

RELIGION

Crusade To Heal Illiteracy Ills

The Rev. Freddie Johnson says the problem with inner-city America is not the usual litany of woes: drugs, crime, gangs, teen-pregnancy, domestic abuse.

All of the above are deeply rooted in something far more fundamental, he says. In a word, illiteracy.

"If you go into any American city and look into the eyes of young people, you will see anger and alienation," says this nondenominational preacher. "Why? They are surrounded by a wealth of opportunity in this country yet are convinced such opportunities are not for them. This the result of illiteracy."

Mr. Johnson should know. He grew up in this Los Angeles-area inner city, which has the national average (at 20 percent), and nearly half of those of high school age are considered "functionally illiterate" - unable to read a map or menu.

In the wake of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, which devastated this community, Johnson planted seeds to

change that. Already active in the neighborhood with an eight-year-old outreach program for youths, he founded the Compton Literacy and Learning Project. A year later, it was named the World Literacy Crusade (WLC) and has since become so successful that chapters have been cloned in 30 other cities around the world.

The curriculum Johnson uses is a simple system from a controversial source. In the 1930's, L. Ron Hubbard, who later founded the Church of Scientology, designed a way to help potential readers of all ages overcome their own barriers to learning. He stressed that readers must know where, when and how they become confused.

In the WLC program, student are urged to look up any unclear words in dictionaries before proceeding in schoolwork or reading. They are taught to backtrack to lesson areas where their comprehension derailed or attention waned, to continually monitor their own understanding, and to construct ideas and concepts in materials

like clay so they may literally grasp them.

"The concepts are incredibly simple, which is partly why they are powerful and why they have been overlooked elsewhere," says Sandy Chapman, a 20-year reading specialist and curriculum writer in San Diego.

Born in Birmingham, Ala., and a disciple of Martin Luther King Jr.'s belief that individuals can make a difference in their communities, Johnson was led to the cause of literacy by a lifetime of church activism.

"St. John said, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God,'" says the preacher, in a clerical collar and jeans. "I always knew that the spirit of God was bound up in words. I knew there was power in words."

For more information on the World Literacy Crusade and the educational works of L. Ron Hubbard, contact Applied Scholastics International at (800) 424-5397, or visit its Website at www.appliedscholastics.org.

Donald Lawrence & The Tri-City Singers

USA Today has labeled Donald Lawrence & the Tri-City Singers "One of the most phenomenal choirs" in the country today. They've received Grammy, Stellar, NAACP and Dove Award nominations for their two previous hip-hop styled gospel albums. Their 1993 debut *A Songwriter's Point of View* featured Peabo Bryson and Stephanie Mills and was a Top Ten charter.

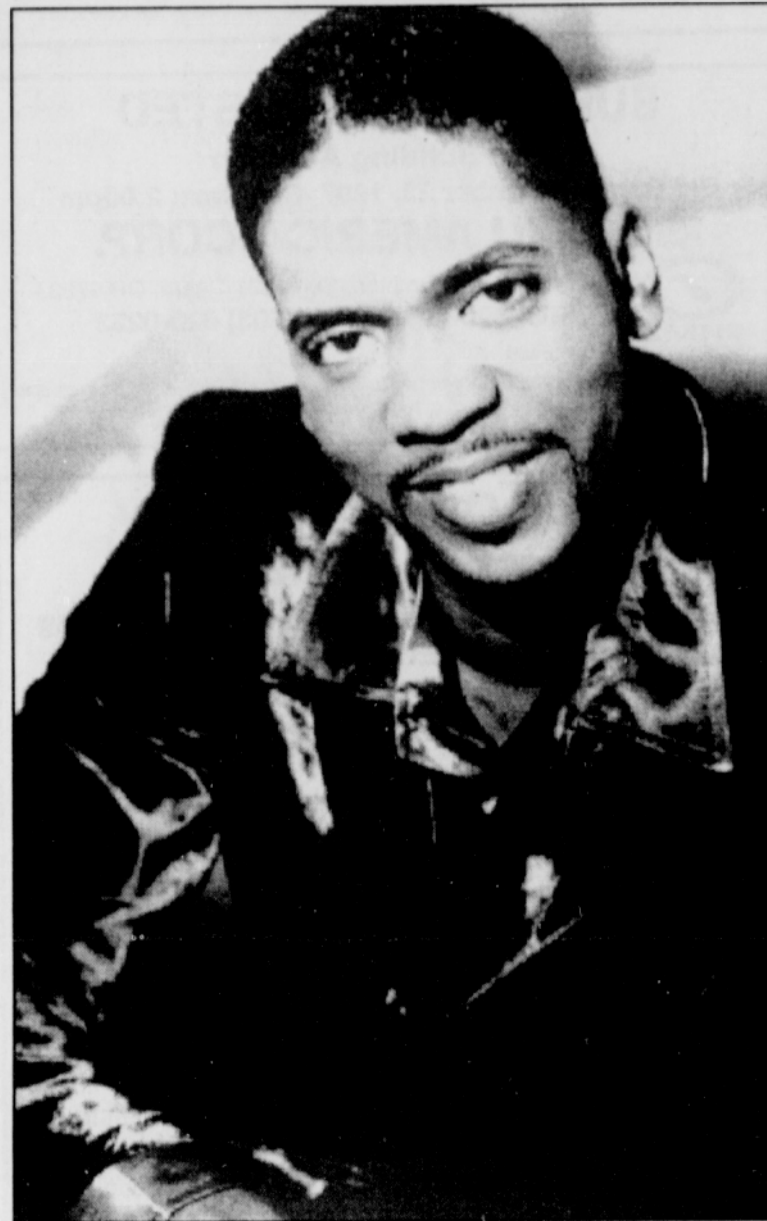
Their 1995 follow-up *Bible Stories* reached #1 and remained

"One of the most phenomenal choirs"

on Billboard's gospel charts for over two years and has sold a quarter million copies.

Their new *Hello Christmas* album has already debuted on Billboard's gospel charts and gaining momentum on mainstream and gospel radio playlists.

Donald Lawrence is one of the most in-demand producers in gospel today. His credits include R&B group En Vogue, rock songstress Sophie B. Hawkins and gospel luminaries such as Kirk Franklin and the Family, Stephanie Mills, Daryl Coley, the Clark sisters, Hezekiah Walker, Thomas Whitfield, Ricky Dillard and Karen Clark-Sheard who currently has one of the hottest gospel albums in the country. However, music isn't the only thing on the mind of Lawrence who studied at the prestigious Cincinnati Conservatory of the



Arts.

He itches to become an actor, so he brings a dramatic flair and style to each and every one of his projects.

On Saturday, December 20th Donald and the choir will make a live appearance on NBC's "Today Show" (7:00-9:00 a.m.) where they will sing two songs from the new album.

They will sing from the streets

of New York about the hope and joy of the yuletide season.

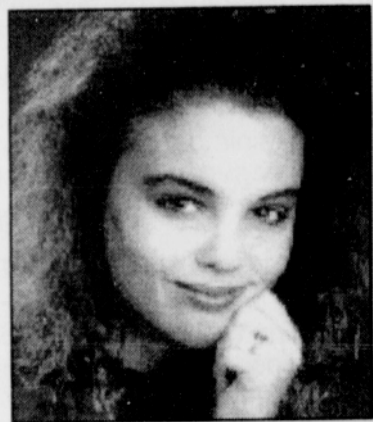
Later that day, Black Entertainment Television (BET) will feature two songs by the choir on its "Teen Summit" (12:00-1:30 p.m.) Christmas special. Donald and the choir will tape the program in Washington, D.C. the weekend before the broadcast.

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"In Thee, O Lord, Do I Put my trust:
Let me never be put to confusion"
Psalm 71:1

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