



Ask the clergy

by Pastor Larry O'Keefe

Using your gift from God

Q: "Is everyone given a gift by God? If so, what are they and do we really lose it if we don't use it?"

A: The Bible makes it very clear that God is the giver of all our talents and abilities. The Apostle Paul cautions us of the danger of pride that so often accompanies our accomplishments. His sobering words are recorded in 1 Corinthians 4:7: "What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if everything you have is from God, why boast as though it were not a gift? Talents and natural abilities are distributed to all men and women apart from their spiritual condition, but there is a difference between talents and spiritual gifts.

The Bible teaches that every Christian is given at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:7, 11). Some have more than one but no one has all the gifts. These gifts or special abilities are given as a tool to be used in service to other Christians and to the Church itself. They are not merely for the enjoyment or enrichment of the individuals themselves. There are four main listings of Spiritual gifts found in the scriptures, three by the Apostle Paul and one by the Apostle Peter. Paul's listings can be found in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, and Ephesians 4:11, although Paul's list here in Ephesians is a list of various offices within the church. Peter's brief list is found in 1 Peter 4:11.

These spiritual gifts are special abilities given by the Holy Spirit to be used to build up and care for His church.

The issue is not "use it or lose it," but rather use it as God intended or be prepared to explain why not. Jesus told a wonderful story that may help in our understanding. It is found in Matthew 25: 14-30. The text is often referred to as "The Parable of the Talents", but here "talent" is a measure of monetary value and not necessarily "giftedness". The story's application though is clear. The servant who did not invest and employ the Master's gift was termed a wicked, lazy slave. The Master gave gifts with the expectation of full use and investment. The servant who fails to "use them" will answer to the Master himself.

Pastor Larry O'Keefe serves at High Desert Baptist Church in Phelan. He and his bride Jeannie have been married for 29 years and have eight children ... they remember most of their names.

From academia to evangelism

Harvard biologist extends olive branch to religion

By **JEFF BARNARD**
Associated Press Writer

Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson might normally arouse suspicion among evangelicals, given his faith in science over scripture.

But in his latest book, "The Creation, An Appeal to Save Life on Earth," the two-time Pulitzer Prize winner extends an olive branch to Christian believers in hopes of saving the Earth from the biggest mass extinction since the dinosaurs.

Wilson's book is the latest attempt to bridge the gap between evolutionary science and a literal interpretation of the Bible, a rift dating back to Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection.

"Pastor, we need your help. The Creation — living Nature — is in deep trouble," Wilson writes in this letter to an imagi-



The Associated Press

Harvard biology professor Edward O. Wilson, 77, a two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize, poses at his residence in Lexington, Mass., on Tuesday. His latest book is 'The Creation, An Appeal to Save Life on Earth.'

nary Southern Baptist pastor. "You might well ask at this point, Why me? Because religion and science are the two most powerful forces in the world today."

R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is a longtime reader of Wilson's work on sociobiology, and was initially impressed by Wilson's honesty in the book, but has since

grown skeptical of Wilson's motives after not seeing any concrete contacts with evangelicals since the book came out in September — contacts Wilson says are coming.

"E.O. Wilson did not write that book to evangelicals," Mohler said from his office in Louisville, Ky. "He wrote it to his fellow naturalists as a way of encouraging them to find a public relations strategy to reach out to a broader constituency.

"I don't think humanity can bring the world to an end. The fundamental judgment we must fear is the judgment of the creator. When he comes in judgment, certain ecological sins will be among the sins for which he calls us to account. That is not in scripture the pre-eminent issue. That is where we have to reject E.O. Wilson and his policy."

Indeed, many evangelical leaders have rejected environmental efforts, arguing that it's important to stay focused on core social issues such as stopping abortion

and opposing gay marriage.

But among the evangelical wing that has become more concerned about environmental issues in recent years, the reception has been enthusiastic. Calvin DeWitt, a professor of environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin and a founder of the Evangelical Environmental Network, said Wilson's book would restore the term "creation" to scientific discussion.

Richard Cizik, vice president of governmental affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals, which represents 45,000 churches, gave a copy to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad last September, when Ahmadinejad addressed the United Nations.

"I think (Wilson) has been courageous to come forward, and we need to be equally courageous," said Cizik. Though the issue of protecting all life on Earth has been the most controversial he has faced, "We will not allow this to be ignored."

Hollywood lends talents in name of Jesus

A who's who of leading black actors lend talents to 'Bible Experience'

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — It's an epic telling of the life of Jesus — an ambitious production featuring an all-star cast. But it's not a movie or miniseries.

It's a new audio Bible released by Zondervan, one of the world's largest publishers of religious books.

"Inspired By ... The Bible Experience: New Testament" features a large, all-black cast including some of Hollywood's biggest names. And in the world of audio books, it's a smash.

It has been at or near the No. 1 spot among the best-selling books listed on Wal-Mart's Web site since its early fall release. The retail chain Family Christian Stores say it's the fastest-selling audio Bible it has ever stocked.

The 21-hour production features the voice talents of more than 250 singers, clergy and actors, including Denzel Washington, Cuba Gooding Jr., Angela Bassett and Alfre Woodard. Blair Underwood portrays Jesus, and Samuel L. Jackson, who played a Scripture-spouting hit man in "Pulp Fiction," is the voice of God.

"It's really good and it's transcending every barrier. We're thrilled with the way that the product has turned out," said Paul Caminiti, vice president and publisher of Bibles for Zondervan, a Grand Rapids-based division of News Corp.-owned HarperCollins.

Zondervan started shipping "Bible Experience" in late September and has sold more than 70,000 units, Caminiti said. By comparison, Zondervan, which publishes the five best-selling audio Bibles in the United States, sells about 60,000 units each year of its longtime top-seller, the "New International Version Audio Bible."

"Bible Experience" is available on CD and in mp3 formats, with an Old Testament version due in fall 2007 that is expected to run much longer. It will feature many of the same well-known actors, al-

though someone will take over for Jackson as God, a role that will balloon from about two hours to more than 70 hours.

The project is the brainchild of Kyle Bowser, a former television executive with a law degree. At Fox Broadcasting Co. in the early 1990s, he helped develop such TV shows as the sketch comedy series "In Living Color," a show with a mostly black cast that also propelled white comedian Jim Carrey to stardom, and the Charles S. Dutton situation comedy "Roc." Dutton is one of the performers on the new audio Bible.

Bowser, who is black, said he recommended himself to Christianity in 1997 around the time his wife, TV sitcom producer Yvette Lee Bowser, was pregnant with their first child. A few years later, he bought a 65-CD audio Bible that he quit listening to "after the first two or three discs" because he was not inspired by the storytelling.

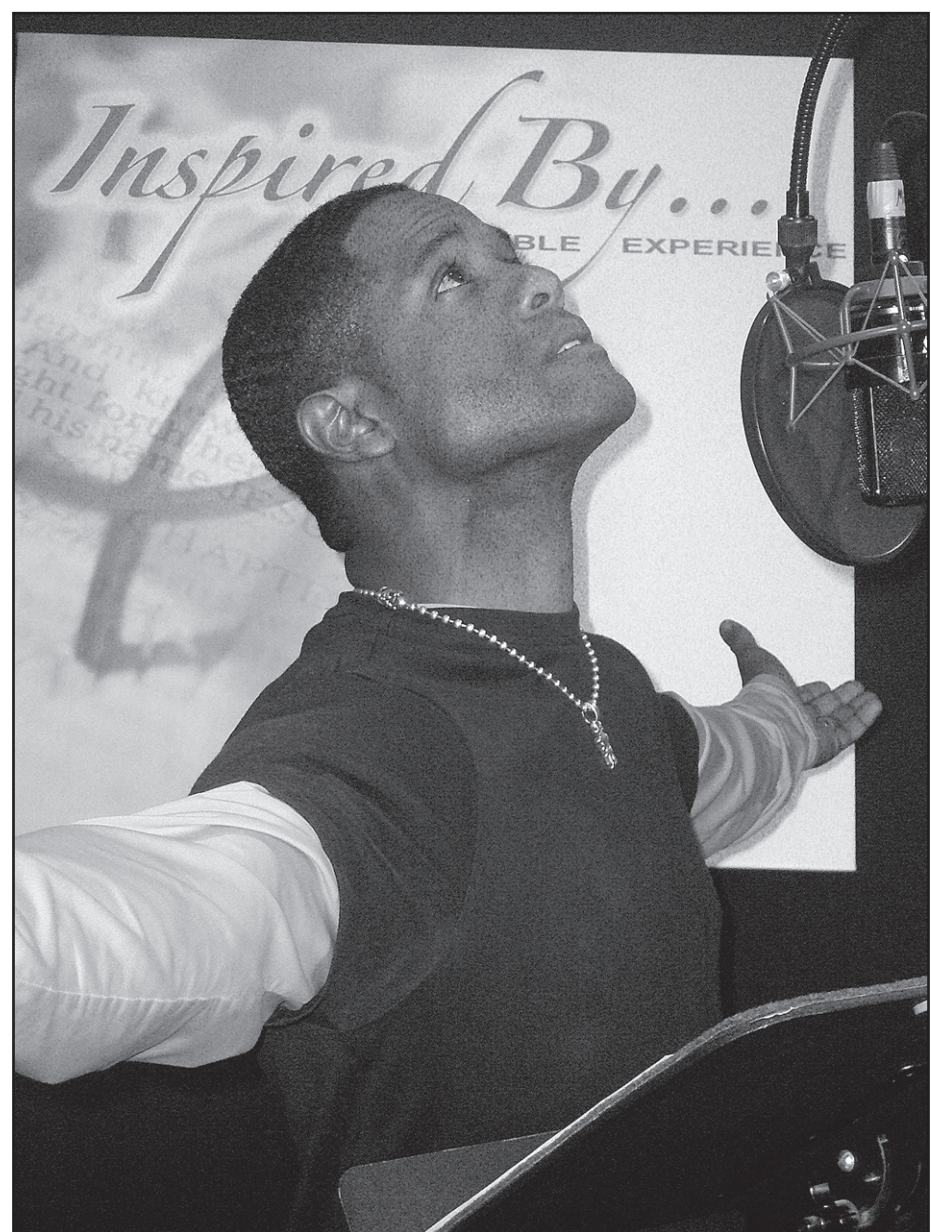
"The production value was lacking and I thought, gee whiz, if we could do this and really capture people's attention, how much more impactful and engaging it might be," he said.

Bowser formed a Beverly Hills, Calif.-based production company called Inspired By Media Group with three fellow Christians: new media executive Ron Belk, music producer Louis "Buster" Brown and casting director Robi Reed, who was principally responsible for getting commitments from the talent.

About a year and a half ago, an agent representing the four partners approached Zondervan with their idea. The publisher agreed to provide financing as well as text from its Today's New International Version Bible, a conversational translation aimed at young readers.

"Bible Experience" spent several years in development before recording started last December. Work on the entire New Testament, plus part of the Old Testament, was completed by July 1.

Underwood said the experience was a "unique and timely" version of the Bible.



The Associated Press

In a promotional photo provided by Zondervan Christian Media, Blair Underwood portrays Jesus during a recording session at the company's recording studio in Grand Rapids, Mich. Underwood is among several Hollywood actors who have lent their names to an ambitious dramatization of the life and teachings of Jesus in a new audio Bible released by Zondervan, one of the world's largest publishers of religious books.

Religious Perspectives

Fear not

By **REV. DR. DONALD P. RICHMOND**

We live in fearful times. Internal and external pressures threaten to overwhelm and destroy us. Many of our social, economic, psychological and spiritual "fabrics" appear to be unraveling. Anyone with ears to hear and eyes to see knows this. Nevertheless, in spite of life's many harsh realities, the bible tells us to "fear not."

How can this be? Is God an eternal optimist? Does God want us to be dominated by denial? Are we to be a "pie in the sky" people who are so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly use?

The answers to these questions are found in the readings listed above. God tells us that we need not fear because of "His" presence and promises (Isaiah 35: 4 - 7). When times are tough, regardless of what our circumstances may be, we have God's presence and promises as a source of strength and encouragement. Moreover, apart from presence and promises, we can enjoy God's "perfect gifts" (James 1: 17). When we read the bible we find many promises. Among these promises are found this: "[God] has plans for you for good and not for evil to give you a future and a hope." God has plans for us, and, when we are properly related to God, we need fear nothing. Finally, we need not fear because of

God's power (Mark 7: 31 - 37). God is the sovereign Lord over all life. Sometimes it may seem that God is not there, that God may not care. I think that at times we are all tempted to doubt. Nevertheless, as Dr. Francis Schaeffer has said, "He is there, and He is not silent." The old children's hymn says it well, "He has the whole world in His hands." This includes every one of us. Those persons who are converted and committed to Christ, who seek to live in obedience to the Written Word of God (the bible), need fear nothing or no one.

Every one of us pass through many dark shadows and manifold difficulties. These are universal human experiences. They are, quite simply, part of life. However, if seen from God's perspective and properly processed, is it not possible that these experiences can finally — by God's grace — help us to hear and see and speak properly (Mark 7: 31 - 37)? God can help deliver us from the darkness of our limited perspectives and troubling concerns. Fear not!

Rev. Dr. Donald P. Richmond, is a priest with the Anglican Province of America.

Do you have a religious perspective on a current issue to share? If so, please write to Justin Beckett at jbeckett@vvdailypress.com.

DePaul U. blasted for scheduling pro-homosexual conference

Gathering to focus on homosexual-affirming in teaching, curriculum

By **JIM BROWN**
Agape Press

The nation's largest Catholic university is under fire over its plan to host a conference aimed at expanding homosexuality-affirming teaching and curriculum on Catholic university campuses.

Next October DePaul University in Chicago will be hosting a two-day conference for professors and staff who are involved with "lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer" issues on Catholic campuses. The first "Out There" conference was held at Santa Clara University in 2005 and reportedly attracted 150 participants from more than 40 colleges and universities.

Patrick Reilly, president of the Cardinal Newman Society (CNS), a Catholic renewal group, says he is very troubled by the event and its location.



The Associated Press / File photo

The Barat Campus Library on the campus of DePaul University in Lake Forest, Ill. Next October, the school will host a two-day conference for professors and staff on 'lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer' issues.

"The approach that these people are taking is to accept — and in some cases even endorse — the homosexual lifestyle and build an academic curriculum around the homosexual culture as if it's a distinctive and worthy culture to be studied," notes Reilly. "And that's obviously a serious concern for Catholics."

The Cardinal Newman Society is calling on DePaul president Thomas Holtsch-

neider to drop the plan to host the pro-homosexual conference in October 2007.

The CNS leader says Catholic educators like Holtschneider "must respond with aggressive efforts to restore an assumption of chastity among students, faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees" if they hope to overcome what Reilly describes as "an explosion of homosexual activity and activism" on Cath-

neider needs to cancel the event if the administrator wants to uphold the school's Catholic identity.

"One would think that he would step in and insist that this is inappropriate in a Catholic institution," he says. "And beyond that, it's an inappropriate academic exercise," Reilly adds. "It's playing on the fringes of academic study, and it's not worthy of a reputable academic institution."

DePaul is the only Catholic institution in the country with a "Queer Studies" minor.

IN BRIEF

St. Hilary's in Hesperia holds Thanksgiving show

HESPERIA — At 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 19, St. Hilary's Episcopal Church will welcome the Kevin R. Blandford Memorial Pipe Band at the annual Kirkin' o' the Tartans.

Bring your family tartan and join us for blessing and celebration. Not even a wee drop of Scottish blood in you? Not to worry. Bring any item symbolic of your family heritage as we ask God's blessings on all families everywhere.

A Thanksgiving brunch will follow the service. Turkeys will be provided and all guests are asked to bring a side dish to share.

The church is located at 11305 Hesperia Road, Hesperia, one mile south of Bear Valley Road.

For more information, call 244-6444.

Bethlehem sights, sounds coming to Hesperia center

HESPERIA — Tri-City Christian Center Academy and Preschool is bringing an Old World shopping experience to Hesperia.

The center will be transformed from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday into an Old World, Bethlehem marketplace.

The marketplace will feature music and food catered by Ala' Al-Deen. In addition, kids can play games of the ancients and create holiday gifts and souvenirs. There will also be a live Nativity scene.

Tri-City Christian Center is at 11616 Hesperia Road. For more information, call 948-8877.

Officer asks bishops to find work for accused priests

NEW YORK — The former FBI agent who served for three years as head of child protection for the nation's Roman Catholic bishops says dioceses should find work for priests accused of child molestation who have been permanently removed from public ministry.

In an article in the Nov. 20 issue of the Jesuit magazine America, Kathleen McChesney wrote that the bishops' decision in 2002 to remove the men from all church work was sound. But she fears that without any structure, accused priests may lose self-esteem and be more likely to re-offend.

"While removing such priests from ministry is prudent and necessary, it is also essential to provide them with meaningful and time-consuming work," she wrote. "It is possible, though difficult, to assign such men to work that contributes to the church's mission of serving others without placing the offender or alleged offender in a position of unsupervised contact with minors or vulnerable adults."

Virginia Episcopal moving toward break with church

FAIRFAX, Va. — Two of the most historically significant parishes in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia are moving toward breaking with the national church because of differences over the Bible and sexuality.

The vestries, or boards of directors, of Truro Church in Fairfax and The Falls Church in Falls Church, Va. have voted independently to recommend the parishes split from the Episcopal Church, according to spokesmen for each parish. Congregants in both parishes will vote between Dec. 10 and 16 whether to approve a break.

Truro Church and The Falls Church both grew from Truro Parish, which was created in 1732. George Washington served as a lay leader in both congregations.

Croatia approves its first asylum application

ZAGREB, Croatia — A Christian woman from Africa has been granted asylum in Croatia, the first person to receive asylum in the country since the end of the Serbo-Croat War more than a decade ago, the interior ministry said.

The woman, who was not identified by name, age or nationality in line with Croatian privacy laws, sought permission to stay in predominantly Roman Catholic country on the grounds of religious persecution and the practice of female genital mutilation in her home country, the interior ministry said in a statement Wednesday.

— Compiled from staff and wire reports

Italian satirists target the pope

Comics draw fire from bishops who insist skits covering all religions are taken too far

ROME (AP)—They imitate Pope Benedict XVI's German-accented Italian, poke fun at his secretary and even have the pontiff shooting pigeons in St. Peter's Square.

The pope and the Vatican have long been a favorite target in a country where satirists hold little sacred, but Italy's Roman Catholic bishops and others now complain that the current crop of comedians is going too far.

"You can't joke about the Vatican," was the banner headline Wednesday in the left-wing daily L'Unita, which denounced a "crusade against satire" by Catholic media and conservative politicians.

"This is Catholic fundamentalism, a faithful mirror of certain Islamic fundamentalists who don't want cartoons about Allah," the paper wrote in an editorial, drawing comparisons to the uproar in the Muslim world by cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in Danish and other European newspapers earlier this year.

The popular comedian Fiorello imitates the pope's secretary, Monsignor Georg Ganswein, representing him as a hip, sporty and very



The Associated Press

Comedian Maurizio Crozza performs during a TV show, in this file photo taken on Nov. 10, 2005. Maurizio Crozza's latest satire on TV, with a hysterical Pope Benedict XVI's speaking a German-accented Italian, shooting pigeons on his ledge over St. Peter's Square because they disturb 'people who have work to do' or throwing burning candies to the 'dear children' in the square, stirred bitter criticism in the Catholic press.

vain prelate. The comedian uses him to talk about the pope.

"He's smoking like a Turk — three packs a day — to prepare for

his upcoming trip to Turkey," he had the secretary saying recently on his radio show, using the Italian expression for a chainsmoker.

The Maurizio Crozza satire on TV is stronger, with a hysterical pope shooting pigeons on his ledge over St. Peter's Square because



The Associated Press

Italian showman Rosario Fiorello jokes in this photo from files taken on Sept. 8, 2002. The popular comedian Fiorello imitates the pope's secretary, Monsignor Georg Ganswein, representing him as a hip, sporty and very vain prelate.

they disturb "people who have work to do" or throwing burning candies to the "dear children" in the square.

The Vatican had no official comment, but Italian newspapers carried comments by the pope's secretary dismissing the satire as "unacceptable" and insisting that Benedict never watched or listened to the programs.

Letters to the editor

DALE HILEMAN
of Apple Valley

Thank you for "Do animals have souls?" Nov 11, pertinent because I had been thinking about that very subject. My question is why the Christian and some other religions consider it OK to eat animals. Often we stumble onto topics very uncomfortable and that's why we so seldom hear them discussed by the clergy. The usual answer, as I understand it, is because they don't have souls (the beasts, not the clergy). But whether they do or not, or even whether there is such a thing as a soul seems beside the point. They live and love and suffer and mourn their dead just like we do.

Yet we think nothing of killing and eating, or for that matter, mistreating them. Now, we don't eat horses; but the pig, for instance, is very clean (if so allowed), smarter than a dog, and makes an excellent pet. Yet we suffer him to (literally) live in a pigsty, then hang him live by the back legs and slit his throat

so as to bleed him to death.

It could be reasoned that God obviously means us to eat them because she gave us eye teeth meant specifically for tearing meat. But it might as well be argued that she is trying to wean us off the habit, as in the course of evolution she has so decreased the length of these canines.

Therefore it seems very difficult to rationalize our wanton cannibalism, while it behooves the spiritual establishment to explain this apparent ambiguity.

MYKEL PICKENS
of Victorville

After reading Mr. Morrison's article I became saddened because it sounds like so many of the religious leaders in Jesus' day were trying to hold people to an old way of doing things, namely worship. When Mr. Morrison writes, he is actually talking about a practice called regulative principle of worship. Basically it is a belief that for the public worship of God, if the Bible

has not written about it, then we are not to do it. I can worship in a Baptist Church just as well as I can in a Methodist Church or a Pentecostal Church and each of these churches do worship differently.

The word worship comes from an old English word that contains the ideas of honor and worth. When we worship God, we are honoring Him. When we worship God, we are recognizing His inexpressible, indescribable, infinite value. Like the angels in heaven, all true worshipers say, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power" (Rev. 4:11). The Old and New Testaments have a number of words that are translated "worship." The Hebrew word, Shehahh is used most often in reference to worship means "to bow down, to do homage" (Gen. 18:2). The most prominent Greek term for worship conveys the idea of "showing reverence" or "bowing down to God" is Proskuneo (Jn. 4:21-24). A second Greek word, latreuo, means "to serve, to minister" (Mt. 4:10).

True worship not only recognizes the worthiness of God, it rejoices in it. I don't know about you, but when was the last time you were rejoicing and not having a good time or were entertained?

People worship differently. Some people can worship by listening to a sermon, some by playing their guitar; still some may worship by serving their fellow man, by showing the love of Christ. True worship is not about how a church conducts its liturgy or worship service. Worship is a condition of the heart and our response to what Christ has done for us in our lives. What is wrong with making something enjoyable for ourselves in terms of worship as long as that worship is genuine and comes with our best intentions?

I agree that worship should never be about man or our entertainment. Worship should always be for and about God. The focus of worship should never be on us or the musician(s) or the song, but the reason for the song. Worship is not just singing songs and clapping and

raising our hands. It is about revelation. It's about discovering who God is and who we are not. Many churches rely on the musical aspect of worship. They bring together musicians, dancers, artists, actors, etc. All of them bringing their own sacrifice or worship to God. We read in Genesis that God only wants the best for worship and sacrifice. Things like PowerPoint, drama, praise bands, etc. help enhance the worship experience. It's not for our entertainment, but to help connect the worshiper with the one being worshiped, Jesus Christ.

Mr. Morrison writes how believers would benefit if they would just obey the Bible. I agree. Why would God create people with talents and abilities and then tell them they cannot use those talents to worship Christ? I admire his passion and his desire for people to truly worship God. I just don't think you can limit worship to just a specific set "do's and don'ts." Use your gifts and talents for God, be creative and honor the one who has blessed you with those talents.

Candor in the workplace

Most managers think they have a pretty good idea of what's going on in their department. Many pride themselves on their open-door policy and self-perceived approachability. Yet it's likely there are things they don't know about and employees who hope they don't find out.

According to dozens of organizational surveys administered by the Josephson Institute, at least 30 percent of employees say there's a "kill the messenger" syndrome in their workplace that causes them or others to conceal or distort negative information. Nearly as many admit they are under so much pressure to hit their numbers that they regularly tailor reports to give their superiors what they want to hear.

Whether management really has created an intimidating culture or employees have formed unfair perceptions as an excuse to avoid confrontations or criticisms, the fact remains that there are huge gaps in management's knowledge on both practical business matters and potential legal and ethical issues.

One lesson from the recent



Character Counts

by Michael Josephson

bundle of business and accounting scandals is that complete, reliable information is essential to good decisions and that it is prudent as well as respectful and responsible to encourage employees to reveal facts, discuss pressures, and challenge practices that might be inefficient, illegal, or unethical.

The primary goal of encouraging candor in the workplace is to provide managers with important information while reinforcing the idea throughout the organization that you want and expect everyone to be forthcoming and accountable. When employees feel comfortable expressing themselves, the likelihood of morale-damaging gossip and outside whistle-blowing is reduced.

439 **Facts About The BIBLE** BY JOHN LEHTI

This is a dramatized version of facts taken from the Book of Joshua, intending to show some of the customs of these ancient and traditional times

OTHNIEL'S TRIUMPH
BLINDED BY THE SUN REFLECTED INTO THEIR EYES BY OTHNIEL'S SHIELD BEARERS AND BESET BY DEADLY VOLLEYS OF ARROWS AND STONES, THE GIANTS ARE NOW IN A STATE OF CONFUSION...

TAKE THE SUN FROM MY EYES!
THEY CANNOT SEE TO STRIKE US!

NOW, YE MEN OF JUDAH LEAP THE WALLS!

AND OTHNIEL'S ATTACKERS LEAP INTO THE RANKS OF THE BLINDED AND CONFUSED GIANTS, SWORD AND LANCE STRIKING RAPIDLY!

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