

# **Wineskins Magazine**

## **Election Year Reflections**

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## Religion and Politics Do Mix

by Rubel Shelly  
October, 1992

We are in the last days of a presidential election. Unless things change drastically from the time of my writing this editorial until we actually go to the polls, the 1992 election will come and go without our nation's fundamental problems ever being addressed.

Our two major political parties and a wild-card candidate have generated "position papers" that do little more than attempt to posture a personality with some special-interest group. Staged rallies and sound bites have become dull alternatives to substance. One gets the feeling that votes tallied on November 3 will be an anticlimax to one final opinion poll taken by the networks in which the winner will be announced before the voting booths close.

For most of the first half of this century, dispensational theology kept most of American fundamentalists from significant involvement with politics. It regarded attempts at improving our social and political institutions as meaningless. At the same time, liberal theology jettisoned eternity and made political concerns equivalent to the gospel.

Carl F.H. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* appeared in 1947. It was a positive challenge for people on the right of the theological spectrum to speak to their time with a socially-responsible message. It challenged the dictum long heard among American conservatives that "Religion and politics don't mix." It advocated a new and controversial thesis.

Then came the social upheaval of the 1960s. There were campus riots, racial conflict, and drugs. A sexual revolution took place within a generation. Suddenly the most conservative Christians affirmed that the Bible did have something to say about these issues.

Some right-wing religious leaders began to look like their left-wing counterparts of a generation before. It seemed that it was compulsory for them to have political clout. A loose coalition of conservatives, evangelicals, and fundamentalists came to be known in some media as the "Silent Majority" and in others as the "Christian Right." Aspirants to the White House received its leaders and offered to speak at conventions and rallies. Both Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan carried two-thirds of the white evangelical vote. Visions of civil religion thrilled some and terrorized others.

For the most part, the Christian Right rallied its own with inflammatory rhetoric focused on a few issues. Its early success in appearing to articulate the concerns of many Americans about so-called "traditional values" quickly began sounding like haughty judgmentalism. True to its religious heritage, the movement began to devour itself from the inside. Unwilling to tolerate honest differences of opinion on certain issues (e.g., Is abortion always wrong regardless of circumstances or generally wrong except in circumstances such as rape and incest?), and insisting on uniformity of method (e.g., Must everyone who opposes abortion on demand picket Planned Parenthood clinics and/or get arrested?), it began fragmenting.

There has always been a strand of thought in the conservative fabric that has tended to equate the United States with ancient Israel. The post-millennial theories of Alexander Campbell and his early associates unquestionably bordered on a form of idolatry with its attitude toward America. Our loyalty to an earthly system may not be substituted for the Kingdom of God without our being guilty of actual idolatry.

Against this uncertain past, people wonder what the relationship of faith is to politics. I do not know how to articulate an adequate answer to such a complex problem. The following suggestions, however, appear critical to the issue at hand.

*First*, biblical religion is inherently political in nature. One who claims to love God makes that claim a lie by his failure to love his brother (1 John 4:19-21). But loving a brother necessarily requires concern with the socio-political arena in which both live. As with racism, abortion, and the like, almost all political issues are ultimately moral issues because they require value-based decisions.

*Second*, the church must never ally itself with the institutions of power. Do I believe in the separation of church and state? Absolutely! Why? Because the church's role in the state is to be its conscience. It cannot fill that role if it identifies with the state and its institutions. The religion Karl Marx dubbed the "opiate of the people" was a form of religion used to prop up the rich and powerful. True religion is never an agency of the powerful but is always the voice of God for the weak.

*Third*, the church must avoid the false dichotomy of physical versus spiritual, justice versus mercy. God still requires this of his people: "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8b). It is not ours to choose, for example, between preaching repentance and feeding the hungry. We must do both. There is no credibility for the person who wants to teach and baptize without regard to the poverty, alcoholism, or injustices being suffered by those he seeks to convert. Obedience to Christ demands that we pursue both goals – in humility.

*Fourth*, we do not have the luxury of being unconcerned about the political arena. Since both justice and mercy are involved in the people and policies of government, we dare not remain silent on the sidelines during any election. State and local elections are often more crucial than presidential ones. Some Christians may choose to offer themselves as candidates for office. Others will work to see that responsible, principled people are elected. It is fully within the realm of our Christian duty to support, vote for, and hold accountable our civil officials.

*Fifth*, the obligations of dual citizenship must be taken seriously. All the kingdoms of men are under the judgment of our God. Whenever there is a conflict of loyalty, there can be no question as to which takes precedence.

As we move toward Election Day '92, pray that God will guide us in the choice of national leaders. Whether the candidate you support is elected or that candidate's opponent, pray for "all those in authority that we may live peaceful lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Timothy 2:1-2). And always remember where your ultimate loyalty and hope lie.

Religion and politics *do* mix. They must mix, for a faith that is genuine cannot leave any part of one's life unaffected. In a society such as ours, Christians are not only excluded from the process but can actually influence it for the sake of justice and mercy. It would smack of irresponsibility not to care about the outcome.

## The Parable of the Church Bus

*by Mike Cope*  
*October, 1992*

As the bus rolls out of the parking lot, the driver calls out the destination on the itinerary. He has been handed this itinerary and fully intends to follow it.

But a few passengers seated around the bus don't like what they've heard. "That's not where we want to go," they murmur. Their shared dissatisfaction brings them together. Then their whispers swell into a shout, "We are not going there! We've never gone there before, and we don't plan to go this time!"

The frantic driver tries to reason with them: "Come on, folks, hang in there with us. Give it a try. We need you along." But they insist, "No! Not only do we not like the direction you're going, but if you continue we'll get off the bus."

"Now what will I do?" wonders the driver. But he knows. He can't afford to lose these passengers. So he announces that the itinerary is being changed.

And many other passengers are heart-broken.

As another bus pulls out of the lot, its driver also announces the itinerary. Again there are a few who are violently opposed to the direction the bus is heading. "Who knows where he'll want to go next?" they ask.

So they make their demands: "We want this bus turned around now – or we're getting off and finding another bus!"

This driver is also distraught. But he knows he can't cave in. After all, the itinerary isn't his own. His supervisor had handed it to him.

"I understand that you're not happy," he says. "But I want you to go with us. After all, this has been your bus for a long time. Let me listen to you to be sure I understand what you're unhappy about. It must be frustrating to want to go in a different direction."

"Not only that, but if I can't convince you, I'd be glad to have you on the bus offering a voice of precaution and displeasure – as long as you don't bring mutiny!"

"And I'll go even a step beyond that. I value you so much that if you can't in good conscience remain on this bus, I'll slow down long enough to help you on another bus that's going where you want to go. And I won't thin any less of you because you weren't ready to follow the itinerary I was handed."

“There’s only one thing you’ can’t do. You can’t drive the bus. We’re not changing directions just because you aren’t happy.”

And the other passengers rejoiced!

## Election Year Reflections: Is there any Word from God?

*by Edward Fudge  
October, 1992*

A few weeks from now, on the Tuesday next after the first Monday in November, we Americans across seven time zones will trek in quadrennial ritual to our respective polling places. There we will collectively choose George Bush or Bill Clinton – or, less likely, Ross Perot or some other candidate – to be the next President of the United States. Do we who are Christians have anything unique to say in the current presidential campaign? Is there any guiding word from God?

Churches of Christ have no brotherhood voice, and our local congregations will endorse no candidate or political party. To do so would be legally inappropriate, procedurally unworkable, and spiritually presumptuous. That does not mean, however, that Scripture provides no principles relevant to the process. I suggest three areas in which the Bible challenges conventional wisdom and popular but careless thinking.

*First*, while we reject the cynical notion that all politicians are crooks, the Bible is clear that they all (like we) are sinners. That means that our next president will be a sinner, as were all his predecessors in office. It also means that no human act or agenda, no political platform or program, is totally pure. However ringing the rhetoric and however noble the ideals, the best goals of all candidates fall woefully short of God's perfect standard for human life and society. Some sinful people at every strata of society, whether on welfare or on Wall Street, will abuse any system we have, proportionately to their power and opportunity. That will happen whoever occupies the White House and regardless of which party controls the next Congress.

*Second*, "dirty tricks" are inherently unchristian. "Truth" and "light" should be our watchwords. As for lying, gossip and slander, we ought neither to commit them nor listen to others who do. Such activities are neither funny nor clever to people of principle. They are evil, no matter who does them. The old cliché is wrong: the end does not justify the means.

*Third*, most issues are far more complex than their vocal partisans wish to allow. Consider the abortion controversy. Why should a "pro-life" position not include concrete proposals for quality life after birth? And why should "pro-choice" rhetoric not also address the need for responsible choices before conception? Must "pro-life" advocates always presume that the answer they give to the fundamental moral question of individual human value is inherently inconsistent with a "pro-choice" answer to the political question involving states and the federal government? Is there any intrinsic reason why "pro-choice" advocates cannot unashamedly counsel premarital sexual abstinence and lifelong marital fidelity? Have the microphones on both sides been usurped by extremists? Must they be?

Or consider the much-discussed matter of "values." Which is more important: personal morality (holiness), or concern for the powerless and needy (justice)? Biblical prophets consistently demand both. In a non-theocratic society, what is government's proper role in establishing

either? Assuming the answer is at least “some,” at what level of government is regulation most appropriate and most effective?

Should social regulation merely prohibit evil conduct, or coerce good behavior, or both? And to what extent? Ought human law seek to enforce all God’s commandments? If not all of them, how many and which ones?

Why do the advocates of the poor and disenfranchised, who denounce so eloquently the sins of discrimination and middle-class indifference, not also promote with equal volume the virtues of hard work, responsibility and persistence as keys which free from the debilitating chains of ignorance and poverty? What, in the meantime, do proponents of free enterprise and “trickle-down” economics have to say to the fatherless family with an empty cupboard, or to the able-bodied men and women who are eager to work but lack the education, training or contacts to find jobs they can perform?

Amidst the ambiguities, the Bible assures us that God ultimately presides over all the nations. Societies, like individuals, have character whether good or evil, and character has consequences. Earthly rulers govern at God’s pleasure and they are accountable to him for their stewardship in the end. Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world, or of the United States of America, which, we should remember, has no divine promise of perpetuity.

Unlike most people in all the world’s history, we are blessed with the freedom to participate in selecting our leaders. Policies, although imperfect, are important. The business of governing is too significant to leave to the thoughtless. As Christians, let us pray diligently, evaluate carefully and vote accordingly.



## **The DisUnited States of America: A Call for Christian Realism and Action**

*by Perry C. Cotham*  
*October, 1992*

One of the most familiar stories in our Christian heritage is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. While the highly placed Jewish official travelled on the Damascus highway, preparing to persecute even more new disciples of Jesus, he was blinded and laid low by a heavenly light and a startling voice. From this seeming catastrophe, Saul came to see reality more clearly. He experienced the living Lord, transferred his allegiance and loyalty to him, and became an apostle of good news and peace.

Occasionally, events in our nation impact our collective consciousness so dramatically that we feel blinded and laid low. Our only realistic choice is to consider what truths they reveal. Surely, last May's verdict in the Rodney King trial and subsequent riots and destruction in Los Angeles – totalling more than 50 fatalities and a half billion dollars in cost – opened our eyes to some profoundly sad realities that we as citizens have conveniently tried to ignore. One wonders how differently we might have received a message about our cities and our fragile social fabric if those 81 seconds of videotape had not been recorded by a chance observer.

My own sobering conclusion, one to which I regretfully have been moving for the past few years, is that there is an alarming disintegration of the concept of community in our land. Our nation is experiencing what historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, jr., has called “the disuniting of America.”

What is community? How is national community built? How is it maintained? What are the forces which destroy it? Can Christians who take citizenship seriously act constructively to build and maintain community?

Community is one of those popular buzzwords with a wide range of connotations, all positive. For some, any racial or ethnic group living in close proximity is a community. For others, an aggregation of occupied residences, pinpointed at the same region on a map, may be called a community. Little wonder that “community” has lost its rich meaning with such varied common use.

At the outset, the Christian thinker begins with one profoundly important insight: a community is not created by geography, heritage, law, accident of birth, or economic interdependence. All of these may be dynamics which serve to encourage a community's viability but they alone are insufficient to produce genuine community.

“Community” is rooted in “commonalities” or “commonness.” A common life – life that is shared at the deepest levels of human experience – does not develop by accident, but is created by the will of women and men resolute in desiring and maintaining a genuine human community.

Several major elements exist within a meaningful community: (1) commitment to core beliefs, values, and ideas such as freedom, liberty, equality, and justice; (2) an awareness of duty owed by one person to another and, in our religious communities at least, an awareness of duty to God; (3) deep concern about the “common good” or “public welfare” which leads people to guard and protect zealously the core beliefs, values and ideals.

Jesus told a parable which illustrates the principle of community. A lone man travelling a highway is beset by personal disaster – the unfortunate, unnamed traveller is assailed and mugged. Then comes the dreary passage of conventional citizens, each with a sufficient sense of ordinary responsibilities which for them precluded personal involvement. How mistaken we would be to perceive the priest and the Levite as evil men. They were no worse than any other citizens equally ensconced in ordinary career life, personal responsibilities, societal stereotypes, and unimaginative, stifling legalism. Developing a rationalization for renegeing on immediate involvement for the beleaguered traveller was sure no difficult task. Their service in the temple or synagogue was, after all, the greater good to which they, with certain regret, were summoned.

You know the story. Another traveller arrives on the scene of the crime. He perceives the victim compassionately. He stops. Perhaps with absolutely no thought about the historically entrenched animosity between Samaritans and Jews, this anonymous Samaritan perceives a duty and unselfishly performs it. Two men on one road. Two cultures. Two races. Two religious heritages. A ministry is rendered. A community is born. This Samaritan and this Jew are no longer strangers. There is a human society. Jesus hardly need ask, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the one who fell among thieves?”

Historically, our nation has identified itself as a special community of many peoples, many nationalities, many races, many cultures. We have opened doors to the poor and politically oppressed, those “huddled masses longing to breathe free.” Such self-identity provides a mix of both reality and myth, but it is authentic enough for us to consider the foundation and cohesive forces for such a unique political community.

The foundation for American community has been called by different names, such as “Americanism,” “the American way of life,” and, more recently, “American civil religion.” The great value of American civil religion has been its promotion of a keen sense of corporate identity and common good. No nation on earth owes its sense of community more explicitly to fidelity to an idea. Our country was born “dedicated to a proposition.”

Historically, the viability of American society has depended on the dedication of public officials and the general citizenry to the realization of certain “self-evident” moral propositions. “What holds the United States together is not, as it is with other nations, geographic proximity, ethnic loyalty, dynastic loyalty, religious conformity,” declared political science professor Hans J. Morgenthau, “but the common purpose, however inadequately conceived and ineffectively put into practice, of living up to certain moral propositions, which can be defined as equality in freedom. Put into question the viability of this purpose and you have put in jeopardy the very existence of America as a distinct social and political entity.”

Even a casual glance at news developments and crime reports or occasional consumer participation in our society's entertainment offerings in the fields of theater, motion pictures, television, and pop music will lead Christian citizens to wonder if our nation is jettisoning its common core ideals and values.

Modern technology and engineering, providing ease of communication and mobility, have contributed to this threat to community. The quest for better salaries and upward mobility has led Americans to change careers and either dissolve marriages or move families from one locality to another. The placing and maintaining of roots in one local community, with devotion to community churches, schools, and civic enrichment, is a threatened tradition. Americans are dwelling among strangers, in apartments, condominiums, and suburban subdivisions where, even after several years, they may not remember the name of the person next door even if they have met him or her. In the same inner city neighborhood, some decent citizens, especially among the elderly, have become virtual prisoners in their own homes, afraid to venture out onto sidewalks and streets where the law of the jungle seems to prevail both night and day. Even in suburbs, prosperous citizens may arrive home at the end of the day and never have to put a foot onto the turf of an open yard as they drive into the attached garage with an automatic door enclosing them in privacy for the rest of the day.

We may pine for a simpler past – a time in which Americans lived mostly in rural and small town communities and enjoyed leisurely front porch repartee or backyard block barbecues. Or a time when the few local churches were a social center as well as worship center and preachers of all denominations delivered the same basic messages about the meaning of life, suffering, and death.

What a paradox! While our society is mobile, urbanized, and culturally diverse, and while the quest for an M.B.A. is like a crusade for the Holy Grail, most of our national myths and values are rooted in the rural past. We work in cities, live in suburbs, and dream of the countryside or rugged west. Our myths include wagon trains pushing west, courageous homesteaders conquering the plains, presidents born in log cabins, lonesome cowboys, plantation belles, and happy family life in the prosperous '50s.

That past, to whatever degree it was real, is irretrievable. we can no longer expect our public schools to provide public Bible reading and prayer. With the increase in unwed motherhood and a 50% failure rate of first marriages, we can no longer expect the nuclear family of two parents and children under one roof to be the norm. The concept of family must be redefined. outside of our homes and churches, we can no longer assume a consensus about integrity in business, the sanctity of God's name, extramarital and deviant sex, drug use, and the nature of ethics. Nor can we, short of a grand reversal, assume that our homes and churches will be our youth's primary mentors about lifestyle and morals.

Television has done as much to diminish the concept of community as any other non-human factor. Television served to bring the nation together in the '50s when it seemed all the nation was watching "Milton Berle," "I Love Lucy," "Life of Riley," and "Ozzie and Harriet," the latter an Eisenhower-era prototype for American marriages.

Today's cable television has produced the opposite effect by fragmenting an audience of millions. Indeed, members of almost any identifiable subgroup – black, Jewish, rock fan, sports fanatic, political junkie, show-biz follower, trans TV devotee, romance and soap opera lover, news buff, porn consumer, fundamentalist – may retire to the privacy of their own rooms and be massaged by their own specialized magazines, advertisements, and cable television and radio stations.

we have always boasted that cultural diversity was our special strength because each race and ethnic group brings its unique special experiences and insights to the mainstream of society. In recent years, however, cultural diversity has threatened some core values while fanaticism and intolerance have produced fragmentation.

While the loss of community is viewed as positive by those who seek to live lives of quiet anonymity and be free from the responsibilities of neighborliness and the judgments of fundamentalist fanatics, in general the disintegration of community is unhealthy. A community, as we have emphasized, is linked with moral consensus; without moral consensus, a nation may survive in some sense, but it cannot be a real community.

The breakdown of community means disconnectedness, alienation, and anomie. With the loss of moral authority comes confusion, suspicion, distrust, and, eventually, chaos and perhaps anarchy. With the loss of community is the loss of uncontested right to apply moral standards to civil liberties or political issues. Consider, for example, that concerns such as pornography or abortion are viewed not so much as fundamental moral issues as they are public policy issues to be dealt with in courts of law and legislative bodies and decided by slim majorities.

As community spirit weakens, the American melting pot becomes a boiling cauldron of warring factions, each claiming its entitlements, each suspicious of the other, each making non-negotiable demands, each writing its own tribal code of rules and laws.

What is the message for Christian citizens as we move toward the 21st century?

First and foremost, the church bestows on “community” its deepest and richest meaning. Ideally, no community is any more closely-knit or more involved in providing insight and direction for life's greatest issues than the community of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The church is thus a super-community, for its members share the transcendent goals and values of a loving heavenly Father who created all the world and its inhabitants.

Second, this super-community, the church, can meet all our deepest needs and longings for association and inter-relatedness. The experience of first century Christians is evidence that the community of faith can survive in an environment that legally, politically, and socially is hostile to its purposes. Not coincidentally, the black churches in southcentral Los Angeles played an important role in stabilizing the riot situation and proved once again to be the most stable and positive forces in the black community.

Third, this super-community must ever be vigilant, like any other community, so that insidious evils do not destroy its esprit de corps. Jealousy, envy, pride, gossip, slander, power struggles,

pettiness, and other “works of the flesh” can rob the church of its spiritual dimension and render it as worldly and limited in nature as any other human institution or affiliation. The church must be the answer to rather than the cause of individual alienation and disillusionment about the meaning of life.

Finally, Christians should derive their strength from walking in the light and from fellowship with committed brothers and sisters and yet seek to impact in a positive, healing way the larger community (nation) of which they are members. For some, this will mean their voting behavior reflects a commitment to spiritual life and transcendent values; for others, thankfully, it will mean also signing petitions, running for office, boldly confronting evil-doers, demonstrating publicly, and/or seeking public forums to address vital issues.

Throughout it all, responsible Christians acknowledge the essential freedoms and rights bestowed by the larger national community and realistically resist imposing some minority version of morals or ethics on the larger majority. In the final analysis, good behavior cannot be legislated. Civic virtue, so vital in a democracy, requires what one philosopher has called “obedience to the unenforceable.”

The American dream still shines brightly for most people. Our diversity, which often keeps us embroiled in petty, contentious politics, can continue to be a source of our greatness if we attempt to resolve our differences peacefully and learn by listening to the voices of others.

Finally, the great gospel metaphors of yeast, salt and light underscore the unique quality of the Christian man or woman’s involvement in the larger community. The Christian is not simply an arm-chair critic seated close to a remote-controlled TV. Nor is he or she a spectator in some giant arena while the world’s events unfold safely below. Noble as the reading and discussing of current events may be, Christians are not citizens who are simply informed of the truth about a political community and major world issues.

As yeast is different from the dough in which it works, as light permeates darkness so as to change its essential character, and as salt penetrates the meat which it preserves, so then that super-community of redeemed believers in Christ provides the moral insight, which might be the salvation of that larger community among nations.

After all, the church is the one special community which exists primarily for the sake of those who do not belong.

## The Christian and Politics: From a Secular and Christian Perspective

*excerpts from a speech given on June 10, 1992 at the Harpeth Hills Church of Christ, Nashville,  
by Dee T. Travis  
October, 1992*

On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy rode through the streets of Dallas, Texas, on his way to give a speech at the invitation of Trammell Crow, at the Dallas Trade Mart. There is a black and white photograph hanging today in the Administrative Offices of the Dallas Market Center, showing the leaders of Dallas standing at their tables, awaiting the arrival of the President. It was a speech that, had he given it, would have been remembered as one of Kennedy's best. The following is an excerpt from the speech John Kennedy never gave:

We are by destiny, rather than choice, the watchmen on the walls of world freedom. We ask, therefore, that we may be worthy of our strength, with wisdom and restraint, and that we may in our time and for all time achieve the ancient vision of peace on earth, goodwill toward men. That must always be our goal, and the righteousness of our cause must always underlie our strength. For as was written long ago, "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in van."

Now, 29 years later, because of the unique position that America holds as the truly undisputed leader of the world, those remarks have never been more relevant. A minister who had once served as mayor of his town told me, "I've been involved in elective politics and church politics, and church politics is much dirtier."

Lest there be some who believe the church is above politics, or that it has ever been, let us review our spiritual heritage. In Acts 6, deacons were not appointed because the widows were being neglected. Deacons were appointed because the *non-Hebrew widows* were being neglected. In 1 Corinthians 1, a class system was developing, apparently based on who baptized the disciples. In Galatians 2, Peter fraternized with the Gentile Christians until Jewish Christians came, and then he withdrew from them, in order to be more politically correct. Paul called his hand on it. In James 2, we are warned against "Robin Leachism" – paying undue attention to those living the lifestyles of the rich and famous. So, it would seem that the problems of elitism, racial discrimination, and power politics have been around for a long time.

First, let us take a look at politics from the secular vantage point. We in America do not live in a democracy, but rather in a republic, a form of representative government under law. I was once fortunate to serve in that system of representation as a State Senator in Texas.

I used to keep a cartoon taped to my desk as a humble reminder of reality. Senator Snort walks out of the chamber, turns to a colleague and says, "I'll tell you what I thought we were voting on if you'll tell me what you thought we were voting on." That is more true to life than I like to admit.

That only accentuates the critical nature of the call to arms for Christians to get more involved. Just because someone gets elected to public office, that does not make him or her an expert on

every topic, or any topic for that matter. Elected officials need input. They need to be guided, and they will be. The question is, "Who is doing the guiding?" The answer is, "Those who choose to get involved."

I was an eyewitness to one of the darker times in American political history. I was working on Capitol Hill in Washington during Watergate. I met and visited with G. Gordon Liddy and John Dean. One of the things that John Dean said seemed to encapsulate the whole tragic series of events. He stated, "I became blinded to my own ambition as to what was right and what was wrong."

It is so easy for that to occur today in American politics because we have allowed style to overcome substance. President Dwight Eisenhower held the first live televised Presidential Press Conference and things have been going downhill ever since. Major issues of extreme complexity are reduced to 10 second sound bites. Phrases such as "There you go again" or "Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy" have become ingrained in the American mind.

I am convinced that we have reached a point in American history when Abraham Lincoln could not be elected President today, because we would not be able to sell him on television. No disrespect to Raymond Massey, but Lincoln was 6' 4" and very thin. His clothes never fit. He did not grow a beard until after he was in the White House, so his face appeared drawn and gaunt. He had a high, squeaky speaking voice. He would be a tough sell in today's media markets.

Even when we hear something live, the spin doctors come on right afterwards to tell us what they want us to remember. Truth becomes packaged, sometimes to the point of making it unrecognizable.

The formula for success in this secular setting of politics is as follows: Money and/or access equals power. That formula is also often valid in business, as well. Karl Marx wrote, "History is economics." The New Golden Rule is not the one you learned from Matthew 7:12. The New Golden Rule is, "He who has the gold makes the rules."

Access, in our political system, is so often controlled by lobbyists. The term comes from the administration of General U.S. Grant, when the President would walk the two blocks down Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House to the Willard Hotel. There he would relax at the bar in the hotel's lobby, drink whiskey and smoke a few cigars. People would constantly come up to him in that setting and ask for favors, and he called them lobbyists.

Placing the secular mode aside for a moment, let us look at this from the spiritual perspective. Alarming, the view is not always that much different.

Louis XIV was arguably the last ruling monarch with truly worldwide impact. At his funeral, the greatest collection of leaders the world had ever seen assembled in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. There were not lights in the massive Gothic structure that day, only the light from a single candle atop his casket. The bishop rose to give the eulogy to this most revered leader. He said, "Only God is great," and he blew out the candle.

Philippians 2:10 says, “[A]t the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” That list of confessors will include Winston Churchill, Queen Victoria, Mikhail Gorbachev, Joseph Stalin, Rameses II, Nebuchadnezzar, every U.S. President ... and Louis XIV.

In Revelation 2, the angel said (paraphrased), “You are doing the right things. You’ve just forgotten why. You know what is most important. You’ve just forgotten who is most important.”

One way for that to happen in a spiritual context is for us to revert back to the secular model that we reviewed and bring it over into the church. The elders become the Board of Directors. The ministers become the Executive Committee. The members become the Stockholders. The church is not a corporation; it is a family. God is not a president; he is the Father.

After Jesus died, his disciples met in a room behind locked doors. It was a time of crisis. Dante wrote, “The hardest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of crisis, preserve their neutrality.”

I believe we are in a moral crisis in this country today. Proverbs 14:34 reminds us, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.” As a nation, as a people, as God’s people, where do we stand on the major ethical issues of our day? Is the taking of life from innocent children just another political issue to us, comparable with budget and tax agendas? As Christians, are we willing to stand up first and oppose racial discrimination, or are we willing to let others be the Good Samaritan while we play the parts of the Priest and the Levite? Are we prepared to stand up and be counted in the public debate over the acceptance of homosexual lifestyles? What position is the church and its members taking on drinking, or smoking, or abuse within families? Where are we on these issues? All too often, the answer is that we are right where we started 2,000 years ago. We are sitting in a room, behind locked doors.

One of the greatest challenges that I faced as a candidate was the attitude that Christians should not get involved in politics. With so much at stake in our society today, we simply cannot allow that myopic viewpoint to prevail.

As a State Senator, I introduced a resolution to remove from federal jurisdiction the issue of prayer in public schools. One of the witnesses who testified in favor of my resolution was Bill Murray. He said, “In 1963, I was the little boy who stood in front of the United States Supreme Court building as my mother, Madalyn Murray O’Hair, removed prayer from public schools. I’m going to spend the rest of my life trying to turn that around.” I asked Bill why he had come such a long way to testify for my resolution. I will never forget his answers. He said, “I am here because I have to be here. You see, if I were not here, my mother would be. I don’t have a choice.”

In Matthew 12:43-45, Jesus tells the parable of the man who had an evil spirit. The evil spirit left and the man cleaned his house, put everything in order, but left it empty. The evil spirit returned with seven others and the state of that man was worse than before. In the moral and ethical



battles being waged in our society today, rest assured that the vacuum will be filled. Just like Bill Murray, we do not have a choice.

It is time for God's people to stand up and be counted for what is decent and for what is right. May we, as a nation and as a people, always stand with Abraham as we look for a city which has a foundation, whose builder and maker is God.

## **Book Review: A Prophet With Honor – The Billy Graham Story**

*Reviewed by Shaun Casey  
October, 1992*

Billy Graham is often characterized as either the high priest of American civil religion by his detractors or as “the most important single thing God has done since the Apostle Paul” according to one of his devotees. Harvard Divinity school alumnus William Martin, B.D. '63, has entered this thicket of interpretive dissonance, and the result of his labor is a superbly crafted narrative that offers an interpretation from which both despisers and lovers of Graham can learn much. Martin writes a critical biography that portrays Graham in all his faults and strengths (there are plenty of both) as perhaps the central figure in the emergence of Evangelicalism in this century. This single fact of placing Graham within the historical web of American church history makes the book worth reading.

What makes this work a model of the biographer's craft is how effectively Martin negotiates conditions which could be characterized as simultaneously the biographer's fondest dream and worst nightmare. In the Foreword, Martin describes the conditions under which he accepted Graham's request that he, Martin, write a critical biography. Martin was granted full access to Graham, members of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and the archives at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, yet he was given complete freedom to write as he saw fit. Martin sets out how he proceeded under the commission to write a book that had the endorsement of a subject not known for granting access to potentially negative assessors.

There are four sets of issues which I found particularly interesting in Martin's treatment of Graham. These are Graham's carefully cultivated relationships with U.S. presidents from Harry Truman to George Bush, his evolving stance on social and political issues such as the Vietnam War, race, and nuclear weapons, his relationship to liberal Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, and finally the character and persuasive power of the man himself.

Graham's long association with presidents began inauspiciously with Harry Truman. By 1950 Graham was winning popular acclaim as an evangelist, yet he had little success in the political realm. Despite unsuccessful efforts to secure a meeting with Truman in 1949, Graham continued to importune the White House. Finally, with the aid of Massachusetts congressman John McCormack, Truman granted Graham a private meeting. The meeting itself seems uneventful, but upon leaving the White House, Graham and his entourage broke protocol and gave reporters an account of what Truman had said and relayed the story of how they had prayed together. Graham obliged reporters' requests to reenact the prayer and posed while kneeling on the White House lawn. Needless to say, Truman, who was not known for his piety, was not happy and regarded Graham as a publicity seeking religious huckster.

Graham's preference for Republican presidents was whetted by the Eisenhower years, especially by the budding relationship with Richard Nixon. yet the ascendance of Lyndon John presented an interesting detour in Graam's march through politics. Graham and LBJ had maintained a relationship since the latter had been elected to the Senate. But shortly after the Kenedy

assassination, the relationship took on a new depth, primarily the result of Johnson's initiative. As a native Texan and as a lifelong student of conservative Protestantism, Martin is uniquely equipped to chronicle this symbiotic relationship in which both men sought to gain from the other's company. As LBJ put it, "... we bragged on each other. I told him he was the greatest religious leader in the world and he said I was the greatest political leader" (303).

Graham's relationship with Nixon was long and complex and is well told in this book. Perhaps nowhere else are Martin's talents as a researcher and writer more evident than at this juncture. In February 1991, Martin furnished Graham with a copy of the manuscript of the book to allow Graham to check for factual errors and Graham acknowledged that much of what he read about his relationship with Nixon surprised him. Upon seeing the extensive evidence Martin compiled regarding Graham's efforts in Nixon's 1972 reelection and the extent to which Nixon's staff used him, Graham remarked, "I felt like a sheep led to slaughter."

One has to ponder if this revelation gave Graham pause after having offered his imprimatur to the Persian Gulf War barely a month earlier as he spent the night with George Bush on the eve of the war. The extent of Nixon's manipulation of Graham coupled with Graham's bitter disappointment with the Watergate scandal leave the reader amazed that Graham would continue such close relations with politicians. Equally puzzling is Graham's insistence that preachers should not be involved in the political arena and yet the clearly documented thread running throughout 40 years of his ministry is the studious cultivation of political leaders. The moral of the story would seem to be that whenever a would-be vicar of Christ chooses to walk hand-in-hand with Caesar it is the latter who maintains the stronger grip.

Woven into Graham's ministry and political life is a thread of evolving stances on various social issues the country faced during the decades of his public career. Graham's record on issues such as race, the Vietnam War, and nuclear issues present a complex constellation of changing positions. To his credit, he did not allow the overwhelming individualism of Evangelical piety to prevent him from eventually taking relatively progressive stands on all three sets of issues. Martin painstakingly details the shifts, retreats, and advances on a number of important social issues. By the mid-1980s Graham could speak of the three conversions of his life: his first acknowledgment of Jesus as his Lord and Savior, his determination to work for a racially just society, and most recently, his commitment to work for world peace for the rest of his life.

The only time I ever had the opportunity to hear Graham speak in person was in the early '80s when he addressed a predominantly secular audience at M.I.T. on the question, "Can There Be Peace in the Nuclear Age?" Much to my surprise, Graham mesmerized this audience throughout his speech as he detailed the magnitude of the nuclear threat. Equally astonishing was how quickly he lost the audience when he revealed his punch line that lasting peace would not happen until Christ returned to establish the millennial reign on earth. Graham has been surprising skeptics like me for most of his career.

I have to confess that I have never found Billy Graham to be a personally compelling figure. I have tended to see him as a rather innocuous evangelist who has probably helped a lot of people yet who lacks any sense of boundary between his work and his political relationships. My casual perceptions have not been overthrown in this biography. Perhaps it is a standard of judging the

effectiveness of a critical biography if one's casual perceptions are challenged and a deeper and thicker description is given to replace one's prejudices. By that standard, Martin has written a masterpiece.

## Near Tragedy in the Fast Lane

*by Joy McMillon  
October, 1992*

Like millions of other couples, John and Annette Poore were used to living life in the fast lane. Both of them loved their work. John was the minister at the Northwest Church of Christ in Tampa, and deeply involved in every area of Christian ministry.

Annette, like 60% of American women, was performing a juggling act, trying to balance a career, be a wife and mother, and serve as family cabbie.

Then one day it happened. The couple in the fast lane hit a speed bump. An artery ruptured behind Annette's right eye, and doctors braced her family for the worst. Her husband and their 13-year-old son, Byron, were told she might not recover. If she did, she could be a very different person from the vivacious wife and mother they loved. The operation needed to repair her damaged artery was both long and delicate.

A year later, Annette is herself again. Not only is she teaching, she was named Teacher of the Year at Florida College Academy.

"Every day is precious to me. I try to live one day at a time now," said Annette.

Her positive attitude carries over to her students at Florida College Academy, where she has taught third grade for eight years, said Buddy Payne, vice president of the Temple Terrace school.

"She doesn't allow her kids to say, 'I can't.' She doesn't accept less than the best from her students, and they produce it for her," Payne said.

When Annette felt the excruciating pains in her head and neck on February 21, 1991, she suspected they were probably stress-related. Active at school and at the Northwest church, she was on the road one to two weekends a month promoting her craft business. Following the usual 11-hour school day, she would rush home to work on craft projects which frequently kept her up until 1:00 a.m.

"I had too much going at one time. I guess I was driven," she says.

As the pain worsened that morning, she left school and drove to the emergency room at University Community Hospital. An arteriogram revealed she had a burst blood vessel behind her eye and under the optic nerve. Doctors diagnosed her problem as an aneurysm, a blood-filled sac formed by the enlargement of a weakened artery wall.

"The doctors didn't give my husband any hope that I'd come out all right. Most people die from this," she said.

Annette doesn't remember the 11-1/2 hour long surgery or the 115 people praying in the waiting rooms. After her coma, which lasted five days, she mostly remembers the shock of seeing her shaved head, the 600 get well cards, and her determination to recover fully.

"People in 10 states were praying for us. We've had tremendous support from friends, church and family," said her husband, John, 44.

Doctors gave her a 75% chance of survival and a lower chance of full recovery after the risky surgery. Also looming on the horizon was the possibility of her blindness or paralysis.

"She faced 100-to-1 odds of recovering as nicely as she did. It was more in God's hands than the doctors'," said Al kaspar, the physician who coordinated Poore's rehabilitation program.

Following the surgery, Annette was transferred to Tampa General Hospital for recovery and physical therapy on her temporarily paralyzed left wrist and ankle.

But the feisty 47-year-old was so determined to walk out of the hospital that one night, against physicians' orders, she slid out of her wheelchair and tried to walk across the room. She fell flat on the floor.

"They were so upset that they put me in a straight jacket," laughed the Martin, Tennessee native.

"There was never any doubt in her mind she wouldn't get well. But what surprised me was her speed of recovery. The doctors said she'd be walking with a cane in six weeks, but in six weeks she was running," said John.

"They told us it would be at least 18 months to two years before she could teach again. In six months she was teaching."

Despite her successful progress, more stressful times hit the family as everyone had to adjust to Annette's condition when she returned home. Relatives and friends prepared family meals and took her to daily therapy sessions for several weeks. John had to take over the family finances, and Byron had to deal with a strained and somewhat chaotic home schedule, said Annette.

And the stress of the past year seems to be taking its toll on John, who candidly admits to feelings of depression while the family was groping its way through their ordeal. He also suffered a serious blood pressure episode in July that has left him feeling exhausted.

"I guess stress and depression affect all of us differently," said John. There were peaks as well as valleys in her recovery, times when it was very difficult, such as the day he rode in an ambulance with her to the second hospital where she would receive therapy.

"It was only a simple 20-minute ride, but I had never put my wife in an ambulance before," said John. "When you are going through the early grieving period, time sort of stands still. You lose track of nearly everything."

John said he regrets not realizing how much their son was impacted by the family's struggles. "I just didn't have the presence of mind to know all he was dealing with then, because I was trying to cope with everything that was happening."

But friends of the couple say much has changed for the Poores. Even though he hasn't consciously changed his preaching style, church members tell him that he preaches with "more conviction and emotion," said John. The family's suffering has also been a great teacher in many respects, he claims.

"I've learned that you don't have to experience a death to have a loss. So many times people around us are grieving, and we aren't even aware of it. We aren't as sensitive as we should be to each other's wounds and losses," said John.

Today, both Annette and John have exited from the fast-lane living. They're trying for a more balanced life, which means a careful juggling of labor and leisure, relationships and reflection. Annette exercises regularly, has dropped her craft business, and spends more quality time with her family.

Annette finds more time in the quiet parking spaces of life where she can contemplate, read, pray, or just sit. Though the pressures are still there, filling every day, she refuses to be stampeded by them. "I make lists and concentrate on what is important for that day and that day only."

Mainly, she attributes her recovery to the Lord's prayer. "I know one thing: God is so good. He brought me back, and he didn't have to. I have a lot to be thankful for and a testimony to give that might help someone else," she said.

The Poores keep a fully-decorated Christmas tree in their living room all year. "We tell people, 'Every day that we're healthy and happy, it's Christmas.'" "

## Can Laughter Be a Lethal Weapon?

by Gary Holloway  
October, 1992

Church is serious business. In Churches of Christ we have always taken our religion seriously, particularly when it comes to doctrinal controversy. After all, the eternal salvation of souls is at stake.

This seriousness of demeanor is seen in the photographs of the pioneer preachers in our movement. here are tough, stelly-eyed defenders of the faith, ready to debate at a moment's notice.

One picture is different. It shows an older man with a long beard and a serious expression, but if you look closely at his eyes, you can catch a twinkle of mischievous merriment. His name is Thomas R. Burnett.

T.R. Burnett certainly took his Christianity seriously. Converted to the Christian movement as an adult in 1874, he devoted the rest of his life to spreading the gospel throughout North Texas by word of mouth and by pen. Although adequate as a preacher, he excelled as a journalist, publishing one of the first religious papers among Churches of Christ in Texas, the *Christian Messenger*, beginning in 1875.

Frontier journalists, particularly religious ones, dipped their pens in acid, calling their opponents every name in the book. Burnett was no exception. He could battle with the best of them, and was always ready to meet all comers in debate. However he possessed a weapon few religious leaders had in their arsenals: a finely-honed sense of humor that he expressed in doggerel verse.

Burnett was the poet of the Restoration Movement. Calling himself "the Dallas bard," he published three volumes of *Doctrinal Poetry*. Not an issue of the *Christian Messenger* or *Burnett's Budget* (his monthly paper) arrived without his latest poem that poked fun at the latest outrage performed by Baptist or Methodist preachers. Typical is his brief poem entitled *Chickenology*:

*I am a valiant Methodist,  
And wear a smiling face.  
While chicken is abundant  
I'll never fall from grace!  
Though sorrows sore beset me  
And waves of trouble roll,  
With yellow-legs about me  
There's glory in my soul!  
I'll shout my way to heaven,  
And sing until I die,*



*Just stuff me full of dumplings  
And lots of chicken-pie!*

Those of us currently in Churches of Christ may be embarrassed by such language. It may confirm all our prejudices about our past: that we were a narrow, bigoted, mean-spirited people. What frees Burnett from such a charge is his ability and willingness to turn a humorous eye on himself and his own brethren.

In Burnett's day, the Churches of Christ in Texas were undergoing a great transition. Small rural churches had been the norm in his youth, but now large city churches were springing up, churches that built great buildings in a desire to be like their religious neighbors. Burnett described this *Modern Church*:

*Well, wife, I've found the modern church,  
And worshipped there to-day:  
It made me think the good old times  
Had surely passed away.  
The meeting-house was finer built  
Than they were years ago,  
But then I found when I went in  
'Twas mostly built for show.  
The pews were luscious to behold,  
The cushions of the best,  
For when they labored with their souls  
They gave their bodies rest.  
The spires reached up to the sky,  
The pulpit was the boss,  
And built in finest style of art,  
And hidden from the cross.*

Not just the building, but the attitude of this modern church aroused his ire:

*I saw the people coming in,  
Their silks a rustling made,  
They did not come to worship God,  
It was a dress parade!*

Finally, the preacher of the church came under Burnett's gun:

*He did not say confess your sins,  
Believe, repent, or pray,  
You could not tell there was a soul  
That needed aught that day.  
He spoke of the "esthetic taste"  
Of this "progressive age,"  
And said each plays a brilliant part*

*On life's theatric stage,  
We live upon a "higher plane"  
Than did apostles old,  
And we should not becloud our minds  
With ghostly tales they told.*

Burnett was no old mossback, afraid of any change in the church. But the urban churches of his day (and ours) did face the danger of being subverted from their true calling by falling into materialism. He fought that danger with sermons, articles, and books; but his most effective weapon was parody.

Even the most serious doctrinal controversy did not escape his satire. Churches of Christ in his day came close to dividing over the issue of rebaptism. Should believers immersed in the Baptist Church be required to be rebaptized to enter the Church of Christ? The question may have little interest to us, but it prompted one Texas preacher, Austin McGary, to begin a new paper, *The Firm Foundation*, to defend the necessity of rebaptism.

To Burnett, the whole controversy was silly, a "quarrel over words" (1 Timothy 6:4). If Baptist baptism was not valid, then all the early leaders of the Restoration movement were not truly baptized. As he says in his poem *A Hobby Straw*:

*Old brother Campbell, and his dad,  
And Jacob Creath, A Baptist lad,  
And Raccoon Smith, and Walter Scott,  
All Baptist sheep – a sorry lot!*

To Burnett, rebaptism was McGary's "hobby," a cranky obsession that threatened to split the church. He has McGary say:

*I've started a great Texas schism,  
And built a sect on re-baptism,  
With creed and tenet nice and hobby,  
And I must save my blessed hobby!*

Burnett's poetry did not end the rebaptism controversy, but it did help put it in perspective. What seemed like a crucial issue to some was really quite insignificant. Instead of producing defensiveness and anger, it deserved only laughter.

So who was T.R. Burnett? Just a crank with a gift for silly poetry? Hardly. He was a well-respected preacher who spent his years travelling through Texas in appalling conditions to preach the gospel. In his journal of his travels he left this typical entry from December 25, 1866:

*Had intended to start meeting, but snow was falling and the weather grew worse and worse. Put out appointment to speak on Christmas day, but weather too cold for people to turn out. Rode over the neighborhood and made up a club of subscribers for the Messenger. Very hard*

*travelling – exceedingly cold, and bushes bent over the road with sleet until my horse could hardly get through at places.*

To Burnett, Christianity was serious business. He gave up wealth, endured hardship, and faced ridicule in order to preach. But he also knew when to laugh.

What can today's church learn from him? No doubt many in the church today do not take their Christianity seriously enough. But many of us make everything a matter of faith and salvation, feeling we must be right and prove others wrong in every doctrinal controversy. Perhaps what we need most in the church is a good laugh, a funny poem. After all, laughter is sometimes our greatest weapon against the Evil One.

Just ask T.R. Burnett.

## Sundays: Funeral Dirge or Wedding March?

*by Cindy Blanton Zahodnik  
October, 1992*

A few years ago I became captivated by a fresh insight to the meaning of worship assemblies. Prior to that time, I had compared going to church with going to a funeral. There, within a beautiful, padded, stained glass coffin made of brick, I felt like a dead body all decked out in its Sunday best. Without the lifeblood of Jesus and his love, I felt no power, no vision, and no ability to reproduce. In a real sense, I was “all dressed up with no place to go!” Going to church was a somber, joyless occasion. One could usually count on some supportive fellowship, though. As lifeless as it seemed, the assembly was well attended, but I think the saints came to pay their respects rather than to celebrate a feast.

We shouldn't be surprised that more recently a ho-hum attitude has discouraged some people from even “making an appearance” on Sundays. Perhaps our routine religious service has slowly suffocated our expression of worship and praise. Many have failed to grasp the real meaning and purpose of the Body coming together.

I am often asked to lead women in worship, and I ache for understanding and wisdom of how to renew our worship together. I pray to be rekindled in my own personal worship, to offer wholehearted worship to God in spirit and in love, so as not to become a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

God sent me a pivotal experience. I happened to see the 25th wedding anniversary of Barbara Mandrell and her husband, Ken, which was televised on The Nashville Network. They had a full-fledged wedding ceremony to reaffirm and recommit their marriage vows of 25 years. The occasion was complete with engraved invitations, ushers, candles, flowers, music, minister, tuxedos, and a breath-taking wedding gown. I was moved to see their eyes still bright with love and excitement as they gazed deeply at each other. Ken recited 1 Corinthians 13 to Barbara; then tears filled my eyes as I listened to their vows of love and adoration. I felt such joy watching them at the reception, as they cut the wedding cake and delighted in feeding each other the traditional first piece, followed with the sharing of the wedding toast. I found my heart restating my own wedding vows and felt my marriage had been enhanced by having shared in their experience.

I became intrigued with the idea: What if my husband, Matt, and I renewed our vows? Where would we have the ceremony? What words and scriptures would we use in recommitting our love to each other? What would we wear and what music would we choose?

Some things I would do the same as I did almost 10 years before. I would want to wear the same simple but elegant candlelight ivory dress, for it was the dress my mother wore on her wedding day. It was also worn by both of my sisters, and both of my mother's married sisters and their married daughters – a wonderful family tradition, rich in heritage. I realized too that some things wouldn't be as important as they were before, such as place, colors, candles and flowers.

Renewed marriage vows! My mind couldn't stop exploring that idea. Then somehow I seemed to feel God's Spirit within me saying, "Cindy, you are the bride of Christ. Renew your vow of love to him. Sing him your songs of love and praise. Read over and over again his vows and promises to you and rewrite them on your heart."

I got excited thinking of worship in terms of a wedding ceremony.

Coming to her groom, the bride of Christ is presented in a pure white gown of righteousness that he bought for her with his blood.

The Holy Spirit serves as wedding consultant, directing the flow and continuity, while angels serve as attendants.

It is a joyous, beautiful occasion, full of hope and promise. There are songs of love and adoration, songs that retell the story of Jesus' love for his bride. Some songs are old, some are new, all are heartfelt.

The communion is a precious feast shared between the bride and groom, sealing their covenant of love and commitment to each other.

The bride puts on the name of her groom. His ministry becomes hers, and she is received by his father, our God, as a daughter of his royal family.

And heaven is the forever honeymoon ... when the bride removes the veil and sees her groom face to face. She forever leaves her worldly home to live in the mansion he has lovingly prepared for her. In painful contrast to many marriages, they will live happily ever after!

These thoughts helped me see how diverse worship can be, how we can embrace expressions of worship that are different from our accustomed ones. Though certain expressions of praise may not be my own choice and may make me a little uncomfortable, they are spirit motivated and genuinely from the heart. I ought not speculate about the sincerity of other worshippers and the validity of their worship methods. For instance, Matt and I chose each element and song for our wedding ceremony. But neither of us verbally sang one song at our wedding. We had a small choir, several solos, some taped songs that I had prerecorded; we even had congregational singing. However, I don't believe anyone present questioned our commitment or the sincerity of our hearts because we didn't do our own singing that day.

Furthermore, I have been to countless weddings, with no two being exactly alike. Each has been a unique expression of love, full of meaning and purpose for the bride and groom. I have never felt offended or compelled to get up and leave a wedding because I didn't like a particular song the couple selected, or because I didn't personally care for the color of the bridesmaids' dresses, or because they added some nontraditional element into their ceremony. In fact, I can say that almost without exception, I came away from each wedding experience in some way blessed, or inspired, and recommitted to my own marriage.

So, I look forward to Sundays, anxious to meet my groom, feast with him, and renew my vow of love to him in prayer and song. I also anticipate being blessed and inspired by the other unique testimonies of love for the groom.

It is easier to arise on Sunday morning, knowing I am going to a wedding rather than a funeral!

### Once Upon a Cross – Part 3

*by Thom Lemmons*  
*October, 1992*

“Eric, could you hand me the second clarinet folders, please?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

I love this kid. The quickest way to any teacher’s heart is “Yes, sir” or “Yes, ma’am.” Out of fashion though it may be, politeness has often been known to transform a C-plus into a B-minus.

Eric and I are preparing the sight-reading folders for the advanced band, which will meet next period. Already I can feel the fluttery nervousness gathering like a herd of rabid butterflies in the pit of my stomach. In a week, this group will go to compete at a local music festival, and an entire year’s worth of self-esteem will be on the line for me. I keep telling myself that it’s not that big a deal; the principal doesn’t care what rating the band makes, the other teachers at my school don’t care what the band makes, the kids’ parents don’t care. No one is going to give a flip about the rating they get ...

Except me. Anything less than a “superior” rating from every single judge on the panel will be taken as a personal indictment of my character, my professional integrity and my fitness to continue drawing my paycheck.

Well, maybe not quite that bad. You can forget the part about the paycheck ...

I hate festivals, and I love them. I hate the jitters and the pressure I put on myself. I hate the despair that threatens to overwhelm me every time I realize that the primary objective evidence of my expertise consists of a single performance by a group of hormone-addled seventh- and eighth-graders.

But I love the challenge – the chance to pull it off. I love the opportunity to measure my efforts and those of my students against a standard. I love the feeling of confident relief that comes over me when the last note is played, the last reverberation fades into the balcony of the hall. Because, the simple fact is – and I can never admit this aloud, for fear that the festival gods may punish my hubris – I am a good teacher, a good music coach.

Sounds a little crazy, even to me, this schizophrenic amalgam of cautious confidence and neurotic fear of failure. It’s how I imagine a sales person must feel before a major presentation, or an actor before an important audition. The only way out is forward.

“Should I do the low woodwinds now, Mrs. Thompson?” Eric asks.

“Yes, Eric. And it’s ‘Miz,’ remember?”

“Oh, yeah,” he grins. “Sorry.”

For some strange reason, Eric reminds me of the golden retriever puppy my family had when I was a kid. He has the same sandy-red hair, the same eager-to-please grin, the same big-footed clumsiness that Butch had. He’s a sweet youngster, and he lives and breathes for band class. I’m sure this doesn’t impress too many of his non-musical friends, but I don’t think Eric cares.

I guess I was a lot like Eric. My earliest successes came in music, and I suppose I never forgot that. I still remember the first time I played a solo at a music contest. I was petrified. My lips were so dry that the mouthpiece on my cornet clung like glue; my palms got so slippery I didn’t think I could hold my horn down without dropping it, and I’m sure the judge had to see my knees shaking. But, by some stroke of fate, I made a First Division rating – the best. My mother was so proud.

My father was out of town, preaching at a revival. Probably through no fault of his own, in all fairness. Music wasn’t really his thing, anyway...

I had to play the cornet, you see, because both my brothers had played the cornet. And I had not only to play it, but to play it better. So I did. I remember being almost the only girl in the cornet section in my high school band. All through junior high and high school, the boys hated it when I regularly clobbered them in auditions. But it didn’t matter – not the way I wanted. Try as I might, practice diligently though I did, my accomplishments were generally qualified by my gender – or so it seemed to me. I got dreadfully tired of being “that good girl cornet player at Smithfield High.” How desperately I longed for an endorsement that never came in exactly the model and shade I wanted.

I went to the local college, got my music education degree, and got an assistant directorship at the same high school where I had attended. After a year or two, I took the band job at one of the local junior highs.

But it didn’t work for me – not there. The problem wasn’t the kids, not the teaching. There simply wasn’t room enough in my hometown for me and my past. I came down with an acute case of biographically-induced claustrophobia. The only cure I could figure out was distance, taken in liberal doses as needed.

Besides – it had to be less stressful for Dad with me out of town, right? Less wear-and-tear on his pastoral circuitry, without having to witness an intransigent daughter dashing her pilgrim bark repeatedly against the rocks below his gospel lighthouse.

And there you have it, Eric, my lad: the story of Miz Thompson’s life, in 400 words or less. Pretty exciting stuff, huh?

Get over it, Janice. I toss the second clarinet folders on top of the stack piled in the chair of Jamal Lewis, first chair clarinetist and section leader extraordinaire. I glance at the wall clock. Ten minutes until the next period starts. Eric is finishing the last of the woodwind folders.



“Eric, did you already do the percussion and low brass folders?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

I love this kid. Polite and efficient. I mean – what are the odds?

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Linus eased the tool bag to the ground in front of the stone house and knocked at the gate. In a moment, he heard footsteps slapping against the stones of the courtyard inside.

“Who’s there?” a loud male voice shouted in Aramaic.

Linus recognized the sound of the large man who had engaged him. “It is I,” he replied in Greek, “the carpenter whom you saw in front of the inn.”

The steps slapped toward the gate, which was flung roughly open, barely missing the end of Linus’ nose. “Come in,” the large man bellowed in heavily-accented Greek, beckoning him toward the house. “I didn’t expect you until tomorrow, but come in, nonetheless.”

Linus paced across the spacious, stone-paved courtyard toward the wide front door of the house. The prosperity of the dwelling’s owner was evident in the fine dressing of its stones, the elegant carving of the wooden fixtures. Linus knew immediately that the large, loud man was well able to afford the cost of his craftsmanship.

“This way, this way,” his host blustered, leading Linus through the main portal and into a foyer which opened onto yet another courtyard, around which were ranged the various rooms of the house: the scullery, the sleeping rooms, the main room for dining and the entertainment of guests.

“Woman!” the man bellowed, making Linus wince. “Come here! Bring water! Sit there,” he finished in a softer voice which was still louder than warranted, pointing Linus toward a small bench against the wall.

In a few moments, a female appeared in a doorway across the inner courtyard, her head bent low in a posture of submission, bearing a water jar and a handful of linens. As Linus watched her approach, he sensed something familiar in her mien, her gait. Then she entered the foyer, and glanced at him over her veil.

It was Tabit, the woman at the well! Her eyes widened for a heartbeat as she recognized him in the same instant, then she immediately knelt, without a word, and began to remove his boots.

“When you’ve refreshed yourself,” his host commented, “join me in the main hall. That is where the table you will build is meant to be.”

Linus nodded, and the man turned to stride across the courtyard. The carpenter had quickly ascertained from Tabit's manner and the harsh way the man had summoned her that it would not be advisable to speak to Tabit as if he knew her – at least not within the man's hearing. From the slope of her shoulders and the self-effacing droop of her head, he knew that her life with the master of this house must be anything other than happy. He began to see more of the reason for her strange, fey manner at the well.

When he heard his host's footsteps disappear into the doorway across the courtyard, Linus said, in a low voice, "I thank you for sending your husband to look at my work by the inn. As you have heard, he has engaged my services. I am grateful ..."

"I said nothing to him," she interjected in a low, fearful voice, without raising her head. "He doesn't permit me to speak to him, nor to anyone else when he can prevent it. He hired you for reasons of his own. And ..." She drew a long, shuddering breath. "He isn't my husband." She placed his boots to one side and poured water over his feet.

"Then, why ..." began Linus in a pained, incredulous voice.

"As I told you," she said, "I have acquired – earned, really – a reputation. I have no one, no other family, nothing. I do what I must to keep from starving. I have few choices."

Linus could not accept that Tabit's fate was completely without alternative. "Is there no one else in Sychar who can offer you shelter?" he asked softly. "Perhaps ..." His mind grasped for any straw of logic or comfort to which he could appeal. "Perhaps there is someone here who shares your empathy for the Galilean. Your kinsman at the inn, maybe? Would he not take you in and rescue you from this, this ... degradation?" he finished sadly.

She looked away, across the courtyard. After a few moments, she shook her head slowly. "When the Galilean came, many heard his words. Some even said they believed in him. But," she continued, glancing back at Linus, "belief dies a far easier death than habit. Life in Sychar did not change greatly after he left," she sighed. "And any alteration which did occur was shallower by half than my yearnings taught me to hope for."

Linus' chest ached with the pain of his pity. "Why are you telling me all this?" he asked. "I needn't have known about your arrangement with his man. You could have spared yourself that humiliation, at least."

She began wiping his feet with the linen. Then, for the last time, she raised her face to him, challenging him with her eyes. "When the Galilean came, he taught me to stop lying to myself. Having learned that, I can no longer lie to others. That choice, at least, remains to me."

She looked down and quickly laced the thongs of his boots. Without a word, she rose, picking up her jar and soiled linens, and trod swiftly away, across the courtyard toward the scullery. She went inside without looking back.

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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.

## Hope Network Newsletter: Thank you God, Even Though It's Small

*by Phil Ware, Guest Writer*

*Introduction by Lynn Anderson, Feature Editor*

*October, 1992*

The winds of change are blowing. We see fresh signs of hope nearly every day. Churches scattered across the country are willing to reexamine fundamental ways of doing things. Change is never very comfortable. However, several churches are willing to travel new trails in attempts to (1) connect with God in more meaningful worship and (2) connect with people through more meaningful strategies. Specifically, some churches are experimenting with worship on Sunday morning only, with Sunday School on Sunday nights. This allows for multiple use of facilities during these times of high building costs and economic recession. For some churches this has been a fruitful discovery. One leader in this innovative strategy is the Westover Hills church in Austin, Texas, where Phil Ware is the preacher. I asked Phil to do a special favor for the readers of *Hope Network Newsletter*. He has pulled together some “reasons, reservations and results” from among some of the churches that have gone to this “Bible-School-on-Sunday-night format.” Many congregations may profit from his findings and you will certainly enjoy the interesting story he tells.

Twelve years ago, the granddaughter of one of our elders came to visit with her grandparents. Each morning they shared a wonderful breakfast. But when Sunday rolled around, they sat down in front of a bowl of cereal and a glass of juice. “Dear God,” she began, “we thank you for this food even though it's small.”

This event has been a metaphor for our 10 years at Westover Hills. The membership grew over 30% the first two years. Since then, we've been playing facility catch-up. This has not been easy. Austin is like many growing urban and suburban areas. Zoning regulations, neighborhood groups, and city procedures can be very difficult challenges. Building and real estate costs are exorbitant. Affordable land is too far away from our congregational base to move. With our commitment to missions, major expansion remains a distant dream.

One Sunday morning a number of years ago, I slipped out of class early. Headed down the hallway, I noticed a pile of chairs. The door was propped open. People were crammed into the room. Most of the men were sitting on the floor. That evening, I asked one of the class members what was going on. “We can cram more people in the the room when the men don't use chairs!” he replied. “We've been doing it for several months now.”

Later that same week, our education minister took me to one of our toddler classrooms. “How many two-year-olds do you think we can squeeze into this room?” he asked. I suggested 15 or 16 maximum. “We had 32 children in this room Sunday morning. That doesn't count the three teachers. We've got to have more room!” he insisted.

We were up the proverbial “crick without a paddle.” We had been hearing the crescendo of concern for months. Unfortunately the Austin economy had gone subterranean. What could we do?

We carefully examined possible options. We checked around with other churches. We consulted church growth experts. We chose our thirteenth option – the option no one else had tried. We moved Sunday School to Sunday night. Class was divided into two shifts. Our oldest adults, parents, and children met at 5:00 p.m. Young singles, launching families, and other adults met at 6:30. We no longer had a Sunday night preaching service. After several months of meetings, a professionally done multi-media presentation, and a taped message from Reuel Lemmons (who was bedfast), we made the switch.

Some made woeful predictions. “In a year this will be catastrophic to our children!” I was bluntly told. “People won’t come back on Sunday night for class,” several others suggested.

Others were more excited about the proposition. “This is the greatest thing since sliced bread,” one young man told me. “This isn’t new; this is what we did in the ’20s and ’30s,” one of our older members pointed out. “This idea is great. We can more easily get together with church friends after class on Sunday nights,” one of our ladies said.

After our first year we asked for additional feedback. Over 60% of the congregation said if they could start from scratch, having ample facilities and the ability to have Bible School any time they wanted, they would choose to have it in the evening. The percentage of people returning on Sunday night went up significantly more than we had projected.

We are in our fourth year of this arrangement. We have recently completed additional educational facilities. We consistently run 70-80% of Sunday morning attendance in our Bible classes. Most of these classes are on Sunday night.

Some of our anticipated advantages for Sunday night classes were correct. Bible class teachers have more preparation when class is on Sunday evening. We have better youth participation in all grades, especially for our teens. Those with young children find church easier for their young children to handle. We have a much clearer focus on quality worship on Sunday morning.

But the biggest blessings were the serendipitous surprises God brought us in our change. These blessings involve real live people. I’ll use fictitious names for their stories, but the events and the people are real!

Janie started coming back to church because her daughter had a friend attending Westover. She came mostly on Sunday night because her daughter loved her Sunday School class and the V.I.P. program for our third, fourth and fifth graders. They soon began to come regularly on Sunday morning. Now Janie’s husband is regularly involved and Janie teaches one of our children’s classes.

As she became more involved, she invited her friend Betty to bring her children to VBS. Betty’s children had come to our Mother’s Day Out program and soon they started coming to Sunday

night Bible classes. After a special seminar for fathers, Betty's husband started attending regularly, too. She was baptized a few months later. They now regularly attend Sunday morning worship as well as Sunday night classes.

The key door of entry for both families into the life of our church was the Sunday night Bible class. Would they have come otherwise? Probably not. Our Bible school change opened the door for them to come into our church family.

They only started attending Sunday morning worship after they had made friends and felt more comfortable about coming to church on Sunday morning. We didn't know when we made a structural change it would open up new doors of opportunity for outreach, but it did!

Carie is an older woman who has been a faithful Christian all of her life. Driving at night is difficult for her since her cataract surgery. For several years, she has not gone to evening services. She has missed the fellowship of being with other Christians. When we started our Sunday evening classes, we had the oldest class meet at 5:00 p.m. Carie, and those with similar concerns, could get to classes and back home before dark. Getting to study the Bible with her friends on Sunday evening has been a real blessing for Carie.

Sally is a young woman from a difficult family situation. She is blessed with a beautiful voice. Because of the loving commitment of her mother and friends in the church, Sally has faithfully attended. By changing Bible classes to Sunday evening, we were able to go from two services to three services on Sunday morning. Our third service has more singing and contemporary music. We use a group to introduce new songs and share special songs related to our worship theme. Sally is a vital member of our singing group. Using her gift has been a wonderful blessing to her, but an even greater blessing to our worship!

Audrey is a widowed, newly-retired professional. She also is a true servant of God. She saw a need to involve younger widows and widowers, those who had unbelieving spouses, and those who were just not involved in a class. With our schedule, she was able to organize those people into a new class. They meet on Sunday morning for class (during our second service time) and Sunday night for ministry projects (during our class time). They are able to attend either our first or third service for worship. Moving our classes to Sunday evening opened up a whole new set of options for classes. Audrey's group is just one example of these new options.

Bert and Martha are the proud parents of two teenage children. One of them has just recently been baptized. They recently finished a class for new Christians. This class is held during one of our Sunday morning services. This enables them to worship together and share in this special class as a family on Sunday morning. Then they can go to their own Bible classes on Sunday evening.

Despite research, prayer, and brainstorming, we envisioned none of these blessings. We had simply made what we felt was an innovative solution to a nagging and frustrating problem. We didn't know what opportunities God had waiting for us until we started down a new path. Breaking the mold of traditional service times enabled us to not only do things differently, but

also more beneficially. These blessings are the result of the corridor principle (see note) and a faith that God can help us use nontraditional ways to overcome limitations.

Don't get me wrong. We have made some mistakes. Not everyone has been happy with our changes. We have had a few folks leave because they were upset over the change. A few others went to other congregations because of the convenience of their schedule. Not all of our visitors who are new to town are attracted to our schedule. Sunday night attendance on holiday weekends is low because our folks aren't back from trips and our visitors have already returned home. It hasn't been smooth sailing every step of the way. We have used up a large amount of people's tolerance for change. But if we were challenged to do it again, I believe we would.

We are not alone in our change. When we first investigated, we couldn't find anyone else who operated with this schedule. Since that time, there are a number of churches making similar changes. Some have gone back to the standard time format. Others believe this new format is the way to go. In addition to our type of schedule change, Sunday nights are changing across our brotherhood. In most cases the changes have meant increased attendance and new opportunities.

I'm excited to see us unwilling to settle for 50% or less attendance on Sunday evening. People are not satisfied with a "small version of the Sunday morning thing," as one of our members described it. To counter the "50% off" factor, some churches are going to praise services on Sunday evening. Other congregations are using care groups successfully. Other churches are going to small group Bible studies for their Sunday night focus. Still other congregations are using Sunday nights for a short devotional and then work on World Bible School correspondence courses together. I'm sure these are just a few of the ideas being tested. The exciting reality is we are beginning to free ourselves of traditional times if they do not work. We are targeting a specific purpose for each gathering. Rather than being frightened by these cosmetic schedule changes, let's make sure we're doing them to honor God, to bless his people, and to reach to the lost. If we come together for reasons other than these, maybe it's time to find a new corridor! I have increasing hope for us to use our limited time, our limited facilities, and limited money, and begin new traditions to meet current challenges.

Cramped facilities, growth opportunities, and little money can be frustrating. But don't despair. Limitations are really challenges asking us to be creative stewards of God's resources. They can free us to try new solutions to old problems. As we continue the journey, let's remember to thank God "even though it's small."

### **Special Note on the Corridor Principle**

The corridor principle says, "When you make a prayerful, well-researched change, you start down a corridor which will lead you to other doors of opportunity you cannot see until you start down that corridor. Some of these unforeseen opportunities will bless you far more than the original change. But if you never start down that first corridor, the other opportunities will never be found."

In other words, God has great things waiting for us if we will launch out in faith, trusting in his grace and power to take us where he wants us to go!

God has repeatedly used this principle with his people. Think about Abraham! Remember Joseph. Go back and review the history of the early church in the book of Acts. Trace the development of the Antioch church in Acts 8-15 and see how the first change, speaking the gospel to the Greeks, led to wholesale changes in the church, evangelism, and the world! Many times our limitations and dead ends are simply God's prodding us to try a different corridor.

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**Three Churches Which Have Sunday School at Night:**

Highland Church of Christ, Abilene, Texas – 915-673-5295

Westover Hills Church of Christ, Austin, Texas – 512-345-6386

Woodmont Hills Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee – 615-297-8551



## AfterGlow: Dual Citizenship

*by Phillip Morrison*  
*October, 1992*

“If you vote for him, you’ll just lose your vote!” I don’t remember who said it, or which candidate, or even which election was being discussed. I only remember that I was a young boy listening to the conversation of older men, and that it took me many years to realize what I had heard was wrong.

In our society, no vote conscientiously cast can be lost. The value of our voice in government is determined by participation, not by whether our candidate wins or loses.

The man who feared losing his vote was at least a participant. Many Christians did not vote in those days, perhaps convinced by the negative lectures and debates about Christian participation. Though there are still many Christians among the legions who do not vote, that is likely due to apathy or neglect rather than any conviction that voting is wrong.

Jesus’ teaching about rendering unto Caesar and serving two masters may emphasize the separation we should maintain between the sacred and the secular. But he also reminds us that we are citizens of both worlds, with responsibilities to each.

The apostle Paul placed all Christians squarely under the authority of civil government which, he declared, is ordained of God (Romans 13:1-7). Particular governments are not necessarily approved by God, though we should not think it strange when God seems to have special relationships to them. Throughout human history, God has used people and governments – including evil ones – to accomplish his will.

Christians have every right – especially in a democracy – to participate in the selection of leaders and the determination of policies. But we have the greater responsibility to be Christians under whatever kind of government we happen to live. Civil disobedience is a God-honored exception to obeying law (Acts 4:19), but it is to be applied with care only when God’s law and man’s are clearly in conflict.

Government is the oldest unit of society with the exception of the family. Individuals may exist apart from either, but pure individualism can produce neither family nor society. If we are to live together, we must agree to accept the laws which govern our living together. We may all be nice people, but when we arrive at the four-way stop simultaneously, we need some kind of governance to unsnarl the traffic jam.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were the traditionalists who hated Roman rule, while the Herodians were loyal to Rome and its authority. During the last week of Jesus’ life, on his last visit to the temple, just three days before his crucifixion, these opposing forces joined to challenge Jesus. They would not support a common cause, but they would unite against a common foe.

Unfazed by the dilemma they posed, Jesus articulated the dual responsibilities his followers would always have: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Mark 12:17).

The coin Jesus used for his object lesson had Caesar’s image stamped on it, and it belonged to Caesar. God’s image was stamped on us at creation (Genesis 1:26, 27). We have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). Therefore we belong to God, and we must present ourselves as living sacrifices unto him (Romans 12:1, 2).

Whether our favorite candidate wins or loses, we live under God-ordained laws which are more important than the will of any individual. And we live under the rule of God, who is Lord of all.