

# BA

BIBLE ADVOCATE®

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## Patriotism and Politics



**O**ur American Independence Day on  
 July 4 features celebrations all across  
 the US. Amid the fireworks and all,  
 what's a Christian citizen to do?

Patriotism is the natural sense of attachment  
 and devotion we feel toward the nation  
 of our birth or residence. It combines sentiments  
 of gratitude, loyalty, and prejudice. As part  
 of who we are, a degree of patriotism is almost  
 unavoidable. Don't reject it; enjoy it!

On the other hand, patriotism stands in mild  
 contrast with Christ's higher call to seek first  
 the kingdom of God. Neither Jesus nor the  
 apostles repudiated their country of origin,  
 but neither did they celebrate it with any  
 recorded zeal. They knew that our higher  
 citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).  
 For them, this meant that national memberships,  
 by comparison, have lesser worth.

In theocratic Israel, patriotism was expected  
 of all her children. God's people in Christ,  
 however, are not limited to any nation or  
 nations. Under Him, no country is singled out  
 for exclusive honor. Now God's kingdom  
 embraces people of all earth's tribes.

The New Testament neither rejects the patriot  
 nor recommends his nationalistic fervor.  
 Christians should be subject to governmental  
 authority, to be sure, and honor our rulers.  
 But Jesus and His apostles say little or  
 nothing about national heritage as a cause  
 for celebration. Over-much patriotism can  
 smack of selfishness, exalting our own to  
 the detriment of what should belong to all.


The love of country that finds biblical approval  
 must be subservient to a greater good.  
 Praiseworthy patriotism inclines the national  
 interest toward God's glory and the service  
 of others in every land.

As we sing "God Bless America" this year,  
 let's ask how America could bless God and  
 others more than we do. Even non-Americans  
 have a sense that this nation was blest of  
 God for special purposes. Fellow citizens,  
 as we give thanks for the USA, let's petition  
 the Lord of all the earth to bless it all – not  
 just America. Then let's act, and vote, in  
 accord with our most unselfish prayers.

The Democratic National Convention comes  
 to Denver in August. At this writing, either  
 Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton will face  
 Republican John McCain in November. We  
 write about politics in this issue, not to  
 promote partisan propaganda but to probe  
 biblical views. Notions of Christian citizens  
 will vary. Views expressed in this issue may  
 not match yours or the editor's. We ask for  
 patience and open-mindedness as you read.

– Calvin Burrell

# Saying No to Caesar



True discipleship could make us wary of “God and country.”  
by Jason Overman

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. — Dietrich Bonhoeffer<sup>1</sup>

**S**o begins Bonhoeffer’s classic *The Cost of Discipleship*. It continues:

Cheap grace means . . . the forgiveness of sin . . . [is] thrown away at cut prices. . . . the Church’s inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. . . . Grace alone does everything . . . so everything can remain as it was before. . . . cheap grace was turned into grace without discipleship [and] . . . Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.<sup>2</sup>

When Bonhoeffer wrote these words in the 1930’s, his primary concern was not to correct some abstract doctrine of grace but to confront a concrete political dilemma that haunted the church of his day. His quandary was simple: How is one to be a Christian and a German in a nation run by Nazis?

Bonhoeffer’s world found Adolf Hitler using the rhetoric of “God and country” to frightening effect. In 1933, for instance, Hitler expressed his “heartfelt” desire for a

. . . genuine harmony between Church and State. . . . The national Government sees in the two Christian Confes-

sions the most important factors for the preservation of our nationality. . . . [and so] will provide and guarantee . . . the influence due them.<sup>3</sup>

Of course Hitler expected that the church would show the “Government . . . the same appreciation.”<sup>4</sup>

It is said that Bonhoeffer denounced the idolatry of the Fuhrer long before others recognized the threat. More than that, writer Mark Nation has noted how often Bonhoeffer attacked the one issue that “God and country” seeks most to uphold, and the single issue that tests our discipleship like no other. “War today . . . must be utterly *rejected* by the church,” Bonhoeffer proclaimed to the nation’s youth. “The church renounces obedience should she sanction war.” What mattered most to Bonhoeffer “was how to shape a Christian people that would embody discipleship seriously enough that an Adolf Hitler could not have his way with them.”<sup>5</sup> If Jesus is Lord, Hitler is not. Discipleship must trump nationalism.

Of course, the church in Germany was not prepared to say no to Hitler. When conscription was instated in 1935, most Christians were eager to serve their country. Likewise in 1938 when “all pastors on active duty were required to take an oath of allegiance to the Fuhrer. . . . Bonhoeffer was ashamed . . . [that] by and large,” they did.<sup>6</sup> He laments in *Discipleship*:

We Lutherans have gathered like eagles round the carcase of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the

life of following Christ. . . . The result was that a nation became Christian . . . but at the cost of true discipleship.<sup>7</sup>

By 1939 a confident Adolf Hitler would boast that “With a tenth of our budget for religion, we would thus have a Church devoted to the State and of unshakeable loyalty.”<sup>8</sup> With God and country virtually indistinguishable, the church was not prepared to recognize, much less refuse, the evil of the Third Reich. Instead, an undisciplined “Christian nation” loyally participated in the Holocaust that was Adolf Hitler.

### God and Caesar

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” — Mark 12:17

One is either a good German or a good Christian. It is impossible to be both at the same time. — Adolph Hitler<sup>9</sup>

In this statement, we hear a different Hitler — one who shows the shallowness of any Christ-Caesar coalition. The biblical relationship between “God” and “country” is often characterized by tension and competing allegiances.

Abraham, for instance, begins his journey with God’s call to “get out of your country,” while Israel is taken from Egypt so that she may serve God rather than Pharaoh. Israel is “a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations” (Numbers 23:9; Genesis 12:1; Exodus 8:1). But she is not apolitical — only a new sort of politics: a holy nation (Exodus 19:6), visible yet distinct from the nations around her (Leviticus 18:1-4; Deuteronomy 4:6), and YHWH is her king (Psalm 47). When Israel demands, “Give us a king . . . like all the nations,” she betrays her discipleship and her God (1 Samuel 8:5-7). Ironically, in captivity, in a strange land, she learns how to be faithful. While Israel seeks the well-being of her host nations, she does not confuse these places with home (Jeremiah 29:7). Israel belongs to God first — wherever she is — and loyalty to Him requires a discipleship that does not fear even a fiery furnace. It is exodus and exile — leaving or living in someone else’s country — that defines Israel’s story.

This paradigm continues and enlarges in the New Testament. Like Abraham and Israel, disci-

**The biblical relationship between “God” and “country” is often characterized by tension and competing allegiances.**





ples of Jesus are redeemed “out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). They are “strangers and pilgrims” in the world (1 Peter 2:9-11, KJV) and citizens of a new society inaugurated by the Christ they call king. The politics of His kingdom orders their lives and defines their allegiance (Matthew 4–7). These disciples are called the church, and they serve the world as witness and foretaste to this present, and future, reality.

Dispersed throughout the world, the church is a holy nation that transcends all other national boundaries, interests, or claims. Not conformed to the world, she walks that fine line of being in it but not of it (John 17:11-13). She carefully discerns what belongs to God and to Caesar, while acknowledging that they are neither friends nor equals. While the church honors rulers (1 Peter 2:13-15), she realizes that should their demands run contrary to the gospel of peace, she can only respond, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

The early church reflected this biblical model to a remarkable extent. Discipleship had

political implications for these saints. Confessing “Jesus is Lord” meant that the expectations of the empire had to be critically examined against the life of Christ. Consequently, Christians withheld from Caesar exactly what they offered Hitler: oaths of allegiance and military service (Matthew 5:33-48). At the risk of persecution, these displayed the costly grace of discipleship by not participating in battle.

### Divided loyalty

“Shall I crucify your king?  
. . . We have no king but Caesar!” — John 19:15


. . . in matters of human allegiance, loyalty and priorities, Christianity is a nearly complete, unabashed failure.  
— Michael L. Budde<sup>10</sup>

All this changed dramatically in the fourth century. Author Roland Bainton remarks in *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* that the pacifist period in church history ended with the rise of Constantine. Significantly, Constantine’s questionable conversion to Christianity coincided with his military victory at Milvian Bridge. This decisive battle was won after he allegedly had a

vision that he would conquer by the sign of the cross. The Edict of Milan followed a year later, and the process of establishing Christianity as the official religion of the empire was underway. That year he issued a directive to the prefect of Carthage granting church clergy exemption from imperial service. Shrewdly, Caesar got more than he gave in ceding to a few what all had previously possessed. The expectation was that in exchange for status in the empire, the church would relax her standards and serve Caesar in a capacity that she had heretofore refused in the name of Christ.

Christianity revised its position and accommodated Constantine with alarming speed. Mennonite historian Guy Franklin Hershberger has summarized the process. As early as 314, only a year after the Edict of Milan, the Council of Arles threatened with excommunication those Christians who refused military service. By about 350 Athanasius could write, “Murder is not permitted, but to kill one’s adversary in war is both lawful and praiseworthy.”<sup>11</sup>

A little later still, Ambrose would laud the warrior defending the homeland as “full of righteousness,” and Augustine would provide a systematic defense for the “just war” even as he endorsed military suppression of heretics. This remarkable reversal was complete in 416 when all soldiers were required to be Christian. “And so,” Hershberger concludes, “the nonresistant Christian brotherhood founded by the suffering Christ, after three and one-half centuries was transformed into a militant imperial state church.”<sup>12</sup>



**C**onfessing “Jesus is Lord” meant that the expectations of the empire had to be critically examined against the life of Christ.

Under Constantine, the biblical tensions between God and country are collapsed, church and state are fused, and discipleship succumbs to nationalism. Author Rodney Clapp notes that the question for the church has shifted from “How can we survive and remain faithful Christians under Caesar?” to “How can we adjust the church’s expectations so that Caesar can consider himself a faithful Christian?”<sup>13</sup>

From Constantine to Charlemagne, from the Crusades to Cortez, Christians would raise the cross with the sword, making a warrior of the Prince of Peace. War is now a virtue because God is on “our” side; the enemy of the State is the enemy of God.

The Christian compromise with Constantine reached a gruesome climax in the twentieth century when, for national interests, Christians killed Christians in the tens of millions. In World Wars I and II the “Christian West” turned against itself. In Rwanda, Yugoslavia, and Northern Ireland, Christians committed genocide, ethnic cleansing, and terrorism against their own brothers and sisters in Christ.

All too often, national and ethnic loyalties regularly triumph over the discipleship of Jesus. The sad truth is that when nationalism calls Christians to subordinate the commands of the gospel to the interests of the State, we too seldom refuse.

### God with us?

“God so loved the world . . . .” — John 3:16

To reject nationalism, we must begin by recognizing

**The sad truth is that when nationalism calls Christians to subordinate the commands of the gospel to the interests of the State, we too seldom refuse.**

that Christ lived and died for all persons. — Dale W. Brown<sup>14</sup>

Discipleship means taking Jesus seriously. The more dedicated we are to this, the less likely we are to confuse faith with flag or Christ with Caesar. Disciples must be wary of “God and country” when it distorts the universal character of the church, when it tempts us into thinking that God is for “us” and against “them,” when it reduces God’s purposes to our self-interests, when it insists on rebuilding the very walls and borders that the Cross has torn down (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-22).

The truth that Dietrich Bonhoeffer so boldly proclaimed, the truth that his church could not hear, is that the “god” so often invoked to legitimize the ambitions of “country” is rarely consistent with the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Adolf Hitler’s elite soldiers fought with the slogan “God with us” inscribed on their belt buckles. This god of nationalism was not the God who was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, but something else entirely. A disciple is simply one who can tell the difference, one

for whom costly grace means sometimes saying no to Caesar.



**Jason Overman** lives and ministers in Jasper AR, with his wife, Stephanie, and their two children, Tabitha and Isaac.



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2. *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 45
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5. Mark Thiessen Nation, “Discipleship in a World Full of Nazis,” *The Wisdom of the Cross*, pp. 260, 275
6. *Ibid.*, p. 266
7. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, p. 53
8. “The Most Famous Christian of the 20th Century?” by Robert Flynn, online essay ([www.somareview.com/mostfamouschristian.cfm](http://www.somareview.com/mostfamouschristian.cfm))
9. Lee C. Camp, *Mere Discipleship*, p. 137
10. Michael L. Budde, “Pledging Allegiance,” *The Church as Counterculture*, p. 214
11. Guy Franklin Hershberger, *Nonresistance*, pp. 70-71
12. *Ibid.*, p. 71
13. Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, p. 26
14. Dale W. Brown, *Biblical Pacifism*, p. 129

# Questions & Answers

**Q Show me that God loves the world. Considering the wars, disasters, and environmental hazards that destroy lives, can we really say He loves us?**

**A** At its core, your question goes like this: “If God is loving and good all the time, then why so much unlovely and bad stuff in His creation?” Perhaps more than any other issue, this has plagued thinkers and seekers for thousands of years.

People who reject Christian faith often follow this line of reasoning: Either God is not loving, or He is not powerful, or both. If He truly loves the world, then He must not have the power to change it. If He has the power, then He must not care enough to act.

Think about this. It is not just the magnitude of evil that prompts this question, for any evil could cause us to ask why — especially if it happened to us. We may think that since God is flawless, His creation, too, should be minus the flaws of pain and suffering. But a perfect Creator implies a perfect creation only if no part of it was empowered with freedom to act independently of Him. In this case, God created angels and humans with the power of free will. And therein the mystery of evil began.

Bible students explain evil in God’s world by reference to the “fall of man.” From the first sin on that fateful day in a perfect garden, the entire creation has been damaged and out-of-joint (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12-21; 8:19-23). God could have prevented this, to be sure, but He chose rather to make humans free to decide their own way. Now predisposed by sin, we are still at liberty to decide and act, but not free to choose the results of our actions. Sinful choices bring bad consequences — much of the world’s pain and suffering — in their wake.

Could God have made the world with freedom for us to choose good or evil, and still prevented

the natural results of our wrong choices? I doubt it, since the options in this question are mutually exclusive.

Without denying sin and suffering in our world, Christians also know that much beauty and good exist here as well. How do skeptics explain that? If pain and sorrow in the world testify against God’s love, doesn’t the reality of truth, virtue, purity, and justice give positive witness to Him? It is inconsistent to say that evil and injustice reflect directly on God, while goodness derives only from man.

How do we know God loves the world? We know it from what He has naturally revealed to all: the majesty and beauty of the created order (Psa. 19:1-6); the witness of rain and fruitful seasons (Acts 14:17); and the love reflected in the faces, words, and actions of those He made in His image. (It is true that sin has marred these and our ability to recognize them, to some degree.)

Further, we know God’s love in its finest form through the gift of His only begotten Son. Whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Those who receive this special revelation of Jesus Christ realize God’s love the most: It is poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

Yes, we can say God loves the world, because the Bible says as much. Saying it, however, doesn’t mean everyone gets it. When we mix the Bible’s report with faith, then God’s love becomes real to us.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

*Note: Readers are invited to write their own answers to this classic question: In view of all the bad stuff going on in it, how do we know God loves the world? Send your answer of 300 words or less to the editor for possible publication. Answers may be edited for length and clarity.*





# Whatever Happened to Personal Responsibility?

Christians who rely on the country miss greater provisions. **by Kenneth Ryland**

**A** disturbing trend among Christians is noticeable during this “silly season” of political elections: to seek what others want by letting the government take care of them. More Christians are looking for politicians to put food on their tables, bail them out of bad loans, provide them with health care and child care, guarantee their jobs and educations, and cushion their lives so that they can never fail or even feel uncomfortable.

My question to these Christians is “Who is your provider: Caesar or God?”

## **‘Compassionate’ government**

We hear a lot about compassion in government these days.

The political version of compassion amounts to taking someone else’s money and providing ourselves with some service for it. Taking money from all of us and spreading it around to various recipients makes them feel as if they are getting something for free. It also wins votes for politicians. If we had to take our withholding tax out of each paycheck and mail it in to the government, we would all have a different attitude about the services we demand from government.

As it is, we never see the money, so we don’t think of it as our money. In fact, however, the government has confiscated a part of our paycheck to give it to someone else. Often that

money goes to people who we know are lazy and are simply looking for someone else to provide them a living. Governmental compassion (an oxymoron) then becomes “your money for my needs.”

I have known Christians who are content to let others supply their needs rather than get a job. What would happen if we imposed the command given by the apostle Paul: “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10)?

## **Lost dignity**

In the past, U.S. compassion was measured by the kind, generous actions of individuals and churches. Christians believed

they had a personal responsibility for the welfare of others, believers or not. People took care of people, and churches took care of larger problems. There was no government aid, no taxpayer-funded welfare programs. People were more self-reliant. They valued independence and didn't expect others to rescue them whenever they had a problem. They would make do with what they had if possible and only impose their burdens on others when they had no other alternative.

Then politicians realized that they could ensure their election by taxing one and giving the money to another. They convinced the taxed person that the world would collapse without some new tax. The recipient of the politicians' largesse was convinced that the other person's money should be taken from him in order to make the recipient more comfortable. But this is not really compassion.

I am not suggesting that the elderly and disabled who receive government assistance should not have those checks. Most senior adults have spent their entire working lives paying into the government's Social Security system, and it is only right that they should receive something back. My focus is on those Christians

who are looking to politicians to "fix" their problem-filled lives.

### Poor among us

A friend of mine (debt counselor) says many Christians are up to their eyeballs in debt — not because of personal disaster but because if they see something they want, they acquire it as soon as possible *by whatever means possible*. They have no faith that God might provide what they need. After all, God might say, "No" or "You'll have to wait for it."

These people don't save for the future. They refuse to look beyond their immediate wants. Evidently they have never read the proverb:

Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest (Proverbs 6:6-8).

Such people got themselves into the mess and need to work themselves out of it. I am more inclined to give my money and time to those who, through no fault of their own, are unable to meet their basic needs.

There are two kinds of poor among us. Some are poor, not because they don't make enough money but because they are

overcome by their own impatience and greed. Others are poor because they can't make enough money to cover their needs. Jesus and the apostles told us repeatedly to remember the poor. I believe that these latter poor are the ones that deserve our compassion.

### Biblical principles

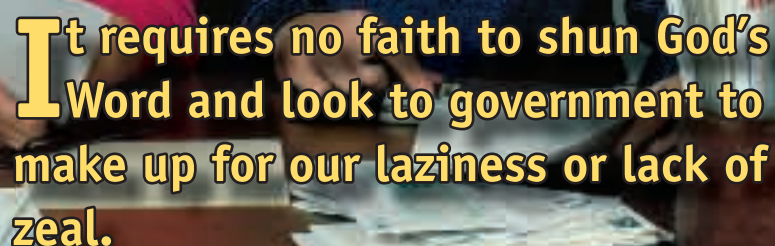
Many Christians have become lax about following the financial and social principles in the Bible. They have stopped studying the Bible to improve their Christian walk or draw close to God. Rather than waiting on God to give instruction or an "impulse" for this or that, they follow the impulses from their emotions. The result has been wrecked lives, broken families, and despair.

The useful principles in the Bible will lead to peace and happiness, but they require discipline. It requires no faith to shun God's Word and look to government to make up for our laziness or lack of zeal. It does demand faith to follow God's requirements for a rich and wholesome life. As Joshua told the Israelites, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15).

If you have been lax, renew your commitment to follow the precepts of God. Begin with Proverbs, a book full of practical wisdom. God is eager to bless. If you are faithful to Him, He will add increase to your life and never shortchange you. ■■

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**Kenneth Ryland** of Wichita, KS, serves the Bible Sabbath Association ([www.biblesabbath.org](http://www.biblesabbath.org)) as editor of its magazine, *The Sabbath Sentinel*.



**I**t requires no faith to shun God's Word and look to government to make up for our laziness or lack of zeal.



# Choose Well

by Allan Burlison

The character of citizens in the United States from their independence (1776) until today has changed significantly — from one influenced by strong Christian values to one affected by mostly secular values.

We have the continually changing role of religion and the Bible in public life to blame for this: from the birth of the nation (when most of the founding fathers acted in the name of God) into a troubled adolescence (when Abraham Lincoln led through a terrible war with a profound sense of the divine will being accomplished) down to the present time (when George W. Bush attempts to de-secularize government through his religious terminology, support of faith-based initiatives, and foreign policy that divides the world into good and evil).

George Washington and Franklin Roosevelt confided in God. Lincoln assured us that the will of God prevails. We've seen a sharp decline in such ideals of faith in America. Consider the decay of the family. There have been more illegitimate births during the last decade. Homosexuality, same-sex marriages, abortion, and many single-parent homes have brought us to a time when, unlike the past two centuries, it is no longer a great strength in political life to be a Christian. To some, it would be a great miscarriage of justice to allow one's Christian faith to influence a political decision.

Can today's Christians reverse



## American Forum

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Four observers of the American political and religious scene offer their views.

this tide? Can the church help in this process? The answer to both questions is a resounding yes! But to do so, we must make the right choices.

I strongly believe that America's greatness has been because of its two-party system. We should be politically active. At the least, we should vote in small and major elections. We

should study the issues, attend meetings, ask questions, and make sound choices, including political party affiliations. If the party you have chosen supports positions clearly contrary to the principles and laws of Scripture, you may want to reconsider.

**Allan Burlison** lives in Oklahoma City, OK.





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## Does Truth Matter?

by Ray L. Straub

Those of us who sat through lengthy doctrinal sermons remember the persistent emphasis on the importance of truth. When quoted, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” was confirmed by a resounding “Amen” from listeners. “Old paths” mentioned by Jeremiah were considered to be the Church’s historic doctrines, also identified as the “faith once delivered to the saints.” A favorite evangelist, keen on doctrines, often quoted Proverbs 23:23: “Buy the truth, and sell it not. . . .” Years later I was introduced to the rest of this proverb: “also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding” (KJV).

Should concern about truth include political talk? Might James’ warning about the untamed tongue apply to politics as well (chapter 3)?

As Christians, we do well to safeguard the value of wisdom, instruction, and understanding even when engaged in political discussion. Our commitments to political parties on nearly every

issue — wars, economy, immigration, nationalism, or the role of Christianity in politics — are based on emotions that dictate whom we believe or dismiss forthrightly. Ironically many find it easier to criticize their church, a theoretical bastion of truth, than to question assertions identified with their political party.

Our country is in a serious quandary. Our next president will emerge from the U.S. Senate, where the use of hyperbole to manipulate is more important than safeguarding truth. Senators are trained verbal warriors. No candidate in the race has meaningful executive experience outside politics. Sorting out misleading political spin from the truth is challenging.

Laws protect us from false marketing. Not all products live up to their claims, but they cannot be overtly deceptive. However, these laws do not apply to political advertising, a form of marketing.

It is wise to pay attention to political dialog, to listen critically. It is difficult to find news sources that report objectively. While talk radio is heavily conservative, a majority of the news media, TV talk shows, movies, and magazines reflect liberal ideology. When we share views, we should quote our sources as often as possible so that others can evaluate their authenticity. Sources matter. Few of them are without an agenda, a strongly slanted point of view.

Does God hold us accountable for what we say, except when discussing politics? Perhaps it is wise to reaffirm that He deserves our allegiance, disciplined tongue, and good behavior no matter what we’re discussing.

These should hardly be sacrificed — even for political advantage!

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Ray L. Straub lives in West Linn, OR.



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## What You Need to Know About Voting

by Israel Steinmetz

When I turned twenty-one, I wasn’t sure I would ever vote. I was disillusioned with the system, felt my vote was insignificant, and believed that voting would always be choosing the lesser of evils.

Recently I’ve come to see voting in a different light — as a privilege. Millions of people have been under governments that did not let their citizens vote. This right should ever be cherished. Along with it comes responsibility: If we can impact our friends, family, neighbors, and fellow citizens through the political process, then we must do so in the most God-honoring way possible.

The call to be separate from the world refers not to isolation from people or man-made organizations but to separation

from sinful activity. Christ and His apostles consistently encouraged believers to be responsible, godly citizens. Numerous believers were employed by the government (Luke 19:1-9; Acts 10; 16:31-34; Philippians 4:22). All believers were told to pay taxes (Mark 12:13-17), honor and pray for their rulers (1 Peter 2:13-17), and be subject to their governing officials (Romans 13:1ff; Titus 3:1). Christ calls believers to be salt and light in their world and to not hide their light (Matthew 5:13-16). The voting process gives an excellent opportunity for Christians to honor these commands.

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**Israel Steinmetz** lives in Kansas City, MO.



## Keeping the Message Clean

by **Phil Russell**

There is a valuable lesson in the story of Jeremiah Wright and Trinity United Church of Christ: Jesus is the message of the church, and Jesus is what Christians must preach. Wright, you may recall, made controversial statements that caused problems for the Obama campaign. Wright is evidence that preaching anything other than Jesus on Saturday or Sunday morning leads Christians down a poorly paved road.

Jesus and politics don't mix well in the message of the

gospel, and making Jesus share space with politics in the pulpit is inappropriate. There's a reason Jesus came to this earth as a teacher and spiritual leader, and not a political crusader. Christians, as individual citizens, *should* play an active part in their political world; it is part of influencing society for good and trying to maintain a moral balance. The church pulpit, however, is for Jesus and nothing else. Political discussion may wait until the service is over.

Keeping the church's message of Jesus free of politics helps keep the gospel clean. Jesus'

message is marked by unity, love, and peace. Heated political rhetoric in the pulpit tends to produce disunity, sometimes hatred, and anger.

Christians, their spiritual leaders, and their church organizations have one message for the world, and that message is Jesus and all He represents. The pulpit is reserved for Him. Anything else, as recent events prove, perverts the message of the gospel. ■■

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**Phil Russell** lives in Arvada, CO.

## Political Action in the Church: Is It Legal?

Many are unclear about IRS restrictions on political activity by tax-exempt organizations. A final list of do's and don'ts is impossible to give, but here are general guidelines.

**Yes**, this is OK for any church or pastor:

- Sermons on social issues; encourage civic involvement
- Voter registration that doesn't promote one candidate or party
- Educational materials that don't promote one candidate or party
- Forums where each qualified candidate is invited to speak
- Candidate surveys or voting records over a wide range of issues
- Biblical instruction pertaining to moral and cultural issues
- Petition drives supporting or opposing legislation\*

**No**, this is not OK for a church with non-profit status:

- Endorsement of, or opposition to, specific candidates
- Use of church funds or services for political action committees
- Distribution of materials that favor one candidate or party

\*A church or other 501(c)(3) organization may promote or oppose general legislation, provided such activity is an insubstantial part of its overall work. It may promote or oppose legislation that directly affects its organization and operation (for example, an attempt to repeal tax-exempt status of churches) without limitation.

*Condensed from [www.ivotevalues.org](http://www.ivotevalues.org). We encourage readers to visit this site.*

# Silent in the Crowd

by Ron Saladin

Picture this: Jesus, brought before a mob; Pilate wanting to release Him, and probably would but for the cry of the crowd: "Let Him be crucified!" (Luke 23:22, 23).

Had you been in that crowd that day, what would you have done? Spoken for His innocence? Remained silent? Or joined the voices that prevailed for crucifixion?

People's voices still carry great influence today, a fact that many Americans take too lightly. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that many eligible to vote simply choose not to. Most elections are decided by less than half of the voting-age citizenry.

When it comes to voting, many self-identifying Christians choose to remain silent. The reasons are legion: No candidate is worthy; Christians should not sully their hands with the contemptible politics of this age; I am too busy or uncomfortable taking a stand; it would go against prophecy to oppose the evil that must reach its climax before Jesus' return (but God's eternal purposes are never thwarted by our decision to do right); and so forth.

While believers are silent, the crowd calls for more freedom to dissect babies, promote perversion, and remove the last vestiges of God from public life. Their silence enables other voices in the clamorous crowd to prevail.

Human governments exist under the authority and permission of God (Daniel 4:25; Romans 13:1). Our government offers a voice for us to choose the leaders whose decisions direct the nation into either favor or wrath with God.

Recently, leaders chosen by the people have enacted laws permitting infanticide and presenting pornography and perversion as freedoms of speech. They have removed moral laws from schools because children might be influenced, and misinterpreted the intent of our nation's founders to neutralize godly influence on culture. Christianity is fine as long as Christians remain silent in the crowd. Forget God. Enter a twisted interpretation of separation of church and state.

For God's highest purposes to be worked below, good men and women are needed to do what is just and right. Take a stand for

the innocent and helpless and against the removal of Christian values evidenced in our historical roots. Christians should vote, not to usher in the kingdom of God via political process but to resist evil and immorality in the land God has given us.

Consider carefully the issues, records, and claims of candidates. Make the best choice you can as we enter a time of potential upheaval. If all who claim Christianity would vote for candidates and issues that best reflect Christian values, more candidates would advocate those values. To claim the name of Christ and not actively embrace His principles is hypocritical.

God did not put us in the crowd that day calling for Jesus to be crucified. If He had, we all know what we should have done, if only we had the courage. God's plan of salvation would have gone forward even as we did our part to stand for truth.

But God has given you and me a voice in selecting this nation's leaders and often its policies. How can a Christian do nothing to resist political movements that seek to change the definition of marriage, remove godly principles from practice, and permit abortion? How can a thoughtful follower of Jesus Christ not register a vote for leadership that best reflects His values? How can a real Christian be guiltless when he knows the truth but remains silent in the crowd? ■■■

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**Ron Saladin** is employed by AT&T. He and his wife, Cynthia, host the Church of God Faith Fellowship in Cedar Hill, MO.



At some time in life, most people ask themselves where they fit in this world. For Christians, the questions are “What is my mission?” and “How can I best further the kingdom of God?”

All of us, regardless of vocation, have been given certain talents, with service to perform. Should it be in politics? Perhaps — if we believe God is leading us toward it and if we uphold Him in the effort.

Most of us have a relatively small sphere of influence on earth. What we do to affect these temporal kingdoms may be of little eternal consequence. Or it may result in a lasting, national revival, as in the case of Queen Esther.

Unknown to her at first, Esther had been strategically placed in her position by God to deliver her people from annihilation (Esther 4:13, 14). We Christians likewise must be open to what God would have us do in accordance with His Word. We should have the same attitude as Esther and as Isaiah when he said to God, “Here am I! Send me” (Isaiah 6:8).

Consider the recent film *Amazing Grace*, which depicts William Wilberforce fighting the English slave trade. Though an influential politician, Wilberforce struggled and thought of leaving his position for a life dedicated to furthering the gospel.

Others may face the same quandary, thinking that their earthly and heavenly missions are mutually exclusive. But just as the body of Christ is “joined and knit together by what every joint supplies” (Ephesians 4:16), so our life’s work need not compete with the Lord’s work. They work

# The Political Christian

by John Butrick

together, exactly as Wilberforce’s compatriots implored of him. God used him in the British government, just as God used others to convince him to remain steadfast in that position regardless of derailments along the way. In the end, Wilberforce’s efforts led to abolition of the slave trade throughout the empire.

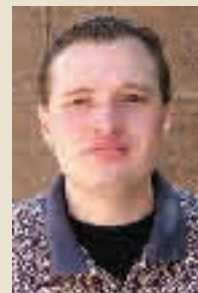
It is vital that Christians remain engaged in the political process. One need only look to the attack on the family — the altered definition of marriage, unwanted pregnancies that end in abortions — to confirm what we already know: Our enemy, the Devil, is out to destroy us. He is a subtle foe who will not engage in a frontal assault against our national moral fabric or our individual lives. Rather, he attacks with deception and sleight of hand, from the side. How else could the family and life itself have become such controversial topics?

The same tactic meant for evil by Satan can be used against him for good through those who love truth. Consider President Ronald Reagan and his strategy

in the 1980s against *Roe v. Wade* that legalized abortions in this country. He chipped away at *Roe* little by little, rather than by a full frontal assault. Likewise, Wilberforce’s victory came slowly, only after years of effort and apparent failures.

Politics offers a Christian the opportunity to significantly affect a great number of people. One person can make a difference. We each have purpose and mission in this world, though we are not of it. And if that mission includes a life of fighting for policies more in harmony with our Christian faith, then so be it. Our response can make all the difference: “Here am I! Send me.” ■

**John Butrick**, grandson of Elder Hugh and Lucille Butrick, is a political strategist living in Albuquerque, NM.



# Division and Reunion:

The middle third of the century past – within the memory of some – was not the brightest time for the Church in North America. Still, by God’s grace, it had points of light. We divide this period into two sections.

## **Painful separation ('33 - '49)**

Several years of disagreement among the Church’s leadership came to head at a 1933 campmeeting in Stanberry, Missouri. (For more background on the conflict, read “CoG7 Journey” in the June BA, p. 16). The discord resulted in an alternate Church office and publishing house being established in Salem, West Virginia, and in the rupture of fellowship in local churches across the U.S., Canada, and beyond. For the next sixteen years, two magazines were produced, two sets of CoG7 leaders selected, two congregations operated in some areas, and two smaller organizations contended over Bible details and personal differences.

In *The Story of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*, Robert Coulter writes:

The division . . . caused the membership and leadership much grief. Many members and prospects were discouraged by the frequent attacks one church launched on the other. In some instances, ministers switched organizations, bewildering their membership. In other cases, the membership became

pawns in the struggle between ministers who were vying for their loyalty and support. . . . It is difficult to state affirmatively, but there is a strong indication the membership of the church decreased during this period (pp. 54-55).

Among the losses of that time were those who separated from the Church to form “sacred names” assemblies – groups using Hebrew names and titles for God and Christ in place of the common terminology.

Around 1930 Herbert W. Armstrong, an advertiser by trade, began to preach for the Church and was granted a ministerial license by its Oregon state conference. In the schism of '33, Armstrong gravitated toward the Salem church. He was named one of its seventy elders and received its ministerial credentials. These were revoked in 1937 when he insisted on promoting Hebrew festival observance and Anglo-Israelism, teachings the Church never embraced. Mr. Armstrong later moved his work to Pasadena, California, where it became a prosperous and exclusive cult: the Worldwide Church of God.

In reporting the difficulties of the Church during the Salem-Stanberry split, we must not diminish the faithful efforts of those who gave their best service to their Master during the '30s and '40s. A fair number of today’s congregations trace their beginnings to that time. The National Women’s Associa-

tion began its work in 1939, and Spring Vale Academy opened near Owosso, Michigan in 1948 (see pp. 28-29). An impressive new church, classroom facility, and publishing plant were completed in Stanberry about the same time.

After a failed attempt to reunite the Church in 1942, the brethren made a concerted effort to repair the breach later that decade. Each conference appointed three members to a Unity Committee that first met in late 1947. Representing Salem were Elders E. A. Straub, K. H. Freeman, and W. W. McMicken, while Elders S. J. Kauer, L. I. Rodgers, and Charles Adams represented Stanberry. Elder A. E. Lidell, a moderate, chaired the committee.

The Unity Committee called a joint meeting of ministers for Fairview, Oklahoma (February 1948). There, details of the merger plan were explained, perfected, and unanimously endorsed by the sixty-one delegates. The Fairview meeting was followed by a joint summer campmeeting. One year later, in August 1949, the Salem and Stanberry conferences both convened in Stanberry for united worship services. In separate business sessions, both groups voted overwhelmingly to reunite, thus ending the painful separation that began sixteen years earlier.

# 1933 - 1963

## Sporadic progress ('50 - '63)

The merger of 1949 brought together most, but not all, of the Church's factions. A few ministers felt too much compromise had been made and soon began a "back to Salem" movement. On the other wing, some brethren, feeling the new conference imposed doctrinal and organizational concepts they could not support, began a loose association of members and congregations from Meridian, Idaho.

In the years following the reunion of Salem and Stanberry, hopes ran high but progress did not come easily. According to the merger agreement, Denver, Colorado, became home to the Church's general offices, first in the basement of the local church and later in a three-story mid-town residence converted to office space. By 1960 the Conference had invested in a thirty-three-acre site north of the city, and a new building to house the Church's central operations opened there in 1972.

Elders A. E. Lidell of Michigan, E. A. Straub of California, and K. H. Freeman of West Virginia served the General Conference as president during the first fourteen years of reunion. Under their leadership, the departments of the Conference developed new vision and energy, though often under-funded. A sampling of the Church's work in the '50s and beyond shows . . .

- Midwest Theological Seminary, later changed to Midwest

Bible College, began preparing ministers from its Stanberry campus (1951-1976). Burt Marrs served as the first director.

- Home Missions department dared to set a church growth goal and support it with ambitious programs: *Faith for Our Time*, a national radio broadcast (K. H. Freeman, speaker); Searchlight, a free Bible correspondence course; and EMGAM (Every Member Get A Member), an outreach plan.

- Publications department expanded its literature list and changed the youth magazine to *AIM*. National Women's Association first published *WAND* magazine (1954), and the *Bible Advocate* celebrated 100 years of publication (1963).

- Foreign Missions department sponsored Elder Charles Adams and his family on an extended missions trip to Africa, Australia, and other countries.

- The youth department became more active, including the Church's first summer camp in Oregon (1961), followed soon

by camps in Michigan, Missouri, and Oklahoma.

During the '50s and early '60s, a series of biennial campmeetings and Conference sessions were held in the Denver area. These drew an increasing attendance and served to further cement the Church's fellowship and ministry. The prevailing peace was interrupted for a time around 1958, when some brethren followed the lead of a Layman's Research Committee that raised concerns about the funding and priorities of the departmental work.

In 1963 the General Conference board opted for change by selecting thirty-three-year-old pastor-administrator Robert Coulter of West Virginia as its chairman and Conference president. Applying his preordination skills in construction and business, Elder Coulter served in the position for twenty-four years, during which much of his vision for the Church and its ministries was achieved. To that part of our story, we turn in the next issue.



General Conference Executive Board — 1950



# Finding a New Song

by Ron “Buzz” Overman

Until my mid-teens, my life consisted of poverty, welfare, foster homes, and housing projects. I grew up without a father and was a high school dropout. Then I learned to sing and play guitar and write songs, and pop music became my savior.

In the summer of 1967 at age 23, the band I was with — Don and the Goodtimes — performed weekly on television. We had a contract with Epic Records and went on our first national tour with Dick Clark’s Caravan of Stars. Twice that year, we had songs that charted on Billboard’s Hot 100 and an album that spent months in trade magazine hit parades — the first potentially “big money” we had seen. From the local dance scene in Seattle we were thrust into the national spotlight by becoming regulars on Dick Clark’s *Where the Action Is*, a TV series in the sixties. Our first record, “I Could Be So Good to You,” debuted at seventy-two with a bullet on the Billboard Hot 100.

By December 1967 all this came crashing down around me with the Vietnam War. Once more I found myself directionless and now divorced. I always thought it was rock ‘n’ roll that rescued me from a poor boy’s low self-esteem, but it was really Romans 8:28: “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

I was born toward the end of World War II, the big band era. Frank Sinatra, Glenn Miller, and Judy Garland had not heard the term *rock ‘n’ roll*. By the mid-fifties there were two new household words: *Elvis* and *rock ‘n’ roll*. When I was thirteen, a buddy’s parents took us to Spokane, Washington, to see Elvis. There, surrounded by ten thousand screaming fans, I knew what I wanted to be: a rock ‘n’ roll star. After the concert, I bought my first guitar for around \$30. Before long, I was singing and playing in a

small combo called The Gems.

At a sock hop in the ninth grade at Pioneer Junior High in Walla Walla, I first noticed a thirteen-year-old eighth grader named Vicki Patterson. Her father was George Patterson, the physical education and shop teacher. My friends cautioned me to stay away from her.

Vicki and I went together off and on throughout high school. I always felt that getting serious would hinder my ambition of stardom. Though Vicki was always near with every group I was in on my climb to the top, I was shocked when she told me she was pregnant. We weren’t Christians, and though we loved each other, marriage seemed to be a complication neither of us wanted then. We decided on abortion — before it was legal. Vicki’s older sister knew someone who could set it up.

At the last minute, Vicki refused to go through with the abortion, and we married. Five months later I told her I didn’t want to be married anymore, and left. Eight months pregnant, she went back to Walla Walla to have our baby. All the time we were separated and divorced, I never sent her any financial support and only saw our son, Jason, once.

In June 1968 I was drafted into the Army and went to boot camp. I can’t recall a lower time in my life. A blossoming music career gone; a wife and child gone. And now I faced possible death in Vietnam. For the first time, I felt truly alone. Then, I looked up.

I had always thought there was a God. My mother was a religious woman in her own way and read her Bible daily. In the Army my love affair with the Scriptures began. Just previous to my induction in June, Mom and I went to a Billy Graham crusade. When the invitation was given, I went forward. I was way up in the back row of a huge arena, and I walked all the way down with tears streaming. My hair was past my shoulders. People in the aisles said, “God bless you, son.”



Nikhil Gangavane—Dreamstime.com

During ten weeks at boot camp, I studied the Bible at every chance and began to see that war wasn't God's will. I had become more than willing to fight for God and country, but was it right? I started writing my mother, a member of a peculiar church that kept Saturday instead of Sunday, asking questions on this and other subjects. Upon reading my letters, she realized how much conviction I was under and contacted her minister in Tacoma.

One Sunday morning while on KP, I was peeling potatoes when someone from company headquarters summoned me to the visitors center. He said my father was there to see me. I thought, *My father?* My mother and father divorced when I was a child, and I had only seen him once since.

I changed into my dress uniform and went as ordered. The visitors center was large, and hundreds of parents were there to see their sons. Only immediate family members were allowed to visit during basic training. I walked around looking for someone like my father until I saw a man sitting at a table, alone. He waved and said, "Ron?" The man looked in his late thirties and wore a blue suit with his hat sitting on the table next to a Bible.

I walked up to him. "Dad?"

He smiled. "The master sergeant thought I was your father, and I didn't tell him differently." He then introduced himself as Elder Wesley Walker and reported how my mother had spoken with him. We talked for two to three hours, and he answered all my Bible questions. I was surprised with his church's stand on what he called carnal warfare. He was the first to show me a bold new way of looking at war.

I knew in my heart that the Church's stand was right. Most of his verses were in the New Testament, but Isaiah 34:2 was the clincher for me: "For the indignation of the LORD is against all nations, and His fury against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them,

He has given them over to the slaughter."

In my mind, there will be war until Christ comes; it's the way of the world. But we are not of this world, only in it. With Brother Walker's help, I became a conscientious objector. After eleven months of pleading my case, I was found sincere and was released with full honors and excellent conduct.

While I awaited the Army's decision on my CO status, I had a change of heart toward my ex-wife, Vicki, and our son. I started writing her and sent money for the first time in three years. She came to visit me at Fort Lewis and saw a changed man.

Four months after my release, we remarried. Two years later we had our second child, Sarah. Vicki was baptized and became my sister in Christ as well as my wife. We went on to have a third child, Beth. The child we were going to abort, Jason, is now our pastor in Jasper, Arkansas, and writes for the *Bible Advocate*. Sarah is an active Church of God member in Entwistle, Alberta, Canada, and Beth attends the Jasper church with us. Vicki and I have been married thirty-nine years (the second time).

I am still in music today, but God has put a new song in my heart. Vicki, our kids, and our three grandchildren are my biggest fans!



Ron Overman today and in 1967 (top left).



Don and the Goodtimes





# Foreign Forum

As a boy, I delighted in mischievously singing “God Bless America” as “God Bless Australia” instead. For me, it was a savored patriotic moment tempered by the ongoing friendly rivalry between English-speaking brothers of the U.S. and Australia — nothing more.

The perspective from “the land down under” is that America is a jigsaw of enigmas. My father often reminisced of his boyhood experiences during World War II when the U.S. troops helped liberate Europe. What followed was an international aid and rebuilding program never equaled.

The closest I’ve been to the Statue of Liberty was in the glossy pages of a magazine. The sheer size of this bronze statue and what she represented for millions of migrants to “the land of the free” was enough to foment any boy’s imagination.

America seemed so big and rich, yet fair and friendly. I couldn’t understand why such a freedom-loving country would allow its citizens to bear arms. We heard more about shootings and muggings in Los Angeles than about starving people in India.

I have wondered about the United States’ inability, in spite of its greatness, to meet the needs of so many of its homeless after Hurricane Katrina. Then there’s the United States’ ailing international profile — unable to extri-

cate itself from the bloodbath in Iraq.

How can we understand that three percent of the world’s population could inherit forty percent of its wealth? Surely there was a Divine connection, an inheritance somehow related to the words featured on U.S. currency: “In God We Trust.”

In this thread an answer may exist. The same God on American coins told Abraham millennia ago that through his faith, all other nations would be blessed. In a physical sense, that is true today. But with greatness, wealth, and military might comes moral responsibility and an ongoing faith in the ageless, God-given values at the heart of national and family life.

Last year I had the privilege of visiting the U.S. With thousands of fellow believers, I sang a gutsy “God Bless America” — and didn’t even try to substitute “Australia.”

Whatever parochial differences I perceived as a boy are now superseded by a growing awareness that with wealth and prominence come responsibility and leadership — something both Australia and the U.S. are actively learning.

— John Klassek  
Australia

As an impressionable young Canadian, I once read *The Ugly American*, by William J.

Lederer. I thought what he described must be the way it was: Americans bungling into the world like bulls in china shops and gaining notice more for their rudeness than for their brains. The sense of entitlement, the ignorance of other cultures, and the narrow-mindedness that some take abroad has aggravated much of the world.

Later I came to see that Americans are a charming and disarming lot, generally. Still, I speculate on how a country of such giving and friendly people can be perceived this way. The U.S. has given so very much to the world; people are blessed by your largesse. Yet as one dissatisfied customer can undo the good PR that stems from 20 satisfied ones, so one ugly American can ruin the reputations of many beautiful ones.

— Gordon Fiel  
Canada

The anti-Americanism spreading around the Middle East and parts of Europe has a life span. This world has been blessed by God through the agency of American dominance. The legacy of respect for the rule of law, liberty, human rights, etc. has been spearheaded by the American people. May God bless America and turn away the evils from all our hearts, not just Americans.

— Femi Temilola  
Nigeria



## Readers around the world share their thoughts about '08 America.

**A**ll I seem to hear about America is housing problems, food shortages, and a failing economy. Why? What could lead the greatest nation on earth to its knees? God has a way of grabbing our attention. Israel was taken captive, yet God restored wealth as she left Egypt. Maybe America is going through a spiritual Egypt, and this is a wake-up call — time for a nation to wholeheartedly return to God. After captivity comes freedom. At the end of the year, Americans will vote. A new leader waits in the wings: a new Moses may emerge to lead America through this wilderness, whether the journey be fifteen days or forty years!

— *Pauline Byers*  
*United Kingdom*

**R**egardless of who the President may be, Christian influence is not the apparent driving force in the U.S. political arena. The Christian label is used without evidence of personal commitment to Christ. This results in America being often resented for her wealth and what appears to be selfish motives.

Founded with freedoms, America now allows all religions and invites the non-religious. Has she forgotten her founding faith?

— *Samuel Holland*  
*Canada*

**A**merica is rich and powerful because her moral and ethi-

cal principles have been Judeo-Christian. Also, she accepted the persecuted Jews from Europe and Russia on a large scale and is a close ally of Israel.

The blessings of your nation's democracy, liberty, justice, human rights, peace, pursuit of happiness, and power or wealth (capability to help poorer nations) can be sustained only by adhering to the biblical and moral principles laid down through "the people of the Book." If political leaders veer from this focus to put their minds on the "black gold" of the Middle East, they will lose God's blessings. As long as America lives out the noble dictum "In God We Trust," the God of Israel will continue blessing her with power, wealth, influence, and moral leadership in the world.

— *Mike Dizon*  
*The Philippines*

**A**s Portuguese, I am interested in the American elections. Our newspapers, radios, and televisions show the fights between the candidates. Our only problem is that we cannot vote.

The main problem of the U.S. is not the result of its elections but the moral degradation of its society. America took the same journey Europe took many years ago. Our secular European politics annulled the Christian vestiges and excluded the signs of its Judeo-Christian roots. The U.S.

currently is rejecting its moral origin based in the Word of God. On top it placed the love of money and, more recently, relativism and secular society with its free and promoted sins. The result is a society that loses solidity and a country that slides in economic weakness and in effective leadership in the present world (Isaiah 24:4, 5).

Europe keeps its love-hate complex regarding the U.S. With a dose of political and moral cynicism, we reject a deep involvement in the troubles of planetary life and easily forget help received from the U.S. in the postwar period (Marshall Plan). At the same time, Europeans have the feeling that Washington's politics suffers the difficulty of finding consensus with its western partners, as a matter of balance in worldwide crises. Thus we live with the effects of European cynicism and American autism.

For Christians of any country, such should not astonish us. The Word of God cannot be opposed; biblical prophecies fulfill themselves in their time. No nation will fulfill the designs of God. That is why we expect the coming of our King Jesus Christ, who will rule the world in His millennium kingdom (Revelation 11:15). ■■

— *Paulo Coelho*  
*Portugal*

[.org](http://www.org)



# YOUTH REACH

## What's YOUR story?

Ever been looked down on, made fun of, kicked off, or de-graded because you wouldn't write about evolution, for example? Ever told not to pray or carry a Bible? Ever been refused a job because you wouldn't work on Sabbath or

(fill in the blank)? Maybe these things could have happened if you had convictions, but you chose the road of convenience instead — and escaped the consequences.

Share your story with us! E-mail Kurt Lang: [kurt.lang@cog7.org](mailto:kurt.lang@cog7.org).

## Conviction vs. Convenience

by Wayne Hrenyk

Do you know the greatest danger to young people in our church today? It's the struggle between conviction and convenience. Here's an example.

Say you're assigned a report that's worth 30 percent of your final grade. You can either work hard to receive a high mark, or you can do just enough to get by. Which will you choose?

Convenience tells you to do the minimum so you can watch TV and hang out with friends. But conviction says that with some extra effort, you'll get a good mark in that class — what colleges look for.

The question you must answer throughout life is this: "Will I settle for less than my best?" Many young people plan to fail; this almost guarantees that they will.

Here's another example. In your spiritual life, God has given you some convictions. Will you be true to them, or settle for what just anybody tells you? If you know stealing is wrong and someone gives you a stolen MP3 player, what will you do?

When life gets rough, conviction gets you through. Remember Goliath's challenge? "Send out your best man for me to fight!" How many of Saul's soldiers jumped at the chance to defend the army and the God of Israel? Not one. It was convenient for them to know about God, but that didn't produce someone to fight Goliath.

David, however, was a young man of conviction. He couldn't stand still as others did.

Conviction requires action. Convenience says, "I'll act if and when I want to." It requires only a feel-good mentality.

David's conviction caused him to act in the face of great odds. The odds didn't matter, really, because his belief in God was everything.

God wants you to believe with a heart of conviction, not convenience.



Convenience will not defeat Goliath, but conviction will! Conviction will change your life, your youth group, church, and community. Conviction can bring a nation back to life.

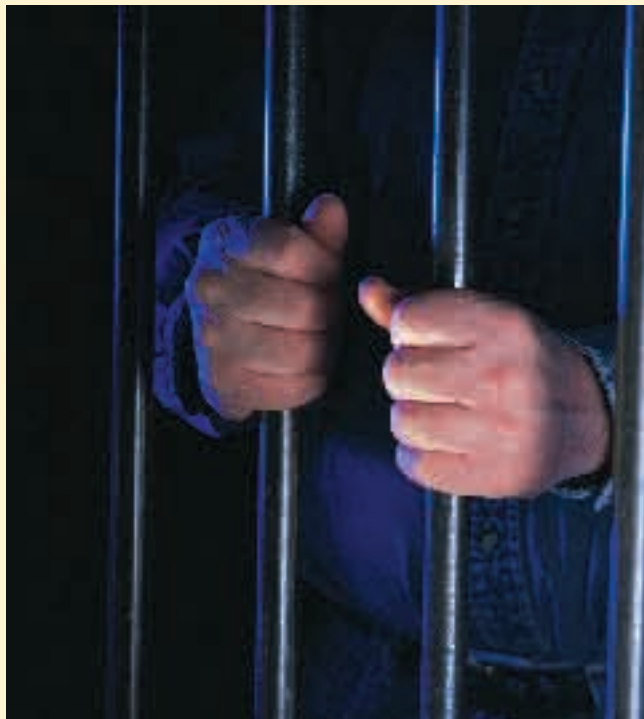
What does conviction mean to you? Spending time reading your Bible, praying — but not just a 15-second rehearsed speech that doesn't allow God to talk to your heart.

Anyone can claim to be part of an army or a church. But it takes someone special — you — to step out like David and allow Jesus to live through you. Conviction means acting the way Jesus wants you to!



### Think about it . . .

If you were to stand trial today in a court of law with the charge of being a follower of Christ, would there be enough evidence to convict you?



I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

— Jesus, in Revelation 3:15-17 (NIV)

Your Defense Attorney asks you to be hot; if you're not, you're in danger of being spit from His mouth.

## Youth Camps

Camp Crabtree, Raleigh, NC, June 29 - July 6;  
Sandy Jones (summer.youthcamp@yahoo.com)

Rio Grande, Edinburg, TX, July 31 – August 3;  
Daniel Flores (956-424-2778 or castorescon@yahoo.com)

Long Lake Outdoor Center; Middleville, MI,  
July 13-20; Rex Miller (kingmerex@aol.com)

SWORD Camp at Sis-Q Meadows, OR, July 16-20;  
Kim Duncan (541-923-0487 or kjduncan@firstam.com)

SIS-Q Meadows (senior youth), OR, July 20-27;  
hogren@msn.com or haffnerg@earthlink.net

Mt. Hope Campgrounds, Forbestown, CA,  
August 11-17; Jorge Perez (nazaritemex@hotmail.com)

## Make a difference!

In more than 40 countries Christians are now being persecuted for their faith. This ranges from being forbidden to talk about Jesus to making Bibles illegal to not even teaching your own family about the Lord. If they refuse to obey these restrictions, Christians face harassment, torture, even death. Read the stories at [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com).

Even in the United States, Christian values are under attack. You can't talk about creationism in science class. Many schools promote a day of silence to support the gay and lesbian agenda. Teachers may not share anything about Jesus, but it's OK to talk about Allah. Employees must participate in "diversity training" in tolerance of homosexual practices. (Read the stories at [www.onenewsnow.com](http://www.onenewsnow.com). The headlines may surprise you.)

What are you standing for today? Better yet, whom are you standing for? Those who stand for Jesus Christ will make a difference in this tiresome, decaying culture.

For more events and pictures, visit <http://nfyc.cog7.org>



# Mail Bag



## Cheers for 'Last Word'

Whaid Rose continues to amaze me with his radical thinking. His "Last Word" is a breath of fresh air, a thrilling adventure into spiritual freedom, and brings us closer to wonderful truths held by men of faith in ancient times.

"In the Face of Christ" [March '08, p. 31] was thought-provoking and helpful as we reexamine our place in the Christian world. "Embrace the Cross" [April-May '08, p. 31] fell into line with the direction I find my faith and belief heading. This church will grow more than ever as a faithful, evangelical force under such refreshing teaching. How thankful I am for the clear vision God has given to Brother Whaid Rose.

G. H.  
Tasmania, Australia

## Wonderful words

I enjoyed reading the [March] issue. English is my second language. Sometimes the words in articles are not commonly used (*pithy, tannin*), which is good because I increase my vocabulary. But at times a dictionary is necessary to understand what has been written. Also on page 23,

second paragraph: "God's plan . . . among all nations, races. . . ." I believe there is only one race: the human race.

G. R.  
e-mail

## More on April-May

I heard about some changes in CoG7, re-subscribed to BA, and was pleasantly surprised. Amazing are the things I read in the April-May issue: Jesus is preached from cover to cover. Keep up the good work!

C. T.  
Huntsville, AL

I noticed that the list of articles on the cover of the April-May BA don't jive with the articles within. It is a beautiful cover, by the way.

D. N.  
Fort Qu Appelle, Saskatchewan

*Editor's note: The three short "blurbs" on the cover are intended as descriptions of an article's content, not its title.*

## More missions

I would like to see more mission stories in the BA. I was disappointed that Pioneer Missionary Training did not get more applicants last year. I know young people who would like to go. We enjoy pictures in the BA and pray for those working there.

M. D. W.  
Eugene, OR

## Inspiration

The BA inspires me entirely, spiritually. I read it twice or thrice to understand properly. None can compare with this magazine. I share it with Church members and use it

to preach God's messages to an assembly where I attend.

S. B. (CoG7 pastor)  
Assam, Northeast India

## Donation

Thanks for sending the BA all these years. Forgive our irresponsibility in not reimbursing you. Enclosed is [a donation]; we will endeavor to send that much each year. I have particularly enjoyed the magazine the last few years.

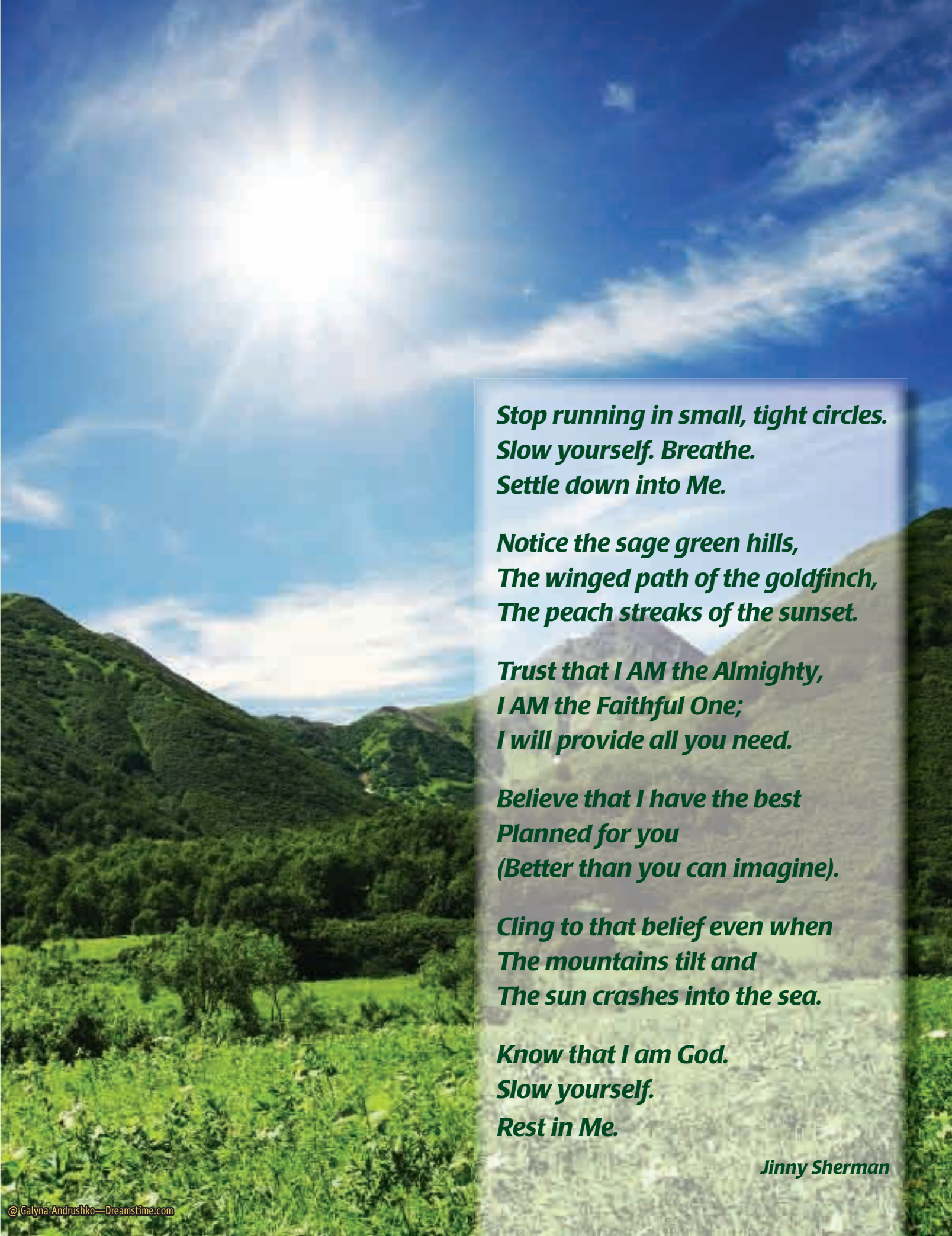
H. S.  
Nine-Mile Falls, WA

*Editor's note: Thanks for teaming up with our efforts. Response to our annual funding letter is appreciated, but not required to keep the magazine coming your way.*

## A reader's reflection

My good friend (brother-in-law) and I discussed Romans 2:13-16 and sought to know God's viewpoint of what represents full acceptance of Christ. Learning these texts almost 60 years ago, it seems to me this teaches that God accepts persons who act the best according to their conscience. We can rest assured that the love of God will be in full evidence at judgment. In Matthew 25:31ff we find people rather astonished because Jesus opens the doors of the kingdom to them. This suggests they were acting in full accord with a good conscience — the ear by which we hear the Holy Spirit. When God declares He has people in Babylon and warns them to come out, is it not reasonable to understand that our heavenly Father reaches out to all the world, everybody, everywhere?

L. P.  
Manassas, VA



***Stop running in small, tight circles.  
Slow yourself. Breathe.  
Settle down into Me.***

***Notice the sage green hills,  
The winged path of the goldfinch,  
The peach streaks of the sunset.***

***Trust that I AM the Almighty,  
I AM the Faithful One;  
I will provide all you need.***

***Believe that I have the best  
Planned for you  
(Better than you can imagine).***

***Cling to that belief even when  
The mountains tilt and  
The sun crashes into the sea.***

***Know that I am God.  
Slow yourself.  
Rest in Me.***

***Jinny Sherman***





General Conference  
Church of God (Seventh Day)

*GC Ministries*

### Did you know . . .

- that the Church of God (Seventh Day) around the world has grown nearly tenfold in 50 years? In the 1950s the Church existed in about a dozen countries, with less than 25,000 members. Today churches are in more than 30 countries, and membership exceeds 250,000.

- that your investment in the Church's missions work (Change for Your World, Cristo Viene, Missions Abroad) is probably your most effective soul-winning dollar?

- that the Nigerian church is larger than any other national CoG7?

## Change for Your World



Each year Missions Ministries asks members and friends of the Church for a special offering to support the International Ministerial Congress (IMC) of the Church of God (Seventh Day). The growth of the global Church in our generation is cause for much praise and joy among brethren in many countries. There is great need for funding to carry the gospel even further, by God's grace.

Readers in Canada and the United States especially are requested to save pocket change for a year and donate it to IMC missions work. The congress, organized into seven world zones, works through Church leaders and evangelists in more than 30 nations, with CoG7 literature going to nearly 100.

Working through your offerings, God will accomplish wonderful things to encourage your brethren around the world and grow His church. Please save your change and give generously so that we can reach into unreached places with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

— *Bill Hicks, Executive Director  
International Ministerial Congress*

IMC online: <http://cog7medmissions.org/blogengine.net/default.aspx>





*Partners in missions: April 26 was Missions Sabbath in Alfred, ND, with G. C. Missions Director Bill Hicks. In the top photo, Elder Hicks presents the Partners in Missions certificate of recognition to congregational leaders for support of the Nicaraguan street orphan project. Below, the Schlenker and Nitschke families hold a second certificate for contributions through Steer INC (cattle-raising that helps fund CoG7 missions around the world). Bill Hicks says the Alfred people are as active in the harvest of the kingdom as they are in the harvest fields of North Dakota.*

**Activities**

Oregon Senior Retreat at Sis-Q Meadows Camp near Cave Junction, August 22-27; contact Dale Lawson (503-769-6636) or Ken Lawson (541-923-6323)



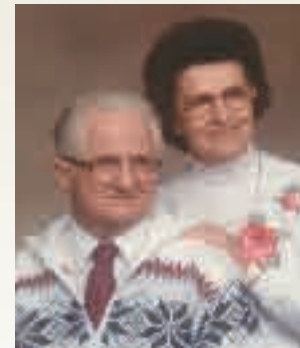
*Pastor Eduardo Villalba baptized three folks in cold Clear Creek in Golden, CO, on April 13. Brother Refugio Aranguti assisted in the service. All attend the Aurora, CO, church.*

Michigan Women’s Retreat at the Springs in Gladwin, MI, September 5-7; Esther Winchell (989-274-0104 or 989-607-2652)

**LITES Ministries** is accepting applications for 2008-09 school year that starts September 15 in Stanberry, MO. Applications may be submitted on-line by August 15; [lites.cog7.org](http://lites.cog7.org) or call Larry Marrs, director (660-783-9544).

**Golden Couples**

Roy and Alvina Marrs of Lodi, California, will mark 50 years of marriage on July 10. It’s the second for both; each lost a mate to death within a dozen years of a first marriage.



Congratulations also to these ‘08 golden couples:

Gil and Barbara Kauer, Sacramento, CA (March 28); Roy and Shirley Keim, Yakima, WA (November 27); Paul and Virginia Heavilin of Muskegon, MI (60 years on August 25).

Know other golden anniversaries or 50+-year marriages not yet recognized in the BA? Please forward information to the editor.



**Corpus Christi, Texas, site of ‘09 General Conference convention, July 6-11, on the theme “Fresh Encounter.” We’ll use the Omni Hotel on the shore of Corpus Christi Bay, shown here.**



## Sixty Candles at Spring Vale (1948-2008)

The grand adventure of Spring Vale Academy started for me with a family camping trip. We were in a 1940 Plymouth with an eight-foot tent and my cat Goldie en route from Albany, Oregon, to Michigan, where my dad would become the boarding high school's first principal. Our possessions were packed into a one-wheel trailer that seemed to need a new tire in every state we passed through. Dad was a problem-solver by nature; this trip was good practice for our arrival at the large farmhouse south of Owosso. The Tiemen DeWind and Floyd Turner families were already at home there, so we took the last three low-ceilinged rooms – without plumbing or electricity. The outhouse was a long walk away, so our camping continued.

I turned nine that summer, and the big barn on campus was my favorite hangout. People came from all over each weekend for work-bees to help prepare the farmhouse for school. A second stairway was added to create a boys dormitory in the second story at the rear. The original staircase reached the girls rooms in the front. First floor housed the kitchen, dining area, and classrooms, with the unheated sun porch for science. The fishbowl froze the first winter; when spring came, the goldfish were fine – and we were amazed.

As people caught the vision, the

school soon outgrew the farmhouse. A used army barracks was added to the campus, delivered on two large trucks. It was unfolded and turned into a dormitory for boys. Gravity held the roof down. In hot weather, the guys would lie on their backs on a top bunk, lift the roof with their feet, and stack books to prop the roof open for ventilation.

With lots of hard work and God's blessing, school opened in the fall of 1948. Sixty years have now passed, and the grand adventure continues.

— Gil Kauer

*Son of SVA's first principal, Elder S. J. Kauer*



As director of Midwest Bible College, Elder Stanley Kauer launched a new era for that school too. His love for education, his experience as a teacher, along with his devotion to truth and godliness, meshed and flowed freely from his heart to the ministerial students. So many times I've heard ministers who graduated under his administration say, "Elder Kauer taught us . . ." And then they'd add, "I think he had it pretty well put together." His students respected him and valued his instruction.

Elder Kauer's example of diligence and drive for excellence inspired us all, staff and students alike. He wanted nothing more intensely than to have men go out to preach the gospel of the kingdom with power and effectiveness. His classes were tough, yet so informative. It was a delight to study under him.



*Stanley J. Kauer (1908-1990)*



As the years passed, Elder Kauer maintained his rigorous schedule, arriving at school well before 7:00 a.m., then gone by 5:00 p.m. Evenings were for home or occasional social gatherings. Near the close of Midwest (1976), in an informal moment, questions were directed at him regarding growing older. His eyes sparkled as he said, "I can do just about anything I ever did; it just takes longer" — then smiled radiantly and waved his hand. That wave of his right hand — almost a salute, with the palm upturned a bit — and his "My, my, my" in moments of surprise or amazement will forever be with me.

— Elder Max Morrow  
30-year SVA Bible teacher  
and Owosso church pastor



Fifty-one years ago I graduated from Spring Vale Academy. My memories of three years there have mellowed, a few bad ones have faded, and the good times have become sweeter and more precious.

The day I arrived at SVA I met several girls who became not only my roommates but also close friends for life. I also met the person who would become my husband years later, a moment etched in both our minds.

Starting with little Bible knowledge, I soon gained greater understanding of God's Word and will for my life. Each Bible class required memorization of Scripture. Those verses I still remember.

In Academy life, opportunities abounded to



*SVA in a farmhouse, around 1950*

### Academy Highlights

- Relationships that will last a lifetime
- Safe place for youth to learn and grow
- Unique opportunities for leadership
- Sports and other activities that don't compromise Sabbath or Christian values
- Strong connections with the Church
- Distinctive Bible truths as taught by CoG7
- Academics that prepare for college or career
- Quality spiritual education

A few staff positions remain open for the '08-'09 school year, and there's lots of room for students. Classes begin August 25 at the Owosso, Michigan, campus. Contact Mark Caswell, director; [www.springvale.us](http://www.springvale.us); [mcaswell@springvale.us](mailto:mcaswell@springvale.us); 989-725-2391.

practice leadership skills. Anybody who could sing, lead music, play an instrument, do a reading, give a talk, perform in a skit or musical rendition, etc. was encouraged and enlisted. We had a great choir that always sang when we went to all-day meetings.

Students were required to work ten hours each week as part of their payment for attending Spring Vale. My sophomore year on kitchen duty, I did anything that our great cook, Mrs. Jones, needed done, except for plucking and cleaning chickens. I couldn't stomach the smell. My junior year I did school laundry in the farmhouse basement with Betty Skelton. Washing boys' clothes wasn't exciting,

but starching their underwear gave us a little pleasure. The worst part was hanging the clothes on outdoor clotheslines in the winter. My senior year, I worked in the office as secretary for Mr. Kauer.

For Gil and me, there was never any question about our children going to Spring Vale when their time came. They heard us talk about it all their childhood and could hardly wait. Rhonda graduated in 1977 and Lyla, in 1980. All of their children have followed suit; our last grandchild graduated in 2008.

— Barbara Nicholas Kauer  
Class of 1957





# International Tour

## Africa

I departed London on April 2, arriving first in Nairobi, Kenya. From there I went to Burundi, arriving on Friday the fourth. Pastor John Njogu and I were met by Pastor Alexander Masumbuko and other leaders.

**Burundi.** On Sabbath we attended services in Bujumbura City. The brethren were encouraged by our update on the global church. As part of a great organization, they were challenged to do their best even though they might feel small and alone. On Sunday we traveled to Nyanza Lac province where seven days of training was held in church leadership, administration, and doctrine.

Four congregations in Burundi have achieved church status: Nyanza Lac (110 members), Bujumbura (35 mem-

bers), Rutana (24 members), and Cibitoke (71 members). Eight more Sabbath schools wait to achieve full status: Musenyi, Ruhwa, Mabai, Mugina, Kabonga, Mabanda, Ngozie, Ketega.

Generally the Church here has good structure and shows great potential for growth and development to impact its communities. Among the needs are equipment for evangelism, microphones, speakers, musical instruments, gospel tracts in Kiswahili, bicycles for leaders, and assistance with permanent structures.

**Sudan.** Pastor Njogu and I intended to visit Sudan, but we were advised by Brother Tudeal not to venture there due to heavy fighting in the region. We urge you all to pray for these brethren who desire to walk with Jesus, that peace and stability will prevail in their land.

**Tanzania.** The work in Tanzania consists of five churches, three pastors, and one evangelist under the leadership of Conference Chairman Selestini Ryamayaga, Bernard Sulemani as vice-chairman, and Sosthenes Bhatta, secretary. Though the Church struggles with few

financial resources and unemployment, it built a permanent structure in the Ukerewe Islands and is asking Missions Abroad for assistance with the roof. (Assistance is also urgently needed in these islands of Tanzania, due to crop failures there.)

At present, affiliation is being sought by Marejeo Sabbatho, a registered Sabbathkeeping group with 40 branches and more than 4,000 members. We have had preliminary interviews to facilitate their becoming part of the Church of God (Seventh Day).

**Commendation, thanks.** We commend Sister Pauline Wangari of the Nakuru church in Kenya. She serves as secretary to the conference in Kenya and to the regions of East and Central Africa. Well done, Pauline! God bless you for your hard work.

— Robert Crawford  
Gloucester, U.K.

Zone 5 IMC Representative



## We Hold These Truths

“What you believe about God will determine where you will be a thousand years from tonight.” That’s what the preacher said the night I gave my heart to Jesus. “And besides believing in His existence,” he continued, “the most important truth you can believe about God is that He loves you enough to send His only Son into the world to die for your sin. By faith in Him, you can have eternal life.” I believed it and have never been the same.

The preacher’s words reflected his worldview. Over time all of us develop a worldview that impacts how we see the world, how we see ourselves, and how we relate to those around us.

Core convictions about God, human dignity, and freedom led to the greatest human experiment in history: the United States. The opening lines of the Declaration of Independence attest to this claim and set forth the essential pillars upon which this nation has stood for more than two centuries:

When, in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s GOD entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the Causes which impel them to the Separation.

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their CREATOR, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.\*

What seemed “self-evident” then is not as clear to current generations of Americans. Life is no longer sacred, liberty is being traded in the market place of ideas, and the pursuit of happiness threatens our spiritual and moral foundations.

While America was still young, core beliefs about

God, the Bible, and the church led to the founding of the Church of God (Seventh Day). Its pioneers held to certain beliefs that shaped the movement and the pillars upon which it still stands: the authority of Scripture, observance of the Ten Commandments (with emphasis on the Sabbath), mortality of the soul, and Christ’s second advent.

While we celebrate the faith of our fathers, we also recognize their foibles and are challenged to raise the standard regarding truths we hold. Belief in the authority of Scripture should translate to sound hermeneutics and a theological construct that puts Jesus where He belongs. Then we must grasp the difference between obedience as the means to salvation and as the fruit of it. And waiting for Christ’s return should be understood in light of occupying till He comes (Luke 19:13) – i.e., influencing the culture with the truth that leads to life, liberty, and genuine joy.

Both our nation and our church will make significant decisions this fall. Americans will elect a new president. The current political debacle reflects worldviews in collision, and the guiding influence for Christians at the polls must not be political affiliation. (God is neither Democrat nor Republican.) The critical question is, “Which political viewpoint aligns most closely with the biblical worldview?”

In October our church’s Ministerial Council will study the new covenant, clarifying the difference Christ makes in salvation. Our guiding influence in this should not be to protect our heritage and traditions but to honestly examine Scripture. What we believe about Jesus is the most important truth we hold. That’s what the preacher said that night, and my soul still shouts, “Amen!”

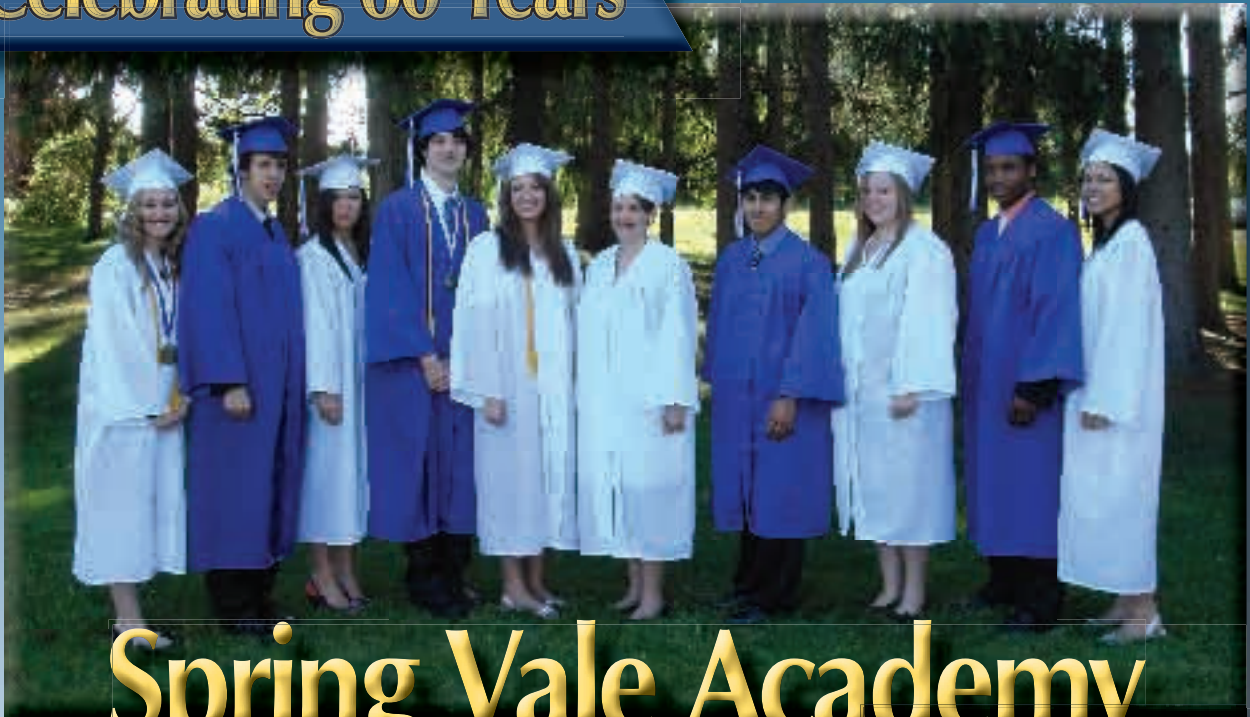
– Whaid Guscott Rose  
General Conference President



\* Library of Congress ([www.loc.gov/index.html](http://www.loc.gov/index.html))



# Celebrating 60 Years



## Spring Vale Academy

*Class of '08 (L to R): Katelynn Paul, Ben Brann, Abby Chesney, Zach Ciavarella, Karri Bland, Rebecca Hanna, Rigo Salgado, Jessica Miller, Cameron Crayton, Ariel Beattie*

### One Student's Witness

"What have I to dread,/what have I to fear,/Leaning on the everlasting arms." This old hymn assures Christians that we can go through anything; God is with us every step of the way. This confidence did not come to me quickly or easily but by way of constant interaction with God through the ministry of Spring Vale Academy. My experience here has been the blessing of a lifetime: students and staff always surrounded by His unmerited favor. High schoolers who want blessed peace with the Lord so near should attend Spring Vale. It will be a blessing for you too.

– Cameron Crayton  
SVA Student Body President

*For more on Spring Vale, see pp. 28-29.*

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