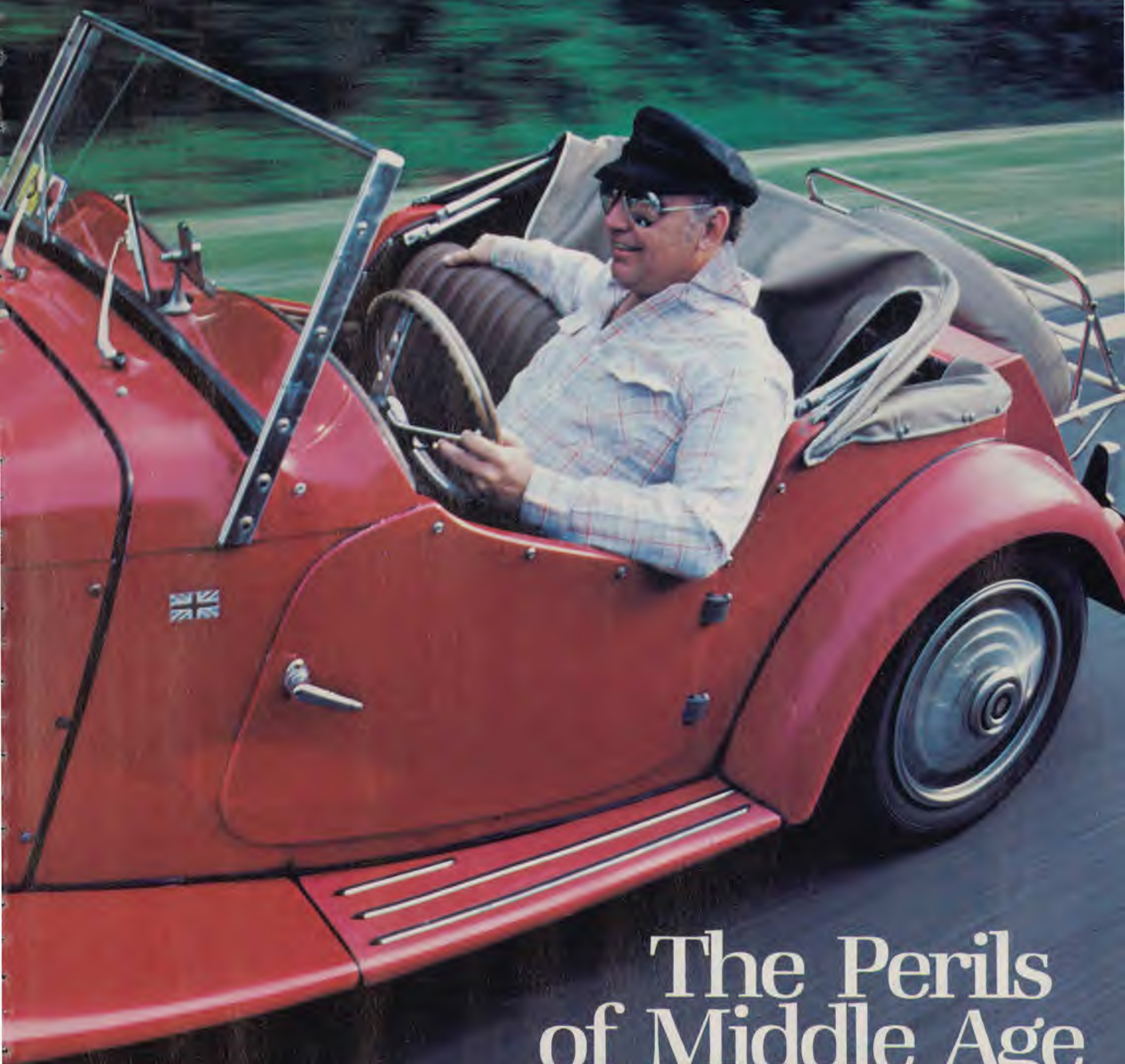


THESE TIMES

August, 1982

HOW CAN I
FORGET THE PAST?
SOMEONE DOES
CARE FOR YOU
THE TYRANNY
OF THE
RIGHTEOUS



The Perils
of Middle Age





THE TYRANNY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

BY ROLAND R. HEGSTAD

Worldly power in religious hands—be it Islamic or Christian—has hardened into more than one inquisition. In view of this fact, Christians in America need to evaluate carefully efforts to place political clout in the hands of the clergy.

On July 20-24, 1980, nearly 5,000 scientists, thinkers, planners, and policymakers met in Toronto, Canada, at the First Global Conference on the Future. Specialists from more than 40 countries, they explored fields

ranging from brain research and communication technology to population control and space exploration.

The agenda also included a panel discussion on the future of religious freedom. One participant, Prof. Howard Didsbury, from Kean College, New Jersey, used a phrase I've borrowed for the title of my article.

Roland Hegstad is editor of Liberty, a magazine of religious freedom. © 1982 by Roland R. Hegstad.

Said Didsbury, "We can, in the future, anticipate the tyranny of the righteous. Theistic religions are prone to kill for religion. There is in religion a strong bond of hatred for the outgroup. Religion provides a strong bond of unity—in hatred."

Didsbury predicted that the "erosion of values in rapidly developing countries and meaninglessness in post-industrial societies will lead more people to commit themselves to religious fanaticism."

Is the professor's world view correct?

Amnesty International reports that half the countries of the world jail thousands of people for their political or religious beliefs. Torture, summary trials, and execution are common, Amnesty said.

Amnesty reported that more people have been executed in Iran during a recent four-month period than in the entire world during 1980.

A fanatical Moslem sect is believed to be behind the assassination of Anwar Sadat. Its one-time leader, Shukri Ahmed Mustafa, once said the organization's objective is to "dismantle all Islamic regimes and then reassemble them as part of an all-Islamic caliphate under a Koranic constitution."

And then we have Ireland and Cambodia. How many thousands of Buddhists and Christians were slaughtered by the Pol Pot regime?

What about the tens of thousands who died in 1947 when India was partitioned and Pakistan became a nation? Whole villages of Hindus and Moslems were wiped out.

Perhaps Professor Didsbury knew what many people do not know: More people have died, victim of religious or religious-related persecution in the past 50 years than in all the centuries since Jesus said to His disciples, "The time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2).

I should like to explore the tyranny of the righteous as some

Court Decisions Which Contributed to the Rise of the Christian Right

Three seminal decisions of the Court were significant factors, I believe, in provoking this frustration, and in giving birth to what we today are calling the Christian Right.

One was the Court's decisions in four 1961 Sunday law cases favoring Sunday laws. Evangelicals seemed to think the Court's approval was an endorsement of their Christian-nation concept. What they should have noted is that the Court said Sunday laws must have "primary secular purpose" to pass judicial muster in this land of church-state separation.

Gradually, what had really happened dawned on evangelicals—the state had taken over and secularized their day. You see, what the state touches, the state secularizes; what the state finances, the state secularizes.

Since that decision, 18 States have voted out their Sunday laws entirely and 17 others have filed back their enforcement teeth so far that they couldn't chew pudding.

Today, Sunday laws generally are objects of derision. Small wonder Christian Righters are talking of secular humanism and the inroads it is making

into the decent America they desire.

Second in order but first in importance in this developing frustration were the 1962-1963 decisions of the Supreme Court against state-sponsored Bible reading and state-mandated prayer in public schools. In New York State officials had written a 22-word prayer that didn't even name the name of Christ, but we were led to believe that students would go to hell for sure if they didn't recite it. The Court believed otherwise.

I can recall the attorney general of Maryland pressing

see it in its embryonic form in the United States. By several measures—if I may venture a generalization—religious liberty is in pretty good shape in today's America. There is bigotry, but it has clean fingernails. And never have our constitutional protections had so much clout as they do today. We may not have attained the ideal expressed in a wistful dissent by Justice William O. Douglas of the U.S. Supreme Court—"I had assumed that the welfare of a single human soul was the ultimate test of the vitality of the First Amendment"—but we have not lacked substantial sensitivity. For one example, the Court recently ruled that an imprisoned Moslem could not constitutionally be deprived of the use of his prayer rug. (I assume that the Court might draw the line short of a flying carpet!)

Substantial concessions to rights of conscience have been made recently by the executive and legislative branches of Government. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits, among other inequities, racial and religious discrimination in employment. The right to take time off from work to observe one's holy days recently has been incorporated into Governmental guidelines and substantiated by the courts. On

December 13, 1980, the U.S. Congress passed the "Conscience Clause," which permits the few evangelicals having scruples against joining a labor union or paying dues to it, to work without doing so.

But not all the news is good. The Establishment Clause of the Constitution isn't in quite as good shape as the Free Exercise Clause.

What entered the past decade as a "high and impregnable wall of separation" between church and state, as the Supreme Court defined it, is today, according to the Court, only a "blurred, indistinct, and variable barrier, depending on circumstances." A look at the Court's current caseload involving the religion clauses of the First Amendment reveals many critical issues awaiting decision.

The "Christian Right." It is against this backdrop of case history and generally beneficent Government action that we must now examine the "Righteous Right," or the "Christian Right," as it is more generally called. Incredible as it seems, only since 1979 have the 40 million or so evangelicals in the United States been welded into a potent political force. Ironically, these are the same evangelicals who, only a few

years ago, were roundly condemning liberal churchmen for involvement in politics.

The movement is not centered in denominational headquarters, as one might expect, but in half a dozen electronic evangelists* and their tributary organizations—Moral Majority, Christian Voice, People for the American Way, Round Table, and others, several of which receive some \$50 million and more a year in contributions.

According to a leading conservative, Richard A. Viguerie, author of *The New Right: We're Ready to Lead*, these were the forces recruited by the political right prior to the recent elections. At this point, I'm undecided whether their achievements are an example of what Nobel Prize winner Elias Cenetti has called the "religion of power," or only an example of the power of religion.

The evangelicals of the Christian Right seek to exercise power in several ways: by moral suasion, voiced primarily through television

* Among them: Jerry Falwell, Lynchburg, Virginia; pastor, Thomas Road Baptist Church; founder, speaker for Old Time Gospel Hour, radio and television show; nearly 1,000 employees, annual operating budget nearly \$60 million; founder, Moral Majority, Inc. Dr. Robert Grant, chairman, executive board, Christian Voice, a national lobby with in excess of 200,000 members. E. E. McAteer and James Robison, of the Round Table. Two other early supporters, Jim Bakker, president of the PTL Television Network, and Pat Robertson, of the 700 Club, have announced their disengagement from the Christian Right, citing its potential divisiveness as one reason.

his argument for prayer before the Court. "Have you considered the consequences if you rule out prayer?" he pleaded.

Never shall I forget Justice Black's quiet response. Leaning across the bench, he asked gently, "And have you considered the consequences if we approve?"

These decisions as no others of this century were misunderstood and misrepresented. God had been kicked out of the schools, we were told, and here we were, in a life-and-death struggle with Communism, caught with our prayers down.

programs, publications, subsidiary organizations, a "Morality Scale," and Congressional "Report Cards"; by recruiting and training people to run for public office who will implement the moral positions of the Christian Right; and by bloc voting.

Jerry Falwell's three goals for his 400,000-member Moral Majority are revealing: "First, get them converted; second, get them baptized; and third, get them registered to vote."

Common to most members of the Christian Right is the conviction that the United States is "God's land." Repeatedly, America is equated with Biblical Israel. A key text often quoted is 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Said Baptist Minister James Robison at a rally of Evangelical Christians in Dallas in the summer of 1980: "I'm sick and tired of hearing about all of the radicals and perverts and liberals and leftists and Communists coming out of the closet. It's time for God's people to come out of the closet and the churches and change America."

To change America means to

make it a Christian nation—a concept Jacques Ellul has challenged. During Premier Khrushchev's visit to the United States, a group of evangelicals hired a plane to trace a smoky cross in the sky over the Premier's route from the airport into Washington. They wished him to know, they explained, that this is a Christian nation.

During a 1979 press conference in the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C., I heard Christian Voice director Robert Grant describe both his organization's genesis and revelation:

"There's a tremendous wave of unrest and frustration sweeping the Christian community. We did not create the tidal wave; rather, it created us. We seek to guide its power so that it has massive impact on Washington."

Continued Grant: "If Christians unite, we can do anything. We can pass any law or any amendment. And that's exactly what we intend to do."

Pat Robertson of the televised 700 Club was quoted as saying, just prior to the 1980 elections: "We have enough votes to run the country. And when the people say, 'We've had enough!' we are going to take over." (Robertson has since ruminated on the potential divisiveness of the Christian Right and announced his intention to eschew political involvement.)

Exemplifying the thinking of the Christian Right are the words of a Tennessee high school coach confronted with a ruling that he could not constitutionally lead his team in prayer before an athletic event.

Said the coach, "It seems someone is always trying to tear down the traditions and ideas we believe in. I hesitate to sound radical, but it makes one wonder if there isn't a Communist influence, which leads to some of the challenges against the things Americans hold dear to them."

The same type of reaction followed the Supreme Court ruling that Kentucky public schools can't display the Ten Commandments in the classroom. As the result of these and other decisions, many

Christians are beginning to link the ills of the American body politic with exercise of the First Amendment.

Because of these and other decisions, it became the popular thing to blame the ills of the nation on the Supreme Court and its "anti-God" decisions. And it became mighty convenient for politicians under the guise of "State's rights" and other code words to seek to dilute the power of the court, an effort that continues to our day.

Also contributing to the growing discontent were the Court's desegregation and reapportionment decisions, which promised to rewrite political realities in the South; the Vietnam war, a war which, under the ground rules the U.S. Government subscribed to, could not be won; the excesses of the counterculture—the rock concerts and X-rated movies; pornographic bookstore and sex education classes in the public schools; increasing crime and the uncloseting of homosexuals; the growing military might of the Soviet Union—all contributed to the decision of evangelicals to seek a better land in the here and now, through the political process. And certainly many Americans who are not evangelicals would approve of many of the standards and objectives they hold dear.

Still another decision of the Court has moved the Christian Right and the Roman Catholic Church in America toward a working alliance. I refer to *Roe v. Wade* (1973), which left it up to a woman to make her own decision about abortion. On December 10, 1980, Archbishop John R. Roach, the new president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, proposed an alliance with leaders of the Christian Right in support of an amendment to the Constitution that would prohibit abortion.

Roach said that abortion had become "such a gross evil" and the solution "so politicized," that the bishops must enter the

political arena to right the situation. It is my conviction that what we may see, if this alliance prospers, is a pro-life, pro-prayer amendment.

Barriers to a religious amendment—which must be ratified by 38 of our 50 States after passing by a two-thirds vote of the House and Senate—have fallen in the Senate because many who opposed a constitutional change were defeated with the help of Christian Right organizations in the last elections.

Others who haven't "seen the light" are targeted for defeat in 1982. On the Supreme Court itself, only one or two Presidential appointments could change the course of judicial history. It is this awareness and the abortion issue that precipitated the controversy over the nomination of Sandra O'Connor to the High Court.

We have noted, superficially to be sure, the composition of the Christian Right, something of its thinking, and the seeming anti-God decisions of the Court that have fueled evangelical frustration. As Director Robert Grant, of Christian Voice, summarized it: "Our nation is failing because we have removed ourselves from the guidance of . . . God. Everywhere we turn, Christian values are assaulted and are in retreat. As Christians, we are not going to take it anymore."

It is only fair to say, however, that not all evangelicals are infatuated with the movement.

Says Stan Mooneyham, of World Vision International: "I sense . . . the mood of some of my fellow evangelicals . . . and it scares the daylight out of me. . . . Power, even with anointed beginnings, has an unfortunate way of turning in upon and magnifying itself. I see little to convince me that evangelical power—past or present—is less immune to that kind of misuse than any other kind of power.

"I am as scared of an evangelical power bloc as I am of any other. Worldly power in religious hands—Islamic or Christian—has hardened into more than one inquisition. That God has delivered us from the hands of

zealous but misguided saints is all that has saved us at times."

I wonder: If Jesus were here among us in person, would He wish us to make a Congressional Report Card, and urge people to vote men out of office who did not subscribe to it, as some Christian Right organizations are doing?

Would He insist, as the Christian Right does, that we Americans take back our Panama Canal? Or would He say, "If a man ask of you your coat, give him also your canal?"

Would He instruct us to vote, as the Christian Voice *Index* does, against fair housing laws, against welfare, against a measure to create emergency Government jobs, against the Federal agency for consumer advocacy, against the Department of Education, against . . . against . . .

Would He go door-to-door, as Christian Rightists did in Birmingham, Alabama, last November, to whisper that Congressman John H. Buchanan, a Baptist minister, was a Communist and racist—because, among other things, he had voted for sanctions against white-dominated Rhodesia?

I have wondered what the Christian Righters would do to Jesus, were He to slip into their planning sessions for a new America, with His gentle guidelines of the Sermon on the Mount?

Could Kris Kristofferson's song give answer?—

"Jesus was a Capricorn; he ate organic food. He believed in love and peace and never wore no shoes. Long hair, beard, and sandals, and a funky bunch of friends—Reckon we'd just nail him up if he came down again. . . ."

Are we then well-advised to expect the Christian Right to become the tyrannical force Professor Didsbury sees emerging as a consequence of the erosion of values and meaninglessness of our age?

I think such a conclusion would be premature—though with James Madison we would be wise to "take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. . . . The freemen of America," he wrote in his

Memorial and Remonstrance, "did not wait until usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise. . . . They saw all the consequences in principle, and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle."

Whatever the faults of the Moral Majority, we must also acknowledge the demerits—and dangers—of an immoral or amoral society, which has no vision of unalienable rights or self-evident truths.

During the Vietnam war a top Government official stood before a select group of American student leaders who had been invited to see the White House. He told them to be good kids, not to bomb buildings, destroy the structures of society, or cop out by fleeing to Canada or Morocco. When he had finished, a student from Harvard University stood and asked respectfully, "Sir, can you tell us upon what your moral values are founded?"

The official stood for a moment, a flush touching his face. Then, soft-voiced, he replied, "I'm sorry; I do not know."

Philosopher David Klein has observed:

"The experience of learning that an entire civilization is founded on nothing solid morally; that it is shot through and through with . . . hypocrisy; that [there is] nothing in it to give . . . life meaning—this has been so overwhelming a shock that it has left [modern man] largely mute, inarticulate, confused, unable to cope. He can literally be sure of nothing."

The dangers of such a society are, I believe, themselves self-evident.

First, that we will trade freedom for security.

Today, we submit to surveillance at the airport for the sake of frustrating hijackers. Some would have us strengthen laws against criminals at the expense of constitutional rights. Others, confronted with the insecurities of our valueless age, seek security in the values of the "Good Old Days," which on close examination often prove not to have been that good after all.

The second danger is that we will seek to recover virtue through legislated morality or enforced conformity. Examples are: The Christian Right's attempts to put state-enforced prayer back into the public schools and to legislate a pro-life amendment; and Government's attempts to force public policy upon private institutions, even when their conscientious scruples stand in the way. An example of the latter: Regulatory agencies have sought to compel church-related colleges to abandon such distinctives as dress codes and moral standards as conditions of employment and attendance.

The third danger of relative ethics is that we will redefine freedom into something more compatible with our elastic morals.

What is religious liberty?

Increasingly, I hear that religious liberty is simply a social contract, one of many human rights conceded or granted by Government. I believe it to be what our American forefathers knew it to be—an inalienable right given by God to His creation and thus not subject to legislative amputation or executive veto.

Increasingly, I hear that religious liberty must be subject to majority vote, that this is the democratic process. But minority rights subject to majority vote are no rights at all. Our American forefathers created a constitutional republic rather than a majoritarian democracy. In the former, rights of conscience are deemed superior even to majority vote.

I hear also that religious liberty is simply respect for another person's religion. But true religious liberty penetrates much deeper than respect. It is to concede the right of a person to practice a religion you do not respect and may even abhor.

These, then, are the dangers with which our moral dilemma confronts us: That we will trade freedom for security; that we will seek to recover virtue through legislated morality or enforced conformity; and that we will redefine freedom into something more compatible with our elastic morals.



"More people have died, victims of religious or religious-related persecution, in the past 50 years than in all the centuries since the days of Christ."—Roland Hegstad (Editor, Liberty magazine).



"I sense the mood of some of my fellow evangelicals . . . and it scares the daylights out of me."—Stan Mooneyham (World Vision International).



"If Christians unite, we can do anything. We can pass any law or any amendment. And that's exactly what we intend to do."—Robert Grant (Christian Voice Director).

Thus dangers come both from the Righteous Right and the Rootless Left. And both, ironically, may play a part in forwarding the tyranny of the righteous, which is, indeed, one form of "righteous" response to the evils of our age.

Professor Didsbury's paper contained a last prediction we should note. "For many," he said, "the perilous, uncertain times now

ahead of us may make submission to an absolute authority increasingly attractive, if not necessary."

Mankind seeks a messiah. I suspect they will find one.

Either the one who offered all the kingdoms of the world to those who would bow to him, or the One who said, "My kingdom is not of this world."

T



HOW CAN I FORGET THE PAST?

How does one put a bad experience, trial, or misfortune out of his or her mind? How do you stop telling yourself "If only I hadn't . . .?"

BY PATRICIA MAXWELL

"His Vietnam war experiences wrecked his marriage," a friend of mine commented about her son.

"How can that be?" I asked.

"Nightmares," she said. "He kept having such awful nightmares that it ruined his marriage."

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How terrible, I thought. Isn't there some way this man could erase those past experiences from his mind? A case of partial amnesia could have saved his marriage.

On a lesser scale, I thought of things I'd like to forget, such as angry words of people who turned against me and my family and the pain of my own foolish sins, mistakes, failures, and goofs. I could use a bit of amnesia myself.

And couldn't we all!

Psychologists tell us that much of our present emotional, mental, and physical ills could be alleviated if we could forget past negative experiences. An unhappy, painful childhood mars our self-image and makes it hard for us to function as well-adjusted adults. Betrayal by a friend or lover keeps us from trusting or building new relationships. Past financial losses make us too fearful to improve present opportunities. Personal losses in the past make us bitter, sour, and unlovely in the now. If only we could wipe our memories clean and start over! We could eliminate a lot of ulcers, high blood pressure, backaches, and headaches as well as aching hearts and minds.

God, Himself, wants us to forget the past, for He says, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past" (Isaiah 43:18, N.I.V.).*

But how? Especially when it seems some inverse law is at work within us making us remember the things we should forget and forget the things we should remember. And there are physiological reasons making it difficult to forget

bad experiences too. During very frightening or exciting experiences, the body releases hormones such as adrenalin that imprint the experience more indelibly on the mind than during normal life situations. So what hope is there for Vietnam

veterans, crime

victims, and war refugees to forget the awful things they've been through?

Trying to forget doesn't seem to help. Telling yourself "Don't think about that bad experience" only focuses your mind more firmly on it. Even prayer doesn't seem to help when you keep saying over and over to God, "Help me not to think about that . . . help me not to think about it . . . help me not to think about it . . ." Continuously repeating the past is like

playing an old record over and over. It stamps the negative tune more indelibly on the mind.

So how can we forget the negative things of the past?

Joan seemed to have an answer. When she heard that her friends Ruth and Roger were getting a divorce she said, "I can't believe this! What do you fight about?"

"Everything—absolutely everything," Ruth answered bitterly. "The kids, money, his job . . ."

Joan nodded. "I know. Sam and I often do the same thing."

"How often?"

"Well—practically every day."

Ruth was puzzled. "You can forget that?"

"Oh, no—I don't forget it. But I forgive it."

Forgiveness is the key to forgetting. Even the origin of the word *forgive* gives some clues as to how this works. *Forgive* comes from the Old English *forgiefan*, which includes the prefix "for" meaning "away" plus "giefan" meaning "give." Give away! Forget your past by giving it away in forgiveness!

I thought of my friend Eileen. Three years ago her son died. Police and coroner's records say he shot himself. His friends and some of the evidence say he was murdered.

Though events surrounding his death had been traumatic, his life had been even more difficult for himself and his mother. A combination of youthful rebellion and drugs caused him to hate his mother. Twice he tried to kill her. He refused to see her or even talk to her on the phone. She ached and prayed for him and asked herself "Where did I fail this boy?" After his death, her guilt and bitterness grew and engulfed her until she doubted she could ever be a whole, functioning person again.

"But I finally learned to forgive," she told me.

"Who . . . what did you forgive?" I asked.

"I went back in my mind and forgave each person who had a part in Steve's destruction—the drug pushers, his friends, the police who seemed to be so

reluctant to investigate the case, even the psychiatrists who had failed him."

"How could you do that?" I wondered aloud.

"When I learned to forgive myself," she said quietly.

I paused before saying anything, then recalled, "I saw a billboard along the highway that said 'God forgives, let Him.' Does it really work that way?"

"Yes," Eileen answered. "When I finally accepted God's forgiveness of me, I could forgive myself. Then I could forgive others and gradually the pain and bitterness left me."

"And that ended all your negative feelings?" I asked.

"Not quite that quickly or easily. I spent a lot of time reading my Bible and praying. I read other good books, too; and listened to inspirational tapes. But I found the most help in memorizing Scripture."

"And that's how you could forget that awful experience of losing your son?" I asked.

"I haven't really forgotten it," she said, "but I've replaced the bitterness of the experience with something better so I can go on living positively."

Six guidelines. Forgiveness removed the sting of the past for Eileen. And it can do the same for anybody who learns to live in a forgiving way. This can be accomplished by following these guidelines:

1. Sense your need. A few months ago my husband observed, "You're getting awfully bitter." His statement shocked me into seeing I had a sinful attitude. I was letting circumstances and problems make me bitter.

Eileen said her road to recovery began the day she stood in her kitchen and suddenly felt so overcome by dark, negative thoughts that she felt physically and emotionally frightened. She realized she'd be destroyed if she didn't get help. That's when she fled to God.

2. Acknowledge your mistakes and confess them to God. This includes the attitude of bitterness, for whether you've sinned through actions or

attitudes, the only way to "clear the deck" is to confess.

3. Believe and accept God's forgiveness. Once you've confessed your mistakes to Him, you don't need to go over them again and again. God says, "I . . . am he who blots out your transgressions . . . and remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25, N.I.V.).

4. Forgive others. Wherever possible extend verbal forgiveness to those who've hurt you. But at least in your mind and in your prayers be forgiving. Pray aloud. Hearing yourself tell God that you forgive someone will help liberate you to begin loving that person.

5. Replace negative experiences with positive ones. Jesus told a parable about a man cleansed of an evil spirit who failed to place in his cleaned-up soul house anything better. Seeing the vacancy, the evil spirit moved back in, bringing seven more spirits with him. So don't leave your life empty. Fill it with good things. And there's nothing better than the Scriptures. Read them every day. Memorize portions that pertain to your situation. Surround yourself with positive-thinking friends, good books, inspirational music.

6. Act and think like a forgiven and forgiving person and soon you will feel like one. Though most of us wait until we "feel like it" before acting like we should, it works the other way around. Feeling follows obedience. Forgiveness can be cultivated and extended when we don't feel like it, and sooner or later we'll find our feelings have changed too.

The other day I updated my long-neglected diary and in trying to chronicle some devastating experiences that happened to our family this past year, I found my feelings had changed. I no longer felt bitter, angry, and frustrated about the experiences of the past. Forgetful forgiveness had healed my hurts.

And I decided it's not only healthier to forget by forgiving, it's exciting, too!

TT

* From *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. Copyright © 1978 by The New York International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

WATCH OUT . . . BUT DON'T WATCH!

Studies on the negative effects of television on our culture, especially our children, have become so commonplace that one wonders whether they are doing anything to change the viewing habits of the American family. At last report, the average family was still sitting in front of the tube for about fifty hours per week. Citizens groups and religious denominations have pleaded with us to watch less. Self-appointed TV critic Don Wildmon, the United Methodist minister from Tupelo, Mississippi, who heads up the National Federation for Decency, calls for mass boycotts of the advertisers who sponsor objectionable programs.

Everyone is screaming at the one-eyed monster, but it doesn't seem to hear. So if the answer isn't limiting television viewing or boycotting TV's sponsors, what is it? Why, throwing the thing out altogether, of course!

This idea isn't new. Recently, however, a small—but growing—percentage of one-time TV viewers has been heeding the advice of a growing number of critics who are calling for the removal rather than the control of television. Writing in a pamphlet entitled "Your Child and Your TV," Michael Snow calls the



Some critics of TV programming claim the only way to control TV is to toss it out of the house entirely.

television viewer an "addict." He says, "Some people are full-fledged teleholics. As with the alcoholic, they will not be helped by those who advocate 'control.' They will need to get 'on the wagon' and will need the support and prayers of others."

Snow's program for withdrawal includes three steps: (1) settle the question once and for all; (2) set a deadline to rid your family of the TV set; (3) attack withdrawal symptoms by putting time and energy into enjoyable and constructive family activities. (Copies are available from Mr. Snow, RR 1, Gayville, South Dakota 57031.)

Anti-Church TV Program Backfires in Czechoslovakia

"You only need to bring a few more programs like that

and we'll all believe in Jesus, who founded the church. He lived. That's a fact. He was willing to be crucified for what He taught. If you are willing to be crucified for your convictions, we'll believe you—but not before."

Hundreds of young people from the Zilina area in Czechoslovakia signed this letter sent to the Czechoslovak State TV company. The young people thanked the company for the TV program "From Myths to Science," in which the Christian faith was ridiculed. "This program," the young people wrote, "opened their eyes" for God.

They continued: "If there were no God, atheism would have nothing to deny. We want freedom, freedom of thought, freedom of world! We have come to the conclusion that

the only true, external freedom is God, whom you deny, and thus actually confess that He is. Why go to so much effort and trouble for something that does not exist?"

Evangelist Oral Roberts Dedicates City of Faith Complex

A 60-foot sculpture of joined hands stands in front of the spectacular new City of Faith medical complex in Tulsa, Oklahoma (below). At the dedication on November 1, Evangelist Oral Roberts said that he had fulfilled a 5-year dream when the mammoth facility opened. It includes a 30-story hospital with 294 beds that is expected to expand to facilities for 777 patients, a planned 20-story research center now under construction, and a 60-story diagnostic clinic, already operating. The center, founded by Mr. Roberts' organization, will combine modern medical technology with prayer counseling to achieve healing.



Oral Roberts' new City of Faith includes a 30-story hospital.

News items appearing in UPDATE represent current events of general interest to the readers of THESE TIMES and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions and views of the editors. Since the items come from a variety of news sources, the editors do not assume responsibility for inaccuracies beyond our control that might inadvertently be reproduced on these pages.

A New Christian School Every Three Days

Protestant day schools are now opening at the rate of three every day, according to latest estimates. The new schools are part of the nation's fastest-growing segment of education. No longer is the phenomenon concentrated in the South, where some saw such schools a way of avoiding racial integration. Religious day schools are springing up in all sections of the country, draining off a growing portion of public school enrollment.

"Many parents are having difficulty in identifying with the moral climate of the public schools," says Paul Kinel, executive director of the Association of Christian Schools, La Habra, California. "The doctrine of humanism is becoming dominant in the public schools, the belief in the supremacy of man rather than the supremacy of God."

Human Leukemia Virus Isolated

Scientists at the National Cancer Institute have isolated what they believe is a human leukemia virus. The discovery could stimulate new research for viruses as causes of human cancer.

The find, which they call "exciting" and other authorities identify as "highly significant," could lead to a cure for leukemia and, in the future, perhaps even prevention of it.

Dr. Robert Gallo, chief of the Laboratory of Tumor Cell Biology at the National Cancer Institute, and his coworkers have identified the virus in four patients, and also found antibodies to the virus in twelve more. The antibodies provide solid evidence, the team says, of the human body's effort to resist the leukemia virus.

Japanese doctors at the University of Kyoto, working in cooperation with Gallo, report that they too have identified the virus in some patients.

Is TV Boycott Being Felt?

Norman Lear, who "cleaned up" in TV (as producer of two dozen sit-coms), opposes the new thrust of "Falwellians" to clean up TV. Author Ben Stein ("The War to Clean Up TV," *Saturday Review*, February) quotes Lear, "I don't want a narrow band of people controlling American politics or what's on television."

But Stein also points out, "This narrow band numbers an estimated 30 million militant Christians," and later asserts that "a 'narrow band' of network executives and TV producers control American TV right now. Their parochialism is one of whispered TV traditions and Nielsen ratings, but it is hardly less narrow than the Bible."

Falwell has indicated that, if less drastic steps don't succeed, "he will reluctantly call for national boycott of products advertised by sponsors of humanist shows." TV executives publicly downplay the power of a boycott, but Stein quotes one of them: "If a boycott by a few million people was ever successful, it would shake up the programmers a lot. They'd be putting dresses on the girls in bikinis in a hurry."

Stein notes indications that "Falwell's ultimate goal is to actually buy a controlling interest in a network." A stockbroker suggests that such effective control could be purchased for as little as \$150 million, well within the reach of Falwell supporters.

Others besides Lear are alarmed. George



A popular new game—Dungeons and Dragons—emphasizes demonic activity, hate, deceit, fear, and violence.

Cunningham, an assistant to George McGovern, warned, "They're frighteningly effective. They can do anything unless someone stops them."

Many conservative evangelicals have for a generation objected to liberal churchmen being involved in politics and have opposed boycotting various products for "religious" causes. Now the shoe (and the power) is on the other foot.

New Dungeon Game Captivating America

Someone has finally taken a potshot at the most popular item on the play market since hula hoops—Dungeons and Dragons. With the games selling at the rate of 34,000 each month and several people playing with each set several hours weekly for years at a time, it's about time someone scrutinized the craze. Who did it?

The *Christian Science Monitor*, which usually goes by the dictum, "If you can't say something nice, avoid the subject." The *Monitor* is hardly an alarmist.

Among the charges that

are leveled in print: "Evil becomes a legitimate strategy subordinate only to the higher goal of winning." "Financially, the game becomes a trap." "Captivated by the game, players seem to want to spend as much time as possible playing, often to the distress of family and friends." "There's no end to it." "People can become their characters. Reality is that fragile." "There's too much hate involved." "With its emphasis on demons and demonic thinking, it involves . . . negative thought patterns—hating, deceiving, conniving." "Encouraging fear, confusion, and hate as weapons." "The violence certainly is there."

Why the protest? Largely because Dungeons and Dragons is appearing on school campuses across the country, informally or formally. In some schools in Arizona it is part of the curriculum in classes for gifted and talented teen-agers. In Arizona parents who object to Dungeons can have their children excused from it. **Tt**

Linguist Chester Bitterman (left), of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, suffered martyrdom before he could begin his work as a Bible translator among the Carijona Indians of Colombia.



THE WYCLIFFE BIBLE TRANSLATORS

BY HENRY N. FERGUSON

The Wycliffe organization, sometimes referred to as "the alphabetmaker of the world," has 4,255 workers in 35 countries. They have catalogued 5,103 languages, some spoken by fewer than 100 people.

Early on the morning of March 7, 1981, a shopkeeper in Bogotá, Colombia, ran across the street, banged on the outside gate of a residence where Brenda Bitterman was staying, and shouted out a message she had hoped never to

hear: "They've found Chet's body!"

Almost seven weeks had passed since her husband, linguist Chester A. Bitterman III, had been kidnapped by left-wing terrorists. They said they would kill him

unless his organization, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, withdrew all its people from Colombia. The sturdy Translators refused to yield during the 48 tense days of threats, rumors, and deadlines.

It was raining that morning, a dark, oppressive downpour. The Bogotá police had found the body propped up on the front seat of an abandoned, hijacked minibus on a deserted street. It was blindfolded, with a single bullet wound through the heart. The terrorists had wrapped Chet in a flag after they killed him. The red-and-black flag bore the insignia of a Colombian guerrilla army. Pinned to it was a note crediting his death to the M-19, National Coordinator Base.

Bitterman's death left his wife, Brenda, a widow and his two little girls fatherless. Chet had been cut down before he'd even had a chance to begin his lifework as a Bible Translator among the Carijona Indians of Colombia.

Five days later and a continent away, in a rural, prickly-pear setting in extreme south Dallas, some three hundred members of the Wycliffe Bible Translators gathered in a small sanctuary to mourn Chet Bitterman's martyrdom.

There was no real anguish here, but many shed tears for this 28-year-old Lancaster, Pennsylvania, native. The people acknowledged the tragedy as a part of God's plan; Chet had not been the first to give his life in this uncommon service to God.

The Wycliffe Bible Translators organization is the extended vision of one man, William Cameron Townsend. A native of Downey, California, he attended Occidental College near Los Angeles and at the age of 21 became a Bible salesman in the villages of Guatemala. There, in 1917, he was confronted by one of the many Indians who couldn't read the Spanish-language Scriptures he was peddling.

Flipping through the pages of a Bible, this ancient member of the Cakchiquel tribe blurted, "You say this is God's Word, señor, but if your God is so great, why can't He talk in Cakchiquel [a minority tongue spoken by 250,000 Indians]?"

On the spot, Townsend decided "to give God another tongue, little realizing that I would be devoting the rest of my life to this work."

Fourteen years later, and a half-century ago, the Cakchiquel version of the New Testament was completed and dedicated. Soon after, Townsend and his wife set up a summer course in an abandoned farmhouse in the Arkansas Ozarks. Called the Summer Institute of Linguistics, its purpose was to train translators. Today, four U.S. universities and nine others overseas sponsor Wycliffe training programs.

The graduates of these schools became known as the Wycliffe Bible Translators in 1942. Their initial missions concentrated on Mexico and among the Navajo Indians in the United States.

A few years later, the Townsends visited the Amazon jungle, where they established a Wycliffe Jungle Aviation and Radio Service, which provides communication and logistical support for the Translators.

Half of the growing Wycliffe team is composed of translators. The remainder consists of support personnel: doctors, nurses, pilots, mechanics, teachers, editors, radio technicians, printers, buyers, and secretaries.

Wycliffe work today extends to Australia, Asia, New Guinea, Africa, and South, Central, and North America.

Of all the tongues that still have no Bible, the majority are found in the most isolated areas imaginable. Giving such people the Bible for the first time is no simple task. The missionary linguist must begin with a seemingly hopeless jumble of strange sounds, and from these construct an alphabet. He must analyze a complicated grammatical structure, master the meanings of tens of thousands of words, and become thoroughly familiar with the beliefs and practices of the people. Only then can he translate the Bible in such a way that it, in turn, can be translated into life. Once this is done, the natives must be taught to read and write their own language, with the Bible as the text.

The Wycliffe people take their name from John Wycliffe, who initiated the translation of the first Bible into English, a task completed about 1382. Because of

this and other "heresies," Wycliffe's body was ordered disinterred 44 years after his death and burned.

Translating the Bible into previously unwritten languages is tedious work. Wycliffe linguists, who often are husband-and-wife teams, allow two or three years just to learn a new tongue. In all, it usually takes 15 to 25 years to produce a completed New Testament. They work in strange places.

Mr. and Mrs. Herb Zimmerman are in Yellowknife, in Canada's Northwest Territories, translating the Bible into Dogrib, an Indian tongue. They have been at the task since 1964, and so far have finished the Gospel of Mark and 10 percent of Luke and John. They figure they will need eight more years to complete the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament.

In Oniluradarannai, Papua New Guinea, Den and Jenny Oatridge, who have been deciphering the Binumarien tongue for 22 years, have nearly completed its vernacular New Testament.

In Colombia, Translators have helped Guahibo Indians develop the country's first indigenous-language newspaper, *La Voz de Cavasi*. The newspaper office, which contains two typewriters and three silk-screen printing outfits, is a palm-thatched house two days' walk from the nearest dirt road. Jungle journalists put out the 12-page paper every two months and distribute 200 copies by dugout canoe.

The Wycliffe organization, sometimes referred to as "the alphabetmaker of the world," has 4,255 workers in 35 countries. They have catalogued 5,103 languages, some spoken by fewer than 100 people. The New Testament has now been published in about 150 of these tongues and linguists are working on 725 others at the present time.

On October 25, 1981, founder William Townsend, speaking from the pulpit of Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, announced that the Translators have completed work on 800 languages spoken in

30 countries. He also said that there are at least 3,000 more unwritten tongues to be translated.

Natives in the far outposts of the world gain much more than a knowledge of the Scriptures from the work of the Translators. They learn to read, and reading opens windows of the mind and of the world. For the first time, people in many places are learning that there is something beyond the limits of their jungle habitat. They are learning about people in other lands, getting glimpses of other cultures, and gaining vital information about how to treat illness and how to improve their crops and livestock.

The life of a Translator is not an easy one. Most of the members are American "dropouts": people who have achieved success in the military, with IBM, in university circles, or the church, then decided at some point to give this up and take their families to a grass hut where they try to survive on \$600 or \$700 a month. They face disease, the constant risk of accidents, near misses in tiny airplanes, snakebites, bouts of depression, and often frustration when the very people they have come to help turn out to be indifferent to their presence.

Even the governments in the countries where they work often make things unpleasant for them. They have been accused of building secret rocket bases in the jungle, of using their radios to supply information to the CIA, of smuggling gems, drugs, and art works out of the country, and of sterilizing the Indian women.

With all these problems, however, modern Translators usually face lesser hazards than some of their predecessors.

The projects of Wycliffe Associates are financed by gifts from people everywhere. In the construction of many of their facilities, lay people volunteer their services. Such a team—paying its own transportation costs and supplying its own tools—worked five weeks on the construction of a 30-by-100-foot translation center in Danau Bira, Indonesia. They had to cut down trees in the nearby

jungle and tow them upriver to use in the building.

A translation and language studies center was built in Darwin, Australia, by a volunteer crew from the United States. John Bender, director of the construction, brought a team of ten people on a two-week working vacation. They paid their own expenses. John is sure the Lord picked the crew because it included a land developer, some professional builders, a prison chaplain who provided the welding skills essential to this particular project, and a computer systems manager who used his expertise in planning for the word processing system and computer to be installed in the center.

Generous Christians also give money to provide such things as helicopters and boats to be used in transporting Translators to scenes of action deep in unexplored jungles.

Mistakes do happen. The Translators are meticulous in their exactness. In spite of this, mistakes happen. Sometimes just a slip of the tongue produces serious misunderstanding. For instance, a Translator in the Solomon Islands found that he had rendered the psalmist's "The wild asses quench their thirst" as "The cannibal pigs drink water to stop hiccoughs." A Congo Translator transformed "five loaves and two fishes" into a veritable feast—"five loaves and two elephants."

Translators working with the Stone Age Tarahumara Indians of Mexico tried to obtain the word for *jump* by acting it out. The Indians chorused an expression that the worker happily wrote down, only to learn later that it meant, "What's wrong with you?"

The most profound spiritual truths may be communicated by phrases that seem quite senseless to us, but are highly significant to others. Among the Shilluks of the Sudan, for instance, God's forgiveness is spoken of as "God spits on the ground in front of us."

Spitting among the Shilluks is not an act of contempt or rejection, but may be a symbol of reconciliation. When a plaintiff

and defendant have had their case tried before a chief or king, and the punishments have been meted out and the fines paid, the two men are then required to spit on the ground in front of each other, to signify that the case is terminated and all is forgiven.

Accordingly, the Shilluk pastor can say to his people, "We have all sinned against God, and He had a case against us, but rather than punishing us, He was, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. By faith we may know that God has spit on the ground in front of us, to show that our sins will never again come into His presence."

In spite of adversities, the intrepid Translators persist in making the Bible comprehensible to every man. Consequently, a Filipino farmer on Mindoro can reach for a Bible in Tagalog, and in the Congo a missionary can pass out Gospels printed in the Tshiluba dialect and illustrated with photographs of local scenes.

The task of translating and distributing Bibles to the far corners of this planet is not one for which there are many applicants. Those who accept this challenge often toil in some of the most dreary and difficult terrain imaginable, in situations that are rarely pleasant. The work seems never ending, and the immediate rewards are few. Is all this worth the efforts and hazards involved?

President Woodrow Wilson once answered this question with these words: "The men and women who dedicate their lives to translating and distributing the Scriptures to the far outposts of the world are like the shuttles in a great loom engaged in weaving the spirits of men together. The miracle cannot be accomplished in a hundred years. But if the weaving goes on, and men do not lose heart, the task will someday be accomplished, and a light will shine upon the earth in which men cannot go astray."

To this the Wycliffe Bible Translators add a hearty "Amen!"

TT

Henry Ferguson is a free-lance writer living in Kerroville, Texas. © 1982 by Henry N. Ferguson.

JUNE STRONG

BUILDING BRIDGES TO NEW GENERATIONS

I'd been digging around in the small cupboards flanking our living room fireplace, attempting to organize vacation pamphlets accumulated over the years. Colorado. North Carolina. Sanibel Island. The Caymans. California. Monhegan Island. Memories—sorted into States and then into Manila envelopes. Beaches we hoped to walk again. Mountains awaiting our return.

I came to a small, faded, green book sandwiched between the Grand Canyon and Zion National Park. I recognized it immediately. It had nothing to do with faraway places. Or perhaps it did, for it had been authored in Vermont, which was a considerable distance from our New York State home. And there was a distance in time. It was dated, in my grandmother's round neat script, *nineteen hundred and twenty-four*.

It was just a collection of trivia that my grandmother had gathered in this cheap scribble book over a period of seven or eight years. I opened it with nostalgia. There were a lot of small poems and prayers I had memorized with Gram when I was a child. The words crept into old familiar niches in my mind.



"We must not waste our time
It quickly speeds away
..."

Perhaps words had first come to life for me then, chanting morals set to rhyme with the one I loved most in her geranium-bright kitchen.

There was a section in which Gram had kept careful records of a remodeling project on our old farmhouse, itemizing every expense right down to 45 cents for hardware.

In the front of Gram's scribble book, however, lay the yellowed pages that interested me most. There she recorded the events of her first camp meeting, day by day, speaker by speaker. I read of her confidence in a Lord who *would* return, of her interest in clinics and schools on far-flung missions, and of her longing for a fresh relationship with her Lord.

Because she died while I was a spiritually indifferent teen-ager, I never took the opportunity to talk with her about matters of the soul,

but now, years later, here in my living room, I was reading words I might have penned myself. It intensified my desire to be ready on that day when a triumphant Lord speaks the righteous dead from their graves to join His living saints on the heavenward journey (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). I was so grateful she had written it all down.

Which reminded me of an article I'd read only days before, stating that students today, while reasonably capable at writing letters, filling out forms, and assembling memorized facts, have few creative writing skills. I thought that was sad, for one does not have to be a James Michener to enjoy the juggling of words. And words are so important, for they are links with the past and future.

Bronson Alcott, father of Louisa May, insisted his children keep a daily journal, which the parents were free to read and to which they often responded. I'm not sure how well the latter would go over today,

but the idea of encouraging the child to record his thoughts was excellent, and may well have been the platform from which Louisa sprang to literary fame.

In every family there should be one who chronicles the activities of the unit. Who records the traditions and the high moments, along with the date the baby first pulled himself up in the playpen.

Someone with a bent for storytelling could spin the tale of the clan over a span of generations, illustrating it with fading tintypes from the attic. What a gem for the family archives!

Even letter writing, creatively pursued, becomes an art. We all have at least one friend who writes such entertaining letters we cannot bring ourselves to discard them, and thus such epistles become a bit of history.

Words are powerful, strong and persuasive. The more we write, the more effective becomes our outreach. So just put it down the way it looks and feels to you. Build a bridge of words to your friend. Your mother. Your son. To the next generation. To some lonely one who is starving for communication.

Write poems. Write stories. Write songs. Write love letters. Write anger. Write joy. Write sadness. Don't be satisfied until you've done it well. Till the words fall as neatly into place as the squares upon a Rubik's Cube. For someday, somewhere, a grandchild may discover *your* scribble book, and see *your* world through *your* words.

TT



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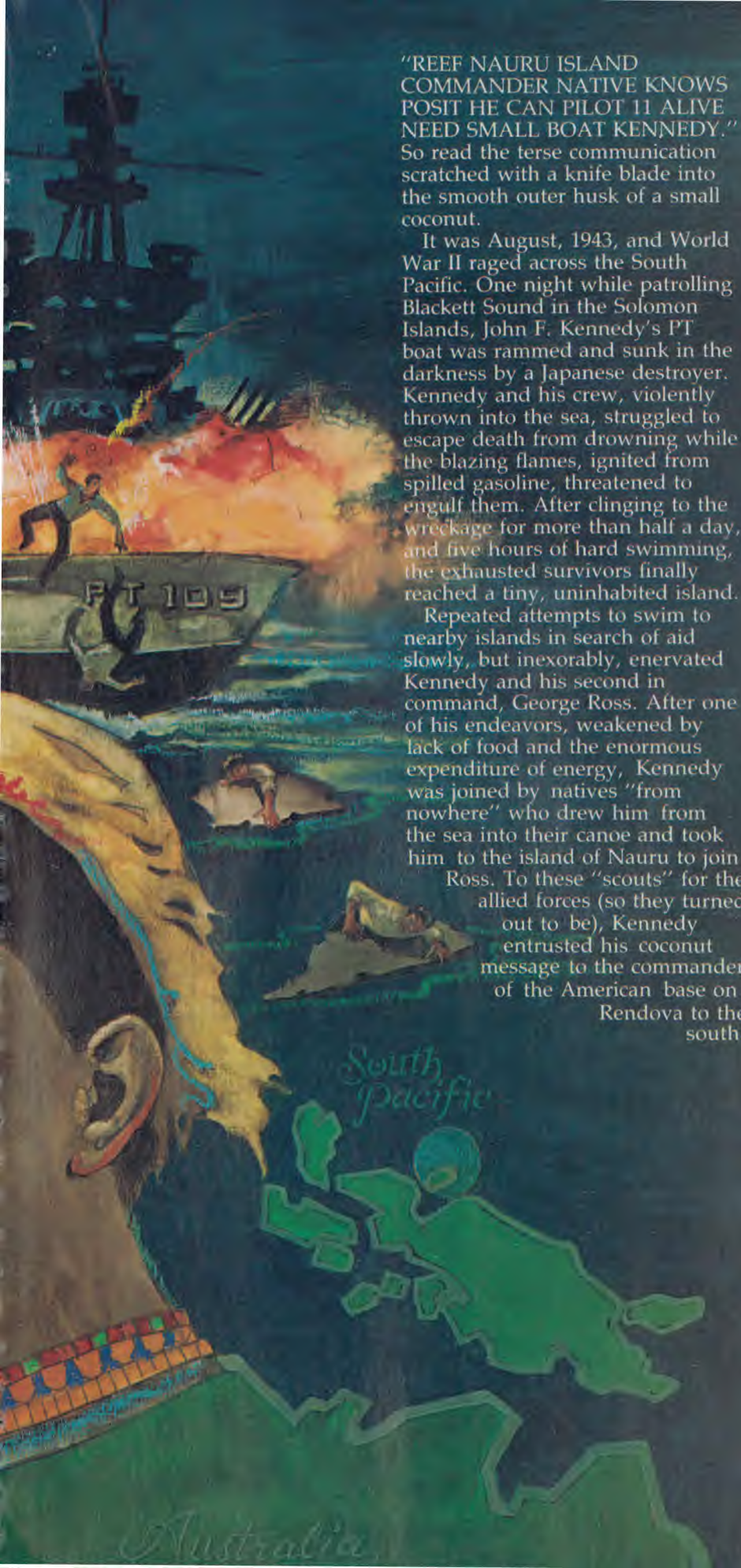
Mindy, Where Are We Running? and *Project Sunlight*. She enjoys people, writing, gardening, and sewing.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Behind the dramatic sea rescue of Lieutenant John F. Kennedy in World War II by former Solomon Island cannibals lies the ability of a remarkable Book to transform lives.

BY FRANK B. JHILL





"REEF NAURU ISLAND
COMMANDER NATIVE KNOWS
POSIT HE CAN PILOT 11 ALIVE
NEED SMALL BOAT KENNEDY."
So read the terse communication
scratched with a knife blade into
the smooth outer husk of a small
coconut.

It was August, 1943, and World War II raged across the South Pacific. One night while patrolling Blackett Sound in the Solomon Islands, John F. Kennedy's PT boat was rammed and sunk in the darkness by a Japanese destroyer. Kennedy and his crew, violently thrown into the sea, struggled to escape death from drowning while the blazing flames, ignited from spilled gasoline, threatened to engulf them. After clinging to the wreckage for more than half a day, and five hours of hard swimming, the exhausted survivors finally reached a tiny, uninhabited island.

Repeated attempts to swim to nearby islands in search of aid slowly, but inexorably, enervated Kennedy and his second in command, George Ross. After one of his endeavors, weakened by lack of food and the enormous expenditure of energy, Kennedy was joined by natives "from nowhere" who drew him from the sea into their canoe and took him to the island of Nauru to join Ross. To these "scouts" for the allied forces (so they turned out to be), Kennedy entrusted his coconut message to the commander of the American base on Rendova to the south.

Crossing Ferguson Passage toward their destination, the natives decided to report also to Reginald Evans, an Australian naval officer secreted in that section of the Solomons with a radio transmitter to monitor enemy movements and to report such to his superiors. The officer added a message of his own and sent the scouts on their way.

In a few hours, however, Evans decided that an earlier rescue was possible and sent a request to a nearby village for volunteers to find and bring two shipwrecked Americans to his hideaway.

It was a Sabbath rescue mission. Although their families and neighbors were assembling for church services, three Seventh-day Adventist natives joined by five of their Methodist friends responded to the call for help and launched a large canoe loaded with food and other supplies. By midmorning they had reached Nauru. Fearing Japanese presence, they began to search cautiously for the Americans. Eventually they came across a leafy shelter and peering in saw two sleeping men. It was certain they were Americans "because they were so big."

"Are you Americans?" they called. Immediately one of the men stood up and identified himself as Kennedy, captain of the sunk PT boat. With relief the natives responded with assurances they had come to help him and his men.

After preparing food for the surviving crew and searching for several hours for two sailors who had been missing since the night of the disaster, the natives made a bed of leaves in the canoe for Kennedy and started homeward. The approach of a Japanese plane caused them to quickly place the American prone in the canoe's bottom and to cover him with the leaves. With motors roaring, the plane buzzed the canoe so closely the terrified natives thought it would crash into them, but the pilot at the last moment pulled away. And the Christian islanders, recovering from their fright,

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paddled rhythmically into the Sabbath sunset singing hymns, joined by a grateful PT boat commander.

John F. Kennedy, later to become President of the United States, and his crew represented only a fraction of the hundreds of allied servicemen that Christian natives of the South Pacific rescued during the fierce struggles of the war in that area. But what would have been their fate if World War II had occurred in the nineteenth century instead of the twentieth? Instead of being returned in kindness to his base, Kennedy and his men would probably have been cruelly murdered or butchered for a cannibal feast by devil worshipers and headhunters, for such were the ancestors of those Christian natives who risked their lives to save him that auspicious Sabbath in August, 1943.

But what alchemy so radically changed these islanders from bloodthirsty cannibals to lifesaving Christians? The islands of the South Pacific stand as exhibit "A" of the power of the Holy Scriptures, the Christian message it discloses, and the dedication of missionaries to transform and uplift even the most depraved of the human family.

If the Holy Bible with its life-changing communications can subdue the savage of the Solomons, may it not also subdue the civilized "savage" of modern society as well? Indeed, millions of Christians—living in every culture under the sun—testify to the truthfulness of the psalmist's personal testimony to God: "The unfolding of thy words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple" (Psalm 119:130, R.S.V.).*

The spiritual waters of the Holy Scriptures never run dry. They truly refresh the human heart because they bring the reader into union with his Creator and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Said Jesus to the worldly woman of Samaria: "Every one who drinks of this water [the local well of Sychar, symbolizing the world's philosophy of life] will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the

water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14, R.S.V.).

"Sir, give me this water." While the world has witnessed only one Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, today literally hundreds of translations of the Bible exist, which "pipe" the waters of salvation in many languages of the world. In fact, more than 50 new translations of a part or of the whole Bible have appeared in the English language alone since 1952. We have so many English translations today that a common question voiced by those who would like to begin Bible reading and study in English-speaking lands is: What Bible shall I use?

The settled conviction that the Bible was for every man and not simply for the scholar of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew became the driving motive behind earlier endeavors to translate Scripture into the common languages of Europe.

You can become very knowledgeable in the Bible by reading ten chapters a day.

"If God spares my life," cried William Tyndale to one of his opponents, "ere many years I will take care that a ploughboy shall know more of the Scriptures than you do!" Little did he realize in the sixteenth century how successful his endeavors would be, and that the twentieth century would become (at least as far as English is concerned) an age of multiplied versions. A variety to suit every taste!

How does one begin to read and study Holy Scripture? Like most subjects the Bible has both its simple statements and truths as well as its more complex and deeper aspects. Although it

presents one basic theme—God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ—it is really a library of 66 books written over a span of some 1600 years by more than twoscore authors. Much of it is in the form of history: the origins of the earth, sin, the history of Israel, and the history of Christ and the early church. The reproofs, corrections, and encouragement of the major and minor prophets make up a large part of the Old Testament even as the letters of Paul and a few of the other apostles to new Christians make up the bulk of the New.

Thus a very new reader may feel overwhelmed at first, until he becomes oriented to this wide sweep of salvation history. A good beginning would be a prayerful reading of the Gospel of Mark in the New Testament (or, perhaps, Matthew), which portrays simply the life of Jesus Christ. This beginning might be followed by a reading of John's Gospel, with its invitation to belief and commitment to the Saviour to whom all Scripture points.

Next a reading of Genesis and Exodus would begin to sketch in the beginning of things: the Creation, the origin of sin, and the call of Abraham and his descendants, to whom were entrusted the truths of salvation for the world (cf. John 4:22). The Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament would likewise sketch the beginnings of the Christian church. The last parts of the apostle Paul's letters and the book of James would be helpful to read as guidelines for daily Christian living.

Finally, the other Gospels, the full letters of Paul, the books giving Israel's history under her kings, and the writings of the prophets who ministered in that area should be read. With such a background the deeper prophetic books of Daniel and the Revelation will become more meaningful to the student of Holy Scripture. The study of all these sacred writings under the illumination of the Holy Spirit will challenge any mind. The seeker for truth will be rewarded with a never-failing spring of spiritual understanding (cf. Psalm 1:1-3).

* Texts marked R.S.V. are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952, © 1971, 1973.

Those who have some acquaintance with the Scriptures should follow a two-pronged approach: (a) select a system whereby you can read the entire Bible through periodically, and (b) at the same time, continuously study selected portions. The first procedure will give the reader an overall sweep—a panoramic view of sacred history; the second will make more meaningful the individual parts of that panorama.

Irving Jensen in his book *Independent Bible Study*, summarized Martin Luther's approach to Bible study: "He said he studied the Bible in the manner in which he gathered apples. First, he would shake the whole tree, to let the ripest fruit fall (study of entire Bible as a unit). Then he would climb the tree and shake each limb (book survey). Then he would move to the branch, as on each limb of the tree (chapter study). Next he would shake each twig (paragraph and sentence study). Finally, he would look under each leaf (word study)." page 107.

Several time-honored plans for reading the Bible by course do exist. If one reads but three chapters per day and five on the Sabbath or Sunday, he can complete the entire Bible within one year. Leland Wang, a Chinese Christian famous for his slogan: "No Bible, no breakfast," became very knowledgeable in the Bible by reading ten chapters a day. His motto was based on Jesus' words: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). He refused to eat breakfast unless he had read at least 1 chapter from the Holy Book.

Here is his daily formula: $2+2+5+1=10$. Every day he proposed to read two chapters from the Old Testament and two from the New; five from the Psalms, which would teach him how to pray and praise; one from the book of Proverbs because it taught him how to live and deal with men. Inasmuch as the book of Proverbs has 31 chapters, Pastor Wang used it as his calendar to remind him of the day of the month. On this basis a reader will

From Confucius to Christ

A century ago there lived in the Shansi province of China a Confucian scholar named Hsi. Hsi had nothing but contempt for the Christian religion, which, according to him, was propagated by "foreign devils." David Hill, a missionary in that province, felt an increasing burden to try to reach the aristocratic Confucian scholars like Hsi. He announced that he would give prizes for the best essays comparing Christianity and Confucianism. Hsi won prizes for three of the essays he submitted. The missionary then invited Hsi to live in his home and teach him the Chinese classics.

In his room at the Hill house, Hsi found a New Testament and began to read the four Gospels. As he read he became increasingly impressed with the reality and power of the person of Jesus Christ. This struck him with such force that he came to acknowledge that the Jesus of the Gospels was no mere man, nor the product of human imagination, but was God manifest in human form.

When he learned of the love of God in sending Jesus to die for his sins on the cross, Hsi got down on his knees in his room and asked Christ to forgive his many sins and give him the power to break the terrible opium habit. The Lord answered his prayer and Pastor Hsi (as he was later known) became one of the most effective of all the Chinese converts to Christianity.

complete the Old Testament once a year, the New Testament three times, and the Psalms and Proverbs once every month.

However, reading the Bible by course tends to be rapid reading. It is fitting, therefore, to spend some time reading and meditating on small portions of Scripture—such as a book of the Bible, a chapter, or even a few verses. One even may wish to read a book or chapter several times, using different versions. Try to grasp the flow of thought, the points which the Bible writer is making. This will enable you to clearly see the principles that were being enunciated in the ancient setting so that you can then derive their proper application to your situation now.

Keep a notebook and pencil handy so that you can jot down your analysis or any thoughts that come to you. Try memorizing some of the key verses. They will stick in your mind like burrs, to be recalled for meditation and spiritual blessing later on in the day as you have a moment to recall your reading or need to

reach out to God in prayer.

Another significant and important method of Bible study that tends to synthesize the teachings of Holy Scripture more forcefully to the mind than simple reading by course is the study of the Scriptures *by topic*. Since the Holy Spirit is the essential Author of Scripture—the One who inspired the prophets (2 Peter 1:21)—He is consistent with Himself. Thus, we may compare what the Spirit has inspired the several authors of the Bible to write across the centuries on a given subject (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:13).

Jesus Himself is our authority for this method of Bible study. Desiring to instruct the disciples on the subject of the Messiah, He began "at Moses and all the prophets" to expound "unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27; cf. verses 44, 45). If we follow Christ's procedure and bring all the passages on a given subject together, we will find that the plain statements of Scripture will illuminate the obscure ones. And

while there may be some passage not fully clear, we may grasp the tenor of the entire Bible on that topic, and may draw our conclusions on a given teaching by the weight of evidence.

(For your information THESE TIMES offers its readers a series of study guides on the great truths of the Bible constructed on this principle. They are free for the asking.)

How can modern men and women come to grips with such an ancient book? It is true that the Bible is an ancient book; parts of it were written approximately 3,500 years ago. It is true also that its writers used the ancient languages of Hebrew and Greek, in a Near Eastern culture whose customs and thought patterns differ from those of Western man. Nevertheless, all humankind—whether ancient or modern, whether oriental or occidental—have similar needs. We are all sinners and hurt by the effects of sin; we are all estranged from our common Creator (see Acts 17:26); we all pursue happiness, and can find it only through the salvation offered by that same Creator through faith in Jesus Christ (see John 3:16). For all practical purposes, this basic salvation message transcends the problems that the time-language-cultural gap interposes between Bible times and ours.

Nevertheless, the modern reader will be tremendously helped if he is made aware of correct procedures for understanding God's Word at the outset of his reading. A small, but helpful, book in this connection that is worth purchasing is *How to Understand Your Bible*, by T. Norton Sterrett (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1974). But here are a few general, common-sense guidelines for the beginner:

1. The language of the Bible should be read and understood according to its natural grammatical sense. Such a rule recognizes that every language employs figures of speech (simile, metaphor, personification, symbol, etc.) that must be recognized and

treated as such. Furthermore, every language has its own idioms, which reflect the thought patterns of that particular culture. The perspective of that idiom must be discovered and understood. For example, the Bible was written almost in its entirety by Hebrew people (Luke may be the possible exception). It reflects the Hebrew way of viewing reality, which at times differs from the way Western man might see it.

God, for example, was viewed by the Hebrews as the ultimate Authority in the universe; hence, in the Bible, God is often said to *do* that which (in our way of viewing reality) He *permits* or *does not prevent*. It is puzzling to a Western reader who is unaware of this Hebraic thought pattern when he reads: "An evil spirit from the Lord troubled" King Saul (1 Samuel 16:14), or, "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh" (Exodus 9:12). These statements—and many more like them (particularly abundant in the Old Testament)—simply mean that God permitted or did not prevent Satan from taking possession of Saul, who had turned away from following Him; nor did He prevent Pharaoh's heart from hardening as the stubborn king continued to resist His direction.

Until one becomes more knowledgeable in the manner in which Bible writers express themselves, he is to be alert to the danger of misconstruing some term or expression due to his Western background. A simple rule is to let the Bible define by its own usage its terms and expressions. As your acquaintance with the Bible deepens, you will find that comparing passage with passage will clarify many words and phrases, the meaning of which may at first seem strange to you.

2. A Bible passage is to be understood first in its natural historical setting before application of its principles can be made to your present situation. Such a guideline requires the reader to ask: "Who is speaking? To whom is he speaking? Under what circumstances? When and where?"

Every event in the Bible has its particular historical, geographical, and cultural setting that impinges on its meaning. As two modern scholars have written: "Geography, history, and religion are so inextricably bound together in it that the religious message cannot be truly understood without attention to the setting and conditions of the revelation. In this respect the Bible is unique among the world's scriptures; it is the only one for whose comprehension the study of historical geography is basic."—G. Ernest Wright and Floyd V. Filson, eds., *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956, rev. ed.), p. 5.

3. A passage must be understood according to its context. In some kinds of materials such as a proverb and in some prophecies the context provides no help. But in most cases it is absolutely essential to understand what precedes and what follows a given passage in order to grasp correctly what the Bible writer is saying. Many words have a range of meanings, but it is the context of the passage that is the ultimate arbiter on the meaning of a word or phrase in that passage. Beyond the immediate context for a given verse, the Bible student must also—for safe interpretation—understand the wider context of the chapter, the book, and ultimately the whole tenor of the canon of Scripture on the point under study.

4. Interpretation must be in harmony with the principle of progressive revelation. A failure to appreciate this perspective has brought much perplexity to some and wrong conclusions to others. We may state this principle in a more practical manner this way: "God (the Bible) does not necessarily endorse all that He (the Bible) permits."

Although we may read of certain social practices or customs practiced by God's people at various times in their history (such as divorce, polygamy, drinking, and slavery), it does not mean that

God directly approved or that we now are at liberty to live in the same manner. Jesus made this point clear, for example, in regard to the matter of divorce (Matthew 19:1-10).

He pointed the Jews back to Eden for God's ideal and plan. Because of the hardness of sinful hearts God was not always able to realize the ideal in His people. But the thrust or spirit of the Bible is always the spirit of restoration—of moving back to God's original ideal. The apostle Paul summed up the guideline in these words: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

How can we make our Bible reading and study more enjoyable—more meaningful? The real secret is to be in love with the subject of Holy Scripture—Jesus Christ. How does a person in love read? Dr. Mortimer J. Adler's characterization is apropos:

"When they are in love and are reading a love letter, they read for all they are worth. They read every word three ways; they read between the lines and in the margins; they read the whole in terms of the parts, and each part in terms of the whole; they grow sensitive to context and ambiguity, to insinuation and implication; they perceive the color of words, the odor of phrases, and the weight of sentences. They may even take the punctuation into account. Then, if never before or after, they read."—*How to Read a Book*, p. 14, cited by Irving L. Jensen, *Independent Bible Study*, p. 86.

The Word that created the earth and its teeming life is the Word that is able to recreate the modern socialite as well as the savage Solomon islander. An exposure to the Scriptures with a sincere desire to follow God (John 7:17) is, in effect, an exposure to the life-giving beams of the Sun of Righteousness, Christ Himself. The changing effect is inevitable: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18, R.S.V.).

TT

REFLECTIONS

BY BILL LOVELESS

To help you get the most out of *THESE TIMES*, we offer "Reflections," a guide to deeper understanding of individual articles. Actually, we'd like to challenge you to probe these issues that can enrich your life and make them more fulfilling. Please read each article first, then consider Bill Loveless' suggestions. Bill is a master at inspiring people to think—and what is even more amazing—to enjoy doing it.

The Tyranny of the Righteous page 3

1. What are the signs that religious liberty is healthy in the U.S. today?
2. Under the paragraphs that begin "I wonder," the author places Jesus in several contemporary positions. Which position taken by members of the Christian Right seems particularly unchristian to you?
3. What are the dangers inherent in placing political power in the hands of religious people?
4. What are the dangers of rule by an immoral or amoral society?
5. Define religious liberty, based on the author's position.

How Can I Forget the Past? page 8

1. Recall a negative experience in interaction with people that troubled you. Name the people who contributed to that negative experience. What forgiveness can/will you offer the people named?
2. Recall the interaction with someone else that you considered unsuccessful, embarrassing, or damaging. What steps suggested by Patricia Maxwell would help you deal with the memory of that interaction?
3. Compose a prayer thanking God for His forgiveness.
4. Define forgiveness.

The Story Behind the Story page 16

1. Select a book of the Bible that interests you. (If you are uncertain of an apt choice or not well acquainted with the Bible, we recommend Luke or one of the other gospels.)
2. Read in the book you have selected until you find a verse you would like to memorize. Paraphrase the verse and read both the verse and your paraphrase to your study group.

If you have found "Reflections" helpful, we offer one more suggestion: We have available an expanded version of "Reflections" called "Discussion Guides." These guides are designed to act as aids for study groups. Perhaps your church or community club would find these guides a perfect catalyst for sprightly conversation and continuing study. Certainly they are worth trying.

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FRANK ANSWERS

HOW ACCURATE IS TEXTUAL CRITICISM?

Are verses 9 through 20 of the sixteenth chapter of Mark's Gospel authentic? I understand from the New International Version that these verses were added at a later date. Does the Seventh-day Adventist Church make any exceptions if they know that certain verses are later inserts, or do they accept everything that is between the covers of the Bible?

The question you address arises from the fact that there are variants in the texts of the approximately 5,000 Greek manuscripts (whole or fragmentary) of the New Testament that have been preserved and upon which our printed Bibles are based. It is recognized that the process of hand copying the New Testament for 1,500 years (until the art of printing became established) is the source of these variants. However, it has been fully demonstrated after 150 years of scientific analysis of these same documents that we have the New Testament substantially as its individual parts were first written.

Now, what are the facts



In this column Pastor Frank B. Holbrook answers questions about spiritual truth, ethical behavior, and Biblical understanding.

Write to him c/o THESE TIMES, 6856 Eastern Avenue NW., Washington, D.C. 20012. Names are confidential. If a personal answer is desired, please send an addressed envelope. Only questions of general interest are published.

about these particular twelve verses. Limited space prevents any detailed discussion of this textual problem, so only the essential perspectives will be noted here. First of all, the New International Version does *not* say that these verses were added later. A note simply says: "The two most reliable manuscripts do not have Mark 16:9-20."

Textual criticism, the science of determining as far as possible the exact text of a document no longer extant, can seldom be dogmatic about its conclusion on a disputed reading. For example, it is possible for an early dated manuscript to have an omission that a later dated manuscript may have preserved, having been copied from another line of manuscripts. Consequently, a certain amount of subjectivity enters into the evaluation of a given reading. To strengthen the accuracy of his conclusions the scholar will not only evaluate the reliability of the various manuscripts he works with but will also consult citations of Bible verses by the earliest church fathers and the earliest translations of the Greek New Testament into other languages.

The two manuscripts which the New International Version footnote refers to are the Sinaiticus and the Vaticanus manuscripts (apparently belonging to the same family of manuscripts) dated to the midfourth century A.D. But while these two omit the passage, other important manuscripts such as A and C (dated to

the fifth century) contain them.

Eusebius (fourth century) and Jerome (fourth to fifth century) indicate that the passage was missing in nearly all Greek copies of the New Testament in their times. On the other hand Irenaeus (c. A.D. 177) who lived much earlier than the production of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus as well as earlier than the above-mentioned fathers clearly cited Mark 16:19 as a genuine passage.

The point is simply this: the manuscript evidence is divided on the genuineness of this passage. Most, but not all, modern scholars infer from the data that the ending was not a part of the original writing of Mark, but, inasmuch as many important manuscripts contain these verses, they are usually printed in our common Bibles (as it is in the N.I.V.), sometimes with a footnote of explanation.

It should be observed that in this instance the addition or deletion of these 12 verses has little effect on the total information preserved for us in the Gospels and in the New Testament in general. All the main points recorded in this passage are found elsewhere in the New Testament. Note the following:

1. Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene and her report to the disciples (verses 9, 10). See John 20:1, 11-18; cf. Luke 8:2.
2. The unbelief of the disciples (verse 11). See Luke 24:10, 11.
3. Christ's appearance to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus (verses 12, 13). See Luke 24:13-33.

4. Christ's first appearance to the disciples in the upper room (verse 14). See Luke 24:36-48; John 20:19-21.

5. The gospel commission (verses 15, 16). See Matthew 28:18-20.

6. Signs that would accompany apostolic preaching (verses 17, 18, 20). See Matthew 10:8; Luke 10:17-20; Hebrews 2:3, 4.

7. The ascension to "the right hand of God" (verse 19). See Acts 2, 3; 1 Peter 3:22, et cetera.

Seventh-day Adventists recognize—as do others—that in any doctrinal dispute the Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek text must be the court of final appeal. They also recognize that the discipline of textual criticism (while not an exact science) has been most helpful in reaffirming the basic Hebrew and Greek text of our Scriptures. Furthermore, Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Bible should be studied as a whole to determine the tenor of the Scriptures on any particular doctrine and that conclusions must be drawn from such a study on the weight of evidence. Following this procedure we avoid building a theological argument on any disputed passage.

TT

RESPONSE

I WAS FURIOUS WITH MY FIRST COPY

When I received my first copy of THESE TIMES years ago I was furious. I thought it was some far-out religious propaganda and I threw it in the trash with a resounding thump. When the next issue arrived I was bored with what I was doing that day so I thought, Let's see what these crazy folk have to say. Well, I couldn't believe it! The magazine is so uplifting. Your emphasis on marriage, family, and children would inspire anyone to do better for the glory of God, with the added bonus of being happy here on earth.

I'd like to say to my sponsor, whoever you are, Thank you! When I read THESE TIMES as soon as it arrives now, I know there will be a lesson I can apply to my daily life. A lesson I learned long ago but seemed to forget. Thank you!—Georgia Perkins, Memphis, Tennessee.

Hallucinations and Near-death Experiences

In your article "Life After Death—What About the New Evidence?" April, 1982, aren't we confusing death and near-death? In a near-death experience the patient may hallucinate, or have an extra-sensitive brain output of that type, but this really has little to do with death. He may think he is

dead, but he is not. He may "see" different things than he has seen before, but he is seeing this with a still living, near-death, brain.

To my knowledge, only two men are reported to have returned from a long-term dead state. Lazarus who was reported dead and had been in the grave long enough that those about him commented on the odor that was bound to be there, and Jesus Christ, who was crucified, certified dead, buried for three days, and arose by the special dispensation of the Spirit of God or, if you prefer, the will of God.

There have been others brought back to life in the Bible but I find no "vast host of witnesses" to others as there were to these two instances.—H. Ray Goodwin, O.D., Sulphur, Oklahoma.

Dachau and the Homosexuals

I have just read the heart-rending article "Why Dachau?" in your April, 1982, issue and wish to express my appreciation for the clear message of warning that must never be forgotten. One group singled out for persecution by the Nazis you neglected to mention, and that was the homosexuals who were forced to wear a pink triangle, and it is a historical fact that over 200,000 were victims of the Nazi program. (The Jews were forced to wear a yellow Star of David.) These people and their horrible sufferings must not be forgotten or ignored.—James B. Passer, Rome, New York.

One of the Best Published

I want to thank someone for having the wonderful magazine THESE TIMES sent to me. I have just finished reading the article "Vegetarianism—A Viable Alternative" in the February, 1982, issue, and "Who Will Fight the Battle of Armageddon?" Both were superb. Your magazine is one of the best that is published. Keep up the good work.—Albert Krieger, Truth or Consequences, New Mexico.



Dachau and the Jews Today

The article by Jamie Buckingham on Dachau was most interesting, to say the least. Certainly a blot on human history. Her statement that the word *genocide* was coined to describe this as an annihilation of a human race is not quite correct, however. This was far from an annihilation of the Jewish race. It was Hitler's attempt to destroy this race within his own borders, and those of countries he invaded.

The more recent Cambodian attempt at genocide was far more

complete, and certainly as horrible. Even more so was the attempt during the Dark Ages, by a church in conjunction with the local governments, to put to death Christians. Some estimates place this real holocaust at over 100 million people put to death during this period of history.

The writer also failed to mention that this same Jewish race is now engaged in similar warfare with Arabs in the Middle East. The Prime Minister of Israel is purportedly a former terrorist himself.—George Green, Cross City, Florida.

Mental Illness Article Needs a Rebuttal

I write to express my displeasure with the article by Rene Noorbergen entitled "Do Psychiatrists Make Good Brain Surgeons?" printed in the March, 1982, issue of your magazine.

If mental illness is the result of a life apart from Christ, how does one explain such psychological problems as autism and childhood onset schizophrenia and other maladies that are frequently in evidence from birth? Also, the article totally ignores the role that chemical and hormonal imbalances (e.g., postmenopausal depression) can play in mental illness.

I strongly suggest that a rebuttal to the article in question be printed in your magazine as soon as possible.—Dennis A. Howerton.

Tt

THESE TIMES welcomes letters from readers on subjects dealt with in the magazine. The editors reserve the right to publish those letters they choose and to edit them for clarity and length before printing. Send to: Letters, THESE TIMES, 6856 Eastern Avenue NW., Washington, D.C. 20012.



THE PERILS OF MIDDLE AGE

Broadway plays poke fun at the problems of middle age. Novelists build amusing plots around those who desperately fight the march of time and the waning of passion. And business derives large profits from those who seek to conceal the advancement of age.

Much is written and discussed about babies, children, and adolescents. Ministers continually preach sermons to the youth. Youth has tremendous opportunities and privileges. Youth also has its perils that are obvious and often dramatic. Youth is the habit-forming time of life. It is a time assailed by fiery temptations, which, depending on how they are met, will make or mar the rest of life.

Sermons are also preached to the aged. The consolation and compensation that come with the right kind of old age are lifted up. Old age also has its perils—living in the past, pessimism, and fear of the future.

Sermons and articles on the active, important, forgotten middle-aged are few and far between. Consequently, for this largest, most influential group in the congregation and in society, little specific guidance exists.

Broadway plays poke fun at the problems of middle age. Novelists and soap opera scriptwriters build amusing plots around those who desperately fight the march of time and the waning of passion. Business derives large profits from those who seek to cover the lines

on the face, who seek to color the graying hair, and who in a hundred ways seek to conceal the advancement of age.

When is middle age? To define middle age is dangerous and delicate. Someone said that you can tell you have reached it by four things: "Bifocals, baldness, bridges, and bulges." It's the age when the steps seem steeper, the cold wind stronger, and the joints stiffer. Middle age is when you get "too-itis"—You are too tired, it is too late, too far, too much, too long, too hard, too fattening, too noisy, or too loud.

Middle age starts when we begin looking at the past and we find ourselves repeating, "When I was young." It is here when we fear the future and our slogan is "Things can't continue long like this."

"Life may not begin at 40," quipped one lady, "but your life begins to show at 40." It's true. By 40 the record of our souls is now written on our faces. The record of our habits is now written on our bodies. And the record of our attitudes is written on our countenance.

Recent writings suggest that middle age, give or take a few years, goes from 40 to 65. Also it is described as a distinct period of human development—as distinct as childhood and adolescence—in which great changes take place physically, psychologically, and

spiritually. This article refers particularly to the third of these changes.

Middle years—triumph and tragedy. While the dangers of youth seem obvious and center around the physical appetites and passions, the dangers of middle age are much more secret and subtle. While the more obvious sins of youth may injure fatally, the sins of middle age, usually not as open or obviously shameful, none-the-less can prove fatal. The psalmist describes this period of life as "the destruction that wastes at noonday." "In the midst of the years," says Habakkuk, God needs to revive His work and make His path known to us.

Stories of people who reached their greatest victories and then experienced their greatest defeats in the middle passage permeate the pages of history.

On the other hand, Moses led God's people out of Egypt and through the wilderness during his middle years. The mantle of Moses fell on faithful Joshua in the middle years of his life. John Wesley, at the acme of his powers in the middle years, led multitudes to the saving knowledge of Christ. John Knox and Martin Luther, in the middle of life, demonstrated the courage of clear Christian commitment. John Bunyan penned *Pilgrim's Progress* during his middle passage.

All through the centuries, in all

John Drescher, professor of applied theology, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Virginia, has had articles published in more than 100 periodicals. © 1982 by John M. Drescher.

Someone has said that you can identify the arrival of middle age by the four B's: "bifocals, baldness, bridges, and bulges."



realms of life, contributions of men and women were momentous during the middle years. Robert Weston writes, "Yet, while the middle generation is the prime mover down at the church, it is also the age group that is most taken for granted. There are the youth groups and their retreats, and young adults and their ball games, the senior citizens and their golden age clubs, but the middle generation usually has only the opportunity to foot the bill."

Calvin W. Mauser says, "Never in the history of man has any generation so taxed itself for the good of others as has the present generation in the middle."

But the opposite is also true. Middle age is also the most dangerous time of life. C. S. Lewis in the *Screwtape Letters* writes: "The long, dull, monotonous years of middle-aged prosperity or middle-aged adversity are excellent campaigning weather [for the devil]."—Letter 28.

Have you ever noticed that the most ghastly failures in the Scriptures are those who made shipwreck in the middle passage? Samson, God's strong man in his younger years, experienced his "destruction that wastes at noonday." He didn't even realize that the Lord had departed from him. Saul, the stalwart, strong young man who stood head and shoulders above his comrades, fell at the noontime of life.

Solomon, the wisest king and one who reaped the worthy honors of the world, wasted his life in the middle years. David, the great, good, and gracious young man, became lazy and lusty in middle age. He grew careless about his relationship with God and his own family. David's children hardly knew their father. He wept about Absalom—too late.

In the New Testament, Judas seemed to have come through the pitfalls and perils of youth unscathed. His character disclosed no major stain to his companions. But somehow in the middle years he allowed the corroding influence of money and the love of power to take over. And when he saw that

following Christ would gratify with wealth or power, he committed the crime of the centuries, repeated again and again for the same reasons, in betraying his Lord.

Demas demonstrated and illustrated the same danger. For years he followed Christ faithfully and was a fellow-laborer with the apostle Paul. But he fell under the heat of the noonday sun. Paul writes, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." He succumbed to the perils of the middle passage.

Recently we had a U.S. President who in his prime, along with many of his brilliant, loyal, and capable companions, made shipwreck in the middle of life.

So at every level of life, in every realm of life, the middle passage has seen great victories and great defeats.

Why so perilous? The question then arises: Why is the middle of life so perilous? Let me suggest three reasons, which pertain primarily to the spiritual.

1. In the middle passage there is the danger that we lose our idealism. Youth is a time of dreaming and seeing visions. Youth is a time to build gorgeous castles in the air. Early in life we cherish splendid ambitions. "Wait till I'm a man," J. M. Barrie said as a small child to his mother, "and you shall lie in feathers." He dreamed of bringing comfort to his beloved mother. The danger in middle age is that we find the ideals and comforts of life harder to achieve than we thought. They are hard to reach and realize. So, many times, in the middle years we give up on dreams. We abandon our quests. We surrender our ideals.

In Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, Sir Gawain, like the other knights of the Round Table, sets out in search of the Holy Grail. This is another way of saying that he started with the ideal of a pure and holy life. However, he soon wearied of his quest. Soon he saw a silk pavilion in a field, full of merry maidens. Sir Gawain abandoned his quest and spent twelve months in sensuous

ease and pleasure.

When Sir Gawain returns to the court, he scoffs at the idea of the quest for the Holy Grail. He now says:

But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,
I shall be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,
And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,
To holy virgins in their ecstasies,
Henceforward.

Here is the picture of a person who starts life with high ideals, but who, in time, surrenders. The aspirations of life have left and he becomes deaf and blind to the pure and holy.

"He was born a man and died a grocer" is the bitter and biting epitaph written on a gravestone in a parish churchyard. So many people begin with the vision to make a life and then settle for making a living.

When we surrender our dreams and laugh at or reason away our ideals, we commit spiritual suicide. This is the constant peril of middle age. We get settled in a groove and it becomes our grave. (These two words, by the way, come from the same original stem.) Accommodation takes the place of conviction. Compelling desire for acceptance and respect replaces the compelling witness that bears the offense of the cross. The drive for dusty gold blinds our spiritual eyes.

"We must face reality" are the words of middle age, only to lose the great realities of the Spirit. "We must be practical" are the words of the middle passage, only to forget that Jesus meant His words to be practiced. "We need to make a living" are the words of the middle generation, only to forget that before we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," we pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done."

Middle age has the great temptation to rationalize away every wooing of the Spirit, to continually criticize the world and church, but avoid the sin in one's own life. Those in the middle of life too often look so long at the facts that they forget their walk is a walk of faith.

Middle age must guard against

always taking the easy way out. Sir Francis Bacon, the great Elizabethan philosopher and statesman, wrote: "Young men, in their conduct and manage of actions, embrace more than they can hold; stir more than they can quiet; fly to the end without consideration of the means and degrees. . . . Men of age object too much, consult too long, adventure too little, repent too soon, and seldom drive business hours to the full period, but content themselves with a mediocrity of success."

E. Stanley Jones in *Christ and Human Suffering*, page 209, has a striking paragraph: "Every man needs reconversion at forty on general principles! Because at forty we settle down, begin to lose that sense of spiritual expectancy, begin to take on protective resemblance to environment, and to play for safety. I once heard an Anglican bishop say that the period of greatest number of spiritual casualties is between forty and fifty and not between twenty and thirty, as one would expect. Why? Well, if heaven lies about us in our infancy; the world lies about us in our middle age. We come under its standards, fit into its facts, and are slowly de-Christianized."

So one of the dangers of middle age is the loss of our ideals. However, as we remain honest and open to the Holy Spirit and God's Word, the ideal of Jesus and the meaning of life as He has taught it will remain clear. These will stand the test of time and eternity. He not only sets before us the ideal of Jesus, but He stirs within us the aspirations needed for purpose and purity, and He instills within us the power for spiritual living.

2. Another peril of the middle passage is the loss of vital faith. Childhood is happy. Childhood looks at life through the beautiful glasses of a guile-free and trustful spirit. Old age, while not as innocently trustful as childhood, usually is more mellow and gentle in its judgments.

But between childhood and old age there is the constant danger to become hard, cynical, and scornful. Life, by middle age, has

brought disappointment and disillusionment. And because we may sense that we are at our peak physically, at the job and every other way, we may let envy and jealousy take over. Resentment may run rampant.

Middle age is inclined to sit in the seat of the scornful, to make savage and sweeping judgments, and to declare with the psalmist, "All men are liars" (Psalm 116:11). Pessimism is sometimes called "the measles of middle age."

Read the literature of middle age. Every man is a scoundrel and every woman is base and soiled. Middle age produces the awful films. Middle age imagines that there are no happy marriages or peaceful homes. Middle age assumes every husband is unfaithful.

A. E. Taylor in *The Faith of a Moralists* writes: "Middle age is attended, for all of us, with the grave danger of moral stagnation." The road of middle age is crowded with moral wrecks, persons who gave up against the power of impurity and lust. Many in middle age yield to the cynicism of the disillusioned, and because we lose faith in our fellow men, we doubt God and lose contact with His Word and Spirit. The feeling of many in middle age is expressed in the words of a song, popular a few years ago, "Is that all there is?"

Dr. George Washington Truett, after 42 years as a pastor and preacher, says that throughout his ministry the "greatest downfalls have come in life's middle." Westwood Purkeiser, in an editorial, writes, "A thoughtful Christian leader in his late fifties recently commented, 'What signs there are of renewal in the church are among the young. I don't see much evidence of it in my generation.'"

One thing I learned early in my ministry throughout the church in holding revival and renewal meetings is that revival starts with the young. With the exception of a few individuals here and there, it never starts with the middle-aged. Middle age, along with its inclination to react to new ideas, is cautious about making new commitments. By middle age we

develop a defense mechanism that, through long practice, makes it difficult to face ourselves.

We are inclined to leave God out, especially if we are successful. We are inclined to leave prayer out, especially if we consider ourselves thoughtful persons. We are inclined to leave the Holy Spirit out and to walk by sight rather than faith.

According to one study of the religion of the middle-aged man, the man between 40 and 60 attends church less, prays less, discusses vital matters with his minister less, and says that religion has less meaning than either the older or younger persons.

Is that all there is?

The answer from the Christian is No! In Christ there is the forgetting of the past, and pressing on to that which is before, to seek to realize more fully every day the reason and purpose of Christ's calling. More spiritual treasures and joys exist ahead in Christ.

3. A peril of the middle passage is that we can lose the sense of the eternal. In childhood the spiritual and eternal seems strangely near. Heaven, God, the white-robed angels, are wonderfully near.

Again in old age, eternal things become vivid and clear. The mere decaying of strength reminds us that no abiding place exists here. Friends move on. And as we follow one friend after another to the grave, we find it increasingly difficult to ignore eternity.

The danger of losing the eternal perspective is the peculiar peril of the middle-aged. Middle age is a time filled with responsibility. The demands of business and the burdens of life wipe out time for eternal values. As one recently said, "Scarcely can we turn aside for one brief hour of prayer."

We have no time to look to the hills and to the God who made all that abides. We materialize life and starve the soul. We struggle for bread and butter until we believe that bread and butter are the most important things in life. We lose sight of eternal riches for a few temporal toys.

Carl Jung described middle age as the time when a "man breathes his own life into things until finally they begin to live themselves and to multiply, and imperceptibly he is overgrown by them."

It was this instinct that John Bunyan had when, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, he placed Vanity Fair, not early or late in Christian's journey to glory, but near the middle. This vainglory, this avarice, this passion for money and position is more deadly than the hot passions of youth. It is the more deadly because few recognize it. It possesses no shame in the world's eyes. Success here counts to one's credit in the eyes of one's peers.

Yet it destroys the soul as surely as drunkenness. It beckons the betrayal of our Lord. It shuts out the spiritual for the satisfactions of the sensual.

No wonder Habakkuk cries, "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, . . . make [it] known."

This might be our prayer. If we make the Most High our habitation and His will our delight, if we abide in the secret place of the Most High, we will not need to be afraid of the arrow that flies by day, nor for the pestilence that walks in the darkness, nor for the destruction that wastes at noonday.

But we need God at every step. At no time do we need Him more than now, in the middle passage. And knowing Him, middle age can represent a time and chance for self-renewal and rededication, which can produce a greater stability than at any other time of life. Middle life, because it is in the middle, is capable, in Christ, of a greater depth in relationships, to the young and old, to the church and world, than any other time of life.

Thank God that many of the saints of the ages experienced reconversion in the middle years. At a time when many sink in the Slough of Despond, those reconverted become increasingly aware of the presence and power of God.

TT

Presenting Jesus Christ in
all His fullness to all the world.

We believe the Bible to be the authoritative
word of God, Satan to be our great adversary,
Jesus to be our all-sufficient Saviour, and the
coming Christ to be our only hope as the
world nears its cataclysmic end.

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THIS TIME



While Columnist Frank Holbrook was writing his article on the Bible (page 16), he complained that he needed more space in which to state his feelings about the Book of books. Unfortunately, we had to put a word limit on him, as much as we disliked to. Actually, we could have filled the whole issue with good things regarding Holy Scripture.

For example, I like this quotation by the well-known English preacher-writer Samuel Chadwick, "I have guided my life by the Bible for more than 60 years, and I tell you there is no book like it. It is a miracle of literature, a perennial spring of wisdom, a wonder of surprises, a revelation of mystery, an infallible guide of conduct, and an unspeakable source of comfort.

"Pay no attention to people who discredit it, for I tell you that they speak without knowledge. It is the word of God itself.

"Study it according to its own direction. Live by its principles. Believe its message. Follow its precepts.

"No man is uneducated who knows the Bible, and no one is wise who is ignorant of its teachings."

Then there is this jewel by the great evangelist Dwight L. Moody: "I prayed for faith and thought that someday faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not seem to come. One day I read in Romans 10, 'Now faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word.' I had closed my Bible and prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible and began to study, and faith has been growing ever since."

I can't resist including the following observation by Ellen G. White, whose writings have appeared many times in our pages: "Many a man who delights to quibble, to criticize, seeking for something to question in the word of God, thinks that he is thereby giving evidence of independence of thought, and mental acuteness. He supposes that he is sitting in judgment on the Bible, when in truth he is judging himself. He makes it manifest that he is incapable of appreciating truths that originate in heaven, and that encompass eternity. In the presence of the great mountain of God's righteousness, his spirit is not awed. He busies himself with hunting for sticks and straws, and in this betrays a narrow and earthly nature, a heart that is fast losing its capacity to appreciate God.

"He whose heart has responded to the divine touch will be seeking for that which will increase his knowledge of God, and will refine and elevate the character. As a flower turns to the sun, that the bright rays may touch it with tints of beauty, so will the soul turn to the Sun of Righteousness, that heaven's light may beautify the character with the graces of the character of Christ."

Recently H. M. S. Richards, veteran speaker on the Voice of Prophecy religious broadcast, challenged his audience to read the New Testament through once a month for the rest of 1982. Why not? There is no book like it. As Noah Webster, master architect of our educational system, said, "Education is useless without the Bible."

Kenneth J. Holland

"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

A certain store advertisement asks the question, "Who cares?" and gives the answer, "We care." You may be asking that question now in your hour of trial. "Who cares? Does anyone care about me in my present need?" This message brings to you the "good news" that there is One who does care about you and would be your dearest Friend. About this Friend someone once wrote:

*Earthly friends may prove untrue,
Doubts and fears assail;
One still loves and cares for you,
One who will not fail.*

Many years ago, David, the psalmist, made a startling statement, "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul" (Psalm 142:4). Man may fail you when the going is hard, but Jesus Christ never fails those who put their trust in Him. He does care for you in your hour of trial. About Him the apostle Peter wrote, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Whatever your burden may be, will you not let Jesus bear it? He has proved to countless thousands through the years to be a loving Friend.

The Bible tells us that "a friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17). God is not unmindful of your burden. His love reaches out to you at this moment. The Word of God speaks of Christ's love in these words, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). And again, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10, N.I.V.).* In His love God has permitted this trial to come into your life so that you might turn to Him and receive His love in Christ. Someone has said,

"God often digs wells of joy with the spade of sorrow." God's wonderful love in Christ can change a dark outlook to a bright one in times of trial. His love can chase the shadows of gloom away and turn your night into day.

*Dear one, I know thy sorrows,
Thine every trial I share;
I know how thou art tested,
And, what is more—I care.*

Christ has also proved to many to be a lasting Friend.

Christ's love and care for you is unchangeable.

You can depend upon His faithfulness to give

strength to meet each new day with its trials and burdens. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deuteronomy 33:25b).

The story is told of a hard-working man who fell on difficult days. Through no fault of his own he lost his health and all his capital and at last his family faced ruin. A rich man heard of his plight and sent him an envelope with a certain sum of money and a note attached that read, "More to follow." After a few days another envelope arrived with a gift and a note attached with the message "More to follow." For many days and weeks the family received such help, always with the cheering message "More to follow," until the ruined fortune was mended and a measure of prosperity restored.

So it is with God's care. He supplies strength and grace enough for present needs and there is always the cheering assurance for each new day, "More to follow."

Who cares about you in your present need? God cares. His care is supremely seen in His love for you in Christ. Will you not let Christ prove to be a loving and lasting Friend to you? The Bible invites you now to "cast your burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee" (Psalm 55:22).

BY GEORGE E. SADLER

Yes, Someone Does Care for You

"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

George Sadler is a writer for the American Tract Society. © 1982 by George E. Sadler. Reprints of this article are available by writing to American Tract Society, P.O. Box 402008, Garland, Texas 75040.

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Tr





WHERE IS GOD WHEN I NEED HIM?

God hasn't gone anywhere. He doesn't take vacations. He's right here. He always has been. It's just that you may have been too wrapped up in your own problems to recognize Him.

Take a few minutes to focus on His presence and His message to you. It's here, too, in the Bible—ancient words with timely meaning for modern men and women.

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