

DISCIPLESHIP DISCIPLESHIP DISCIPLESHIP DISCIPLESHIP

FORUM IN FORT LAUDERDALE



On December 16-17, 1975, a representative group of pastors, teachers, and leaders met in Ann Arbor, Michigan, for a theological and pastoral evaluation of the current controversy over discipleship and shepherding. This two-day meeting ended with the agreement that much of the controversy has resulted from poor communication and misunderstanding, and that the real differences which exist are well within the bounds of "allowable variety" in the Body of Christ.

The participants in the Ann Arbor meeting recommended that *Logos Journal* and *New Wine* magazine publish simultaneously a question-and-answer forum on the issue. The questions are the

same ones being asked by concerned leaders all over the world. The purpose in asking them was to give the men involved in this particular concept of discipleship an opportunity to share with a wider audience a realistic statement of their beliefs.

The forum was held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on January 7, 1975. Dan Malachuk and Jamie Buckingham of Logos presented the questions to a panel comprised of Don Basham, Ern Baxter, Bob Mumford, Derek Prince, and Charles Simpson—all associated with Christian Growth Ministries. The following is a condensed transcript of the questions and answers presented at the forum.

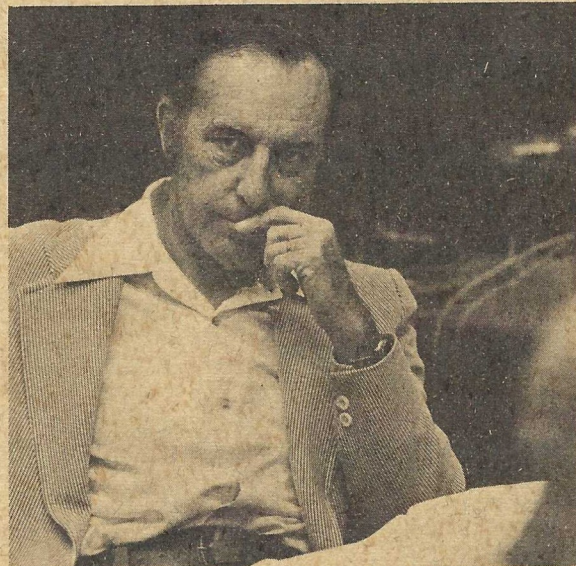


DAN MALACHUK: "We need to listen to one another."

JAMIE: What has brought about the current world-wide emphasis on discipleship?

DEREK: In Matthew 24:12 Jesus warned us that the outstanding characteristic of the world at the close of this age would be "iniquity," or "lawlessness." We all need to be careful that this spirit does not infiltrate or corrupt the Church of Jesus Christ, but rather that we cultivate the very opposites of lawlessness—submission, discipline, respect for authority and order. The scriptural way to produce these results in the lives of believers is discipleship. Discipleship, therefore, may be regarded as a divine antidote to the spiritual crisis in the world, and God's way of strengthening and protecting his people. However, it should be emphasized that discipleship is not a single system, but the application of scriptural principles. The methods of applying them can vary widely, and different forms of discipleship are being advocated or practiced in various groups. For instance, Youth With a Mission and Bill Gothard in his Basic Youth Conflicts seminars are both laying strong emphasis on the need for discipleship and authority. The Navigators, too, have long propagated teaching along this line with very useful results in the lives of thousands. We need to distinguish between the *principles* which are permanent and the *applications* which should be flexible and adaptable.

JAMIE: What you are saying, then, is that you men are not the originators of this teaching, nor are you the only ones doing the teaching.



DEREK PRINCE: "God commands his people to tithe."

DEREK: That is absolutely correct. Of course, the term "discipleship" is not always the one mainly used; people may talk about "Christian maturity" or the need for "character formation." These are but different ways of referring to what is essentially the same process. Nor is this confined to the Charismatic Movement. There are many churches that are not "charismatic" that have some kind of program for developing discipline and character, and sometimes they divide congregations up into small groups for this purpose. It is also interesting that Teen Challenge is using the book *Call to Discipleship* by Juan Carlos Ortiz as part of their training program.

JAMIE: Then you repudiate the "pyramid theory"—that everyone involved in discipleship needs to be involved with you or with any other central body?

CHARLES: Absolutely!

JAMIE: All right, the question then is: Do you believe the current emphasis on discipleship represents a substitute for the institutional church?

BOB: Categorically, no! A perspective of church history reveals that all denominations have made ongoing contributions to the body of truth that we now hold. As we see it, discipleship is not a substitute, but rather the beginning of a solution to problems currently facing many institutional pastors. We know that discipleship can be and, in fact, is being implemented very successfully in institutional churches. Our goal is the same as that of any conscientious pastor—the maturity and usefulness of God's people.

JAMIE: Churches have been practicing discipleship across the years. They have had teaching programs, soul-winning programs, stewardship programs. What is the difference between what they have been doing and what you are doing?

CHARLES: I think the primary difference is *personalization*. In the past such programs have been conducted with groups rather than with individuals. With the growth of churches the groups have tended to get larger and larger. As a result, individual relationships have become less important and less personal. The "difference" is that we are returning to a "one-to-one" practice of these principles. The *general* principle is still the same, but our emphasis is now on the *individual* relationship.

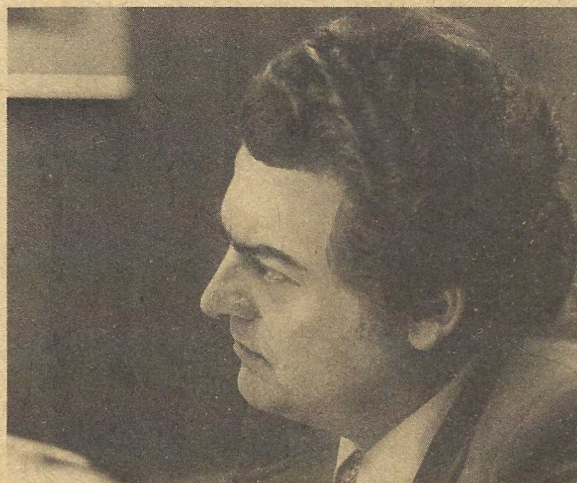
BOB: Charles, may I add that personalization, as you explained it, is the key both to the success and to the threat of what we are doing? Many have assumed that the Christian life is simply knowledge to be learned or classes to be attended. We believe it is a way of life, which is primarily imparted through sharing closely with another who knows the way.

JAMIE: Do you feel that the New Testament norm for all believers is to be clearly accountable to one person as shepherd or spiritual counselor and director?

CHARLES: I believe so—if you accept Jesus' method as the New Testament norm. His disciples answered very directly and personally to him. If you accept the great commission as his command for us to duplicate what he did, then that would be the norm. Later, after a New Testament church fellowship had been established, government was normally administered by a plurality of shepherds. But the responsibility of a shepherd is such that he must know precisely which sheep he is accountable for. We see this particularly in Paul's relationship to those he trained. They were related not only to Jesus Christ, but to Paul, as well, who was Christ's delegated authority in their lives. We believe this is what discipleship is doing today: restoring the close personal relationship between teacher and disciple. There is a point beyond which a man cannot be "discipled" by a book or a tape or a group of men.

DAN: Can an individual be a member of a church and at the same time be discipled by a leader outside that church?

CHARLES: Since some churches have not seen the value of one-to-one relationships, individuals have, on occasion, been discipled by a person outside their own church. Some denominations actually recognize, as Derek pointed out earlier, a para-church group that makes disciples, such as



BOB MUMFORD: "I'm ready to be adjusted."

the Navigators. But I believe that, ideally, disciples should be made in the church.

JAMIE: In the event of conflict, whose authority prevails?

CHARLES: If there should be a conflict between a spiritual advisor outside the church and the church itself, the leadership of the church must have final authority over any matters pertaining to the church.

Furthermore, the aim of discipleship is to produce in those being discipled respect for all legitimate authority. This includes respect for the authority of their church so long as they remain members of it.

JAMIE: It seems there are two kinds of authority relationships. One is the authority to govern, and the other is the authority to train. Do you accept this distinction?

BOB: Yes, and failure to make it is the source of much confusion. The authority to train is a basic concept of discipleship. Training requires a direct application of authority to the life of the individual. It has to do with correction, character formation, and life-style. Authority to govern relates to the life of the whole community, and is concerned primarily with the maintenance of proper corporate order.

JAMIE: Won't the concept of discipleship lead to proselytizing?

BOB: If by "proselytizing" you mean that it is our intention by discipleship to take people out of their church, *no*. If you mean that discipleship causes people to embrace new aspects of truth, *yes*.

JAMIE: You men have really been "disciple-makers" for years through the tapes and other teaching materials that you have distributed



Don Basham fields a question from Logos Editor Jamie Buckingham.

so widely. Do you now feel, in fact, that you should draw men to yourselves to oversee them?

CHARLES: We have learned that when people are influenced by our teaching, we then have some measure of responsibility to help them implement what we have taught. On occasion, this has led us to take direct personal responsibility for their oversight. But after we have trained a person, we release him. Then the responsibility is transferred to the one who has been trained. The personal relationship may endure, but the responsibility of continuing personal oversight ceases.

DAN: What happens, though, when this continuing relationship moves outside the local community, becoming trans-local in nature? Won't it lead to the establishment of a religious "hierarchy"?

DON: No. Not if the trans-local relationship is properly understood. Trans-local relationship and trans-local influence are not the same as trans-local discipleship. By its very nature, discipleship must be a local operation. The teacher and the disciple have to be in the same location. We believe we can advise and counsel a man at long distance, but in doing so we are not exercising the authority of discipleship.

DAN: Are you saying that you believe discipleship must be local, and that trans-local relationships should be limited to influence and counsel?

BOB: That's right!

JAMIE: Given that discipleship can only be on a local basis, how does it actually work?

CHARLES: Looking back, I realize that I had already begun making disciples while I was still pastoring a Southern Baptist congregation. I developed a relationship with a nucleus of leaders

which was different from my relationship with the church as a whole. My aim was to produce maturity in these leaders, so they could in turn take responsibility for others. I now see this as the real goal of discipleship—to produce maturity in the one being trained. The way it works out will depend on the two people involved. It involves not only teaching, but also personal example. Beyond the impartation of knowledge we have to impart the *attitude* of Christ. It also becomes our responsibility to correct where their attitude is not consistent with the attitude of Christ, or with the scriptural knowledge they have been given, or with our example. How personal the relationship becomes depends on how personal the trainee wants it to be. I do not believe even corrective discipline in this relationship can be imposed. It must be asked for. Some people will come with a greater desire to be disciplined than others.

DAN: Does a "disciple-maker" have the right to impose his will upon a family, or to give advice to a husband or wife which would bring a schism between them?

CHARLES: No. Any advice or correction given is predicated on the desire of the one being disciplined. I personally would never by-pass the leader of a family to tell his family what to do. I do not discipline a family, but only the leader of the family, and then he leads his own family.

If a man is going to be trained, then he must submit his will in whatever area he wants to be trained. Personally, I would never impose my will on another man, even if I were convinced that I was right and he was wrong. The imposition of one person's will on another can never bring maturity. It simply brings domination.

DAN: Aren't we all disciples of Christ? How do you avoid the problem that occurred in Corinth—factions, personality cults ("I am of Paul, I am of Appollos"), etc?

CHARLES: Let's not forget that the Holy Spirit is the real teacher. He sets men as teachers in the the Body, but their calling must be confirmed by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those they teach.

DEREK: We could add that the Holy Spirit knows which disciple should relate to which teacher. I see this more and more. There are people whom I can't help, but who will respond to Bob, to Charles, to their pastor, to some home group leader, or perhaps to one of you. This does not cause division as long as the leaders are secure and willing to recognize one another. So we also need the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit, not only in the relating of teacher to disciple, but of teacher to teacher.

BOB: I agree. The essence of New Testament life

was the formation of a living model. That is what we need today—for someone to stand up and say, “I know the way, follow me.” This is what Paul implies in 2 Thessalonians 3:9: “Not because we do not have the right to his, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example” (NAS). Discipleship requires the demonstration of mature Christian life in the teacher. Let me quote from the *Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman, a professor at Asbury seminary:

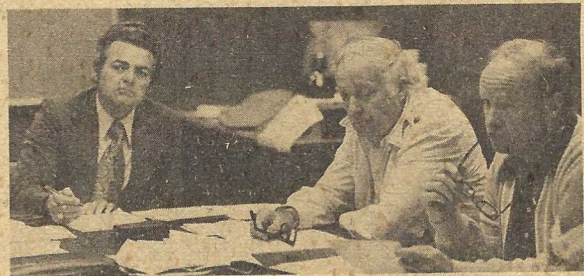
In response to the question, “If you were a pastor of a large church in a principal city, what would be your plan of action?”

(Billy) Graham replied: “I think one of the first things I would do would be to get a small group of eight or ten or twelve men around me that would meet a few hours a week and pay the price! It would cost them something in time and effort. I would share with them everything I have, over a period of years. Then I would actually have twelve ministers among the laymen who in turn could take eight or ten or twelve more and teach them. I know one or two churches that are doing that, and it is revolutionizing the church. Christ, I think, set the pattern. He spent most of his time with twelve men. He didn’t spend it with a great crowd. In fact, every time he had a great crowd it seems to me that there weren’t too many results. The great results, it seems to me, came in his personal interview and in the time he spent with his twelve.” Here Mr. Graham is merely echoing the wisdom of Jesus’ method.

JAMIE: Could not discipleship of this kind produce an elitism or cliquishness?

ERN: True Christian discipleship ought to produce, in the best sense, an elite kind of people. The Lord Jesus implied three different levels of spirituality when he spoke of “thirty-fold, sixty-fold, and one hundred-fold.” If we use the word “elite” in its classic sense, we are speaking of a select group who are noted for excellence. Discipleship produces disciplined, dedicated people, who obviously stand out in contrast to undisciplined, undedicated people. People of this kind find one another in fellowship. Then the charge is laid that they are “cliquish,” or that they are engaging in “elitism.” Inevitably, where you have committed, dedicated people, it is going to appear that they are segregating themselves. But that is not the real truth.

However, we must acknowledge that in this matter of discipleship it is possible for people to become segregated for wrong reasons. Paul referred to this in Acts 20:30 when he said some of the elders he was addressing would “draw away dis-



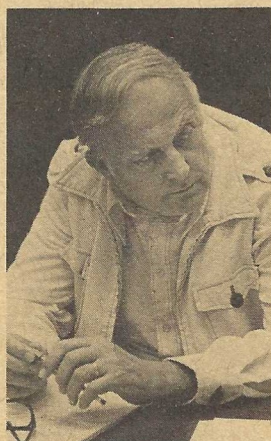
The joy of the Lord is my strength.

ciples after themselves.” This is an example of a valid principle being applied with a wrong motive—obviously this can happen today. We are as opposed to this as we are to any other error. But I don’t think you can avoid the kind of elitism that comes from dedicated and committed people finding one another in fellowship on a high level.

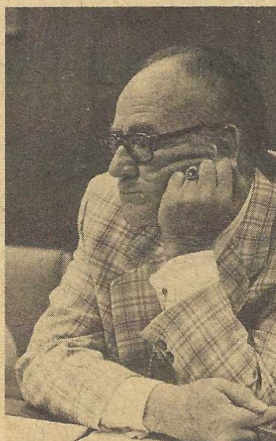
JAMIE: If we accept the need for shepherds, is there any way to insure their competence?

CHARLES: This problem of incompetent leaders—whether we call them “shepherds” or “pastors”—is one that affects the whole church. It is not a new problem. Many shepherds, or pastors, have been given responsibilities for which they are not qualified. This tends to happen when the “learning” environment is divided from the “doing” environment. In Jesus’ training of his disciples (who were to be the new shepherds for the ongoing church), he combined both teaching and practice in the same environment. Scripture warns against appointing a novice to the office of bishop, or overseer. This indicates that a man should serve an “apprenticeship” under mature leadership. Also, a new shepherd ought to be appointed by a plurality of ministers and not just by a single man, so that there is joint agreement concerning his competence. Of course, all of this presupposes that the new minister meets the requirements of character and life-style laid down in 1 Timothy 3:1-12. Following these Biblical instructions would solve the problem of a man being appointed as shepherd who is immature or incompetent. Mere education by itself will not solve the problem. Experience has proved this repeatedly.

JAMIE: There are many reports of shepherds abusing their authority, that is: a wrong kind of intrusion into personal privacy; authoritarian imposition of the leader’s will upon another; financial irresponsibility; control of a person’s affairs where the shepherd is not competent himself; schisms in the family; suppression of legitimate women’s ministry; an anti-institutional mentality; or proselytizing for personal gain. What provision should be made to avoid these abuses?



DON BASHAM: "Discipleship must be local. You cannot disciple a man at a distance."



ERN BAXTER: "Division is Satan's best weapon to destroy."

DEREK: First, let me say that instances of extremes, abuses, or mistakes can be found in relation to every major activity and truth of the Gospel. Whether it be evangelism, missionary activity, or pastoring—I can fill a book with mistakes made in pursuit of any of those activities. In my observation, far more mistakes were made in introducing both healing and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit than have been made in connection with discipleship. But the mistakes do not invalidate the basic principle. To come down to this question, one great safeguard is, that only a man who is *under* authority should be allowed to *exercise* authority. I would advise any Christian who is contemplating submitting himself to authority to be extremely cautious. He should make certain that the man to whom he is submitting is, himself, submitted to legitimate authority; otherwise, he should not make any submission to such a man.

JAMIE: Derek, you speak of the necessity of any man who exercises authority being under authority. What do you feel is the final base of authority? Is it the local church, the college of elders, the local presbytery, or is it a "hierarchy" (in the good sense of the word) outside the local area?

DEREK: The supreme authority in the church is Jesus Christ who is its Head. Authority descends downward. It is not elective. It is not democratic. The highest *human* authorities in the church are listed in Ephesians 4:11—apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. The highest authority on the human level that I can find in the church is in these ministries, functioning under the headship of Jesus Christ, rightly related to one another, operating in plurality and in a scriptural setting. In the local church, I believe there is no higher governmental authority than the presbytery

of elders. Other ministries resident in that locality—whether they be apostles, prophets, evangelists, or teachers—should take their places within that presbytery.

However, in 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul says that God has "set some in the church, *first* apostles, *secondarily* prophets, *thirdly* teachers. . . ." There I do see a descending order of authority. In its outworking we must distinguish between *ministry* and *government*. Government is in the hands of a duly appointed presbytery, but when a man functions in his ministry as a prophet, apostle or teacher, it is the responsibility of the other leaders to recognize his ministry and the authority God has endowed it with. *But that authority cannot be imposed.* There must be voluntary submission to it.

JAMIE: Do you feel that the local church is the highest authority?

CHARLES: To claim the local church as the highest authority will not fit every situation. Likewise, to claim that an extra-local authority is the highest authority will not fit every situation. In other words, where local church eldership is required it must be recognized as the highest. Where extra-local authority is required it must no less be recognized as the highest. It is not a case of "either/or." Let me illustrate this from my own experience.

There are some men outside my immediate area who are under my oversight by virtue of our long-standing relationship or our mutual choice; but I do not view myself as governing their constituencies. For instance, if they are pastors of churches, I do not oversee their churches. I am not a "bishop" in the sense of overseeing the churches of men who are under my oversight; just as I do not oversee the families of men who are under my oversight. In every case, the personal relationship is between me and the man I oversee. Obviously, this relationship affects his ministry. But he is the "door"—that means he must invite me into any area of his ministry in which he needs me. I do not overrule that man to govern his ministry. I am shepherding the man; he must shepherd his family and his flock.

JAMIE: Are you saying then, Charles, that it is possible that there be several structures for the church, and all of them within the will of God? That makes room for Roman Catholics as well as Baptists.

CHARLES: We need to see that most denominations have incorporated only a portion of New Testament structure. For example, the Baptist emphasis on local self-government is correct, but incomplete. Likewise, the Roman Catholic emphasis on trans-local authority has scriptural support, but sometimes threatens the integrity of the local church.



CHARLES SIMPSON: *"I've been called, as have all Christians, to make disciples."*

DAN: Would you try to give direct advice to a pastor as to how a church situation should be handled?

CHARLES: If I were asked, yes. But then so would you or any other teacher. I might even volunteer my advice if I thought the situation was critical, but I would never seek to enforce it.

JAMIE: Is it possible that the exercise of trans-local relationships could lead to a new denomination?

CHARLES: The obvious answer to that is, yes. Any spiritual emphasis can lead to a new denomination, and many in the past have. People tend to rally around a particular truth. But this need not establish a new denomination. The early church had trans-local authority and had disagreements, but it did not fragment into denominations. New denominations can be avoided if we adopt a different basis for fellowship; if, rather than theological agreement, love becomes our basis. If we stress covenant love rather than doctrine, we can maintain our unity despite our theological differences. As long as doctrine is the basis for fellowship, we will continue to get new denominations every time we get new doctrine. If method is the basis for fellowship, we will get new denominations every time we get new methods. Further, I would suggest three practical ways to avoid forming new denominations: honoring God's leaders and God's people wherever we find them; recognizing the spiritual authorities that God has already es-



JAMIE BUCKINGHAM: *"Let's deal with specifics."*

tablished; and maintaining fellowship even with those who disagree with us.

JAMIE: Tithing is certainly within the sphere of spiritual discipline. The question, however, is: Where does the tithe go?

DEREK: We need to begin by looking at Scripture. The first instance of tithing in the Bible is found in Genesis 14 where Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek as a priest. This established a pattern in the Old Testament that tithing was for the support of the priestly ministry and was given directly to a priest. The pattern was continued under the law of Moses, where the primary use of the tithe was for the support of the Levitical priesthood and where the priests, in turn, tithed their tithe to the high priest. At the end of the Old Testament, in Malachi 3:10, God charges his people to bring "all the tithes into the storehouse." Of course, the word "storehouse" is a figure. If we turn to the natural, the storehouse is the place from which we obtain the *food* we need to eat and the *seed* we need to sow. It seems, therefore, that tithing is the way we acknowledge the source of our spiritual food and seed.

In the Old Testament, tithes were never used for the construction or the equipping of places of worship. The two main examples are the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon. Both of them were constructed out of special offerings received for that purpose. However, these are Old Testament patterns and there is no guarantee that they can be automatically transferred to the New Testament.

In the New Testament, in Hebrews 7, Jesus Christ is presented as our High Priest "after the order of Melchizedek." I take this to indicate that tithing is part of our recognition of Jesus Christ as our High Priest. Ultimately, our tithes are given to him. But I find no detailed description in the New Testament of the way in which Christians actually handled their tithes. On the other hand, there are two principles or examples we need to note.

First of all, in Acts 4:34-35, when the believers sold their lands and possessions, they brought the proceeds and laid them down at the feet of the apostles, who were the recognized leaders of the church. It would seem therefore, that it is the prerogative of the leaders of the church to receive the finances of God's people and to determine how they are to be used.

The other principle, stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:7-11 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18, is that the man who shepherds God's people is entitled to receive his support from those whom he shepherds, basically in proportion to the amount of time he spends in shepherding. Therefore, it seems reasonable to infer that one proper use of the tithes of Christians is to support those who are responsible for shepherding them. However, I do not believe it would be scriptural to make any kind of legalistic system out of this.

JAMIE: Is it possible to elaborate on the conflict which arises when church members receive their "spiritual food" from outside their own church? To whom should their tithe go?

BOB: Remember, there are many others practicing "discipleship" other than those of us connected with Christian Growth Ministries. We cannot answer for them, only for ourselves. We believe that as teachers, we should strengthen and support the local pastor. Obviously, this excludes the draining off of funds which the pastor needs. In our case, too, we have no costly buildings or programs of our own to maintain. Of course, if we had a \$3 million complex that needed funds to keep it going, there might be reason to suspect us. But in every instance I know, our teaching and our practice have been to encourage committed church members to support their own pastor.

DAN: Is there any kind of "pyramiding" tithe structure where the money winds up in Fort Lauderdale?

DEREK: Absolutely not! Furthermore, this limitation should not be confined merely to Fort Lauderdale. I do not believe there should be any central office or headquarters to which tithes should be directed from all over the nation.

JAMIE: What is necessary to remove the threat of change so the entire church may become involved in discipling?

DON: I don't think you can do anything to completely remove the threat, which springs from the overall conservatism of the American church. Almost all churches tend to resist change.

BOB: I would like to add that this question is most effectively dealt with in a book by Howard Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins*, recently published by Inter-Varsity Press.

BOOK LIST

1. *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman, Fleming H. Revell Company.
2. *The Problem of Wineskins* by Howard A. Snyder, Inter-Varsity Press.
3. *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Harper and Row.
4. *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* by E. Stanley Jones, Abingdon.
5. *The Velvet Covered Brick* by Howard Butt, Harper and Row.
6. *Spiritual Authority* by Watchman Nee, Christian Fellowship Publishers Inc.
7. *A New Way to Live* by Charles Simpson, Manna.
8. *Discipleship, Shepherding, Commitment* by Derek Prince, Derek Prince Publications.
9. *The Company of the Committed* by Elton Trueblood, Harper and Brothers.
10. *Call to Discipleship* by Juan Carlos Ortiz, Logos International.
11. *Call to Commitment* by Elizabeth O'Connor, Harper and Row.
12. *A Quest for Vitality in Religion* by Findley Edge, Broadman.
13. *Gathered for Power* by W. Graham Pulkingham, Logos International.
14. *They Left Their Nets* by W. Graham Pulkingham, Logos International.
15. *A New Way of Living* by Michael Harper, Logos International.
16. *In God's Providence* by John Randall, Logos International.
17. *The New Testament Church Book*, compiled by Al West, Logos International.