

Blacks and Whites

By Jamie Buckingham

From all outward appearances, this is the most unlikely time in history for revival to break out among blacks. Never has the black church been in such disarray. Never has male leadership been so weak. Never have blacks been so anti-church. Yet I believe the next move of the Holy Spirit will be among the blacks of America.

Last summer 1,000 black church leaders met in Atlanta for a Congress on Evangelizing Black America. It was a conference of doom and gloom. Speaker after speaker lamented the huge numbers of young blacks who are shunning the church. Others spoke of the alarming number of black pastors who are dropping out of the ministry—discouraged beyond repair. Church of God in Christ (COGIC) evangelist George McKinney of San Diego said as many as 25 percent have quit because of the incredible difficulty of winning blacks to Jesus. This, he says, has brought “a very large number of pastors to the brink of despair.”

Black Christian heroes are virtually non-existent. While an increasing number of competent blacks hold down responsible political and business positions, very few give clear testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ. Their religion is that of Jesse Jackson—more cultural and political than personal and evangelical.

Only among college and professional athletes do we find black heroes. Who can forget that thrilling speech made by Julius (Dr. J.) Irving when he retired from professional basketball—giving all glory to “my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?”

But where are the young black preachers? Most of them are preaching to whites.

Where are the black Christian musicians? Singing in white churches.

And how many black Christian writers have you read recently?

Thank God for men like Bishop Charles Blake of the COGIC, pastor/evangelist Carlton Pearson, and others who preach with such power. Thank God for the growing number of young black



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leaders who are part of this newly integrated society. Thank God for the local pastors, many of whom are highly educated, working in the small, all-black churches. But the struggle is tough.

But sadly lacking are black national voices crying out for personal holiness, a return to family values, honesty, morality and biblical theology.

The Atlanta '88 conference revealed that the black church community is severely handicapped by 1) lack of cooperation between churches, 2) no mass-media mechanisms, and 3) inadequate finances.

Recently I asked a group of white pastors in my town about their relationships with blacks. None of them knew a single black pastor in our city.

In the excellent magazine, *Pastoral Renewal*, Prentice Tipton tackled the problem of the absence of strong male leadership among blacks. The problem is acute because black men are disappearing from the population. The largest cause of death among young black males is murder. Thousands of others are sent to prison each year. The third highest cause of death among young black men is suicide—ranking just below traffic deaths. The wholesome black home Bill Cosby represents on TV is rare—and rarer still are young blacks who are spiritual fathers.

Although blacks make up only 12 percent of the population, they account for almost 50 percent of the prison

population.

Not since the days of slavery have black people been under such attack. Yet in such a time as this God is about to move among his people with freedom, power and prosperity.

Although the few super-churches—like Evangel Temple in Washington D.C. (pastor John Meares: white) and Crenshaw Christian Center in Los Angeles (pastor Fred Price: black)—get publicity, the real work is being done by the pastors in the little neighborhood churches. Tom Skinner, an evangelical, specializes in black leadership development. But we need publications to equip black leaders to move in the power of the Holy Spirit. If God is about to move among blacks, someone needs to prepare the tens of thousands of black pastors in the all-black neighborhoods and ghettos who are struggling along—50 years behind—many of whom have lost all hope of winning the next generation.

Now an opportunity has arisen to help. I have recently accepted the editorship of *Charisma's* sister magazine, *Ministries Today*. Initially I saw an opportunity to help pull divergent Christian leaders together. Most of the magazine's 30,000 subscribers are pastors of small churches. We're dedicated to helping them in their struggle.

Then I asked myself: Who's helping the black pastors? Most *Ministries Today* subscribers—and nearly all our writers—are white. That's not right.

I have enlisted a number of outstanding columnists to write for us, beginning in January. One of these is Leonard Lovett, a black Ph.D. who pastors an inner city church in the Los Angeles area. We'll add more.

In anticipation of what God is about to do among blacks, I now believe the magazine has been ordained to equip thousands of struggling, discouraged blacks as well as white pastors. White readers can help by giving gift subscriptions to black pastors in their cities.

And who knows what might happen if white pastors started talking to black ones. ■