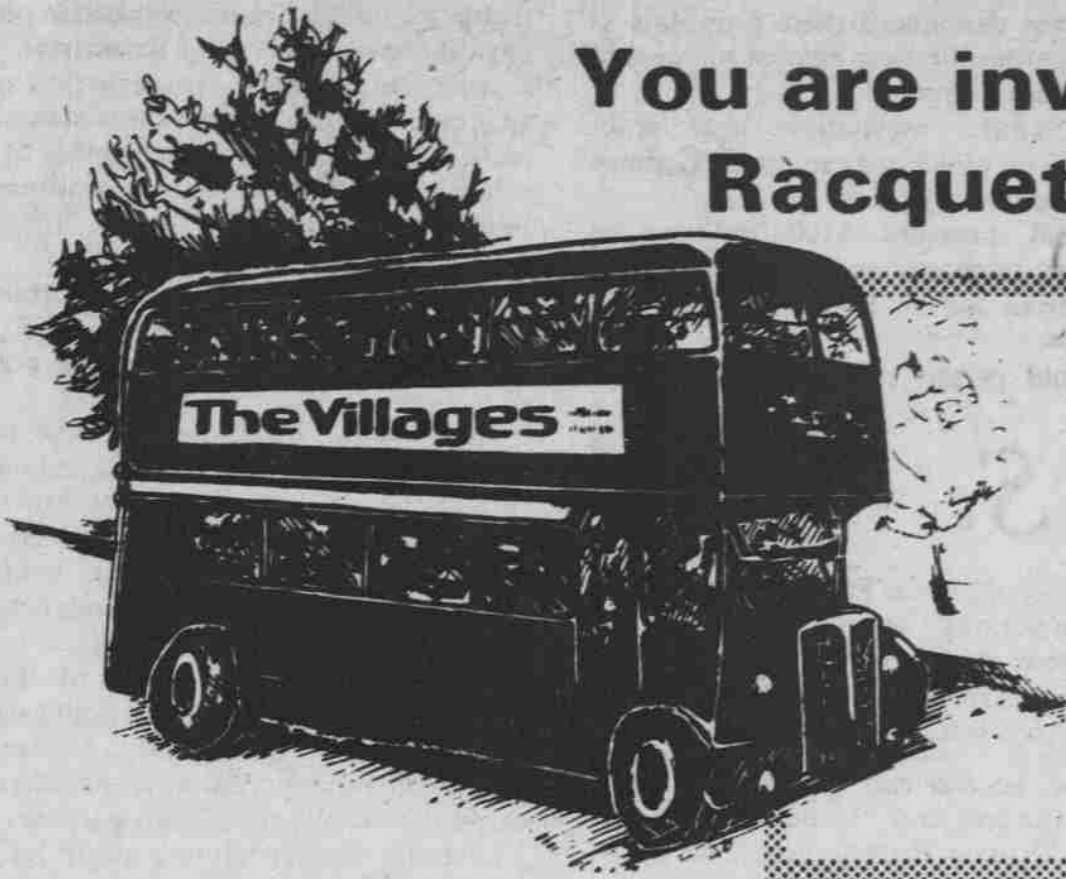


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'A Month of Sundays'

Updike's minister no saint

by Warren Rochelle
DTH Contributor

'A Month of Sundays' by John Updike, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.,
228 pp., \$6.95.

*Forgive me my denomination and my town:
I am a christian minister, and an American.*

I write these pages at some point in the time of Richard Nixon's unravelling.

These words are the appropriate opening of John Updike's latest novel: *A Month of Sundays*. The novel is an unravelling. As the Reverend Thomas Marshfield unravels the spool of his memory onto a therapeutic typewriter, he recounts his personal unravelling. Marshfield has been sent from his local parish in shame to a hotel in the west, where he can be rehabilitated. His therapy is filling "a sheaf of blank sheets." He plays golf, cards and other games with other miscreant clergy in the afternoons and evenings; in the mornings Marshfield writes, purging his soul.

The language in *A Month of Sundays* is Updike's usual — thick and well-flavored. In thirty-one sections, one for each day of the month, the Reverend Marshfield tells of his sins in a humorous and overwrought style. He uses such phrases as "a warmed-over McGovernism of smug lamenting," and "the apopleptic stiffness that insinuates the world." Even in the sermons, where the language undergoes a slight conversion, the full Updike touch is there. It is still fresh and rich as in earlier Updike novels, leading the reader through thick verbiage that is to be savored.

The novel is a confessional of the errant life of the reverent Marshfield — of his seduction and affair with his organist, Alicia; his growing up in his father's parsonage; his marriage to the daughter of his ethics professor — all the little pieces of his life as it has fallen apart, causing him to be sent to the omega-shaped hotel of Ms. Prynne.

Updike takes us through this collapse, and we go through laughing. We watch the cleric tumbling outside the parsonage on a cool morning without pajama bottoms trying to discover if his organist-mistress has betrayed him to his bisexual curate. We see the "fine dry skin in the soft knit dress" of Frankie Harlow, a parishioner who looks to him for solace in her basement and in the choir loft; we witness Marshfield's other sexual indiscretions in "the robing room, smelling

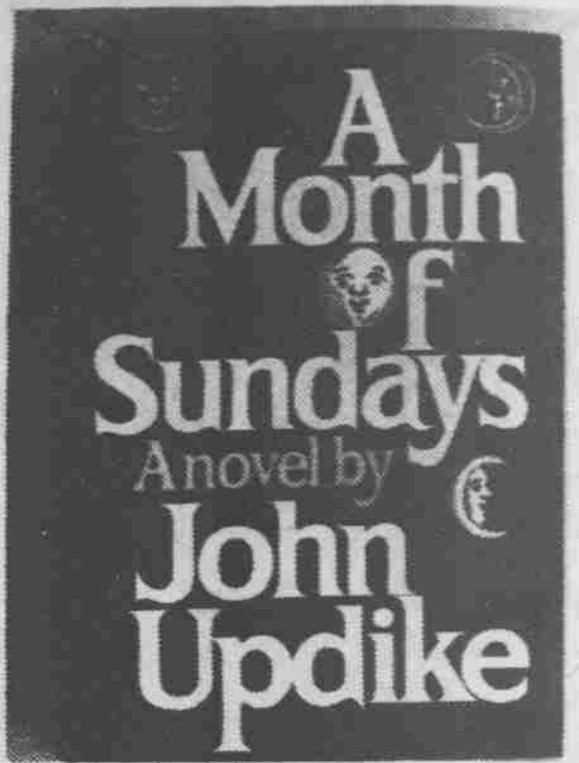
of clean linen and old paper, the nap mats in the Sunday school nursery . . ."

There is even the semi-parody of *The Scarlet Letter*: the Ms. Prynne; the Reverend Chillingworth — all of this a nice bit of tongue-in-cheek by Updike.

Beyond the humor, this is a novel of . . . human contact, this blank-browed thing we do for one another, sexual or otherwise. Marshfield gropes for this throughout the novel in a pathetically humorous way.

But Marshfield fails: he loses Alicia; he becomes completely estranged from his wife and even becomes impotent, losing his last avenue of reaching other people. Updike does not condemn Marshfield to aloneness however; on the last night of his stay at the hotel, Ms. Prynne finds her way to his bedroom and the roadblocks to Marshfield's sexual contacts are removed. Perhaps he will now be able to touch others.

A Month of Sundays is a good novel, in some ways perhaps even brilliant. It is satisfying and amusing to read. However, it does not fill the air after the book is closed. There is a nice lingering, but the contented



sigh of having read a really good book is not there. Updike does not completely give of himself to this novel; it is good but does not quite fill.

Kincaid is GOP loner

by Ralph J. Irace
Contributing Editor

Last November, Raleigh's political observers were saying, "Senator Kincaid will have to go along to get along."

But Donald R. Kincaid, state senator and lone survivor of last November's devastating defeat of GOP state legislators, has established himself as his own man.

The only Republican in the fifty-member state senate, Kincaid comments that his two terms as senator and preceding three terms as a state representative have given him enough familiarity with the legislature and the people in it to overcome the disadvantages of his GOP affiliation.

"I feel the bills I've introduced are needed in North Carolina and cover pretty broad areas," said the 37-year-old lawmaker, adding, "I've seen problems in the state that need to be corrected and I listen to what my constituents have to say."

Republican Gov. Holshouser adds to the GOP's dilemma in the senate by introducing administration proposals through a friendly Democratic senator rather than Kincaid.

"I discussed the matter with the governor and I don't feel snubbed," said Kincaid

explaining that channeling the governor's proposals through a friendly Democrat would probably strengthen the chances for passage in a predominantly Democratic legislature.

Far from being given unfavorable committee assignments, the GOP "black duck" of the senate has gotten everything he has asked for, particularly the committees on insurance and agriculture. Kincaid is an insurance agent by occupation and also a part-time farmer.

The GOP legislator doesn't feel that the political situation in the state has condemned him to "second class membership" in the senate.

"I think I'll contribute just as much this year as I did last session, if not more," Kincaid says.

Meanwhile, people are noticing that Senator Kincaid will not be a Democratic whipping boy and "go along to get along."

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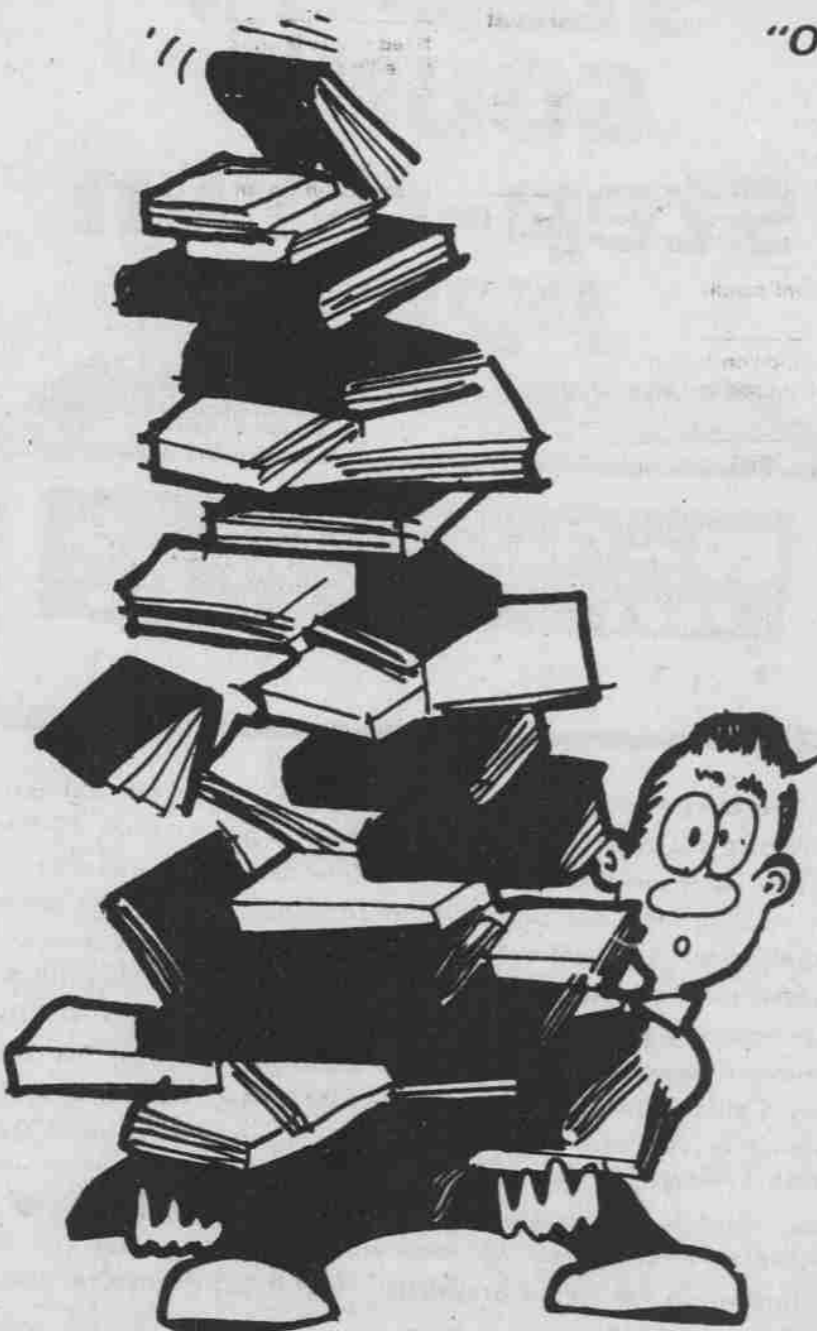


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