

Every home a church,
every church a seminary

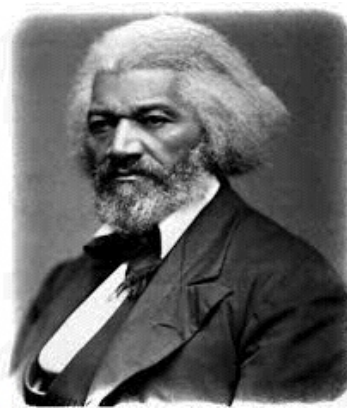
A communication catastrophe – and a cure

BY DAVID ASPINALL

IT HAS taken me 45 years and 3000 books to shovel away the dust of 70 generations and 20 centuries – to get down to the bedrock of Christianity. Did it HAVE to take so long?

Well, my training was not good. Till age 36 I was taught primarily by The Watchtower. As I grew into Christ my reading grew gradually wider, but not much more fruitful, for my early mentors were often not much ahead of me – fairly shallow in their digging abilities & even digging ambitions. It took my getting into the book business, and then *still* took me till I was almost 50 – just to figure out who the BEST teachers were. Then another 10 years to sift wheat from chaff among their works (for JW's and other non-scholars out there, the best teachers in 'Christendom' produce far more wheat than chaff, which is exactly the opposite of the Watchtower).

Can we speed up the process of creating competent Christian disciplers? Do we HAVE to dig through 70 generations of dusty



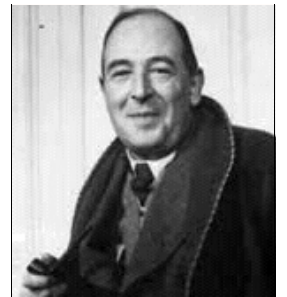
FREDERICK DOUGLASS

“Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.”

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

tradition? Would it not be enough just to get back 7 generations – say, just before Darwin and higher criticism came along? If 7 generations is too shallow, then how about 14 generations to the Puritans, 17 or 18 generations to the Reformers? Most conservative Christians I have met seem content to get back to their denominational and/or theological roots – usually 100-400 years. They tend to assume there is no real gap between their favourite teachers/traditions and New Testament Christianity. Some won't even go that far – “the Bible is my only textbook”. You have met them too. For such Christians, no generational gap gets in the way of the Holy Spirit, who gives them direct insight into Scripture, insights which even scholars, apparently, do not share.

But there is a gap – a GIGANTIC gap – which the Holy Spirit seems unwilling to jump. The Spirit has embedded His divine truths in historical documents which are 20 centuries old, many much older. (This sets the Bible apart from all other sacred books, which tend to make history irrelevant.) Our 21st century minds, meanwhile, are embedded in and conditioned by a culture removed from THAT culture and world by 2000 years and 5000 miles. The bedrock of Christianity is the apostolic witness, 70 generations ago, not 7 or 17. No denomination, no cult, no theological tradition – not Jehovah's Witnesses, not Mormons, not Pentecostals, not Brethren, not Baptists, not Presbyterians, not Lutherans, not Anglicans, not Roman Catholics, not Orthodox — has dug down to the bedrock. The Orthodox may have got the closest, for they have not changed much over 15 or so centuries. But even the Orthodox communities are still at a fair distance from the bedrock. They too need help from the only Divine community which has shovelled ALL the dust from the succeeding centuries. That community are the New Testament scholars.



C.S. LEWIS

advised that we
read 2 old books
for every new
one

But who is listening to NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARS? Judging by the size of their seminary classes and the print runs on their books, fewer than 100,000 people on the planet take them seriously enough to pay CLOSE attention to their message. Compare that to the more than 2 billion lay Christians and churchgoers who look to 'other authorities' for spiritual guidance. Some justify their inattention to NT scholars with a flip "well, they all disagree anyhow". I used to say that myself, but then I was a JW. One of my biggest surprises when I left the WT was finding

But how many are listening?

that the 'scholars' disagreed far less than Christians – even ministers – did, and much less than JW's did with other 'denominations' – or even with their own founder, CT Russell.

So after 20 years of 'hanging out' with both Christians AND scholars of every stripe, which Christian 'body' have I found which has shovelled aside the rubble of 20 centuries? Well, the most honoured Bible teachers come from EVERY denomination and tradition. F.F. Bruce is Brethren, Howard Marshall Methodist, John Stott Anglican, James Smart Presbyterian, C.H. Dodd Congregational, Raymond Brown Roman Catholic, A.T. Robertson Baptist. How is it that the scholars are in general agreement about Christian roots, but their churches still squabble? How is it that the scholars tend to be far more 'ecumenical' than their less-sophisticated brethren? And how come virtually ALL 'discernment ministries' — which feed off a polemical, decidedly UN-ecumenical spirit — are headed by Christians who have little or even NO training in New Testament exegesis?

Why, to be blunt, are even most committed Christians OUT OF TOUCH with Bible scholarship – and the **real** New Testament? A communication catastrophe to be sure. Is there a cure? What can we do about this disconnect between experts and non-experts?

ONE WONDERS – ABOUT A CURE:

EVERY HOME A CHURCH,

EVERY CHURCH A SEMINARY

Well, scholars hang out in seminaries and universities. The rest of us spend most of our lives in our homes (if we are among the blessed.) Since most of us will never get to the seminaries and the universities, and most of the greatest teachers of the church are dead already, there is but one way for most Christians to build the bridge back to the REAL New Testament, to REAL Christianity. That is to get the fruit of the great teachers into the homes of as

many Christians as we can. NOT into churches, I repeat, but into homes. Most of us need to 'hang out' with them regularly, if we are to benefit much from their guidance. Vivian and I have found that's the best way to keep your 'sanctified sanity'. Anything less is slow starvation.

But how do we get from subsistence survival to house fellowships which function as not only church and **real family**, but also as mini-seminaries? For that is what it will take to move the western church out of survival mode, and into the thriving, communities which 1000s of fellowships in Africa and Asia have now become. *Every home a church, every church a seminary* is

one of the foundation commitments of I:I ministry and its attached book and home education resource shop, **One Wonders**. Our chief asset is a bounty of books in every category relevant to Christian life and work. We have the resources to feed the spiritually hungry. What we **don't** have – in our local churches – is enough available workers to feed the hungry sheep. *Beg the*



JAMES D. SMART

Why do only 5% of churchgoers attend Bible classes? Is it not to do with how they view their own role in life & therefore eternity?

Master of the harvest to send out more workers, the Lord urged His disciples. We know there are 1000s of Christians – even in the affluent and distracted GTA – who already are committed to house churches. And probably many of them would love to participate in the teaching of such fellowships, had they the time and resources. We cannot do much to give them more time, but we have the resources.

**HOW YOU CAN HELP MAKE
EVERY HOME A CHURCH,
EVERY CHURCH A SEMINARY**

It is our goal to help every Christian adult (and every willing youth) become a competent, even excellent, teacher of the faith. And to make it possible for every believing parent to become an effective communicator of the faith with their own children. Beyond that, to equip all for every good work in a house fellowship setting. *You ought to be teachers in view of the time* (Heb. 6). If what prevents you from realizing that goal is the time factor, work on your schedule. But if what prevents you is the fiscal factor – no space in your present budget – **I:I** and **One Wonders** can help right away.

Our determination is to create vibrant house fellowships, with teaching the main ongoing focus. To facilitate that ambition, we will help committed leaders build their family libraries. To make it easy for limited budgets, the policy we have adopted is simply *pay when you can*. Don't let dollar limitations get in the way of feeding your family and your fellowship. Yes, it is desirable – nay, *essential* – to set a family and/or fellowship budget for educational resources & books. And in view of ongoing budget constraints for **One Wonders**, it is also desirable that we establish a healthy cash flow. But again, we can't let money concerns get in the way of *feed my sheep*. The disciples who heard Christ command Peter *feed my lambs* knew He would not let them run short of bread – if they obeyed. So if we build the libraries, we know the Lord will ensure the work can go on. Therefore, if you are willing to commit the time to becoming a shepherd, we are willing to commit the resources to your shelves. Even if you cannot see

yourself becoming a shepherd, perhaps you can help some who might have the willingness and ability, but not the financial situation, to realize their calling.

**HOW MUCH WILL IT COST – \$\$\$ AND HOURS
– TO MAKE EVERY HOME A CHURCH,
EVERY CHURCH A SEMINARY**

What will it take in financial commitment to get the best teachers in the history of Christianity into your living space – on call any hour, any day? Only you will not be at their feet, they will be in your lap.

A minimal library will cost you about one wall, a comprehensive library more like a small bedroom. Here are some figures to work with:

GOAL	SIZE of LIBRARY	COST
personal study	the price of competence is 500-1000 books (one wall)	at retail or second hand prices, \$10,000 +
fellowship library	comprehensive selection in every area crucial to discipleship = 2000+ works (one small room)	\$40,000+. If Levitical model followed, about 10% of income should be consecrated to discipling
seminary level library	10,000+ volumes (more crucial to keep up-to-date, especially on 'battleground' books such as Genesis, Acts)	new commentaries cost in the \$50-100 range, so value can easily surpass \$250,000
the bottom line – every man & woman a teacher, every home a church	every believer AT LEAST have access REGULARLY to the best teaching of the centuries (a steady diet of 1 book a week (?) will cost you app. 5-10 hours)	if we do not expect to spend less than \$500/month to make sure our family has enough of the 'food that perishes', how much shall we set apart for the 'bread of life' which the Son of man will give us? (John 6:27)

James Smart, C.S. Lewis on the lack of passion for Bible classes ... and how to start healthy reading habits

... even where such a class is made available, not more than 5% of the members of the church are likely to make use of it. 95% feel no need of it. Their version of the Christian faith and the Christian life is of a character that they can dispense with any serious delving into the Scriptures. They are content with a church in which all things are done decently and in order, which makes minimal demands upon their time and provides a maximum of moral stability and spiritual security ...

– **James D. Smart**, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Churches*, pp. 168-169

... keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books. Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. But not the *same* mistakes ... Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction.

– **C.S. Lewis**, *First and Second Things*, pp. 26-28