

Wineskins Magazine

An Alternative Culture

Volume 4, Number 3 May-June 1998

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Ethics: The Church vs The Larger Culture

by Rubel Shelly

May – June, 1998

The church does not define the values of our culture. We are called of God to be an *alternative culture* to the mainstream – whether first century or twentieth, China or United States. We live under political systems and within economic systems we did not create. We obey laws and pay taxes. We respect the authority of policeman and judge, governor and president. Our ultimate goal is not social change or political impact but spiritual integrity within a community of faith.

Then why worry about the latest mess in Washington or pornography on the Internet or the lingering problem of racism? Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has used the phrase “defining deviancy down” to articulate his fear that contemporary culture is being influenced to accept as part of life things we should find repugnant.

Before Senator Moynihan called it “defining deviancy down,” this was Paul’s warning to believers: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2a). Or, as Eugene Peterson translates the same verse: “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking” (The Message). Paul knew the power of a dominant culture to impinge upon the church and to squeeze Christians into its mold.

Across the centuries and in all cultures, there are certain core values and rules of conduct that have been universally praised. Every culture known to us, for example, has rules against murder and stealing and praises promise-keeping and loyalty. Whether religious or nonreligious, Eastern or Western, what I have elsewhere written and spoken about as an “ethic of minimal civility” is discernible. The Code of Hammurabi, the Ten Commandments, the moral teachings of Aristotle, Karl Marx’s writings on ethics, John Rawls’ theory of justice – these diverse and sometimes irreconcilable systems of thought are more notable for their similarities than differences on what should be regarded as fundamentally appropriate human behavior in society.

All these systems affirm autonomy and truthfulness, justice and protection of the innocent. All of them forbid murder and lying, stealing and breaking promises. In American culture, these principles have been most widely taught and praised through such means as the Ten Commandments or Jesus’ Golden Rule. The last half century however, has witnessed a Nietzschean “transvaluation of values” (i.e., standing traditional virtues on their head). It has been fashionable to celebrate everything we once despised (e.g., violence, infidelity, drugs) and to denigrate everything we once cherished (e.g., marriage, religion, respect for authority).

Right and wrong still exist. But the notion of objective ethical norms is not popular in our culture. Instead we are all told to find our own way, create our own truth, discover our own values. And the most articulate persons pointing to this travesty against decency have not been those you might have expected. Because the church has been trivialized and discredited by its moral failures of racism, sexism, and greed, it has no credibility. Because its clergy has been

trained at the feet of modernist and post-modernist professors, it has no biblical voice of an authoritative word from God.

Thank God, however, that someone occasionally speaks directly to what is happening in our larger culture. Ted Koppel delivered a commencement address at Stanford University on June 14, 1998, in which he told his audience:

We are at least teetering on the brink of tolerating the unacceptable and focusing the full force of our moral outrage on the trivial. We live in a society that not only tolerates but rewards Jerry Springer and Larry Flynt, while simultaneously removing Huckleberry Finn and Shakespeare from the curricula of some of our schools and universities, lest they offend. We permit the archdeacons of political correctness to twist our language and behavior into parodies of sensitivity, while simultaneously, the language at large, our entertainment and our general behavior have become cruder, coarser and less sensitive than at any time in my memory.

I believe that, ultimately, questions of what is right and wrong require the individual to measure himself against absolute standards of ethics and responsibility. Not that any one of us ever completely measures up to those standards; but you can't set your compass, moral or otherwise, by a shifting North Star. Our generation has become so comfortable watching itself being defined according to polls and ratings and surveys, in the Dow or on the NASDAQ, in the outcome of elections or in public propositions or referenda, that we have sunk into a sort of general relativism, in which all issues are determined by majority vote or a public display of the lowest common denominator. We learn, according to the syndicated lesson taught by Jerry Springer, that while all of us are flawed, we who are watching are not nearly as flawed as the poor souls he parades in front of us. Which may, if the lesson is repeated often enough, teach us that, rather than struggling toward an ideal of perfect behavior, we can always console ourselves with the examples of those even weaker than we are.

“But isn't it *wrong* to judge other people?” someone asks. “Hasn't that been the great sin of Christians across time – that we have been so judgmental and narrow-minded?”

The answer to the question “May a Christian ever judge another person?” is the somewhat exasperating answer “It depends.” If following Christ means passing no moral or spiritual judgments, we could never judge racism or child molestation evil and do things to oppose and correct them. If following Christ means passing no moral or spiritual judgments, we must condemn our Lord for the judgments he passed against religious hypocrites (Matthew 23:1ff) or for telling some people they were liars (John 8:55).

As a matter of fact, Jesus' fuller statement about judgment is this: “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment” (John 7:24). Yes, he prohibits judging people by their skin color, nationality, or church membership. But he most certainly does not forbid judgments about fundamental matters of truth and error, right and wrong, praiseworthy behavior and blameworthy actions.

This clarification of the matter of Christian “judgments” is not intended to be a defense of self-righteousness or strident shouting into a television camera or unbeliever's face. It is meant

instead to be a call to character based on commitment to Christian truth and discipleship. It is meant as a challenge for people who wear the name of Jesus Christ as our Savior to embrace him as the authentic Lord of our lives.

The conclusion of Ted Koppel's speech at Stanford was designed to call graduating seniors to pursue the high road for their lives. It might also be heard as a challenge to the church in a time of widespread moral bankruptcy:

We will not change what's wrong with our culture through legislation, or by choosing up sides on the basis of personal popularity or party affiliation. We will change it by small acts of courage and kindness; by recognizing, each of us, his or her own obligation to set a proper example. Aspire to decency. Practice civility toward one another. Admire and emulate ethical behavior wherever you find it. Apply a rigid standard of morality to your lives; and if, periodically, you fail – as you surely will – adjust your lives, not the standards. There's no mystery here. You know what to do. Now go out and do it!

The white church in America had the Word of God in the 1960s and thus could have known the right thing to do about racism. But we chose to live the institutionalized racism of segregated schools, segregated residential areas, segregated churches – until federal law made us change.

Today no one can say he or she doesn't know the right thing to do about racism. But many are still not doing the right thing. The excuses are gone, and it is time to go out and do what will honor the Lord.

Movie Review: The Prince of Egypt

by Mike Cope

May – June, 1998

I would love to have been a fly on the wall in that room. Three titans of the entertainment world, Steven Spielberg (film), Jeffrey Katzenberg (animation), and David Geffen (music), were in the process of forming DreamWorks, the first new major motion picture studio in Hollywood in over half a century.

Spielberg leaned forward in his chair and asked Katzenberg, who was leaving his position as president of Disney, what makes a great story. After Katzenberg told him what “Walt” (yes, THE Walt) used to say, he eased back and replied, “You mean like the story of Moses and the Ten Commandments?”

“Let’s make that our first movie,” Geffen said.

Since that conversation, 200 of the world’s top animators have spent four years preparing for the December release of *The Prince of Egypt*. The 88-minute animated special consists of about one million individual drawings which together powerfully tell the story of Moses.

DreamWorks broke new ground in the conflict between leaders of Hollywood and leaders of religious groups as the film was being prepared. They brought in scores of religious leaders over the past two years, showing the work in progress and asking for feedback.

The group I was in was made up of about twenty leaders of Evangelical churches and parachurch organizations. At our first meeting in March, 1997, we were given a tour of the crowded DreamWorks studio. Then, after viewing as much of the movie as was ready, we met for over an hour with Katzenberg. When this group returned early in 1998, we saw a much more advanced version of the film.

Why would the execs at DreamWorks go to this trouble? One reason is that they wanted to get the story right. They’re not dealing in fiction here. And they’re not just adding embellishment to some character of history. They are telling the story of Moses and the Exodus – a critical story to Christians, Jews, and Moslems. People tend to fight wars over the mistelling of stories like that!

In both our meetings, Katzenberg showed a keen interest in getting the story right. Issues of biblical accuracy and ethnic sensitivity were paramount.

He also discussed the dicey matter of marketing. The studios make tons of money off of merchandising tie-ins. But the DreamWorks people don’t want to belittle the sacred text by selling “Burning Bush Night Lights” or by having people pull up to a drive-through at McDonald’s and order a “Moses Burger in a Basket.” (They have decided to allow stores to sell dolls that look like the animated characters.)

But let's be honest, though: there's another reason they wanted so many religious leaders to view the film. They undoubtedly wanted to cut back on the whiplash that might occur if the expensive movie was met by resounding condemnation. Call it detente – an effort to downscale the culture wars between Hollywood and religion. Or call it savvy – getting the most powerful potential critics inside the animated tent.

But however one views DreamWorks' move, it was refreshing to experience the open dialogue between Katzenberg and Evangelical leaders. The impression that he was serious about the value of the meeting was confirmed during our second visit. Then we learned of changes that had been made in the film as a result of suggestions from the first gathering.

Though missing some of the zing of songs that kids love to sing again and again from other animated films like *The Lion King*... (Remember "Hakuna Matata?") and *The Little Mermaid* ("Under the Sea") and some of the zip of humor as in *Mulan* or *Aladdin*, this is nevertheless a compelling film that children and adults should see and will ENJOY seeing.

I emphasize ENJOY because the executives at DreamWorks learned from the relatively poor public response to *Amistad* that when people hear that they should see a film rather than that they would enjoy seeing a film, most won't go. (What does that say about us?)

The biblical story of deliverance is developed by focusing on the relationship between Moses and Rameses. Though Scripture doesn't illuminate us about any such relationship, these two surely must have known each other before Moses came marching back in from the desert. Moses was brought into Pharaoh's palace (almost certainly Pharaoh Seti) by his daughter. There he would have known Seti's son, Rameses II, who was (in all likelihood) the pharaoh of the exodus.

The epic drama has wonderful vocal talent – important to any animation – with Val Kilmer (Moses; couldn't they get Charlton Heston?), Ralph Fiennes (Rameses), Patrick Stewart (Seti), Jeff Goldblum (Aaron), Sandra Bullock (Miriam), Michelle Pfeiffer (Tzipporah), Steve Martin (Hotep), and Martin Short (Huy). In addition, many of the top artists from country, pop, R & B, and gospel music participated in the music for *The Prince of Egypt* and for two "inspired by" albums that have been released.

Viewers who know the Exodus text well will recognize a couple minor departures in the film – liberties the producers took to help develop their story line. But rather than get torqued by these minor items (Think about the "liberties" preachers and teachers routinely take in developing a biblical story!), Christian viewers should marvel that out of Hollywood in the 1990s comes a major animated film that tells part of their story.

Len Sweet, one of the Evangelical leaders in our group, got it right:

The old stories are still the best. They continue to engage and enthrall us because they embody truths about life that remain constant throughout the ages. "Storytellers" – whether they are Walt Disney, Steven Spielberg, Tom Clancy, Toni Morrison or John Lennon – provide us with tale-hooks upon which to hang up our own life experiences. We identify their stories – filmed, written or sung – with our own lives.

Our prayer should be that somehow God will use the talent and money of some of Hollywood's heaviest hitters to draw people to Moses, the prince who led his people away from an angry king in Egypt and ultimately to Jesus, the Prince of Princes, who had to be taken to Egypt to escape an angry king.

I Have a Dream

*by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
May – June, 1998*

Delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C. August 28, 1963 at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Transcribed from audio recording at Martin Luther King, Jr., Library and Archive, Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc., Atlanta, Georgia. Used by permission.

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves, who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacle of segregation and the chains of discrimination.

One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the

time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual.

There will be neither rest nor tranquillity in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds.

Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must ever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. They have come to realize that their freedom is extricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.

We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

No, no, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecutions and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair. I say to you today, my friends, that even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain and the crooked places will be made straight and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I will go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this

faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. This will be the day, this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring!" And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that.

Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi, from every mountainside, let freedom ring! And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every tenement and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

The Civil Rights Movement Begins

by Fred D. Gray
May – June, 1998

Excerpted from *Bus Ride to Justice*, pages 36-73, by Fred D. Gray, lawyer for Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, and many other Civil Rights causes. Published by The Black Belt Press, Montgomery, AL. Copyright 1995 by Fred D. Gray.

During the early months of my law practice, I had few clients and little to do Since I was interested in civil rights and politics, I started attending the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) meetings. Rosa Parks was the secretary to the Montgomery Branch of the NAACP and also served as youth director Mrs. Parks was very kind, quiet, gentle, loving and would never hurt anyone. She was and is one of the kindest and loveliest persons that one would want to meet. She still maintains these qualities almost forty years later

December 1, 1955, was a typical day in Montgomery. It was late fall, but it had not begun to get cold. [Mrs. Parks and I] had lunch together that day, just as we had done many times before Mrs. Parks went back to her work as a seamstress. I continued my work and left the office in the early afternoon for an out-of-town engagement.

Upon my return to the city later that evening, I was shocked to learn that Mrs. Parks had been arrested in an incident involving the buses

That day was, for me, the beginning point of all the monumental events that soon began to unfold. My immediate little world began to change. And so did the larger world. I had pledged to myself that I would wage war on segregation. The opening shot had now been fired. With Mrs. Parks's arrest came the beginning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. It changed the history of civil rights in Alabama, in the nation, and in the world. And it launched my legal career

Mrs. Rosa Parks was arrested for disorderly conduct – not for violating the segregation laws. This was the first of several crucial mistakes made by the white authorities. Anyone who knew Mrs. Parks knew that she would never do anything disorderly. She was soft-spoken, trustworthy, and very reliable. Disorderly conduct was altogether inconsistent with her reputation and character. Rosa Parks had the right temperament to test the segregation laws

The trial of Mrs. Rosa Parks took all of thirty minutes. The drama leading up to the trial itself was a lifetime in the making I met with Mrs. Parks, Mr. Nixon, Rev. Abernathy, Dr. King and other leaders at my office, which was a block and half away from the court

I knew that this was not the forum to challenge the segregation ordinances. The only victory that we could hope for with this case was to get Mrs. Parks exonerated because she was charged with disorderly conduct and not with violating the City's segregation laws. We vigorously defended Mrs. Parks; however, Judge John B. Scott found her guilty and fined her ten dollars and costs

Most scholars believe that this case ignited the civil rights movement of the fifties and sixties. This case and the Montgomery Bus Boycott also gave an opportunity for Dr. King to exhibit his leadership; this, it paved the way for the development of one of the greatest leaders in modern history

Check Your Church's Pulse: 8 Principles

by Lynn Anderson
May – June, 1998

When it comes to studying church growth and health, two mistakes are commonly repeated. First, we tend to examine the booming mega-churches, primarily those in America. Second, we tend to mimic specific local programs or methods which these mega-churches claim as keys to their success, rather than looking for universal and transferable principles.

While we thank God for giant churches, they are scarcely universally replicable models. Mega-churches tend to be phenomena peculiar to their own place and time, often led by an unusually gifted charismatic leader. The formula of their success may become a recipe for failure if copied in another community and another mix of leadership skills.

Even if the context and leadership mix of that church we admire is identical to our situation, copying is still dangerous as may be copying the wrong things. Sometimes leaders of large healthy churches mistakenly identify some of their favorite bells and whistles for the source of their success, while some matrix of less visible factors may actually be the key to their growth. So we may wind up merely mimicking some of their external programmatic “bells and whistles” and miss the less obvious but universally transferable principles of church health and growth. A locally effective method is one thing. A universally transferable principle is quite another.

Conclusion: attempting to transfer features from one church to another may prove ineffective at best, and disastrous at the worst. Besides, not all large or rapidly growing churches are healthy.

Of course, this does not mean churches cannot learn things from one another. Nor does it mean there are no universally identifiable ingredients contributing to church growth and health. In fact a research team out of Germany has demonstrated a way to surface some of these universal and transferable principles. In a few moments, we will describe what this team did and outline their discoveries. But, first, note some bedrock assumptions under-girding their research.

Churches are bodies, not mechanisms. Human beings can create dolls. But dolls cannot create dolls. We can co-operate with God and create babies. Babies can then grow to produce more babies in cooperation with God. Only God can grow churches.

Churches are organisms, not organizations. For plants to flourish, we must co-operate with God who grows the plants, but we cannot grow plants. Just so, God grows churches. We do not. As the apostle Paul put it, “I planted. Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” The best we can do is cooperate with God by removing limiting human hindrances to growth and supplying conditions friendly to growth.

And we cannot create seeds, but we can plant and water seeds, and God makes them grow. So it is with churches. God is sovereign. Sometimes, even when we set up the best conditions, a church may not grow. Apparently God makes sovereign choices. God causes some churches to

flourish despite poor conditions. Generally, however, church health and growth result from cooperating with God.

In addition, no single factor produces church growth and health. As in all bodies, health and growth in churches results from a symbiotic balance of a number of factors or principles. We cannot grow churches mechanistically simply by mixing up the right formula or assembling all the pieces and pushing the right buttons. Church growth and health is of God. And “unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” for, as Jesus said, “apart from me you can do nothing.”

Note also that church health and numerical growth are not necessarily the same thing. Obviously, there is usually some strong correlation between numerical growth and health. But a few very healthy churches are not growing numerically because of some unusually contextual circumstance(s). And no doubt many churches, which are growing numerically, are not healthy. Some are merely large crowds gathering for the emotional “loaves and fishes.”

With the foregoing assumptions under their belts, two German believers, Christopher Schwarz, a Lutheran minister, evangelism enthusiast and Ph.D. from St. Andrews, Scotland, and Chris Schock, Ph.D. from a German University in Organizational Psychology and statistical analysis, launched their massive research into church health and growth. Rather than examining only American mega churches, they have studied more than a thousand churches, rural and urban, small and large, right and left, state and free – across ten years, thirty-two countries and five continents. And rather than looking for methods to transfer from church A to church B, they looked for universal principles. They define principles as ingredients which are: (a) found universally among flourishing churches around the globe, and (b) which are also compatible with scripture. Fully aware that numerical growth and health are not the same thing, Schwarz and Shock evaluated churches with interest in both features: health and numerical growth.

While their research will be ongoing, after ten years they surfaced eight key ingredients or principles they found in healthy and growing churches. These are not methods, nor are they programs. They are universal. (On Schwarz and Schock’s testing instrument, churches that are unhealthy and declining scored below 50. But if a church scores above 65 there is a 99.4% likelihood it is a healthy and growing church.) And these ingredients are all grounded in scripture. As you look at the list, place your emphasis on the adjective. Here they are:

Empowering leadership: Not merely stable or visionary leadership, but leadership that gives permission and supplies skills.

Gift-based ministry: Where people get skilled to serve in areas of their giftedness, not merely where square pegs get shoved into round holes.

Functional structures: Not merely stable structures. But structures that get the church where it is trying to go.

Passionate spirituality: Where people are openly excited and verbal about their faith and their church, and where they serve, pray, fellowship and read scripture as a life-style.

Inspiring worship: Not necessarily contemporary or traditional but inspiring in ways appropriate to the worshipers.

Holistic small groups: Groups that are many-functioned microcosms of full spiritual care and development.

Need-oriented evangelism: Rather than program-oriented evangelism. Where people build authentic relationships, serve others and thus build bridges for Christ to walk over.

Loving relationships: Not merely common corporate membership and church attendance.

Schock and Schwarz have now made available testing instruments (questionnaires) that can be used to evaluate your church in each of these eight areas, scoring them against the global mean. You can clearly determine how well you are doing in each of these extremely crucial areas, compared to growing and declining churches worldwide.

In addition, Schwarz and Schock have developed a manual of exercises and focus group processes addressing each of these eight areas. These exercises and focus group processes give you a “track to run on” as you mobilize and empower your church to employ its strengths to upgrade itself in its weakest areas.

Several months ago some generous brothers made it possible for me to attend training to apply the testing instrument and access the computer software that does the statistical printout. At Hope Network Ministries we are available on a limited basis to help churches walk through this process. However, since this kind of testing is most helpful when done annually, across several years, to monitor progress, we recommend that someone in your church be sent to the training institute. That way you can administer the process for yourselves, to great benefit.

To get first-hand information, call an organization called ChurchSmart at 1-800-253-4276 and ask for information on training in Natural Church Development.

Among the congregations we have assisted with the test, a number see clearly their weaknesses, and understand what needs to happen to address those weaknesses. But they feel that they lack the skills needed to pull that off. We at Hope Network are keenly interested in helping congregations upgrade the skills they need to take them where they believe they need to go. We can be reached on the web at www.hopenetworkministries.com. Or e-mail hopenet@dhc.net or phone 214-874-0857.

Note: contact information may be out of date

A Visit to the Lorraine

by Gary Selby
May – June, 1998

“God does not show favoritism” (Acts 10:34).

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Roman 15:7).

I was nine years old when Martin Luther King, Jr., was killed. For some reason, I remember the moment clearly. I was watching television in the family room of our house when the words “SPECIAL REPORT” flashed on the TV screen in bright red letters and a voice announced that Dr. King had been shot. I vaguely remember the talk of “those awful riots,” as the adults around me called them, which immediately erupted in Washington, D.C. I remember that a friend of my family, a white policeman, was shot and wounded in the riots. I remember a few years later the tensions in our predominately white schools over the issue of busing. But mostly, I was insulated from the struggles of Black Americans for civil rights. I grew up in a comfortable house in the all-white suburbs of Washington. What I did hear of the Civil Rights Movement was filtered through the perspective of white middle-class America, fearfully guarding its position of economic and social privilege.

As a student and a young adult, I listened to the stories of close friends who were black. I watched with rapt attention as documentaries like “Eyes on the Prize” chronicled the struggle. I studied Martin Luther King’s speeches in an academic setting. But I had no real sense of what black Americans faced in their quest for civil rights. Indeed, nothing prepared me for what I would find when I visited the Lorraine Motel.

My family and I were in Memphis for other reasons, and we found ourselves with an extra day on our hands. As we thought about the sightseeing possibilities, I remembered that a friend had mentioned seeing the National Civil Rights Museum, located in the renovated Lorraine Motel where Dr. King was assassinated. I thought it might be an interesting thing to do. I am ashamed to say that I questioned my choice when we drove through the city and realized what part of town the museum was in. All the more reason to go, I now realize.

From the moment I left my car and entered the courtyard, just below the famous balcony where Dr. King was shot, I found myself in the grip of this powerful place. The National Civil Rights Museum chronicles history, of course—events, names, places, dates. But much more, it creates experience and evokes emotion more powerfully than any monument or museum I have ever seen. It invites those who, like me, were insulated from the Civil Rights Movement, to put ourselves—if even for a moment—in the place of those for whom the struggle was a matter of life and death.

At points in my tour, I felt strangely out of place – as if I had stumbled in on the funeral of someone I didn’t know. I remember squeezing in to see the museum’s climactic exhibit amid a

throng of black visitors, in town for a religious convention. As we gazed on the rooms where Dr. King and his friends stayed and on the balcony where he was standing when those shots rang out, we heard someone say, "Right there's where he was standing." A hush fell over the crowded room. I felt like an intruder, like I had no right to be there. It was a holy place, sacred to the memory of pain and struggle. But for someone who grew up in comfortable, white, middle-class America, the pain and struggle had not been mine.

Those feelings, however, were more often overpowered by a sense of outrage as exhibit after exhibit carried me back to those events. The faces of protesters, some angry and defiant, many sad or afraid. Photographs of lynch-mob victims. Movie footage of angry whites shouting, "Niggers go home," of fire hoses and attack dogs. A recreation of Rosa Parks' famous bus. I sat there on that bus and listened as the mannequin driver stared my way and barked out his order, "Get up!" The lunch counter scene, powerfully recreated, with movie footage in the background showing the abuse and humiliation heaped upon those four young men and women just because they were black. And maybe for the first time in my life, I glimpsed the horror of racism. The very idea that these Americans should have had to struggle for what was rightfully theirs. That anyone should ever treat another person this way, because of the color of his skin or for any other reason.

But mostly, I felt deep shame. Shame for what these people felt. Shame for the humiliation and abuse they endured. Shame at being a member of a system – no, a beneficiary of a system – which brought such misery upon so many people. I thought about the ways that I have participated, knowingly and unknowingly, in this oppression. I thought of pronouncements I have made about matters which I didn't really understand. Jokes I have told or laughed at. Conclusions I have reached about others because of their appearance. Being there forced me to admit how quickly I still judge a man "by the color of his skin rather than the character of his heart." I remembered my own reluctance to get out of the car when I realized what section of town the Lorraine was in a section mostly poor and black. I who have so wanted to be seen as somehow above all of that. The museum forced me to see that the issue for me-maybe for all or us-is not, "Am I prejudiced?" The question is simply, "In what ways?"

But as I left the Lorraine, I also felt strangely hopeful. After all, by whatever quirk or coincidence or moving of the Holy Spirit, I was there. I had seen this place, felt these emotions, shared in some small way in the pain of these, my fellow human beings. And I knew that what I had experienced at the Lorraine Motel was now a part of me, and that I would never be able to look at another person-especially a person different from me-in quite the same way. I would never be able to write off another person quite as easily as before. I was hopeful because my young sons also saw the Lorraine-my oldest just a year from the age I was when the news of Dr. King's death interrupted rev tele\iSion show. As we were leavrig I asked him what he thought. He looked at me with sadness, almost unable to believe wiia he had seen. "Why did they do that, Dad? Just because their skiii was different?"

The tensions and harriers that divide us from one a v)tlrer are formidable. The problems of crime, economic injustice, health care, and poverty that plague our nation seem overwhelming. Our efforts to stem the tide, even on a small scale, can seem fruitlessmuch less our aspirations of

turning around an entire nation. Indeed, I wonder if I will ever be free of the prejudice that lives in my own heart.

And yet, I found what was, for me at least, a place to start that afternoon in Memphis. I was forced to put myself in the place of those toward whom I had been conditioned to react with hostility and suspicion. For once, I glimpsed what it meant to listen to another person's story without defending myself. And I wondered, what would happen if we could do that in our churches? If I could say to those who are different from me, "Please, tell me your story. What has it been like for you?" If I could say to my brothers and sisters who are black, "What is it like for you to be a part of this church?" And then to listen. Really listen.

That day in Memphis, I was forced to ask myself, "What would it have been like if I had been there?" And I will never be the same.

Remembering Ada Jean

by R. Scott Brunner
May – June, 1998

I loved Ada Jean.

I loved her from the first time I saw her dip snuff, when I was five years old.

She would stand at the ironing board, taking a rest from the work shirts of my father's she was pressing. Beads of sweat would glisten on her forehead and upper lip as her big, fleshy fingers would twist the top of a small tin container that held the dark, strange-smelling powder. She'd pull open her bottom lip with her thumb and forefinger, lift the tin to the dark cavity of her mouth, and pour a modicum of the stuff into the waiting receptacle she'd created between her yellowed bottom teeth and lower lip. Then she'd return the top to the tin.

I was fascinated. No one else I knew dipped snuff.

Deposited in Ada Jean's lip, saliva oozed into the snuff, making a brown goo from which with a deadly aim she discharged excess liquid into an old cup. In her mouth, the dip made a lump in her lower lip, making her chin seem larger than it was. Her tongue wagged out over her bottom teeth and tucked down between teeth and lip, to hold the deposit in place.

It distorted her speech. S sounds became F's, and R's became practically impossible, so that when she said "Listen here," it sounded more like "Liffen heeyuh." It often was difficult for me to understand her when she spoke.

Ada Jean spoke quite a bit, but mostly to herself as she watched her stories on the TV. "Stories" that's what she called the soap operas, and she was especially fond of *As the World Turns*. In the late 1960s, if it was noontime in Bessemer, Alabama, you could always bet that the television in our house would be tuned to WBMG Channel 42, where Ada Jean was transfixed by the lives of characters so different from herself, or me, or anyone else either of us knew.

"That Mif Lifa, she sho' do keep huhseff in twubble," Ada Jean would say as the closing credits rolled, referring to the perils of her particular *As the World Turns* favorite, a character named Lisa – "Miss Lisa" to Ada Jean. Miss Lisa was rather irresponsible, it seemed to me, but then, I was only five years old. What did I know?

In retrospect, I'm surprised at how little I knew – or know now – about Ada Jean. She came to work for us shortly after my younger sister was born and my mother went back to her school teaching job. The turnip greens she cooked were to die for. She stayed with us for about five years.

Ada Jean was of inestimable age, the mother of two high school-age girls, and she lived in what my father called – without malice as far as I knew – "the colored section" over in Raimund

Heights. She was a church-going woman. And she worked hard, sometimes too hard, as in the time my father had to ask her to stop starching and ironing his boxer shorts because the starch chafed.

I remember the first time I saw her. She stepped meekly into our kitchen, a black patent leather purse on her arm, knee-high hose rolled down around her ankles, her feet bulging in sensible shoes. She wore cotton blouses and simple skirts, mostly-plain, slightly faded and worn.

She smelled faintly of snuff and hair oil and perspiration. It was an exotic, lusty aroma to a child more accustomed to the light, airy scent of White Shoulders and hairspray that trailed after my mother. Ada Jean's was something darker, more exotic, unfamiliar to me, yet not at all unpleasant.

Ada Jean neither looked nor acted like anyone else in my little world. For one thing, she was colored. That's what she called herself – a colored woman – even as her daughters were urging her to say she was black, and to stop using what they viewed as another repressive, pejorative expression of a passing era.

I didn't think she was black at all. Her skin was the color of cinnamon, of rich, swirling sorghum, of fresh pecans, of warm Alabama topsoil. I was drawn to the deep, electric warmth of it, and I wished I was colored, too. Any old body could be white.

What's more, Ada Jean couldn't drive, or didn't. She certainly didn't own a car, and I've always assumed she'd never been taught to drive. So early on weekday mornings, my father would leave home, retrieve Ada Jean from her tiny, ramshackle, clapboard house on Bullard Street and deposit her at our door before heading for work himself. It was a funny sight to see the two of them speeding down our street wedged inside Dad's little sardine-tin of a Volkswagen Beetle.

To this day, I don't know how my parents afforded a maid. Although I wouldn't realize it until years later, we certainly weren't well-off. When my father's commissions from the insurance policies he sold were combined with my mother's salary, there couldn't have been much left in the till at the end of the month. But there was enough for Ada Jean – not just her wages and withholding taxes, which my mother dutifully paid, but also vegetables from the garden and day-lily bulbs and hand-me-downs and all the other things that friends and neighbors give and take. Ada Jean was family.

I remember her laughing. Often. Heartily.

One afternoon, when my mother had made an appointment for my two-year-old sister and me to have our portrait made at Olan Mills, Ada Jean was charged with getting us dressed for the occasion. Mother hurried home after school, loaded us in the car and off we went to the studio, Ada Jean riding in the back seat to watch after my sister and me.

When we reached Olan Mills, Mother eased the car into a parking space and was opening her car door when suddenly Ada Jean let fly a whoop from the back seat.

“What, Ada Jean? What is it?” my mother asked, a look of shocked concern on her face.

“Lawd have mercy, Miz Brunner, dis baby don’t have on no unduh-drawers!” Ada Jean shrieked, then convulsed into deep belly laughs that left her gasping for air. Not even my mother could keep a straight face in light of Ada Jean’s apparent oversight. In my recollection, it’s the only time a member of ourfamily has ever had her portrait made without her underpants.

It wasn’t long after that that Ada Jean left us. I was never sure why. Something about her daughters wanting her to do better for herself.

Awhile back I saw Ada Jean again for the first time in more than 20 years. She came to my sister’s wedding. Older, of course, a bit stooped, not quite as plump as she once was – she seemed careworn, but grinned broadly when she recognized me.

“It’s so good to see my baby,” she whispered. “It’s so good to see my baby.”

We embraced, and I was struck by how small she seemed, by how much had changed since those days when, as a small boy, I’d admired her snuff-dipping technique, and I was reminded of a line from a Langston Hughes poem I’d read in college: “Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.”

As she released me, a tear rolled down her cheek.

Mine, too.

This essay was broadcast nationally on NPR’s All Things Considered, June 9, 1998.

A Church that Makes a Difference

by Tim Woodroof
May – June, 1998

This article is the third installment. All three articles will soon be available in book form from Look Press, 800/863-5665

“Effective churches have a sense of purpose. They know why they exist” -Lef Anderson, Dying for Change

Oliver Sachs, in the title piece from his wonderful book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, tells of one of his neurological patients (Dr. P.) who could dress himself, eat and carry on a conversation – until interrupted or distracted. Once the flow of his activity was broken, however, Dr. P. would freeze, motionless, staring unblinking into space. Having lost the thread of what he was about, Dr. P. came to a complete stop, forgetting himself and his surroundings. Only through gentle reminders of what he was doing and why could Dr. P. be persuaded to resume his activity.

Movements, like people, can forget themselves. Interrupted or distracted, they can lose the thread which holds their activities together and gives them coherence. One moment you are marching along with a sense of purpose and identity. The next you are sitting paralyzed on the ground, wondering how you got here and where you were going. Something breaks into the flow of our activity and, with surprise, we find that we can no longer recall what it was we were attempting to do.

A movement grows becalmed when it forgets where it is supposed to be going, when its sense of purpose is dulled, when not only the means of getting there but the destination itself is shrouded in confusion. A movement which mislays its mission should expect to encounter times when paralysis creeps over its members and they stand frozen because they are no longer sure what the point is.

The churches of Christ are in such a period today. Somewhere along the way, we have forgotten what we were doing and why. We find ourselves confused over the most basic questions: Who are we? and What have we been called to do? We’ve lost the thread that gives meaning to our activities, and, having done so, we have lost the motivation to continue doing what we no longer understand. We find ourselves paralyzed, not because we are too tired to go on but because we despair of our activity resulting in something that God values.

The purposes we can articulate for the church – borrowed as they are from a prior generation and a radically different world – seem narrow and rote. In quiet and reflective moments, we question whether those goals are worthy of the sacrifices required. Many of us are no longer willing to pour the best of ourselves into the preservation of 19th century modes of worship or doctrinal positions which – in our hearts – we no longer accept or believe to be central. Jesus did not die, nor do we want to live, to ensure that buildings not have kitchens or that music remain congregational and *a capella* or that a woman never make announcements in church.

The debate over such matters is exhausting precisely because it seems so irrelevant. The world around us is sick and demented. Daily, we watch people being butchered and starved and exploited. Children are growing up fatherless. The greed of nations is devouring entire populations in mindless wars. “Sexual ethics” is oxymoronic and increasingly anachronistic. Politicians are corrupt; priests are perverse; and “there is violence in the land.” It will take something more potent than an answer to the marriage and divorce question to make a dint in this present darkness.

And we know it.

Yet, from some memory older than the restoration plea or even than Christianity itself, comes the notion that the people of God should make a difference, a difference felt at the foundations of our culture. Whatever our purpose and mission, we know that it should be no little thing concerned with the fringes of life. If something is to break into our paralysis and startle us once more into activity, we must find a mission that is worthy of renewed efforts.

On a Mission from God

We can laugh at Dan Ackroyd deadpanning the line in *The Blues Brothers*, “Ma’am, we’re on a mission from God.” But his satirical seriousness as he utters those words, the implied ridicule of people who actually believe such things, convicts our movement at the very point where we are most sensitive. Do we have such a mission? Is there yet a sense among us that God has called us to be something, to do something, that is unique and world-changing? Can we claim to be on a mission from God and keep a straight face while doing so?

As we ask that question, we are necessarily defining who we are, and what our priorities should be, and what purposes should govern our behaviors. We are deciding where our time, energies and resources should be invested. We are determining the traits which should characterize us and the passions which must consume us. We are not formulating a slogan to put on our letterhead, but a guiding sense of purpose that expresses what we believe to be important to God and definitional for us.

For decades, the notion that we are a “restoration people,” called to “do Bible things in Bible ways,” provided that sense of mission. We prided ourselves on being a movement bent on replicating in modern times the ancient and primitive rites of first century faith and practice. We were consumed with the identification and cataloguing of the early churches’ modes of worship, examples of outreach and cooperation, their structures for leadership, the names by which they called themselves, the ethical standards by which they lived, and the means by which they expressed and maintained community. We believed that by becoming students of the early church and by adopting those ancient patterns of life for ourselves, we could restore the ancient church in modern times.

The duplication of the manner in which the earliest Christians “did church” became for many of us the central tenet of restoration efforts. The result of all those years of study and discussion was a real, if informal, consensus about how the first century church acted and how, therefore, we ought to act. Did they take the Supper every first day of the week? That pattern was seen as

binding on any church that would be faithful today. Did they have five acts of worship? So must we, and neither less nor more. Did they have elders and deacons chosen on the pattern of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1? We must also have both elders and deacons (never one without the other), and those must be chosen strictly by the standards set out in the pastoral epistles. Did they have love feasts and greet one another with a holy kiss and speak in tongues during their worship services? Well, you can't take restoration too far!

But, of course, we did. Having gotten the restoration bit between our teeth, it was hard to know where to stop. How many cups did early Christians use for the supper? Was the bread they used one loaf or bite-sized pieces? Where was the biblical authority for a Sunday School or cooperative support for children's homes or a Missionary Society? Did early churches build church buildings or hire located ministers? Was it proper to erect family life centers and hold marriage seminars and feed hungry people who wouldn't sit still for a Bible lesson?

It was precisely over such questions that churches of Christ have, for the past hundred years, reasoned and debated and argued. Eventually it was over such questions that they alienated and divided. To the outside observer, all this frenzy about ancient patterns and modern practice seems obtuse and even absurd. What such an observer would fail to understand is the critical assumption we were making even as we split over these theological hairs.

The assumption, rooted in no less a figure than Alexander Campbell, was that if we could replicate the ancient church in modern times the millennium would be ushered in. For Campbell, restoration was no mere tool for getting the church back on track. It would open the door for the return of Christ and the judgment of the world (See Richard Hughes and Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*, pp. 170ff. "[Alexander Campbell] proclaimed in the *Christian Baptist* in 1825 that 'just in so far as the ancient order of things, or the religion of the New Testament, is restored, just so far has the Millennium commenced"). If only the first century church could be resurrected, if only all men of good character would join together in practicing simple, primitive Christianity stripped of the accumulated theological baggage of the centuries, the path would be cleared for the promises of God to be fulfilled in toto.

Of course, that was Campbell's assumption, not ours. As good as millennialists, we could not swallow Campbell's theories about the end times. But we could (and did) modify his assumption to one with which we were more comfortable. Why was it so important to conform our practice of church to the patterns and forms of the first century? Because when we perfectly restored the first century pattern, we believed we would usher in a revival of first century power and effectiveness. Function would follow form. We convinced ourselves that the power, harmony, fervor, and holiness we were sure we saw in the ancient church would break out afresh in the modern church – if only we could reinstate the pattern they followed. By "doing church" in the same way that the ancients "did church," we too could become a church that turned the world upside down, changed lives and brought glory to God.

That was always (or at least often) the motive for an otherwise incomprehensible obsession with arcane data of first century church life. We did not study the past because we liked it better than the present. We scoured the past because we saw it as our best hope for functioning effectively in the here-and-now. Copy the modes of early worship and true worship would break out among us.

Imitate the methods of early evangelism and the world (or at least the interested) would beat a path to our door. Model our leadership structure and styles after those found in Jerusalem or Antioch or Ephesus and God would bless us with leaders who were leaders indeed!

So captured were we by this assumption regarding restoration that we took matters a step further. Not only would the pursuit of form lead us to function, but only the pursuit of form would do so. Only by discovering and reproducing the modes, methods and practices of the first century church could we have any assurance that the resulting church would produce the fruit God wanted. There could be no legitimate leadership in the church, no trustable vision and divinely sanctioned authority, unless such leadership grew out of the NT pattern of elders, deacons, and evangelists. There could be no legitimate worship, no true praise or pleasing sacrifice, unless that worship matched exactly in form and expression the patterns seen in the early church. There could be no legitimate evangelism unless, first and foremost, the means, methods, and message used by the modern evangelist conformed precisely to the express or necessarily implied example of his ancient counterpart.

Unless the form was correct, the results didn't count. Thus we found an ingenious way to kill two birds with one Bible. What is our mission? We are the ones who have discovered the key to revival for the church. Because we worship like the first churches and organize ourselves like them and adhere strictly to their ethic and do not practice any unauthorized "innovations," God is using us to rebuild in these last days a church through which he can freely work.

And what about all those other churches out there? Well, sadly, the good which they do is tainted because they are not doing it in the right way. Certainly, there are churches which have a powerful ministry of compassion for the poor, but because they are encumbered with a denominational structure, God will not bless their efforts or use them to expand his kingdom. And, yes, there are groups which have stressed the deepening of the spiritual life through prayer and confession; but they are unsound on the instrumental music question, so their spiritual wisdom is suspect. And there are examples in the religious world around us of harmonious fellowship, holy living, sincere worship, sacrificial generosity and dedicated service. All that is wasted on the kingdom, however. Because they fall short on the means, the ends cannot be valid. – All of which might be quite defensible if we could point to the results of our own efforts and show that, in fact, function has followed form for us. If the churches of Christ could demonstrate that our key does indeed fit the lock for effective churches, that after 150 years of pursuing proper form we were finally functioning as the loving, holy, evangelistically fervent, compassionate, worshipful body of Christ envisioned by the apostles, there might be room for boasting about ourselves and discounting the efforts of others.

So what has been our fruit? I want to take nothing away from the good done in our fellowship over the years: the souls that have been won, the lives which have been changed, the sacrifices which have been made, the worship that has been offered. Yet I do believe that enough time has passed, enough effort has been invested, enough lives have been dedicated to the restoration of ancient forms to allow us to ask, "Are we now functioning as the glorious church we want so badly to be?" Has our obsession with NT patterns and duly authorized forms resulted in a more loving and united community? Having struggled so long with issues of church leadership, do we now provide a vivid and compelling model of strong, faithful, visionary leadership for the

religious world around us? After all the dust has settled from our arguments over modes of baptism and issues surrounding discipleship, are we turning the world upside down with our passion to save the lost?

Forced to admit that our movement has, in fact, stagnated, that we have divided ourselves into exhaustion, that we have not enjoyed the expected period of explosive growth, that our young people are leaving or at least have discovered no passion for the vision which so captured their fathers, that our worship periods have settled into a stultifying sameness, that our congregations are graying at a rapid rate or dying off entirely, a strange kind of rearguard action is taking place in many quarters. Unwilling to accept that our assumptions about restoration may have been wrong, we are scrambling to find ways to shift the blame. It is not our efforts which have been misdirected, it is the times in which we live! We console ourselves with memories of Jeremiah's lonely ministry and Jesus' inability to perform miracles in Nazareth because of the people's "lack of faith." We tell ourselves that it is hard to be right, and quote like a mantra "narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Our present struggles have become almost a badge of honor, proving in a perverse way that we are on the right path – it's just that nobody is interested in the truth any more.

The prescription for the church advocated by those who take this tack is for the church to hunker down, protect its gains, remain "faithful" especially in these difficult days ... and (God help us) to do more, much more, of the same thing we have been doing. Then perhaps God will bring the blessing we have all been taught to expect.

The Loyal Opposition

Not everyone, however, is taking that line. Some of us, reviewing the state of churches of Christ at the close of the 20th century, are recognizing that drastic surgery is in order or else the patient may well expire on the table. To do more of the same will result in more of the same, and that we cannot afford. It is time, past time, to do something different so that we can make a difference.

Those voices calling for change will not let us take refuge by circling the wagons against a hostile world. They refuse to shift the blame to a hardhearted culture or an increasingly unfaithful church. They remind us that if the first century Christians had heard Jesus' words about the "narrow road" in the same way we seem to be hearing them, there would have been no evangelistic push out of Jerusalem, no turning the world upside down. They still have faith that the churches of Christ can find a way to function effectively in these dark times. As a consequence, they are far more willing to call into question the assumptions our movement has made about restoration and to wonder whether there might be another way to "do church" today than focusing on and imitating NT forms.

Many of these "young Turks" are for a wholesale repudiation of past forms and the substitution of new ones deemed more contemporary more in keeping with the modern mind, more attuned to the times in which we live. Plundering the surrounding religious world in a pragmatic frenzy, they are borrowing new methods, fresh approaches, creative ideas. Are our worship services stilted? Change the order, introduce special music, use drama and testimonials, never preach more than 20 minutes. Have our evangelistic efforts bogged down? Host marriage seminars, start

a Seeker Service, advertise, advertise, advertise. Do we lack fellowship opportunities in our hectic, driven lives? Start meeting in small groups, cancel Sunday nights in favor of more informal interaction, put coffee and donuts in the foyer.

Everything is on the table, from the role of women to the style and structure of leadership. There are no sacred cows. No tradition is too revered to be above question. Such changes may be painful for a church and threatening to unity, but when the alternative is slow death for the church and certain death for the world, a little pain is a small price to pay for a second chance at new life.

You can dismiss such efforts as mere “faddism” or as a fatal accommodation to the prevailing culture. You can castigate those who advocate these changes as caring little for their heritage or for God’s word. You can even accuse them of being, like Demas, too much in love with this present world.

But those are shallow and unfair depictions. Look a little closer and you will see people who love the church deeply, are devoting their lives in ministry to it, are very concerned about its future, and are desperate to find a way to usher in a revival of health and growth.

It’s just that these people are asking different questions. They are working from a different playbook. They live out of a different paradigm from their restoration forefathers. If you will refrain from dismissing them for a few moments, let me help you understand them.

For a new generation in the church (and for many in the older generation), a decision has been made that function comes first, not form. These Christians are as interested in restoration as anyone. They want to be biblical. They are very concerned with being faithful to God’s will and his word. But, for them, this means that the church must reorder its priorities, keep focused on what is at the core of faith, and pursue the functions of God’s people with a single-minded devotion.

They no longer believe that a restoration of proper form will ensure proper functioning in the church. That belief has been beaten out of them by too many years of experience with churches consumed with forms and oblivious to functions. They do believe that God has called his church to be an incarnational, worshipping, holy, disciple-making community that makes a difference in the world. For them, the only kind of restoration worth pursuing has little to do with resuscitating ancient methods and much to do with recapturing an ancient vision of who God’s people are and what business they are to be about.

Ask them if they are interested in restoring the first century church and they will answer, “Yes!” But ask them what about the first century church they want to restore, and you will hear things like “Their passionate worship,” “Their effective outreach,” or “Their sense of community.” Restoration, for this generation, isn’t about first century forms. It’s about purpose and effectiveness and doing things that matter to God. It’s about what we do, not how we do it. It’s about focusing on core values, not tinkering with matters which are viewed as peripheral and tiny. “Form follows function,” they insist. “Get the functions right and God will provide the forms we need to do His business.”

And they want to be biblical. Only being “biblical” means paying attention to the “weightier matters of the law” rather than being tyrannized by the details. They have seen too many people in the Bible arid in the modern church who have focused on the trees and missed the forest. They realize that “correctness” is not the same as “godliness” – that doing things right is not synonymous with doing right things. Being biblical, for them, means pursuing the same ends as the apostles and the first century church, not using the same methods or adopting the same forms.

In fact, they confront us with a most difficult question. “Who is being more biblical? The church that adopts innovative and creative methods of building a strong sense of community among its members, or the church that is so wedded to particular forms it cannot effectively build loving relationships? The church that encourages a personal encounter with God through music, drama, testimonial, and dialogue, or the church that sticks to traditional worship formats whether or not they help members experience God? The church that is known in its neighborhood for feeding and housing battered women, or the church that is unknown by its neighbors because it cannot find biblical authority for using church funds for such activities?”

This new movement in the churches of Christ is as passionate about restoration as those who have gone before. We are as taken with the power and vitality of the first century church as were our fathers. We, like them, believe that churches in Jerusalem and Antioch and Ephesus and – yes – even Corinth are worthy of our intense study and faithful imitation.

The difference is that we want most to restore the functions to which God has called his people, and are willing to disconnect first century forms from those timeless functions. We believe it is possible to experience again the power and life-changing dynamic of the early church, but only if we are able ‘to find fresh wineskins to contain the gospel that is always new.

We want the chance to build a church that flies. In many ways, that church will not look like the ancient church. It will use forms and methods and approaches that would never have occurred to Christians in Philippi or Rome. It will draw from a contemporary toolbox rather than an ancient one. It will meet modern needs using modern methods.

What that church will have in common with the ancient one is a commitment to being the people God wants us to be, doing the work God gives us to do, living the lives God calls us to live. Our methods will vary, but our goals are the same. Our means will differ, but our ends are identical. Our forms will be new, but the same functions hold for us as for them.

We long for the chance to build a church that flies with the ancient church. From the outset, we confess the church we envision will not fly like its first century counterpart. But in the end, we believe it is a functioning church that is important to God-whatever forms that church adopts.

That is a goal which has, I believe, the power to capture the children of the Restoration Movement. It is an ideal which is bold enough to break into our paralysis and startle us once more into activity. It promises to breathe new life into people who have lost their way and forgotten their purpose. By rediscovering the ancient purposes which have always shaped God’s people in the past, and committing to the pursuit of those purposes in the present, we have hope of remembering what we are about and resuming our interrupted activity.

There is an entire generation in the church which is no longer willing to flap first – or nineteenth – century wings. But if they can be given permission to find wings of their own, you may well discover they are as eager to soar into the heavens as [the apostle] Paul or Alexander Campbell.

Surprised by a Painful Memory

*by R. Vernon Boyd
May – June, 1998*

We were having our monthly fellowship meeting in Detroit. One of the leaders of the church where we were meeting had invited Mayor Archer to give greetings to the group but he couldn't come. He sent a representative, a man who looked to be in his fifties, a well-dressed person who stood with dignity. At first he seemed puzzled about what he could say to a group of church leaders. Yet there was a confidence about him which conveyed that he could represent the Mayor acceptably.

He had arrived late and was ushered to the side up front, to the deacon's bench where he listened as the scheduled program ended. The meeting was discussing race relations in the church and how they could be improved. All seemed aware that blacks and whites needed to get along better but no one took the lead as to how it could be accomplished.

The time came for the Mayor's representative to speak. It seemed he put aside whatever canned words he might have had in mind and the previous discussion lead him to tell of his youthful experience when he confronted racism while growing up in Harlem in New York City. He and a few friends wanted to play baseball. In those days baseball was THE game and the city was captivated by the Yankees and the Giants. There was no basketball or football or any other sport which caught the interest of the people like baseball. The group of friends went to the local police station asking if they could play in the Police Athletic League (PAL). The two sergeants in charge of this work agreed to let them join. At that time there were no black teams playing in the entire league and many assumed blacks could not play the game acceptably.

What even their sponsors did not know at first was the enthusiasm and talent of these boys. They had almost no equipment – used, taped-up bat or two with a ball which had to be continually rewound with tape. But the boys were good at baseball and proceeded to win all their games. They beat one team so badly that the next time the two teams played, they decided to give them a break and play backwards. If a man was right-handed, he would only swing left-handed. It was the only game they lost all season.

They went into the play-offs with a 14 and 1 record. They continued to win, upsetting and surprising all competition. At the final game their record was 16-1. The other team was from the Bronx, dressed in sharp clean uniforms, with beautiful sports jackets with their team name emblazoned on the back and a crossed bat insignia on the front. The boys had never had such signs of athletic success within their reach before. They were confident this kind of outfit would be theirs after winning this game. And win it they did! One of their players hit a grand slam and the ball went over the fence. They totally dominated the game and won the championship for the city! The photographer was there to take pictures. They expected the picture to be in the next day's paper but it turned out that the photographer was there to document the players to find out if they were eligible age-wise to play. There was no public proclamation to match their joy over

the accomplishment. PAL was a white institution at that time and a black team was not welcomed by the organization.

There was an awards ceremony to be held later. All the boys and their three sponsors were there. The boys looked forward to getting their shiny new sports jackets. Instead, they were presented with rather ordinary jackets, a far cry from what the white players from the Bronx wore.

At this point in the story the city official suddenly broke down. His recounting of the story had been with the enthusiasm of a youth reliving a grand achievement. But when he came to the climax, one could feel the idealism of his youth being crushed to the core. He lost his composure. Tears came to his eyes and his confident voice wavered. He apologized to the audience and asked for a moment to regain his composure. Voices all around the room encouraged him.

The coaches were heart-broken, too. They told the boys that what they had accomplished no one could take from them. They knew what they had done and had proved themselves victors. The boys were urged never to let what others did to them define who they were nor set limits on what they could accomplish. Neither the boys nor their sponsors ever played in New York City's Police Athletic Leagues again.

The Mayor's representative urged us to be our best and thanked us for working for good in our communities, then was soon gone. It took a while for the impact of his visit to sink in. He now is a successful and accomplished public servant. But for a moment he was a young boy learning a harsh lesson about life.

There was no bitterness in his tone, nor was he on a crusade to lash out at all white people. But how long that pain had lain hidden in his memory! Fifty years had not erased the scar. It all came back to him, caught him by surprise in the middle of his speech. What he had buried and tried to forget would not be so easily dismissed. If anything, that racism had propelled him to outlive and succeed in spite of injustice.

It comes as no surprise that there is a disproportionately high number of black men languishing in prisons, caught in the violence of drugs and poverty who have not been able to succeed in spite of their circumstances. And blacks see the evidence of discrimination long before it begins to dawn on many whites. Sometimes they do not have the skills to make better choices as our speaker did. Blacks have to live haunted daily by the history of their past, stunned by present obstacles they must face, with the understanding they must work harder than white contemporaries to succeed in the future. And many are successful today. But sometimes this comes at a high price. For instance, black men have a much higher problem with high blood pressure than white men do in American society. High blood pressure leads to kidney failure which can cause early death.

If there is one word to summarize the attitude of Jesus it is compassion. We all need this quality as we live among people who are different from us and who must struggle to survive. The compassion white people can show today may be sorely needed by them after the year 2011, when it is predicted that whites in the United States will be in the minority.

Infant Worship

*by Jeff Nelson
May – June, 1998*

Stressful day? Marriage on the rocks? Parents just don't understand? How am I going to pay for that?

When thoughts like these overwhelm me, do you know what sounds good?

A little drink? No. Just one of those wonderful pills? No. Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps? No.

Climbing up in the lap of Jesus. Sometimes that's the only place I want to be. The lyrics of Dennis Jernigan's song help me get there:

If I could just sit with you awhile.

If you could just hold me.

Nothing could touch me

though I'm wounded, though I die.

If I could just sit with you awhile.

I need you to hold me,

Moment by moment till forever passes by.

I have found peace many times in singing these words. But something has always been a bit awkward. When I see this in my mind I see my five foot eleven inch body sitting on the knee of a grown man, which appears a little silly. Something like a forty-one year-old sitting on Santa's lap. I still picture it, though. Because the peace that comes from the thought far outweighs the awkwardness.

My picture has changed now. Last week in a wonderful moment of prolonged worship I had a more complete image of what I think it means to climb up in the lap of a welcoming Savior.

We have sold the Oak Hills church building to a wonderful church, City Church. We are sharing facilities for the better part of this year. We have our worship assemblies on Sunday morning, and they come in for the afternoon. I go eat lunch and come back to worship with them. I love to experience worship with City Church. It's very different from the format of our worship, and I find it very refreshing and meaningful. They only have one service (we have three), so they're not in a hurry to beat the clock. Before anyone gets up to speak the worship may last an hour (what a dream.)

Last Sunday they came to a point in the worship where they all just knelt and offered God whatever was in their hearts. It wasn't planned, and it lasted a longtime. A woman began singing from her heart how much God wants his children to know he loves them. She wasn't singing a

song that anyone had ever heard before. She was singing what she believed the Lord was impressing on her heart and was being obedient to share with the other worshippers.

Sometimes it takes a pregnant moment in worship like this for us to give the Lord our undivided attention and receive the fullness of his presence. No distractions. No watches or beepers going off. No wondering about the football game that is being missed. Just God and his worshippers with no agenda in a holy place expecting a holy encounter.

The picture came to my mind of Jesus holding an infant in his lap. They were staring into each other's eyes. The pathway of vision was locked in place. Nothing could have broken the stare. The baby was making the sweetest little sounds, oooing and cooing, and Jesus was absolutely soaking up every bit of it. He was grinning from ear to ear. And the more the baby cooed, the more Jesus grinned. And when the baby sensed the pleasure he was giving Jesus, he cooed all the more. There was a special relationship between the two and they both knew it.

A big grin came across my face. I realized the baby was me. I no longer felt awkward. I didn't have to look in his face wondering if he was wanting to ask, "What's a forty-one-year-old doing in the lap of a grown man?" I was in the arms of someone who didn't feel awkward at all holding me. As a matter of fact, he held me like he didn't want to let go.

What was happening here was worship and adoration. The baby was so enthralled by the love of the caregiver that his entire being was responding in worship. And Jesus, the great caregiver adored the little one experiencing what he was created for. The more Jesus adored the child, the more the child longed to worship. The more the child worshiped, the more Jesus adored him.

When I saw myself as a child, I had permission to feel helpless. He has asked me to cast all my burdens on him. An infant has no burdens. The infant is totally dependent on its caregiver. And the caregiver doesn't have a checklist the infant has to pass before being caressed.

Sound inviting?

Don't think that because there are sins in your life that he doesn't have unending love songs to sing you. He does.

Don't think for a moment that he only receives your worship when all your ducks are in a row. You'll never worship.

Don't think you have to act your age when you're around him. Age doesn't count. The desire of your heart does.

That special bond that happens when a parent is holding his or her child is magnified thousands of times when the parent is Jesus. There are no words to describe the love flowing between an earthly parent and child, yet Jesus' love is beyond that. His is perfect love. As much as I may be loved by other humans, I long for more. I long for him.

Anytime I want the nurturing that an infant craves, I can go to his lap. I can sit there awhile. He'll just hold me. Nothing can touch me. I am safe. I am settled.

I am loved.

And if I want to hear his voice, I just close my eyes and listen to his invitation: *I am with you, I am mighty to save. I take great delight in you. I will quiet you with my love. I will rejoice over you with singing* (Zephaniah 3:17).

I will show you the path of life; I will fill you with joy in my presence; with eternal pleasures at my right hand (Psalm 16:11).

How great is the love I have lavished on you, that you will be called my child (1 John 3:1).

You are my son through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26).

And because you are a son, I have sent the Spirit of my Son into your heart, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and since you are a son, I have made you also an heir (Galatians 4:6-7).

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and not by anything you have done; it is my gift to you (Ephesians 2:8).

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you; I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27).

You will go out in joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and the trees of the field will clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12).

What comforting words from the Father. Another Jernigan song comes to mind:

When the night is falling, and the day is done.

I can hear you calling, "Come"

I will come while you sing over me.

When the night surrounds me,

all my dreams undone,

I can hear you calling, "Come."

I will come while you sing over me.

When the night would hide my way,

I will listen until I hear you say,

"How I love you, child I love you."

When this life is over and the race is run,

I will hear you calling, "Come."

I will come while you sing over me.

The amazing fact is that Jesus never runs out of laps. You don't have to wait in line. His lap is always available no matter how many infants are clamoring to nestle in his embrace. He will receive the cooings of worship no matter how dissonant the sound and return adoration in its fullest sense with no strings attached. Where else would you rather be when the dark moments come? Where else could you be once you know he's there and waiting? Didn't he once say, "Let the little children come to me"? Don't act too grown up around him. You'll find yourself trying to convince him all is well like you do other adults. Grab a blanket, get small, and climb up in the lap of a proud parent. You don't even have to climb. He'll pick you up. Be still and listen for his love song. Gaze into his eyes. His are already fixed on you. The love that is shared here will mend a broken heart, encourage the weary, convince the doubting, and heal the wounded. Worship that transforms. Worship as it was intended.

His arms are open. His lap is empty. Come!

The Dawning of a New Era?

by Trina Williams & Leslie Jones

May – June, 1998

There is no evidence that the way we conceive of race has biological significance. It is a socially contrived construct based on skin color. Society defines and redefines what belonging to a racial group means, both technically and practically.

Does having one great-grandmother of a particular race (1/8 of a bloodline) determine classification, or is race a matter of self-identification? How much does being identified with a particular racial group impact where one lives, works, socializes, and worships?

Paul writes that in the Kingdom of God “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:28-29). Today we might expand the thought to include there is neither Black nor White nor Hispanic.

Although there are many directions a discussion on race relations could take, this article is simply two young people reflecting on black-white interaction within Churches of Christ. Given some three hundred years of tumultuous history since the first Africans set foot on American soil, it is not surprising that there is still racial tension and animosity in the United States. What is surprising, however, is that Christians still struggle with racial tension when we are called to be one in Christ. Do we so conform to societal norms that the church will continue to exhibit the same conflicts, tensions, discrimination, and misunderstandings that take place in the country at large? Or has the church learned from its past mistakes such that it is approaching a new era where Christians become a light that models unity and love with respect to race?

Before we, the authors, address this question, it is necessary to introduce ourselves and be up front about who we are as individuals and what perspective we represent. We are both African-American women, aged 27. We grew up attending Churches of Christ in the Midwest and were baptized at an early age. Our fathers currently hold leadership roles in their respective congregations, one an elder and the other a deacon. Although we grew up attending predominantly black congregations, we have had the opportunity to live in a myriad of cities and locations. We have both worshipped in all-white settings, mixed-race settings, and even international settings. We have lived away from home and witnessed how racial dynamics unfold in both school and work situations. In addition, we have known one another for over eight years and spent half of that time worshipping together at a few particular congregations.

Our first recognition of racial issues within the church was noting how separate our fellowships were. No one seemed to notice a contradiction in announcing a “national youth conference,” a “national lectureship,” or a “national crusade” where only black congregations were expected to attend. Even for local events, a “city-wide” song meeting typically included only the other black

congregations in the area. We learned about “other” youth conferences, single conferences, lectureships, etc. when in predominantly white settings.

Even when congregations came together for an interracial program, the fellowship felt superficial and contrived because very few members knew one another. For a youth group activity, adults warned that we should be on our “best behavior.” The events were presented as something out of the ordinary rather than brothers and sisters gathering for a common purpose.

When we questioned this as youths, the responses were typically indifferent or non-committal. “It has always been this way.” “This is simply how things are.” “A while back we were not allowed to worship together, so now we remain separate.” The distinctions were painfully apparent but rarely discussed.

Going beyond our recognition of how the races worshipped and organized separately, as we went more places on our own, we also felt and were treated differently. In a predominantly black setting, we recognized the songs, understood the context in which statements were made, were familiar with preaching and singing styles, and knew tacitly there would be acceptance. When visiting a new congregation, we were approached by members who came up to chat and when they asked where we were from, there was inevitably some person or congregation we knew in common. In a predominantly white setting, sometimes the songs were unfamiliar, we were not as sure of the context in which statements were made, singing and preaching styles were unfamiliar, and there was not always obvious acceptance. People would stare or act noticeably uncomfortable in our presence. When visiting a new congregation, members often were friendly, but we rarely knew anyone in common and had not frequented the same congregations, even if we visited the same cities. On such occasions, we rarely had bad experiences, but usually did not feel as welcome.

Internationally (at least in England, France, Peru, and Ecuador), congregations were typically smaller and of mixed race. It was often unclear who was in charge and sometimes difficult to tell whether the congregations were

predominantly of any one race. There might have been songs that were unfamiliar or even in a different language, but the fellowship was warm and seemingly not very contingent on race. Returning to the United States after such fellowship made the racial separation that exists here again more apparent.

If there is one place a person can walk in and not be seen through the lens of race, it ought to be the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. But even as we question the lingering vestiges of racism and separatism, we know the issues are complex.

When vital statistics are decomposed by race, there are differences. Differences in family structure, differences in income, differences in employment status,

differences in level of education, differences in level of incarceration, differences in prevalence of poverty, and differences in political opinion are measured and reported annually. Add to this the segregated schools and neighborhoods that exist in most urban cities and the differences

loom even larger because we know they are likely to be perpetuated. This is the backdrop from which black and white Christians face each other.

Even if we believe emphatically that all of us are created in the image of God and that we are mandated to love and esteem one another, we still each have the interpersonal, institutional, and historical baggage that comes from living in a society that magnifies and is divided by issues of race. Good intentions won't take us into a new era. The black Christian who has been overlooked for a promotion at work for years, yet has to train younger less experienced white colleagues to do their job will have to deal with the anger and frustration of that situation. The white Christian who is afraid to go through a black neighborhood will have to confront that feat. Anyone who has never had a meaningful relationship with a person of another race will have to work through his or her own prejudices and assumptions to be genuine in such a situation.

But thankfully, one thing that distinguishes our generation from those before us is that there have been more opportunities for such interaction between blacks and whites. Our understanding of violent and overt racism is based on historical memory rather than personal experience. We attended a private white university that 40 years ago did not accept many black females. We were not subjected to the arbitrary assignment to separate water fountains and the back of buses and public institutions like our parents and grandparents. We have worked alongside, traveled with, and established friendships with people from other races. We still have our own baggage and there is always potential for misunderstanding, but we know that racial differences can be overcome from experience and have even developed strategies for addressing them.

With increased opportunity for interaction, there emerges a cadre of persons who are comfortable in a variety of different racial settings. For want of a better term, we can call them cultural brokers. These are "bi-lingual" people who are comfortable within their own race and cultural reference group, but can also speak, dress, and communicate in ways that are acceptable and understood within other reference groups. As the numbers of such cultural brokers increase within congregations, better fellowship and genuine respect between races becomes more likely.

How might a new age with respect to race begin to look and feel in comparison to the recent past? Some would posit that a remedy to problems of race within the church is to fully integrate each congregation and have members who are "color-blind," not even noticing racial differences. A characteristic statement might be "Let's put the past behind us and just all get along!"

A quick rejoinder, regardless of the race of the speaker, might be that "I am more comfortable worshipping with people who are like me. I would not be as happy worshipping God in a mixed race setting, especially if it means giving up aspects of worship and fellowship that I enjoy simply to accommodate a new racial reconciliation."

This is an honest and perfectly acceptable reaction. There is something natural about wanting to be with what is familiar. Racial healing doesn't need contrived arrangements or forced interaction. We will, however, have to go beyond interacting with only the cultural brokers of "acceptable blacks" and "accommodating whites."

When there is interaction, there ought to be real communication and not a need to be on our “best behavior.”

When ministers and leaders as well as members from different congregations begin to interact regularly with Christians of another race, they may discover opinions or cultural patterns that they genuinely dislike. In that case, don't pretend. There may be individuals that you dislike. Love and respect are required; agreement and assimilation are not. But be careful not to attribute every character flaw or idiosyncrasy to race. There is as much variety among blacks as there is among whites and in society at large.

With increased opportunity for interaction, changing attitudes from a new generation, and honest communication, there is hope. With the power of the Holy Spirit we can learn to respect racial differences and glorify God together. But it will take conscious effort. It may mean confronting the inequities and stereotypes we find in society at large. We definitely can't continue to deny they exist. The love of Christ can supersede race, but we must prepare ourselves to act out that love. We look to the future with hope and are willing to actively participate in working with others to bring about the dawn of a new era. But this hope is undergirded by the understanding that we still have a long way to go.

Can Democrats Be Christians?

by Tony Campolo
May – June, 1998

A friend of mine, while talking with her ten-year-old son, was asked, "Aren't all Republicans Christians?" Of course, the answer is, "No!" Nor is it true that all Christians are Republicans, although there are a lot of people who think that they should be. Since abortion has become an overriding concern for many Evangelicals, and since the Republican Party platform is specifically pro-life, there are those who make an easy equation that evangelical Christianity is nothing more than the Republican Party at prayer (although evangelicals should remember that this Supreme Court, which has refused to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, was largely created by Republican presidents).

Those who would make evangelical Christianity and the Republican Party synonymous are usually concerned with more than abortion. Often, their more covert agenda is to make the political-economic philosophy of the Republican Party part of the evangelical creed, while equating liberal politics with liberal theology.

For the purpose of definition, liberals are people who believe that big government should be proactive in solving societal problems. Unlike conservatives, who believe that the government that governs best is the government that governs least, liberals believe that the government should step in and try to engineer a more just and equitable society. Thus, liberals in the past have sought to use government to insure all people, regardless of race, their civil rights. They have sought to guarantee the equality of women through law and to insure the well-being of the poor. In the halls of Congress, conservatives have often resisted using the power of government for such purposes. With many conservatives there is a nostalgia for the good old days, while forgetting that the good old days were marked by racial segregation, the denial of voting rights for women, and exploitative labor practices that included the oppression of children.

More recently, conservatives have fought hard to keep government out of the medical field, and have successfully defeated a comprehensive and universal health plan. So, instead of government controls, we find that the medical profession, without restraint, now determines the cost of health care and pharmaceutical companies determine what we pay for medicines. Costs for simple tests in hospitals have become exorbitant, and a hospital stay can leave a middle class family bankrupt. Even worse, there are tens of millions of Americans who have been left without any medical insurance at all. Today, insurance companies with their HMO plans, instead of government, tell us what kind of care we can get, how long we can stay in the hospital, and what kind of prescriptions we can buy. We even find that the insurance companies have been telling our doctors what kind of treatments we can receive. In some cases we are not even told about treatments that could help us, because the insurance companies deem them expensive. On the other hand, liberals have created a host of problems for us. The welfare plan devised by liberals may have done more harm than good for the poor. It has created dependency, diminished people's dignity, and encouraged sloth. Also, liberalism has driven religion from the center of American life and has moved us towards being an increasingly secularized society.

We can go back and forth with the pros and cons of liberal versus conservative politics, but I believe that it is safe to say that God ordains neither of our political parties. Regardless of whether we are liberals or conservatives, all of us ought to be aware that government itself is ordained by God as an instrument to carry out His will (Romans 13:1-7; Colossians 1:15-16). As conservatives, call upon the government to stop abortions and to ensure religious freedom; and as liberals, use it to ensure civil rights and to care for the poor. We should all see that government can be a good thing that blesses America. Certainly, there should be room in the evangelical community for both Republicans and Democrats; and we, as a people united in faith, ought to discern God's will for our nation and insure the public good by law.

When Your Church Wants to Check Its Pulse

by Lynn Anderson
May – June, 1998

When it comes to studying church growth and health, two mistakes are commonly repeated. First, we tend to examine the booming mega-churches, primarily those in America. Second, we tend to mimic specific local programs or methods which these mega-churches claim as keys to their success, rather than looking for universal and transferable principles.

While we thank God for giant churches, they are scarcely universally replicable models. Mega-churches tend to be phenomena peculiar to their own place and time, often led by an unusually gifted charismatic leader. The formula of their success may become a recipe for failure if copied in another community and another mix of leadership skills.

Even if the context and leadership mix of that church we admire is identical to our situation, copying is still dangerous as may be copying the wrong things. Sometimes leaders of large healthy churches mistakenly identify some of their favorite bells and whistles for the source of their success, while some matrix of less visible factors may actually be the key to their growth. So we may wind up merely mimicking some of their external programmatic “bells and whistles” and miss the less obvious but universally transferable principles of church health and growth. A locally effective method is one thing. A universally transferable principle is quite another.

Conclusion: attempting to transfer features from one church to another may prove ineffective at best, and disastrous at the worst. Besides, not all large or rapidly growing churches are healthy.

Of course, this does not mean churches cannot learn things from one another. Nor does it mean there are no universally identifiable ingredients contributing to church growth and health. In fact a research team out of Germany has demonstrated a way to surface some of these universal and transferable principles. In a few moments, we will describe what this team did and outline their discoveries. But, first, note some bedrock assumptions under-girding their research.

Churches are bodies, not mechanisms. Human beings can create dolls. But dolls cannot create dolls. We can co-operate with God and create babies. Babies can then grow to produce more babies in cooperation with God. Only God can grow churches.

Churches are organisms, not organizations. For plants to flourish, we must co-operate with God who grows the plants, but we cannot grow plants. Just so, God grows churches. We do not. As the apostle Paul put it, “I planted. Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” The best we can do is cooperate with God by removing limiting human hindrances to growth and supplying conditions friendly to growth.

And we cannot create seeds, but we can plant and water seeds, and God makes them grow. So it is with churches. God is sovereign. Sometimes, even when we set up the best conditions, a church may not grow. Apparently God makes sovereign choices. God causes some churches to

flourish despite poor conditions. Generally, however, church health and growth result from cooperating with God.

In addition, no single factor produces church growth and health. As in all bodies, health and growth in churches results from a symbiotic balance of a number of factors or principles. We cannot grow churches mechanistically simply by mixing up the right formula or assembling all the pieces and pushing the right buttons. Church growth and health is of God. And “unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” for, as Jesus said, “apart from me you can do nothing.”

Note also that church health and numerical growth are not necessarily the same thing. Obviously, there is usually some strong correlation between numerical growth and health. But a few very healthy churches are not growing numerically because of some unusually contextual circumstance(s). And no doubt many churches, which are growing numerically, are not healthy. Some are merely large crowds gathering for the emotional “loaves and fishes.”

With the foregoing assumptions under their belts, two German believers, Christopher Schwarz, a Lutheran minister, evangelism enthusiast and Ph.D. from St. Andrews, Scotland, and Chris Schock, Ph.D. from a German University in Organizational Psychology and statistical analysis, launched their massive research into church health and growth. Rather than examining only American mega churches, they have studied more than a thousand churches, rural and urban, small and large, right and left, state and free – across ten years, thirty-two countries and five continents. And rather than looking for methods to transfer from church A to church B, they looked for universal principles. They define principles as ingredients which are: (a) found universally among flourishing churches around the globe, and (b) which are also compatible with scripture. Fully aware that numerical growth and health are not the same thing, Schwarz and Shock evaluated churches with interest in both features: health and numerical growth.

While their research will be ongoing, after ten years they surfaced eight key ingredients or principles they found in healthy and growing churches. These are not methods, nor are they programs. They are universal. (On Schwarz and Schock’s testing instrument, churches that are unhealthy and declining scored below 50. But if a church scores above 65 there is a 99.4% likelihood it is a healthy and growing church.) And these ingredients are all grounded in scripture. As you look at the list, place your emphasis on the adjective. Here they are:

Empowering leadership: Not merely stable or visionary leadership, but leadership that gives permission and supplies skills.

Gift-based ministry: Where people get skilled to serve in areas of their giftedness, not merely where square pegs get shoved into round holes.

Functional structures: Not merely stable structures. But structures that get the church where it is trying to go.

Passionate spirituality: Where people are openly excited and verbal about their faith and their church, and where they serve, pray, fellowship and read scripture as a life-style.

Inspiring worship: Not necessarily contemporary or traditional but inspiring in ways appropriate to the worshipers.

Holistic small groups: Groups that are many-functioned microcosms of full spiritual care and development.

Need-oriented evangelism: Rather than program-oriented evangelism. Where people build authentic relationships, serve others and thus build bridges for Christ to walk over.

Loving relationships: Not merely common corporate membership and church attendance.

Schock and Schwarz have now made available testing instruments (questionnaires) that can be used to evaluate your church in each of these eight areas, scoring them against the global mean. You can clearly determine how well you are doing in each of these extremely crucial areas, compared to growing and declining churches worldwide.

In addition, Schwarz and Schock have developed a manual of exercises and focus group processes addressing each of these eight areas. These exercises and focus group processes give you a “track to run on” as you mobilize and empower your church to employ its strengths to upgrade itself in its weakest areas.

Several months ago some generous brothers made it possible for me to attend training to apply the testing instrument and access the computer software that does the statistical printout. At Hope Network Ministries we are available on a limited basis to help churches walk through this process. However, since this kind of testing is most helpful when done annually, across several years, to monitor progress, we recommend that someone in your church be sent to the training institute. That way you can administer the process for yourselves, to great benefit.

To get first-hand information, call an organization called ChurchSmart at 1-800-253-4276 and ask for information on training in Natural Church Development.

Among the congregations we have assisted with the test, a number see clearly their weaknesses, and understand what needs to happen to address those weaknesses. But they feel that they lack the skills needed to pull that off. We at Hope Network are keenly interested in helping congregations upgrade the skills they need to take them where they believe they need to go. We can be reached on the web at www.hopenetworkministries.com. Or e-mail hopenet@dhc.net or phone 214-874-0857.

Note: Contact information may be out of date

Movie Review: Good Will Hunting

by Janet Morrison
May – June, 1998

(Janet Morrison is Children's Outreach Director at Central Dallas Ministries and lives in the middle of the South Dallas neighborhood where she spends her days leading, teaching, and loving underprivileged children. She is a graduate of Harding University.)

Good Will Hunting is a movie about discovering purpose. It's a movie about relationships. Strange as it may seem, I also see it as a movie about the pain in charity.

This movie is about a kid from South Boston, the rough part of town, who has a natural-born talent that allows him to solve extremely difficult math problems with little effort. Raised in various foster homes, and working as a janitor at M. I. T. to fulfill his parole requirements, Will (played by Matt Damon) enjoys hanging out with his friends, drinking, and fighting more than he aspires to be a well-known mathematician.

Will's hidden talent is discovered one evening as two professors walk out of their office, see Will, and assume because of his janitorial position that he could only be vandalizing the chalkboard. Instead, they learn that this is the mathematician who has secretly been solving their near-impossible problems.

In a serious endeavor to discover who this boy is, Professor Lambeau (Stellan Skarsgard) tracks him back to the court system where he has just been convicted of his latest crime: fighting and assaulting a police officer. Lambeau meets and talks with Will, explaining that he will be released if he agrees to meet with the professor once a week to work on math, and meet with a counselor once a week to help himself. Even though reluctant to go the counselor, Will agrees.

Math is easy for Will and presents no problem he can't solve. Counseling, on the other hand, is not something Will believes he needs. Therefore, he makes a game of the counseling sessions, taunting each and every counselor until they all give up. After Will sends five counselors running, Professor Lambeau visits an old college roommate in a last effort to find a therapist for Will.

As Lambeau enters Sean McGuire's (Robin Williams) classroom, Sean is explaining to his psychology class that they must establish trust in the client-doctor relationships. Trust later becomes the backbone of Sean and Will's relationship. On their first meeting, Sean immediately turns to and excuses the other professors in the room to provide privacy for Will. Other therapists had treated Will as a project and a case to be studied. In each session, professors were on hand taking notes and observing Will's "progress." In contrast, Sean began by treating Will as a valued person with rights. The fact that Sean also grew up in South Boston helps advance this process.

Throughout the rest of the movie, Will experiences relationships with his girlfriend, Skylar (Minnie Driver), and Sean that develop him and challenge him. Sean allows Will to be himself.

He gives Will permission to live his life the way he wants to live it. In doing that, Will is able to finally see what he really wants in life. He has purpose. Sean doesn't push him to be somebody he isn't. Sean realizes Will is valuable whether or not he has a math award on his wall or a great job by society's standards. And, in a classic moment between Sean and Will, Will is made aware that all of the pain and hurt he has been through is not his fault.

Skylar is simply someone who loves Will for who he is. She does not attempt to change his life, his friends, his habits, or his job. But, because she loves him, she wants to help him. It was interesting to me to see him immediately push somebody he loved very much away when she told him she wanted to help him. The pain in "being helped" seemed so apparent. No one wants to be loved with ulterior motives (although her motive was very sincere). No one I've met enjoys being another person's project.

Toward the end of the movie, Lambeau begins pushing Sean to make Will accept the jobs he'd been offered. Seeing the progress Sean was making with Will, Lambeau felt it was time for him to move on to bigger and better things. Thank goodness Sean realized the potential disaster inherent in Lambeau's plan. Yes, Will had made progress. However, pain and hurt that has developed over a lifetime cannot be reversed in a few counseling sessions. Thank goodness there are people like Sean who realize that just because things look good on the outside, such experiences don't mean the person has dealt with them on the inside. Because Sean allowed Will to take his own time with decisions, he was able to make a decision that he felt good about. He wasn't forced to make a decision that made everyone else happy.

This movie had such deep meaning to me. In working with children who have many underutilized talents, I see how people run over their feelings and seem to know what's best for them. To me, this movie seemed to be a statement about charity. Will didn't ask for any of the attention he received. He was simply doing his job in life to get by. He didn't realize how valuable his mathematical talent was, but he also didn't care that it could bring him fame and fortune. Fame and fortune did not make him happy. His happiness revolved around his friends.

On the other hand, knowledge and fame did mean a lot to Professor Lambeau. And because they meant so much to him, he thought it ridiculous for Will not to think the same way. Therefore, his mission became to show Will how important it is to use his talent. Unfortunately, the professor's real focus was not about Will, but about himself.

Doesn't this tell us something about charity? Charity is something we believe to be good. Charitable people honestly want to help others. But helping others becomes, not finding out what they want or need, but knowing what we want for them. And, in the end, the focus is ourselves. We are the ones who have done the good deed; we are the ones who get the credit; we feel good. But, where have we left the people we are trying to help?

I see a lot of young people who let their potential go out the window. But maybe, just maybe, the reason that upsets me so is not because of what they could be but because I no longer receive credit for their fame and success. Society has defined success, and I, many times, have defined their success. I think I need to understand how my kids view success. As Will said, "What's wrong with laying brick? There's honor in that." But we also have to ask what Sean asked

Will: "Is that why you took that job? For the honor of it?" I should value a brick layer just as much as I value an accountant. I need them both. I wouldn't have a home without the bricklayer and I wouldn't have a job without the accountant.

Value. People need to be valued. Not for their money or their talents, but for being a child God has made. People are inherently valuable. Sean recognized that Lambeau had never valued him. Sean was from the "wrong side of the tracks." His choices in life weren't perfect. Sean pointed out that, even years later, Lambeau still talked to him with a condescending voice and looked at him with an embarrassed look. There's an arrogance about Lambeau that is often seen only by Sean and people like him. Lambeau treated Sean like a failure even when he was no longer a failure.

Good Will Hunting. What exactly does it mean? Are we the type of people who search so hard to do good that we become people hunting to do good as was Professor Lambeau? Or would you define yourself as a someone who searches for the good in Will Hunting as Sean did? Perhaps you are just the type of person who sees another for who he is.

Each of us needs to do good for our own benefit, yet each of us needs to see the good in someone else so that we are not the primary benefactors from the relationship. But, finally, each person we come in contact with needs to be valued as they are, for who they are, and not for whom we make them to be.

AfterGlow: the Lady Rosa Parks

by Phillip Morrison
May – June 1998

The usually affable high school principal was stern and hostile. With jaws clenched and veins pulsing, his eyes as piercing as laser beams, he demanded, “Did you call Rosa Parks *a lady*?”

I was a fresh-out-of-school, small-town preacher, supplementing my income by doing substitute teaching in the high school. Though I couldn’t afford to lose the \$5 a day the school board paid substitutes, my conscience demanded that I give a truthful answer. “Yes, in the Civics class I taught yesterday, I called Rosa Parks a lady.”

“Don’t you know she’s *colored*?” he asked with a reddening face.

“Of course; everybody who’s been following the news from Montgomery knows she’s colored. I called her a lady because that’s the way I was taught. And she is a lady – a heroic lady,” I concluded with a courage I didn’t really feel.

“Well, I can’t use you any more,” said the principal.

“I understand, and I’m sorry,” I said as we parted without a handshake.

In those days, “whites” and “coloreds” didn’t go to school together, didn’t use the same rest rooms, didn’t drink from the same water fountains, didn’t live in the same section of town. President Lincoln may have freed the slaves, but black Americans were not really emancipated.

Much sadder than this blight on our national character was the segregation practiced by our “Christian” churches and schools. Until graduate school, I never went to school with a black person a single day of my life. The Christian college I attended allowed no black students, but did allow black lectureship visitors to sit in roped-off sections. No wonder a black preacher years later rebuffed my friendship overtures by saying “The Christian college that graduated you with honors had me arrested when I tried to enroll.”

We both knew we couldn’t rewrite history or undo the past. he knew I was not personally responsible for the segregated campus, but I had no answer for his anger.

Segregation has been illegal for many years, but it has been immoral for much longer. As Christians, we must not be satisfied with compliance; we must actively seek brotherhood.