

BY ARTHUR L. MILEY

# Anatomy OF CHRISTIAN PERIODICALS

A WAVE OF CHANGE has swept over magazine publishing within the Churches of Christ in the past decade. This change is evidenced by a shift away from former "mainstream journals" like the *Gospel Advocate*, *Firm Foundation*, and *Christian Chronicle*. Within the past decade these journals accounted for about forty percent of the paid circulation, while they now account for about twenty percent (due to proliferating new journals and a decline of some subscribers by one). A more significant change is the emergence of new journals both to the left and right of mainstream journals. We have witnessed new open journals such as *Mission* and *Integrity*. We have also seen a counter emergence of several new reactionary conservative journals that were created partly in response to their editors' perception of "liberal" assaults on what they consider to be sound doctrine represented by open journals. Some examples of these are *Anchor*, *Spiritual Sword* and *First Century Christian*.

## THE SUBSCRIPTION GAP

Most of the brotherhood journals are house organs designed to speak to specific segments of people who have special interests, concerns or needs. The fact that many of them appeal only to highly defined audiences, accounts for their small circulation. Judging by their circulation, it is questionable if any are reaching a broad group of readers. Almost all are telling Church of Christ members about Church of Christ members, consequently hardly anyone outside the brotherhood sees the journals.

While editors always have considerable faith that their magazines are read, total circulation is not necessarily a measurement of this. Circulation to *individuals* (not total bulk circulation) is an indication as to whether the printed message is communicated to the intended audience.

In many instances people receive magazines because of their membership in a particular congregation. For example, *Action*, the largest subscription periodical with 75,017 total circulation has about 20,000 sent to individuals and 55,000 to bulk groups for distribution. Bulk mailings have only marginal readership value since they are unsolicited reading material and are often discarded without examination.

In the end, individual circulation is the measuring

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rod by which publishers ultimately gauge their success. However, it is by no means a measurement of quality journalism or of the impact upon readership.

### ECONOMIC FACTS OF LIFE

Every religious journal loses money, according to publishers. In fact, a rule of thumb is that the cost of publishing a religious magazine is about two times the subscription price charged to readers. (For example, *Mission* has an annual subscription rate of \$7.00 and the annual cost to publish is about \$13.00 per subscriber.) This is a conservative estimate; it doesn't include paying a salary to all the unpaid volunteer help that goes into publishing a magazine. Advertising provides only nominal revenue to most religious publications, and is frequently regarded more as a service than as a source of revenue. Most religious periodicals are underpriced as an inducement to increase subscriptions.

It also appears that religious journals lose money regardless of the size of their circulation. According to Carl Henry, former editor of *Christianity Today*, that journal must be subsidized to an amount equal to its subscription income despite a circulation that approaches 200,000 plus considerable advertising.

Because the journals lose money, they must have supplementary sponsors to underwrite the cost. The sponsors are from the following sources:

**EDITORS:** The most frequent underwriter is the editor, who is the person most deeply involved. He not only gives his time, but he also financially underwrites the magazine.

**READERSHIP:** Readers interested in the financial well being of the journal send contributions. *Integrity* receives such gifts.

**TRUSTEES:** Several publications have a governing board of trustees who commit themselves to underwrite its cost. *Mission* is supported by trustees.

**FOUNDATIONS:** A few journals are underwritten by proceeds from a foundation. *Truth* has such a foundation assisting with its costs.

**PUBLISHERS:** Several journals are arms of publishing houses (*Gospel Advocate* and *Firm Foundation*) and the income from church books and supplies provide an economic cushion against losses incurred in publishing their journals.

**CHURCHES:** Some congregations print periodicals and the minister serves as editor, e.g., *Christian Courier*.

### PLURALISTIC PERIODICALS

Martin E. Marty, church author, editor and professor, says of religious periodicals, "There are too many

saying too little to too few." Still, perhaps the most surprising aspect of our journalism is the vast number of periodicals in our brotherhood. I have counted 66 brotherhood periodicals printed in the United States, and the list is not exhaustive. There are several reasons for this proliferation. One is the absence of a central governing body (which would publish an official party line) has created a need to have periodicals speaking for, or to various interest groups. Man surely has a compulsive will to publish.

Another reason for the fluidity of magazines is that there is no registration required to publish. Thus it is possible for anyone to go to a printer and contract for production of a magazine. All a publisher needs is editorial material, a place to put his magazines when they come off the press, some buyers of the magazine, money to pay his bills, and adherence to postal regulations.

There is a definable life cycle to a magazine. The average journal in our brotherhood has a life cycle of about ten years. Some editors equate the longevity of a periodical with its vitality (while an inverse relationship may exist). Carl Ketcherside has established a policy which every journal should examine. He recently announced the final issue of his journal, *Mission Messenger*, to be December 1975, unless his death hastens that event. Most periodicals do not cease publication near the peak of their influence or circulation, but *Mission Messenger* is a rare exception.

No magazine will go on forever. Examination of where it exists in its life cycle can lead to a longer healthier life—or if it is warranted, a quick, merciful death.

### NEWS VERSUS PROPAGANDA

True journalism is not propaganda. The prophet Ezekiel condemned the rulers who had a corrupt foundation and covered it with paint to make it look good even though the building was falling down.

A free religious press assumes editors who are free to write and a public that is free to read. The periodical in your hand is of little value to you unless it is free to print what its writers, its editor and its publishers choose. Responsible readers expect to find a journal's content free of alteration by political influences and free from pressures to conform to a given "ecclesiastical party line." However, in reality, readers find that many sponsors serve as censors and backseat critics of the editor and apply subtle pressures to conform to their concepts.

As far as church openness is concerned, we've been in a rut too long. And that rut is a pious make believe. Efforts to hush-hush an issue often come

from church leaders. If church leaders want a controlled press, they should at least be honest enough to admit that it is the tool used by totalitarian states.

Readerships must reinforce the need for a free and open church press. We may not always like what we read, but remember, we don't always like what life offers. Had you been writing the New Testament would you have mentioned the dissension at Corinth? How can we solve our disputes if we are closed-minded or hesitate to air them?

### CHARACTER OF RELIGIOUS JOURNALS

We have observed several types of journals. Each has distinguishing characteristics.

#### 1. "DEFENDER-OF-THE-FAITH" JOURNALISM

Such a journal is explicitly and self-consciously orthodox and defends a clearly defined status quo position. It has the advantage of clarity of purpose. Most of these periodicals see themselves as distinct from the surrounding culture, and in tension with that culture. They expect regimented thinking. The reader has only limited opportunity to make up his own mind about basic issues.

#### 2. "OPEN" JOURNALISM

An open Christian magazine believes in freedom of inquiry. It will be open to divergent and even conflicting points of view. It will not attempt to control thought, but it will expect readers to grapple with basic questions and arrive at considered positions of their own. Much attention is given to the relationship between religion and the problems of today. An open Christian magazine attempts to avoid simplistic answers, sensationalism, and distortion. It strives to be committed, honest, without cliches. In a real sense the Bible is open journalism to perfection.

#### 3. NEWS REPORTING, DEVOTIONAL, INSPIRATIONAL OR SPECIALITY AUDIENCE

These journals exist to report the current news and trends for geographic regions, teachers and leaders, youth, missionaries, or other groups. They may also provide idea articles and inspirational writings in addition to news reporting.

I have attempted to classify the brotherhood periodicals (see the tables) into major character groupings, although they do not all neatly fit into the groupings. Some could be classified in several ways. (Free periodicals or bulletins published by colleges, churches, radio and TV sponsors are not included).

### EDITORIAL JEOPARDIES

Denny Rydberg, editor of a religious journal, *The Wittenburg Door*, says in an article on religious

journalism, "If an editor describes the fastest growing Sunday school class, promotes the church picnic, or blasts the 'enemy' he is tolerated, but if he raises issues that need critical examination, he is considered a heretic, destroying the unity of the body." Mr. Rydberg says the editor is then advised to use his God-given writing gifts in a positive manner: writing about the annual lectures, church dinners and missionaries in Iceland. But unity isn't achieved by ignoring wrongs. Unity is achieved by finding, examining and looking at the various alternatives to arrive at truth. Mr. Rydberg continues, "As long as humans reside in the church they will: (a) make mistakes, (b) rationalize their mistakes, (c) institutionalize their actions, (d) give birth to sacred cows. The church needs the journalist to call attention to this process and help arrest the process." An editor needs wisdom to keep balance, resilience to withstand barrages of criticism and courage to face subtle pressures brought to bear on him.

### SO WHAT

The ultimate question a responsible editor must ask himself is, "What influence does the journal have on the readers?"

While some periodicals lead the thinking of its readership, too few provide little more than an ineffective diet of sermonia and spiritual pabulum. Pick up these magazines and it's the same diet all over each month. The church press has been notably parochial, trying to build institutional loyalty, often at the expense of honesty. The traditional fare of those who read the church press is to read of another church dedication, a new fund raising drive, personality sketches of "loyal" church members, and newsy tidbits about church leaders pontificating on subjects of little importance.

A responsible editor will fire the readers imagination for modern Christian discipleship. He will leave room for differences of opinion and encourage the individual to act on the basis of his studied conviction. He will provide readers with objective materials to consider real problems in this troublesome time. If today's journal motivates a person to think for himself, if it leads him to honestly examine his whole being, if it helps make the connection between faith and life, between word and deed, then the effect is immense in shaping the person.

### THE FUTURE—TIME FOR MORE CHANGE

These suggestions are offered to give a greater thrust to brotherhood journalism.

**"DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH"**

JOURNAL	LOCATION	FREQUENCY	ANNUAL COST	1972 CIRCULATION
Gospel Advocate	Nashville, Tn.	wky	\$6.00	40,700
Firm Foundation	Austin, Tx.	wky	\$5.00	26,174
Spiritual Sword	Memphis, Tn.	qtr	---	11,250
Pitching for the Master	Marion, Ind.	mo	---	7,647
Searching the Scriptures	Tampa, Fla.	mo	\$5.00	6,476
Gospel Vidette	Cincinnati, Ohio	mo	\$1.50	3,565
Truth in Love	Atlanta, Ga.	mo	\$2.00	3,408
Truth	Marion, Ind.	wk	\$6.00	3,364
Gospel Guardian	Athens, Ala.	wk	\$5.00	2,328
Old Paths Advocate	Lebanon, Mo.	mo	\$2.00	2,000
Preceptor	San Antonio, Tx.	mo	\$3.00	1,810
Bible Beacon	Memphis, Tn.	mo	\$2.50	1,600
Torch	Mt. Olive, Ala.	mo	\$3.00	1,506
Gospel Truths	Woodsfield, Ohio	mo	\$3.00	1,189
Bible Standard	Bryan, Tx.	mo	\$3.00	500 (est)
Anchor	Houston, Tx.	qtr	\$1.00	*
Bible Way	Clinton, Miss.	mo	\$2.00	*
Christian Courier	Stockton, Ca.	mo	---	*
Contending for the Faith	San Francisco, Ca.	mo	\$1.00	*
Faith & Facts	New Albany, Ind.	qtr	\$2.00	*
First Century Christian	Memphis, Tn.	mo	\$3.00	*
Sword & Shield	Torrance, Ca.	bi-wky	\$1.00	*
Words of Truth	Haleyville, Ala.	wky	\$3.00	*

**"OPEN"**

Mission Messenger	St. Louis, Mo.	mo	\$1.00	7,237
Integrity	Flint, Mich.	mo	---	5,000 (est)
Mission	Dallas, Tx.	mo	\$7.00	4,200
Restoration Review	Denton, Tx.	mo	\$3.00	3,000 (est)

**"REGIONAL NEWS EMPHASIS"**

Christian Journal	Ft. Worth, Tx.	mo	\$1.00	21,912
Christian Chronicle	Nashville, Tn.	bi-wky	\$5.00	3,855
Christian Worker	Wichita, Ks.	mo	\$2.50	2,221
The Bible Herald	Parkersburg, W.V.	mo	\$3.00	2,055
Carolina Christian	Greenville, S.C.	mo	\$2.50	1,861

No. American Chr. Exhorter	Leominster, Mass.	mo	\$4.00	1,500
Christian Observer	Hammond, La.	mo	\$3.00	871
Nashville Christian News	Memphis, Tn.	mo	\$1.00	*
Rocky Mountain Christian	Nashville, Tn.	mo	\$1.00	*
	Denver, Co.	mo	---	*

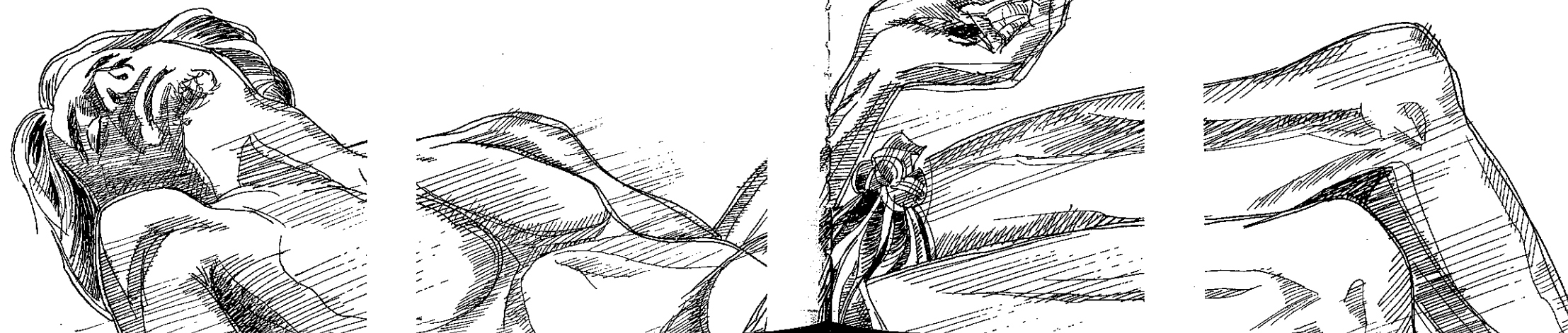
**"DEVOTIONAL & INSPIRATIONAL"**

Power for Today	Nashville, Tn.	mo	\$4.00	58,334
Gospel Minutes	Ft. Worth, Tx.	wky	\$2.50	55,228
20th Century Christian	Nashville, Tn.	mo	\$4.00	35,957
Gospel Light	Delight, Ark.	mo	\$2.00	4,500
Christian Appeal	Amarillo, Tx.	mo	\$2.50	2,397
The Truth	Cowdon, Ill.	mo	\$2.00	1,083
Printed Preacher	Dayton, Wash.	mo	\$1.00	960

**"SPECIALTIES AUDIENCE"**

Action	Redondo Beach, Ca.	mo	\$1.00	75,017
Christian Bible Teacher	Abilene, Tx.	mo	\$5.00	23,808
Christian Woman	Nashville, Tn.	mo	\$3.50	7,495
Voice of Freedom	Nashville, Tn.	mo	\$4.00	7,365
Teenage Christian	Atlanta, Ga.	mo	\$3.50	6,400
Christian Echo	Los Angeles, Ca.	mo	\$2.00	6,104
Gospel Tidings	Houston, Tx.	mo	\$2.00	5,360
Good News	Los Angeles, Ca.	mo	---	1,980
Christian Youth Chr.	College Sta., Tx.	mo	\$3.00	1,482
Word and Work	Louisville, Ky.	mo	\$2.50	1,162
Voice of Evangelism	Ottumua, Iowa	mo	\$3.00	1,124
Biblical Foundations	Nashville, Tn.	qtr	\$5.00	1,000 (est)
Living for Jesus	Farmington, N.M.	mo	---	1,000 (est)
P.T.L.	St. Louis, Mo.	mo	\$1.00	1,000 (est)
Restoration Quarterly	Abilene, Tx.	qtr	\$5.00	500 (est)
Campus Journal	Springfield, Mo.	qtr	\$1.25	*
Contact	Abilene, Tx.	qtr	\$3.00	*
Editorially Speaking	Riverside, Ca.	mo	\$2.00	*
Outreach	Fresno, Ca.	mo	\$3.00	*
Personal Evangelism	Madison, Tn.	qtr	\$1.50	*
Biblical Notes	Hurst, Tx.	mo	\$3.00	*
World Evangelist	Florence, Ala.	mo	\$3.00	*

\* Circulation data not published



1. Church leadership should provide their members with opportunities to hear and read divergent viewpoints (not to prevent them from hearing different viewpoints). Many are unwilling to let elders and ministers do their thinking for them. Readers must have material for making their choices on real issues.

2. Religious publications need to find a more satisfactory way of blending journalistic expertise and theological backgrounds. Journalistic training for theologians would help bridge the gap.

3. Regroup and examine where the real needs exist. Several journals are very similar and would benefit from consolidation. On the other hand, several demographic areas are unserved. Specialized journals geared to the college student, a general family magazine, or providing a resource journal for elders and deacons would find instant readership.

4. Utilizing the available technologies is a must. The technical computer ability exists to develop a national mailing list within the Church of Christ. These lists could be rented to publishers. Publishers could serve as a clearing house for information stored by computers.

#### SOME RECOMMENDED PERIODICALS

Some of the periodicals I recommend to those wanting to read the better journalism across the spectrum of the brotherhood are listed:

The *CHRISTIAN BIBLE TEACHER* is an outstanding how-to-do-it magazine for teachers and leaders and can be ordered from Box 1060, Abilene, Texas 79604.

*CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH* is a pungent eight page newsletter written by Ira Y. Rice, Jr., in a unique style, in which the editor interprets documented "evidence" of heresy. This editor can never be called "timid" and he understands the power of the press. Orders can be placed through Box 588, San Francisco, California 94101.

*INTEGRITY* is an open forum periodical, very readable and thought provoking. This refreshing periodical can be ordered from 8494 Bush Hill Court, Grand Blanc, Michigan 48439.

*MISSION* is an open journal designed to explore the scriptures and their meaning within the context of twentieth century life. It is well written and offers a variety of features. This journal has recently employed a full time editor, a step which might be explored by several journals. It can be ordered from Box 2822, Abilene, Texas 79604.

*MISSION MESSENGER* is edited by Carl Ketcherside and is highly personalized in style. It openly explores some of our long held traditions. The

final issues may be ordered from 139 Signal Hill Drive, St. Louis, Missouri 63121.

*TRUTH* is a well written and attractive weekly journal which presents rational writings by an ultra-conservative denomination of the brotherhood (it believes the *Gospel Advocate* to be liberal), and can be ordered from Box 403, Marion, Indiana 46952.

*20TH CENTURY CHRISTIAN* presents well written inspirational articles and has a very good newsletter insert. It has recently been upgraded in appearance and content and can be ordered from 2809 Granny White Pike, Nashville, Tennessee 37204.

Others having interesting content are *Action*, particularly its annual evangelism review, P.O. Box 146, Palos Verdes, California 90274. *Campus Journal* reporting on campus activities, 1114 E. Madison, Springfield, Missouri 65804; *Firm Foundation* for its good weekly editorial, P.O. Box 610, Austin, Texas 78767; *Restoration Quarterly*, a study in Christian scholarship, P.O. Box 8227, Abilene, Texas 79601; *Restoration Review* with an emphasis on restoration unity, 1201 Windsor Drive, Denton, Texas 76201.

In the total context of all religious periodicals from other religious groups only two or three of our brotherhood journals are of the content quality to be classed in the best 100 of all religious journals. More will be written at a later date of outstanding periodicals outside our brotherhood.

#### Thoughts on journalism

"There aren't any embarrassing questions—just embarrassing answers." Carl Rowan

"I am always in favor of a free press, but sometimes they say quite nasty things." Winston Churchill

"When I begin by reading, I must finish by acting." Henry David Thoreau

"Reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge; it is thinking that makes what we read ours." John Locke

"Declare ye among the nations, and publish and set up a standard; publish and conceal not . . ." Jeremiah 50:2

"Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please." Mark Twain

"Were it left to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." Thomas Jefferson

"Every man claims to read both sides, but few do." E. W. Howe



Renewal in the Pulpit

HIGH ON THE PROSCENIUM arch which frames the stage on which the comedy and tragedy of human life are acted out are two faces: a weeping face and a laughing face, reflecting what was written back in the Old Testament ages ago: "There is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time for mourning and a time for dancing." The little story of Zacchaeus, the filthy-rich superintendent of taxes in Jericho, who "climbed a tree the Lord to see," is obviously a time for laughing, a time for dancing. It ought to be told in the setting of musical comedy.

One major problem that we all have with the Bible is that we take it *all* too seriously. Obviously there are portions of the Bible we do not take seriously enough, what with a cross at the center of it. But scattered throughout Scripture there are moments when it is a time to laugh and not to weep. Bill Cosby's widely popular recording of Noah is hilarious and properly so. For the story of Noah is delightfully incongruous. Imagine, building a fantastic wooden tub of an ark on dry land in bright sunshine. As Bill Cosby's Noah says, "Lord, why do you keep doing all these *weird* things?"

Then there is the story of David, kicking up his

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# Up a Tree

A SERMON BY  
EDMUND A. STEIMLE

heels and dancing before the Ark of God, that awesome spot where the Lord God Jehovah dwelt. The people were scandalized and so, typically, was his wife. But God approved this apparent irreverence. His wife was made barren for the rest of her days for her serious, prim and proper disapproval of David's irreverence. But David was blessed. "There is a time for mourning and time for dancing."

So too when you come to the stories that Jesus told. More than once there must have been a gleam in his eye as he told, for example, the rollicking story of the laborers and the hours with its weird ending when those who had worked only an hour or two in the cool of the day were paid just as much as those who had worked long hours all through the heat of the day.

And what in the world can you make of the story of Zacchaeus except a wildly hilarious story full of incongruity and surprise? First there is the picture of a little man, darting this way and that, trying to peek through or over the crowds that lined the street in Jericho. Giving up, he drops his attache case, clambers up a Sycamore tree like a small boy, "the Lord to see."

Then there is also the fact that he is rich and you know perfectly well how Jesus felt about rich people: it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. And yet even though Zacchaeus is more than rich, he is filthy rich, salvation comes to his house that day, almost casually.

Add to that the fact that he was not simply one of