

January 2003

AN AWESOME PROJECT IS IN PROGRESS at this time, but let me give some review of the year 2002 before telling you about it.

Actually, I will review further back than 2002. From the very first of the 18 printings of *Free In Christ*, I have tried to keep records, but a few years back a computer crash lost them. In December I tried to assemble a new accounting from fragmentary records and was surprised at some of the statistics. One amazing part was being reminded of the great number of you who have been partners in this effort through the years. Trusting that many of you partners, past and present, are still reading these mailouts, I will recall some evidences of how God has used us together.

Beginning in November 1984, we distributed 6,950 free copies of FIC in the first year. By the end of the second year, that number had reached 12,750 averaging 17 copies each day. Not including the 5,000 in process now in Africa for free distribution, there are 63,056 copies in print with 33,873 having been distributed free of charge. This figure includes printings in Telugu in India and one in Spanish. I have kept no record of the other titles given free but the number is not comparable to that of FIC. All my figures are subject to correction.

With the third printing I began to pay for the printing and to reclaim \$1.00 for each book sent out free of charge. I still relinquish any profit from those given free, but I recover \$1.00 from each book. That does not cover the printing costs, but I have let that figure stand. Thereafter, I have paid for all printings except for those in Telugu and Spanish. No one receives profit or salary from their distribution. This will hold true for the printings in Africa and any other nation where we may reprint them. For my other titles sent free, I receive a small profit above costs while you pay the remainder plus other necessary expenses.

Accurate bookkeeping by this centralized one-horse operation is impossible. The trust you have shown in me to use your donations wisely and efficiently is not taken lightly. This ministry has come as an exciting surprise to me after my career in congregational ministry. For some strange reason (!) no publisher would handle my writings, so I have had to publish my own material. But that has proved to be an unforeseen blessing, for you have had to contact me for the books. God has sent thousands of you wonderful people into my life and you became fellow-workers. I wish I could remember each of you. Without commercial advertisement, most of the distribution has come through your person-to-person recommendations and distribution. We still depend upon you to put the books in the hands of those whose hearts are ready for them.

Including my other five publications, the Ketcherside and Fudge books I have published, and sales of books written by Leroy Garrett, Edward Fudge, and Robert Rowland, I have distributed about 100,000 books with no help in packaging them. Multiplied thousands of packages and hundreds of trips to the Post Office. Folding brochures for all those books has not been my favorite recreation. Before buying mailers, I wrapped many packages

using over a mile of butcher paper. I admit to being tired bodily, but the excitement never dies out. Each new testimony from grateful readers lifts my spirit. Even though it has grown tiresome, this work has always been a joy. The books are sent with my prayers.

Formerly, I stamped packages small enough to put in a drop box and mailed them there, but after the "unibomber," our legislators over-reacted so that I have to take any package over a pound to the Post Office. The closest office to me is in Aloha, a seven mile round trip. So we pay for the crime of one sick-minded man each time we mail a package weighing over a pound. With from two to five trips each week, the postal workers and I are all on a first-name basis! They are all caring and helpful.

Vic Phares, of Shreveport, Louisiana, has added tremendously to this outreach by establishing and maintaining a web site for my writings. He sends out our *Freedom's Ring* emails and posts all my writings, both books and *Freedom's Ring* essays, for permanent internet access world-wide. (Oh, that the apostle Paul could have been blessed by such a means of communication!) Statistics cannot tell the whole story, but here are some figures indicating web site traffic in 2002:

110,972 -- Visits
288,686 -- Pages
635,034 -- Files
796,472 -- Hits

Last year 1,715 copies of *Free In Christ* were sent out. Probably more than that number in Telugu and Spanish were distributed free. I have no current figure on them. Another printing was made in India last year.

Now to the AWESOME PROJECT. Roger E. Dickson has devoted himself to providing college-level courses of Bible study for preachers and leaders especially in mission areas. He is director of International Bible Institute working out of Cape Town in Africa. Presently, 2,000 preachers in 40 nations are involved in these extended courses by mail with two students being graduated and two more enrolled each week. Their average age is 36, and most all of them already preach for two congregations. On any given Sunday, they preach to about 275,000 people in the fast-growing church in Africa. The young and vibrant church in Africa now claims almost as many disciples as we have in America, and they should outnumber us soon as a truly maturing movement.

Dr. Dickson has written and published many of the advanced courses being taught. He is careful to use Christ-centered and grace-oriented material so as to avoid the divisive legalism which has plagued our congregations in America. Recognizing the tremendous impact of the Bible Institute on the continent, I inquired of Roger to learn if he would be interested in using *Free In Christ* in his teaching program.

Though Roger had read the book in 1993, he took time to read it again. Then he sent me an email stating that he would like to include it in his curriculum. For such purpose he would need 3,000 copies at an estimated cost of \$4,500.00. I responded with delight that Friday night. However, I told him that I did not have the money for the printing and, due to

the current economy, it might take a long time for me to collect that much money. That was on Friday evening.

The next morning my phone rang at 8:00. The call was from a total stranger living in Texas. She told how that someone had given her and her husband a copy of *Free In Christ*. Having just read it, they were so excited that she ordered 100 copies to distribute! As we continued in conversation, I told her of current printings of *Free In Christ*, and I told of the exchange with Roger Dickson. She asked how much the printing in Cape Town would cost. When I told her Roger's estimate, without hesitation, she replied, "My husband and I will pay for it."

WOW! AWESOME! Who could question that God was shouting, "YES!"

In the next exchange of email with Roger, he had gotten a more definite quotation and stated that, if those gracious people wanted to go ahead with the \$4,500.00 figure, he could get 4,000 copies printed for it. They happily sent the money and Roger is working on getting the text on disk and formatted for the printer. That will take some time.

In my little world, this is exciting! Your joy or dismay will depend upon your evaluation of the book. No, my book is not a new revelation bringing salvation. It has not been lauded by the academics. There may be a few people saved without reading it! { :-) However, if it affirms the Christ-centered teachings that Roger is giving those preachers, its influence can be expanded beyond our ability to measure or appreciate. It will be invaluable if it helps the growing church in other nations to avoid the pitfalls of heirs of the Stone-Campbell Movement in America.

The cost of about \$1.25 per book for printing and distribution is truly a bargain. No one will profit financially from this project. No salaries are involved. I have received many requests for books from disciples overseas who are eager for books. Due to the high cost of production and postage, I have been limited in filling requests. Last year several M-Bags of books were sent to Africa and the Philippines. By sending a quantity in M-Bags, the rate for postage is reduced to about \$1.00 per pound.

Now, I am seeing how practical it is to have the books printed in other countries where the cost is so much less. In India, for example, Dr. Prasad has gotten books printed in Telugu for even less than \$1.00 each and has distributed them personally at no extra cost to us. If you or your congregation is sponsoring a foreign work, why not consider such a project? We would be happy to work with training schools or other dependable persons in other countries, trusting that you partners in ministry will provide the resources.

For further extension of overseas printings, suggestion has been made that selected chapters from my other four books be made into one larger book, or two smaller books.

We trust that these statistics have been of interest to you who have worked with us in the outreach. May God continue to work through both us and the books.

(Cecil Hook; January 2003) []