

RELIGION

PBS Special Shines Light on Faith

Religion's role in the African-American experience

(AP) — An ambitious goal: To shine light on the religious faith of black Americans, while exploring what sealed their devotion across three centuries of history.

That is what "This Far By Faith" sets out to do. Airing June 24-26 on PBS (check local listings), the six one-hour segments add up to a sweeping portrait of the black experience - from the arrival of the early African slaves through the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Depression, the civil rights era and the advent of the 21st century.

This becomes a sobering journey as it revisits innumerable hardships and indignities. But it is uplifting, too, with one point repeatedly brought home: Black Americans' spiritual focus has been more than a survival mechanism; it is a natural state of being.

"There is no word for religion in many African languages," explains the narrator in the series' first moments, "for in a traditional African view of the world, there is no place where God is not."

In countless versions, such a world view has served black Americans to the present day.

"To grossly oversimplify: They don't separate their Sunday morning ritual from the rest of their lives,"



Members of the Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco surround Rev. Cecil Williams. The religious faith of black Americans is examined this week in the PBS' series "This Far By Faith." (AP photo)

says June Cross, a producer of the series. (Just consider black Americans' claim on the word "soul" to signify their shared ethnic awareness and pride.)

Cross cites a Harris Poll conducted in January that found higher levels of religious belief among blacks than among whites and Hispanics.

"Our faith is constant," says executive producer Dante James, "and it's not at anyone else's whim or influence. It's something that we own and we control."

As a result, the series is "an affirmation that spirituality has been and probably will continue to be the backbone of the African-American fight for justice in this country," James says.

The first hour invokes two very different 19th-century black leaders, both of whom were sustained by their faith: a freed slave in New York who renamed herself Sojourner Truth and became a nationally known advocate for equality and justice; and Denmark Vesey, a carpenter and would-be insurrection-

ist who plotted an uprising to kill white oppressors in Charleston, S.C., but was found out, tried and executed.

Later in the series, viewers meet contemporary figures including the Rev. Cecil Williams, who nearly 40 years ago took over a dying church in San Francisco's blighted Tenderloin district and gave it new vitality through wide-open community involvement.

"The church," he declares, "had a commitment to help us become free."

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Why be Accountable?

By **ETHEL J. BATES** FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

'Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him (Luke 17:3).'

Some things taught in Scripture makes us uncomfortable, and the idea of being personally accountable to someone else for our actions is certainly one of them. Yet, the passage quoted above could not be any clearer about our responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ. When fellow believers drift off into sin, it is our responsibility to confront them.

Many believers mistakenly believe that the personal nature of our relationship with God excludes our need for mutual accountability. Although it is true that our relationship with God is personal, it is not true that it is private. The Bible teaches that we are accountable to one another for our conduct and character.

In (Matt. 17:18, & Mark 1:25) Jesus took the disciples by surprise when he commanded them to "rebuke" a sinning brother. It is a strong term. To ask them to rebuke a brother was a stringent thing to do. Yet Jesus didn't hesitate. The same idea is echoed in what Paul told the believers in Galatia (Gal. 6:1-3). Paul said that if a believer was caught in sin the strong members were to help shoulder responsibility of that person's sin. Notice, Jesus, nor Paul instructed the believers to cover the sin, or deny that

it existed. But rather, to confront it, that the offending believer may be restored to fellowship with Christ!

Perhaps one reason we Christians are reluctant to hold each other accountable, or confront our brothers and sisters, is because instead of being the leaders on such issues as life values, morality, and integrity, we have allowed society to set the perimeters. We have lost our understanding of what sin really is. Let's look at the definition of sin.

In biblical thinking, we can understand neither shalom nor sin apart from reference to God. Sin is a religious concept, not just an oral one. Sin is not only the breaking of law, but also the breaking of covenant with one's savior. Sin is the smearing of a relationship, the grieving of one's divine parent and benefactor, a betrayal of the partner to whom one is joined by a holy bond. It is the result of corruption in the mind, and heart. The filmmaker Woody Allen said in 1993, trying to explain his controversial affair with the young daughter of Mia Farrow, "the heart wants what it wants," Without accountability. Without conscience.

But why doesn't the heart want God, trust God, look childlike to God for life's joys and securities? Why doesn't the heart seek final

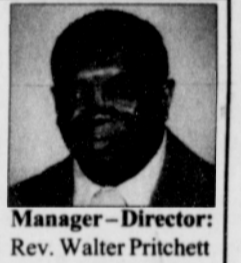
good where it can actually be found? Why turn again and again, in small matters and large, to satisfactions that are mutable, damaging, and imperiled?

Reformation documents offer a number of images for corruption: it is a despoiled nature, a diseased root, a contaminated spring, a foul heart. According to these documents, we are wrong to the core.

A bad strain has gotten into the stock so that we now sin with the ease and readiness of people born to the task. After the fall we sin by second nature: we are "born sinners" as some folk are born athletes. This fact, empirical as well as biblical, lies behind a broad consensus on original sin. All sinners subscribe to the doctrine of corruption, the centerpiece of which is the claim that even when they are good in important ways, human beings are not sound. Without a childlike spirit of submission; trust and humility, which is required of all true believers, accountability is not possible. Whether we know it or not, agree with it or not, like it or not, practice it or not, we are accountable to one another! Protect your faith! Walk in accountability!

Ethel J. Bates is a minister for the Allen Temple CME Church in Portland.

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Obituaries

Mother of 13 Remembered

A funeral was held last Friday, June 20, 2003, in Maranatha Church of God in Portland for Ethel Mae Moore, who died June 17 at age 79.

Ethel Mae Blanson was born Jan. 6, 1924, in Winnsboro, La. A homemaker, she moved to Portland in 1965. In 1943, she married Sam L. Sr.; he died in 2002.

Survivors include her sons, Roy B. Thomas, Sam L. Moore Jr., Demarcus R. Moore, Willie D. Moore and Dallas Dennis; daughters, Brenda K. Coleman, Gwendolyn J. Robinson, Deborah L. Warren, Ollie A. Banks, Mona L. Jiminez, Constance D. McCool, Algia R. Moore-Thomas and Margo L. Taylor; sisters, Georgine Turner and Maxine Grimble; 23 grandchildren; and 46 great-grandchildren.

Reverend Dies at 82

A memorial service was held Thursday, June 19, 2003, in Walker Temple Church of God in Christ in Portland for the Rev. Lonnie D. Dotsey Sr., who died June 13 at age 82.

The Rev. Dotsey Sr. was born March 15, 1921, in Cameron, Texas. During World War II, he served in the Army. He moved to Portland in 1946, where he was a supervisor for Linden Farms. He was a pastor at Nazarene Church of God in Christ. About 1957, he married Audrey Brown; she died in 1996.

Survivors include his sons, Lawrence and Lonnie Jr.; daughters, Lydia D. Lewis and Audrey Muhammad; stepsons, Tom Moore and Lee Moore; sister, Celestine Jackson; 17 grandchildren; and 16 great-grandchildren.

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