

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A CHRONOLOGICAL PRESENTATION OF THE
WRITINGS OF ELMER L. TOWNS FROM 1999-2005,
NOTING THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF
HIS TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS FROM 1980-2005

A Thesis Project Submitted to
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By

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Lynchburg, VA

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RESEARCH PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

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ABSTRACT

A CHRONOLOGICAL PRESENTATION OF THE WRITINGS OF ELMER L. TOWNS FROM 1999-2005, NOTING THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF HIS TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS FROM 1980-2005

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Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005

Mentor: Dr. Rick Rasberry

This project will analyze the contributions of Elmer L. Towns to six distinct disciplines, i.e., Church Growth, Sunday School, Christian Education, Bible Study and Exposition, Christian Life, and Theology. This is the third in a series of projects centered on the writing ministry of Elmer L. Towns. This project will examine the writing ministry of Elmer L. Towns from 1999-2005, and also include an analysis of his teaching ministry within higher educational settings. In addition, conclusions will be drawn from a survey of supervisors of the teachings of Elmer Towns from 1980-2005.

Abstract length: 92 words.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project will be to analyze the interrelationship of the teachings and writings of Elmer L. Towns to his disciplines, i.e., Church Growth, Sunday School, Christian Education, Bible Study and Exposition, Systematic Theology, and Christian Life. Elmer Towns has been teaching in higher education over 47 years in the aforementioned areas. This thesis is the third in a series. The first was entitled *Elmer L. Towns, A Biographical and Chronological Presentation of His Writings* by Stephen R. (Sam) Towns, D.Min, professor of religion, Liberty University. His study examined all of the writings of Elmer Towns until 1985, and was completed for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. The second project was an update to the earlier Towns study that examined the writings and contributions of Elmer Towns from 1986 to Spring 1999. The unique contribution of this thesis was to examine specifically the contributions of Elmer Towns to Church Growth, Sunday School, Christian Education, Bible Study and Exposition, and Christian Life; but it did not analyze his unique contribution to the area of Systematic Theology, which was his major at Dallas Theological Seminary. David Allan Brown's *A Chronological Presentation of the Writings of Elmer L. Towns From 1986-1999* produced this thesis for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, Virginia.

Purpose

In order to better understand the influence of Elmer Towns, this project will examine the interrelationship between the writing contributions of Elmer Towns (from 1999-2005) and his teaching contributions (1980-2005). The author will only attempt to examine the writings that were not covered in earlier research projects. The author will attempt to draw conclusions from a survey given to academic supervisors who have directed Towns in technical teaching assignments at institutions of higher education from 1980 to the present. The date 1980 was chosen because it represents a 25-year period of time, and for practicality, since it is likely that those individuals who were educational supervisors of Towns before 1980 are no longer at the educational institutions where he lectured or taught.

The following questions will guide the researcher of this project, and the answers to these questions will become the basis for the conclusions that are reached:

1. What have been the writings of Elmer Towns since 1999, and what contributions have each of these writings made?
2. What have been the teaching activities of Elmer Towns that have specifically contributed to or grown out of his writing ministry?
3. What has been the overall perceived contribution, if any, of Elmer Towns from his teaching activities at higher educational institutions since 1980?

These questions will guide the research for the first area of concern in this thesis.

To answer the first question the author will assemble a complete bibliography of the literary contributions of Elmer Towns (1963-2005) in the third chapter of this project.

The author will assume that the previous activities of Stephen Towns and David Brown have been thorough and complete, and will list their research in the bibliographical findings. The author will search the Library of Congress, the library of Elmer Towns, the

library of Liberty University, and the library of Church Growth Institute, Lynchburg, Virginia, to discover all published works by Elmer Towns from 1999-2005. The author will use seven of the headings originally used by Sam Towns and David Brown for the display of all new works by Elmer Towns, i.e., (1) articles; (2) audiotapes; (3) books; (4) contribution to books; (5) film and video series; (6) Sunday School campaigns (resource packets); and (7) worktexts for Liberty University. The author will assign each new book to one of the above headings used by Sam Towns and David Brown. Then the author will summarize the content of each new book, giving a statement for its intended purpose, and an analysis of each.

In chapter five, the author will examine the teachings of Elmer Towns as related to his writing ministry. The author will interview Elmer Towns to determine what he remembers of his teaching schedules at the various places where he has taught during the past 47 years, i.e., Midwest Bible College, Winnipeg Bible College, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Liberty University, and Baptist University of America (these represent only the full-time teaching positions for Elmer Towns). There are many other short-term teaching assignments in other recognized educational institutions where Towns has taught. For this information, the author will rely on the research conducted for Elmer Towns' most recent portfolio, completed in Fall 2003 for Liberty University. In addition to depending on Towns' memory, the author will conduct research in Towns' files, and will talk to fellow educators at Liberty University and Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. The author will attempt to classify part-time teaching assignments on a chronological basis.

He will be guided in the fifth chapter by the following questions:

1. What in the teaching ministry of Elmer Towns motivated him to a writing ministry? In this place the author will examine the following sub questions:
 - a. Were the writings of Elmer Towns an application of what he taught or the reverse; did the writings influence his teachings?
 - b. Did Elmer Towns intend his writings to be used in church settings as a lay teaching ministry, or were his writings related to and directed at students and professors of institutions of higher education?
2. From the determinations found from the above questions, the author will attempt to determine how Elmer Towns' writings contributed to his teaching. The author will attempt to determine what contributions Elmer Towns has made by interviewing him for his explanation and assessment of his contribution.

The sixth chapter will discuss the uniqueness and effectiveness of the teaching contributions by Elmer Towns to the broad area of Christianity. To do this, the author will attempt to survey those who have invited and/or supervised Elmer Towns' teachings at other higher educational institutions. In the first area of the survey, the supervisors will be asked to evaluate his contribution in content as it relates to six specific areas. The content that they will evaluate is related to the five divisions used by David Brown in his thesis, i.e., (1) Church Growth, (2) Sunday School, (3) Christian Education, (4) Bible Study and Exposition and (5) Christian Life. To this will be added (6) Systematic Theology.

In the second area of the survey, the supervisors will be surveyed to determine what contribution Elmer Towns' teaching has made in general on the students and institutions where he has taught. Though these supervisors are in the area of higher education, many of them may not be experts in the fields in which Elmer Towns has taught; however, their motivation for acquiring the services of Elmer Towns as a teacher in their institutions will add validated insight into this research. Their original

motivations and expectations should be a basis by which they evaluate the outcome of his effectiveness.

Because of the advanced age of supervisors in higher educational institutions and the fact that many of them may not be available for this survey because of death and/or transfer, the author will attempt to only survey those who supervised Elmer Towns in the past 25 years, i.e., since 1980.

The Basis for the Choice of Topic

This research will make a contribution to Liberty University and its students because it will give an opportunity to analyze the contributions that Elmer Towns has made to the ongoing educational life of the University. It is hoped that this project will give insight and motivation to other educational institutions as they develop educational programs in relationship to the areas in which Elmer Towns has taught. This project will give the author insight into a teacher and educational pioneer that will ultimately motivate the author to become a better teacher and church leader.

The author has chosen this topic for several reasons. First, Elmer Towns employed the author as a graduate assistant from 2001-2003, working in the following undergraduate classes: BIBL 110 – New Testament Survey; BIBL 323 – The Gospel of John; THEO 201 – Theology Survey 1; THEO 202 – Theology Survey 2; and CHMN 101 – Evangelism and Christian Life. He was a graduate assistant in the following graduate courses: EVAN 500 – Spiritual Factors of Church Growth; EVAN 510 – Evangelism and Church Growth; EVAN 550 – Church Planting; EVAN 597 – 21st Century Tool and Techniques for the Revitalization of the Church; EVAN 697 – Seminar

in Evangelism; and THEO 697 – Teaching Systematic Theology. The author was a graduate assistant in the following doctoral classes: EVAN 851 – 21st Century Tools and Techniques for the Revitalization of the Church; EVAN 910 – Spiritual Factors of Church Growth; and EVAN 997 – Seminar in Revivals. The author also assisted in grading papers where Elmer Towns taught at Evangel Theological Seminary, Harrisonburg, Virginia, and Winebrenner Theological Seminary, Findlay, Ohio,

After completing his Master of Divinity degree from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, the author began working full-time at Liberty University in the School of Religion; Elmer Towns was his supervising dean. The author has continued to work closely with Towns while surveying and assessing the large classes taught within Liberty University's School of Religion. The author has also had the opportunity to team-teach BIBL 110 – New Testament Survey with Elmer Towns. In addition to team-teaching with Towns, the author is currently using materials written by Towns to teach THEO 201 – Theology Survey I and THEO 202 – Theology Survey II at Liberty University. The books being used are *Theology for Today*, Harcourt College Publishers (2002), *Theology 201 Worktext*, Thomson Custom Publishing (2002), and *Theology 202 Worktext*, Thomson Custom Publishing (2002).

The author has also traveled with Towns on many occasions, helping with logistics at seminars and church meetings. In these meetings he was responsible for selling educational materials. Seminar topics covered while the author was present with Towns include: Fasting, Sunday School, Prayer, Revivals, and Church Growth in general. It has been the author's privilege to experience first hand the teaching of Elmer Towns at many different levels and in many different settings. His passion for Christians to

experience the deeper-Christian life is conveyed in pastors' conferences and undergraduate classes alike. His ability to communicate to individuals where they are, and to motivate them, has especially impacted this author.

Having worked with Elmer Towns for four years, and currently working for him at Liberty University in the School of Religion, the author desires to learn valuable insights that will help him in his teaching ministry.

The Limitations of this Project

A project as broad as the scope of the writings and teachings of Elmer Towns could be unmanageable and incomprehensible, so the author has focused on a specific aspect of Towns' writings, i.e., the relationship of the teaching ministry of Elmer Towns to his writing ministry.

First, the author has not included in this project a survey of any of Elmer Towns' publications or writings before the summer of 1999. These were addressed in the doctoral projects of Stephen R. (Sam) Towns, 1988, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, and David Allan Brown, 1999, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, Virginia. The author has access to the surveys for his research.

Second, the author will not attempt to surmise the thinking, theology, or interpretation that Elmer Towns has given in his teaching (input); rather, he will attempt to analyze the results of his teaching on his writing ministry, and the results of his writing ministry on his teaching. The author will attempt to determine those ideas of Elmer Towns that are considered new, unique and innovative; and, whether his ideas have resulted from his teaching ministry or his writing ministry.

Third, this project will not attempt to determine why Elmer Towns has written the things that he has written, nor the motive behind his teaching. Rather, the author will allow Elmer Towns to give his reasons for the things he taught, as well as the way he used his teaching ministry to influence students. This will allow Elmer Towns to share his insights, motives and evaluations of his contributions.

Fourth, the author will not attempt to determine the extent of the influence of Elmer Towns in every area of ministry. This means that this study will not look at his administrative duties as vice president, dean, or other offices Towns has held in positions of higher education. Towns' work as a consultant and guide to churches, ministries and educational institutions is also beyond the scope of this project. The author will not attempt to determine the extent of Elmer Towns' influence upon church groups, para-church groups, or other educational institutions apart from those in which he has taught. If the author attempted this evaluation, it would be impossible to determine since he also has influence among pastors, lay people, and those in para-church circles.

Finally, the author will not attempt to write a complete biographical sketch of Elmer Towns. This was first done as a doctoral project of Sam Towns at Fuller Theological Seminary; later David Brown used that biographical sketch as a basis in his project. The author will use the biographical sketch written for the North American Professors of Christian Education. This sketch was prepared by Timothy Paul Jones and Mark Senter in their attempt to identify some of the greatest Christian educators in the past century. This biographical sketch is used because of the referral nature of its writing. Mark Senter, Chairman of the Department of Christian Education at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, was a student of Elmer Towns during his

tenure at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Chapter two of this project includes this biographical sketch and includes any new elements or activities relevant to the teaching and writing ministry of Elmer Towns that have been conducted since the completion of Mark Senter and Timothy Paul Jones' project.

Methodology Employed in this Project

The author will use several areas of research to complete this project. First, the author will search the Library of Congress, the A. P. Guillermin Library at Liberty University, Church Growth Institute, Lynchburg, Virginia, and the personal library of Elmer Towns to determine what books, writing projects, videos and audiotapes have been completed since 1999.

Second, the author will interview Elmer Towns to determine the principles, methods, trends and emphases that were used in the presenting of these works. This project will continue the chart that was contributed by David Brown in the category of discipline, to determine any processes in the thinking and contributions of Elmer Towns.

Third, Sam Towns' *Elmer L. Towns, A Biographical and Chronological Presentation of His Writings*, and David Brown's *A Chronological Presentation of the Writings of Elmer L. Towns From 1986-1999*, will be used for their insight into the writing ministry of Elmer Towns. This information will assist in determining the nature and character of Towns' teaching ministry. Fourth, the author will personally interview David Brown to build on the research that he completed in 1999.

Fifth, the author will also survey those members who supervised the teaching ministry of Elmer Towns at Liberty University and other higher educational institutions

where Elmer Towns was employed in a technical teaching ministry. In this survey the author will attempt to determine the reasons why Elmer Towns was chosen to teach in their institutions, the contributions that he made in teaching, and the long-range results that they project from his teaching.

Finally, the author will examine the content of the books, writings, class notes and syllabi to determine the purpose of the teachings of Elmer Towns. This research will be used to locate innovations in his methods and content of his teaching ministry.

CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHY

In 2004, BIOLA and Talbot School of Theology gathered information for a web-based database on the Christian educators of the 20th Century. Included within that list was Elmer Leon Towns. Timothy Paul Jones and Mark H. Senter III wrote a biography of Elmer Towns to be included with others who were recognized as the greatest Christian educators. The intent of this author is not to reexamine the work that was done in preparing the biography of Elmer Towns; rather, it is necessary to update it with additional information about endeavors that have been undertaken since Jones and Senter wrote the biography. Their biography will be included in Appendix A of this project to provide the reader with the necessary information concerning Elmer Towns. This chapter will offer the reader a brief biography of the life of Elmer Towns, but will be devoted to key events and changes in the ministry of Elmer Towns that were not covered in the biography by Jones and Senter.

Biography¹

Born on October 21, 1932, Elmer Leon Towns, Jr. was the son of Elmer Leon Towns, Sr. and Erin McFaddin. Elmer grew up in Savannah, Georgia, where his father

¹ Summary of information obtained from Timothy Paul Jones and Mark H. Senter III, draft of the entry on Dr. Elmer Towns developed for the "Christian Educators of the 20th Century" web-based database project funded by the Lilly Endowment. Final version will be available in 2005 at the project website: www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/.

worked as a hardware clerk. The individual noted within Towns' life for being a great influence was a door-to-door salesman by the name of Jimmy Breland, who first introduced Towns to Sunday School. For the next fourteen years of his life, Elmer Towns never missed a Sunday at Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia.

It was during these formative years that Towns first flashed a glimpse of his passion for writing. During his seventh grade year, Towns wrote a paper that, "was unremarkable for its content but highly remarkable for its length – the paper filled ninety-nine handwritten pages."² Despite Towns' exemplary Sunday School attendance, his conversion did not occur until he was seventeen.

Towns attended Columbia Bible College in South Carolina, and at the age of nineteen was called to his first pastorate; a small Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. It was during this time at Columbia Bible College that Towns met his future wife, Ruth Jean Forbes. On August 21, 1953, the two married, and soon after the couple moved to Northwestern College in Minneapolis, Minnesota in order for Towns to pursue his Bachelor of Arts degree.

After completing his Bachelor of Arts degree from Northwestern, the family moved to Dallas, Texas, where Towns entered the Master of Theology degree at Dallas Theological Seminary. It was during this stay in Dallas that Towns' passion for large, growing churches was enhanced and solidified. Towns moved away from the covenantal, Presbyterian theology of his younger days, and embraced a more dispensational, Baptist

² Timothy Paul Jones and Mark H. Senter III, draft of the entry on Dr. Elmer Towns developed for the "Christian Educators of the 20th Century" web-based database project funded by the Lilly Endowment. Final version will be available in 2005 at the project website: www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/.

view of theology. This was due much in part to the influence of W.A Criswell, the pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, where Towns attended.

Although he was still enrolled at Dallas Theological Seminary, Towns also enrolled at Southern Methodist University, where he entered the Master of Education degree program. “After simultaneously completing theses for both degrees, Town graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary and Southern Methodist University in 1958.”³

At age twenty-six, Towns was an Assistant Professor of Christian Education at Midwest Bible College, and it was here that his first book was published. *Teaching Teens* was a self-published book used by Towns in class, Introduction to Youth Work. Through serving on a committee for Midwest Bible College’s accreditation council, Towns was able to become a member of the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges. In turn, this position opened an opportunity for Towns to become the president of Winnipeg Bible College, where he assisted the school in attaining accreditation and helped relieve the school’s indebtedness.

After his stay at Winnipeg, Towns moved to Deerfield, Illinois, where he was an Associate Professor of Christian Education at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. During this time Towns also enrolled at Garrett Theological Seminary, where he completed his Master of Religious Education degree. It was at Trinity that Towns’ desire and drive for research and writing were encouraged and more fully realized.

In 1966, Towns became the Sunday School editor for *Christian Life* magazine; at the time one of the largest evangelical magazines in circulation. This ultimately led to

³ Ibid.

research regarding the ten largest Sunday Schools in the United States. Towns' *Ten Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes them Grow* boosted him further into the national spotlight.

It was during research for this book that Towns met Jerry Falwell. At the time Falwell's Thomas Road Baptist Church, in Lynchburg, Virginia, had the ninth largest Sunday School in the United States. Through their interaction, Towns and Falwell eventually co-founded Liberty Baptist College in 1971, latter to be named Liberty University. After a brief time back in Georgia, 1973-1977, Towns returned to Liberty University, where he has held numerous positions. These positions include, editor-in-chief of Falwell's publications, Dean of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Vice-president of Liberty University, and Dean of the B.R. Lakin School of Religion.

Additional Endeavors⁴

During the time of this project (1999-2005) Towns became involved in four additional projects, which are not mentioned in the above biography by Timothy Paul Jones and Mark H. Senter III.

Spiritual Advisor to Wingfield Encounters

The fourth endeavor that Towns participated in was mentoring evangelist Steve Wingfield and becoming teacher for spiritual foundations for revival and evangelism in each area where Wingfield held his evangelistic encounter (an evangelistic crusade). Steve Wingfield, a former student at Liberty University (1971-1973), operates an evangelistic ministry out of an office building in Harrisonburg, VA. The Steve Wingfield

⁴ Information regarding these additional endeavors was obtained by interviews with Elmer Towns during July 2004.

Evangelistic Association has a large 5,000 seat tent, and according to Steve Wingfield, he wants to go to small and medium size towns so that when the crusade comes to an area, it will be the biggest religious event they have that year.

The Steve Wingfield Evangelistic Association conducts crusades similarly to Billy Graham. As a result, Steve Wingfield has two ministries for Billy Graham, i.e., he is the writer and instructor of the course to a corps of 30 young evangelists that the Billy Graham Evangelism Association trains each year, and he is a member of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association committee that oversees an international network of evangelists.

The Wingfield organization has a group of four field representatives who spend approximately one year in an area, organizing the pastors and laymen to plan and conduct an evangelistic crusade. During that year they train ushers and counselors, organize prayer meetings, and raise funds. During each of those organizing events, Elmer Towns goes to the area and conducts a one-day seminar with pastors, giving two messages, *Planning for Evangelism but Getting Revival* and *Fasting for Revival and Evangelism*. These become the basis for the lay prayer meetings before the Encounter.

Between 1999 and the spring of 2005, Towns conducted sixteen training sessions for the Steve Wingfield Evangelistic Association. These sessions were conducted in such places as Springfield, Georgia; Harrisonburg, Virginia; Bristol, Tennessee; Chambersburg, Pennsylvania; Canton and Coshocton, Ohio; Seaford and Ocean City, Delaware; and Garrett County, Maryland.

The Amsterdam 2000 Conference

Towns' second involvement was his membership on the planning committee for the Amsterdam 2000 meetings. This was a training conference sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, lasting 10 days (July 29 – August 6, 2000) and held in the RAI International Exhibition and Congress Center, Amsterdam, Netherlands. Its purpose was to train evangelists to do evangelism like Billy Graham did evangelism. Towns became a member of this council when he was previously invited to Wheaton, IL by Robert Coleman in 1994 for a two-day discussion on issues facing evangelism. The purpose of this two-day discussion at Wheaton College was to present a research paper to Billy Graham on the issues and trends facing evangelism. At that conference Elmer Towns presented a paper concerning 14 issues facing evangelism. The other delegates had not brought papers, and since his was the only paper, it became the focus of discussion for the two-day conference.

Billy Graham wrote the members of this group, asking them whether he should call a conference on evangelism in Amsterdam in the year 2000.⁵ There was disagreement among the staff members of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association; some felt that another conference on evangelism needed to be held, and some did not. In Towns' response to Billy Graham, he pointed out the growth of a postmodern generation that did not have a recessive memory of Christianity. The needs of young people alone demanded a reconsideration of techniques and methods of evangelism. Then Towns pointed out the changing needs of the world represented by changing culture, a changing political environment, and a changing religious environment, demanded a conference. Finally, Towns pointed out the growth of revival in Africa, South American and in

⁵ Billy Graham, personal letter to Elmer Towns, July 1998.

certain Asian nations demanded that the Western church look at their success and determine how the best evangelize in today's changing world. Towns indicated the focus should be on the young. Because of his contribution, he was invited to serve on the planning committee for Amsterdam 2000. The planning committee met in various locations, i.e., Los Angeles, California; Wheaton, Illinois, and in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Towns attended the conference in Amsterdam, managing the details, ministering to individuals, and presenting a paper on "Fasting for Spiritual Evangelization and Revival." He participated on a committee that formulated recommendations concerning college and seminary preparations for evangelists. Also he worked in the early morning meetings where speakers and workshop leaders were given an orientation to their task of global evangelization.

Global Pastors Network

In 2002 Towns became Dean for the Global Pastors Network. This involved being dean over four schools. Then, Towns became dean of the School of Bible Knowledge. Towns worked with James Davis and Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, developing the courses to be offered, identifying the faculty to be appointed, and actually recruiting faculty for these positions.

In the summer of 2002 James Davis and Elmer Towns held a series of phone conference calls to leaders across the nation raising money to underwrite the Global Pastors Network. There were a total of ten conference calls, each one about an hour long. Some calls included as few as 15 pastors; other conference calls included as many as 50 pastors. Bill Bright, the founder of the project, John Maxwell, the chairman of the board

of Global Pastors Network, and Jerry Falwell also participated in the conference calls, helping to raise additional funds. The conference calls raised over a million dollars towards the establishment and operation of the Global Pastors Network.

The Council of Ecclesiology

Beginning in 1994, Towns became involved with a Council on Ecclesiology. Dan Reeves, President of the American Society for Church Growth (1994-1995), became aware of the great need to understand the church, its nature and function. The decision to discuss issues related to Ecclesiology came out of the American Society for Church Growth, of which Dan Reeves and Elmer Towns are members. Dan Reeves took the initiative and called representatives of 14 faith groups to the first meeting of an organization called the Council of Ecclesiology, which met at Beeson Divinity School on the Campus of Sanford University, Birmingham, Alabama, 1997.

To get this council off the ground, Towns secured an underwriting request from Gospel Light/Regal Books amounting to \$2,500.00. The need for the council was demonstrated by the fact that leaders came from a variety of faith groups, paying their own way and donating their own time. Also, it is noteworthy that many other individuals volunteered to attend, but were initially refused. It was felt that 14 was a good number for a discussion and since delegates paid their own way, the council needed to have limited participation to justify their investment. In addition to meeting at Beeson Divinity School, the council has met at Houston, Texas; Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, IL; and in Kings Seminary, Van Nuys, CA.

During the 2004 meeting, Towns presented a paper on *Being Ecumenical and Evangelical*, which analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of both the National Council

of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals, suggesting reasons why the two should not join. While other papers were presented at the council, the paper by Towns was the dominant focus of discussion, and the paper was then passed on to the members of the subcommittees of the National Council of Churches, as well as the members of the National Association of Evangelicals. This paper was also printed in the *American Church Growth Journal*.

CHAPTER 3

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This chapter is an annotated bibliography of the works produced by Elmer Towns from April 1999 to May 2005. These works are divided into seven categories, articles, audiotapes, books, contributions to books and encyclopedias, film and video series, resource packets, and worktexts for Liberty University. The pattern that will be used for this chapter follows the works of Dr. Sam Towns and Dr. David Brown.

Articles

The following is a list of the articles written by Elmer Towns that have been published during the period April 1999 to May 2005. They are listed in chronological order.¹

“What are the Main Boundaries for the Evangelical Church and How Can We Best Address Our Major Issues?” *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, Vol. 10 (Winter 1999) : 85-100.

“Does the Sunday School Have a Bright Future?” *IssacharFile* (May 2002) : 1, 3 (cont.).

“Evangelism in a Postmodern World.” *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, Vol. 13 (Spring 2002) : 37-49.

“Answering the Arguments of Post-Tribulation Rapture Position.” *The Conservative Theological Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 19 (December 2002) : 291-131.

“Ten Foundational Books of Church Growth That Influenced the Movement.” *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, Vol. 13 (Winter 2002) : 3-8.

¹ Information for this section was gathered through a series of interview with Elmer Towns during the Fall of 2004 and also through his portfolio for Liberty University (2003).

“Effective Praying Begins on Your Knees.” *Resource*, Vol. 22, Number 2 (December/January/February 2002-3) : 3, 24 (cont.).

“Salvation by Grace Through Faith.” *The Conservative Theological Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 20 (March 2003) : 27-39.

“The Beginning of the Church Growth Movement.” *Journal of Evangelism & Missions*, Vol. 2, (Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary), (Spring 2003) : 13-19.

“You Can Make a Difference.” *Evangel*, (30 November, 2003) : 2-4.

“The Harmony of Agreement.” *Pray Magazine*, Issue 34 (2003) : 17-29.

“Mastering the Basics Is Essential.” *Evangel*, Vol. 109, No. 6 (February 6, 2005) : 2-4.

“The Korean Pentecost (1907).” *A Journal on Revival and Spiritual Awakening: Heartcry!* Issue 30, (Life Action Ministries) (2005) : 7-13.

Audiotapes

There were no produced audiotapes during the years 1999-2005.

Books

The following is a list of the published books written by Elmer Towns during the period April 1999 to May 2005. They are listed in chronological order.²

Developing a Giving Church, with Stan Toler, Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1999.

Stan Toler came to Elmer Towns with the idea for this book. Toler was doing a series of financial seminars for INJOY of Greater Atlanta, Georgia, and he kept running into information and research that Elmer Towns had done. So, he decided that the two of them should do a book together. Actually, Toler took the initiative for this project, so that the strong local church ideas, programs, and projects came from Stan Toler.

² Information for this section was gathered through a series of interviews with Elmer Towns between July 2004 and January 2005.

Elmer Towns supplied the stewardship lessons to Stan Toler that he had been teaching at Thomas Road Baptist Church over the past years. Each March, Thomas Road Baptist Church conducts a stewardship campaign in which Towns teaches three or four lessons on stewardship. Towns had developed a definition that was used in this book, "Stewardship is properly managing your time, talent and treasure for the glory of God." In his lessons, Towns had said that (1) stewardship is not fundraising, (2) stewardship is not a church program, and (3) a stewardship campaign is not an attempt to get money from people. Towns went on to explain that a stewardship campaign is when the church attempts to teach every member how to be a steward, i.e., how to manage his assets for the glory of God. Therefore, the stewardship campaigns were highly educational in nature. A theory that Towns' conveys throughout the book is that if you teach a person how to properly manage his money, then they will make sure that a tenth of his money goes to God in the tithe, and in the long run; the church will prosper financially (see especially chapter 4).

Many of the statistics on which local church programs are based were found in Towns' writings. First, Towns points out that approximately 18 percent of church attendees give substantially on a regular basis, i.e., give a tithe. That means approximately 1 out of 5 people in the church are tithers. Whereas many churches try to get more money from individuals, Towns feels that the church should live on the tithes of its members, not attempt to motivate their members to give more money.

Towns had also researched and found that the average American church attendee gives \$10 per Sunday to his local church (1995). That means that if there is an average of 100 people in church attendance, that church will average approximately \$1,000 per week in income, or \$52,000 per year. However, when a church has an annual stewardship campaign—educating its people concerning their obligation to manage their money—they will give more money. Towns notices that churches that regularly teach on stewardship and tithing get approximately \$20.00 or more per member, per Sunday.

Throughout the book, there are a number of biblical illustrations concerning stewardship as applied to the local church. These illustrations came from the Sunday School lessons of Towns that he taught at Thomas Road Baptist Church.

The stewardship sermons in the Appendix of this book are primarily from Towns; however, the stewardship stories, as well as the stewardship quotes, are primarily from Stan Toler.

This is a basic book on church stewardship, and Towns believes that every pastor should read this book before assuming the leadership of a local church. It will give him a biblical foundation in the theology of money, but also will give him a

practical orientation towards raising money, budgeting money, spending money and saving money.

The Son, Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1999.

This book is a novel on the life and death of Jesus Christ. The original title by Towns was *The Greatest Life Ever Lived*, which he felt was a description of the life of Jesus. This was a play on the words from the book *The Greatest Story Ever Told* by Fulton Oursler (Garden City: DoubleDay and Company, 1949), which was a best selling book in the 1950s.

Also, there was a premature announcement by Regal Books that the title was *The Jesus Story* which was a take off from the very successful film by Campus Crusade for Christ, *The Jesus Film*. However, when Gospel Light did a marketing survey attempting to sell the book by the title *The Jesus Story*, they received very little response. So they renamed the book *The Son*. Towns testified that he feels the title *The Son* was a poor choice because there were no verbs in the title to give it action, also the cover did not promise the reader anything. The cover had a picture of a statue of Jesus that sits in the Kierkegaard Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark. The statue shows Jesus extending His wounded hand to Thomas. However, the picture is artistically presented so that is it difficult to determine what the picture is about. All of this, according to Towns, hurt the sale of the book.

Towns felt that he could write a novel because in the early days of Liberty University he taught creative writing and a second course in journalism. In that course he introduced the students to writing a novel, and he felt he could write a novel. Also in the early days Towns taught both English and American literature. In these courses he gave an understanding of how to write a novel so students could analyze the structure of novels, characters, story plot and the use of metaphorical language. All of these experiences led Towns to believe that he could write an effective novel.

After *The Son* was published, Dr. David Beck, professor of philosophy, submitted the book to the "Virginia Center for the Book," at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. This organization recognizes and awards excellence in three areas, i.e., novels, non-fiction, and children's stories. The author must be Virginia born or a resident of Virginia to receive a prize. The winning books are recognized at a banquet at the University of Virginia library each fall. Towns received notice that his book was a nominee to be recognized as the outstanding book written by a Virginian author in the fall of 2000. The night on which the banquet was to be held, Towns was on the West Coast and was not able to attend. His wife, Ruth Towns, and daughter, Polly Wooldridge, made plans to attend the banquet thinking that the novel had a good chance of winning. However, a few days before the banquet they received word that *The Son* was only a runner up; so they did not attend the banquet. The tickets were \$250.00 each.

God Encounters: To Touch God and be Touched by Him, Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2000.

This is a unique book because Elmer Towns first wrote it as a manuscript, and then taught it in his Sunday School class. He typically follows the opposite sequence.³ This book contains 12 individuals in the Bible who had a unique encounter with God, and is written in story form to describe each individual's encounter with God.

The book also contains principles so that the reader may learn how they may also encounter God. At the end of each chapter are two practical applications. First, there is a section called, "What We Can Learn." In this section principles are laid out for the reader to follow. Second, "Take Aways" is a section where practical illustrations are written in short "power statements."

When the book was submitted to the editors, they felt that it was a good Bible study, but needed contemporary application. Therefore, Towns found illustrations of contemporary people who had encounters with God similar to ones he described in this book. These contemporary illustrations appeared at the beginning of each chapter and included people who lived in the 20th or 21st century.

Technically, this book began when Bill Greig III, president of Gospel Light/Regal Books, talked to Elmer Towns on the 38th day of Towns' 40-day fast. Greig asked Towns, "What great answer to prayer have you gotten in this fast?" Towns was perplexed at the question because he was not fasting to get an answer to prayer. Towns said, "I am not fasting to get an answer to prayer, rather, I am fasting to know God more intimately."

"Wonderful," Greig answered. "Write that as a book for us here at Regal." Immediately on the 38th day of the fast, Towns went back to his motel room and began writing that evening. Originally he wanted to use the phrase *Experiencing God* but Henry Blackaby had already written a book entitled *Experiencing God* (Broadman and Holman, 1997.)

Next Towns wanted to use the title *Knowing God*, because when a person experiences God, he ends up knowing Him better. But J. I. Packard had already written *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1993). Therefore, Towns used the phrase *Encountering God*.

Tommy Tenney had recently written a very successful best seller entitled, *The God Chasers* (Destiny Image, 1998). Because of the book's success, the publishers asked Tommy Tenney to write an introduction to this book, and they featured Tommy Tenney's name at the top of the front of the cover. The thought

³ The sequence typically used by Towns will be further explored in chapter 6.

was that the success of Tommy Tenney's book dealing with intimacy with God could be attached to this book on knowing God. However, that connection never took place. Regal Books had originally printed 12,000 copies, expecting a large sale. But this was a poor seller by their standards.⁴ Towns felt it did not sell well because of the title *God Encounters* instead of *Encountering God*. He felt it was too close to the science fiction movie title *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.⁵ Also, the art work on the front is rather "eerie," and the man walking down the road has a left arm that is apparently much longer than the right arm, giving a science fiction appearance. Towns feels that the book was not positioned as a deeper life book, nor did the cover and title position it to tell the reader that this book is about knowing God intimately. He feels that the name and art work hurt the sales of the book.

Into the Future: Turning Today's Church Trends Into Tomorrow's Opportunities, with Warren Bird, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 2000.

Towns calls this his "14-pile book." Originally Towns approached Fleming H. Revell with a project of surveying everything that is written about Church Growth and ministry. According to Towns, there were over 100 books that were written in the 90's, instructing pastors how to do ministry. The problem was, many of these books did not agree with one another, and some of these books were written by pastors about the unique methods they used in their church. Also, the authors often were giving only one emphasis that they thought brought about church growth.

Towns approached Fleming H. Revell with the view of summarizing everything that was said in these 100 or more books into one book. He assumed that a pastor would not have all 100 books, but could read a summary of them in one volume, and get the results in one book.

Fleming H. Revell approved the project, but it moved forward very slowly because Towns was busy with many other projects. In discussing the project with Warren Bird, Towns found that Bird was very interested in the project, and it was natural for the two to team together. Therefore, the two collaborated, and the contract was expanded to include Warren Bird as the coauthor. Because Bird is still working on his PhD degree, Towns allowed Bird to receive the entire financial advances for the book.

The 14 areas of Church Growth were identified by the book as the following:

1. The healthy church is a growing church
2. Emphasis on social works as a foundation for ministry
3. Relationship evangelism

⁴ As of August 1, 2005, *God Encounters* has sold 15,439 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns' editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

⁵ Directed and written by Steven Spielberg, produced by Columbia Pictures, EMI Films, 1977.

4. Adapting ministry to the postmodern
5. The seeker-driven church
6. Churches intentionally target evangelism (rather than doing many things well some churches doing a few things with excellence)
7. Emphasis on apologetics (reaching young post-moderns through apologetic preaching, assuming that they have no background of understanding Christianity)
8. Multi-sensory preaching
9. Praise and worship music
10. Leadership
11. Signs and wonders
12. The mega-church movement
13. Deeper Life emphasis
14. A renewed emphasis on stewardship

Halfway into the writing process, Fleming H. Revell threw Towns and Bird a “curve.” Rather than writing a heavily documented book that would summarize many of the references on the local church, the sales committee of the publishers asked that it not be a research book, but rather a popular book. The sales committee wanted more illustrations, and popular orientation. They felt that focusing it on pastors and scholars who are interested in research about local churches would not produce enough sales. They wanted to broaden the appeal to lay people, i.e., church boards and lay Sunday School classes.

Towns and Bird decided to write this book so that each page would reflect the experience of the contemporary newspaper, i.e., *USA Today*. They surrounded each article with a number of sidebar short stories, statistics, anecdotes, or bibliographical sketches. On almost every page there is a sidebar to interest the reader. The assumption is that as a potential reader thumbs through the book, he will read the sidebars, even when he might miss the stories.

Each chapter has a church profile that reflects the truth being taught in that chapter. These 14 churches are:

1. Community Church of Joy – Glendale, AZ
2. Fellowship Bible Church – Little Rock, AR
3. Vineyard Community Church – Cincinnati, OH
4. Ginghamburg Church – Tipp City, OH
5. Skyline Wesleyan Church – Lemon Grove, CA
6. Redeemer Presbyterian Church – New York, New York
7. McLean Bible Church – Tysons Corner, VA
8. Mosaic – Los Angeles, CA
9. Centre Street Evangelical Missionary Church – Calgary, Alberta, Canada
10. Scottsdale Family Church – Scottsdale, AZ
11. Trinity Baptist Church – Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada

12. New Hope Christian Fellowship – Honolulu, Hawaii
13. Georgian Hills Baptist Church – Memphis, TN
14. Windsor Village United Methodist Church – Houston, TX

Rather than using the traditional approach to get references and recommendations for the book, i.e., a forward by a well-recognized name, 14 experts/authorities were asked to examine a chapter and write a recommendation and/or observation about that chapter. Therefore, rather than having general “blurbs,” the book contains 14 poignant observations about the truth of that particular chapter. These expert commentators are:

1. Doug Murren
2. W. Charles Arn
3. Leonard M. Kageler
4. Glen S. Martin
5. Jock Ficken
6. Tom Clegg
7. Marshall Shelley
8. Reggie McNeal
9. Kent R. Hunter
10. Terry Wardle
11. Karen Hurston
12. John Baergen
13. Brad Smith
14. John C. Maxwell

The book only enjoyed moderate success in sales.⁶ Most have felt that it was two or three years late. It was not released until 2000, after the vast public interest in the future that was created by Y2K was over.

However, the book has enjoyed good success among serious students of the future of the church. The book has been used in EVAN 851: 21st Century Tools and Techniques, a course taught by Elmer Towns at the doctoral level at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. It has been effective, as the students have had to read, analyze and discuss the issues in class.

The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever, with Douglas Porter, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Books 2000-2003.⁷

In 1991, Douglas Porter wrote his DMin thesis project on the title, *An Analysis of Evangelical Revivals with Suggestions for Encouraging and Maximizing the*

⁶ As of August 1, 2005, *Into the Future* has sold 7,313 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns’ editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

⁷ This book has been reprinted twice from the following publishers: Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2003-2004, and Virginia Beach, Virginia: Academx Publishing Company, 2005.

Effects of an Outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism. Elmer Towns was the mentor for this project. Porter received his doctorate, and on several occasions talked to Towns about the two of them publishing something on revival from his project.

Towns and Porter made a proposal to Regal Books in 2000 on the topic, “30 Days to Revival.” This proposed book was to include revival stories that a pastor could read for 30 days, the purpose being that when a pastor was revived through the stories, he will lead his church into revival.

Towns was attending a Christian bookseller convention in 2000 where he met with the editorial team of Regal Books. It was there that they told him they would not print the book on “30 Days to Revival,” because they already had another book scheduled on the topic of revival.

Because Towns had a meeting with the editorial team at Servant Publications, he left the Gospel Light editorial meeting to go to the Servant display. Before he could sit down, Bert Ghezzi, editor, said to Towns, “I want you to write a book for me on the ten greatest revivals ever.” That statement became the title for the book.

“I can do that,” Towns responded to Ghezzi. It was then that he explained to the Servant editorial team a book proposal had been turned down by Regal Books. Towns said, “The thesis of *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever* will be a better seller than a devotional reading on revivals that we had proposed.”

Because they had done the research, Towns told Ghezzi, “I can get the book to you in 30 days.” Actually, it took 90 days to wrap up the research and get the book to the Servant editorial team.

Towns invited 20 authorities in the theology and history of revival to serve as an advisory panel for the choices and rankings of *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*. Three declined, and 17 served on the panel. These members represented broad theological persuasions, from Pentecostal/Charismatic, to the opposite, more formal Presbyterian and Methodist denominations. The team also represented various theological positions, bringing a comprehensive view to the selection process for the book. The selection panel included:

1. Bill Bright
2. Gerald Brooks
3. David Yonggi Cho
4. Robert Coleman
5. James O. Davis
6. Lewis Drummond
7. Dale Galloway
8. Eddie Gibbs

9. Jack Hayford
10. Charles Kelly
11. D. James Kennedy
12. Ron Phillips
13. Alvin Reid
14. Chuck Smith
15. Tommy Tenney
16. C. Peter Wagner
17. Steve Wingfield

This is the first book for which Towns used the Internet for his research. Matt Chittum, MDiv., 2001, was his research assistant when Towns was doing research for this book. He began doing research on the Internet as Towns told him what topics to explore. Eventually, this project was the motivation that forced Towns into learning the use of the computer and how to make it a tool for research.

There have been many books on the history of revival, and this book does not add a lot of new material that had not been researched previously. It does rank the revivals in descending order of importance, and also adds stories that may not have occurred otherwise. But, this book adds two new observations not previously noted. First, Towns and Porter discussed the various methods that were used to bring about each of the great revivals in history. Previously Towns had used the title “anointed methods,” meaning that some unique methods were used of God to bring about a work of God. While Towns believes that no method is actually anointed, the people who use the method are anointed, and when they bring faith, prayer and dedication to the employment of a method, the combination brings about great results. And just as people can lose their anointing in ministry, Towns believes that methods can lose their anointing when people and conditions change.

Towns believes that biblical principles are eternal (trans-cultural and trans-temporal) but methods change from situation to situation. Technically, a method is the application of a biblical principle to culture.

A second contribution of the manuscript is a classification and description of the changes that happened in culture or society as a result of revival. The authors did not consider or include in the manuscript a movement if there was not an eventual impact in culture. Quite often they were asked why they did not include the American revival in Pensacola, Florida, at Brownsville Assembly of God or the revival in Toronto, Canada, known as the “Toronto Blessing” at the Toronto Vineyard. Their answer is that there has not been an impact on culture in the communities or cities where these revivals occurred.

The basis that the panel used for selecting the revivals and ranking them are as follows:

1. Does the experience fit the biblical portrait of revival?
2. Was there a demonstration of God's presence?
3. Was the larger body of Christ awakened to its New Testament task?
4. Was the surrounding culture impacted positively by the revival?
5. Are there reliable sources that demonstrate the greatness of the revival?

The research that Towns did for this book became the basis for his course on revival that is taught at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, EVAN 997: Seminar in Revivals.

A Beginner's Guide to Fasting, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Publications, 2001.

This book was written by Elmer Towns when Bert Ghezzi, president of Servant Publications, came and asked Towns to write this book for him. At first, Towns was reluctant to write for Servant Publications because he thought it was an exclusive, charismatic publication.

Bert Ghezzi has a PhD in history from Notre Dame University, and had operated a small Roman Catholic novelty and gift book store. This line included accessories for Roman Catholic worship. When Bert Ghezzi received the charismatic gift of tongues, he wanted to use his business line for the message of his new experience. He published a series of books that were uniquely charismatic in content. However, shortly after beginning publishing books, he wanted to branch out beyond charismatics to evangelicals. Because of this, he introduced the line "Beginner's Guide" and recruited evangelicals such as Elizabeth Elliot, Neil Anderson, Erwin Lutzer and Towns to be a part of this series.

Whereas Towns' earlier book, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*, Regal Books, 1997, had been a Bible study on the various types of fasting and the prescription for each of those fasts, Bert Ghezzi asked Towns to write a simple guide for anyone who wanted to begin fasting. So this book begins with a story of Towns' 11-year-old granddaughter who fasted for God's power in a puppet show to a juvenile delinquent home in Lynchburg, VA. She was a part of that presentation. This book gives basic guidelines for those who have never fasted, and also provides answers to many of the questions that the beginner might have about fasting.

The book is divided into two sections, the first chapters discuss the practical "how tos" of fasting, and the second half of the book reflects the spiritual reasons for fasting. Reflecting on his deeper-life approach to Christianity, Towns includes six chapters on six words of scripture associated with worshiping God, i.e., knowing, waiting, listening, opening, hungering and worshiping. These chapters take the readers beyond the mechanics of fasting, introducing them to their attitude when fasting. Towns stresses the fact that a person should have a hungering attitude for God while he abstains from food; fasting is never a

mechanical ritual that one performs to please God. The point of fasting is to deepen one's relationship with God.

Towns believes that the Holy Spirit is calling the church to a renewed dedication to fasting, and this is in light of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. While Towns does not call the renewed evidence of fasting in the church a sign that Jesus Christ is coming, he does say that fasting is the evidence that Christians are not satisfied with sermons, worship hymns, and everyday Christian service; they want to go deeper. Towns sees fasting as the doorway to a deeper walk with God.

A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Publications, 2001.

Towns wrote this book to fulfill two purposes. First, because of the success that Servant Publications had with *Beginner's Guide to the Bible*, Bert Ghezzi, president of the company, approached Towns to write a second book to "hitch hike" on the success of the first book. As they discussed a topic for the second book, Towns wanted to write on the topic of Bible reading because a previous publication of his had not been successful. In 1997 Towns released a videotape teacher training series entitled *How to Study and Teach the Bible*, Regal Books, 1997. This series was very successful, and through GLINT, the foreign missions publishing arm of Gospel Light/Regal Books, this series was translated into Russian. The editors of Regal Books asked Towns to write the series for a book publication. However, after finishing writing the manuscript, the editorial team for Gospel Light/Regal Books did not give the manuscript a high rating, and ended up dropping the book. The project was presented to Broadman & Holman, Nashville, Tennessee, and they published the series under the title, *How to Create and Present High Impact Bible Studies*, 1998. Towns rejected the title and told the publishers that the focus of the manuscript was not on organizing Bible study groups for home Bible study classes. Towns thought the new title didn't reflect Bible reading and study, but reflected organizing Sunday School classes. The book did not sell well⁸ and was quickly dropped by Broadman and Holman.

In *The Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible*, Towns took out the material on "how to teach" and directed the book to a much larger and generic audience who would read the Bible. Rather than focusing primarily on Sunday School teachers, he focused on all Christians. While this last book is similar in content to the Broadman & Holman book, Towns changed it enough so as to not infringe on a previous copyright; he also changed the focus of the book to application. Whereas the previous book is directed towards the Sunday School teacher, the later book is directed towards those who have no spiritual understanding of the Bible. The intended audience is seen in the title of the Introduction to the book, i.e., What is the Bible?

⁸ As of August 1, 2005, *How to Create and Present High Impact Bible Studies* has sold 15,439 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns' editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

The chapters of this new book are:

1. Read the Bible with Everything You've Got
2. Let God Tell You How to Read the Bible
3. There Are Lots of Good Reasons to Read the Bible
4. Getting Ready to Read the Bible
5. Reading about People in the Bible
6. Reading Stories in the Bible
7. Reading the Bible Devotionally
8. Reading the Bible – One Book at a Time
9. Reading Prophecy in the Bible
10. Reading the Bible Doctrinally

Praying the 23rd Psalm, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: Destiny Image, 2001.

Around 1990 Elmer Towns began writing a book on the 23rd Psalm because it was one of the best loved chapters in the Bible. However, he could not find the “groove” to hold the Psalm together. He did not just want to do another book on the 23rd Psalm, but he wanted it to be unique so people would get practical help from it, more than a devotional or exposition of its content. He wanted people to get something helpful out of the Psalms when they read it.

In the year 1999, Towns was reading through the Bible for the year when he came to the 23rd Psalm. He decided to write it out into the language of everyday life. Then he turned the Psalm into a prayer. Technically the 23rd Psalm is propositional teaching to explain the relationship of the Lord to His people. But Towns turned it into a prayer to God. Then is when he determined to write a whole book as a prayer to God. If people could learn to pray the 23rd Psalm, it would change their lives. Towns divided Psalm 23 into 16 sections, and determined to write a chapter about each phrase in Psalm 23.

At first he tried to write a chapter in the book a day, emphasizing only one phrase. However, he found he could not get all of the work done in one day. It took approximately one week to write and edit each phrase.

After the manuscript was finished, Towns did not like what he had written. He has often said, “I don’t want to write more books, I want to write better books.” So over the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays of 1999, he completely rewrote the manuscript in the second person directing it to the heart of the reader. Then after every two or three paragraphs Towns stops to include a prayer in the text. These are easy to spot since they are italicized. Thus a person who reads the book automatically begins praying the truth of Psalm 23 into his or her life.

During Amsterdam 2000, an evangelistic conference in Amsterdam, Netherlands to train and equip 10,000 itinerant evangelists, Towns told Billy Graham that he should give away this book through the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Naturally Billy Graham said, “Why?” It was then that Towns said, “This is the most popular chapter in the Bible that is read by almost everyone, but when they properly understand it they will see that it is about a relationship between the Shepherd the sheep which is a relationship about salvation.” Then Towns explained to Billy Graham, “When they properly pray the 23rd Psalm, they will become converted.” Towns explained that this book would carry out the purpose of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Graham said, “Let’s do it.” Approximately 185,000 copies were distributed through the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in the fall of 2003.⁹

The Year-Round Book of Sermon Ideas, Stories and Quotes, with Stan Toler, Ventura, California: Gospel Light, 2001.

Because of the successful sales of *The Year-Round Church Event Book*,¹⁰ Gospel Light asked Elmer Towns and Stan Toler to prepare a second book on year round ideas. Since Elmer Towns’ name was first in the original book, Stan Toler’s name is mentioned first in this volume.

Again, Toler and Towns went through their files, gathering quotes, stories, sayings, statistics, and other interesting tidbits about the various days in the calendar year. One thing that they added was short sermon outlines, and both men now wish they had not added them.

The book has not sold well for Gospel Light, nor met sales projections.¹¹ Towns believes that the problem is the title of the book. When the editor suggested to Toler and Towns a year round book of sermon ideas, both authors rejected the use of “sermon ideas” in the title. They mentioned that there are thousands of sermons on the web that are free. They also mentioned that there are thousands of books on sermon outlines or sermon texts. They told the editors that pastors would not use a 9 ½ size worktext for their sermon notes. They felt that the “cute” art work was not sophisticated enough for pastors. Also, there was no index to help a pastor locate an exact sermon that was needed. As an illustration, Sermon Central.com has over 70,000 sermons that are listed by topic, title, communicator, or Bible reference. Most pastors would go to www.sermoncentral.com and quickly find sermon help, rather than use the book by Toler and Towns.

The strength of the book is that the contents are tied to the church year. This includes celebrations, services, commemorative events, special days in the church year, fellowship and outreach events, stewardship ideas, and general ideas.

⁹ Bill Schultz, e-mail message to Elmer Towns, 23 January 2005.

¹⁰ As of August 1, 2005, *The Year-Round Church Event Book* has sold 17,656 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns’ editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

¹¹ As of August 1, 2005, *The Year-Round Book of Sermon Ideas, Stories and Quotes* has sold 5,276 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns’ editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

Toler and Towns have approached the editors of Gospel Light to change the name of the book to *The Year-Round Book of Ideas for Church Bulletins*. Since the book contains a wealth of material to include in church bulletins and/or newspapers, Toler and Towns felt that the ideal market would have been those preparing church bulletins and/or newspapers.

Fasting for Financial Breakthrough, Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2002.

The editors at Regal Books wanted to capitalize on the success of Towns' book, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*,¹² so they asked Elmer Towns to write a series of books on fasting. They first asked him to write *Fasting to Know God*, but when they saw the manuscript they rejected it because it was too devotional. The manuscript was subsequently submitted to Destiny Image and was released with the title *Knowing God Through Fasting*.

Fasting for Financial Breakthrough was the second book Towns wrote and was accepted by Regal Books. This book was a "natural" according to Elmer Towns. He said in all of his Bible college and seminary work throughout his life, he has been praying for money. Therefore it was only natural to write a book about fasting and praying for money.

The first half of this book is about the supernatural intervention that God provides for his workers to give them money and material prosperity for their lives and ministry. As a result, this book contains many miraculous answers to prayer that came through fasting and prayer.

However, Towns did not want to hold out a false hope to the reader that everyone can get supernatural answers to prayer because they pray and fast. He says that most people must work for money, and wisely use the money that God has given them. Therefore, the second half of the book outlines the principles of financial stewardship, i.e., properly managing one's time, talent, and treasure to the glory of God.

The thesis of the second half is that when one prays about money, many times God does not answer with a miraculous supply; but rather God will teach a person how to manage what he already has. While this does not seem like an ordinary answer to prayer, nevertheless it is a necessary answer to prayer when an undisciplined person learns to properly manage his money. God gets the glory because he becomes a "disciplined financial disciple."

This is a short book, only 92 pages, designed for the modern day reader who wants a quick read and answers to his problems.

¹² As of August 1, 2005, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* has sold 207,543 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns' editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

The Gospel of John: Believe and Live, Chattanooga, Tennessee, AMG Publishers, 2002.

This book is a revision of the original book by Elmer Towns, *The Gospel of John: Believe and Live*, printed by Fleming H. Revell, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1990. This book became the format for the AMG Publisher's 21st Century Biblical Commentary Series, general editors, Mal Couch and Ed Hindson. They originally knew about Towns' book on John published by Fleming H. Revell and felt it would make a good contribution to their new proposed series. But more than becoming the first in a series, it became the pattern for the rest of the commentaries in the 21st Century series.

Couch and Hindson wanted the commentary by Towns reduced by approximately 25 percent, so it would fit into the length of the other books proposed for the series. Towns went into each paragraph, reducing words, phrases, sentences, and, at places, entire paragraphs. As a result it is a much tighter manuscript, with very little of the original thrust lost.

The original Fleming Revell publication included the King James text, but this was left out in the AMG publication. Towns included a number of boxes throughout the text that contained charts which gave the reader a graphic visual presentation of the content. These boxes were kept, and because of their "reader friendly" style, were added in other commentaries in the series. Also, new study questions were added at the end of each chapter.

Towns originally followed the writing approach of Kenneth Wuest who wrote commentaries over most of the books in the New Testament for Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois. Because Towns used the Wuest commentaries in college and seminary, he knew the benefit and usability of the Wuest format. Also, because Wuest did not write a commentary on the Gospel of John, Towns wanted to do it. The Wuest commentaries were based on word studies and word pictures, but left out the higher critical and textual questions found in most analytical commentaries. This became Towns' pattern of writing.

The original book had become a text for the Distance Learning Program of Liberty University at both the graduate and undergraduate level. Towns has been very pleased with the results and the influence of this textbook with his students. However, since the textbook was associated with AMG and the 21st Century Bible Commentary, this book is available for use by other colleges and seminaries as a textbook. Towns is happy for the broader influence of this manuscript. He advertises it as "A Commentary on the Greek text for the English reader."

Knowing God Through Fasting, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: Destiny Image Publishers, 2002.

Because of the success that Towns had in publishing *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* (over 200,000 copies), many other publishers wanted to key off that success and get a book by Towns on fasting. His first book on fasting talked about the nine different kinds of fasts, for nine different purposes, following nine different prescriptions. This book on *Knowing God Through Fasting* is more about worship and fellowship with God while fasting.

The chapter titles for this book employ ten action words, i.e., emptying, tasting, waiting, coming, drinking, disciplining, growing, looking, resting, and knowing.

Destiny Image is known as a Charismatic publisher, but in an attempt to broaden their market, they reached out to several evangelical (non-Charismatic) authors. This book by Towns represents his unique orientation to the Christian life, i.e., a Keswickian approach to the deeper spiritual life (see *Understanding the Deeper Life*, Fleming H. Revell, 1990).

This book is designed not to tell the reader how to fast, or to give him practical suggestions in fasting; rather, this book was written for those who are fasting to help them know God and experience the presence of God. Therefore, this is a devotional book for those fasting.

Prayer Partners, Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2002.

During May and June of 2001, Elmer Towns taught a series in the Pastors Bible Class at Thomas Road Baptist Church on the topic, "Two Prayer." This series was taken from Matthew 18:19, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

Towns was motivated to write this book because of his various experiences that included prayer. First of all, he had been meeting early on Sunday morning with prayer partners in the prayer chapel at Thomas Road Baptist Church. In the early 90s Towns carried a copy of *Prayer Shield* by C. Peter Wagner, Regal Books, Ventura, California, 1993, into the prayer room and read excerpts to his prayer partners. Wagner's book said that leaders need prayer partners to place a "shield" around their ministry to be protected from the Evil One. They also need partners to be effective in ministry. Then Towns asked the group a question which was very difficult for him, "Will you make my ministry your ministry?"

He did not like the question because it seemed to be egotistical, i.e., that his ministry was more important than others. However, because God had led him to the question, he then said, "Don't answer today, but pray about it, and let me

know in the future.” Most of the people in the room have become his prayer partners, “making Towns’ ministry their ministry.”

A second thing motivated Towns to teach the series and write the book. Before he teaches on Sunday morning, when Jerry Falwell is conducting the introduction to the Sunday School class, Towns walks around, shaking hands with class members, both old and new. Quite often during this time people give him prayer requests. He asks each of them to stand, and they clasp hands together and pray on the spot for that person’s prayer request. He believes that the spirit of “Two Pray” gets answers to prayer.

Then a third experience motivated this book. As Towns phoned absentees concerning the Pastor’s Bible Class at Thomas Road Baptist Church, he never asked his absent members, “Where were you?” But rather, he told them that he missed them, and asked, “How can I pray for you?” It is then that the people shared their hearts and their fears. Then over the phone Towns asked two questions: “What do you want God to do through this request?” and, “Do you want to pray out loud after I pray over the phone?” He found that many people did not want to pray, but they joined him as he prayed over phone.

Towns wanted to call the book *Two Pray: Pray With Others for Answers*. However, the editorial team at Gospel Light did not want that unique new phrase i.e., *Two Pray*. They had invested extra money in printing the book *God Encounters*, and that title had failed. However, Towns has always felt that there should be a verb in the title of each book. To him a verb has action and it takes the reader somewhere or promises the reader something.

The contents of *Two Pray* followed the nine lessons that Towns taught in the Pastors Bible Class. They are:

1. The Power of Two Pray: How partnering in prayer taps into the power of God and results in blessing others.
2. Two Pray is an agreement pray: Jesus promises to answer prayer “when two of you agree.”
3. When you warfare-pray against the enemy.
4. When you worship-pray effectively
5. When you faith-pray together for ministry
6. When you fellowship-pray in difficulties
7. When you spirit-pray. This is a chapter on the ministry of the Holy Spirit’s intercession with the believer.
8. When you Jesus-pray. This is a lesson on the intercession of Jesus with us.
9. Vital questions and answers about prayer partners. This is a question on how you can get someone to be a prayer partner and if you are called to be a prayer intercessor for someone.

Stories on the Front Porch: Tales to Make You Smile, Springfield, Missouri: 21st Century Press, 2002.

This book was originally released in a hard back edition by Regal Books in 1996. It tells stories of the influences that formed the life and attitude of Elmer Towns as he grew up in Savannah, Georgia. The original book sold approximately 8,700 copies and was dropped by Regal Books. Towns wanted to continue using the book in his classes at Liberty University, so he contacted 21st Century Press, who re-released the book.

The new edition is paperback, and a new photo was put on the front cover. The original photo had young boys arm and arm walking up a dirt road, but superimposed over the photo were sample chapter titles. The superimposed titles were hard to read, and the photo was hard to see. The new photo has Towns sitting on a swing on a front porch with his two grandchildren (Bradford Elmer Towns and Collyn Stephanie Towns), listening to him tell stories.

Theology for Today, Stanford, Connecticut: Wadsworth-Thomson Learning, 2002.

This book has been in development since 1958 when Towns started teaching Systematic Theology at Midwest Bible College. At first he developed an extensive outline over every area of theology. During the 1960s and 70s he taught Systematic Theology, printing up these outlines, and letting the students fill in the outline as he lectured.

During the 80s, Towns began filling in the outline and writing out chapters in manuscript form. He completed one of the areas of Systematic Theology each semester until the entire book was complete and published in mimeograph form in 1985.

Towns chose to use long quotations in his text so that the distance learning student would have extensive background information for the points presented in the text. Rather than requiring the off-campus students to buy three or four parallel textbooks, Towns used the longer quotations to help the students "sample" various theologians and how they wrote, i.e., Shedd, Strong, John Wesley, Martin Luther, Calvin, etc.

In 1985 the book was published and released by Kendall-Hunt Publishing Company, Dubuque, Iowa, because the Distance Learning Program of Liberty University had a working relationship with that company. This was a typed manuscript printed as an 8 ½ x 11 size manual with space in the right margin for notes.

In 2002 the textbook was formatted into a standard case bound volume of 934 pages. Dr. James Borland, professor of Systematic Theology at Liberty University and recording secretary for the Evangelical Theological Association,

was hired to proofread the text, verify every scripture and quotation, and verify that the theological statements were clear and evangelical.

This is now updated and reprinted as a standard textbook, which will allow the book to receive recognition and usability by other colleges and universities, rather than just by the DLP at Liberty University.

Women Gifted for Ministry: How To Discover and Practice Your Gifts, with Ruth Towns, Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2002.

Originally Elmer Towns taught this as a series in his Sunday School class under the title “The Role of Bible Women in Ministry.” In this twelve-week series, Towns identified 12 different women in the scripture and he identified their dominant spiritual gifts. He taught a lesson to illustrate how their spiritual giftedness was reflected through their ministry.

Elmer Towns believes that a woman should not pastor a local church, and throughout his teaching he reiterated that view. However, the manuscript says nothing about whether women should be ordained, but it does emphasize the fact that women can serve fulltime on the staff of a church, and be used greatly of God. Towns believes that the key to a woman’s usefulness, as well as to anyone’s usefulness, is the proper exercise of her spiritual giftedness.

As Elmer Towns prepared each lesson, he first taught the series to his wife. It is there that she gave her views of women, and at times had to disagree with some of the things that her husband was going to say. She counseled him concerning a woman’s view of her ministry, and how women saw themselves in ministry.

During this counseling session, Ruth Towns added a section to each chapter that appeared first in the lessons, then in the book, i.e., watching for the spiritual gifts in young girls. This volume teaches how to identify embryonic spiritual gifts in the new Christian or in young girls.

Then Ruth Towns developed the sections on “What the gift does.” She was careful to point out that her husband, Elmer Towns, usually thought in terms of what men do, and he had to rethink and include in his Sunday School lessons what a woman can do to serve God.

The book is published in a worktext format, i.e., a book for a leader’s guide in a woman’s Bible study class. As a worktext it includes several sections at the end of each chapter to help a woman apply what she has been reading, or to give a teacher practical help for teaching. These practical sections include:

- Practical take aways
- Three-step Bible study
- Your time to pray

- Journaling and meditation (sample copies of what journaling should look like are added in this section)

At the end of each chapter there is a space where the reader can add her notes.

The original 12 lessons that were taught by Towns were reduced to 10 chapters for the worktext. These chapters are:

1. The woman at the well (spiritual gift of evangelism)
2. Phoebe (spiritual gift of helps)
3. Lois and Eunice (spiritual gift of teaching/mentoring)
4. Esther (spiritual gift of exhortation)
5. Lydia (spiritual gift of giving)
6. Martha (spiritual gift of administration)
7. Naomi (spiritual gift of mercy showing/counseling)
8. Deborah (spiritual gift of spiritual gift of prophecy)
9. Mary Magdalene (spiritual gift of shepherding or group leading)
10. How to find and grow your gift, practical suggestions to help you discover your spiritual gift.

At the end of this book is the Towns Spiritual Gift Inventory Test. This test was first written, printed and distributed by The Old Time Gospel Hour through the ministry of Jerry Falwell. Approximately 50,000 spiritual gift tests were mailed out by Thomas Road Baptist Church. Then, Towns had the spiritual gift questionnaire posted on his website so that it could be made available to anyone (at no charge). This is available at www.elmertowns.com. Finally, the spiritual gifts questionnaire was printed in this text and made available to those who use this text in a teaching ministry. When this book is used as a textbook in a class, the students can either take this test in this textbook, or take the inventory online.

Bible Answers for Almost All your Questions, Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publications, Inc., 2003.

This book came out of interactions with Dr. Victor Oliver, an acquisition editor and co-publisher with Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc. Victor Oliver is a friend of Elmer Towns and has stayed in his home on several occasions when visiting and/or speaking at Liberty University. On one of these occasions, Towns mentioned to Oliver that he had been answering questions that were mailed to Jerry Falwell for approximately 25 years. In answering the mail, many people write questions to Dr. Jerry Falwell, which Elmer Towns and others have answered (Harold Willmington, Larrie Schlapman, Jerry Falwell, and others).

Towns told Victor Oliver that in the past summer, he had received many requests for answers for the same questions, so he went back through all his copies of the letters he had written, gathered them together into a systematic presentation, and the questions were placed on his web page, i.e., www.elmertowns.com. Towns told

Victor Oliver there were over 1,100 questions and answers on his web page on just about every subject he could think of; from Bible minutiae, to questions about demonism, questions about marriage and divorce, questions about Christian service, as well as questions about church practices, ministry, etc.

A few days after Victor Oliver left Towns' home, he phoned back with the book idea saying he had the perfect title: *Bible Answers to Almost All Your Questions*. He asked Towns to write up a proposal that he submitted to Thomas Nelson, and it was accepted. Victor kept telling Towns to make the book "big," and he often emphasized, "really big." Originally, the contract called for the book to be a very large book, i.e., over 600 pages, yet manufactured cheaply so the price would be under ten dollars. The company planned a mass-media campaign through Wal-Mart and other mass media outlets. Towns was told that his name would not be on the cover; instead, the book would be marketed on the fact that it had answers. However, between the writing of the book and its publication, Thomas Nelson went through downsizing in business, and changed the focus of the book. Towns' name was put on the cover of the book, the price was raised to \$17.00, and it was released through Christian bookstores, rather than through secular mass markets.

Because he did not want to infringe on copyright laws, Towns was very careful not to duplicate the exact words that were included in the letters he answered for Dr. Falwell. When answers questions for Dr. Falwell, Towns was always careful to be open and honest with the individuals he was responding to. Towns had never answered letters under the signature of Jerry Falwell, but rather introduced his response and letters, "Jerry Falwell has asked me to answer this letter and question for him because I am the co-founder of Liberty University and teach his Pastor's Bible Class at TRBC."

The questions in the book are arranged around topics. There are sixteen topics in the first 260 pages, and then 66 divisions, one for each book of the Bible.

The answers are not intended to be deep, nor footnoted as though Towns were answering questions for students in a theology class. Rather, his guideline was to answer questions briefly and succinctly in layman's terminology, as though someone asked him a question while shaking hands as they left church on a Sunday morning. Because of this, many of the questions do not have proof texts, only surface answers. However, some questions are much more involved and complex, such as *Why should a person not drink alcohol? Why was the Great Commission given five times? How can I find God's perfect will?*, etc.

The questions range from very simple questions, *What is the Bible?*, to very serious questions about divorce. Some of the questions are what cynics like to call "brain stumpers," and others are practical for ministry.

Churches That Multiply, with Douglas Porter, Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 2003.

The idea for this book grew out of a meeting of denominational executives for *Mission America* in 1999. Towns was meeting with approximately 60 denominational executives as they planned for *Mission America* and its celebration in 2000. During a break, Towns was talking with several denominational officials and proposed the idea of a Sunday School quarterly that would help denominations plant new churches. Since denominational officials are very interested in expanding their outreach through new churches, they were extremely interested in his proposal.

Towns proposed that most activities in church planting were a “trickle-down” effect. This meant that denominational officials planned and advertised methods of church planting. Then they tried to motivate local churches to carry out their plans. Towns suggested a new concept, i.e., the “bubble-up” effect. By this he suggested that if adult Sunday School classes were to study what the Bible said about church planting, the Bible study content could get adults excited about church planting, and then they would begin taking steps to plant a new church.

It was Towns’ concept that the Sunday School lessons would have practical applications so that adults would take steps to plant new churches. In these practical steps, Towns conceived that they would begin surveying neighborhoods, begin prayer groups praying for new churches, and go to church officials with plans and goals for church planting. He felt that when Sunday School classes would coordinate with church boards to plant new churches, new churches would spring forth.

After Towns shared his plans with denominational executives, there was a great enthusiasm for it. So Towns combined with Douglas Porter to write a book on twelve different ways that churches were planted in the Book of Acts.

Churches That Multiply

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The Corinthian Church
 12. *Building People Who Build Other People*
The Ephesian Church

Towns was disappointed that the Nazarene church released this manuscript through their book publications, and not through their adult Sunday School curriculum. He felt if the adults had used this in Sunday School, it would have been more profitable. But as a “stand alone” book, classes had to choose the book and many of them did not do it. Towns still thinks the content of the manuscript is extremely valuable and relevant, but has not been positioned in the right way to make an impact on churches.

God Bless You, Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2003.

Towns indicated there are three reasons why he wrote this book. First, he was writing books on popular themes and phrases recognizable among evangelical Christians such as the Lord’s Prayer and the 23rd Psalm. He recognized that the phrase “God Bless You” was an extremely popular statement used by many Christians, therefore; he wanted to clarify what the phrase meant so that people could use it in a correct way. He determined the meaning of *bleess* was to “add value” to another, so he wanted to “add value” to the members of his Pastor’s Bible Class at Thomas Road Baptist Church and help them “add value” to others to whom they related.

Towns taught a series of nine Sunday School lessons in the Pastor’s Bible Class from August 5, 2001 to September 30, 2001, each lesson becoming a basis for a chapter in the book. Towns defined blessing as “adding value” to another person. He defined the blessing as either natural or supernatural. The blessing of God was not necessarily divine intervention, nor was it always an answer to prayer; rather, it was the way God enriched or added blessing to another person.

Towns believes this book did not become a good seller because there was not a verb in the title.¹³ His feelings are that verbs add action and imply activity and application to the reader.

Originally he had written the book and focused on a much narrower topic, i.e., “How to add value to your children.” However, Regal Books thought that title was too narrow and wanted a much broader topic. According to Towns, the title *God Bless You* does not promise the reader anything.

Towns feels one of the strongest chapters in the book is “How to Bless Your Children,” which was originally one of the first chapters in the book, but was later moved to chapter five.

Joined Together: How to Build a Lasting Marriage, with Ruth Towns, Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2003.

In 2002 Elmer Towns taught a series in his Sunday School class at Thomas Road Baptist Church on the topic, “Bible Couples.” When he did his research, he found that there was no book that examined the relationship of the couples of the Bible. Therefore he taught the series with the view of writing the book.

Again as he did in a previous volume on women, he taught the lessons to his wife before teaching it to the Sunday School class. Because men tend to look at their marriage through masculine eyes, he needed to view marriage through the eyes of a woman, and he got that perspective from his wife.

As he taught the series, he emphasized one unique strength in each couple, or in some cases, a unique weakness. He drew positive principles and practical applications from all of the couples, including positive applications from those couples who had bad relationships. The 12 couples and the main emphases of the lessons are:

1. Isaac and Rebekah, learning communication
2. Jacob and Rachel, learning contentment
3. Adam and Eve, learning to live after the honeymoon
4. Aquila and Priscilla, learning to work together
5. Xerxes and Esther, learning to live with minimal choices
6. Samson and Delilah, learning from bad choices
7. David and Bathsheba, learning to pick up the pieces
8. Boaz and Ruth, learning to love and support each other
9. Joseph and Mary, learning to share unconditional trust
10. Zechariah and Elizabeth, learning to reflect companionship
11. Ananias and Sapphira, learning to be honest with God and each other
12. Abraham and Sarah, learning to live with problems

¹³ As of August 1, 2005, *God Bless You* has sold 2,659 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns’ editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

The book is published as a worktext, and includes several practical suggestions at the end of each chapter. These are practical take aways, journaling, and marriage-strengthening exercises. The practical sections were written by Ruth Towns, and the main text was written by Elmer Towns from his Sunday School lessons.

After the book was finished, several well-known Christian couples were asked to write an introduction to each chapter. It was felt that their name recognition and role modeling would give credibility to the text and help it sell. The picture of each couple appears with their introduction. The 12 couples are:

1. Pastor Yonggi and Grace Cho
2. Mike and Cindy Jacobs
3. Bill and Vonette Bright
4. John and Margaret Maxwell
5. Ed and Donna Hindson
6. Tim and Julie Clinton
7. Ed and Jo Beth Young
8. John Ed and Lynn Mathison
9. Jerry and Macel Falwell
10. D. James and Anne Kennedy
11. Neil and Joann Anderson
12. David and Kathy Earley

The book has not sold well, according to Thomas Nelson.¹⁴ Towns feels that the title and art work have wrongly positioned the book. The title *Joined Together*, was especially rejected by Ruth Towns. She feels that *Joined Together* makes people think about Siamese twins, rather than a marriage. Elmer Towns wanted to use the title *Bible Couples: How to Strengthen Your Marriage*. Also, the authors feel that the subdued art work on the cover does not position the book on marriage or couples, but rather is so “artsy” that it really does not tell anything.

What Every Sunday School Teacher Should Know, Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2003.

This book came out of a brainstorming session at Gospel Light/Regal Books where Towns and others were discussing the future of Sunday School. Bill Greig III (who wrote the Preface), President, Gospel Light and Regal Books, suggested to Towns that he write a book on the topic *What Every Sunday School Teacher Should Know*. The title and idea caught on with the members of the committee, and Towns came home to write the book. However, he confessed to having writer’s block and for the next six months could not even begin to write the first words on a page. He constructed 3 or 4 different outlines for the book,

¹⁴ As of August 1, 2005, *Joined Together* has sold 3,416 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns’ editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

but none of them satisfied or, to use an author's description, "clicked." He testified that he even prayed and fasted over the topic, but nothing came.

According to Towns this is one of the first times he ever missed a deadline for a writing assignment. He was sure as he got closer to the deadline, the urgency of completion would make him become creative, but it did not happen.

Three weeks after the deadline, as he and his wife were riding home late one evening, he told her about his difficulties with the project. Then his wife Ruth suggested that it should be a very easy book. She said the first thing a Sunday School teacher ought to know is that "God can use you." The second thing is, "You can make a difference in a life." And the third thing that every teacher should know is that "In a one-minute conversation you can turn a life around." Ruth listed eight or ten topics that were obvious in their necessity, but simple in their application. Then Towns used a phrase to describe this book that he has used in other places, "There is profundity in simplicity."

The book suggests the first steps that every teacher must take to become successful with students. They are:

Chapter 1	You Can Make a Difference in a Life
Chapter 2	God Can Use You
Chapter 3	God Has Equipped You
Chapter 4	Students Learn Differently
Chapter 5	Mastering the Basics
Chapter 6	Effective Teaching Begins on Your Knees
Chapter 7	Your Actions Speak Louder Than Words
Chapter 8	One Thing Is Really Important
Chapter 9	You Can't Lead Your Class Until You Know Where You're Going
Chapter 10	Developing a Lesson Outline Is Important
Chapter 11	Students Learn when They Talk
Chapter 12	Sometimes Teaching Is Lecturing
Chapter 13	Students Like a Good Story
Chapter 14	Students Learn by Looking
Chapter 15	Students Learn Best by Doing
Chapter 16	Teaching Builds on what Students Already Know
Chapter 17	Memorizing Is Necessary
Chapter 18	In One Minute You Can Influence a Life
Chapter 19	Application Is Everything
Chapter 20	Review Is Important
Chapter 21	Good Behavior Doesn't Come Naturally
Chapter 22	How to Make Your Class Inviting
Chapter 23	How to Lead Students to Christ
Chapter 24	Growing a Class Comes Through Friendship Evangelism
Epilogue	

Each chapter follows the same format, i.e., a short story at the beginning to create a need, the development of the principle, and finally a concluding practical application.

At the writing of this project, nearly 55,000 copies have been sold and the book is considered a success by Regal Books/Gospel Light. According to Towns, there are several reasons for the success of this book. First, an advertising postcard was sent to churches, suggesting they could buy 20 copies at half price, to give the book free to all their teachers to celebrate the annual Sunday School Teacher Appreciation Day (third Sunday of each October). A majority of the books were distributed in this way. But second, Towns believed the success is in the size and format of the book; a 4.25 x 7 inch size makes the book very handy to fit into a pocket or purse. The third reason for the success of this book is that its short format tells the reader that the book is practical and can be read quickly.

What Every Pastor Should Know About Sunday School, with Stan Toler, Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2003.

Because of the success of *What Every Sunday School Teacher Should Know*, Bill Greig, III, President, Gospel Light and Regal Books, suggested that Towns do a companion book, *What Every Pastor Should Know About Sunday School*. His desire was to help encourage the work of Sunday School by getting pastors involved. Before this book was printed, but after it was written, Towns prepared a PowerPoint presentation and gave a lecture to pastors' groups on why they should become involved in Sunday School. According to him, the lectures were much better received than the book.

Towns and Toler collaborated on the book because they had done other successful projects for Gospel Light/Regal Books. The video series, *Leading Your Sunday School Into the 21st Century*, by them was also a foundation for this book. Stan Toler outlined the book and came up with illustrations to introduce each chapter. It was then given to Towns, who did the actual work on each chapter.

The intent of this manuscript was to demonstrate to pastors how important Sunday School is to a local church. The chapter titles are:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Chapter 1 | Sunday School Will Help You Reach the Lost |
| Chapter 2 | Sunday School Will Give You Extra Doors into the Church |
| Chapter 3 | Sunday School Will Boost Bible Knowledge |
| Chapter 4 | Sunday School Will Help You Minister to All Ages |
| Chapter 5 | Sunday School Will Help You Meet Needs |
| Chapter 6 | Sunday School Will Produce Leaders in Your Church |
| Chapter 7 | Sunday School Will Provide Role Models |
| Chapter 8 | Sunday School Will Turn Spectators into Workers |
| Chapter 9 | Sunday School Will Provide Prayer Intercessors |

Chapter 10	Sunday School Will Provide Teaching Evangelism
Chapter 11	Sunday School Will Provide Instant Follow-Up for New Converts
Chapter 12	Sunday School Will Provide a Friendship Network
Chapter 13	Sunday School Will Provide Life Coaching
Chapter 14	Sunday School Will Teach Churchmanship
Chapter 15	Sunday School Will Make Use of all Spiritual Gifts
Chapter 16	Sunday School Will Provide Spiritual Care
Chapter 17	Sunday School Will Teach Faithfulness
Chapter 18	Sunday School Will Build Character
Chapter 19	Sunday School Activates Friendship Evangelism
Epilogue	Don't Give Up on Sunday School

365 Ways to Know God: Devotional Readings on the Names of God, Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2004.

Between the years 1987-1995, Towns wrote three books regarding the Trinity, one for each member. When he first became teacher of the Pastor's Bible Class at Thomas Road Baptist Church in 1987, he taught a series on *The Names of Jesus*, and because of its popularity he wrote the lessons into a Bible study book for Sunday School, i.e., *The Names Of Jesus*, Accent Books, Denver, CO, 1987. Because this series was so well accepted, he did a second series in the Sunday School class, i.e., *My Father's Names*, Regal Books, 1991. Finally, Towns thought, "Because I am a Trinitarian, I have to write a book on the names of the third person of the Trinity."¹⁵ He taught a series in his Sunday School class, which later was written in the book, *The Names of the Holy Spirit*, Regal Books, 1994. Towns won the Gold Medallion for this book, given by Christian Booksellers Association, in 1995.

The Gold Medallion was awarded based on the following criteria in 1995¹⁶

1. The manuscript makes an original contribution to Christianity.
2. The manuscript evidences superior literary style and presentation and is well edited.
3. The artwork on the book cover correlates with the content of the book and represents it in an artistic way.
4. The book appeals to all evangelicals, crossing denominational and theological lines.

After completing the three books on the persons of the Trinity, Towns felt he wanted to do more than just give people a Bible study on the names of God. Towns said, "I want to do more than fill the head with knowledge, I want to stir

¹⁵ Elmer Towns, e-mail interview with author, 15 July 2004.

¹⁶ The criteria for the Gold Medallion have since changed, for more information, see the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association website: www.ecpa.org

the heart to love and action.”¹⁷ Because of this, he suggested to Regal Books that he incorporate the best of the three previous books on the names of God into a daily devotional; featuring a different name of God for each day of the year.

In the introduction Towns says that there are over a 1,000 names, titles and metaphors of God found in the three previous books. In this current book the readers will study one name of God for every day of the year, nurturing a deep worshipful understanding of God, and coming to know him in a deeper way. Originally Towns wanted to call the book, *Knowing God on a First Name Basis*, but Regal Books did not accept that title.

Each section begins with the prayer by the reader, and in response the reader learns how a name of God meets his needs. Each devotional ends with a prayer and daily Bible reading where the reader can learn more Bible information on that particular name for God.

The various appendices list all the names, metaphors, titles and symbols found in Towns’ study for the Father, Son, the Holy Spirit, and for the corporate Trinity.

The Perimeters of Light, with Ed Stetzer, Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 2004.

This book began as an assignment from the American Association of Church Growth when they asked Elmer Towns to present a paper on the topic of “Boundaries.” During the early 1990s the association was confronted with several methods in evangelism and church growth that seemed to be crossing the orthodox “boundaries,” pushing the church into a secular, if not a non-Christian, position. In November 1998, the question was considered, “What are the main boundaries for the evangelical church, and how can we best address our major issues?” There was a general agreement from the members of the society that more needed to be done to analyze the boundaries.

Towns approached Moody Press with the project because that publishing company had a strong commitment to the fundamentals, i.e., they were known for publishing books in defense of fundamental Christianity. The project was accepted by Moody, and a contract was issued to Towns. However, in developing the book, Towns became bogged down in his thinking and writing. Even though Towns developed nine chapters, he felt they were not sharp, and for some reason, he was missing the issue.

Ed Stetzer had been a former student of Dr. Towns at Liberty University in the early 1990s, taking a course in church planting. Ed Stetzer went on to receive an MAR from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. After that, Stetzer received his MDiv and PhD from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, and became known as an authority in the area of postmodernity. In the fall of 2002, Stetzer visited the campus of Liberty University and gave a

¹⁷ Elmer Towns, e-mail interview with author, 15 July 2004.

lecture in the course on church planting for Towns. It was here that Towns saw the insights of Stetzer in postmodernity. He saw the difference between traditional Christianity and how the church must reach out cross-culturally to the postmodern generation. This was the missing link in the manuscript. Towns asked Stetzer to read and evaluate the manuscript.

Stetzer wrote back that Towns tried to solve the boundaries of theology and methodology in the same book. Stetzer said that Towns should focus only on methodology and leave out the issues of theology. It was then that Towns invited Stetzer to become a part of the project. Moody agreed and issued a contract to both men.

Stetzer finished his contributions in 2003, and Moody released the book in the spring of 2004.

Because postmodern young people like parables and use them in their teaching, the book includes parables that examine the perimeter between a fire and darkness. The parable is explained at the beginning of each chapter. It tells the story of an older missionary (representing Towns) and a young missionary (representing Stetzer) who are going into a jungle area of Indonesia to reach the Nimo tribe. As they prepare to make an overnight camp in the primeval forest, the older missionary gathers a lot of wood to make a great fire for the night. The younger missionary does not understand why. But when the night turns chilly, the fire was comfortable. Also, the fire protected them from predators in the forest, and the fire made communication and relationship much easier. It is with this analogy that the authors describe the edge of Christianity and the edge of night. Also, they relate the edge of civilization to the edge of light. They indicate that there is no actual edge, there is only a perimeter that is hard to perceive when one is in the twilight zone.

This book attempts to examine the perimeters between Christianity and darkness in the area of forms, practices, worship, music, preaching, evangelism, and the nature of the church.

The authors do not teach that Christians must stay within the light, but they must take light with them into the darkness, turning the dark recesses of the world into the places of light (see chapter ten and the epilogue).

However, many modern churches are moving away from the light, but not taking the light to darkened areas. Other churches are letting the fire go out. This book may anger some evangelicals because it questions many cultural practices and methods used by the church that could be quenching the light. However, the authors always bring everything back to scripture. They are not trying to do away with the Bible, but rather establish biblical principles of how they do evangelism and worship.

This is an excellent book for young seminarians and Christians college graduates who plan to work in the church. Whether they are fulltime ministers or lay workers, they need to understand the issues between pure Christianity and the darkness that is invading the church and corrupting its meaning.

Praying the Psalms, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: Destiny Image Publishers, 2004.

This book grew out of the daily devotions of Elmer Towns from summer 2001 through summer 2002. Each day Towns would read a Psalm and then study the Hebrew text of that particular passage of Scripture. Towns then wrote out the Psalm in English, so that he was paraphrasing the biblical text. This is a practice he continues in his daily devotions, i.e., writing out a scripture passage. He says his mind slows down and he begins to meditate and analyze the Bible word by word as he writes out a Bible text. Next Towns transposed each Psalm into modern day English yet focused each Psalm as a prayer to God in Heaven. His intended purpose was to help people pray the Psalms daily.

In preparing this book, Towns was aware that most evangelicals did not use printed prayers, but rather, most individuals pray spontaneously and extemporaneously. However, because Towns saw the benefit of reading prayers in his own personal life, he felt that other Christians would also benefit from actually praying those requests that had been written for them.

Many people do not realize that not all of the Psalms are prayers. Originally the book of Psalms was called the hymn book of Israel. Some of the hymns were about God and described His work of creation, i.e., His saving, guiding, protecting, and delivering His people from evil. Each of these declarative sentences (usually called verses) Towns turned into the second person and made into a prayer. As an illustration, when Towns describes the creative act of God of individuals in Psalm 139, he makes it a prayer of gratitude for creation and a request for direction and guidance in everyday life. When the Psalmist describes the power of God through a storm (Psalm 29), Towns turns it into a prayer of worship and praise. Even the classic Psalm 23 that describes the shepherd care of God over Israel, Towns turns into a petition so that the reader is asking God to relate and care for him as a shepherd does his sheep.

In translating the Psalms, Towns attempts to keep intact the meter of the original language as expressed in the King James Version. Throughout the Psalms, Towns has included help in understanding various aspects of Psalms such as the meaning and significance of the word *Selah* in Hebrew thought and language (25-26).

This manuscript was originally submitted to Regal Books, Ventura, CA, but they rejected the manuscript because it did not fit their publishing focus. The rationale of the editors was that they did not print scripture, and it was the intent of Towns that when this book was printed, it would find its way into the scriptural shelves of the Christian bookstore. Inasmuch as positioning is important, Towns felt that

if this book were placed among Christian life books, it would lose its uniqueness. However, when placed among Bibles, people would immediately recognize its unique contribution of praying the scripture; hence they would buy the book. When Towns presented the book to Destiny Image, they thought it would be a great book that they could sell effectively.

The Good Book on Leadership: Case Studies from the Bible, with John Borek and Danny Lovett, Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 2005.

As Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary attempted to develop a concentration for their MAR and DMin courses on leadership, Towns came up with an idea to develop a course, which later became this book. Because Towns is a good friend of John Maxwell and believes in the contributions of John Maxwell, he knew that he could not improve on the leadership books written by Maxwell. However, all of Maxwell's leadership books are summary studies of good leadership based on a collection of data, surveys, scripture and his experiences. Maxwell does not examine leaders who are subnormal, average, psychotic, or even failed leaders.

Therefore, Towns began to do an inductive study in scripture of the various leaders in the Bible. Rather than choosing data from each leader to formulate an appropriate definition of leadership, the opposite action took place. Towns decided to let the facts speak for themselves, and to learn from each in his or her limited sphere and to determine how each leader exercised leadership.

This book helps the reader to understand leadership as it is, with its weakness, pathology, and failures, and to draw a set of principles by which today's leaders can face the same problems.

In the year 2001, Dr. Tom Mullins, pastor of Christ Fellowship, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, invited Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary to teach a course in his facilities so it could be available to some of his staff members who were taking advanced courses at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. This is a large church with almost 10,000 members; therefore it was a platform church to draw other students to Florida. This course was offered during the first week of January and it was decided that it would be team-taught by John Borek, president of Liberty University; Danny Lovett, Dean, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary; and Elmer Towns, Dean, School of Religion of Liberty University. John Borek has a PhD in financial management and brought expert insight into financial leadership. Danny Lovett pastored a large church of over 1,000 in attendance and brought pastoral leadership to this course. Elmer Towns, because of his research into the science of church growth, could bring both sociological and theological insight into the principles.

A course syllabus and worktext were prepared by Towns, outlining 24 lectures examining the various types of leadership found in the Bible among men and women. The leader/chapters are:

Lesson One

The Nature of Leadership

Lesson Two

Abraham: The Entrepreneurial Leader

Lesson Three

Jacob: The Pragmatic Leader

Lesson Four

Joseph: The Decision-Making Leader

Lesson Five

Joseph: The Strategic Leader

Lesson Six

Moses: The Charismatic Leader

Lesson Seven

Moses: The Administrative Leader

Lesson Eight

Moses: The People Management Leader

Lesson Nine

Joshua: The Equipped Leader

Lesson Ten

Joshua: The Confrontational Leader

Lesson Eleven

Samson: The Flawed Leader

Lesson Twelve

Saul: The Failed Leader

Lesson Thirteen

David: The Growing Leader

Lesson Fourteen

Solomon: The Transitional Leader

Lesson Fifteen

Hezekiah: The Crisis Leader

Lesson Sixteen

Ezra: The Spiritual Leader

Lesson Seventeen

Nehemiah: The Administrative Leader

Lesson Eighteen

Daniel: The Subordinate Leader

Lesson Nineteen

Esther: The Crisis Leader

Lesson Twenty

Shepherd: The Servant Leader

Lesson Twenty-one

Jesus: The Mentoring Leader

Lesson Twenty-two

Peter: The Self-Correcting Leader

Lesson Twenty-three

Paul: The Visionary Leader

Lesson Twenty-four

Paul: The Training Leader

After the course in Palm Beach Gardens, Borek, Lovett and Towns went into the television studio of the Distant Learning Program of Liberty University, to tape the 24 lectures for DLP students. This became a course in the leadership concentration, CLED 510. Within the year the course was completed and put into operation.

Dr. Douglas Porter was hired to write the extended outline into a rough draft. He took the taped version of the course and turned it into a manuscript. Then Borek, Lovett and Towns proofread the manuscript to correct it. Towns did most of the work to expand the manuscript, and made several changes in the copy.

Each chapter is developed in approximately the same way. First, the type of leadership is defined and examined. Next, the strengths of this type of leadership are enumerated and examined, with a practical application made to the life of the student. Then the type of leadership is examined from a biblical perspective.

Originally the three authors wanted to call the book *Leadership Principles of Biblical Characters*, but the publishing company chose *The Good Book on Leadership*, thinking that most people would understand the phrase “Good Book” to refer to the Bible, and it would be a catchy phrase to get attention.

Understanding the Christian Life, Virginia Beach, Virginia: Academx Publishing Company, 2005.

This book is a reprint of Towns’ book *Understanding the Deeper Life* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1988). Towns uses this book in many of his seminary classes; therefore, he decided to reprint the book. Although the book is primarily used for his classes, the book’s title was changed in order to appeal to a wider audience. Towns felt that changing the title would help people understand the basic contents of the book just by reading the title.

Contributions to Books and Encyclopedias

The following is a list of the published books and encyclopedias that Elmer Towns contributed to during the period April 1999 to May 2005. They are listed in chronological order.¹⁸

¹⁸ Information for this section was gathered through a series of interviews with Elmer Towns between July 2004 and January 2005.

Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: Five Views, edited by Gary McIntosh, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Co., 2004.

This book on *Five Views of Church Growth* presents five different authors who represent five different schools of Church Growth. Elmer Towns represents the traditional/historical view of Church Growth, i.e., the one introduced by Donald McGavran, who was called the “grandfather of the American Church Growth movement,” and the position which was taught at Fuller Theological Seminary. In the book it is labeled “The Effective Evangelism View.” The five positions and authors are:¹⁹

1. The “Effective Evangelism View,” Elmer Towns, “Church Growth effectively confronts and penetrates culture.”
2. The “Gospel and Our Current Culture View,” by Craig Van Gelder, “Church Growth lacks a sufficient view of the church, which hinders it from effectively engaging the culture.”
3. The “Centrist View,” by Charles Van Engen, “Church Growth is based on an evangelistically focused and a missiologically applied theology.”
4. The “Reformist View,” by Gailyn Van Rheen, “Church Growth assumes theology, but ineffectively employs it to analyze culture, determine strategy, and perceive history.”
5. The “Renewal View,” by Howard Snyder, “Church Growth must be based on a biblical vision of the church as the vital community of the kingdom of God.”

This book is intended to be a textbook and/or parallel reader for advanced courses in Church Growth, evangelism, ministry, or trends in ministry and/or American Christianity. According to Towns, the international Church Growth movement had its rise in Donald McGavran in the early 50s when he first published *The Bridges of God*, Friendship Press, 1955. The movement grew rapidly and had a vast influence on denominations, mission boards (both for home and foreign), international agencies, and especially upon the mega church movement.

C. Peter Wagner has said that Towns’ book *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools*, Baker Book House, 1969, is the first American Church Growth book²⁰ (McGavran wrote books focused on international Church Growth) and the first book to analyze the contributions of the mega-church movement.

According to Towns, the Church Growth movement is now in its third generation. Sociologists recognize the transition of a cycle, “from rags to riches to rags in three generations,” and because of this, Towns recognizes the rise and vast influence of Church Growth in its first generation, yet implied in the influence of the Church Growth movement is also its demise as a movement in its third

¹⁹ Gary L. McIntosh, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing Co., 2004), 5, 6.

²⁰ Elmer Towns, *A Practical Encyclopedia: Evangelism and Church Growth*, (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1996), 77.

generation. However, Towns indicates that even though the popularity of the Church Growth movement has waned, the influence has not waned. The face of evangelism has been permanently influenced by identifying evangelism as a discipline and/or science, where leaders of the Church Growth movement have identified and defined the principles of evangelism through their theological and sociological research. Through the modern use of research, the influence of the Church Growth movement continues to influence many other disciplines, and still has a vast impact on the face of evangelical Christianity.

The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy, Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, Gen. Eds., Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2004.

Towns originally wrote the footnotes in *The Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 2000, for Matthew 13 and Revelation 2 and 3. Because Tim LaHaye and Edward Hindson were satisfied with the work that Towns had done, they asked him to write articles in the *Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*.

The first article Towns prepared was on “dispensationalism,” which is a re-write of the material on dispensationalism in his systematic theology, *Theology for Today*, Harcourt Custom Publishers, Fort Worth, Texas, 2002, 934. The uniqueness of this article is that Towns ties together the covenants that God makes with mankind followed by a period of time known as a dispensation where a man is tested concerning the covenant that has been made. Many dispensational writers indicate that there is a time of testing in each dispensation, but they do not tie it to the covenants, which Towns has uniquely done.

A second article done by Towns is simply entitled, “Hell.” Towns has been uniquely proud of this article because it deals with 17 New Testament terms (he treats most of them from the etymology of the original language, i.e., Hebrew and Greek). Whereas, many approach the doctrine of Hell in a broad overview, Towns has looked at the various aspects of eternal punishment by noting the contribution to an understanding of Hell from each word, synonym, figure of speech, or metaphorical representation for Hell.

This material represents a term paper that Towns did over fifty years ago at Dallas Theological Seminary where he gave more time and research than normal term papers because he felt he was uncovering an approach to the doctrine of Hell that had never been examined. For thirty years, Towns did not use the term paper, until he wrote his systematic theology, i.e., *Theology for Today*, Harcourt Custom Publishers, Fort Worth, Texas, 2002, 934.

The third article written by Towns dealt with “the partial rapture.” He presents this view and gives biblical arguments against its position. Towns indicates that his motivation to do research on the partial rapture came from his senior year at Northwest College, Minneapolis, Minnesota. An argument broke out among the

seniors that some were not living by the rules of the Christian college, i.e., they were living in the flesh and not in the Spirit. At this point, some student passed around a petition to the administration of the college asking that certain students not be allowed to graduate, because they were not living by the rules of the college. The petition stated these students would not be taken in the rapture because their lives did not reflect those who shall be “looking for His return.” Towns indicates that he did not get involved in the controversy on either side of the issue. However, it did motivate him to an intense study of the partial rapture position. He wanted to find out what were the arguments for the partial rapture and the biblical arguments against it.

The fourth article was on “post-tribulation.” Towns researched answers and wrote this article concerning the arguments for posttribulationism approximately ten years ago. This material first appeared in *Theology for Today* (Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today*, Belmont, CA: Thomson Learning, 2002). Towns listed seven arguments usually used by those who believe in a post-tribulation rapture position, then answered each one of them point by point. Rather than writing a general article against a post-tribulation rapture position, Towns listed attempts to articulate their seven arguments, then answered them from a pre-tribulation rapture position. He concluded by giving a brief summary of the arguments for a pre-tribulation rapture position.

The fifth article Towns prepared was on “kingdom parables.” Towns had been asked to prepare footnotes for *The Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible* (Tim LaHaye, Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishing, 2000) concerning the kingdom parables. In this article he demonstrates that the sequence of the parables actually parallel the sequence in the church age from Pentecost to the Rapture. Therefore, he implies that the kingdom parables may be signs that point to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Rapture. In the *LaHaye Bible*, Towns uniquely compares the kingdom parables in Matthew 13 to the seven churches of Revelation (Chapter 2, 3), indicating that both give a historical sequence from Pentecost to the Rapture. The article in the encyclopedia is an expansion of the footnote in the prophecy Bible.

The sixth article was on “judgments,” i.e., those which apply to believers. Towns lists the five judgments mentioned in Scripture, then explains the meaning of the five crowns that believers will receive in the future.

The Gathering Storm: Understanding Prophecy in Critical Times, Mal Couch, gen. editor, Springfield, Missouri: 21st Century Press, 2005.

Mal Couch, President and Professor of Theology and Language at Tyndale Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, determined to prepare a volume to give a pre-millennial and dispensational approach to the end times. Because Mal Couch had seen Elmer Towns’ article on “Dispensationalism” in his volume, *Theology for Today*, Fort Worth, Texas, Harcourt and Brace, 2002, 731-774

(933), he determined that Towns' grasp of dispensationalism was a needed chapter to give the reader an overall view of God's plan for the ages. Also, Couch determined that Towns was not just a scholarly writer, but also could present truth in a popular, readable fashion for the contemporary reader. So Couch asked Towns to prepare Chapter Eighteen, "God's Overall Earthly Plan."

Towns used the definition for dispensationalism found in the *Scofield Bible*, 1970, page 5, and then proceeded to outline the seven dispensations by which God has managed man's overall history on earth.

In a day where dispensationalism is under attack, and many are embarrassed to assume the position of a dispensationalist, Towns has boldly claimed that he is not only a dispensationalist, he agrees broadly with the seven dispensations taught in the *Scofield Bible*.

On several occasions, Towns says that he doesn't want to be known as a Calvinist, Arminian, Lutheran, Wesleyan, or by any other theological system identified with a human man. Rather, Towns has said that he wants to be known as a dispensationalist, for that is the term Paul used to identify his interpretation of history and God's plan on the earth.

The Gathering Storm is dedicated to Dr. John F. Walvoord (1910-2002), who was the second president of Dallas Theological Seminary and is generally recognized as one of the outstanding spokesmen for pre-millennialism and dispensational theology. Dr. Towns wrote his master's thesis at Dallas Seminary under the mentorship of Dr. Walvoord, and while at Dallas, Towns was a major in systematic theology.

Film and Video Series

The following were videos, which were produced and offered to the public, between April 1999 and May 2005. This section does not include videos produced and offered relating to Towns' role as the Sunday School teacher at Thomas Road Baptist Church's Pastor's Bible Class. Teachings from the Pastor's Bible Class were recorded and are available on various television networks. Outlines for these lessons are available from Towns' website (www.elmertowns.com). They are listed in chronological order.²¹

²¹ Information for this section was gathered through a series of interviews with Elmer Towns between July 2004 and January 2005.

Biblical Models for Leadership – CLED 510, with Danny Lovett and John Borek, Lynchburg, Virginia: Liberty University, Distance Learning Program, 2000.

This DVD series was taped for Liberty University's Distance Learning Program. The videos are based on the classroom lectures for Biblical Models of Leadership (CLED 510) at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. The DVDs follow Towns' *Biblical Models for Leadership* worktext (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Custom Publishers, 2000).

New Testament Survey – BIBL 110, Lynchburg, Virginia: Liberty University, Distance Learning Program, 2003.

This DVD series was taped for Liberty University's Distance Learning Program. The videos are based on the classroom lectures of Towns' New Testament Survey (BIBL 110) course at Liberty University. The DVDs follow Towns' *A Journey Through the New Testament* worktext (Mason, Ohio: Thomson Learning Custom Publishing, 2003).

Fasting, Lynchburg, Virginia: Global Pastor's Network, available at www.gpn.tv, 2004.

This video presentation was produced for Global Pastor's Network. The video outlines the role of fasting in a Christian's life. Offering practical application and insights, the video allows the student to engage in the material as nine biblical fasts are examined and explained. This video is primarily intended to teach and train pastors throughout the world. Application questions are offered with each unit to assist the students in understanding the significance of fasting.

Prayer, Lynchburg, Virginia: Global Pastor's Network, available at www.gpn.tv, 2004.

This video presentation was produced for Global Pastor's Network. The video outlines the biblical basis and significance of prayer, noting the original Greek and Hebrew words for prayer found in Scripture. This video is primarily intended to teach and train pastors throughout the world. Application questions are offered with each unit to assist the students in understanding the significance of prayer.

Theology Survey I – THEO 201, Lynchburg, Virginia: Liberty University, Distance Learning Program, 2004.

This DVD series was taped for Liberty University's Distance Learning Program. The videos are based on the classroom lectures of Towns' Theology Survey I (THEO 201) course at Liberty University. The DVDs follow Towns' *Theology Survey I* worktext (Mason, Ohio: Thomson Learning Custom Publishing, 2002).

Theology Survey II – THEO 202, Lynchburg, Virginia: Liberty University, Distance Learning Program, 2004.

This DVD series was taped for Liberty University's Distance Learning Program. The videos are based on the classroom lectures of Towns' Theology Survey II (THEO 202) course at Liberty University. The DVDs follow Towns' *Theology Survey II* worktext (Mason, Ohio: Thomson Learning Custom Publishing, 2004).

Resource Packets

During the past six years, Towns has only produced one resource packet, compared to the many he prepared in previous years. Resource packets are designed to be used by churches and are usually aimed at planning evangelism, leadership training, special days, or equipping people for ministry. Resource packets often include videotapes, audio tapes, lesson plans, planning schedules or timelines for implementation.²²

Ask Me To Pray For You, with Douglas Porter, Lynchburg, Virginia: Church Growth Institute, 2003.

Elmer Towns taught a series in his Sunday School class during 2000 and 2001, on the topic of *Two-Pray*. This series was designed for Christians to get other people to pray for them, or for them to pray successfully with other people. Towns taught nine lessons from one verse, "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven" (Matt. 18:19).

Originally, Regal Books published the book *Prayer Partners*, and Towns had a vision of churches teaching this to adult Sunday School classes to promote more prayer for the local church. He saw this as a book from which pastors could preach and get people in their congregations to pray for them. His intent was to see more powerful churches when more prayer would be made for pastoral leadership, as well as by all Christians for one another.

While visiting a store in Anchorage, Alaska, in 2002, Towns saw all the clerks wearing a jacket with the motto on their backs, "Ask me to help you." From that he conceived of a program, "Ask Me To Pray For You."

²² Information for this section was gathered through a series of interviews with Elmer Towns between July 2004 and January 2005.

Towns teamed with Douglas Porter to write a resource packet that would help churches organize a month long campaign of prayer. This campaign would have a master calendar overview of twelve weeks planning of a local church with emphasis on prayer. Each week there would be a specific activity for prayer; i.e., the first week, people would pray in dyads. The second week the pastor and church leadership would kneel at the front, and selected individuals would “pray over them,” re-dedicating them to the Lord. The third week was a “bless your child” campaign where visitors were asked to bring their children to the church for a special prayer of blessing. The last week was concluded with a special day of prayer on the last Saturday of the campaign.

The packet has job descriptions and planning activities for the various events. Also, it has instructions for the various events, lesson plans for each week, and sermon suggestions. There are artwork and bulletin suggestions. The campaign even has buttons for individuals with the motto, *ASK ME TO PRAY FOR YOU*.

It is Towns’ hope that the success of the methods of the book, *Prayer Partners*, will translate into a prayer program for local churches. In these campaigns, churches will teach the methods of *Ask Me To Pray For You*.

It was hoped by Church Growth Institute that this campaign would build on the other successful campaigns written by Towns, i.e., over 45,000 copies of *Friend Day* and over 10,000 copies of *Going To Two Services* have been sold by the company.

Worktexts of Liberty University

The worktexts produced by Elmer Towns from 1999-2005 were second and third editions of previous worktexts. The worktexts are designed for undergraduate and seminary students at Liberty University and Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. The worktexts are used both by residential and distance learning students. They are listed in chronological order.²³

²³ Information for this section was gathered through a series of interviews with Elmer Towns between July 2004 and January 2005.

Biblical Models for Leadership, Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Custom Publishers, 2000.

This worktext is designed for the Biblical Models of Leadership (CLED 510) class at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. The worktext outlines and examines 24 characteristics of leaders and their roles in leadership.

Theology Survey I, Mason, Ohio: Thomson Learning Custom Publishing, 2002.

This worktext is designed for the Theology Survey I (THEO 201) class at Liberty University. The worktext is based on Towns' book, *Theology for Today*, covering the first half of the book. Materials covered are: Prolegomena, Bibliology, Theology Proper, Christology, Pneumatology, Angelology, Satanology, and Demonology.

A Journey Through the New Testament, Mason, Ohio: Thomson Learning Custom Publishing, 2003.

This worktext is designed for the New Testament Survey (BIBL 110) class at Liberty University. The worktext is based on Towns' book, *A Journey Through the New Testament*. The worktext is a basic, chronological history of the New Testament.

Theology Survey II, Mason, Ohio: Thomson Learning Custom Publishing, 2004.

This worktext is designed for the Theology Survey II (THEO 202) class at Liberty University. The worktext is based on Towns' book, *Theology for Today*, covering the second half of the book. Materials covered are: Soteriology, Hamartiology, Anthropology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology.

21st Century Tools and Techniques for the Revitalization of the Church, Mason, Ohio: Thomson Learning Custom Publishing, 2005.

This worktext is designed for the 21st Century Tools and Techniques for the Revitalization of the Church, (EVAN 851) class at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. The worktext contains summaries of many of Towns' writings, including *The Eight Laws of Leadership*, *Ten Innovative Churches*, and *Into the Future*.

Spiritual Foundations of Church Growth, Mason, Ohio: Thomson Learning Custom Publishing, 2005.

This worktext is designed for the Spiritual Foundations of Church Growth (EVAN 500) class at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. The worktext contains summaries of many of Towns' writings, including *Fasting for Spiritual*

Breakthrough, Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough, The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever, and Biblical Meditations for Spiritual Breakthrough.

CHAPTER 4

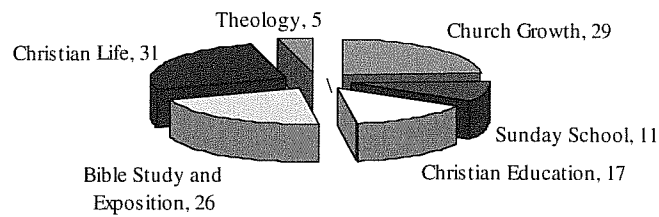
AN ANALYSIS OF WRITING AREAS

Having considered the most recent writings of Elmer Towns (1999-2005) in the previous chapter, this chapter will be dedicated to better understanding the complete writing ministry of Elmer Towns. In Brown's work,¹ charts containing information about the writing contributions of Elmer Towns were provided to give the reader further clarification and insight into the writings of Towns. These charts will be updated and included in this work in an attempt to provide accurate and up-to-date information regarding the writings of Elmer Towns. In the following chapter, the teaching ministry of Elmer Towns will be considered as it relates to the information in this chapter. Only the writing area of books will be considered in this chapter, and the writing ministry of Towns as it relates to his teaching ministry will be considered in chapter 5.

The following chart is a breakdown of the entire writing ministry regarding books written by Elmer Leon Towns, divided into 6 categories (Church Growth, Sunday School, Christian Education, Bible Study and Exposition, Christian Life, and Theology).

¹ David A. Brown, "A Chronological Presentation of the Writings of Elmer L. Towns From 1986-1999" (D.Min. thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999), 85-96.

Graph 1: Elmer Towns' Writing Areas: 1963-2005

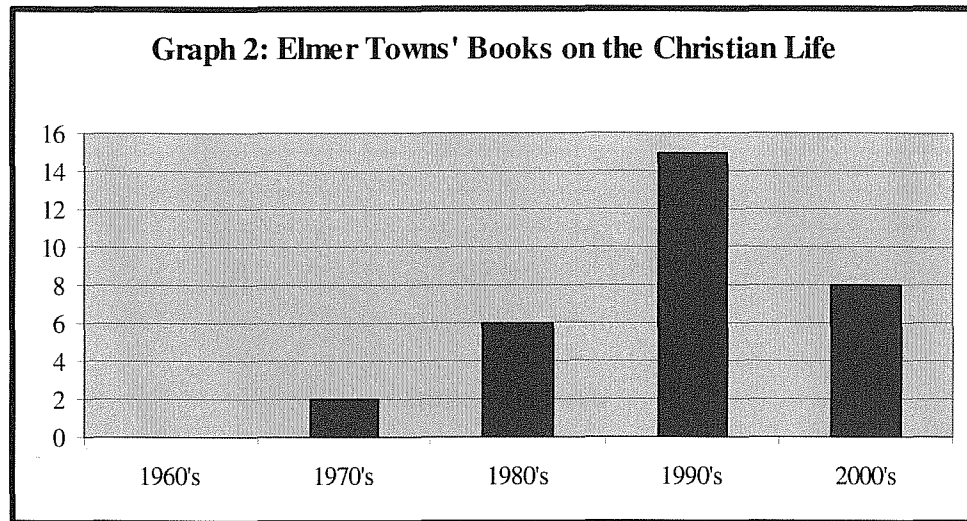


As is seen from the information, the writings of Elmer Towns have focused on the following areas in this order: Christian Life (31), Church Growth, (29), Bible Study and Exposition (26), Christian Education (17), Sunday School (11), and Theology (5).²

Christian Life

Within the context of Christian Life, Elmer Towns has written many books over the last twenty-nine years. His first book regarding this subject matter was *A Fresh Start in Life Now that You are a Christian*. This book was written in 1976 and published by the Sunday School Research Institute. His most recent book in this arena, *365 Ways to Know God*, is a daily devotional designed to offer the Christian a daily reminder of God's faithfulness through analyzing the various names of God found throughout Scripture. The following chart details Towns' writings in the area of Christian Life throughout the last five decades:

² A list of Elmer Towns' book sales is available in Appendix B.



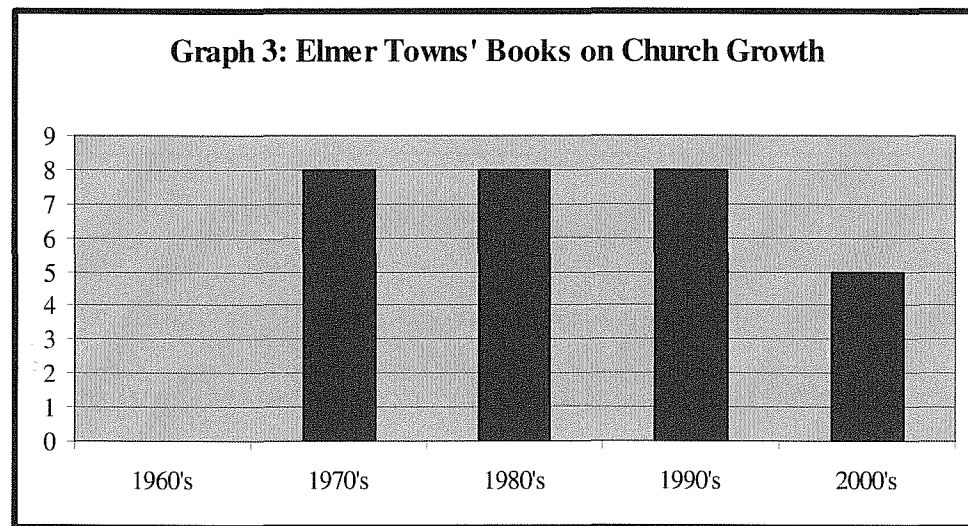
A list of all the books regarding Christian Life written by Elmer Towns in chronological order is as follows:

<i>A Fresh Start In Life Now That You Are A Christian</i>	1976, Sunday School Research Institute
<i>How To Clean Up Your Town For Christ</i>	1979, Old Time Gospel Hour
<i>The Successful Christian Life</i>	1980, 1992, Accent Books
<i>Say-It-Faith</i>	1983, Tyndale House Publishers
<i>The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life in the Books You Read</i>	1985, Camp Hill, PA
<i>What Is the Call of God?</i>	1985, Ministries
<i>God Is Able</i>	1986, Church Growth Institute
<i>Understanding the Deeper Life</i>	1988, Fleming H. Revell
<i>Your Ministry of Evangelism</i>	1992, Evangelical Teacher Training Association
<i>What is Right: Biblical Principles for Decision-Making</i>	1995, Church Growth Institute
<i>When God Is Silent</i>	1995, Church Growth Institute
<i>Biblical Studies for Fasting</i>	1996, Church Growth Institute
<i>Habits of the Heart</i>	1996, Church Growth Institute
<i>Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough</i>	1996, Regal Books
<i>Stories on the Front Porch</i>	1996, Regal Books
<i>Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough (Leader's Guide)</i>	1996, Regal Books
<i>Putting an End to Worship Wars</i>	1997, Broadman Holman
<i>Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough</i>	1997, Regal Books
<i>Stories About My First Church</i>	1997, Regal Books
<i>Christmas Traditions</i>	1998, Beacon Hill Press
<i>Biblical Meditation for Spiritual Breakthrough</i>	1998, Regal Books
<i>Fasting Can Change Your Life</i>	1998, Regal Books
<i>My Angel Named Herman</i>	1998, Tommy Books
<i>God Encounters</i>	2000, Regal Books
<i>A Beginner's Guide to Fasting</i>	2001, Servant Publications

<i>Knowing God Through Fasting</i>	2002, Destiny Image Publishing
<i>Fasting for Financial Breakthrough</i>	2002, Regal Books
<i>Prayer Partners</i>	2002, Regal Books
<i>God Bless You</i>	2003, Regal Books
<i>Joined Together</i>	2003, Thomas Nelson, Inc.
<i>365 Ways to Know God</i>	2004, Regal Books

Church Growth

The area of Church Growth has also been significant in the writings of Elmer Towns throughout the past four decades. His first book in this arena was *Evangelize Through Christian Education*, published in 1970 by the Evangelical Teacher Training Association. This area of writing is somewhat unique in the writings of Elmer Towns, as the following chart illustrates. (Each decade has a consistent number of books published on the topic.)



A list of all the books regarding Church Growth written by Elmer Towns in chronological order is as follows:

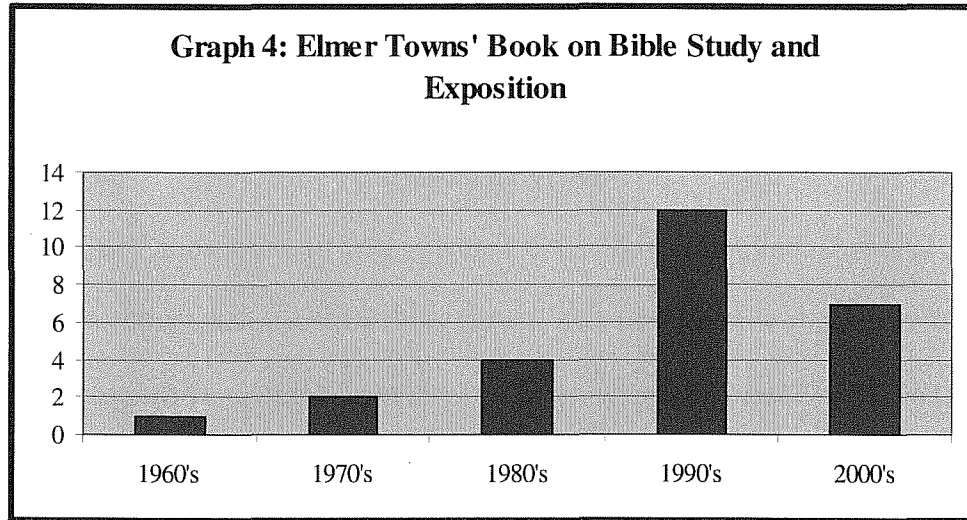
<i>Evangelize Through Christian Education</i>	1970, Evangelical Teacher Training Assoc.
<i>Evangelize Through Christian Education (Leader's Guide)</i>	1970, Evangelical Teacher Training Assoc.

<i>Church Aflame</i>	1971, Impact Books
<i>America's Fastest Growing Churches</i>	1972, Impact Books
<i>Capturing a Town for Christ</i>	1973, Fleming H. Revell Company
<i>Great Soul-Winning Churches</i>	1973, Sword of The Lord Publishers
<i>Is the Day of the Denomination Dead?</i>	1973, Thomas Nelson, Inc.
<i>Getting a Church Started in the Face of Insurmountable Odds</i>	1975, Impact Books
<i>Church Aflame II</i>	1981, Liberty Baptist Seminary
<i>The Complete Book of Church Growth</i>	1981, Tyndale House Publishers
<i>How You Can Produce Church Growth</i>	1984, Ministries
<i>Stepping Out on Faith</i>	1984, Tyndale House Publishers
<i>Getting a Church Started (Student Manual)</i>	1985, Church Growth Institute
<i>Winning the Winnable—Friendship Evangelism</i>	1986, Church Leadership Institute
<i>Church Growth: State of the Art</i>	1986, Tyndale House Publications
<i>How to Reach Your Friends for Christ</i>	1989, Church Growth Institute
<i>Ten Innovative Churches</i>	1990, Regal Books
<i>Seeing the Invisible</i>	1994, Church Growth Institute
<i>Vision Day: Capturing the Power of Vision</i>	1994, Church Growth Institute
<i>A Practical Encyclopedia: Evangelism & Church Growth</i>	1996, Regal Books
<i>Rivers of Revival</i>	1997, Regal Books
<i>The Every Church Guide to Church Growth</i>	1998, Broadman & Holman
<i>The Year-Round Church Event Book</i>	1998, Gospel Light
<i>Developing a Giving Church</i>	1999, Beacon Hill Press
<i>Into the Future</i>	2000, Baker Book House
<i>The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever</i>	2000, Servant Publications
<i>The Year-Round Book of Sermon Ideas Stories & Quotes</i>	2001, Gospel Light
<i>Churches That Multiply</i>	2003, Beacon Hill
<i>Perimeters of Light</i>	2003, Moody Press

Bible Study and Exposition

Elmer Towns has written twenty-six books in the area of Bible Study and Exposition over the last thirty-seven years. His first book in this area was a leader's guide to *The Triune God*. It was written in 1968 and published by the Evangelical Teacher Training Association. His most recent book in this area, *Bible Answers to Almost All Your Questions*, published in 2003 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., is a compilation of questions he has answered in over 45 years of ministry. Although the book could

really be classified into numerous categories, Bible Study and Exposition was chosen because of the book's use of Bible terms and references. Below is a chart summarizing the books in this category written by Elmer Towns during the last five decades.



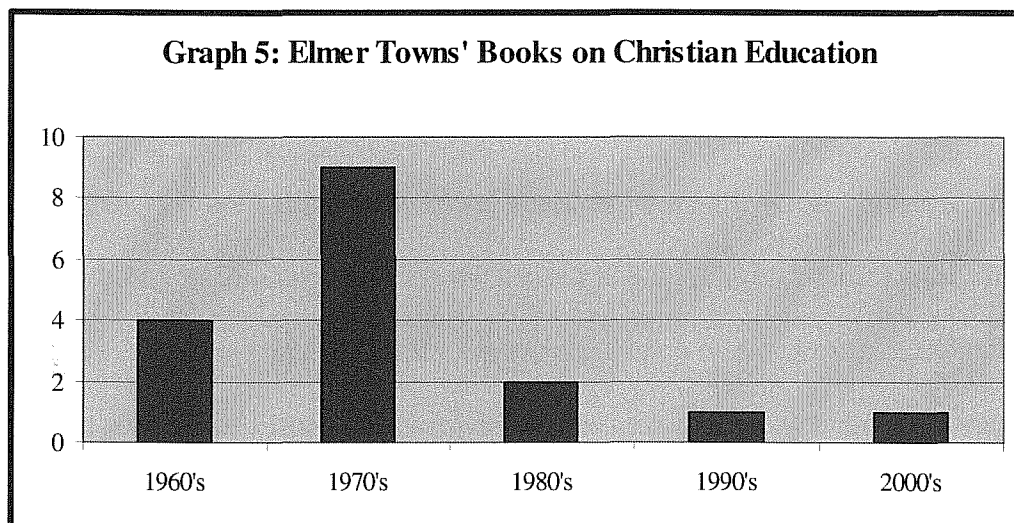
A list of all the books regarding Bible Study and Exposition written by Elmer Towns in chronological order is as follows:

<i>The Triune God (Leader's Guide)</i>	1968, The Evangelical Teacher Training Assoc.
<i>The Gospel of John</i>	1974, Genesis, Inc
<i>Tithing Is Christian</i>	1975, Church Growth Institute
<i>The Greatest Book in the Bible</i>	1985, Church Leadership Institute
<i>The Names of Jesus</i>	1987, Accent Books
<i>The Names of Jesus (Group Study Guide)</i>	1987, Accent Books
<i>History Makers of the Old Testament</i>	1989, Scripture Press
<i>The Gospel of John: Believe and Live</i>	1990, Fleming H. Revell
<i>My Father's Names</i>	1991, Regal Books
<i>My Father's Names (Group Study Guide)</i>	1991, Gospel Light Publications
<i>Our Family Giving to God's Family</i>	1992, Church Growth Institute
<i>What the New Testament Is All About</i>	1992, Sunday School Heritage
<i>The Names of the Holy Spirit</i>	1994, Regal Books
<i>The Names of the Holy Spirit (Leader's Guide)</i>	1994, Regal Books
<i>What the Old Testament Is All About</i>	1995, Sunday School Heritage
<i>A Journey Through the New Testament</i>	1996, Harcourt Brace
<i>A Journey Through the Old Testament</i>	1996, Harcourt Brace
<i>How to Create High Impact Bible Studies</i>	1998, Broadman
<i>The Son</i>	1999, Regal Books
<i>A Beginner's Guide to Bible Reading</i>	2000, Servant Publications

<i>Praying the 23rd Psalm</i>	2001, Regal Books
<i>A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible</i>	2001, Servant Publications
<i>Women Gifted for Ministry</i>	2001, Thomas Nelson, Inc.
<i>Gospel of John: Believe and Live (reprint)</i>	2002, AMG Publishers
<i>Praying the Psalms</i>	2003, Destiny Image Publishers
<i>Bible Answers For Almost All Your Questions</i>	2003, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Christian Education

Christian Education is an area in which Elmer Towns has been involved throughout his entire teaching and writing career. His first four books were in the area of Christian Education: *Teaching Teens* (1963), *Christ-centered Youth Work* (1964), *Successful Youth Work* (1966), and *The Single Adult and the Church* (1967). As the following chart illustrates, Towns focused more on writing on Christian Education during the first two decades of his writing, than he has the last three decades.



A list of all the books regarding Christian Education written by Elmer Towns in chronological order is as follows:

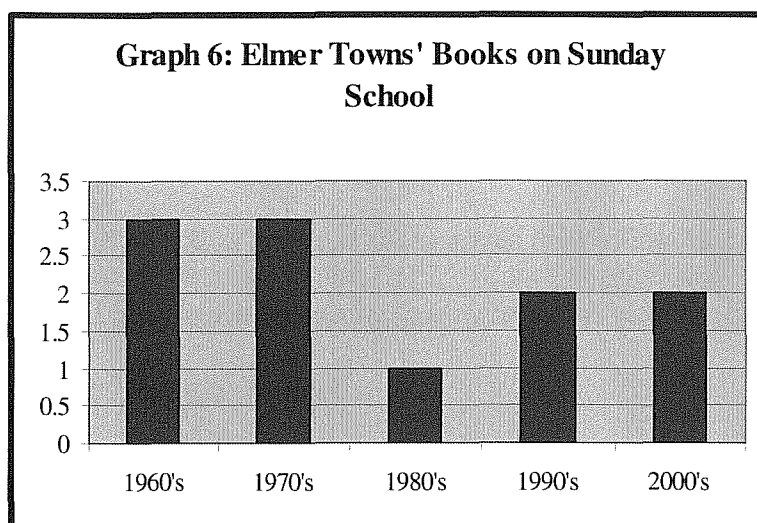
<i>Teaching Teens</i>	1963, Winnipeg Bible Institute
<i>Christ-Centered Youth Work</i>	1964, Winnipeg Bible College Press
<i>Successful Youth Work</i>	1966, Gospel Light Publications

<i>The Single Adult and The Church</i>	1967, Regal Books
<i>Successful Church Libraries</i>	1971, Baker Book House
<i>The Christian Hall of Fame</i>	1971, Baker Book House
<i>Team Teaching With Success</i>	1971, Standard Publishing
<i>Ministering to the Young Single Adult</i>	1972, Baker Book House
<i>Successful Ministry to the Retarded</i>	1972, Moody Press
<i>Successful Biblical Youth Work</i>	1973, Impact Books
<i>Christian Journalism</i>	1974, Genesis, Inc.
<i>Have the Public Schools "Had It"?</i>	1974, Thomas Nelson, Inc.
<i>A History of Religious Educators</i>	1975, Baker Book House
<i>Becoming a Leader</i>	1986, Church Growth Institute
<i>Say It Faith: Building the Sunday School by Faith</i>	1988, Wesley Press
<i>The Eight Laws of Leadership</i>	1992, Church Growth Institute
<i>The Good Book on Leadership</i>	2005, Broadman and Holman Publishers

Sunday School

Sunday School has always been close to the heart of Elmer Towns. As a child he grew up going to Sunday School, and he often recalls to his students at Liberty University that he never missed a Sunday for 14 years straight. His book on Sunday School, *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes Them Grow*, is perhaps the book that changed his own life more than any other book he has written. It was through researching for this book that Elmer Towns met Jerry Falwell, whose church at the time had the ninth largest Sunday School in the United States. Through their partnership, Towns and Falwell co-founded Liberty University, which now has over 26,000 alumni.

The writings of Elmer Towns regarding the area of Sunday School are viewed by decade in the following chart:



A list of all the books regarding Sunday School written by Elmer Towns in chronological order is as follows:

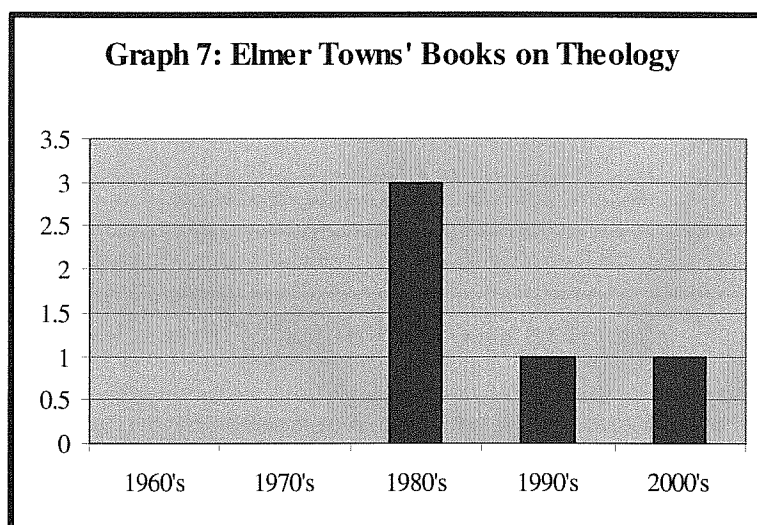
<i>Successful Lesson Preparation</i>	1969, Baker Book House
<i>The Ten Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes Them Grow</i>	1969, Baker Book House
<i>The Bright Future of Sunday School</i>	1969, Free Church Publications
<i>World's Largest Sunday School</i>	1974, Thomas Nelson, Inc.
<i>The Successful Sunday School and Teacher's Guidebook</i>	1976, Creation House
<i>How to Grow an Effective Sunday School</i>	1979, Accent Books
<i>154 Steps to Revitalize Your Sunday School</i>	1988, Scripture Press
<i>Town's Sunday School Encyclopedia</i>	1992, Tyndale House Publishers
<i>Ten Sunday Schools That Dared to Change</i>	1993, Regal Books
<i>What Every Sunday School Teacher Should Know About Sunday School</i>	2001, Regal Books
<i>What Every Pastor Should Know About Sunday School</i>	2002, Regal Books

Theology

Although Elmer Towns received a degree in Systematic Theology when he was at Dallas Theological Seminary, he has not written extensively on the subject. But it could be argued, and perhaps should be argued, that many of his writings, although not falling specifically under the area of "theology books," are nonetheless overflowing with theological significance and ideology. His most significant book in this area, *Theology*

for Today, is a compilation of years of theological research, teaching, and writing.

Chapters from previous books, journal articles, and term papers, were all combined to produce a theology book suitable for undergraduate students taking his theology courses at Liberty University. The following chart summarizes the writings of Elmer Towns in regard to theology, but it is important to note that many of his writings deal with the subject matter, whether explicitly or implicitly:

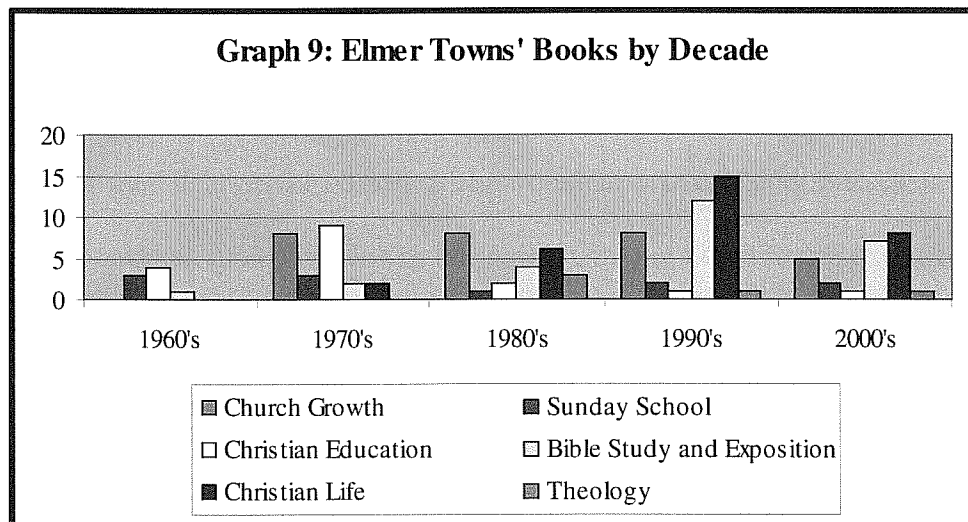
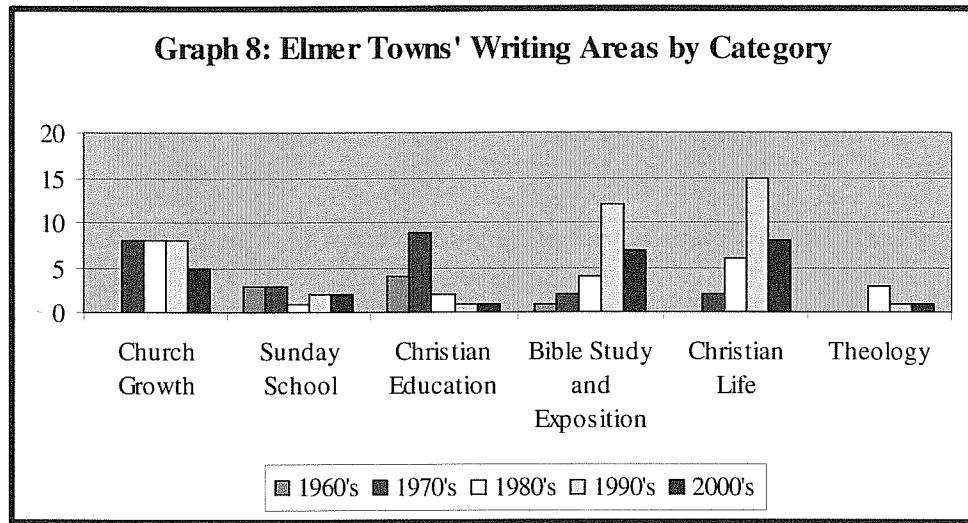


A list of all the books regarding Theology written by Elmer Towns in chronological order is as follows:

<i>What the Faith Is All About</i>	1983, Tyndale House Publishers
<i>What the Faith Is All About (Leader's Guide)</i>	1983, Tyndale House Publishers
<i>What the Faith Is All About (Leader's Guide)</i>	1987, Tyndale House Publishers
<i>Foundational Doctrines of the Faith</i>	1992, Church Growth Institute
<i>Theology for Today (REPRINT 2002)</i>	2002, Harcourt and Brace

As can be seen from the previous charts and information, the writings of Elmer Towns have been varied over the past five decades. His love of teaching and his commitment to the entire individual are seen in the numerous writing areas and the longevity of his works. As a way of summarizing the books by Towns, two final charts

have been prepared dealing with his writings. They graphically present a compilation of all six writing areas, arranged by category and decade.



CHAPTER 5

CORRELATION OF WRITING AND TEACHING MINISTRY

This chapter traces the book writing history of Elmer Towns.

¹ It is included to show his motivation for writing books that correlate with his teaching. This chapter will help the reader understand Towns' motivation for writing the types of books he wrote and the number of books he wrote (in each area).

The author interviewed Elmer Towns to gain the information in this chapter. It includes dates and places, but most importantly, the background reasons that motivated him in his writing ministry. The author purposely chose to include the anecdotal stories because they shed light on the human or emotional aspects of his journalistic expressions.

Obviously all the books Towns has written are not noted in this chapter, nor are all the reasons given why Towns has written the books he has written. These are included because Towns feels these are the books that were significant due to the fact that they introduced a new field of research, or they represented a fork in his writing career, or he considered them influential in his ministry. Therefore, this chapter is limited to Towns' perspective of important books, why he wrote them, and some of the "ways" in which he wrote them.

¹ Information regarding this chapter was obtained by interviews with Elmer Towns during August 2004.

Christian Education, Sunday School, and Church Growth Books

Elmer Towns began his teaching ministry at the collegiate level at Dallas Bible Institute in the fall of 1957 as a part-time instructor, while still enrolled at Dallas Theological Seminary. Even in his first assignment, teaching was vitally connected to his writing ministry. Dr. Martin Massingail, president, invited Elmer Towns to teach the freshman introductory course in foreign missions because Towns was the missionary editor of a monthly newspaper, *The Missionary Crusader*, published out of Lubbock, TX. In that newspaper, Towns wrote a popular article (the entire centerfold of the tabloid sized newspaper) that was called "Missionary World at a Glance." Because Towns' research for the article gave him an up-to-date perspective of world missions, he was asked to teach the course.

Towns had been writing for the *Missionary Crusader* for two years when he began teaching. In his second year at Dallas Theological Seminary, Rev. Homer Duncan, editor, *Missionary Crusader*, was in the Towns' home during a foreign missions conference. As Duncan was leaving, he asked Towns what he thought of his newspaper. Towns replied, "It's not much of a missionary newspaper; it has three sermons from great pulpiteers of the past." Towns went on to explain that a missionary newspaper needed news. To that Duncan replied, "All right, write an article for me each month to tell the readers what is happening in foreign missions."

For the next four years, Towns wrote a monthly article on foreign missions. In the Dallas Theological Seminary Library, there was a very large magazine rack where the magazines and prayer letters from various foreign missionaries were displayed. One evening each month Towns would go to the display, reading everything he could about

the news of missions. He testifies, "I'd begin around 9:00 PM in the evening after the family had gone to bed, and I would stay at the library until approximately 2:00 AM to finish the article."

For his course Towns used the text *The Progress of Worldwide Missions* originally written by Robert Glover. The edition used by Towns was revised and enlarged by J. Herbert Kane, (New York: New York: Harper). *The Progress of Worldwide Missions* was the standard textbook used in most Christian colleges in the 50s. Even though Towns had not been a foreign missionary, he felt this course was extremely relevant because he always began class by sharing his research of what was happening in various mission fields of the world.

After teaching part time at Dallas Bible Institute for the school year 1957-58, Towns accepted a fulltime appointment to Midwest Bible College and Missionary Institute in St. Louis, MO, 1958-61. It was here that his writing ministry again complemented his teaching. For his courses in Bible, theology, evangelism and missions, there were adequate textbooks available for use by other Bible colleges. However, for his course in *Introduction to Youth Work*, there was not an adequate textbook. He needed parallel readings that would give his students an introduction to the psychology of adolescents, orientation to youth work in a local church, and methods and materials to carry out youth ministry. The only thing he found available to use was a book published by the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), but that was not church related, evangelistic oriented, nor Bible centered. With little thought for the intricacies of writing and publishing a book, he decided to write a textbook.

Towns assigned nine students in the class to write out one of his lectures, explaining to the students that each lecture would become a chapter in the book. Three students were assigned to type the manuscript onto mimeograph stencils; another three students were assigned the task of operating a mimeograph machine and binding the pages into plastic binders.

As the book was nearing completion, the question was raised how they would sell the book. Towns planned a Saturday seminar at the school, and invited fulltime and lay youth workers from the area to attend. They were charged \$5.00 each to cover the speaker's honorarium, refreshments, and a copy of the book.

The book was called *Teaching Teens* and was self-published by Towns, first through mimeograph editions (4-5 editions of 100 copies each) and next printed by Friesen Printing Company, Altona, Manitoba, when Towns became president of Winnipeg Bible College, Manitoba. This printed edition was typeset and included artwork from Bob Butts, director of *Youth For Christ*, Calgary, Alberta. This book, like the previous mimeograph edition, sold for \$5.00.

In 1965, Baker Book House printed and distributed the book to Christian bookstores throughout the nation. It was this book that gave Towns a reputation as an authority in youth work, opening up many doors to speak at youth conferences, and youth camps, and to conduct seminars on youth ministry. During his college and early seminary days, Towns had been a youth pastor of local churches (youth pastor, New Brighton Community Church, New Brighton, MN, 1953-54; youth pastor, Southwestern Baptist Tabernacle, Oak Cliff, TX, 1955-56).

As he used the book as a text for his college classes, Towns realized the shortcomings of the manuscript. First, there was not a consistent philosophy of youth work expressed in comprehensive aims and goals. Second, the book had no research (i.e., footnotes or bibliographic references) into theology, Bible, evangelism or contemporary youth culture. Third, the illustrations were superficial and unbelievable (Towns confessed that he was an inadequate journalist when he first began writing). Fourth, the book did not have any interactive assignments or experiences for student involvement and/or continued learning. There was no bibliography at the end of the book, even though there were no Christian books written on youth work in ministry.

Today Towns tells his faculty at the School of Religion, Liberty University, to develop a “signature course.” By that he means each faculty member should develop one course in which he has more competency than all his other courses. Towns stresses that the professor should become an authority regarding the course’s content, and research the topic so thoroughly, that he attains excellence in presenting the material and communicating the results to the students. Therefore, in the first three institutions where Towns taught, *Introduction to Youth Work* became his signature course, and the book, *Teaching Teens*, added credibility to his ministry.

The first edition of *Teaching Teens* was written by his students from his lectures, but Towns heavily edited and added sections to each of the chapters. However, he spent several years preparing his second book, i.e., *Successful Youth Work*, Regal Books, 1965.

In doing research for his articles in the *Missionary Crusader*, Towns had noted that missionaries were using paperback books as a form of evangelism. When Towns heard that Gospel Light Publishing Company (an independent publisher of Sunday

School curriculum) was going to start a new book line called Regal Books, he talked with Bill Greig, Jr., president of the company, about writing a book for the paperback series.

In 1965 Towns became an associate professor of Christian Education at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL. This was an innovative new seminary, merging university education with the professional training of a seminary. One of the hallmarks of this divinity school was the strong emphasis on research. While teaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Towns was taking courses at Garrett Theological Seminary on the campus of Northwestern University, Evanston, IL. That seminary was known for its strong commitment to sociological orientation to theological studies. That influenced his approach to re-writing and preparing his book *Teaching Teens* for a second edition.

The new edition had 25 chapters instead of nine. The new edition reflected what Towns was teaching in his revised curriculum, i.e., the areas of counseling and psychology, a sociological description of adolescence, and a total church program ministry to youth.

When *Successful Youth Work* was released in the fall of 1965, Regal Books assigned it the internal audit number 295-1, indicating that it was the first book to be printed by Regal Books. That publishing company has been in existence for 40 years, and Towns has published 25 titles with Regal Books. The new release became a success, and many colleges and seminaries began using it as a textbook because of the broad outreach of Gospel Light/Regal Books.²

² According to Towns, schools that included *Successful Youth Work* within their curriculum included Baptist Bible College (Springfield, Missouri); Winnipeg Bible College (Manitoba, Canada); and Mountain View Bible College (Alberta, Canada).

While attending Garrett Theological Seminary, Towns took a guided research course on the growing phenomenon of “The Young Single Adult.” His professor was Dr. Grant Shockley, later president of The Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, GA, and a leader in the National Council of Churches. Towns proposed to Dr. Shockley that he would do a research paper of approximately 25 pages, based on library-bibliographic research. Then he added, “I would like to add another 125 pages of popular application, and turn the project into a textbook to be published by Regal Books.” Dr. Shockley found the project exciting and agreed, as did Regal Books.

Towns worked with the First Evangelical Free Church of the Summerdale section of Chicago, IL. This church had a young single adult group of approximately 60 members; Towns spoke to them several times, in addition to interviewing the many members individually. These interviews appear as case studies in the book *The Single Adult and the Church*.

As a professor of Christian Education, Towns taught more than youth courses. He taught in the area of children’s ministry, adult ministry, and Sunday School ministry, along with all the courses in Christian Education. He decided to be known by more than just youth ministry and youth courses. The Sunday School department of the Evangelical Free Church, headquartered in Minneapolis, MN, asked Towns to prepare a book for them on Sunday School. He put together 23 chapters and called the manuscript *The Bright Future of Sunday School*. It was published by the Free Church Press in 1969. Because the publishing company was small and did not have a wide distribution, the book had limited success. Towns recalls a pastor commenting on the book, “This doesn’t talk about the future of Sunday School, this just gives methods of how to do Sunday

School work today.” Towns tucked that thought in the back of his mind and determined to write something on the future of Sunday School.

While teaching a class at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, he casually mentioned that the First Baptist Church of Dallas, TX, had the largest Sunday School in the world. A student raised his hand to correct Dr. Towns saying “I think the First Baptist Church in Hammond, IN, has the largest Sunday School in the world.” Towns knew the attendance figures of both churches and said that the Sunday School in Dallas, TX, had approximately 4,000 in attendance, while the Hammond, IN, Sunday School only had about 2,500. It was then that the student countered, “But Dr. Jack Hyles (the pastor in Hammond) says he has the largest Sunday School in the world.” It was then that another student put up his hand to comment, “There’s a pastor in Akron, Ohio, who advertises himself as having the world’s largest Sunday School.” Towns had not heard about the pastor in Akron.

The following Sunday afternoon when Towns was reading the *Chicago Tribune*, which listed the ten best-selling books, he determined to find the ten largest Sunday Schools in America. Spurred by that observation, Towns wrote all of the Sunday School departments of the evangelical and mainline denominations, asking for the list of their largest Sunday Schools in America. Then he wrote to the various Sunday School organizations (because of his contacts at Sunday School conventions where he was speaking, or had access to a mailing list). Then an announcement was printed in *Christian Life Magazine* (at the time the largest Christian evangelical publication), asking for information on the largest Sunday Schools in America.

When Towns found who these ten largest Sunday Schools were, he interviewed each pastor, writing a biographical sketch of the pastor, an informational overview of each church, and analyzing the causes for the growth of each Sunday School/church. This book became an instant best seller as listed in the *Christian Bookstore Journal*.³ Bob Walker, editor of *Christian Life* and *Christian Bookstore Journal* said, “*The Ten Largest Sunday Schools* hit the world like a thunderclap, because most people thought the Protestant church was dying. Also, everyone thought liberal theology was spreading, but these churches were strong, conservative bastions of the faith, with strong evangelistic outreaches.”⁴

This book changed the public perception of Towns from being an authority in youth work to an authority in the area of Sunday School. The contents of the book became the basis for invitations for him to lecture at Bible colleges and theological seminaries on the topics of Sunday School, Evangelism, and Church Growth.

Towns had taken a course on religious sociological research at Garrett Theological Seminary. This was the foundation for Chapter Thirteen, “Methods of Research.” This chapter described the method of case study he used for research for this book. Towns did more than just visit a church and write down what was told him or what he observed. Rather, he followed sociological principles in gathering data, comparing data, and drawing conclusions from data. When he wrote this book, the Church Growth Movement had not yet come into national focus. Donald McGavran, called the “father of the Church Growth Movement,” had just gone to Fuller Theological Seminary and was

³ Stephen Richard (Sam) Towns, Elmer L. Towns, *A Biographical and Chronological Presentation of His Writings*, (DMin Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1988).

⁴ Bob Walker, *Christian Life*, circa 68.

writing in the area of foreign missions/Church Growth. The two men, apart from each other and unknown to each other, were coming to the same conclusions about why churches grow.

Later, the Church Growth Movement was characterized as a theological and sociological discipline. Just as a discipline has its own terminology, rules or laws, pioneers, periodicals and academic institutions to perpetuate its disciplines; so the discipline of Church Growth was in its infancy stages of formation during the late 1960s. Later C. Peter Wagner would call the *Ten Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes Them Grow* the first American Church Growth book and the first book on the mega church.⁵

The book on the *Ten Largest Sunday Schools* became a parallel textbook in the courses Towns was teaching on Christian Education. In his course on Sunday School, obviously this book became the foundation for examining *The Laws of Sunday School Growth*. When he taught a course on children's work and/or adult work, he described the ministry of evangelism of these churches to that specific age group. It would be another ten years before Towns began teaching courses on Church Growth and Evangelism.

While teaching the course *Introduction to Children's Ministry* at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, he realized that evangelical textbooks described methods, principles and materials, but did not deal with cutting edge innovations, nor did they deal with future trends in children's work.

The individual Sunday School teacher in a self-contained classroom was presented in most textbooks. But as Towns traveled through the churches, he saw open classrooms with several teachers using a team teaching approach. He saw group teaching and group learning, and he realized that the concept of keeping students quiet and

⁵ Elmer Towns, *A Practical Encyclopedia: Evangelism and Church Growth*, 77.

listening was being replaced by activity-teaching, activity-learning, and shared leadership by teachers.

Towns' research for a book also became the material that he was teaching in *Introduction to Children's Ministry*. Again, following the format he had used in previous books, he used a modern journalistic style of writing, based on sociological and theological research to draw conclusions. The book, *Team Teaching with Success*, Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing, 1971, was filled with pictures, diagrams, and contemporary illustrations; yet it also was supported by quotations and footnotes from academic research.

Theology Books

While teaching Christian Education courses in small Bible colleges, he always had to teach outside the field in which he was appointed. At Midwest Bible College he began teaching courses in systematic theology because he had been a theology major at Dallas Theological Seminary. From the very beginning he committed himself to completely preparing his notes. At Midwest Bible College he eventually taught all the various courses in theology so that he ended up with a full set of notes in systematic theology. In his first year of teaching at Midwest Bible College, he noted, "It was like final exams every night. I would teach up to the edge of my knowledge every day, then go home every night and stay up past midnight, preparing my lectures for the next day." He indicated that the good thing that came out of these nightly sessions was that he prepared his lectures so they could be used on a continuous basis, i.e., he outlined the content and worked them into complete, comprehensive lesson plans.

As Towns was lecturing on Church Growth and traveling to pastors' conferences, he realized most pastors had a faulty view of ecclesiology; hence, they had a faulty view of evangelism and ministry. Towns joked on several occasions, "One of these days I am going to write a systematic theology that will give a proper focus on church ministry and evangelism." He went on to say that his systematic theology would give a proper place to pastoral leadership, the Holy Spirit, and Bibliology, i.e., the study of the Scriptures.

Towns realized that writing a systematic theology is a lifelong endeavor. But he has never been shy to take on large projects. As he taught systematic theology at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, he began writing prolegomena, and then he wrote Bibliology into a written text. These first steps to a theology textbook were printed in the Liberty University print shop and became the required text in his classes. Once the material was printed, he heavily edited the text until he was satisfied it was in final form. Progressively, Towns moved through each one of the divisions of systematic theology until he completed his entire text. He chose the title *Theology for Today* because he wanted a systematic theology that was relevant for contemporary church ministry and evangelism, and answered many of the questions that were not dealt with in most other systematic theology texts.

The first complete volume of *Theology for Today* was typed, printed and used in the Liberty University School of Lifelong Learning, later called the DLP (Distance Learning Program). Towns taped Theology 510, which is a survey of all the areas of systematic theology. The students in Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary took this course in their pursuit of a Master of Arts in Religion and Master of Divinity degree

programs. As a result, many students worldwide “cut their theological teeth” on *Theology for Today*.

Bible Study and Exposition and Christian Life Books

Even though Elmer Towns is known for Sunday School and Church Growth, his passion has always been teaching systematic theology because it deals with the Word of God. In addition, he has always taught Bible courses in both Bible colleges and seminaries; such courses as Old Testament Survey, New Testament Survey, The Gospel of John, Acts, etc. Towns never forgot his training at Dallas Theological Seminary, where the motto is, “Preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:2). Even though he is asked many times to lecture at pastors’ conferences, Sunday School conventions, and Church Growth seminars, still his passion on Sunday is to preach the Word of God. In these sermons, he does not bring a “Church Growth” challenge, but most always comes back to preaching the Word of God with a stronger teaching ministry.

In the providence of God, Dr. Jerry Falwell asked Elmer Towns to take over the Pastor’s Bible Class at Thomas Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, VA on February 1, 1987. On several occasions Towns had taught the class for Dr. Falwell, and received a positive response from the congregation. However, Dr. Falwell was not sure Towns wanted to give up his travel to various churches to remain in the home pulpit each week. So when Dr. Falwell asked Towns to teach the class, he asked, “Are you willing to give up traveling and make this your primary preaching responsibility each Sunday?” Towns testifies that it was the Spirit of God speaking to him, because it is what he has trained to do and what he loves to do. He immediately said “yes” and began the first Sunday in

February, 1987. A partial list of the many Sunday School lessons he has taught is available on his website, www.elmertowns.com.

On two previous occasions, Towns had taught in Bible/family camps, and had brought a series on the names of Jesus. So, this was one of the first series of messages he did in the Pastor's Bible Class. These lessons were developed into *The Names of Jesus*, Accent Books, Denver, Colorado, 1987. Towns knew from the positive response of the people in Lynchburg that it could be a good selling book. Because of the good reception by the public, Towns did a second book, *My Father's Names*, Regal Books, 1991. Originally this was called *The Names of God in the Old Testament*, but that was too narrow, so Regal Books asked if he would add a chapter to broaden the title to *My Father's Names*. Towns added a chapter on the name "Father," and the book has been a strong seller,⁶ i.e., the second in the trilogy on the names of God.

Seeing the first two went well, Towns committed himself to teach a third series that became the book, *The Names of the Holy Spirit*, Regal Books, 1994. When he began research on the names of the Holy Spirit, Towns thought he would find 12 or 15 different names or titles for the Holy Spirit, and was wondering if he could get Sunday School lessons on such a narrow topic. Up to that point, he couldn't find a single book that had ever been written on the names of the Holy Spirit, nor could he find any research that had been done. He was pioneering a new area. He looked up every reference to the Holy Spirit (almost 500) and found that only approximately 80 used the adjective *holy* with the name Spirit. Of course the third Person of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit, but there were many other identifiable descriptions of the Spirit. These became the rich ground of

⁶ As of August 1, 2005, *My Father's Names* has sold 37,535 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns' editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

research and Bible exposition. Towns found over 125 different names, titles, and metaphors for the Holy Spirit in Scriptures.

Because of the newness of the topic, the book became an instant success.⁷ Also, Towns knew that it would be extremely successful in Charismatic circles because of their emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Even though neither the book nor Towns is Pentecostal or Charismatic, still they loved the book, used it, and contributed to its sales. In 1994, the coveted Gold Medallion was awarded to Elmer Towns for the book, *The Names of the Holy Spirit*, by the Evangelical Publishers Association (EPA) and the Christian Booksellers Association (CBA). The book has been translated into 4 foreign languages.

Towns became a consultant to Gospel Light Publishing/Regal Books in 1992. In 1993 at a consultant meeting with the staff at Regal Books, Towns gave a list of proposed topics of books that Regal ought to publish. One of the topics was *fasting*, and immediately everyone at the table recognized that it could be a great book because nothing had been written on fasting in many years. The editorial team discussed who could write the book, but they could not come up with the proper person to do it. Then Towns raised his hand and said, “I could do it.” The editorial team responded to Towns, “What do you know about fasting?”

Towns explained that since the early days at Liberty University he had taught a yearly orientation class to the RAs (Resident Advisors) and SLDs (Student Life Directors) on fasting. Towns explained that the students at Liberty University as well as members at Thomas Road Baptist Church had, on a regular basis, fasted for God to

⁷ As of August 1, 2005, *The Names of the Holy Spirit* has sold 27,016 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns’ editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

supply buildings, money, healings, and other answers to prayer. So the editorial team told Towns to go ahead and write the book.

After researching the book, he had difficulty putting it together. Towns told his wife that he couldn't come up with the right strategy or title for the book. She said, "Since it's about fasting, you ought to fast about the book." He spent the following Monday fasting, and in the evening she asked him, "What has God told you to write on?" He confessed he had done more research, prayed and was not getting anywhere. Then he said to her a memorable statement, "I've only got one sermon on fasting, and it has nine points." Suddenly he realized he should take each of the nine points and develop them into chapters. He took the material he had been teaching to his students and developed each point into a chapter. The material came from Isaiah 58:6-8 and in that passage God promised nine results that a believer can get through fasting.

1. The Disciple's Fast to Break Addiction
2. The Ezra Fast to Solve Problems
3. The Samuel Fast for Evangelism and Revival
4. The Elijah Fast to Break Habits and Mental Discouragement
5. The Widow's Fast for Humanitarian Needs
6. The Saint Paul Fast to Make Decisions
7. The Daniel Fast for Health and Healing
8. The John the Baptist Fast for Testimony
9. The Esther Fast for Spiritual Warfare

This book *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* has become the biggest seller of individual books that Dr. Towns has written. While other books may have had more copies printed and distributed through gift offers such as two books through the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and his contribution to *Nelson's Bible Stories*; this one

book represents the largest number of single book sales. Over 220,000 copies of the book have been sold through book stores and the Crossings Book of the Month Club.⁸

During the 1990s the impetus and publicity given to the Church Growth Movement began to decline. With its decline, Towns became convinced that the key to successful church growth and outreach was not another church outreach program, nor was it seminars to learn new evangelistic techniques, or any tool or method. Rather, Towns became convinced that the spiritual factors related to church growth were more crucial than every before.

The next book by Towns was *Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough*. While this did not come out of his university or seminary teachings, it came out of one sermon he preached. During the summer of 1996, Elmer and Ruth Towns took a vacation trip from St. Petersburg to Moscow, Russia, on a riverboat sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ. On a Sunday morning as they were crossing the White Sea, no Sunday morning service had been planned. Towns took it upon himself to plan one, with agreement of the captain. Using the intercom system throughout the boat, he invited everyone to the dining room for the church service. Knowing he had all types of religious backgrounds, i.e., Catholic, Russian Orthodox, and various American denominations, Towns decided to speak on the Lord's Prayer. He reasoned that people would not have a Bible but they would know the Lord's Prayer, so he used that as his text. Bill Greig, Jr., president of Gospel Light, was on the trip, and when he heard the sermon, he said to Towns, "You have got to write that up in a book for us." With that exhortation, Towns began writing that Sunday afternoon a book on the

⁸ As of August 1, 2005, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* has sold 220,548 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns' editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

Lord's Prayer. When he returned to Lynchburg, he taught eight lessons through the Lord's Prayer to his Sunday School class (i.e., one lesson for each of the seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer, plus an introductory lesson).

Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough has become a success because many churches use the Lord's Prayer in their Sunday morning worship service, so it was only natural for them to study this prayer.⁹ Regal Books/Gospel Light also released a videotape series of Dr. Towns teaching the Lord's Prayer to be used in Sunday School classes.

During this time, Towns was serving on the program committee for the Amsterdam 2000 meeting (a training conference in Amsterdam, Netherlands for international itinerant evangelists). The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association paid the way for 10,000 evangelists from the nations of the world to be trained in proclamation/crusade evangelism. During one of the planning sessions, Towns mentioned to Billy Graham, "You ought to give away this book on the Lord's Prayer." When Billy Graham asked why, Towns said, "Many that you influence in Orthodox, Catholic, and liturgical churches pray the Lord's Prayer every Sunday, but they might not be born again. However, if they understood and prayed this prayer properly, they could become Christians." In December 1999 the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association gave away approximately 188,000 copies as a gift offer.¹⁰

The editorial team at Regal Books asked for a third book in the "spiritual breakthrough" series. Towns proposed a manuscript on biblical meditation. The editorial

⁹ As of August 1, 2005, *Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough* has sold 37,781 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns' editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

¹⁰ Personal letter to Elmer Towns from Regal Books/Gospel Light, 16 May 2000.

team was highly enthusiastic because of the emphasis at the time on spirituality. Again, Towns used his Sunday School class as a basis for the preparation of the book on meditation.

Since Towns had done case studies on churches, he went into the Scriptures and identified ten different people who meditated on God, each one for a different purpose. He taught a series of twelve lessons on biblical meditation. These 12 chapters are:

1. Introduction
2. The Lost Art of Meditation
3. The David Model: Considering God's Creation and Majesty
4. The Mary Model: Pondering the Person of Jesus
5. The Saint John Model: Thinking About the Cross
6. The Joshua Model: Focusing on Biblical Principles
7. The Saint Paul Models: Becoming Like Christ
8. The Timothy Model: Meditating on Your Calling and Gifts
9. The Haggai Model: Considering Your Failures
10. The Asaph Model: Meditating on God's Intervention
11. The Malachi Model: Meditating on God's Name
12. The Korah Model: Contemplating Intimacy with God

Biblical Meditation for Spiritual Breakthrough never sold as well as the editorial team at Regal Books expected or as Towns expected.¹¹ While those who used the book gave it a great recommendation concerning its Bible content and its relevance of the topic, the book did not take off in sales. Now Towns thinks the reason is that the title did not promise the reader something as he meditated, nor was the average Christian in America ready for contemplative spirituality. Rather, most Americans are into pragmatic Christianity. They want a faith that works for them or solves a problem in their lives.

¹¹ As of August 1, 2005, *Biblical Meditations for Spiritual Breakthrough* has sold 14,661 copies. (Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns' editorial secretary at Liberty University.)

Educational Positions

The following is a list of the schools or positions held by Elmer Towns in higher education:

1. Instructor, Dallas Bible College, Dallas, Texas, 1957-58.
2. Associate Professor of Christian Education, Midwest Bible College, St. Louis, Missouri, 1958-61.
3. Advisory Council, Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges, Wheaton, Illinois, 1959-61.
4. President, Winnipeg Bible College, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1961-65.
5. President, Canadian Conference of Christian Educators, 1963-64.
6. Associate Professor of Christian Education, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, 1965-71.
7. Executive Vice President and Co-Founder, Liberty Baptist College, Lynchburg, Virginia, 1971-73.
8. Executive Vice President and Co-Founder, Baptist University of America, Decatur, Georgia, 1974-77.
9. Editor in Chief, Jerry Falwell Ministries, Lynchburg, Virginia, 1977-80.
10. Dean, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, Virginia, 1979-92.
11. Dean, School of Religion, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia, 1980-Present.
12. Member, planning committee for Amsterdam 2000, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1999.
13. Vice President, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia, 1985-98; 2003-2004.

Part-time Educational Positions

The following is a list of part-time academic positions held by Elmer Towns within the realm of higher education:

Adjunct Professor:

1. Associate Professor (summer school) Winona Lake School of Theology, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1966-68.
2. California Graduate School of Theology, Glendale, California, 1973-80.

Visiting lecturer:

1. Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California, 1997.
2. Word of Life Bible Institute, Schroon Lake, New York, 1983-94.
3. Horizon Bible Institute (on campus of Horizon Christian Fellowship), San Diego, California, 1997.

Visiting Professor:

1. Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, 1999, 2001, 2003.
2. Baptist Bible College West, Anaheim, California, 1998, 1999.
3. Birmingham Theological Seminary (campus of Briarwood Presbyterian Church), Birmingham, Alabama, 1997, 1998.
4. Dallas Theological Seminary Extension, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1999.
5. Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, 1999.
6. Evangel Theological Seminary, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 2001, 2003.
7. Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1987.
8. Northwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, 1990.
9. Northwestern School of Ministry, Kirkland, Washington, 1997.
10. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 1993.
11. Tennessee Temple Theological Seminary, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1992.
12. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, 1985.
13. Wellspring School of Theology, Cincinnati, OH, 2002.
14. Winebrenner Theological Seminary, Findlay, Ohio, 2003.

Places of Ministry in Higher Educational Institutions

The following is list of the higher educational institutions where Elmer Towns has lectured:

1. Altoona Bible Institute, Manitoba, Canada
2. Anderson University, Anderson, Indiana
3. Asbury College, Wilmore, Kentucky
4. Assembly of God Theological Society, Springfield, Missouri
5. Atlantic Christian University, Monkton, New Brunswick, Canada
6. Baptist Bible College, Seoul, Korea
7. Baptist Bible College, Springfield, Missouri
8. Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary, Jacksonville, Texas*
9. Berean Baptist College, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
10. Bethany Nazarene University, Bethany, Oklahoma
11. Bethel Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota*
12. Biola University and Talbot Theological Seminary, La Mirada, California*
13. Bob Jones College, Seoul, Korea
14. Briercrest Bible Institute, Caronport, Saskatchewan, Canada
15. Broadfording Christian College, Hagerstown, Maryland
16. Bryan College, Dayton, Tennessee*
17. California Baptist College, Sacramento, California*
18. Canadian Bible College, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada*
19. Carolina Bible Institute & Seminary, Pine Level, North Carolina
20. Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
21. Central Bible College, Springfield, Missouri

22. Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Minneapolis, Minnesota
23. Chongshin University, Seoul, Korea
24. Circleville Bible College, Circleville, Ohio
25. Colorado Christian College, Denver, Colorado*
26. Columbia Bible College, Columbia, South Carolina
27. Covenant College, Chattanooga, Tennessee
28. Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri
29. Crown College, Powell, Tennessee
30. Denver Baptist Theological Seminary, Denver, Colorado
31. Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy, Massachusetts
32. Eastern Wesleyan College, Allentown, Pennsylvania*
33. Faith Way Bible College, Greater Detroit, Michigan
34. Florida Bible College, Fort Lauderdale, Florida
35. Free Will Baptist Bible College, Nashville, Tennessee
36. George Fox College, Newburn, Oregon*
37. Georgia Baptist College, Wynette County, Georgia
38. Gulf Coast Bible College, Houston, Texas*
39. Hyles-Anderson College, Crown Point, Indiana*
40. Indiana Baptist College, Indianapolis, Indiana*
41. Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, Indiana
42. John Wesley College, High Point, North Carolina
43. Korean Theological Seminary, Koshin University in Pusan, Korea
44. Liberty Baptist College, delivered lectures in Bristol and London, England, "The History of Wesleyanism"
45. Luther Rice Seminary, Jacksonville, Florida*
46. Massillon Bible College, Massillon, Ohio
47. Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania
48. Miami Christian University, Miami, Florida
49. MidAmerica Nazarene University, Olathe, Kansas*
50. Midwestern Baptist College, Pontiac, Michigan
51. Mountain View Bible College, Didsbury, Alberta, Canada*
52. National Baptist Theological Seminary, Seoul, Korea
53. Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Kansas
54. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*
55. North Central University, Minneapolis, Minnesota
56. Northeastern Bible College, Essex Falls, New Jersey
57. Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho*
58. Olivet Nazarene University, Bourbonnais, Illinois
59. Ontario Baptist Bible College, London, Ontario, Canada*
60. Oxford University, St. Regis College, Oxford, England
61. Pacific Coast Baptist Bible College, National City, California
62. Pacific Coast Baptist Bible College, San Dimas, California*
63. Practical Bible College, Johnson City, New York*
64. Prairie Bible Institute, Three Hills, Alberta, Canada
65. Providence College and Seminary, Otterburne, Manitoba, Canada*
66. Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi

67. Shasta Bible College, Redding, California
68. Southeastern Baptist College (Baptist Missionary Association), Laurel, Mississippi*
69. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina
70. Southeastern College, Lakeland, Florida
71. Southern Nazarene University, Bethany, Oklahoma
72. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas*
73. Southwestern School of Ministry, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*
74. Southwestern University, Waxahachie, Texas
75. Spurgeon Baptist Bible College, Mulberry, Florida
76. Steinbeck Bible Institute, Steinbeck, Manitoba, Canada
77. The Jerry Falwell College, Trivandrum, India
78. The John Wesley College, Owosso, Michigan*
79. The United Wesleyan College, Allentown, Pennsylvania
80. Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, Tennessee
81. Trinity Baptist College, Jacksonville, Florida*
82. University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida
83. Vanguard University, Costa Mesa, California
84. Virginia Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, Virginia
85. Wesley Biblical Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi
86. Western Baptist College, Salem, Oregon
87. Western Evangelical Seminary, Greater Portland, Oregon

* Indicates Towns was invited to present a series of lectures for academic credit, or to fulfill a designated lectureship.

CHAPTER 6

SURVEY OF ACADEMIC SUPERVISORS

In the winter of 2004 a survey was sent to individuals connected to Elmer Towns through his teaching ministry. There are many different areas in which a survey could be conducted, such as the local church (pastors, Sunday School workers), parachurch organizations, denominations (Assemblies of God, Southern Baptist Convention), and higher education. In 1995, Dr. Rick Rasberry conducted a survey of individuals who had ordered resource packets created by Elmer Towns as part of his Doctor of Ministry project (*An Analysis of the "Friend Day" Program Written by Elmer Towns and Published by Church Growth Institute, Lynchburg, Virginia, 1995, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary*). Dr. David Brown also conducted a survey in 1998 of members of the North American Society for Church Growth. David Brown's survey included individuals from both higher education and local church settings (see *A Chronological Presentation of the Writings of Elmer L. Towns From 1986-1999*, available at www.elmertowns.com).

For purposes of this project, it was decided that individuals within the realm of higher education would be surveyed to ascertain Elmer Towns' contribution to their specific programs and students. The survey is not intended to draw conclusions regarding the effectiveness of Elmer Towns' teachings; rather, it is intended to provide a basis for which Elmer Towns was asked to lecture at each specific institution, and how

these educators viewed his role in their institutions. Because of the nature of the survey, observations will be made and opinions will be stated, but exact conclusions will not be possible to discover.

In total, 53 institutions of higher education (colleges, universities, and seminaries) were identified as having Elmer Towns conduct a class at their organizations within the last 25 years (from 1980-2004). Due to the limitations of accurate record keeping dating back 25 years, and the fact that many individuals who had invited Towns to lecture at their school have since retired, etc. from their positions, only 44 individuals were actually sent surveys. Of the 44 individuals that received surveys, 17 responded, establishing a 39% response rate. Considering the responsibilities and requirements placed on the individuals surveyed (presidents, chairs of departments, deans), the number of respondents was encouraging.¹

The respondents were asked two categories of questions, the first dealing with the areas of teaching conducted by Elmer Towns at their institutions. The areas are those presented in chapter four:

1. Church Growth
2. Sunday School
3. Christian Education
4. Bible Study and Exposition
5. Christian Life
6. Theology

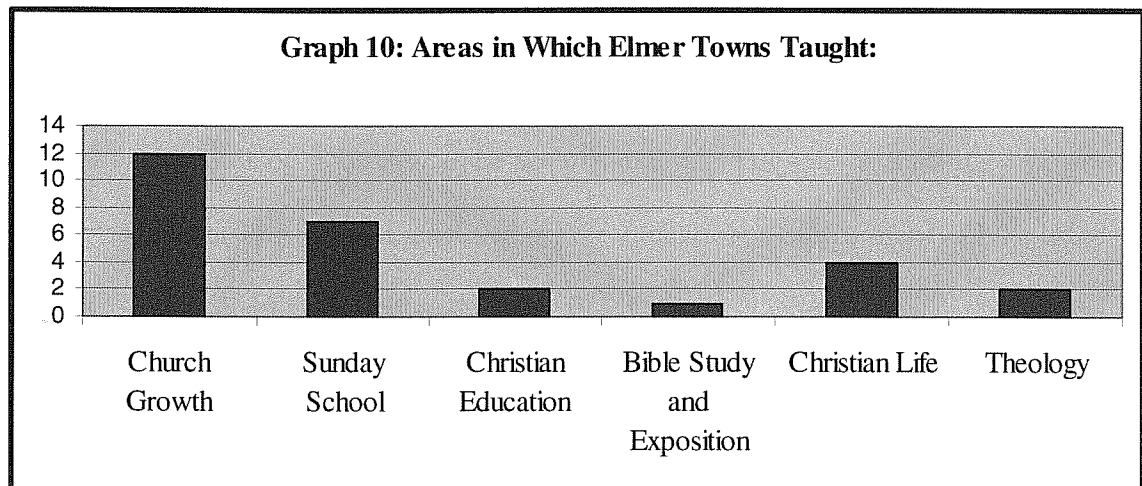
Due to the fact that some of the courses taught by Elmer Towns include more than one of these areas, some of the respondents indicated more than one area of instruction.

¹ A complete list of schools where Elmer Towns has taught within the last twenty-five years, including the list of those schools surveyed, and those schools which responded to the survey are available in Appendix E.

The second area covered by the survey dealt with the motivation behind the organization's asking Elmer Towns to conduct a course at their school. They were asked to indicate what they anticipated from the teachings of Elmer Towns. The individuals were asked to choose one of the following options:

1. New and innovative ideas
2. Reaffirming of accepted church methods and principles
3. Explanation of Scripture
4. Application of Scripture
5. Motivation of students

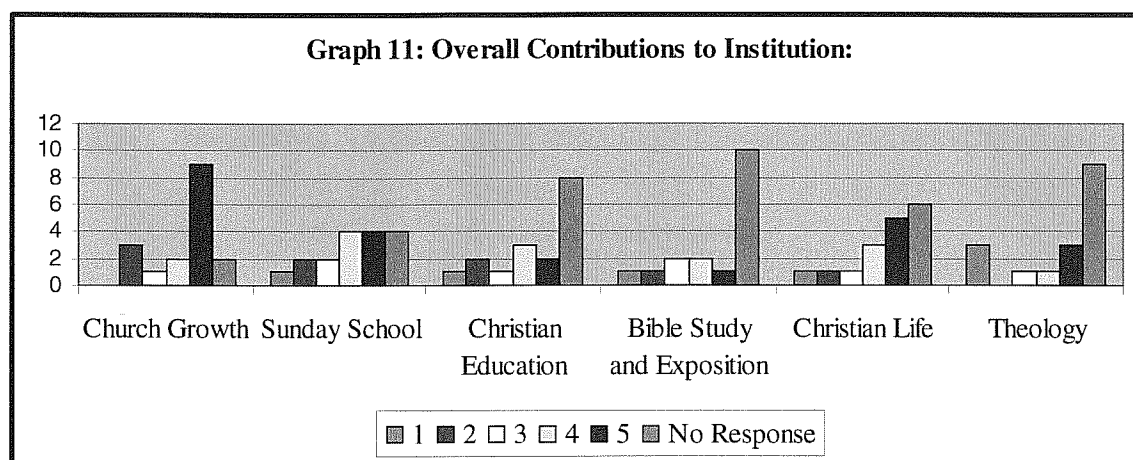
When asked to indicate the area in which Elmer Towns conducted his course, the results focused primarily on Church Growth and Sunday School. The following chart indicates the results:



As is indicated from the chart, the greatest area in which Elmer Towns taught was Church Growth, followed by Sunday School. The Christian Life was a distant third, with the other three areas having fewer responses.

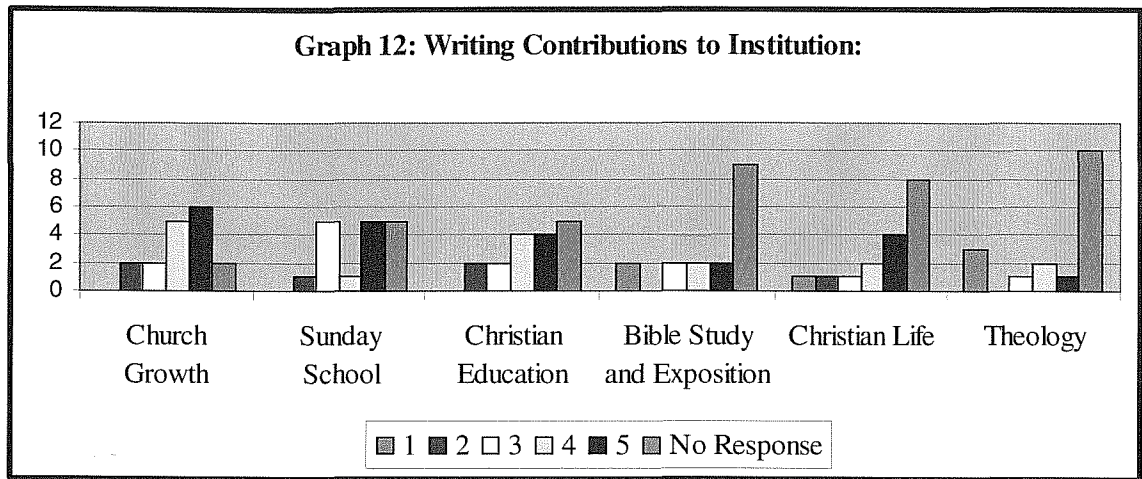
The next question asked dealt with the overall contributions which Elmer Towns made to the institution. The respondents chose from the same six categories, indicating on a scale of 1-5 the level of contribution received by their institution ("1" indicating

little overall contribution, and “5” indicating a strong overall contribution. The results are as follows:



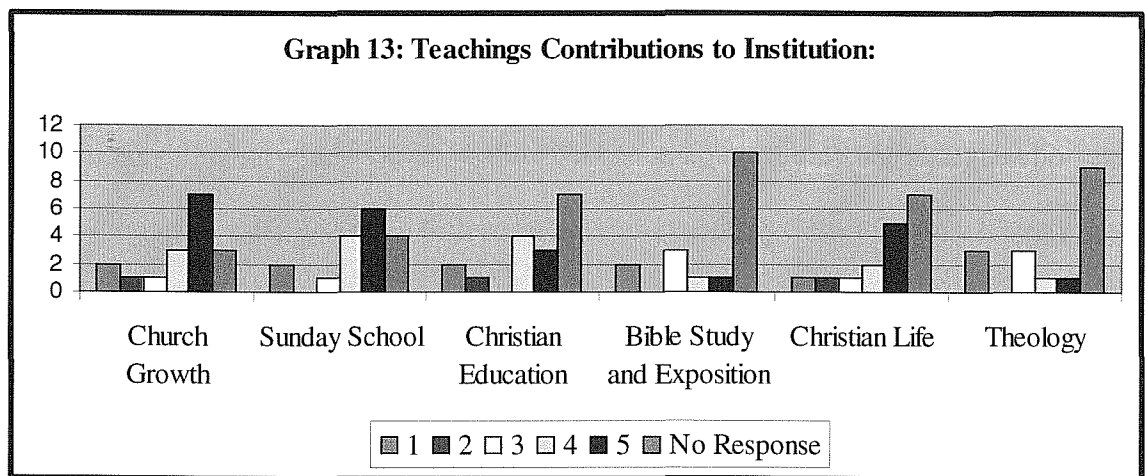
The chart indicates that the greatest overall contributions to the various institutions were in the areas of Church Growth (9 responses of “5” and 2 responses of “4”), Sunday School (4 responses of “5” and 4 responses of “4”), and Christian Life (5 responses of “5” and 3 responses of “4”). As can be seen from the responses, the teaching and writing ministry of Elmer Towns, as it relates to higher education, deals primarily in the areas of Church Growth, Sunday School and Christian Life.

Seeking to gain a better understanding of the previous responses, the researcher then asked those surveyed to evaluate individually the writings and teachings of Elmer Towns in the same areas, using the same scale. The following two charts represent the writing and teaching contributions of Elmer Towns to the institutions:



As is seen from the results, Church Growth once again is the great area of contribution from the writings of Elmer Towns (6 responses of “5” and 5 responses of “4”). Church Growth is followed by Christian Education (4 responses of “5” and 4 responses of “4”), Sunday School (5 responses of “5” and 1 response of “4”) and Christian Life (4 responses of “5” and 2 responses of “4”) follow close behind.

When asked in what area the teachings of Elmer Towns had the greatest contribution to the institution, the results followed the pattern of the overall contributions, as indicated by the following chart:

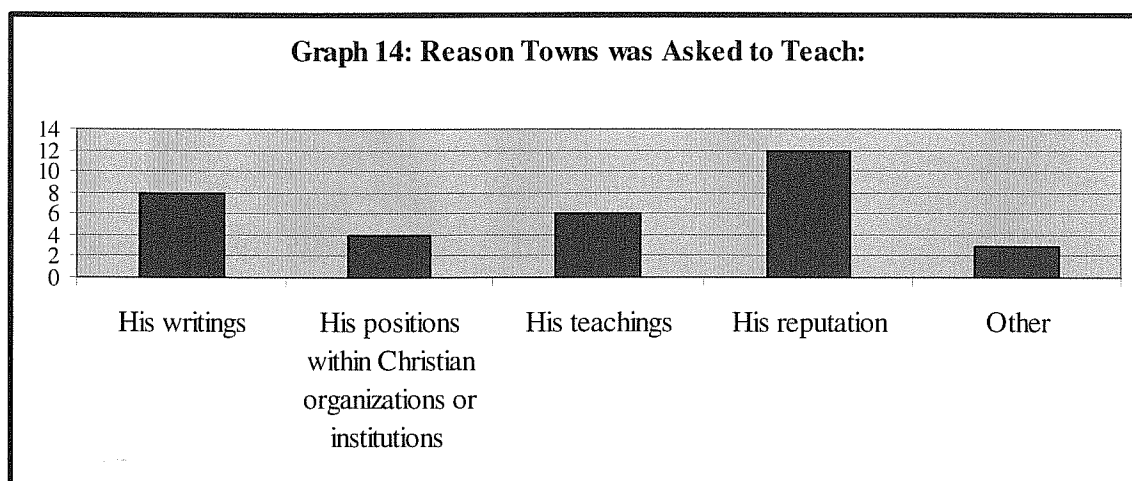


Church Growth continues to be the great area of contribution (7 responses of “5” and 3 responses of “4”). Sunday School is the second greatest contribution (6 responses of “5” and 4 responses of “4”), followed by Christian Life (5 responses of “5” and 2 responses of “4”) and Christian Education (3 responses of “5” and 4 responses of “4”).

From this first section of the survey, it can be observed that Elmer Towns was asked to conduct courses at schools of higher education primarily in order to contribute to the areas of Church Growth, Sunday School, and Christian Life. It can also be observed that the writing and teaching of Towns did in fact contribute to the institutions in those specific areas. Church Growth, Sunday School and Christian Life were consistently indicated to be areas of contribution to the institutions.

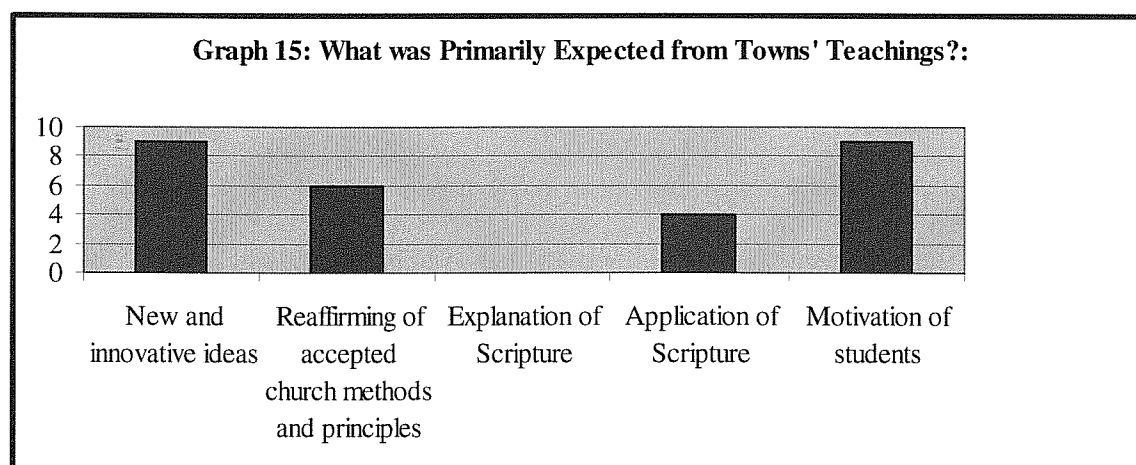
It can be evidenced from Elmer Towns’ earliest writings that he is a known for his expertise in the area of Church Growth. His first book on the subject of Church Growth, *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes Them Grow*, written in 1969, set a pace for his writing that has continued even today. Although the primary focus of his writing over recent years has been the Christian Life, his influence in the realm of Church Growth continues.

The second area the survey covered dealt with the motivation behind the institutions of higher education requesting Towns to conduct a course at their schools. The respondents were given the following options regarding Elmer Towns: his writings, his positions within Christian organizations or institutions, his teachings, his reputation, or other. The following chart represents the results:

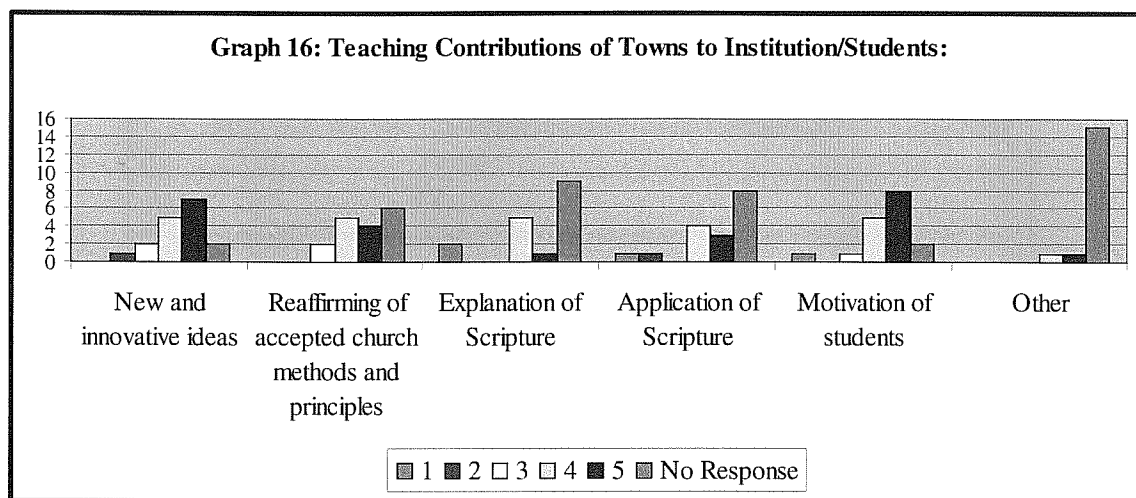


As was seen with the first question of the survey regarding the areas Towns taught, some respondents had more than one reason behind asking Elmer Towns to teach at their schools. His reputation and his writings top the list as the biggest motivators behind asking Towns to teach a course.

The survey then asked the individuals what they primarily expected from the teachings of Elmer Towns. As can be seen in the chart below, the respondents anticipated Towns to give the students both new and innovative ideas and motivation. The results of the question are seen in the following:

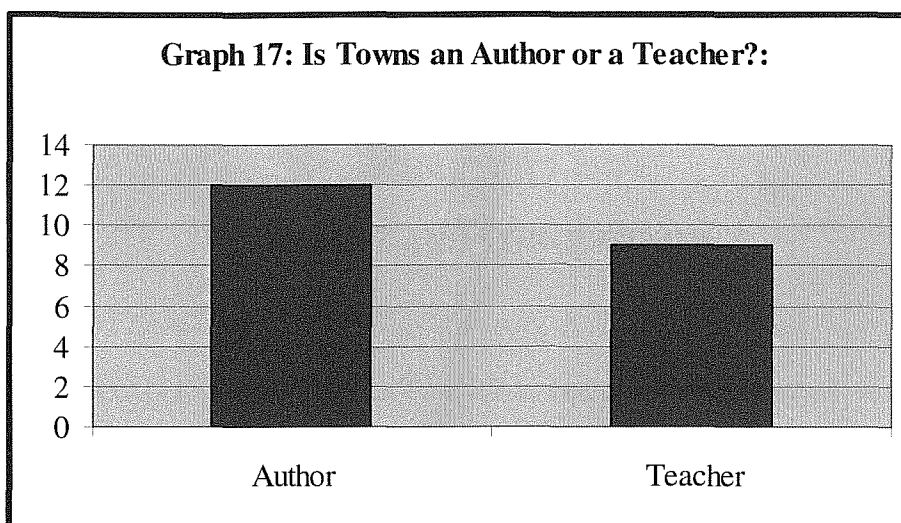


The overall teaching contributions of Towns to the institution/students were then analyzed in regard to the five previous areas. The individuals were asked to rate the contributions on a scale of 1 to 5 (“1” indicating little contribution and “5” indicating strong contribution). The results are as follows:



As the chart indicates, motivation of students (8 responses of “5” and 5 responses of “4”) and new and innovative ideas (7 responses of “5” and 5 responses of “4”) topped the list. If these results are coupled with the results regarding the areas in which Towns instructed the students, then the consensus would be that Towns delivered content related to the areas of Church Growth, Sunday School, and Christian Life, and that the various students received new and innovated ideas and were consequently motivated by Towns’ teachings.

When asked if they considered Towns an author or a teacher, the individuals surveyed offered mixed results. Four of the seventeen responses indicated that they considered him both an author and a teacher, noting that the two go hand-in-hand in Elmer Towns’ ministry. Overall, there were 12 responses indicating author and 9 responses indicating teacher. These results can be seen in the following chart:



Respondents also indicated that Towns has had a greater impact on their current ministry through his writings than his teachings (results were 12 for writing and 8 for teaching). This is most likely due to the fact that the writings of Elmer Towns are able to be used on a much broader basis than the teachings of Elmer Towns. Although he travels around the world teaching, his books have been able to influence numerous individuals whom he will never be able to impact on a face-to-face basis.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Throughout his ministry, Elmer Towns has been involved in numerous endeavors to strengthen and unite the kingdom of God. His teachings and his writings have combined to make his ministry both influential and insightful. Whether his audience was students sitting in a classroom of 400 or laymen attending a Saturday morning seminar at a local church, Elmer Towns has given of his time and efforts to communicate timeless principles to individuals within the Christian church. He is living a life that is truly touching and influencing others. Much can be learned from analyzing the writings and teachings of Elmer Towns, and the following is designed to draw conclusions regarding the effectiveness of his ministry to others. These qualities are evidenced through his teachings and writings, and they have been solidified through the research for this project.

1. *Unity* – When considering the teachings and writings of Elmer Towns, it is clear that although he is a Baptist, his true allegiance is to the universal kingdom of God. His writings appeal to a broad audience. An example of this is his rationale to Billy Graham concerning *Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough*. Towns felt that members of many denominations would consider reading a book about the Lord's Prayer, even if they were not Baptist. His teaching ministry has also exemplified a trend towards unity. Although it is a consideration beyond the scope of this project, his ministry within

local churches extends to other denominations, including Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. As Jones and Senter indicated in their work, the ministry of Elmer Towns has helped prepare the way for many parachurch organizations and cross-denominational ministries and services.

2. *Vision* – The ministry of Elmer Towns has been defined by many visionary decisions and actions. Within his writing ministry, he often identifies new trends through his works. For example, the book *Into the Future*, written with Warren Bird, identified current and future trends regarding ministry in a postmodern world. The same can be said of his recent book, *The Perimeters of Light*, written with Ed Stetzer. Within his teaching ministry, Elmer Towns co-founded two universities (Liberty University and Baptist University of America). While at Winnipeg Bible College he led the school in obtaining accreditation, which enabled the school to offer the first accredited degrees from a Canadian Bible college. He has also participated in numerous global projects requiring a great deal of vision. Included in these projects are the Global Pastor's Network and the Amsterdam 2000 meetings.

3. *Church Growth* – Through his entire ministry, Elmer Towns has been known for his influence in the area of Church Growth. Although a majority of his current writings are in other arenas (Christian Life and Bible Study and Exposition), he continues to consistently write and teach about Church Growth. He is an authority in the field of Church Growth, and he has kept that influence throughout his entire career. A majority of his teachings and lecturing at other institutions of higher education deals with the area of Church Growth; this indicates that his unique contribution to the academic world has largely come through this field.

4. *Discipline* – It has been said that more is caught than taught, and that has been the experience of this student regarding the life and ministry of Elmer Towns. Having had the opportunity to interact with Elmer Towns on a daily basis, the most striking characteristic of his life is his ability to discipline himself no matter what the situation. His extensive travel and engagements require him to deal with many conditions and situations. Yet, he remains focused and disciplined to continue writing, researching and teaching. As an example of his commitment and discipline, on a recent trip with Elmer Towns to Greece, this author observed that “layovers” and “free time” were opportunities for Towns to continue researching and writing. While the rest of the group was staring at the ceiling in the airports or waiting for boarding, Towns would be contently writing and dictating lessons and books. It is this trait that has perhaps had the greatest influence on this author, knowing that this dedication by Towns is not a result of his being a workaholic, but of his commitment to teaching and training the next generation of leaders.

5. *Breadth* – It does not take one long to discover that Elmer Towns’ ministry has been extremely broad in scope. Although some scholars and authors choose to focus on one area of expertise, Elmer Towns has chosen to influence and affect as many people as possible through as many avenues as possible. His teaching ministry extends throughout various denominations, parachurch organizations, and higher educational institutions. As has been described in great detail, his writings extend to six diverse areas, including many books within each of the six topics. This has all been accomplished by Towns at the same time. For example, Elmer Towns is currently the Dean of the School of Religion at Liberty University; the Dean of Bible Knowledge for the Global Pastor’s

Network; the Sunday School teacher for the 1,000 member Pastor's Bible Class at Thomas Road Baptist Church; the teacher of four classes every semester at Liberty University (two or three of which have 300+ students every semester). In addition, he continues to travel extensively and he writes approximately 3-4 books every year. This expansive ministry of Elmer Towns has enabled him to influence many people through many diverse avenues.

6. *Principles* – A distinguishing feature of the writings and teachings of Elmer Towns is his ability to draw principles from subject matter. He often recites the phrase to his students, “Methods are many; principles are few. Methods may change, but principles never do.” He is an individual who lives by the principles in the world, and incorporates the latest trends and methods to help carry out those principles. His numerous books in the area of Church Growth have often identified current trends and the principles upon which they are based. Books such as *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever* and *Perimeters of Light* help to identify the unique principles behind the movements, allowing the students to have consistent ministries in the midst of an ever-changing world.

7. *Never Satisfied* – Elmer Towns is never satisfied to simply rest on his past successes. He is constantly pushing forward to make things better and to modify his teaching and writings when necessary. This can be seen through his teaching and writing for Liberty University. Every three to four years, Elmer Towns revises his worktexts for his classrooms. These revisions can be slight or drastic. Recently, when updating a worktext for his Spiritual Foundations of Church Growth class, Towns changed about 50 percent of the book, indicating his commitment to staying current with the changing nature of the church, and also his desire to present material in relevant and new ways to his students.

8. *Character* – In many of his classes, Elmer Towns presents material regarding the nature of an individual's character. Having had the opportunity to travel with Towns, this author noted his commitment to being a person of character first-hand. When writing about topics like the Lord's Prayer, fasting, and other spiritual disciplines, Towns can speak as an expert, because he has lived a life committed to these qualities. He often mentions that before getting out of bed each morning, he prays the Lord's Prayer; and before going to bed each night, he kneels to pray. It is aspects like this that have produced in Elmer Towns a great deal of character, which has enabled him to have a lasting ministry, not stopped short by immorality or inappropriate decisions.

9. *Experience* – Related to many of the previously mentioned characteristics is the fact that Elmer Towns has experienced many things throughout his lifetime. These experiences have proven valuable for Towns, not just for their own sake, but for the fact that he writes and teaches about what he has experienced. In the classroom or through his writings, Towns is a storyteller. This aspect of his ministry is made possible through the many experiences he has had over the years and the principles he has drawn from these experiences. Everything to Towns is a learning opportunity, and he uses that opportunity to, in turn, teach others.

10. *Teacher* – Although he is committed to many different and diverse areas of ministry, Elmer Towns is a teacher at heart. Everything he does in a ministry setting is done with the aspect of teaching in mind. His writings are a direct result of his hunger and passion for teaching; they just allow him to reach a broader audience. Many of his books flow out of his lessons for his Pastor's Bible Class at Thomas Road Baptist Church. His writings are intended not just to entertain, but to teach principles and insights. *Stories on*

the Front Porch and *My Angel Named Herman* are examples of books that appear to be for entertainment purposes, but when truly analyzed, they are intended to teach others. His hunger for teaching drives him to be committed to the various causes with which he is involved, and keeps him true to the Lord.

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APPENDIX A

“Christian Educators of the 20th Century” – Elmer Leon Towns

“Christian Educators of the 20th Century”
(Biography from Talbot School of Theology)¹

Decades before megachurches became popular among U.S. American Christians, Elmer Leon Towns, Jr., had a passion for large churches. Writing for periodicals aimed both at ministers and at lay-people, Towns popularized Sunday School growth strategies to a broad cross-section of fundamentalist, conservative-evangelical, and Charismatic Christians. One particular article, “The Ten Largest Sunday Schools in the United States,” led to a series of articles and a book that focused on the dynamics of rapidly-growing conservative and fundamentalist churches in an era when *Life* magazine had dubbed Sunday School “the most wasted hour of the week” (Shrader, 1957, p. 110; Towns, 1968). Later, from platforms in Christian higher education, Towns established himself as a well-respected advocate for growing churches through effective organization and pastoral leadership.

Elmer Towns’ focus on congregational growth-patterns flowed not only from his passion for evangelism but also from his application of sociological insights to church growth. Many fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals had rejected or ignored the social understandings of the church proposed by Ernst Troeltsch, H. Richard Niebuhr, and David Moberg (see, e.g., Towns, 1967). Towns, however, treated their insights as bases for more effective church growth. This capacity to apply sociological principles to local-church ministries without compromising an essentially fundamentalist theology has been a chief characteristic of Towns’ career.

¹ Timothy Paul Jones and Mark H. Senter III, draft of the entry on Dr. Elmer Towns developed for the “Christian Educators of the 20th Century” web-based database project funded by the Lilly Endowment. Final version will be available in 2005 at the project website: www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/. Documentation for this section is original to Jones and Senter.

Early Life

Elmer Leon Towns, Jr., was born to Elmer Leon Towns, Sr., and Erin McFaddin Towns on October 21, 1932. The senior Towns worked as a hardware clerk in Savannah, Georgia. The values embraced by Towns' family were those of the Southern middle class. His father was, however, an alcoholic. This habit depleted the family's income and eventually took the senior Towns' life.

A door-to-door salesperson introduced Elmer Towns, Jr., to Sunday School when Towns was in the first grade. Despite the difficulties of his home life, Towns earned perfect-attendance pins for fourteen consecutive years.

Towns' academic record remained undistinguished until his seventh-grade year. During this year, his teacher challenged him to make the honor roll and, perhaps most important for his future, to write. One term paper written for this teacher was unremarkable for its content but highly remarkable for its length – the paper filled ninety-nine handwritten pages. Reflecting on this event, Towns later wrote, “A 99-page term paper built self-esteem. If I could do that, I could write a book. ... Having convinced myself I could write a book, throughout my teaching career whenever I was unable to find an adequate textbook for a particular course, I wrote one” (E. Towns, 1996, p. 55). It seems that the genesis of Towns' voluminous literary output may be traced, at least in part, to the passion for writing that a seventh-grade teacher cultivated in him.

Although Elmer Towns is best known as a Baptist, his childhood and teenaged years were spent in Presbyterian churches. He was sprinkled at the age of 12 and became a member of Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. His conversion

did not, however, occur until the summer after his high-school graduation, following a series of evangelistic meetings.

Called to Ministry

Financial difficulties prevented Towns from pursuing a degree in architecture at Georgia Technical College. So, he attended Columbia Bible College in South Carolina, 1950-1953. Both of Towns' parents believed that God had called their son to the ministry. During Towns' junior year of Bible college, he too recognized God's calling and became the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, a small congregation that the Savannah Presbytery had officially closed. Towns' book, *Stories About My First Church*, recounts his experiences—often humorous, sometimes heart-touching—in this congregation. During his time in the church, Westminster grew from a dying church into a vibrant, evangelistic congregation of more than 100.

At Columbia Bible College, Towns met Ruth Jean Forbes. The two married on August 21, 1953, and moved to Northwestern College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Regarding his marriage to Ruth, Elmer Towns has commented, “God brought a woman to my life who has spiritual gifts, who has ministered to me and has supported me in my ministry. ... Without her support and companionship, I could not have begun to do any of the things I have done. ... She is a challenge and a spur to me to do more for God in a better way” (S. Towns, 1985, p. 123).

While completing his Bachelor of Arts degree at Northwestern, Towns moved away from the covenantal Calvinism that had characterized his southern Presbyterian upbringing. In its place, Towns began to embrace a theological position that was

dispensational in its outlook and premillennial in its eschatology.

"Let's Don't Become Baptist"

From Northwestern, the Towns family moved to Texas, where Elmer Towns enrolled in the Master of Theology program at Dallas Theological Seminary. The Towns family visited the First Baptist Church of Dallas, where W.A. Criswell served as pastor. The personal ministry demonstrated through the Sunday School and visitation programs influenced them to continue attending, although Towns commented to his wife beforehand, "Let's don't become Baptist" (Towns, 1997, p. 185).

After hearing Criswell preach a message from the sixth chapter of Romans, Towns' resolve faltered. Influenced by Criswell, Towns dropped his affiliation with the Savannah Presbytery and received believers' baptism by immersion. Towns later identified this change as the natural result of his earlier movement from covenantal theology to dispensational theology.

It was at First Baptist Church of Dallas that Towns' fascination with large and growing churches emerged. This fascination formed the foundation for his future ministries. Towns said later, "Attending Dr. Criswell's large church with its warm, evangelistic fervor yet the dignity of worship and the majesty of God planted within me a role model of what a church should be. I have never gotten away from the fact that a perfect church would be something like First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas" (S. Towns, 1985, p. 128).

From Pastor to Christian Educator

Towns was not, however, content merely to observe what others were doing; he

desired to put what he was learning into practice. An effective Christian education organization was a key component of the successes he witnessed at First Baptist Church. Towns soon assumed the role of Christian education director at Southwestern Baptist Tabernacle. His emphasis on effective Christian education—as expressed primarily through Sunday School—continued when he accepted the pastorate at Faith Bible Church.

While serving Faith Bible Church and pursuing the Master of Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, Towns enrolled in the Master of Arts in Education program at Southern Methodist University. After simultaneously completed theses for both degrees, Town graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary and Southern Methodist University in 1958.

Towns' first full-time teaching position was at Midwest Bible College in St. Louis, Missouri. As a twenty-six-year-old Assistant Professor of Christian Education, Towns taught, provided seminars for local churches, and served as chair of the Department of Christian Education and as Executive Director of the Greater St. Louis Sunday School Association. His first published book emerged during this time—a mimeographed text entitled *Teaching Teens*, later revised and expanded to become *Successful Biblical Youth Work*. Although little of the material was unique, this work marked the beginning of a fruitful writing career that would continue into the twenty-first century. Because of his focus as an instructor on Christian education in general and on Sunday School in particular, Towns' writings during this era dealt primarily with building an effective Sunday School organization.

Towns served as a member of the committee that enabled Midwest Bible College

to achieve accreditation from the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges (AABC). His efforts in the accreditation process led to him being named to an AABC committee. At this time, Winnipeg Bible Institute and College of Theology—now Providence College and Seminary—was seeking someone to lead the Canadian institution toward AABC accreditation. Towns seemed to be the leader they needed to guide them toward accreditation. With this in mind, Winnipeg Bible Institute and College of Theology called Towns as president in 1961. During his tenure at Winnipeg, Towns led the school to receive AABC accreditation, to eliminate indebtedness through active fund-raising, and to attract a broader range of students.

When Trinity Evangelical Divinity School reinvented itself under the leadership of Kenneth S. Kantzer, Towns' success at Winnipeg attracted the dean's attention. Aware of his need for a doctoral degree, Towns viewed the opportunity to move to Trinity as a twofold blessing: Not only would he be teaching alongside well-known conservative scholars in an emerging divinity school but he would also be near institutions that offered the Doctor of Philosophy in religious education. Towns relocated to Deerfield, Illinois, in 1965 to begin teaching Christian education at Trinity.

"A Tremendous Surge of Publications"

Towns attempted to enter the Doctor of Philosophy program at Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. The school's theological liberalism troubled Towns, and, in the end, he earned only the Master of Religious Education. Although his plans for a Ph.D. were not realized, Towns was able to deepen his knowledge of religious education and to concentrate on writing in the fields of Christian education and church

growth. Describing Towns' time at Trinity, his son commented, "The research atmosphere of Trinity supported his desire to read, determine causes, and publish them. He established a habit of going to his study every evening after the 10:00 PM news and writing until 1:00 or 2:00 AM. Out of this background came a tremendous surge of publications" (S. Towns, 1985, p. 15). The reasons for this surge of publications were not, however, always research-driven. According to Elmer Towns, "Because money was a problem, I drove myself to write Sunday School lessons, popular articles, and books—and my motives were not always pure. Sometimes, I needed money because 'the baby needed shoes.' But ... I did not become a word hack. ... I wrote things that would advance the cause of Christ" (S. Towns, 1985, p. 127).

Towns' appointment as Sunday School editor of *Christian Life* magazine in 1966 provided a national forum from which he explored and expounded effective Sunday School growth strategies. For twelve years, Towns attracted readers by identifying and analyzing the principles that drove the largest and fastest-growing Sunday Schools in the nation. Most of his readers were part of the burgeoning independent Baptist movement—a movement in which Towns found a home slightly to the right of the mainstream evangelicalism championed at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

In one article written in 1967, Towns applied the congregational life-cycles suggested by Troeltsch to the growth-patterns of churches. Many of the books and articles that flooded from his nightly writing sessions built on this model of applying sociological models to conservative-evangelical and fundamentalist church growth. *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes Them Grow*, *Church Aflame*, *America's Fastest Growing Churches*, *Capturing a Town for Christ*, and *The World's Largest*

Sunday School all blended a passion for growth with a firm grasp of the sociological principles of Troeltsch, Niebuhr, and Moberg. The result was a vision of church growth that recognized the importance of social dynamics in growing congregations without discounting the work of the Holy Spirit. This vision was firmly grounded in fundamentalist theology yet, due to its integration with sociology, remained sufficiently universal to describe the dynamics of other groups, including evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Wesleyan congregations.

The Move to Lynchburg

Towns' visibility in the areas of Christian education and church growth led Jerry Falwell to contact Towns when Thomas Road Baptist Church made plans to start a Bible college. Falwell founded Lynchburg Baptist College—later renamed Liberty University—with Elmer Towns in 1971. A church-based institution of higher education fit Towns' model of Christian education and provided a platform for applying his philosophies of education and church growth.

In addition to being the sole full-time instructor and the Executive Vice-President at Lynchburg Baptist College, Towns served as the Sunday School Superintendent of Thomas Road Baptist Church. Between 1971 and 1973, Sunday School enrollment at Thomas Road grew from 4,000 to over 7,000. Towns' writings during this era reflected his movement from teaching in a single field to functioning as a practitioner and a generalist; he produced fewer writings on Sunday School in the 1970s and wrote more in the areas of Christian life and evangelism.

In 1973, Towns left Lynchburg, returning to his hometown of Savannah. His

stated objective for this “self-imposed retirement” was full-time freelance journalism (S. Towns, 1985, pp. 14, 17); this retirement was, however, short-lived. Towns soon found himself consulting with another fledgling institution of higher learning. The next year, the Baptist University of America emerged from the merger of seven small Bible colleges in the southeastern United States. The objective was to create a single, strong fundamentalist Baptist college. The school settled in Atlanta, and Towns became the vice president and academic dean. He retained these positions until 1977.

Jerry Falwell’s publications had expanded rapidly in the latter 1970s. Finding himself in need of an editor-in-chief for his publications, Falwell again turned to Elmer Towns. After investing a year in Falwell’s ministry as the editor of *Faith Aflame* and as a founder of *Fundamentalist Journal* and *The Journal Champion*, Towns made a lateral move within Falwell’s organization, becoming the dean of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. Two years later, Towns also became dean of the B.R. Lakin School of Religion at Liberty University.

In the early 1980s, while maintaining his administrative and teaching duties at Liberty, Towns completed the Doctor of Ministry degree at Fuller Theological Seminary. Towns’ dissertation found a significant correlation between the rapidity of a new church’s growth and the presence of the spiritual gift of faith in the pastor. Again, Towns seamlessly integrated a spiritual reality (in this instance, the gift of faith) with a sociological phenomenon (the growth of a new church) without compromising his fundamentalist theological orientation.

Despite his duties in two institutions of higher education, Towns did not allow himself to become sequestered in academia—his passion for growing churches prevented any onset of an “ivory tower” mentality. In 1984, Towns joined with Larry Gilbert to found the Church Growth Institute (CGI). For the first two years, CGI equipped lay-people, primarily through a seminar based on Towns’ text *154 Steps to Revitalize Your Sunday School and Keep Your Church Growing*. In 1986, the target audience shifted from lay-people to pastors with the launch of Towns’ highly successful *How to Reach the Baby Boomer* seminar. The content of this seminar followed the same pattern that Towns had established nearly two decades earlier when he served as the Sunday School editor of *Christian Life*—using sociological insights to deal with issues related to church growth while retaining a Scripture-centered fundamentalist theology. Towns highlighted five methodological changes that would assist churches in reaching Baby Boomers:

1. The pastor must move from functioning as the church's professional minister to functioning as an equipper of lay-people, so that they may become the church's ministers.
2. Churches must change their worship styles, moving toward biblical exposition coupled with either contemporary or liturgical worship.
3. Churches must market themselves in ways that are understandable and appealing to the unsaved.
4. Churches must move from confrontational evangelism to relational evangelism.
5. Churches must understand and respond to Boomer expectations.

A simple axiom summarized Towns' approach in the Baby Boomer seminars: "Data-driven, Bible-based" (Brown, 1999, p. 72).

In 1987, Towns began teaching the Pastor’s Bible Class at Thomas Road Baptist Church. Five years later, Town resigned his position as dean of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary to allow more time for writing. Towns' preparations for the

Pastor's Bible Class, coupled with increased opportunities for writing, led to a series of successful books targeting issues of theology and personal spiritual growth. One such text, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*, sold more than 100,000 copies. Another, *The Names of the Holy Spirit*, garnered a Gold Medallion from the Christian Booksellers Association. A more recent book—*Perimeters of Light*, co-authored with Ed Stetzer—seeks to develop a “theology of methodology” by which Christians may discern teachings that stand outside orthodox Christianity.

Agenda for the Future

Towns' focus on theology and on the Christian life have not, however, precluded continuing contributions to the field of church growth or to better educational methods. *Ten Sunday Schools that Dared to Change* (1993), *Into the Future* (2000), and an essay in *Four Views of Church Growth* (2003b) define and defend several contemporary trends in church growth. Towns has summarized his current goals in the areas of education, evangelism, and church growth as follows:

As the computer becomes an extension of the human mind, and the human mind becomes an extension of the computer (such as pencil and paper in the past became an extension of the student), I want to make sure I understand how modern-day students learn, how I should teach, and how the process can be assessed. ...

Since the late 1960s I have been dealing in the area of methodology, having written several books that are "trend-setters" in (or at least introductions to) new methods in the fields of evangelism and Church Growth. There obviously will be more trends in evangelism and Church Growth in the future. I am interested in the effectiveness of these trends, and what methods will be most effective in the future. I plan to continue to research, write, and communicate these results (Towns, 2003a, pp. 60-61).

At the time of this writing, Elmer Towns serves as Vice President of Liberty University, as the dean of the B.R. Lakin School of Religion at Liberty University, as the

Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, as the Senior Consulting Publisher at Regal Books and Gospel Light Publishing, and as the dean of Campus Crusade for Christ's Global Pastors Network. Elmer and Ruth Towns have one son, Stephen Richard (Sam), and two daughters, Deborah and Polly. Their son earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from Fuller Theological Seminary and served as Professor of Religion at Liberty University before his death in an automobile accident. At the time of this writing, the Towns had ten grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Contributions to Christian Education:

By Timothy Paul Jones

When asked about his contributions to contemporary Christianity, Elmer Towns listed the following ...

1. ... identifying growth principles from the ten largest churches in the United States.
2. ... being an early advocate of the megachurch.
3. ... identifying and articulating the sociological life-cycle of a church.
4. ... identifying and analyzing six worship and church-growth paradigms.
5. ... identifying and articulating the prescriptions and purposes of nine types of biblical fasts.
6. ... identifying and analyzing nine types of biblical revival.
7. ... identifying and analyzing ten types of biblical meditation.
8. ... researching the history of the Sunday School and identifying the Sunday School as the (a) reaching, (b) teaching, (c) winning, and (d) caring (maturing) arm of the local church.
9. ... identifying and analyzing the seven functions of a pastor.
10. ... identifying and analyzing the nine levels of religious experience.

Building on Towns' list of general contributions, I would identify two specific contributions that continue to impact directly the field of Christian education.

First, *Elmer Towns popularized the concept of the megachurch*. C. Peter Wagner called Towns' *The 10 Largest Sunday Schools and What Makes Them Grow* the first book on the growth of the megachurch (Brown, 1999, p. 9). Towns' specific passion for the megachurch may be traced to his involvement in the First Baptist Church of Dallas; however, the tendencies that engendered this passion were already present when he served as the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Savannah. There, he developed a hunger for seeing energetic, Spirit-anointed ministry merge with effective organization to trigger numeric growth. What he witnessed at First Baptist Church of Dallas was simply a practical outworking, on a massive scale, of a passion that he already possessed.

In a dissertation focusing on Elmer Towns, David Brown has written, "Towns shares dual roles ... both as 'Mr. Sunday School' ... and as a leader of Church Growth" (Brown, 1999, p. 97). At a surface level, this may be true. It may also be contended, however, that Towns' singular passion throughout his ministry has always been church growth. He became "Mr. Sunday School" not because of a passion for Sunday School *per se* but because Sunday School had proven to be an effective means to accomplish his overarching goal of growing churches. Should Towns perceive Sunday School to have ceased to be an effective tool for church growth before the conclusion of his ministry, I suspect that his emphasis on Sunday School would rapidly retreat into the background.

Second, Elmer Towns pioneered *the application of sociological perspectives and the separation of eternal principles from cultural methods in the context of conservative-evangelical and fundamentalist churches*. Neither of these concepts was new. Secular sociologists and liberal theologians had been applying sociological insights to

congregations for decades, and the contemporary church-growth movement had already encouraged the separation of principles from methodologies (see, e.g., Wagner, 1973). What was unique about Towns' approach was his application of social-science perspectives in contexts where many leaders had previously been suspicious of such perspectives. Towns' fundamentalist orientation did not prevent him from seeing that the church's Christian education program could be viewed in terms of a sociological organization without compromising its essential identity as a spiritual organism. Towns summarized this viewpoint in the axiom that undergirded his *How to Reach the Baby Boomer* seminars: "Data-driven, Bible-based." Perhaps partly as a result of Towns' work, many conservative-evangelical and fundamentalist churches have increasingly recognized that, although sociological factors alone cannot explain the growth of a church, sociological factors may work to inhibit or to cultivate spiritual activity, especially among non-believers.

According to Towns, "principles are eternal and are found in Scripture, a method is an adaptation of an eternal principle to culture" (S. Towns, 1985, p. 122). Towns' seminars and resources encouraged a broad cross-section of pastors—many of them from fundamentalist and conservative-evangelical congregations—to apply this separation of principles from methods in their local churches. Today, many churches that once focused heavily on cultural issues of dress codes and musical styles have learned to distinguish between eternal principles and temporary, cultural methods. Elmer Towns was a key influence that contributed to this change. It seems unlikely that Rick Warren's claim that "to penetrate any culture you must make small concessions in matters of style" (Warren, 1995, pp. 196, 202) would have found any friendly reception outside mainstream

evangelicalism without Elmer Town's previous popularization of this principle in his seminars.

Towns has not only proclaimed but also modeled a separation of principles from methods throughout his career. In the mid-1980s, Towns commented:

There are certain methods that I am no longer emphasizing because I believe that they are no longer effective. ... I am no longer emphasizing the bus ministry, Vacation Bible School effectiveness, door-to-door visitation, Sunday School contests, and the Sunday afternoon youth meeting. ... I use the phrase "anointed methods." God has methods that He uses to reach particular people in certain cultural conditions. The effectiveness of these methods is described as "hot" or "anointed." As conditions change and the people change, certain methods lose their effectiveness. They "cool" down in public perception. God has to evolve new methods to become effective to meet new needs. (S. Towns, 1985, pp. 122-23)

As a further example, earlier in his writing career, Towns' primary emphasis was on an effective Sunday School organization with dominant pastoral leadership. He noted in 1970 that the leader of an effective Sunday School was typically "an aggressive, gifted pastor, who heads up a militant program of evangelism." This "energetic minister ... leads his flock like a president runs a corporation" (Towns, 1970, pp. 15-17). Later, however, in his Baby Boomer seminars, concepts such as "aggressive," "militant," and "runs a corporation" were no longer present. Towns' focus had shifted toward the pastor's role as a relational change-agent and as an equipper of lay-people. Both earlier and later, Towns maintained a biblical principle—in this case, the importance of strong and effective pastoral leadership. Yet Towns' recommended methodology moved from an aggressive minister who leads like a corporate president to a change-agent who builds relationships and equips the laity.

These capacities for separating eternal principles from temporary methods have also enabled Towns to remain open to churches outside Baptist fundamentalism. Towns

has termed the principle underlying his openness “the Doctrine of Blessability.”

Long before I came to work at Liberty University, I was speaking at Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Wesleyan-type groups for Sunday School and Church Growth conferences. ... I am committed to the Independent Baptist position; however, I am not anti-Charismatic, anti-Pentecostal, nor anti-Wesleyan. I am committed to my beliefs, but a strong commitment to Christ keeps me from being intolerant or in opposition to others who believe differently about doctrines that are not essential to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. I have called this “the Doctrine of Blessability.” ... I believe God blesses those of different persuasions not because of their accuracy of Scriptural interpretation or a legalistic view of the Christian life, but God blesses a person because of his love [of] Jesus Christ and his faith in him. (S. Towns, 1985, p. 121)

This “Doctrine of Blessability” is, perhaps, what has distinguished Towns from other fundamentalist Christian educators and has allowed his influence to spread beyond a narrow, conservative sector of Christianity.

Other Christian educators have criticized Elmer Towns for having had a narrower influence, due to his fundamentalist orientation, than he might otherwise have had (see, e.g., S. Towns, 1985, pp. 106–07). There is, however, another possibility that is equally worthy of consideration: Perhaps it is precisely because of his unswerving fundamentalist orientation that Towns’ contributions have been so vital. Fundamentalist and conservative-evangelical congregations trusted Towns due to a shared theological orientation; therefore, Towns was able to penetrate these churches with insights from the social sciences and the church-growth movement—insights that might otherwise have been rejected or ignored. If this analysis is correct, it is possible that Towns’ primary contribution is not to be found on the campus of Liberty University or even in the thousands of pages that his reflections and research have filled. It is, rather, to be found in the collective concurrence of a myriad of church leaders that it is possible to recognize the cultural relativity of methodologies and the usefulness of the social sciences without

compromising even the most conservative strands of Christian theology.

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APPENDIX B

List of Elmer Towns' Book Sales

The following is a list of Elmer Towns' book sales. Information has been arranged in alphabetical order, by publisher.¹ Information includes sales through August 1, 2005.

21ST CENTURY PRESS, SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI

Encountering God 10,000

ACCENT BOOKS, DENVER, COLORADO

The Names of Jesus 3,383

The Names of Jesus: Leader's Guide 963

Those published before 1985* 39,300

AMG PUBLISHERS, VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Gospel of John 1,592

BAKER BOOK HOUSE, GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

Into the Future 7,313

 Indonesian n/a

The Gospel of John: Believe and Live 1,089

Understanding the Deeper Life 3,879

Those published before 1985* 166,096

BEACON HILL PRESS, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

Christmas Traditions 5,199

Churches That Multiply: A Bible Study on Church Planting 1,403

Developing a Giving Church 6,168

**BROADMAN & HOLMAN PUBLISHERS,
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE**

How to Create and Present High-Impact Bible Studies 7,905

 Korean 108

Putting an End to Worship Wars 9,631

The Everychurch Guide to Growth 7,988

**CHARIOT VICTOR PUBLISHING,
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO**

154 Steps to Revitalize Your Sunday School and
 Keep Your Church Growing 3,473

¹ Information obtained from Linda Elliott, Elmer Towns' editorial secretary at Liberty University.

CHURCH GROWTH INSTITUTE, LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA	
8 Laws of Leadership	5,078
Foundational Doctrines of the Faith	2,562
How to Grow an Effective Sunday School	4,164
How to Reach Your Friends for Christ	51,540
Our Family Giving to God's Family	2,239
Those published before 1985*	22,000
CREATION HOUSE, CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS*	
	80,000
CUSTOM PUBLISHING	
What the Faith is All About	6,000
DESTINY IMAGE, SHIPPENSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA	
Knowing God Through Fasting	8,382
Praying the Psalms	8,871
THE EVANGELICAL TEACHER TRAINING ASSOCIATION, WHEATON, ILLINOIS*	
	76,668
THE FREE CHURCH PRESS, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA*	
The Bright Future of Sunday School	7,500
GOSPEL LIGHT PUBLICATIONS, VENTURA, CALIFORNIA	
Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough (Study Guide Ed.)	15, 147
My Father's Names: Group Study Guide	4,777
The Year Round Church Event Book	17,656
IMPACT BOOKS, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE*	
	192,026
LIBERTY BAPTIST COLLEGE, LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA*	
	9,000
FLEMING H. REVELL, OLD TAPPAN, OLD JERSEY*	
	106,000
MOODY PRESS, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS	
Perimeters of Light	4,339 n/a
REGAL BOOKS, VENTURA, CALIFORNIA	
10 of Today's Most Innovative Churches	25,112
Korean	80

10 Sunday Schools That Dared to Change	15,188
365 Ways to Know God	6,430
Beginner's Guide to Fasting	31,627
Biblical Meditation for Spiritual Breakthrough	14,661
Evangelism and Church Growth Encyclopedia	4,363
Fasting Can Change Your Life	18,449
Fasting for Financial Breakthrough	10,988
Chinese (Traditional)	3710
Spanish	2,274
Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough	220,548
Chinese	1,173
Chinese (Simplified)	6,000
Indonesian	1,544
Spanish	2,274
God Bless You	2,659
God Encounters	15,439
Indonesian	n/a
My Father's Names	37,535
Indonesian	n/a
Korean	286
Thai	1,500
Prayer Partners	10,196
Indonesian	n/a
Praying the 23 rd Psalm	14,586
Afrikaans	1,186
English	2,447
Indonesian	2,280
Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough	37,781
Bengali – Christ Mission Ashram	1,000
Indonesian	2,234
Rivers of Revival	22,674
Spanish	26,000
Stories About My First Church	12,984
Stories on the Front Porch	8,782
The Names of the Holy Spirit	27,016
Burmese/Myanma	n/a
Indonesian	277
Portuguese	400
The Names of the Holy Spirit: Group Study Guide	2,159
The Son	12,158
The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever	7,217
The Year-Round Book of Sermon Ideas, Stories, and Quotes	6,027
The Year-Round Church Event Book	18,193
What Every Pastor Should Know About Sunday School	9,080
English/Britain	6,000

French	n/a
What Every Sunday School Teacher Should Know	66,932
Those published before 1985*	16,392
REGAL PUBLISHERS, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE*	10,000
SCRIPTURE PRESS PUBLICATIONS, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO	
History Makers of the Old Testament	4,000
SERVANT PUBLICATIONS, CINCINNATI, OHIO	
A Beginner's Guide to Fasting	12,000
Chinese	1,000
English – Philippines	708
Polish	n/a
Spanish	3,694
STANDARD PUBLISHERS, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE*	9,000
SUNDAY SCHOOL HERITAGE	
What the New Testament is All About	n/a
What the Old Testament is All About	n/a
SUNDAY SCHOOL RESEARCH INSTITUTE, SAVANNAH, GEORGIA*	24,000
THE SWORD OF THE LORD PUBLISHERS, MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE*	7,804
THOMAS NELSON PUBLISHERS, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE	
Bible Answers for Almost All Your Questions	22,268
Joined Together: How to Build a Lasting Marriage	3,416
Women Gifted for Ministry	
English and Mongolian	13,072
Those published before 1985*	622,768
THOMAS ROAD YOUTH, LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA	10,000
THOMSON CUSTOM PUBLISHING, MASON, OHIO	
A Journey Through the New Testament	2,044
A Journey Through the Old Testament	n/a

Theology for Today (Reprint) n/a

TOMMY BOOKS, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

My Angel Named Herman 26,347

TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Church Growth: State of the Art 16,190

Towns' Sunday School Encyclopedia 9,669

What the Faith is All About 40,000

 Korean 1,931

Those published before 1985* 35,364

UNILIT

Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough

 Spanish n/a

VINE BOOKS, VENTURA, CALIFORNIA

A Beginner's Guide to Fasting 28,375

The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever 7,217

 English – Nigeria n/a

 Korean n/a

**WINNIPEG BIBLE COLLEGE PRESS,
WINNIPEG, CANADA***

9,000

**ZONDERVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE,
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN**

Fasting for Financial Breakthrough

 Spanish 2,361

APPENDIX C

Survey for Supervisors of Elmer Towns within Higher Educational Settings:

Survey for Supervisors of Elmer Towns within Higher Educational Settings:

1. What course(s)/lecture(s) did Elmer Towns deliver? _____
2. When did Elmer Towns teach the course(s)? _____

(The following six areas represent the areas into which his writings and teachings are divided)

3. In what area did he teach/lecture?
 - a. Church Growth
 - b. Sunday School
 - c. Christian Education
 - d. Bible Study and Exposition
 - e. Christian Life
 - f. Theology

4. Please rate the overall contributions Elmer Towns had to your institution/students in the following areas:

	Little					Strong
a. Church Growth	1	2	3	4	5	5
b. Sunday School	1	2	3	4	5	5
c. Christian Education	1	2	3	4	5	5
d. Bible Study and Exposition	1	2	3	4	5	5
e. Christian Life	1	2	3	4	5	5
f. Theology	1	2	3	4	5	5

5. In what area did the **writings** of Elmer Towns make the greatest contribution to your institution/students?

	Little					Strong
a. Church Growth	1	2	3	4	5	5
b. Sunday School	1	2	3	4	5	5
c. Christian Education	1	2	3	4	5	5
d. Bible Study and Exposition	1	2	3	4	5	5
e. Christian Life	1	2	3	4	5	5
f. Theology	1	2	3	4	5	5

6. In what area did the **teachings** of Elmer Towns make the greatest contribution to your institution/students?

	Little					Strong
a. Church Growth	1	2	3	4	5	5
b. Sunday School	1	2	3	4	5	5
c. Christian Education	1	2	3	4	5	5
d. Bible Study and Exposition	1	2	3	4	5	5
e. Christian Life	1	2	3	4	5	5
f. Theology	1	2	3	4	5	5

7. What was the reason Elmer Towns was asked to teach at your institution?
 - a. His writings, (specific book? _____)
 - b. His positions within Christian organizations or institutions (specific position? _____)
 - c. His teachings
 - d. His reputation
 - e. Other _____

8. What did you primarily expect from the teachings of Elmer Towns?
 - a. New and innovative ideas
 - b. Reaffirming of accepted church methods and principles
 - c. Explanation of Scripture
 - d. Application of Scripture
 - e. Motivation of students

9. Please rate the teaching contributions Elmer Towns had to your institution/students in the following areas:

	Little				Strong
a. New and innovative ideas	1	2	3	4	5
b. Reaffirming of accepted church trends	1	2	3	4	5
c. Explaining Scripture	1	2	3	4	5
d. Applying Scripture	1	2	3	4	5
e. Motivating students	1	2	3	4	5
f. Other _____	1	2	3	4	5

10. How did Elmer Towns accomplish these contributions?

- a. Lecture
- b. Illustrations from church
- c. Explanation of current trends and ideas
- d. Illustration from his life
- e. Appealing to history

11. How did you first hear about Elmer Towns?

- a. His teachings (specific topic?) _____
- b. His writings (specific book?) _____
- c. Hearing him speak
- d. Friend
- e. Other _____

12. Would you consider Elmer Towns primarily an author or a teacher?

- a. Author
- b. Teacher

Please explain your answer

13. Has Elmer Towns had a greater impact on your life through his writings or his teachings?

- a. Writings
- b. Teachings

Please explain you answer

14. Other specific contributions Elmer Towns has had on your institution/students:

If I would be permitted to contact you concerning the answers you have provided above (for further explanation, etc.), please provide me with your contact information. Thank you for your involvement in this project.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

APPENDIX D

Complete list of survey respondents' comments given on the survey

Complete list of survey respondents' comments given on the survey

The following is a list of the respondents' comments on questions 12-14 on the survey.

Comments for Question 12:

1. Teacher - Probably more people have read his books than have heard him speak. However, I have devoted more time to listening to him teach than I have spent reading his books.
2. Author - This has been his widest audience.
3. Author - Most know him best from his books.
4. Author - He has been so prolific.
5. Author - His multiple books.
6. Author - Because I (we) benefit from his knowledge through his writings. We do not sit under his teaching on a weekly/regular basis.
7. Teacher - All his writings (or most of them) arise from his commitment to and interest in Sunday School growth.
8. Teacher - He is excellent at application of the chosen topic in a practical sense.
9. Author - His books are better known among our students.
10. Teacher - His books are an extension of his passion to teach.
11. Teacher and Author - I'm not sure I'd separate these. His writings are teaching and his teaching gains attention for his writings.
12. Author - He has written so much that his influence as a writer is the greatest.
13. Teacher - While Dr. Towns is a prolific author, his writings are tools for teaching. He does not write in order to provide readings as research material, but it helps Christians improve their ministries.
14. Teacher and Author - It is very difficult to separate him from either his teachings or his writings. It seems both go hand in hand with Dr. Towns.

Comments for Question 13:

1. Writings - I have not had the opportunity to sit under much of his teaching
2. Teachings - Probably more people have read his books than have heard him speak. However I have devoted more time to listening to him teach than I have spent reading his books.
3. Writings - Most know him best from his books
4. Writings - Again, he has written so much, and his books are read by more people than he could ever talk to
5. Teachings - Personal interpretation
6. Teachings - It was a joy to hear him explain the application of fasting
7. Writings and Teachings - I have read Dr. Towns books and heard him at the annual meetings of The North American Society for Church Growth
8. Teachings - No substitute for personal contact
9. Writings - I've heard him teach very little

10. Teachings - I admire his writings, but, I also have had the blessing of working with him. I have learned much from him directly. He lives what he preaches and writes.

Comments for Question 14:

1. He has given us a bit more name recognition and by himself has been a source of great encouragement to all of us at E.T.S.
2. His availability to minister in a variety of church circles
3. Better understanding of the church, its structure, development; positive influence for church growth - particularly at American Church Growth movement
4. He has drawn in marginal people and helped introduce them to our programs
5. Dr. Towns is focused, clear, compassionate, and honest. He has had a greater ministry within Sunday School and Church Growth than anyone else I know.

APPENDIX E

Higher Educational Institutions where Elmer Towns taught (1980-2005)

The following is a list of the institutions of higher education where Elmer Towns has taught within the past twenty-five years (1980-2005). Schools in bold lettering indicate those institutions that received surveys and those with an asterisk (*) indicate those institutions that responded with completed surveys.

1. **Appalachian Bible College***
2. **Asbury Theological Seminary***
3. **Assembly of God Theological Society**
4. Atlantic Christian University
5. Azusa Pacific University
6. **Baptist Bible College**
7. **Baptist Bible College, Seoul, Korea**
8. **Baptist Bible College West***
9. Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary
10. **Biola University***
11. **Birmingham Theological Seminary***
12. **California Graduate School of Theology**
13. **Capital Bible Seminary***
14. Carolina Bible Institute & Seminary
15. **Central Bible College**
16. **Circleville Bible College***
17. **Colorado Christian College**
18. **Columbia Bible College**
19. **Dallas Theological Seminary**
20. **Dallas Theological Seminary Philadelphia (Philadelphia Biblical University)**
21. **Denver Seminary***
22. Eastern Nazarene College
23. **Evangel Theological Seminary***
24. **Fuller Theological Seminary***
25. George Fox College
26. **General Baptist Pastoral Ministries**
27. **Grace Theological Seminary**
28. **Horizon College of San Diego (Horizon Bible Institute)**
29. Indiana Wesleyan University
30. International School of Theology
31. **Korean Theological Seminary (International Theological Seminary)**
32. **Luther Rice Seminary**
33. **Mid-American Baptist Seminary***
34. Mid-American Christian University
35. **New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary**
36. Northwest Nazarene University
37. Northwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
38. Northwestern School of Ministry
39. Olivet Nazarene University
40. **Practical Bible College**
41. **Providence Theological Seminary**

- 42. **Shasta Bible College**
- 43. Southeastern Bible College
- 44. **Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary***
- 45. Southwestern School of Ministry
- 46. **Tennessee Temple Theological Seminary***
- 47. **Trinity Baptist College***
- 48. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
- 49. **Wagner Leadership Institute***
- 50. Wellspring School of Theology (This school is no longer open)
- 51. **Wesley Biblical Seminary**
- 52. **Winebrenner Theological Seminary**
- 53. Word of Life Bible Institute

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