

"A Historical Treasure"

**Like a Sea Set
Free: The story of
Students
Christian
Fellowship and
Scripture Union
in Jamaica 1948-
1998**

Edited by Barry Wade and
Alfred Sangster.
SCF/SU, Kingston, Jamaica,
1999.

**Reviewed by Dr. Billy
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Fifty years defines significantly. Such a period is the practical limit of a vigorous work life. It is also the limit of pioneering influence. Therefore, it is the ideal span of time for evaluating an organization's success.

The major criteria for effective assessment would be the achievement of original purpose, the smooth passing of the baton of leadership, and the quality of persons and plans in place for renewal and continuity.

The movement under focus passes the test for success. The founding leaders have laid a good foundation: they have let go of power without generating trauma; and the new leaders are well qualified for their defined roles for renewing and advancing the work.

SYMPOSIUM AUTHORSHIP

The partnership between old and young evident in the work of the Movement is evident in the authorship of the book. The older leaders are the editors and reflectors and the younger are the reporters and testifiers. The happy combination provides

commendable variety within 300 pages (magazine size) that inspire about the past as much as they instruct about the future.

STRUCTURAL FLEXIBILITY

Students Christian Fellowship and Scripture Union (SCF/SU) is a ponderous name, but not the organization. In fact, the essential character of

this ministry of Christian witness has been to emphasize a minimum of organization but maximum of participation.

It is this flexible character that best explains, from a human perspective, the rapid spread of the movement and the remarkable embrace of members across denominations, historic and charismatic.

ARTISTIC ATTRACTIVENESS

In viewing the work graphically, mainly by looking at the cover and by simply thumbing through the pages, one has to commend the artists involved for design attractiveness. Heather Sutherland-Wade's cover exhibits skill for balance, for proportion and for attention to detail.

Errol Stennett's typography is commendable for use of double columns, and for provision of generous cross headings and ample margins. He does even better at the collages in wash. On the whole, the artistic contributions give vibrancy to what could have been a dull historical production.

PERSONAL FOCUS

The story of the Movement's first fifty years is told largely through individual witness and personal testimony. However, the writers being a part of the history, and conscious of the virtue of modesty, record achievements in subdued tones. Nevertheless, enough shines through for the discerning to detect heroes of the Movement.

FLOWING INTEGRATION

Stephen Jennings brings the story into the sunshine from the cold international streams. He recounts how European and North American contact was made with these shores in terms of a human perspective, but all part of God's work to produce a river of blessing, set free in the Caribbean.

Merle Roper picks up the story with details of how the initial currents flowed in Jamaica, and she does so with factuality and parsimony. Alfred Sangster continues the account in similar vein, leading up to the time of the merger with Scripture Union in 1981, which Earle Madden integrates artfully.

Las Newman, an ardent Anglican and former Wolmerian, enters the scene prominently at this significant point of transition. The leadership

baton is being passed, albeit slowly, as the era of management is superseding the merger. His coordinating skills are key to subsequent development for he stands in the gap between the past and present critical periods of the defining fifty year span.

CONTEXTUAL GROUNDING

Newman's writing sets the movement in its historical context. Evangelicals are notorious for being ahistorical or merely chronological when it comes to writing history. Newman, however, transcends such narrowness. He mentions the social realities of the times and the need for the Movement to adjust in order to maintain "sustainability".

His second piece focuses on the contribution of the movement to national development. It is here that his work shines brightest, as he delineates civic contributions through some talented and gifted past members.

His work deepens as he moves from the analytic to the prophetic. In one passage he seems to thunder in the spirit of Amos as he declared that the Movement must henceforth leave the realm of private religious undertaking and enter the domain of the public (215).

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Michael Nicholson, the successor of Newman as General Secretary, reveals clear understanding of the bequeathed heritage and of the required new direction. He recognizes the elitist but strategic importance of student witness, focussing as it does on less than five percent of Jamaica's population. Also, he appreciates Jamaica's critical role in regional outreach.

Barry Wade, the chairman of the Board, succeeding Dr. Sangster, is clear too, in his situational analysis. He delineates the work left to be done in order to complete the mission. What he outlines is helpful enough for the formulation of objectives and goals (244) within the first decades of the new millennium.

Further, Dr. Wade makes the powerful and perceptive observation that will signify success empirically. He says, forcefully, if somewhat hyperbolically, that only when every graduate of the Movement

contributes financially to operations will the evidence be there that the "graduates completely own the Movement" (241).

INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN

SCF/SU as a para-church organization mirrors the social realities. Therefore, as women had no prominence in churches then, compared to present happenings, the leadership of SCF/SU has been essentially male.

However, despite that realistic social milieu, SCF/SU can include in any illustrious list the names of women such as Cathie Nicoll, Merle Roper, Edith Felsted, Winsome Oban, Helen Cassidy, Laurice Bird, Marie Johnson, Gene Denham, and Faith Linton.

Faith Linton surely stands out as a public communicator in what has been traditionally a man's world, distinguishing herself within and without the Movement in multiple capacities. Over the decades she has been an outstanding high school teacher, youth leader, family counsellor, public speaker, broadcaster and Bible teacher. In the book she highlights the ministry of Gene Denham, and she does so in fine style.

STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION

Overall, the book's organization would have been improved had the editors followed their outline of historical highlights. This outline identified the major developmental phases as Mission (1944-56), Ministry (1957-74), Merge (1975-81) and Management (1982-1998).

In keeping with this outline, the present developmental focus would now be Marketing. What seems most needed is the successful selling of the Movement as a new entity with a new image and new directions, with new literature and new leaders. Without skilled marketing, the movement will become a monument rather than a marvel.

Fortunately for the Movement, the right man for this aspect of the Ministry is already in place and is already performing well in the marketing needed. He is a dynamic and creative Advertising Executive, and an ardent supporter of the Movement, Sam McCook (163).

