the home of a female friend in Florida. When forced from his position at United Way, he had the audacity to demand over \$4 million from controversial pension plans he had set up through the agency.

What does any of this have to do with the church of God? What implications for church renewal? What warnings about our personal spiritual lives?

It seems that fallen human beings are always tempted to betray the holiest of causes by subverting them to personal benefit. Is it possible that churches have lost sight of their kingdom agenda for the sake of mere institutional maintenance?

The kingdom of God is the reign of heaven in human hearts and lives (cf. Luke 17:20-21). Christians – even leaders – who embrace the world's way of thinking and behaving have no share in the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21). Yet we understand that the church is meant to be that entity through which the kingdom breaks into human experience. By our rescue from the "dominion of darkness," God has "brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Colossians 1:13-14).

The church's calling is twofold. First, we are to pursue the kingdom of heaven. The church is charged with being an outpost of heaven's reign in a world that lives in rebellion against God. Second, we are to model the kingdom before the world. By this means, we become light to a world still shrouded in darkness. The church offers hope to those who want an alternative to the things of this world that are hostile to God.

How often does the church realize its ideal? It bothers me that several preachers' offices I have been in seem to have more management books than prayer guides, more sermon outline books than tools for personal study. It seems to abandon kingdom pursuit for preserving our own institutions when lectureships and journals are devoted to attacking brothers rather than exalting Jesus, urging conformity to received practice rather than promoting serious thought and responsible progress in communicating the gospel to our contemporaries. elders are merely doing

institutional maintenance when a church's life is dictated by a growling member who gives substantial amounts of money rather than by the larger body's needs, protecting their status as power brokers rather than emptying themselves as servants to all.

Jesus called the church to be radically different from worldly institutions (Matthew 20:25-28). But there is too much of the world's way of thinking among us. How do we measure the success of a church? We typically look to the "bottom line" – attendance, contribution, property. These things may be consistent with faithfulness; if it is necessary to compromise integrity to get or hold them, the kingdom of heaven passes by for the sake of institutional maintenance.

Robert Dale has put it this way in his *To Dream Again*:

"Some congregations my suffer from methodological tunnel vision by majoring on their church and minoring on the kingdom. These groups may ask too often, 'How can we do church here?' to the exclusion of 'How can we bring God's kingdom through this congregation?' A kingdom dream will undergird our methods with a theology big enough to cure tunnel vision."

Life by the world's rules is focused on acquiring and keeping power over others. Leadership is conceived on the model of giving orders and enforcing compliance. Some form of "winning" is the obsession that lies behind all decisions, relationships, and actions.

One who does not know the kingdom of heaven must have the last word and push others around. He struts in victory and pouts in defeat. She is seldom honest with others and never with herself. He cries for himself but not for others. She wants to be heard but cannot listen. He is angry and finds fault with all things and all people. She forgives nothing and remembers every slight (real or imagined) that ever came her way.

The world is filled with non-kingdom people. They lie, steal, murder, abuse, and assault. And the church is overpopulated with them too. They impugn, bully, threaten, and disrupt. By such means, they maintain their cherished traditions and institutional structures.

Love and peace, kindness and gentleness, patience and joy, humility and goodness, self-control and righteousness – these are the features of a reality that comes from God. Yet they are not illusions. They are the ultimate realities of the kingdom of God. They put flesh on the two eternal marks of the church: love for God and love for others.

So we continue to pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And we long to see passion for the preservation of human traditions give way to delight in the reign of God.

## Transition: Where Will it Lead?

by James S. Woodroof  
July, 1992

Our question inevitably comes to mind once a person becomes aware that transition in the church is as inevitable as is change in anything else which is alive. This, however, should not be the first question. The first question for a Bible-oriented people should be "Is transition biblical?" If transition is biblical, a Bible-oriented people will accept it and make whatever changes are necessary to keep aligning themselves with the original, regardless of where the changes may lead. At least this is the basis upon which we have made our appeal to those outside our ranks. We have urged and expected them to change if the evidence warranted change. Can we expect anything less from ourselves? It seems inexcusable for us who have been insistent on change in others to be resistant to change in ourselves.

Every generation of the church has the responsibility and the right to take the church they have inherited and place it up against the original and trim off the excess which has accumulated over the years. Realigning the church is like translating the Scriptures: it must be done over and over again. To refuse to do so will render the church out of date just as surely as refusing to retranslate the Scriptures eventually renders a translation out of date.

The need to realign the church and to retranslate the Scriptures is similar to the need experienced by a boater who launches his boat from a dock into a stream of water. If the boater wishes to stay near the dock he must periodically realign the boat with the dock.

Those intent on keeping their translations near the original and their church near the original will do a similar "realigning" at regular intervals. The purpose of retranslating the Scriptures and realigning the church is to keep bringing them both back to their source. To refuse to do so is to abandon the principle of restoration.

But the question of where this will lead is a legitimate question. What are the implications of "relaunching" at regular intervals? Where will this kind of realigning lead? The bottom line of all such attempts is pointed out in my recent book, *The Church in Transition*. The bottom line is a call to return to 1) a Christ-centered message, and 2) to an attitude of humility which will allow us to accept others as Christians who have experienced the same new birth as we, but who differ with us on one or more of those matters which, according to Thomas Campbell, "properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the church."

The transition incumbent on each generation is never a call to abandon the central truths of the gospel. It is not even an encouragement to abandon the many helpful insights we have gained about the church. For many it will require simply an adjustment in message which restores Christ to the center of the proclamation (instead of the church), and humility as the principal attitude of the believer before God (instead of pride in our correctness).

We will do well at this point to look to Jesus to see if such an adjustment is needed and how to go about accomplishing it.

1. As to the first (the call to restore Christ to the center of our proclamation), we must admit that many of us have for many years made the church the center of our message. But it must be obvious even to the most casual student of Scripture that we have no commission from Christ to preach the church. The only message he commissioned his disciples to preach to the lost was the good news of his death, burial, and resurrection. If we let Jesus determine our message to the world, it is settled: Preach Christ crucified and raised, and call believers to be baptized in response. Then, teach the believers everything Jesus taught his disciples (Matthew 28:19,20).

2. In regard to the second call (to an attitude of humility), there come to mind two occasions on which Jesus addressed this subject. The first occasion is contained in a story Jesus told those who “considered themselves righteous and despised others” (Luke 18:9-14): “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector ....” We all know the story. The man who proudly pointed to the evil he had rightly avoided and recited the good he had properly observed went home unjustified. The other man, who recognized himself as a sinner and cried out for mercy, went home justified.

In making this divine judgment call, Jesus was not putting a premium on sin or disobedience; he was putting a premium on humility. What was Jesus’ lesson if it was not this: Doing right things and refraining from doing wrong things is not the basis of justification before God. Both men in the story were sons of Abraham, but only one exhibited that first attitude of the kingdom: “Blessed are the poor in spirit ...” We cannot earn our justification; it is a gift from God to those who come humbly submitting to him as sinners. To stand before God upon our “rightness” is to go home unjustified.

The second incident involved an application of this principle to his disciples. Luke pictures the Twelve grappling with the problem of pride (Luke 9:46-50). One day, according to Luke’s record, the disciples happened upon a man who, of all things, was casting out demons in Jesus’ name. They were, to say the least, “chapped” at this obvious intrusion into their space. They went to Jesus and reported it: “John answered, ‘Master, we saw a man casting out demons in your name and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us’” (Luke 9:49).

Before we notice Jesus’ response to this report, let’s look at what John was “answering.” Luke 9:46 records that “an argument arose among [the disciples] as to which of them was the greatest. This argument was not a one-time affair; both Luke and Matthew record that pride was a recurring companion of the Twelve (see Matthew 22:24; Mark 10:35-45). They argued repeatedly about which of them was the greatest. Jesus answered their prideful jockeying for position with both an example and a verbal rebuke. First, he had a little child stand beside him. Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all – he is the greatest” (Luke 9:48).

It was this statement about the true basis of greatness in the kingdom that John, strangely enough, seems determined to rebut. Why else would he bring up the incident at this time? (Both

Luke and Mark record John's report about the unauthorized exorcist as coming immediately after Jesus rebuked them for arguing over position.) When individual eliteness was denied them by Jesus, it seems John attempted to establish at least a group superiority that would allow them to maintain their pride and feed the human desire for special place. But Jesus did not allow that either. He replied: "Do not stop him. No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of what is in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward" (Mark 9:39-41).

We must stop following John and start following Jesus! There was, according to both Luke and Mark, at least one man doing good in the name of Christ who "was not following with [them]." Are we resentful of people like that? John was. Do we want to stop them? John did. But Jesus saw it in a different light. Will we follow John or Jesus? Humility of heart and mind must be the "first beatitude" of every attempt to understand true discipleship. If it is not, there will always be resentment, pride, and division in the church. Jesus was not walking the road of resentment, pride, or division. We have walked long enough with the "sons of thunder." I suggest we retrace our steps and stay as close as we possibly can to the Son of God. It may take some proud wind out of our sails, but surely, meaningful transition requires nothing less than this ... if we choose to walk with the Son of God.

Now, to answer our original question, "Transition: Where Will it Lead?" If we are discussing biblical transition (the kind of transformation/transition to which Jesus constantly called his early disciples and to which, through the apostles, he calls the church of all time), transition is nothing more than that painful but essential task of trimming off the excess, realigning the boat with the original dock, making whatever in-course corrections are necessary to keep us true to the divine original. It is the process we know best as "restoration."

Then, where will this lead? It will lead us back to the fundamentals of Christianity to whatever degree we periodically drift away from them. It will lead us: 1) to a Christ-centered faith, and 2) to a spirit of humility. Resisting this kind of transition/restoration is tantamount to rejection of him who called us and a renouncing of our long-cherished dream of being his people.

## Whatever It Takes

*by Kregg Hood  
July, 1992*

**“Whatever It Takes!”** was the 1982 theme for the North Phoenix Baptist Church, one of America’s fastest-growing churches. During the previous decade their attendance exploded from 1,800 to more than 6,000. This growth came without compromise, too. They remained committed to their conservative biblical roots. But they emphasized commitment and creative methods to focus on accomplishing God’s two most challenging goals: evangelism and discipleship.

We in Churches of Christ also have the opportunity to position ourselves for great effectiveness in God’s work. But we’re going to have to be willing to do “whatever it takes.” We can develop creativity but we have to believe there’s always a “better way.” Our methods always need refining. And sometimes they need a complete overhaul! But if we’re willing to work hard, think smart, and stay locked onto God-given missions, he will bless our efforts. Here are seven steps to get you started:

**1. Focus on Your Purpose.** What does God want your congregation to get done? Every church knows the Great Commission: it should evangelize lost people and bring the saved people to maturity in Christ. Is that what you are really trying to do? In reality, most churches have three other “hidden” priorities shaping the true direction of the church: to keep attendance from dropping, to break even financially, and to keep the members from griping. If people are saved or nurtured that’s just “icing on the cake.”

God forbid! Everything we think, say, and do should help accomplish God’s purpose: helping people become like Jesus. Paul said, “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:28,29).

For example, aggressive evangelistic efforts, first-rate Bible classes, sensitive benevolence ministries, and dynamic, God-honoring worship help lead people to maturity in Christ. If you forget the purpose you’ll start to coast. Before long you’ll be working to maintain programs instead of producing momentum.

**Be Intentional.** Always know why you’re doing something. Be deliberate. If you don’t have a good reason for an activity you shouldn’t be doing it.

For example, do you know why you have a Sunday evening worship service? Most churches have one because they’ve always had one. But what specific purpose are you actually accomplishing with that service?

I’m not knocking Sunday night services; I’m knocking Sunday night services which aren’t maximizing their effectiveness.

**3. Identify Your “Sacred Cows.”** Recently I talked with John Maxwell, an extremely effective preacher for a large, fast-growing church in San Diego. I asked him about improving outreach efforts. He replied with a question: “Is your congregation willing to sacrifice its ‘sacred cows’ to help more people come to Christ?” He continued, “Let’s say you tell the people not to worry; you’re not planning to make a certain change, but, how would they feel if a certain ‘sacred cow’ were changed and it helped reach more people ... would they be willing to go along?” Our most cherished programs, schedules, and approaches are probably not unscriptural, but if they hinder effectiveness they are “sacred cows.” Don’t protect them. Identify them and start to ease them gently over to the side.

**4. Develop a Workable Idea.** The previous three steps prepare you for step four. Need some good ideas? Bring together a group of your leaders and best idea people. Get them to imagine they had just moved to the area and were starting a new congregation. Ask them how they would handle one of the specific situations your “new” congregation should address. Find out what other effective churches have done. Make phone calls. Read a couple of books on the issue. See if one or more in the group could go to a seminar on the topic. Then meet again, pool your ideas, and write a proposal outlining the following information: the need for this idea, the limitations of present approaches, possible ideas you considered, and the best idea you found. Then share this proposal with the elders and/or key leaders in your congregation.

**5. Start Small.** Most opposition to change is based on a fear of the unknown. Sometimes that fear is unfounded but it may also be legitimate. For example, smart businesses always test-market a new product before going into full-scale production. Pilot projects let you work out many of the logistical snags before launching a full-blown version to the congregation.

**6. Offer the New Idea as an Option.** Marketing research is clear: people want to “try before they buy.” Again, the fear of change probably torpedoes most new ideas. But we can minimize this fear by keeping an existing approach in place while developing the new idea alongside the old one. This approach frees those who are ready to run with the new idea. It also buys you time to persuade the concerned folks gradually. Even if the concerned ones don’t get involved with the new idea, you may get them to allow it. If you try to make the new idea replace the old one, you have a big battle to fight.

Several months ago, I had a conversation with Bob Buford, a very successful businessman who is also an astute observer of organizational changes. He said that when Interstate 20 was built, the engineers didn’t tear up old Highway 80. At first, some people were afraid of the new interstate. It was an unknown, high-speed, potential death trap. Some folks just kept on driving on Highway 80, passing through every little town on the way, hitting the red lights and speed zones, and getting to their destinations a lot later than if they had driven on the interstate. But eventually they tried the interstate and liked it. The new highway won without a battle!

**7. Implement, evaluate, and improve.** Put your new idea into practice, but stay tuned to whether or not it’s working. If your idea is not an improvement, it’s just as bad as the inadequate old idea – maybe worse! You need a regular review of all important activities. During this review, keep asking some very key questions: “What are we trying to do?” (Write it down.)

“What’s working?” (Keep doing that.) “What’s not working?” (Drop or improve it.) “What do we need to add?” (Make a new proposal.)

Bill Hybels believes that one of the secrets of success for the Willow Creek Community Church is, “We are incurable ‘tweakers.’ ” They are always trying to do God’s work better.

Follow these seven steps and they will help you make “Whatever It Takes” your mindset. Here’s how Richard Jackson felt about his church’s theme:

What a joy it is to be a part of a “Whatever It Takes” kind of people. It is easy to love folks who love the Lord and his church as you do. Being a part of North Phoenix is not convenient. It never has been. We constantly change. We challenge. We grow. As we do these things, the demands for commitment increase. Workers are needed. New schedules are necessary. Our giving must increase. To all of these challenges the faith family of North Phoenix says, “Whatever It Takes,” we will do.

What a great attitude! We have not arrived at either perfection or completion. Let’s pay the price to be and do what pleases God – whatever it takes!

## Television, The Electronic Millstone

*by Philip Patterson*  
*July, 1992*

In an article entitled “The End of Innocence,” Nina Darton tells the story of two boys, six and nine, watching an MTV video entitled “I Want Your Sex.”

Welcome to parenting the media age.

What’s a media age?

It’s tennis player Andre Agassi on television commercials telling our children “image is everything.” It’s one of the nation’s largest theater chains requesting that parents not bring children under three to R-rate features except at bargain matinees. It’s a tangled media web in which the owner of “The Simpsons” and the exclusive licensee of the New International Version of the Bible are the same person. It’s an age where television takes our children around the world before we allow them to cross the street.

And it’s quite possibly the most difficult age in history to protect children and rear them in a godly way.

Childhood was a special time to Jesus. He elevated children to a place of honor by commanding all who would follow him to become as children – free from the shackles of sin and questioning in their faith. And in a stern warning recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, he cautioned his listeners that “If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

In Jesus’ time, the millstone was a large rock, capable of crushing grain to make flour. Today’s “electronic millstone” is a rectangular tube, capable of crushing the innocence, or the creativity and individuality of those under its influence. However, like the early millstone, our electronic millstone has a tremendous utilitarian value as well.

The first century millstone helped to feed the body; the modern electronic millstone can feed the mind. Yet all too often, unfettered use of television has offset its potential for good. Statistics now show that in the average household, the television is on more than seven hours daily. An amazing 35% of all households are “constant TV” households, meaning that in one-third of the homes in the nation, the television set never goes off as long as anyone is awake.

School age children average watching three and one-half hours of television daily. One million children under the age of 18 are still watching television at midnight on any given school night. By the time they graduate from high school, most children will have watched 18,000 hours of television – 50% more hours than they spent in school. This means television takes up as much as 80% of all waking hours outside the classroom.

Ironically, the more families watch, the less they think they are affected. While virtually everybody agrees that television has the potential to harm, few viewers think they are at risk. It's as if many think that the millstone will actually float them while sinking everyone else.

Two university studies make this point. In one, 80% of the respondents agreed that television had the power to manipulate society, yet only 13% felt television could manipulate them. In the second, 65% of the respondents agreed that television addiction was a possibility, yet only two percent felt that they were personally addicted. The conclusion of the researchers: "To put it simply, if almost everyone believes that television has disastrous effects upon almost everyone but himself, then quite a few must be wrong."

What if we are one of the minority who acknowledges the awesome power of the media and who are concerned about the power of television to affect our families? What can be done?

History tells us that Christian parents will be no more successful in turning back the communication revolution than the Luddites were in turning back the industrial revolution. The Luddites destroyed the stocking and lace frames that were mechanizing the textile industry and taking jobs from the workers, mistakenly thinking that they could turn back the path of progress.

While some call for the permanent elimination of television as a solution, most parents will find it easier to make peace with television, films, and videotapes than to eliminate them entirely. The Christian parent doesn't have to give in entirely to the media culture in order to avoid the folly of the Luddites.

Aristotle argued that virtue is usually found between two extremes. Between total abolition and total acquiescence lies the right balance for the use of television in our homes. Our goal is to find that balance. What follows are several practical suggestions for learning to live with television.

### **1. Don't watch television; watch programs.**

All too often, too much of our parental concern is on the content of television, and not the fact of television. We should be concerned with not only *what* we watch, but also *that* we watch.

When one watches television, other possibilities are not chosen. Scores of potential activities vanish in the flickering light of the television set. Conversations go unspoken and books go unread. Why? Because we too often fall into the trap of watching television, rather than watching specific programs. Can you name the last five television shows you watched? For many, so little planning goes into watching television, we can't remember what or how much we watched yesterday.

Try innovative methods to eliminate "random viewing" in your household. Some families have done it with contracts or coupons allowing a certain amount of viewing per week. Why not hold court and make the would-be viewers justify their decision to watch a show in front of a family "jury" who would consider such factors as homework/grades, quality and length of the show, and whether chores are done?

Children soon get the message from these efforts that television is a privilege and not a right. One parent told me that when they limited the quantity of television, the quality took care of itself. The children, faced with a budget of time, instinctively separated the trivial programs from the important ones, and chose the latter.

## **2. Interrupt and interpret.**

Research has shown that an important variable in the potential effects of television or film on young children is present during the viewing. Researchers Shirley O'Bryant and Charles CorderBolz call this important activity "interrupt and interpret."

One important reason for interactive viewing is to mitigate the fear that some viewing instills. Research has shown that heavy viewers of television are more likely to be afraid of their own environment than light viewers, a phenomenon researchers call the "mean and scary world" syndrome. Children look to adults to explain the world. And, in their absence, they make up their own explanations from the options they deem plausible, often leading to nightmares or irrational fears.

Another important reason for interactive viewing is to remind children of the real-world consequences of the actions they see on television. Without adult monitoring, children watch implausible stunts happen on cartoons or movies with no ill effects to the participants. While it may seem needless to tell children that the cartoon staple of a skillet in the face will break bones, the incidents of imitative behavior in the scientific literature are conclusive: children will try to imitate what they see on television.

## **3. Get media literate.**

While we spend thousands of hours with the media, few of us have questioned how the media works. Parents should educate their children in some basic principles of "media literacy." First, children should be taught that television is not real. Real doesn't attract audiences. Television takes shortcuts to tell a story, and these easy answers may not be available to real life problems.

Second, television teaches that one's importance is measured by wealth, and that happiness is obtainable through things. The real power of television is its power to define – what's in, what's out, what's hot and what's not. We should not allow the media to define our children's sense of self-worth.

Finally, children should be taught that they are the true product of television, not the shows they are watching. As they watch, they are being packaged and sold to advertisers. The programming is just the "bait" to lure them in. Someone will always be trying to sell them something – a product, an ideology, a lifestyle either overtly or covertly – on television.

To finish the story begun at the top of this article, when the lyrics of "I Want Your Sex" mentioned "sex with you alone," the younger boy asked the older, "What's that thing when it isn't alone, when lots of people do it? A borney?" "No," came the reply from the older one. "You're so dumb. It's an orgy."

Somewhere between “borney” and “orgy” lies the end of innocence, and simultaneously, the end of childhood. At what point that time comes is no longer in total control of the parent, but with proper media controls, that precious time can be lengthened.

*This is an excerpt from from The Electronic Millstone: Christian Parenting in a Media Age, copyright 1992 by Philip Patterson. To be published this month by College Press, Joplin, Missouri.*

## Once Upon a Cross, Part 2

*by Thom Lemmons  
July, 1992*

Getting into my car, I try to decide whose music I'm in the mood for. Wagner? No, too heavy, like a banana split with a chocolate malt chaser. Mozart? Too sprightly. Right now I don't feel much up to sprightliness. Bach? Hmmm, yeah. Just the right balance. Light in texture but no gymnastic. I dig through the cassettes in my console, find the recording I'm after and insert it. "Little Fugue" in G minor blooms from the four speakers, filling the interior of the vehicle with the crystalline, mathematical mazes of Bach's counterpoint.

It crosses my mind that Johann Sebastian Bach was an intensely religious man. He is supposed to have said that music should be for "the glory of God and the refreshment of the spirit." or words to that effect. Not surprising, since so much of his material was based on Lutheran hymn tunes. I'll bet it was just something to see when the Bach family went to church. Of course, Johann had to be there early since he was the organist and choirmaster. So Mama Bach – his cousin Maria Barbara, wasn't she? – had to get the seven little children fed, dressed, and into the pews before the first chorale prelude. No wonder she died at such an early age. But then came Anna Magdalena, more fecund by half than his first wife. They had 13 children together. Of course, less than half survived him. Lots of baby-sized coffins in those days.

I wonder if Bach had any daughters. What am I talking about? With 20 kids, of course he had daughters! What would it have been like to be a child of the greatest keyboardist and composer in Germany? No doubt the boys, at least, spent a lot of time at the kitchen table and the keyboard, slaving over counterpoint and harmonization assignments. It must have worked out okay: Johann Cristoph, Carl Philippe Emmanuel, Wilhelm Friedmann, and Johann Christian went into the family business when their turns came.

But what about the girls? Did they ever get any counterpoint assignments? Were they ever challenged, coached, admonished to become anything other than housekeepers and broodmares or, at most, intelligent, Godfearing adornments to the husbands selected for them? I wonder if they got into fights with their father. Or, were they in such a distant orbit that his actions and attitudes toward them were irrelevant or, worse, nonexistent? If they survived their father physically, did any of Bach's daughters survive him emotionally and spiritually? Or, being girl-children, were their dreams and ambitions doomed to stillbirth?

I called my folks last night. When pressed, Dad acknowledged receipt of the birthday card with a reluctant thanks. He wanted to know if I was going to church anywhere regularly. I told him no, not really, and that effectively ended his part of the conversation. Mom wanted to know if I was dating anybody, and I told her no. Ditto for Mom. Their worst fears for me confirmed, the call limped toward an anemic goodbye. Just before she hung up, Mom said, "Janice honey ... you know" – I could almost hear her looking over her shoulder, making sure Dad was out of earshot – "you know your father loves you, don't you?"

“Yeah, Mom, I know.”

“He just has trouble ... expressing his feelings.

Right. “Yes, Mom, I understand. Don’t worry. I love you, okay?”

“I love you too, honey.” Dial tone.

No mail in my box at the apartment, except for my electric bill. Oh, for the days of “all-bills-paid” apartment living! But those went out with the energy crisis times in the mid-seventies.

Ahh, the weekend! I luxuriate in the feeling of Friday evening. I exult in the long, plush comfort of the next 55 hours; I soak in them like a hot, scented bubblebath after the cold, damp exertion of the week. Time to do as I like, to go at any pace that suits me. Time to find out what sort of trouble Linus has gotten himself into. With relish, I flip on the power switch to my word processor.

By the time Linus could deliver the cross he had built to Golgotha, receive his payment, and return to the city, the sun was striding toward midday. He set his face sternly toward his house, determined to avoid the vicinity of the Temple and Antonia Fortress. He had no intention whatever of being drawn into the storm gathering about the Galilean prophet. The tensions, voiced and unvoiced, which he had witnessed in the Temple and streets of Jerusalem had shown him the folly of placing oneself under the unwelcome scrutiny of Rome and the Temple hierarchy. Indeed, having naked malice displayed on the faces of Caiaphas and his father-in-law Annas, Linus was hard put to say which was worse: to oppose the empire, or the leaders of his own people.

One thing was certain: the Galilean’s reluctance to grasp the reins of power had served him ill. Again and again, Linus had heard the common folk of Jerusalem and surrounding countryside testify to their awe of the presence and reputation of the wandering preacher from the north country. That the Galilean had gripped the imagination of the masses, Linus could never doubt. Why, then, had he failed to properly use this one weapon which Sadducees and Pharisees most feared and could least withstand? At his one, fleeting encounter with the Galilean, Linus had felt the eyes, the mind of the prophet boring into his own. The Nazarene, whatever else one could say about him, was no simple-headed vagabond. Linus knew this in the core of his soul.

Even the Gentiles in the Temple court had sensed his power. And why, how, had he allowed himself to be trapped within the clutches of the High Priest and his accomplices? For months he had moved cannily about Judea and Galilee, preaching to crowds, drawing such a following as made him impossible to ignore, surpassing even John the Baptizer in the adulation of the throngs. He came into the very Temple courts, surrounded by an adoring mob, throwing down his challenges, unhindered and unanswered, before the feet of Caiaphas and the others. How could a man this astute in the ways of power, this aware of the self-serving greed of the Temple establishment, this attuned to the moods, the dreams, the desires of those around him, allow himself to be snared like a sleeping bird, captured by the callow betrayal of one of his deputies?

Linus tied the donkey in his stall, tossing a few handfuls of straw into the manger. He slouched into his shop and scattered the half-dozen silver coins, the payment for his carpentry work, onto a table. He flopped down on a nearby bench, and set about convincing himself that his involvement in the affair was ended.

He should be busying himself, he knew. After all, was this not Passover Eve? Linus had not gone completely without friends since coming to Jerusalem; usually, he would keep the first night's feast with some household or other. No doubt he should be out and about, to see who might have a spare place at the board. And besides – ought he not go to the market to buy the unleavened matzoh which he would eat with his melas for the rest of the week? There were plenty of things he needed to be doing. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's ... and to God what is God's ...."

He picked up the coin, rubbing his thumb thoughtfully over the emperor's image. The words of the Nazarene haunted him, echoed relentlessly in his memory like a challenge ... or a promise. It came to Linus that the reason for the prophet's misfortune was his unwillingness to be cast in any of the molds which were familiar to everyone. Was he a Zealot? A popular, military champion of the people, like likes of the long-dead Maccabees? No. He might stride to the cliff's edge of rebellion, but he would step aside at the last, and turn his attention to other things. Indeed, outside of the rowdy demonstration in the Court of the Goyim, Linus had never seen or heard of the Nazarene showing violence to anyone. Was he an Essene? hardly. He came willingly to the Temple at feast-times, gladly embraced the occasion to teach such as would listen to his words. His was not the austere isolation, the unforgiving rigidity of the Qumran hermits, which drove them to forsake mankind in favor of some remote, sterile comfortless vision of truth.

But neither was he compatible with the Pharisees, and still less the Sadducees. For he seemed to genuinely love the dirty, crippled, work-bent masses who flocked to him, who hung on his words, who begged him for healing and – some said – were made whole. Not for him the haughty ambition of the Sadducees, nor the manipulative platitudes of the Pharisees. So – in what mold was the Galilean cast? Linus stared at the coin in his hand. Whose image was stamped upon the Nazarene? Would anyone ever know, or would the puzzling prophet from Nazareth carry the secret to his tomb?

More to the point, Linus wondered: whose image was stamped upon himself? Until the Nazarene had come along, he had generally avoided such deliberations. For Linus, identity had long been a matter of the tallying of losses. He defined himself by what was left behind – which was little enough, he thought.

Was this the reason for the instinctive hatred of Caiaphas toward the Galilean – because he would not allow himself to be easily defined? Perhaps he was the unknown factor, a principle of uncertainty in some precarious balance which the High Priest and his peers wished to remain unchanged. Could this be the stimulus which drove the Temple leaders to be so adamant for his blood? Certainly, they had never so troubled themselves over other, more conventional troublemakers. Even the Baptizer Prophet was secretly applauded by them.

Decisively, Linus slapped the table, and stood. He would see the thing to its finish. For good or ill, the Nazarene still maintained a purchase on his mind, still tugged and nagged at his long-dormant sense of wonder.

For the sake of tat, at least, Linus would follow the course to whatever end it might lead.

He strode out the door and turned uphill, toward the Fortress Anotnia ...

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

## And They'll Know We are Christians By Our Scent

by Jeff Nelson  
July, 1992

A wolf prowled along the edge of the flock and killed a sheep and a lamb before the shepherd could stop him. This tragedy left a sheep without a baby lamb, and a lamb without a mother. Both had a great need for each other, but the sheep would not touch the lamb. The tender shepherd poured the blood of the slain lamb over the orphan lamb. Smelling this familiar scent, the mother sheep took this little lamb as her own. The shepherd took great delight in observing “the rebirth of life” he had given.

In worship, seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting are as relevant to our spiritual being as the five senses are to our physical being. The vocabulary of the senses in worship usually describes what *we* experience. However, smell seems to be the one sense that *God* experiences in our worship as a “sweet fragrance in his nostrils.” Smell is one way God receives a part of our worship.

“Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma ...” (Genesis 8:20,21).

“For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life” (2 Corinthians 2:15).

Why would smell be important to God? Why would he make so many references to aroma, smell, incense, nostrils and fragrance? Good smells are welcomed. Bad smells are rejected. At least that’s how we deal with smells.

Is smell important to you? Try thinking of fond memories from the past without certain scents coming to mind – smells so vivid you think the aroma is actually present. Do any fragrances come to mind when you think about Thanksgiving dinner? Mowing the lawn on “family day”? Riding the baler during a hay harvest? The smells of home.

Is it possible that God may be reminded of the sweet aromas of worship through the ages because they linger in his presence as incense does even after it’s burned? Does the aroma of a ram being sacrificed in the place of a boy named Isaac ever waft through the corridors of the throne-room and bring a smile to the face of a proud Father? Just as I believe a prayer, once uttered, echoes in the caverns of time and space for eternity, so I believe the aromas of true worship linger in the presence of the Lord forever. What we offer in worship today perfumes God’s eternity.

Not-so-pleasant thoughts are attached to not-so-pleasant smells. I don’t spend much time reminiscing about pig pens, septic tanks, or dirty diapers. But a pleasant aroma lingers after true

worship. False worship stinks and fortunately doesn't last. God would not want to taint his heavens forever with smells that turned his stomach.

The Lord has a keen awareness for distinguishing the smell of true or false worship. He knows which lambs are his – made his, because they are washed in the blood of the Lamb. In Jeremiah and Amos, God is repulsed by what is being offered as worship. God can smell false worship a million miles away. He can sense insincerity before one word escapes from the lips. Even the strongest spices can't hide the stench of spoiled meat. As Lady Macbeth stated accurately, "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."

When God required a burnt offering he knew if the sacrifice had been made according to the law. When he asked for a broken and contrite heart in place of a burnt offering he knew if the sacrifice was pure. Nothing is sweeter to the nostrils of God than a heart offering its purest form of praise. We know in our hearts what pleases God.

Human nature produces some rank odors – odors we try to hide. We use mouthwash to hide bad breath. We "deodorize" body odor. And, according to the money-motivated marketers of Madison Avenue, perfume promises the ultimate experience: sex, success, and satisfaction. But what smells good to us and what smells good to God may be distinctly different.

When my family lived in Denison, Texas, we lived close to an olive-packing plant. I don't know what was in the olive-packing process that smelled so bad, but it produced an offensive odor. For the people who worked there the odor meant income and security. For me, however, it was just offensive.

We cannot judge what aroma God receives from others. The most distinct scent would be the smell of the cross. The aromas were anything but pleasing – dried blood, perspiration, the emission of body fluids, vinegar, etc. Yet, this sacrifice offered the sweetest aroma ever released from the earth. The heavens smelled eternal victory. Hell reeked with the smell of eternal death and defeat.

The smell of our spiritual sacrifices cannot be manipulated. Each of us has a distinctive scent to God. There is no perfume except the fragrant blood of the Lamb that can cover the sickening smell of sin in the presence of God. We cannot think that God could really accept our sacrifice if all we do is "put on perfume" and "go to church." This is why a lifestyle of worship is so vitally important in our relationship with him. This is why we are encouraged to make our bodies, our whole selves, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which IS our spiritual worship. Our scent doesn't change on Sunday from what we smell like all week.

Our living testimony is the worship God smells. Just like the sheep smelled the blood of the slain lamb and cared for it, God smells the blood of Jesus on us and claims us as adopted sons and daughters. We're part of the family because we remind him of Jesus.

Can you sense what God expects from our worship when he says we are to him "the aroma of Christ"? What is the aroma of Christ? It is the smell of purity touching the stench of disease, the hand of a saint blessing the head of a sinner. It is to continue allowing the manifest presence of

Christ to be lived out in our lives of service. So what God smells is not always pleasing to the nostrils of people, but because it smells like Jesus, it is pleasing to the Father.

When I was a small child, my dad preached in Bynum, Texas, a small town outside of Waco. The owner of the cotton gin, Ennis Smith, and his wife would invite us over after the evening service, but my parents, having school-age children, usually said no. One night Mrs. Smith, who happened to be very fond of this four year old, put me in her car and took me home, knowing my parents would have to come by for me. Hot Dr. Pepper with lemon was a popular drink at that time, and she knew the aroma of this boiling beverage would entice anyone to stay. If we could just get the scent in the air before my parents arrived. Sure enough, when they arrived the smell filled the room. The presence of a convincing aroma changed a decision that had already been made. When others get close enough to smell the aroma of Christ coming from us, it can influence a life-changing decision.

It would be wonderful to know for certain that what we offer is being received as a sweet aroma to the nostrils of God. Can we know? I believe so.

First, our offering must be pleasing to us. If we don't enjoy making the sacrifice, God certainly won't enjoy receiving it. Sacrifices are not to be offered out of obligation, but out of joy in response to the love that has been given to us. "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3).

Second, our offering must be the best we have to offer. God gives each of us good gifts. We should in turn worship him by using those gifts to the best of our ability. Some are gifted in singing – sing your heart out! Some are gifted in teaching – teach, study, and then teach some more! Some are gifted in artistic expression – put your heart for God on the canvas of life! I have a friend, David Harwell, who is doing just that. He is painting what he sees after reading the Word, sensing a conviction from the Lord, and wanting to share with others in a way that God would be glorified.

Finally, accept the freedom you have to express yourself. Sometimes our best is prohibited by restrictions placed on us by others. When we find the freedom to offer God unrestricted praise, the aroma is all that much sweeter to him. One Sunday morning a young woman sang a solo to set the focus of our hearts and minds on the theme of grace. As you might guess, the song was "Amazing Grace," and even though everyone was familiar with the song, I don't believe anyone had ever heard it like this before. She sang with such conviction and sweetness in a moment of worship that seemed isolated from time. Tears were flowing freely in her eyes as well as most others because she knew what grace had covered in her own past and was acknowledging the same for the rest of us. I believe a good part of heaven to this day smells a little sweeter.

Recently, several of us were involved in a "March for Jesus" in downtown Dallas. There were over 100 cities across the nation that participated in this event on the same day. Earlier that same morning over 60,000 had marched through the streets of Berlin. Moscow had a march also. Dallas had approximately 10,000 marching through downtown streets singing praises to God and proclaiming Jesus as Lord of All. Christians from all parts of the city participated. Fifteen different ministers representing many churches led an hour-long prayer for our nation, cities,

families, and churches. As I stood with thousands of others in front of city hall, I pondered what a wonderful aroma this must be to God. If the motives and hearts are pure in offering a sacrifice of praise, time and place are irrelevant. God receives worship when worship is offered.

## **Creativity: The Skin for New Wineskins**

*by David Wray  
July, 1992*

When Christians are asked about creativity, the often repeated responses include: “I don’t have any skills in fine arts and have no creativity.” “I would love to be creative, but I’m just an ordinary person.” “Creativity and imagination are for children. We are required to live in the ‘real world’ of facts and reality.” “Entrepreneurs, strategic planners, and divergent thinkers belong in corporate America, not in the church.” It was from Chuck Swindoll that I first heard the warning: “Choose your ruts carefully because you are going to be in them for the next 2,000 miles!”

In his book, *Why Settle for More and Miss the Best?*, futurist Tom Sine defines creativity as “the process of working in partnership with the Creator to generate new possibilities for our lives and world that are consistent with His redemptive purposes.” This definition emphatically reminds us that our creativity comes from our Creator whose inventiveness and imagination are astonishing. The one who created the heavens and the earth, has invited us to join him in “making all things new.” Since our creativity originates with God, we have the “option of using our God-given creativity to be collaborators in the inbreaking of God’s kingdom.”

### **Barriers to Creativity**

If creativity is, as some claim, “the best thing since sliced bread,” what causes so many congregations to be constrained by convention? What are the fears behind the common refrain, “We have never done that here before,” and the hidden implication, “We are not about to start now”?

Fear of change seems to be the foundational basement of a metaphorical congregation constructed with we-have-never-done-that-here-before building materials. Walls in this house are often constructed with traditionalism and institutional rigidity. Ceilings consist of “fortress thinking” that causes Christians to huddle inside the confines of the building rather than courageously live daily in the marketplace with confused and desperate humanity. Covering for the congregation is a roof constructed of “concrete thinking” and non-imagination. When we reside in this type building we have a difficult time discovering creative new ways of seeing God’s purposes realized in our lives and his world.

### **A Creative Climate**

When Christians break out of the fear of change, God often blesses the risk-taking spirit with a wide funnel of possibilities. As Christians develop their creative hearts and minds they realize that there are many more possibilities than simply expanding options and styles. A creative climate will take us off the beaten pathways. Our thinking will become more divergent and imaginative. Coloring outside the lines will become pervasive. We will celebrate our part of a

magnificent story, a world-transforming history, and a community that focuses on kingdom issues.

The creative climate insists that we ask more “What if ...” questions. “What if a congregation scheduled its assembly at 1:00 a.m. Sunday in the middle of a known drug district?” “What if every Christian were immersed in a cross-cultural experience such as an inner-city ministry at least once every year?” “What if we went about spiritual formation with an approach other than the Greek rational model?” “What if we give people difficult issues and dilemmas when we gather instead of providing answers?” “What if we were to break out of the safety of our fortress churches and go out and do ministry instead of constantly talking about it?” “What if congregations provided a safe environment that encouraged Christians to ask courageous questions about theology and philosophy?” “What if we tackled the challenges we most fear?”

A creative climate in which such questions can be asked starts with trust and community. In our “safe spiritual communities” we will realize that God is so much bigger than any questions with which we might wrestle. Our God is not threatened as we search struggle with hard questions. In the wrestling we will be able to separate biblical kingdom issues from conventional institutional issues. We will begin to envision prayerfully our God-directed future as we break out of traditional thinking into new ministry possibilities.

In this creative climate our roots are always respected and valued. It is on the shoulders of men and women in our heritage that we are able to stand and ask new and vibrant questions. It is in the spirit of restoration hearts that we take courage and confidence to ask the current penetrating questions of Christ and culture. Our roots not only encourage a creative climate, they require that every generation creatively individuate and probe the questions of the day.

With a firm grasp of our roots the creative climate then gives all Christians permission to test their wings of creativity. These wings allow individuals and congregations to live courageously the “Christ life” in a spiritually hungry world. Wings will allow us to prayerfully plan worship assemblies that lift our congregations to the throne room. Wings will grant us permission to read, discuss, and act on the kingdom issues of Jesus and his church. Wings will give us the “helicopter” perspective of how we are to address the “haves and have nots” economic issues of our time. Wings will provide us with clarity as we design new and effective models to communicate the truths of Scripture to children, youth, and adults.

## **Liberated to be Creative**

In congregations all over the world Christians are constructing new wineskins as they discover the joys of creating much broader ways to seek first the purposes of God in their lives and congregations. A congregation in Texas has “adopted” a public school in a poverty-stricken neighborhood. Christians provide food and manpower for a pantry at the school to minister to the neighborhood. A physician provides a free “well baby” clinic at the school every Thursday afternoon. A pharmacist provides prescription drugs at cost for the parents who use the clinic. Every Christmas the entire congregation throws a party for the school complete with Christmas dinner, clothing, toys, and bedding.

In Tennessee a creative congregation is sewing new wineskins by using its facilities to help the homeless. Christians provide dinner and breakfast for the indigent men and women who come to spend the night. Most care-givers at the congregation minister side-by-side with their entire families as they prepare meals and then spend the night at the building. Children are experiencing first-hand what Matthew meant when he said to provide “cups of cold water.”

New wineskins are also being sewn in Oklahoma. In order to give greater focus to worship and Bible study, one congregation moved all their classes to Sunday evening. This allows first-hour worshippers to return home and reflect on the significance of the God they serve. Second-hour worshippers are encouraged to spend the time before worship preparing their hearts and minds to come before the great “I am.” Sunday evenings have the single purpose of intense Bible study. An elder for the congregation recently said, “We want our members to recapture a day of worship and rest. Instead of programming Sunday in the same way as the rest of our harried lives, we are pleading for our people to spend Sundays concentrating on worship, Bible study and fellowship.”

Many other examples could be cited of congregations that are creatively designing and filling new wineskins. As Tom Sine declares, “They are creating imaginative new approaches to whole-life discipleship – orchestrating their whole lives around the purposes of God. They are creating new ministries and new celebrations, and they are having the time of their lives.” Can we do anything less than unleash our creativity to express the joyful inbreaking of the kingdom of God?

## Book Review: Prepare Your Church for the Future

by Steve Bishop  
July, 1992

Hobbes is pushing Calvin down a steep hill in his red wagon.

“It’s true, Hobbes. Ignorance IS bliss!” Careening through a wooded area, Calvin continues, “Once you know things, you start seeing problems everywhere ... and once you see problems, you feel like you ought to try to fix them ... and fixing problems always seems to require personal change ... and change means doing things that aren’t fun! I say phooey to that!”

Traveling faster and faster down an ever-steepening hill, Calvin continues, “But if you’re willfully stupid, you don’t know any better, so you can keep doing whatever you like! The secret to happiness is short-term, stupid self-interest!”

Now practically airborne, Hobbes screams, “We’re heading for that cliff!”

Calvin screams back, “I don’t want to know about it!” and he covers his eyes.

Crashing at the bottom of the hill, the wagon is wrecked, Hobbes is covered with scratches and Calvin’s head is buried in the earth. A dazed Hobbes says, “I’m not sure I can stand so much bliss.”

Calvin quickly retorts, “Careful! We don’t want to learn anything from this!”

If change frightens you, and like Calvin you subscribe to a philosophy that would rather hide problems than face them, then Carl F. George’s book is not for you. From the beginning, George makes it clear that he believes a new day has dawned in the way we need to do church. Those unwilling to make a dramatic shift in thinking about ministry, a shift in thinking about ministry, a shift necessitated by our current realities, will find themselves doing less ministry to fewer people. *Prepare Your Church for the Future* is a call to arms. Through his work with hundreds of churches in practically every denomination and region in America, Carl George believes that he has seen the future of ministry in America. His America is one that is becoming increasingly urban, fractured, and hurting. In his America he envisions churches with more than 50,000 members.

This book is a harbinger of change, not tinkering with some methods, but radical changes that affect the very core of our thinking about the nature of the church. He contends that our present ways of conceptualizing and practicing ministry are ineffective and inadequate. In order for us to meet the realities of the future, ministry structures must change. His call is for a “church big enough to make a difference and small enough to care.”

His new structure is called the Meta-Church. This name signifies a change “of mind about how ministry is to be done” and “of form in the infrastructure of the church.” The two most visible

features of this model are the home cell group (or small groups) and the celebration or worship service. The focus of the meta-Church is on people. The most important part of the church is its small cell groups and the most important questions for its leaders are “How are the disciples doing? How are the people growing?”

In this model the small group is “the most strategically significant foundation for spiritual formation and assimilation, evangelism and leadership development, for the most essential functions that God has called for in the church.” Small groups become the emotional and spiritual center of the church. This emphasis on small groups (10 or fewer people) is highlighted against the backdrop of larger size groupings and their failure to retain people. The reason for this failure, George asserts, is that large groupings can’t deal with the quality of turmoil people feel. So what at first may appear as an accepting, loving group quickly becomes an intimidating one where people are not secure to share their deepest struggles. Only in the context of small groups do people achieve an intimacy level that allows the masks to come off and genuine face-to-face care to take place.

We are warned that this is not a new method to piggyback onto some already existing structure of ministry. This is a complete and total reversal of traditional structures for doing ministry. Chief among those changes is a decentralization of ministry. It’s a system of ministry that takes seriously the giftedness of all believers and as a result changes all the functions we are normally accustomed to in the Church of Christ. The entire life of the church is built around the cell group. Leadership is developed in the cell group, tasks are performed by cell groups, and ministry and evangelism happen through the cell groups.

I found this book to have several strengths. One is that it is a how-to-manual. It offers a detailed account, complete with diagrams and acronyms, of how this system functions. Of special help is the last chapter which offers three anecdotal descriptions of how this model has worked in other churches. These descriptions give us a chance to see how each congregation struggled to adapt this model to their own situation.

A strength of this book’s thesis is that it is applicable to churches of any size. So many workshops, seminars and lectureships only hold up large churches as models, examples which are lost on smaller churches with limited resources. This model can be easily applied to any size group from 50 to 500. It takes no money and no large pool of “five talent persons” to make this a successful model to follow.

The focus on people that his system offers is inspiring. Pastoral care and developing disciples is central to its mission. There is not cumbersome infrastructure to maintain or rigid formula to which all must adhere in the Meta-Church. The focal point of all the organization is to make sure that every Christian can be cared for, nurtured, and equipped to do ministry and to grow in his own faith.

The underlying assumptions upon which the Meta-Church operates are enough to stimulate excitement and creativity for many churches. These assume that churches want to make more and better disciples, are more concerned to give care than information, desire that ministry be spread among the members and not centralized in the minister, have members who are willing to

invest in becoming competent pastors, and accomplish ministry based upon gifts and calling for the mutual benefit of every person.

There are, however, some concerns that surface in George's work. One weakness that this book shares with most church growth materials is its lack of theological underpinnings. Except for referencing the Great Commission and some general statements regarding the human need for salvation, there is very little to commend the theological integrity of these approaches. Much of this work depends more on sociological observations and business management than it does on theological reflection about what it means to be the church or how to judge the ethics of our evangelistic approaches.

George is advocating a system that grows out of an urban, technologically sophisticated culture. His appeals to Bible are yet another example of attempting to justify a new method, by claiming that it is really old through proof-texting. Many productive possibilities could arise from a serious look into the thought world of the New Testament writers. We could admit that our systems and models are far removed from first-century Palestine or 12th-century B.C. Sinai wanderings without losing our identity as a people of God. This, in my opinion, would be more productive than going through the mental gymnastics necessary to find methods and structures of the 20th century in a first century document.

The use and interpretation of Scripture will be bothersome to most readers of this periodical no matter where they stand on the theological spectrum. The basis for a strong emphasis on small group ministry is laid out by simply listing all the "one another" passages in the New Testament. This approach is not foreign to us and still meets with a great deal of acceptance. The more troubling approach may be with the way scriptures concerning women's leadership roles are handled. For example, Paul Yonggi Cho constricted women into leadership roles and then made caps for them to wear, similar to yarmulkes, so that they would be wearing the sign of authority on their heads and thus fulfilling "Saint Paul's rule." Some will see this as an unconvincing treatment of the text, i.e., a literal, pre-critical reading. Others may find it bothersome that an interpretation they are comfortable with – women remaining subordinate to men – has remained intact but an ingenious way to circumvent it has been found. There is an underlying "hermeneutic" that places function above form in much of this book. Churches of Christ will have to decide for themselves if they too can focus on ministry gifts and functions as distinct from traditional roles. What was interesting to me is that most of the churches using the Meta-Church model have between 25% and 60% of their groups led by women. Churches that restrict their resource pool to men may have more difficulty in establishing enough groups to make it a church-wide ministry.

Another weakness of the book was its abundant use of diagrams, acronyms, and Roman numeral designations for leaders. Granted that George is constructing a system which requires new jargon to communicate its function, but the book often gets so weighted down with the correlations and relationships between the Xs, Ds, Ls, and Cs that it becomes too difficult to stay with the reading.

Overall, the Meta-Church model has value as a new way to conceptualize the discipling and evangelizing work of the church. It can reorient our focus toward people and toward serving one

another. It has the potential to cause a dramatic shift in the way we view the roles of elders, deacons, women and ministers. It allows for the creative expression of the Holy Spirit through individual lives by freeing the church from 19th century forms of ministry to ones that are more personal and compelling for the 21st century.

George's challenge – that it will take courageous leaders to step out in this new direction – is not understated. The Meta-Church model calls for a freshness and boldness to move out of traditional comfort zones that have made minimal impact upon our churches and communities and to adopt this new, dynamic, ministry-oriented approach that will redefine the functions of almost all our traditional categories.

If the goal of a church is to provide care and nurture to its members and outsiders, while encouraging the transforming work of God in each person, then the Meta-Church provides a provocative model for the church of the next century.

Calvin told Hobbes that to fix some problems requires personal change. To implement the Meta-Church system will require a lot of personal change for everyone involved in the local church. may God inspire us all not to say "Phooey to that!"

## Hope Network Newsletter: Right-Brain Christians in a Left-Brain Church

*by Lynn Anderson  
July, 1992*

After class Pat pulled me to the side. “Could I talk with you? I’m feeling hurt and offended.” Tears welled up in her eyes as Pat went on. “I felt as if you were putting down the past ... or my parents ... or something. And I feel ... well ... uncomfortable.

“See, I was raised to believe that we worship God ‘decently and orderly’ – with our minds. That emotionalism was dangerous. But what we just did in class was so ... well ... different! I do feel something in that kind of worship. But I get scared when I feel things in church. I can go to a movie, or a concert, or dancing to get my emotional high. Can’t we keep emotion out of the church?”

Pat speaks for a lot of us.

I had just taught a class which triggered Pat’s comments. Our worship team helped me contrast two styles of worship: one designed for “thinker” people (left-brainers) and the other for “feeler” people (right-brainers).

I wanted the class to experience both styles of worship as well as discuss them. So we kicked the first segment off with three traditional hymns from the “old hymn book.” Jeff led up front, very formally.

Then Robert read Scripture (on yet another subject) in traditional style. Next an impromptu prayer, which turned out to be trite and impersonal. “Left-brain” people were feeling secure and at home. But their worship was genuine. “Right-brain” people, however, fiddled with things in the pew racks, counted ceiling tiles, and checked their watches.

Between the first and second segments, I explained, “Both thinkers and feelers were created by God. Neither are good/bad, or right/wrong. God simply wired us up differently.”

True. All of us do have both “feeler” and “thinker” in us. But, according to George Barna, 45% of us are dominantly right-brain, 45% dominantly left-brain, and 10% more equally feeler/thinker.

Segment two: The tempo of the class shifted abruptly into celebrative praise and worship, with contemporary songs projected on a screen in colorful graphics. Readings, prayers, and singing clustered around a single theme. The worship team led directly from one song to the next without interruption, gathering the congregation into the momentum of the experience. A few songs included clapping and one or two worshippers actually “lifted holy hands.” The beaming expressions of the worship leaders spread to the congregation.

Several short scripture readings moved quickly from one reader to the next, climaxing in a congregational responsive reading. When we knelt for a season of prayer, several people prayed poignantly about specific real-life issues, interspersed with periods of silence. Right-brainers were transported while some left-brainers rolled their eyes.

Segment three: I taught 20 minutes on “Hindrances to Worship: over-Emphasizing Our Rational Selves.” Drawing from Paul’s “all things to all men” (1 Corinthians 9), I called upon both right- and left-brained personalities to lovingly celebrate our diversity, because:

1. God is the one who designed us.
2. The praise of half our people might be inhibited if we hold exclusively to one style of worship or the other.
3. If feelers (right-brainers) are to worship in their “heart language,” our assemblies may need to include more experiential and celebrative ingredients. But not to the exclusion of more cerebral segments.
4. To worship in the heart language of the young, we may need to include contemporary formats, but without scrapping all the traditional ones.
5. And, if our assemblies are to connect with visitors who are not acculturated to our old-style and left-brain liturgy, we must avoid “in-house” and “churchy” vocabulary and musical styles.

So as Pat and I examined mixed reactions to the class, she explained: “I understand ‘right-brain/left-brain’ stuff. I’m a school teacher trained in learning styles. In fact, I’m right-brained myself. I teach art, for goodness sake! And I crave right-brain experiences, music, and drama, but ....”

But let me interrupt Pat one more time to visit for a moment with Cheryl.

Cheryl is part of a second category of right-brain Christians. She is one of the thousands who left our fellowship because they feel that “something” is missing. Months after she had left, Cheryl visited over breakfast with the preacher from her “old home church.” “When I left, I didn’t know precisely what I wanted, though I searched for ‘it’ in a number of churches. But I think I’ve put my finger on it,” Cheryl explained. “In my home church we always talked about Jesus in the past tense: New Testament times. But in the churches that connect with my spirit, Jesus occupies the present tense ... is connected to now! I hunger to experience personal relationship with God. Now! Not just talk about someone else’s experience with him 2,000 years ago.” Swarms of “Cheryls” leave our fellowship every year.

Jack represents a third group: right-brainers outside our fellowship who want God and who study the Bible. Some of them do check us out, but most don’t come back. Not because we’re unfriendly or insincere. Right-brain people just find it hard to connect with a left-brain church.

Jack made his living playing in a band with Richard who led Jack to Christ through personal Bible study. Richard said, “Jack fell in love with Jesus at first sign, and loved the idea of being ‘just a Christian.’ But when Jack visited the ‘Old Paths Church’ with me, things didn’t go well. Worship that particular day ran off the charts into ‘left-brain analytical’; and our church is already an unusually cerebral kind of church – even on the most exciting days.”

Every member of Richard’s band eventually came to Christ and visited ‘Old Paths Church’ with Richard. Not one of them stayed there.

Mike, a strong left-brainer, who overheard Jack’s comments, wrote Jack and his friends off as merely “wanting to get a ‘buzz’ out of church rather than to worship God.” Possibly. But God made both men. And Jack’s “expresser/feeler” heart language is just as God-designed for God-honoring worship as is Mike’s “cerebral/analytical” left-brain style.

But Mike is not alone either. As a fellowship, we non-instrumental Churches of Christ tend well toward the left-brain. We pride ourselves in being thinkers, not just feelers. However the gospel is partly right-brain. Plus, not all our left-brain tendencies came from the Bible.

The roots of our movement run deep into the left-brain intellectual soil of the 19th century. The western world had become “enlightened” and held high hopes for the power of reason. At least in part, the American dream grew out of this new-found confidence in the possibilities of the human intellect.

Alexander Campbell was a true son of the 19th century. When Campbell was a child, his father read him the writings of John Locke, one of the “brain fathers” of 19th-century rational enlightenment. Campbell later referred to Locke as “The Christian Philosopher.” With apologies to Campbell and company, let me simplistically sketch out some of the resulting theological assumptions: Clear thinking would clean up the old religious muddle. God made the universe. Enlightened man could unlock the secrets of the universe.

Religious phenomena of the day influenced Campbell too. One phenomenon was the subjective hyper-emotionalism rampant in the frontier religion. For example, at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801, thousands gathered for a 19th-century religious “Woodstock.” Mass psychology overwhelmed the crowd. Undreds broke out in bizarre barking, jerking, and laughter which they attributed to outpourings of the Holy Spirit.

One can only imagine how all this clashed with Campbell’s left-brain thought world. So Campbell pushed the “restoration” pendulum toward the opposite extreme. Eventually, many “restorationists” limited the Holy Spirit to the status of retired author and worship to five acts – stacked heavily on the left-brain side.

In our honest attempts to keep the biblical foundations of our faith from evaporating into some amorphous “better felt than told” experience, we may not only have dwarfed our right-brain but may have inadvertently screened a huge crowd out of our movement.

We may also have wrung the right-brain juice right out of our Bibles.

Aldous Huxley speaks of a human as a “multiple amphibian” – that is, we are designed to make our way through many worlds at once (intellectual, emotional, sexual, social, and so forth). But, since the industrial revolution, we tend to live in the analytical sphere and crowd out those “other” world which are thus atrophying, said Huxley.

When we attempt to analyze and explain God, we may strip our faith of its drama, mystery, poetry and story, which say about life and God what information, precept, and reason can never say. Faith is not “irrational.” Conversion brings a “renewing of the mind” and bids us “understand what the will of the Lord is.” But we can never explain the inexplicable, ponder the imponderable, and “unscrew the inscrutable.” God is too vast and mysterious for that. So are human beings. There is far more to us than brains.

Scripture knows this and penetrates us on multiple levels, touching us at depths unreachable by information alone. Look, for example, at the variety of literary genres in the Scriptures. Some of the Bible is drama, some is music, some poetry, story, paradox and mystery.

However, our analytical roots bent us toward left-brain theology and left-brain styles of worship which in turn attracted more left-brainers than right-brainers into our fellowship. Across several generations, we have evolved a full-blown, left-brain religious culture.

Pat and Cheryl are telling us that some of our own kids feel trapped in all this. They may feel drawn toward some of the recent right-brain elements being restored to our worship and theology, but at the same time they are fearful. Some even register guilt over their own religious feelings! What irony: when my God-given *dispositio* collides with the very religious culture which taught me to love God!

Now, let’s go back and finish our conversation with Pat.

“Actually, I don’t want to deal with this. I can fill my ‘feeler’ needs in other places. And I have conditioned myself to ‘get something’ out of worship even though I don’t like it much and don’t feel much. I’ve given up a lot of myself to be faithful to the church. Why can’t my friends do that?”

“But, Lynn, when you walk into class and lay that right-brain stuff beside the left-brain stuff it stirs up both my longings and my fears. And you set up an internal collision for me. I don’t want to hear it. Why do we have to do these things? Why not just let sleeping dogs lie?”

Right-brain Christians in a left-brain church. Wrestling with convoluted feelings. At times feeling drawn toward the freedom of right-brain worship, yet paradoxically longing for the security of old familiar ways. Feeling guilty when they enjoy “right-brain” unfamiliar religious experience, yet feeling empty in the familiar left-brain worship service. Some resent Christians who break loose and enjoy the right-brain dimension of faith, yet they secretly repress their own right-brain longings. Others may actually feel anger toward the church for squelching their feelings.

You may not be one of the right-brain Christians in a left-brain church. But nearly half of your congregation likely is. Does this mean that half of every church is doomed to be either frustrated or offended? Does it mean churches must split? And do we celebrate the exodus from us to other fellowships? I believe our times call for at least a three-fold response:

1. In all situations: Teach the whole word of God! Let our theology be both left- and right-brain, balanced by the Bible.

2. In some situations: Accept renewal as the Lord gently, lovingly stretches the wineskins.

3. In other situations: Plant new congregations which begin with more balanced right- and left-brain styles.

Let me again traffic in hope!

*Ideas* are changing. For the last two decades our theology has moved steadily away from left-brain extremes. Graduate Bible departments are strengthening our grip on the text, and broadening our understanding of it as well.

*Style* is changing, too. A resurgence of praise and worship is sweeping our fellowship. We are beginning to see the Bible, not so much as an anchor but as a keel, and healthy fresh winds are blowing. May our lives – and our worship – make glad the heart of an awesome God who created us right and left.

Good days are ahead!

## AfterGlow: Which Lines to Color Outside

*by Phillip Morrison*  
*July, 1992*

The “treasure boxes” of our four adult children are filled with pictures painstakingly drawn and proudly presented. Originally tacked to the kitchen bulletin board or held by magnets on the refrigerator door, they now wait to fulfill some nostalgic purpose. Resurfaced, they will bring a new flood of laughter, tears, and “Do you remembers?”

To an objective observer, those childish drawings would have no value. But parents (and especially grandparents) are not objective. They have their own value system, and it declares the scribbles to be as priceless as long-lost hieroglyphics.

As children grow up, they continue to color outside the lines, and in more serious ways. We teach and train and persuade and pray – but we don’t ration our love according to how well our children keep the rules.

That’s something we have learned from God. He wants us to do right, and he sent the One who is uniquely his son to model perfect obedience. It was for us (not just sinners like us) that Jesus died as the supreme expression of God’s love. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Jesus spent much of his ministry throwing off the shackles people tried in vain to bind upon him. At the same time he constantly reminded everyone that he was here on kingdom business. “The world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 14:31).

Critics were always present, always ready to pounce whenever Jesus crossed their lines of custom and tradition. They were aghast that he would pluck grain on the Sabbath, or heal the sick on that day, or presume to cast out demons, or forgive sins. Jesus did not err by crossing the lines; his enemies erred by drawing their lines in the wrong places.

The Nazarene elders must have thought Jesus brash and disrespectful when he pointed to himself as the fulfillment of prophecy (Luke 4:16-30). Allowing a woman to anoint him with expensive perfume produced at least one spoken complaint and probably a lot of raised eyebrows (John 12:1-8).

Are you coloring outside the lines of custom and convention? Maybe you need to be. Are you coloring outside God’s lines? You shouldn’t be; but learning to color better is only part of the answer. The damage done is not corrected by erasers or delete keys, but by the blood of the Lamb.

Mary and Joseph were as frantic as any parents whose twelve-year-old son was missing for three days. There is no indication that he was disrespectful or rebellious. But even at that early age,

when the wishes of his father and mother clashed with the will of his Father, Jesus' path was clear (Luke 2:41-49). We have our "treasure boxes" but Mary had a "treasure heart" in which such amazing events were stored to be pondered again and again.

Encouragement to color outside the lines is neither an invitation to ignore the will of God nor an enticement to adopt an "anything goes" philosophy. It is a challenge to be as bold as Jesus when he healed the sick on the Sabbath and consorted with publicans and sinners. It is also a plea to be as submissive as Jesus in Gethsemane, praying for God's will to prevail.