

THE WALTZING BULLS ♦ EYES OF FAITH

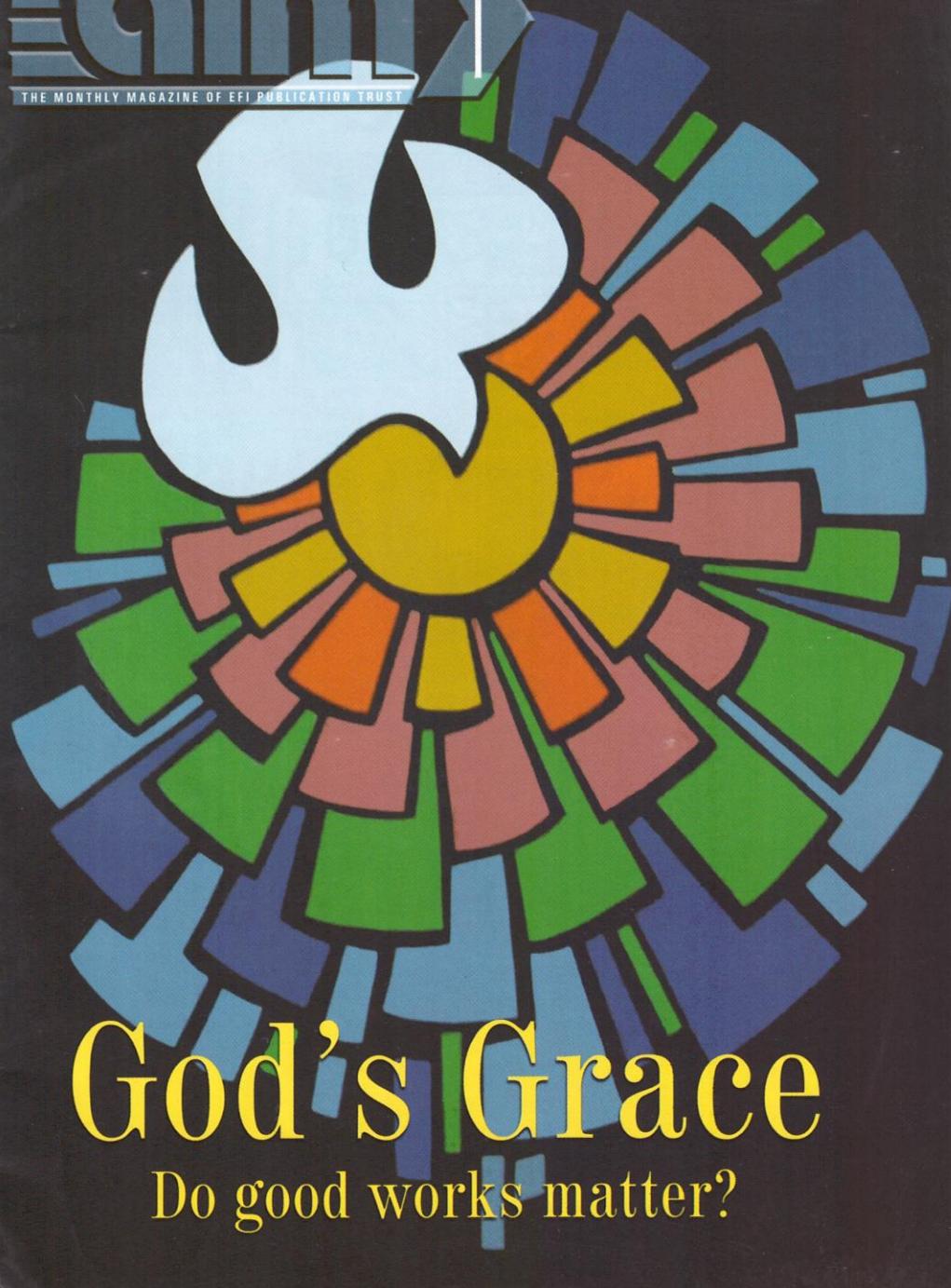
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Perilous times



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C O N T E N T S

From the editor

Rev. Dr. Richard Howell..... 4

Eyes of faith

Rebecca Joseph 9

The waltzing bulls

Freda Daisy Howell..... 13

Mission to the city

Sanjiv Ailawadi..... 15

Pulpit points

..... 18

Children:

Joseph's stories

..... 22

Encouragement

Lareau Lindquist..... 25

Perilous times

Ruth Samuel 27

Christian Ministry . . .

Anand David 31

Beautiful Mizoram

..... 34

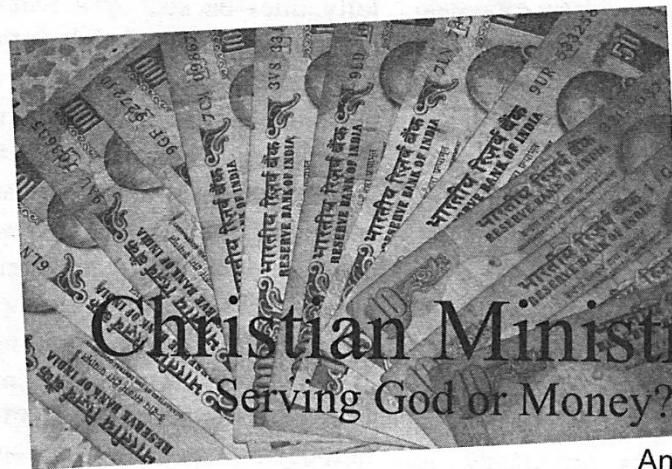
Health:

Beat the heat . . .

..... 37

Prayer Calendar

..... 39



Anand David

Someone said, 'prosperity is the promise of the Old Testament, adversity is of the new.' In apostolic times, ministry was a matter of toil, sweat, blood, tears and many prayers as they navigated through adversity, opposition, physical torture, mental agony and persecution.

Suffering on account of one's faith was found inevitable. In these days, faith appears to be a ready mix of philosophy, new age thought, contemporary culture, national polity and power equations, enterprise, and socio-economic projects! Ministry today has many faces: orthodox, evangelical, conventional, rural, urban, digital, contemporary, liberal, radical, social and even business! Power-mongering, nepotism, factions, dissensions, lawsuits, disunity and violence are diabolic manifestations in majority of Christian institutions and denominations today.

Faith is played up to the gallery to demonstrate one-upmanship by

getting hyped, branded, specialized, commercialised and sophisticated. Mission strategists have come to believe in repackaging the gospel with a touch of corporate culture, futuristic vision, innovation and fashion as soul-winning mantras.

Christian TV soaps, web evangelism, cyber churches, e-tube, online Christian singles dating, cyber hymns, e-books, online library etc mark the undercurrents of ministry in this new millennium. Cyber-bishops are just a click away to christen, baptize, solemnize a wedding, confirm, ordain or consecrate you. You can date online, fellowship online, pray online, give online, send flowers online, marry online, argue online, commit adultery online and divorce online! Cults and heretics thrive on the internet with their "products and services" to proselytise the 'Netizens' of the Internet kingdom.

It is quite sadistic to pen a scathing article denouncing all that is done

under the banner of Christian ministry! I think there are more capable people than me for that. Nevertheless, as we observe how today's ministries are rattling down a decadent path, dependant on mundane know-how, sowing in wind and reaping whirlwind, it is high time to take stock of the situation and seek biblical solutions.

Titles or Testimonies?

Cyber Chancellors are ready to trade a divinity doctoral degrees or a fanciful ministry title for you - via net for a net price. 'Upmarket' preachers and Christian leaders cherish crisscrossing the globe by super jets to attend global conferences and present "strategy" papers weaved with esoteric mumbo jumbo of theological, sociological, philosophical, economical, missiological domains, indiscriminately meddling on every thing under the sun, from homosexuality to global warming, nuclear holocaust to local politics, contraceptives to genetically modified foods, water crises to water baptism, ignorant of their calling and thrust areas. While they engage with the whole wide world around, their personal world crashes all of a sudden with financial scams and scandalous sexual affairs. Let us remind ourselves: Pharaoh had a mighty title, but Moses a miraculous testimony! Naaman had a title as a military general, but his poor servant girl, an orphan had a testimony! The high priests had a

lofty titles backed by a Sanhedrin, but the wandering disciples of Christ who were illiterate fishermen had a testimony of turning the world upside down! Nebuchadnezzar had a title as a grand emperor, but Daniel and his associates had a zealous testimony of overcoming trials, temptations and death.

Workaholics or Witnesses?

Christian organizations revel in introducing mundane "management principles" leading to squandering away of time in exhaustive discussions at luxury hotels and resorts and periodical production of a mountain of paper work, powerpoints and documentaries highlighting 'activities undertaken', 'problems encountered', 'facts and figures,' 'churches planted', 'projects managed,' 'annexure of maps,' 'curriculum developed,' 'training conducted', 'events chronicled', 'population covered', 'literature sold,' 'targets achieved', 'letters answered,' 'trends projected,' 'testimonies profiled' and budgets ... program-wise, strategy wise, activity wise, region-wise, gender-wise, item-wise, line-wise etc., in an attempt to establish a niche for themselves and impress the donors.

In order to ensure steady inflow of funds, the above workaholic frenzy spirals non-stop till people are afflicted by a 'burnout' and quit organisations! While many Christian leaders earn international standard salaries and perks and enjoy living

in ivory towers with three rings of security, their subordinates down the human pyramid are kept as hungry, sickly, burdened, lean cows, leave alone the deadline pressures, petty politics, fear psychosis, job insecurity and threat of transfers and 'use and throw' personnel policy! Martha of Bethany was a workaholic to the core, even ignoring God-in-flesh in front of her own eyes! Do we value life and the welfare of the human soul? If we ignore our high calling to preach, teach, heal, disciple and serve the hurting world, we would only turn as Judases with eyeing the money bag. That would amount to betrayal of Christ and the end of being witnesses for His saving grace. A ministry sans human touch and spiritual sensitivity would fall out of grace, die a natural death in a matter of years, and sink into oblivion.

Professionalism or God's Power?

While the value of professionalism is upheld through constant innovation in systems, work culture, technology, production processes, distribution logistics and administration of services, some argue that ministry cannot be left behind in the shadows of antiquity. Was Jesus a professional in the modern sense of the word -- (selling His gospel)? Did His disciples exhibit any brand of reckonable homiletic expertise in their preaching, tested pedagogy in their teaching or any media-savvy formula in their healing? The

corporate world works 24X7 marked by a work-till-you-drop approach! Is it professionalism? Input of expertise in work that redeems time would be a beneficial approach.

At a decisive point of time, early apostles prudently prioritised their work, so that they did not waste a moment majoring on minor issues! Luke records, "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "it is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables ... but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:2, 4) How well the apostles reorganised themselves that they all lived sharing their faith and resources and faithfully preached Christ and not themselves and then saw their words were indeed confirmed by signs and wonders from above!

to be continued

Anand David works as a Program Officer for a diplomatic mission in Delhi and spends his free volunteering in churches for preaching, Christian writing and counseling. He and his wife Sharmilee attend Centenary Methodist Church.



Christian Ministry serving God & Money Part 2

Anand David

Though Church was founded with theological scholarship and missionary enterprise, it is the components of calling, care, compassion, courage, sacrificial service and even martyrdom that have served as its foundations. Real productivity comes when God's people become branches of the true vine – the Lord Jesus Christ, who said 'he who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.' (John 15:5) When Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit, they can accomplish more than what can be expected as the Bible says, "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts." (Zechariah 4:6) What are the characteristics of a Christian leader and the yardsticks of performance in Christian work?

Grace in attitude:

It is rightly said, knowledge speaks; wisdom listens! While arrogance

leads to usurp for oneself more than what is legitimate, an attitude of grace gives room for the existence and expression of others and their wellbeing and growth. It is important to realise: neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase (I Corinthians 3:7). Peter was once an impulsive,

What are the characteristics of a Christian leader and the yardsticks of performance in Christian work?

impolite and an uncouth man who has also seen the vanity of labour as he toiled fishing all night ending with no catch. With that experience and maturity, he has a sane advice for us all to grow in grace: "Escape corruption that is in the world . . . giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance,

to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful" (2 Peter 1:4c – 8).

Love in action

Love in action is the realisation of the love of Christ poured in our hearts by our heavenly Father. God's love transforms our lifestyle enough to be able to live for others in need . . . by sharing, caring and walking the extra mile in bearing the burdens of others! Paul taught this: "For the love of Christ constrains us, . . . that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Among the needy and the poor are saints, whom we may never know! "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" (James 2:5). Therefore, we must be keen to support those who labor for the Lord, in meeting their basic needs like food or clothing. Givers are not generally millionaires and philanthropists!

Macedonians in spite of their own poverty supported the saints. "For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem." (Romans 15:26). There are also the poor, who are also out side of our

faith. They lack the basic necessities of life. Further, they are oppressed due to the vulnerability of being poor. "The fatherless child is snatched from the breast; the infant of the poor is seized for a debt." (Job 24:9). God created them in His image. Psalmist says, "My whole being will exclaim, 'Who is like you, O LORD? You rescue the poor from those too

Mercy and compassion naturally leads to generous giving.

strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them.'" (Psalm 35:10). The Bible says, "He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done." (Proverbs 19:17). Mercy and compassion naturally leads to generous giving. "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God." (Leviticus 23:22)

Unity in Fellowship

Our callings may differ. Socio-cultural-ethnic and denominational backgrounds may differ, but we represent the body of Christ in this world as a church. Paul makes this clear: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ, For by

one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free . . . But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.” (1 Corinthians 12: 12, 13, 18). Further he says, “I . . . beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3). Ministry may have diverse manifestations, but will ultimately bring glory to God’s name, when it is done with grace, humility, love and unity. The Bible warns: ‘Cursed is he who does

the work of the Lord deceitfully.’ (Jeremiah 48:10a) It is time to stop pretending. Its time to seek the Lord to empower us by His Spirit for the work of building His Kingdom!❖

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Christians should be grave and serious, though cheerful and pleasant. They should feel that they have great interests at stake, and that the world has too. They are redeemed—not to make sport; purchased with precious blood—for other purposes than to make men laugh. They are soon to be in heaven—and a man who has any impressive sense of that will habitually feel he has much else to do than to make men laugh. The true course of life is midway between moroseness and levity; sourness and lightness; harshness and jesting. Be benevolent, kind, cheerful, bland, courteous—but serious. Be solemn, thoughtful, deeply impressed with the presence of God and with eternal things—but pleasant affable and benignant. Think not a smile sinful; but think not levity and jesting harmless.

—Albert Barnes