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ON THE ROAD AGAIN (1968-1975)

I have decided to leave the work here in Portland after 33 years with them. Our ministry has been a long and happy one. I believe God has allowed me to remain in this church longer than any other man in the state of Oregon.

—A. Word, announcing his resignation, July 1968

Time magazine once called 1968 “a knife blade, the year (that) severed past from future.”¹ The Tet offensive was launched at the end of January. Young men burned their draft cards in front of TV cameras. Weary of it all, President Johnson announced in March that he would not seek office in the fall election. On April 4 Martin Luther King was shot, setting off a week of violence that claimed 46 lives. Radical students from

the Students for a Democratic Society took over the campus at Columbia University. On June 6, after winning the California primary, Robert F. Kennedy was shot down in cold blood by a Jordanian Arab. Radical anti-war forces made a farce of the Democratic Convention in Chicago where it was Mayor Daley's cops versus Jerry Rubin's yippies. Blood flowed in the streets while mobs yelled, "The whole world is watching!" in front of the ever-present TV cameras. 1968, according to *Time*, was "a tragedy of change, a struggle between generations, to some extent a war between the past and the future."² Which is exactly where Archie Word found himself in 1968.

THE RESIGNATION OF ARCHIE WORD

The frustration of a 67-year-old man living in such changing and chaotic times was seen in the two final articles Archie Word would write for his beloved *The Church Speaks*: "So You Disagree" and "How Times Have Changed." He felt that many of his preaching counterparts were selling out.

For the past forty years, I have been preaching and writing my convictions . . . and for forty years I have had people, especially sinners, disagree with me . . . as well as some of my own professed brethren. In fact, when I have stood out against sin and those channels that surely lead into sin, it has been my preaching brethren who have hollered the loudest, and then given me the widest berth in the barn of isolation.

That does not bother me very much, and for sure, it is not going to drown out my convictions about living for Christ and trying to keep as near His standards as is possible for me to do. . . . I am not about to sell out to the Devil, even though the vast majority does. 'Here I stand, so help me, God.'³

Following this Luther-like speech, he decried the move to have services on Sunday morning only, calling such a practice "as wrong as hell can make it."

This should be the beginning place for Christian service, evangelizing individually from soul to soul, house to house, and street to street.⁴

In May the congregation moved into its spacious and beautiful new church building at 550 N.E. 76th Avenue. But the combination of age, the building program, changing times, conflicts with younger men and other factors led him to resign the pulpit at Montavilla. In February he had written to Don DeWelt: "I do plan to close my ministry next May, a year from now. Plan to hold some meetings and travel over the country."⁵ But between February and June he changed his mind. In July he submitted his resignation, preaching his farewell sermon to the congregation he had loved and served for nearly 33 years. Banner headlines in *The Church Speaks* read, **BROTHER WORD CLOSES MINISTRY IN PORTLAND.**

I have decided to leave the work here in Portland after 33 years with them. Our ministry has been a long and happy one. I believe God has allowed me to remain in this church longer than any other man in the state of Oregon. . . .

I was told I would not last six months when I came here, but by His Grace we have been happy for much longer. . . .

I am still preaching the gospel, sound and unswerving. . . . We plan to hold meetings in the south in the winter and north in the summer, God willing.

We will be glad to make our traveling and financial arrangements known to any church that is interested in a sound Bible centered Evangelistic and Revival Meeting.⁶

In a personal note, "To All Of My Friends," Archie urged his readers to support Stewart Baker as the new editor of *The Church Speaks*. "After working with him for twenty years I can recommend him to you, and promise that the paper will be continue sending out the same type of material that has given it its status through the years."⁷ Baker, assuming the mantle of leadership, had kind words for Archie Word. "Pray for us and for Brother Word as he leaves us for greater works."⁸

Archie and Florence put their house up for sale and packed their belongings in a 24-foot Silver Streak house trailer. On July 13, 1968 they departed from Portland. Donald Hunt, visiting from Iowa, watched them leave the Rose City.

It is a rare sight to see a preacher 67 years old distribute items of his furniture to different friends . . . put up his house for sale (and end up renting it out), . . . and he and his wife pull out of town and launch forth into another chapter of Christian service that will likely take then all over the nation in evangelistic meetings and rallies, but that is exactly what I have witnessed this morning (July 13) when Mr. and Mrs. Archie Word departed from Portland, Ore., where they have lived, reared their family, and labored in and from the past 33 years.⁹

Hunt noted that the career change was without a doubt "psychologically difficult" for the Words and urged his readers to "shower them with letters of appreciation."¹⁰ One such letter came from Carol Lankford, the man who would succeed Archie Word at Montavilla. "There are certain people that . . . make me want to serve God in a greater way . . . you are one of these men." Lankford's ministry lasted from August 1968 to June 1969. It was probably a no-win situation.

How was anyone, even a good man like Lankford, going to be able to follow a powerful personality like Word? At the congregation's request Archie returned in September and October of 1969 to do a brief interim ministry. In April 1970 a young minister from Los Angeles, Eddie Werner, was called. During his brief tenure Stewart Baker ceased his work as editor of *The Church Speaks*, Werner taking it over and scaling back the mailing list to only 5,000. Werner resigned in July 1972 and was replaced in August by Tom Burgess, a man who had studied under Word and, in fact, had married Archie's youngest daughter Esther. The church has grown from under 100 to over 500 during his 20-year ministry.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

After a third-of-a-century in Portland, Oregon, Archie and Florence found themselves on the road again, just like they started out in the Great Depression years of the 1930s. Their first revival meeting was scheduled for Gering, Nebraska, where Archie had held several revivals – one resulting in over 100 decisions for Christ. The local minister, Don Pinon, also directed a church-governed Bible training program, Church of Christ Bible Training School, which, although it was located in Gering, had nothing to do with Platte Valley Bible College, an Independent college in nearby Scottsbluff. When the revival came to a close August 4, Pinon asked Word if he would consider joining the faculty on a part-time basis in 1969. Surprisingly, Archie agreed. He was only one meeting into his new career and already he had committed himself to return to a labor of love he had enjoyed for the past 16 years.

THE SONORA "SIESTA"

As usual, Archie preached on both Midwest gatherings of the Word-Hunt connection: Rushville, Indiana, and Centerville, Iowa, in the summer of 1968. On the final night of the Centerville rally he almost outdid himself with his sermon, "The Great Cost God Has Paid." A total of 32 people responded at the invitation, the greatest response to any single sermon at the rally in many years. But Archie nearly lost his voice during the sermon. By the time of the invitation his voice was breaking physically as well as emotionally. A doctor advised him to give his voice a rest for at least six weeks or risk losing it altogether.

How could a man named Word keep quiet? While conducting a revival in Eugene, Oregon, where it all started, he took a flight to California to appear on a rally at Hayward where each speaker had been asked, "What would you preach if it were to be your last sermon on earth?" According to Archie's doctor, it might be just that! With a raspy and husky voice Archie preached two sermons, "Why I Want To Believe in the Bible" and "Baptized, But Not Right With God." (If he could no longer preach, he would make sure his last sermons were on two of his favorite topics: Christian evidences and genuine conversion!)

After flying back to Eugene to complete his meeting with the West Broadway church (nine responses), Archie and Florence drove south through California into Mexico. He figured that the only place where he could really give his voice the rest it needed was in a country where he could not speak the language! But even in Mexico he could not escape the call to preach. A small congregation in Sonora prevailed upon Archie to live up to his name and preach the

Word. He consented without a protest because he simply could not quit preaching, even under a doctor's orders.

A REUNION IN THE DESERT

From Mexico the Words returned to their beloved Lindsay on New Year's Day, 1969. Both of them were ill and worn out. Florence's sister, Evelyn, nursed them back to health with the help of old-fashioned mustard plasters. It would be the last time Florence would see her sister alive. Soon they were ready to leave for Reno — the first of six revivals Archie had scheduled for the year. In Reno they established a routine they would follow in most of their meetings during the next 16 years of their lives.

Arriving in Reno on the Wednesday before their meeting began, they set up home in a trailer park and attended the midweek prayer meeting. Florence wrote in her diary, "Our first prayer meeting in a long time. How good!" (She kept a diary from 1969-1984. These final chapters will lean heavily upon her entries.) On Saturday Archie and the local preacher, Rodney Reyman, hung up Archie's charts. "Rest night" was on Mondays. In the weekday afternoons Archie went calling with the preacher while Florence would call with the preacher's wife. Most meetings lasted from two to three weeks. The Reno campaign came to an end January 26, 1969.

Sometime during 1969 an extraordinary providential event took place in the life of Archie Word. For many years he had been on the outs with one of his old friends, Bill Jessup. That all changed one day when Archie experienced a mechanical breakdown in the California desert. Bill and Carrie Jessup recalled their

reunion with Archie and Florence 20 years later:

In 1969 we spent a year in Bishop, California, establishing a church. Sometime during that year I had a phone call from Archie. He had broken down with his trailer out in the desert about 20 miles from Bishop. He had heard I was in Bishop, so he called me. I went out and helped him into town and took his trailer to a repair place. While it was being repaired, we invited them to our mobile home for dinner and kept them overnight. We had the nicest visit that lasted all afternoon and late into the night. The meeting was the same as if we had never had any differences. We talked over all the great times we had had in the past and the work each of us was now doing for the Lord. We had several good prayer times together before they left.¹²

More than a trailer had been repaired in the desert reunion. A broken fellowship of nearly 20 years had been providentially put back together again. Jessup continues:

From that time on in 1969 until he graduated to heaven, we were back in fellowship as brothers in Christ. This was the beginning of our correspondence again and letters went both ways about every month. When I held a seminar in the Platte Valley Bible College in Scottsbluff, he never missed a service. . . . They had me for a delicious steak dinner in their home. Then, every year when he would come through San Jose to visit his sister Nellie, we would always have a picnic time together and enjoy each other's fellowship.¹³

Bill Jessup likened the reunion to that of Paul and Barnabas in Biblical times.

I guess we were a lot like Barnabas and Paul over John

Mark. They parted company for awhile, but all ended up in a good relationship. I have never ceased to thank God for that broken down trailer in the desert that brought us together, where we could help each other.¹⁴

(Before his next revival meeting Archie attended the Conference on Evangelism at San Jose Bible College, his first appearance there in many years.)

FROM MOON LANDINGS TO MANSON MURDERS

Archie's second meeting in 1969 was with Richard Tucker and the Florin Road church in Sacramento, California, where several people rededicated their lives. Florence prayed for one particular woman all through the revival, but had to write the sad words "Still unsaved" in her diary when they pulled out of Sacramento and headed to Oakland where a small, inner-city, all-black church proved to be a real challenge for the Words. Florence taught an after-school class for grade school girls, whom she described as "Undisciplined, disobedient, noisy, impossible!" after her first attempt. But by the end of the meeting she described them as "Very lovely little girls!" Following the Oakland campaign the Words traveled to Mooresville, Indiana, where they enjoyed a reunion with Tom and Esther Burgess and a revival with the Mt. Gilead church. During this April meeting Tom's father died in Los Angeles and Florence's sister, Evelyn, passed away in Lindsay. Tom and Florence flew to California for the funerals while Archie continued on in the revival. They returned just in time to help Archie celebrate his 68th birthday and bring the meeting to a close.

Before his next meeting in Butler, Missouri, the

Words visited Ozark Bible College in Joplin and renewed fellowship with Don DeWelt and Woodrow Phillips. Florence noted, "At Bible College saw T.V. used to teach Homiletics; excellent language department taught from tapes; auditorium seats 1,000, and large Department of Missions started by W. Phillips." They also took a tour of Cecil Todd's Revival Fires headquarters. In spite of seeing firsthand how television was being used in training preachers and reaching the masses, Archie resisted all opportunities to be taped or go on television himself to preach the Word.

The month-long meeting in Butler resulted in six decisions for Christ. From there it was on to Bemidji, Minnesota, and a June meeting with Jim Kennedy. While the Words were in Minnesota they learned of Carol Lankford's resignation at Montavilla, less than a year after he succeeded Archie in the pulpit. They returned to Portland for the annual Holgate Rally where Archie preached the opening and closing sermons, "The Ripened Fields" and "The Lasting Reward." During the summer of 1969 – which saw everything from astronauts landing on the moon to Woodstock to the grisly Manson murders – the Words traveled back to the Midwest for his annual rally appointments. In September they returned to Portland where Archie did two months of interim ministry until the Montavilla church could secure a new preacher.

Ironically, one of the candidates was Don Pinon, the man who had asked Archie to join him in Gering. Eventually the church decided on Eddie Werner and the Words returned to Gering, as promised, to help Don Pinon for nine weeks in his Bible training school.

Archie and Florence arrived in Gering Nov. 6, 1969, not knowing that he would live out the rest of his days

on earth in a wind-swept western Nebraska town which sits in the shadow of Scotts Bluff National Monument – an impressive landmark that towers 800 feet above the North Platte River on the Oregon Trail. They parked their trailer and Archie busied himself teaching Hermeneutics, the book of Hebrews, preaching in chapel, and often filling the pulpit for Pinon while he was away in Kimball, Nebraska, helping start a new church. At this point in his life Archie had every intention of continuing in full-time evangelism, but all that was to change in 1970 when Pinon asked Word the \$64,000 question.

"I'D TAKE A GUN AND BLOW THEIR BRAINS OUT!"

The anti-authoritarian spirit of the late 60s was only a precursor of what was to come in the early 70s. As Archie Word entered the seventh decade of his life "Gay Pride" marches were shamelessly held on both coasts, rock singers Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin died of drug overdoses within a month of each other, National Guardsmen opened fire on rioting students at Kent State, and the Chicago Seven were making mockery of the court system. In the midst of these turbulent times he began the new decade with a three-week revival at the Tyler Street church in Lexington, Nebraska, where I was serving in my first ministry.

Following their normal pattern, the Words arrived on Wednesday, hooked up their trailer, attended prayer meeting, hung up gospel charts, went over sermons, and did some calling before the meeting ever began. We called each afternoon except Mondays. Two calling episodes stand out in my mind.

The trial of Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin and the Chicago Seven was in the news each day of the meet-

ing. One afternoon we were visiting in the living room of a very cultured woman who had shown an interest in the spiritual life. I felt she was a good prospect. Somehow the discussion turned to the Chicago Seven.

"Reverend Word," she asked in her finest cultured voice, "What do you think of what is going on in the trial in Chicago?" "Oh, no," I thought to myself.

Archie bristled. "Lady, do you know what I would do if I were Judge Julius Hoffman?" I nearly choked on my tea.

"Why, no, Reverend Word." She smiled sweetly. "What would you do if you were the good judge?" I braced myself for what was to come.

"I'd take a gun and blow their brains out!" Archie thundered. I smiled weakly.

"Oh! Reverend Word! You wouldn't!" She was aghast.

But Archie was adamant. "I would! I'd take a gun and blow their brains out!" I took out my calling notebook and carefully scratched Mrs. Culture off the prospect list.

(To understand this story it should be remembered that William Kunstler, the lawyer for the notorious Chicago Seven, was reprimanded for calling the judge "a racist, fascist pig." Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin were repeatedly reprimanded for using obscenity in the courtroom. And Archie Word *did* carry a registered 9 mm. handgun under the seat of his pickup.)

Another afternoon we were calling in the home of some former members who had transferred to the local Christian Church. The man — a long-time friend of Archie — asked him if he would preach on television, like Cecil Todd of Revival Fires.

"No, I would not," replied Archie.

"Even though souls might be won to the Lord?"

"I would not." Archie went on to explain that if he appeared on television he would be giving Christians the idea that television was O.K. and perhaps they would use that as justification for having one in their homes where they would probably watch things hotter than Revival Fires.

A SOFTER SIDE

Yet, as nearly every preacher who ever worked with Archie Word would testify, there was a tender side to him in personal work that only those inside the home ever saw. He would plead with sinners to surrender to Christ in the most impassioned manner imaginable. More than once I saw tears in his kind eyes and heard that familiar voice rise and fall as he did his utmost to persuade the lost to be saved.

Another side of Archie Word that was not known to his critics was what he did behind the scenes for others. During the February meeting I came down with the flu. The next morning Archie was at the front door of the parsonage with a grocery sack full of orange juice and other items we needed. Florence scrubbed the kitchen floor on her knees. Later they treated us to a steak dinner (Archie believed steak was a tonic for all ills). Both of them adored our little Mindy, whom they affectionately nicknamed "Pinkie Tinkie."

One night the four of us sang a mixed quartet number while a talented member of the church did a chalk art drawing. After two weeks of revival the men voted unanimously to continue a third week. In his final sermon, "The Peril of Resisting God," he broke down and cried. Several responded to the invitation,

including two wayward sons of area church leaders. The illustration I remember most was "40 Wrestlers for Christ," a story told with such emotion that you felt ready to rise from your seat and march out on the frozen lake to die as a martyr for Christ! It was with genuine regret that we bade the Words a tearful farewell the morning of February 23. Florence wrote in her diary, "Left Lexington 9:00 A.M. Knowles came to tell us 'Goodbye' bringing can of nuts and sack of hard candy. Pinkie (Mindy) sweet as ever."

THE GERING DECISION

Following the Lexington meeting the Words conducted campaigns in Orlando, Florida, Maryville, Missouri, and Loveland, Colorado. In late June Archie flew to Englehard, North Carolina, to appear on the annual Brush Arbor rally with John Butler Book, Raymond S. Bennett, James E. Gibbons (editor of *The Sword and Staff*), and an old preaching companion, O.L. Mankamyer. He stayed over Sunday to preach for "Brother Mac" at Virginia Beach, Virginia. Then it was back to Oregon for Holgate, a revival at St. Helens, rallies in the Midwest, and finally back to Gering to begin an 18-week stint with the Bible college, teaching Old Testament Prophets, Hermeneutics, and Biblical Introduction. He closed out 1970 with a five-night meeting in Carson City, Nevada (which Florence noted was "Too short").

One day, after his semester of teaching was over, Don Pinon called Archie Word into his office and said, "Would you be pleased to move here and teach on a full-time basis?"

Without missing a beat, Archie replied, "Yes, I would be happy to."

Delighted, but somewhat surprised by the quick response, Don inquired, "Are you sure you don't want to think it over?"

"No," said the 70-year-old preacher, "I thought you might ask me and I decided I wanted to come."

And that, according to Pinon, was the beginning of "our long and enjoyable work together." In a letter to Don DeWelt, Archie said he loved to be back in the teaching field again. He liked to call the Gering school a "small seminary."¹⁶ The next six years of Archie's life developed into a predictable pattern: teaching two classes each semester, preaching in chapel once a week, preaching Sunday nights at the 7th and Q church (mornings also when Pinon was out of town), and holding anywhere from five to eight revivals a year, usually during winter and summer. For example, in 1971 he held eight meetings: Fairfield, Iowa (14 responses), Rising Sun, Indiana, Rutland, Vermont, Portland, Maine, Standish, Maine (21 decisions), Putnam, Connecticut, Northboro, Massachusetts, and Kimball, Nebraska.

After three years of living in the Silver Streak, the Words bought a mobile home and moved it to 935 10th Street in Gering. In 1972, longing for a home of their own again, they purchased a house at 1632 10th Street, right across the street from the church building at 7th and Q. Archie had his study in the church building and could usually be found there four mornings a week, at 5 a.m. for prayer and Bible study. He was also keeping busy working on a new book that would be published by *The Voice of Evangelism* in 1972, *The Other Day*, a 104-page book recounting many of his personal experiences and encounters in his 40-plus years of ministry. Bill Paul suggested the title for the

compilation of illustrations, saying that Archie Word "often begins an illustration by saying, 'The other day,' even though the event may have taken place years ago." Though poorly organized, *The Other Day* offers rich insight into the colorful life of Archie Word.

"A SWEET AND VIVID MEMORY"

While President Nixon was visiting China and Moscow, Archie Word was visiting eight more churches for revival meetings in 1972: Orlando and Lakeland, Florida, a return meeting in Fairfield, Iowa; Council Bluffs, Iowa (where he learned, to his joy, that his son-in-law Tom Burgess was taking the Montavilla pulpit), Reedsport, Oregon (where he learned, to his sorrow, that his brother Walter was dying of cancer), St. Helens and Duke Street in Portland, Oregon, and Topeka, Kansas (17 decisions).

On a trip back from Florida he stopped in St. Louis to visit Russell Boatman and St. Louis Christian College. Boatman said something happened then that he had never seen before.

When he dropped in on us at SLCC about chapel time I turned the chapel over to him. Here he was a stranger to almost everyone. He reminisced only briefly and proceeded to preach extemporaneously. At the close the two of us retired to the rear of the chapel to provide students and staff opportunity to meet him personally. In addition to the exit servicing the center aisle there are also exits on each side. Normally those exits are used by a considerable segment of the audience. But that day I witnessed something that had never taken place before — nor since! The entire audience, students and staff alike, queued up the length of the center aisle and every student and staff member waited his or her turn to meet him personally, shake

his hand, and thank him for his message. . . . The lineup in the center aisle is a sweet and vivid memory.¹⁸

DÉJÀ VU

In September Archie's grandson David Brink came to live with the Words and enroll in the Gering school. What a start Archie must have had when he looked out from his desk and saw his own grandson — a shadow of himself, a confessed skeptic — sitting in his Christian Evidences class! Brink said the class soon became one of his favorites.

I was a typical teenager who thought he knew all the answers. I had kind of a smart-aleck view of Christianity and Christians. I had been exposed to much skepticism in high school. When I entered Brother Word's class, I was going to prove to myself once and for all that there was not all that much to Christianity. . . . But I had not anticipated the mind nor experience of this man. Brother Word showed me in a most powerful way that the Christian religion was defensible. He knew "Evidences" forward and backward. I will have to say that if there was one class in all of Bible college that changed my life, it was that one. If there was one man who could help me make that change, it was Brother Word. . . . My heart was softened after that "Evidences" class and I think Brother Word could detect that. . . . It wasn't long until I decided to become a preacher.¹⁹

After learning of Walter's cancer in June, Archie made a special trip to California to spend some time with his brother. Walter was feeling good enough to go walking with Archie on June 17. It was the last time the two brothers would be together on earth. On October 13 Archie got a phone call from Louise,

Walter's wife. Walter was dead. Archie flew the next day to Santa Maria for the funeral. The two brothers were two years apart to the very day — both of them born on April 21. They had gone to school together, played football together, had many good times together. Now Arch would have to carry the ball alone. When he returned from the funeral Florence noted that he was weary from "a very trying trip." Perhaps he was sensing his own mortality. He would be the next Word to die.

"HE REMEMBERED DADDY"

In January 1973 the Vietnam war came to an end, at least on the papers signed in Paris. A new political scandal was brewing in Washington — Watergate. And controversy was heating up in Nebraska and Colorado between the Bible training programs in Gering and Denver. The brethren in Gering, including Archie Word, viewed the brethren in Denver, Edwin DeVries in particular, as "liberal." DeVries saw the Gering group as "legalists." The main bone of contention in 1973 was men wearing their hair long. Papers were exchanged between DeVries and Gary Flom, a Wyoming preacher who was on the faculty at Gering. These papers, as well as tape recordings of sermons preached by DeVries and other Denver men, were given a great deal of attention by the Gering brethren in their area-wide monthly ministers' meetings. There was even talk of "disfellowshipping" DeVries from the brotherhood. The Gering brethren felt that he had "let down the standards" of holiness by showing tolerance of long hair on men, short skirts on women, and young people listening to Christian music with a rock and roll beat.

Archie taught in the Gering school from January to mid-March, then left for meetings in Ottumwa and Des Moines, Iowa, Rising Sun, Indiana, Northboro, Massachusetts, and Wheatland, Wyoming. The Words also attended a special "Homecoming" at Montavilla where they were given a gift for their many years of service. Archie did not normally work in Christian youth camps, but he made an exception in 1973, preaching each night at a camp in Rushville, Indiana, where a total of 36 young people responded to the invitation. Back in Gering for the fall semester, young college students often found a place set for them at the Word's Sunday dinner table.

On Oct. 2, 1973, he reflected upon his surrender to Christ when he was in college; "I am ever thankful to HIM, my blessed Lord, for taking up such a crooked stick to use in His work. It all goes to prove that if anyone will just yield himself — no matter what poor stuff he looks like — the Lord can use him . . . mightily if HE so chooses."²⁰

A highlight of the Word's infrequent social life took place the night of Nov. 5, 1973, when Archie and Florence attended a community concert featuring none other than Simon Estes, the world-renowned bass-baritone. The black singer, who had sat under the preaching of Archie Word in Centerville, Iowa, enthralled the Words that night, closing the evening with the old Negro spirituals "Go Down, Moses," "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," and "Wade in the Water." Estes answered a curtain call with "Precious Lord Take My Hand." After the concert the Words, a striking pair themselves, went backstage and were graciously received by the 34-year-old opera star. That night Florence wrote in her diary: "He remembered Daddy

whom he had heard preach many years ago in Center-ville."

Wherever the Words traveled when they were gone from Gering, they would always stop for church, even on Wednesday nights. Sometimes they could not find a Church of Christ or a Christian Church. On those rare occasions they would opt for a Baptist Church. Such was the case March 31, 1974. After holding meetings in Lakeland and Orlando, Florida, the Words pulled into Houston late Saturday night. After failing to find a Church of Christ Sunday morning they settled for a small Baptist Church. After dinner they came across a Church of Christ which they attended that night. Commenting on the two services, Florence wrote, "We did have the Lord's Supper (but there was) more worship and sincere preaching of the love of God by the Baptist man." The Words' favorite radio program when they were on the road was "The Haven of Rest."

In 1975 Archie visited a number of Bible colleges in his travels: Dallas Christian College, Midwest Christian College, and San Jose Bible College. He held meetings in Enid, Oklahoma, Wray, Colorado, Yoncalla, Oregon, San Jose, California, and Rittman, Ohio. On July 21, while visiting friends in Hamburg, Iowa, he received word that his grandson, Don Hunt, Jr., had suffered a stroke during a recording session in Nashville. Archie and Florence visited him in a hospital in Louisville, Kentucky, several times that summer. In September the Words returned to Gering for another school year.

SITTING UNDER ARCHIE

What was it like for a young student to sit under the

teaching of Archie Word? Another grandson, David Brink, remembers:

It was a unique experience to be under his instruction. Brother Word was a no-nonsense teacher. The Bible and related subjects were most important to him, and he tolerated no demeaning of them.

If a student was becoming too frivolous or inattentive, Brother Word would call him down, even if he were 50 years old (or his own grandson). Tardiness and absenteeism . . . were all it took to be flunked.

Brother Word was a man who demanded excellence from himself as well as others. He was one of the most disciplined individuals I had ever encountered. Even in his late years he would get up early and be in his study working on lessons and sermons.

He taught with what he called the "catechetical method." This was simply the process of asking voluminous amounts of questions. All these questions would be typed out for one to study in advance. Many times at the beginning of a course I have received 50 pages of nothing but single-spaced typed questions over the subject to be studied. In class he would go over these questions. He would read one off and then start calling names in rapid succession. If you had to take much time to think of the answer, you were skipped. If you were skipped too many times in one class, his conclusion was that you hadn't studied. And he was usually right! . . . On the positive side is the fact that when you did study and were able to get past "interrogation time," you knew the subject.²¹

OFF TO ISRAEL

Archie Word held only one revival in 1975, his lowest total in his preaching career. The meeting was a far cry from his earlier endeavors — three successive weekends of preaching in Fort Morgan, Colorado. He hated to even call these weekend sessions "revivals."

On March 7 the Words left for New York and an all-expense-paid trip to Israel. For many years Archie had scoffed at such tours, but his family had made it possible for him to go to "the land where Jesus walked." He liked to call Israel "the UNholy land," because of all the fighting between Jews and Arabs, but when he stood at the Garden Tomb and preached a "very touching" message on Jesus, things changed. Those who accompanied him on this trip said he was "amazed" at how many ruins had survived to confirm the accuracy of the Biblical record. He especially enjoyed a visit to Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus promised He would build His church. When the Words arrived home March 20, to a raging Nebraska blizzard and 50 below wind chill temperatures, "he wished he had gone to Israel earlier for the help it would have been in his studies and preaching."

"IT SHOULD BE A WONDERFUL YEAR"

Cataract surgery and prostate surgery slowed down the 74-year-old preacher in May, but he was home from the hospital in early June. Soon the Words were headed for Portland where Archie preached at the Holgate Rally and saw 12 responses to the invitation. At Centerville, later in the summer, he preached a message that he would later repeat in Gering, the last sermon he would ever preach on earth, "Give Account of Your Stewardship."

Throughout 1975 Archie Word had written a column, "A Word from A. Word," for Bill Paul's Denver-based bi-monthly publication *Impact*. In the November-December issue he addressed the situation of young people imitating the hippies in their ragged clothing and personal habits.

I was born poor and have been poor all my life, but early in my life my Christian mother taught us to be clean. She washed our ears before we knew how to, and she inspected the job we did on our personal appearance later on. Anybody who can eat in this country can find soap to clean up, and it is a disgrace to go around . . . looking like a "rag bag." . . . Cleanliness is not next to Godliness, it IS GODLINESS!²²

The opening of the 1975-76 school year in Gering was again marred by the continuing controversy which was causing "much commotion" among the brethren in Gering over the "liberal" school in Denver. Still, Florence had hopes that the men would be able to get things straightened out in 1976. "It should be a wonderful year for us!" she wrote on Dec. 18. As it turned out, 1976 did have some nice things in it for the Words, but it also proved to be a bitter turning point in the life of Archie Word.

Notes

1. *Time*, Jan. 11, 1988
2. *Ibid*
3. *The Church Speaks*, March 1968
4. *Ibid*, May 1968
5. Letter to Don DeWalt from Archie Word, Feb. 9, 1968
6. *The Church Speaks*, July 1968
7. *Ibid*
8. *Ibid*
9. *Evangelism from the Heart of America*, July 24, 1968
10. *Ibid*
11. *The Church Speaks*, July 1968
12. Letter to author from Bill Jessup, March 3, 1989
13. *Ibid*
14. *Ibid*
15. Letter to author from Don Pinon, Jan. 31 1989
16. Letter to Don DeWalt from Archie Word, Sept. 14, 1970
17. *The Other Day*, p. 2
18. Letter to author from Russell Boatman, Oct. 4, 1990

19. *The Life Story of Archie Word*, p. 110, 111
20. Letter to William E. Paul from Archie Word, Oct. 2, 1973
21. *The Life Story of Archie Word*, p. 109, 110
22. *Ibid*, p. 22

23

THE LAST HURRAH (1976–1983)

“I love to preach. I am doing what I want to do, and I’m doing it with all my heart.”

—Archie Word, Dec. 30, 1981

“THE GREATEST EVENT OF OUR LIVES”

America celebrated her 200th birthday in 1976, the year Archie Word turned 75. In April the Words flew to Portland to celebrate Archie’s birthday, attend Archie Jr.’s ordination, and teach at the new Church Growth Clinic. Following an eye operation in Denver, they returned to Oregon where Archie preached at Holgate and friends from around the country gathered to help Archie and Florence celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. A beautiful grandfather’s clock was

presented to them. Following the three-hour ceremony Archie preached a message on a subject that was dear to his heart: "Homelife and Marriage." Many cards and letters of congratulations were received by the Briar and the Lily, among them a special letter from Don and Elsie DeWelt, who wrote:

So many fond memories we share of the sermons we heard and of the teaching you gave us. Most of all of the grand example you have always been. I remember a self-conscious young man who hid in the back yard when you first called on Mom and Dad.

I remember also the very first time I heard you speak. . . . I cried with you in your illustrations, I cringed at your preaching against my sin, but most of all I am so glad I accepted the Saviour and Lord you recommended. I'll meet you at the marriage supper of the Lamb with 10,000 others you helped me to win to Him.¹

That night, when Florence was alone with her diary, she wrote: "This has been the greatest event of our lives. . . . We thank the Lord for the great joy and many friends as a result of our service to Him." The Word's Golden Wedding Anniversary was almost their last anniversary.

THE TRAIN WRECK

Back home in Gering they prepared for the opening of another school year. Archie wrote to Charles Crane,

We will open our seminary work on Labor Day with an all-day rally. Expecting 50 students this year — opening an A.C.E. school with 60 enrolled. Audience last night for prayer meeting was around 225. God has blessed our efforts to hold the line and not give the

Devil an inch. We have had to stand pretty much alone at times, but so did the apostle Paul.²

On August 29 there were 250 in church for Sunday morning services and 253 came for prayer meeting night on Wednesday, a phenomenon for a church of any size, large or small. The opening rally for the school year was held Sept. 6 and Archie brought the closing message. He and Florence and their 5-year-old granddaughter, Michelle Montross, got into their Cadillac (Archie liked big heavy cars because he said you would be better protected in an accident), and headed for home.

According to the Nebraska State Patrol, the Word's southbound car was hit by an eastbound Burlington-Northern freight train at 5:40 p.m. Archie, who now wore a hearing aid, failed to hear the scream of the onrushing train's whistle, and the car was hit in the rear by the train, spinning the Cadillac into the ditch where it came to rest on its top. The Words and their granddaughter were rushed by ambulance to Nebraska General Hospital in Scottsbluff where Archie was treated for facial and rib injuries. Florence suffered shoulder and neck injuries. Little Michelle was treated for forehead lacerations and was released. Archie and Florence remained in the hospital for several days. The Cadillac was a total loss.

Students at the School of Evangelism would never forget Archie's return to the classroom. He had nearly lost an ear in the wreck, and his head was wrapped in such a fashion that he resembled an Eastern guru. Still, he taught and preached as if nothing unusual had happened. It was among the last of the good memories to be enjoyed in the Gering church and school.

DIVISION!

The year had begun with Archie and Don Pinon participating in four area preachers' meetings where the situation in Denver was repeatedly discussed. Many of the Gering brethren were in favor of disfellowshipping Edwin DeVries, although Archie wrote a friend in the Midwest, "I am no bishop! . . . We are not to be judges, but we are to be messengers, the ones who preach the truth and uphold the Word of God as plainly as we can." But in the Gering program itself, trouble was brewing. The coming conflict was first noted in Florence's diary:

Some men and students are conspiring to give Don Pinon a bad time. They refuse to let any of the older men in on any talks. (They) would destroy the church, training program, and school if they could.⁴

The next day was Sunday, "a very sad day for the Gering church." Archie had to preach for Pinon, who was too distraught over the move to oust him as preacher. Five men were named as "ring leaders," including Pete Peters, who eventually left Gering and began a nationwide organization highlighting the doctrine of British-Israelism and Aryan supremacy, something he had *not* learned under Word and Pinon. The Sunday night service was a shambles.

At the night service they called Don a liar, a slanderer, a deceiver! . . . The church was shocked, hurt, humiliated, in tears . . . prayers broken by sobbing. May God have mercy on those who delight in destroying a good man, a faithful and true man like Don.⁵

Soon the college classes ground to a halt. Archie

continued to fill in for Don, who was not allowed to preach in his own pulpit. The day after Christmas Archie brought a message on peace, "The Message of the Angels," but it was to no avail. The 250-member church continued to be wracked by dissension into the new year. A prayer meeting Jan. 5, 1977, "a God-blessed service" with forgiveness asked of one another, seemed to patch things up. But then —

the henchmen of Pete Peters tore it all apart. . . . Such a work of the devil I have never seen . . . such language, defamation, strife, hatred, discord, envy, jealousy, maligning of character falsely.⁶

The situation had so deteriorated that outside brethren were called in to help settle the growing dispute. Arbitrators came: Donald Hunt of Ottumwa, Iowa, Charles Dailey of Vancouver, Washington, and Don Heese of Denver, Colorado. Saturday, January 8, "day of decision in Gering," was a hard day for Florence. She cleaned house, baked pies, read her Bible and prayed while the meeting at the church went into a marathon session that lasted all day and into the early hours of the next morning. The issue seemed to be resolved for Pinon was back in the pulpit later that morning. But on Wednesday, January 19, "a day of great tragedy in the Gering church," Pinon was disfellowshipped by a majority vote of the men. Signers of the letter of disfellowship said the decision was brought about after Pinon "retracted" his repentance of a lie following the marathon meeting.⁷

At first Archie Word was ready to quit himself of the entire affair and move back to the West Coast, something his family urged him to do. On January 23 he informed Richard Ellis of what he planned to do:

I am closing ny ministry here as of NOW. This stinking mess that has been created by Pete Peters . . . has caused such a disruption in this church . . . that this church will never get over it. I refuse to work with such people; have told them that I am leaving, NOW. . . . Give me a month to get ready to move and before I leave these parts I will hold you a meeting.⁸

But the very next day, January 24, he changed his mind and decided to stay in Gering and start a new church with Don Pinon. Charles Dailey tried to talk to him.

I walked to his office where he was packing his library and said, "We've usually agreed on things, but this time I believe you are making a mistake. He said his mind was made up. He was going with Don."⁹

(It would be several years before Archie Word would acknowledge Charles Dailey again.)

Brother Word still would not speak to me. If I saw him in a group, he would turn his back. If I entered a circle where he was visiting, he would leave. I simply accepted this part of a decisive person who was not noted for coming to terms with his enemies.¹⁰

Archie Word remained loyal to Don Pinon to the day of his death. He believed that Pinon was a good man who had been done in by men who were jealous of his success at winning souls, growing churches and training preachers. The two men found an old Foursquare Church building for rent at 1314 Avenue I in Scottsbluff and two days later held their first Mid-week service with 65 present. On Feb. 1 they began a new Bible training program known as Scottsbluff School of Evangelism. On Feb. 11 some of the family

members flew into Scottsbluff to try to reconcile the two churches before the break went any farther, but the attempts of Donald Hunt, Tom Burgess and Arch Word, Jr. were in vain.

"ON THE SHELF"

Both Archie Word and Don Pinon were effectively "put on the shelf" by most of the brethren in the Word-Hunt connection. Terry Crist came to Gering to hold a meeting for the 7th and Q church and informed Archie that he was being cancelled from the annual Mideast rally. The Ottumwa brethren dropped him from the Centerville program where he had been a popular keynote speaker for over 30 years. After driving to Davenport, Iowa, where he was scheduled to speak at a new church dedication where Donald Hunt preached, he was told by the men of the church that he could not participate in the service. Soon *The Voice of Evangelism*, a paper he had helped start with his own mailing list, declined to print any of his articles or report on any activities of the new Scottsbluff church or college. The ban lasted until 1981. In April he wrote Richard Ellis:

I do not understand this DENOMINATIONAL BROTHERHOOD DISFELLOWSHIPING BUSINESS! It was not until the 'Universal Bishop' gained control of the denominational councils that a Universal Disfellowshipping was put into practice.¹¹

(Yet, as some could have reminded him, a "Universal Disfellowshipping" of Edwin DeVries in Denver had been the topic of numerous meetings that Archie had attended in the past few years.)

Ellis published a 24-page booklet by Archie Word in

1977, *The Christian Home*, a transcription of a message Archie had preached in Ottumwa the previous year. In the preface Ellis quoted Word from a letter (Mar. 5, 1977) “. . . the old man of the mountains is coming down to the finish line and will be, in the not too dim future, headed for what he has labored for. The closer one comes to the finale, the more exciting it all is.”

“WHY NOT SHOOT FOR THE STARS?”

A bitterly disappointed Archie taught in the new school until the end of May, then left for a series of meetings in Oregon with churches that did not recognize the brotherhood ban: Reedsport, Albany, and St. Helens. During the St. Helens campaign he met a man who had been baptized during his great revival in Dufur in the winter of 1933 when 162 souls had been won to the Lord. In stark contrast, the St. Helens meeting netted only four baptisms.

The Word children on the West Coast wanted Archie and Florence to move back to Oregon and, for a time, it seems that Archie seriously considered doing so. In a letter to Charles Crane, he confessed, “I know of no place I would rather retire than on the Oregon coast.”¹² But it was not to be.

During the summer of 1977 Archie attended the Holgate Rally, but was not asked to speak. He was asked to pray, but retorted, “If I’m not good enough to preach, I’m not good enough to pray.” Following Holgate he and Florence left for a trip to Canada. Florence had been in a “daze” with “no heart for anything” since the terrible division in Gering. Archie hoped the scenic wonder of Canada would do Florence some good. In Banff they went to a Baptist Church both

morning and evening. On Wednesday night they could find no church at all, so they had a Bible study in their trailer. The August entries in Florence’s diary do not record any preaching points by Archie in Canada.

The lure of teaching in Nebraska won out over the lure of retirement on the Oregon coast. Back in Scottsbluff once more, Archie wrote to Charles Crane,

I hope to teach for another 75 years! Abraham made it to 175, and I am a child of Abraham in the faith, so why not shoot for the stars?¹³

“I WOULD RATHER BE RIGHT”

On his 77th birthday Archie’s new students in Scottsbluff gave him a boot-shaped birthday cake and some money to buy a new pair of cowboy boots, which Archie did, wearing them proudly until the day he died 10 years later. He continued to preach in chapel each week and on Sunday nights at the new Scottsbluff church, which had seen 40 baptisms during its first year of existence.

During the summer of 1978 Archie preached in Reno, Nevada, Lindsay and Paradise, California, and held return revivals in Oregon at Albany, Reedsport, and St. Helens. In the Reedsport meeting a man was converted just by studying Archie’s charts on the walls each night. He also spoke at a new family camp near Smith River with two old friends, Melvin Traxler and Harold Buckles. Archie Word was “off limits” for three annual rallies on which he had spoken for years. He did not like being “treated like a senile crackpot and given a back seat from the so-called brotherhood.”¹⁴ He once said, “I would rather be right with my God and in my conscience than to preach to the whole

three great assemblies all together, knowing I was wrong." (By "three great assemblies" he meant Holgate, Centerville, and the Mideast rally which had been moved from Rushville to West Milton, Ohio.) He was bitterly disappointed that many of his brethren and associates were rejecting him because of his loyalty to Don Pinon, whom he saw as "the finest man I have ever worked with."¹⁶

"THAT IS WHAT WE WERE BORN AGAIN FOR"

But not everyone had put Archie Word on the shelf. After being allowed to participate in his grandson David Brink's ordination, he traveled to Reno, Nevada, where the preacher, Rodney Reyman, was recovering from a heart attack. Archie was not well himself, but rose to the occasion and preached for Rodney, who said, "He was not well, but wanted to preach and we told him when he was sick his preaching was better than a lot of men who were well, and he took courage and blessed us greatly."¹⁷

James E. Gibbons, editor of *The Sword and Staff*, asked him to write an article, "Advice I Would Give Young Preachers, If Asked." Archie listed 12 things, including, "Keep your life so straight that you will never fear what any accuser has to say about you. Truth will out!"

Archie was now wearing hearing aids in both ears and once in a while his memory would play tricks on him, as it did Nov. 5, 1978, when he was scheduled to preach in Kimball. Florence noted: "A first for Daddy. Left his sermon and Bible in Gering. Had to preach with an hour to prepare."

Archie Word brought 1978 to an end by flying to Phoenix, Arizona, to conduct a mission meeting in a

Chicano congregation. Teaching and preaching was still his life's blood. He wrote Don DeWalt,

Glad your work there goes forward. . . . That is what we were born again for. I have 26 years in teaching in Seminary work, and 52 years of preaching the Gospel in private and in public. God is Sooooo wonderful to us all. Praise His Holy Name, forever!¹⁸

OLD TIMES

The first half of 1979 found Archie Word in good health. He held an April revival in Cheyenne, Wyoming, (6 responses), and after school was out took off for the West Coast once more. He preached for three nights in Las Vegas, Nevada, (Florence called it a "city of sin and corruption"), then traveled to Pomona, California, where he had held two great revivals in the 30s. But this time he spent only two nights with a very small congregation — quite a contrast with the longest meeting he ever held, 13 weeks! In Los Angeles, where he had once tackled a church thief, he preached for a Spanish-speaking church, then returned to his home town of Lindsay, scene of some of his greatest preaching ever, for a service June 17.

Florence described one special afternoon: "We went for a long drive through the foothills to back valleys where we had never been." The Words also spent a wonderful day with Bill and Carrie Jessup, Lewis and Minnie Mick, Dorothy Shaw, Archie's sister Nell, and Hal and Evelyn Martin. "What a glorious, precious afternoon!" exclaimed Florence.

The summer of 1979 was a summer of "old times." On June 24 Archie began a revival in Paradise, California, with his former associate at Montavilla, K.O. Back-

strand. Then it was on to Smith River in Oregon and a family camp with Burton Barber, Traxler, and Buckles. Coos Bay was the next site for a meeting – a town where Archie Word had held more revivals than any other place in the country. Vincent Kohler, a staff writer for *The World*, wrote a front-page article on Archie, whom he called, “the last of Oregon’s old-time circuit-riding preachers.”¹⁹ Kohler also wrote that Word was “something of a force in Depression-era fundamentalism in Oregon,” adding that “a strong current of fundamentalism still runs through the religion of the South Coast,” where Word’s career started in 1930.²⁰

The Coos Bay campaign began July 8 and was going great until Archie came down with hepatitis. His final messages, “Real Christians” and “Gone With Your Last Breath” were not up to par, according to Florence, who described them as “shorter than usual . . . not as much zip.”

OLD AGE

His skin tinged a sickly yellow, Archie went back to Portland where Arch Jr. took one look at him and took him to the doctor. Florence was not feeling well either and underwent a series of extensive tests. On July 29 he attempted to preach at St. Helens, but Florence again had to write, “Daddy not at his best.” But both of them were feeling well enough to attend the last church service at the familiar address of 550 N.E. 76th Avenue in Portland. The congregation had outgrown its new building and was moving to a new location in north Portland where they would be known as the Crossroads Church of Christ. In honor of their 33 years of service the Words were presented with a

special plaque.

Back in Scottsbluff, Archie tried to beg off a rally in Ottumwa with Dick Ellis, but then changed his mind and went anyway. He later apologized for his poor preaching: “I was ashamed of the manner in which I presented the message, but I assure you, I did my best.”²¹

Advancing age was now taking its toll on the couple that had started out for the Lord so many years before. The bout with hepatitis weakened Archie considerably. Then, on Dec. 5, 1979, Florence wondered if she had suffered a slight stroke. A few weeks later she wrote, “I am thinking I should not try to teach anymore.”

As the decade of the 70s came to an end, both of them were wondering how much longer they could go on in their service for Christ and His church.

On Feb. 3, 1980, a “delirious” Archie Word was rushed to the hospital where he was found to be suffering from acute pneumonia. But four days later the old war horse was home, working on his Job class. He did not preach again, however, until March 2, his first sermon since January, and it was “shorter than usual.” On March 5 Florence noted, “Both Daddy and I were very tired today. Is this a warning as to how the summer may go?” It was. One day Don Pinon had to finish Archie’s message for him. On May 15 he was back in the hospital again, this time for three long weeks. During his stay in the hospital the doctors discovered he had been suffering from gall stones all along. Following the operation a considerably weakened Archie Word came home. Esther flew in from Portland to care for her mother and father for the next two weeks, including all the diary entries except one.

On June 15 Archie managed to scrawl, "I love you, Mommie!"

Archie now admitted to one of his close friends that he "began wondering if I'd ever preach again." In fact, he was not just wondering if his preaching career was over — he was wondering if his life was about to run out. In his annual Christmas letter, he shared his heart:

If He is closing my life of service here, I am ready to go to be with Him and trust my soul to Him who is able to move mountains and dry up seas, my eternal and loving Father.²³

He had time to do a lot of heavy thinking in 1980, the last decade of life he would ever know. One day he confided to Charles Crane some of those thoughts:

When I think of the holiness of God and my own UNholiness, I surely have to depend on the Lord's imputed righteousness to even think of meeting the Creator of the universe.²⁴

In 1980 he rallied enough to take Florence out West again, but this time, for the first time since 1930 — 50 years ago — Archie Word did not hold a single revival meeting. He did manage to preach 11 times in Nevada, Oregon and Washington, but when he returned to Nebraska in August he was immediately hit with dizzy spells that lasted into September. Still, he prepared for two of his favorite classes, Biblical Introduction and Christian Evidences, and on Sept. 14 he preached as he had in the old days. "Daddy preached in the P.M. like he used to preach!!!" wrote an encouraged Florence. It would take more than train wrecks, church splits, hepatitis, gall stones and dizzy spells to put this ex-boxer down for the count!

THE COMEBACK

On Jan. 20, 1981, Florence made a notation in her diary: "Hostages are freed! Reagan is now President." The Words, lifelong Republicans, were delighted that Ronald Reagan now occupied the White House. But on March 20 Florence wrote, "President Reagan is shot! Listened to the radio almost all day." Fortunately, Reagan survived the assassination attempt. Archie Word had survived too. He celebrated another birthday, "rejoicing to be 80 and still loved by family and friends."²⁵ The Scottsbluff church presented him with a lovely wall clock for his study. He was still teaching 16 hours a week in the Scottsbluff School of Evangelism and jogging every morning to get ready for another summer of revival meetings!

The campaigns that Archie Word would hold from 1981-1983 would give him better newspaper coverage than the West Coast revivals of 1930-1935. He told Charles Crane in 1981 that the media had given him "the biggest write-ups and photos that I have ever had."²⁶

Archie Word's "comeback" began, appropriately enough, in Springfield, Oregon, sister city to Eugene, where he had gone to Bible college in the 20s. The revival began May 31 and was scheduled to end June 14, but due to excellent press coverage, the meeting caught fire and lasted clear to June 28 — a full four-week revival resulting in 15 responses. Florence was ecstatic: "It pays to have *long* meetings." Archie agreed: "The Southern Baptists and Pentecostals can still have month-long meetings, but the Restoration Movement has about quit any BIG MEETINGS with over 100 conversions. That seems to be a thing of the past."

The month-long meeting was given a big boost by Debbie Selinsky, a staff writer for the *Springfield News*. In her interview with the one-time bootlegger-brawler she called attention to three women who influenced his life through prayer:

He attributes much of where he is today to the prayers of his mother and two 'old maids' in the church he grew up in in California. 'There's a God in heaven, and I believe he providentially works things if we pay attention to it. He can make our lives totally different if we'll let him,' Word says.²⁸

(Word once recalled that sometimes he was the only boy at prayer meeting in Lindsay when the women would pray, "God, raise up a preacher from among us." He figured it had to be him they were praying about!)

Selinsky noted that Word didn't joke in the pulpit, except to make a point. She quoted him as saying:

I do a lot of illustrations — not for fun. If someone opens his mouth to laugh, I'll reach down his throat, grasp his liver and squeeze it. This is too important to joke about. . . . You got to get things right on the inside before you can get them right on the outside.²⁹

The *Eugene Register-Guard* came out with a feature article, "Spreading the Word," in its Sunday edition June 14, the day the meeting was scheduled to end. Reporter Sally Casis Cheriell called Word an "old-time revivalist" who preached with "a voice full of thunder and a fist full of punch." She described Word's pulpit style and sermon:

Like the former boxer he is, he paces and bobs, shuffles his feet, jabs the air with his fist and pounds out a

fundamentalist hellfire and damnation message. 'You're headed for heaven or hell. One of these days, you're going to have to give an account. You wait 'til you're on you're deathbed to change and it'll be too late,' he warns.³⁰

The feature article included three large photographs of Archie Word at his photogenic best: index finger raised in warning; leaning over the pulpit with fire in his eye; whacking his wall-length Bible time-line chart which he was still lecturing from each night before the message.

"WHEN MY TOES TURN UP, I'LL QUIT"

Leaving Springfield full of vim and vigor the 80-year-old preacher headed to the state capitol at Salem and a two-week revival with Harold Buckles (July 12-26). Here the *Salem Statesman-Journal* gave him two full pages of coverage with huge pictures of him in dynamic poses in front of his charts and banners. Staff writer Lewis H. Arends Jr. noted Word's "commanding presence, standing nearly 6-feet tall and carrying 190 pounds on his large frame." He also observed that Archie's "white goatee and metal frame eyeglasses reminds one of Kentucky's late Col. Sanders." But, added Arends, "The 'product' Word offers is not buckets of chicken but Jesus Christ."³¹ Archie told the reporter that he planned to continue holding revivals as long as he lived. "When my toes turn up, I'll quit."

The Salem congregation enjoyed record crowds for the meeting. Elery Parrish came to hear him one night. So did Tom Burgess and Ron Hunt, who tried to get him to appear with them on a television broadcast "Which Way America?" they were taping in Salem each week. But the answer, as always, was no. He

would use every form of media except television.

"I AM DOING WHAT I WANT TO DO"

A revived Archie Word was now feeling as strong as he had in many years. In the summer of 1981 he spoke at two family camps — Smith River in Oregon and Red Feather in Colorado — then was back in the classroom again, teaching Church History and Old Testament Poets in the fall term at Scottsbluff.

In November he flew to Portland where he preached a sermon at Duke Street (7 responses) before beginning a meeting at Reedsport which lasted from Nov. 21 to Dec. 1. Once again the *Eugene Register-Guard* did a feature on him, calling him a "salty, old-time evangelist" who, in spite of several cracked ribs he suffered in a fall during the meeting, "knotted his fist against his side and didn't miss preaching a sermon."

"I was hit worse than that when I was a boxer," he told the reporter. "Not too long ago," he says, someone remarked that a man his age shouldn't have to be working so hard — that he should be doing what he wanted to do. "I collared the man who said that and told him, 'I love to preach. I am doing what I want to do, and I'm doing it with all my heart.'"³³

"A MAN TRULY SENT BY GOD"

On Jan. 13, 1982, a Boeing 737 went down in the icy Potomac River in Washington, D.C. Commuters on the bridge watched in horror as screaming passengers disappeared beneath the frigid waters. Florence wrote in her diary, "passenger plane in Potomac. 78 dead." Archie Word would be in Washington, D.C. a few months later, on his way to a revival in Virginia. Had

he been there in January he probably would have plunged into the river to save lives. But his real calling was saving souls. On Feb. 21 he preached an evening message at Scottsbluff, "Secret Sins," that brought six responses. "What rejoicing! What prayers afterward! It was like a revival meeting!" exulted Florence. The old master had not lost his touch. One of Archie's many "Timothies," Don DeWelt, came to Gering for a revival later in the month and the Words went to hear him preach. They were flabbergasted to see that he was growing older too. "White hair — hard to believe he is that old!"

In April Archie flew to Virginia, via the nation's capitol, to hold a revival for the Locust Grove church in Galax. Florence was a bit wistful: "Hated to see him go this time." But the press was glad to see him come. Larry Chambers, editor-in-chief of the *Galax Gazette* did a front-page feature article, "Spreading the Word," complete with a large picture of a stern-faced, finger-pointing Archie Word gracing the top half of the newspaper. Chambers noted that Word was not exactly a household word in Virginia, having been in the state only three or four times before. Archie told the editor, "I remember coming to the Norfolk Naval Base in 1926, just after the war had ended. I was mean then, real mean. I was far from being a peaceful person." He remembered being locked up in the brig 21 times in 24 days for drinking. "I was always fighting. That was my downfall. Shucks, I was even a boxer at one time."³⁴

Chambers described Word's pulpit manner:

As he starts his walk toward the pulpit, the feeling that this man is truly sent by God is evident. The audience

is quiet. Their eyes are cast on Word as he moves his hands like the director of an orchestra. His sermon Monday night "Are you fit to live with," was inspiring and full of meaning. He held his Bible in front of him as he recited many passages. This man knew what he came for and how to convey the spiritual word to his congregation.³⁵

"THE ONLY PLACE I WOULD GIVE UP TEACHING TO GO PREACH"

When Archie returned from Virginia he and Florence left for Archie's 60th high school reunion in Lindsay. When they got there the orange trees were in blossom. The May reunion amidst the orange blossoms caused Archie to say, "Lindsay is the only place that I know of that I would give up my teaching to go preach."³⁶ It was about this time, according to a long-time Lindsay member, that the men at Lindsay "gave him a call to rebuild the church." Archie pondered the decision long and hard before sending his regrets. "He decided against it because of her (Florence's) health. If anybody could have got things rolling again, it would have been Archie Word."³⁷

The summer of 1982 found Archie holding revivals in Coos Bay and Portland, Oregon. The June meeting in Coos Bay, his umpteenth in the fishing city, netted only three responses. "I did my best, but it did not get much stirred up," he wrote to Charles Crane.³⁸ But the other meeting, with his grandson David Brink and the Duke Street church in Portland, resulted in 17 decisions for Christ. Once again the revival was well attended because of publicity in the *Oregon Journal* and the *Portland Oregonian*. "Believe it or not—Word preaches word" was the banner headline of

Charlotte Graydon's article in the *Oregonian*. The reference was to Word's slogan from the old days, "Hear A. Word Preach the Word," which appeared in Robert Ripley's *"Believe It or Not."* Graydon called Word "one of the old-time revival meeting preachers" who "converted thousands during his evangelism tours, but he won't estimate a number or make claims that they remained converts." Archie told her, "I preach because I love the Lord and lost people."³⁹ The *Journal* described him as a "bouncy one-time boxer" and "roving evangelist" who sent more than 120 men into the ministry. There followed this interesting exchange:

Were any of those new ministers women? No, not one.

"The Bible says men are to be the preachers," Word said firmly. "Where the Bible speaks we speak; where the Bible is silent we are silent.

"The Bible says women are to keep silent in the church. They preach by their lives.

"Today is my 56th wedding anniversary. My wife is a wonderful woman."

Asked what he thinks of ordaining homosexuals as ministers, Word snapped:

"We preach what the Bible says. In the Old Testament homosexuals were stoned. God burned Sodom and Gomorrah because of them. The New Testament condemns homosexuality in no uncertain terms. . . .

"A homosexual minister can preach in hell, I guess."⁴⁰

Ordaining women or homosexuals as ministers was not the only issue Archie spoke out on in 1982. In a Thanksgiving address he blasted the bloody business of abortion (he called doctors who practiced abortion

D.M.s rather than M.D.s — “damnable murderers!”).

This Thanksgiving Day we should thank God we have been spared by God, though as a nation we have turned from Him and His Word . . . we have killed millions of babies under the cloak of national law, unborn innocents.⁴¹

“WE BOTH CRIED”

Ever since Archie and Florence had taken to the road in 1969, they had been accompanied by a faithful traveling companion, “Louie,” a brown French poodle named after Louis the XIV of France. Like Mary and her little lamb, everywhere that Archie went, the dog was sure to go. Archie spoiled the dog terribly, feeding him hamburgers and ice cream. Grandson David Brink recalls,

Louie was like one of his kids. Yet, at the same time, Louie possessed many of the character traits that irritated Brother Word so much when he saw them in other people. Consequently, the dog became the brunt of many sermon illustrations.⁴²

But when poor Louis had to be put to sleep April 12, 1983, it hit Archie like a ton of bricks. Florence was sad too. “We both cried. We miss Louie.”

The Words traveled to Virginia in June, minus Louie, for a return two-week revival in Galax and a five-night meeting in rural Dobson, N.C. The church building sat right in the middle of a tobacco field — a prime target for Archie in one of his sermons. From there they drove 3,000 miles in four days to Portland, where the 82-year-old evangelist held another two-week meeting at Duke Street, resulting in five decisions.

HIS LAST HURRAH

The last big revival that Archie Word ever held was with the North Central Church of Christ in Spokane, Wash., where Myron Wells and Larry Smith were ministers. Wells thought Word was “too old” and a little “out of touch” to hold the meeting, but due to Smith’s “unrelenting pressure” consented. Today Wells admits, “Boy, was I wrong. I will always treasure that great meeting.” The meeting began November 18, 1983. Archie had left Florence behind in Nebraska. While he was gone she became very ill and was taken to the hospital. On Thanksgiving Day the family called Archie and told him that Florence was in serious condition, and the doctor had said she might not make it through the day. Archie had always maintained that if such a situation ever arose he would remain in the pulpit because saving lost souls was to him the most important thing in the world. True to his word, he remained in Spokane and finished out the 12-night revival. A year later he admitted that the stress of not being with Florence during this time, “nearly did me in.”⁴³ There were 35 responses in the Spokane campaign, almost reminiscent of some of the smaller victories he had enjoyed in the great Depression-era revivals of the 30s.

The *Spokane Spokesman-Review* gave Word banner coverage, **Col. Sanders’ double is no chicken about preaching.** Staff writer Judy Mills wrote,

Word once sat under Col. Sanders’ picture in a Portland Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet.

‘Pretty soon the cook came out, looked and went back,’ Word recalled. ‘Then the cook and the waitress

came out and looked. Finally, the manager came out. He stood there and said, 'Why blankety-blank, he does look like him!'⁴⁴

The Spokane reporter was smitten with Word, calling him a "Walter Cronkite avuncular – the kind you'd adopt for a grandfather after the first handshake. He's a tall, burly sort with an endearing twinkle in his smiling eyes." As a speaker she saw him as "a bread-and-butter preacher from the old school of living the scriptures – and only the scriptures – to the last dot of an 'i' and cross of a 't' . . . preaching and pounding and shouting 'God's Word'."

When the woman reporter asked Archie what he thought about the modern day practice of cohabitation, he replied, "The Bible calls it fornication. If you do it, you go to hell."⁴⁵

By this time in his career Archie Word could think of only three states in the contiguous union he had not visited in his revival travels. In addition he had preached in Alaska (before it was a state), the British West Indies, Mexico, and Israel. Although he had traveled in Canada, it is not clear from his records if he ever preached there. The Spokane revival was the "last hurrah" of the man a veteran California newspaperman once dubbed "America's foremost evangelist."

(It was reported that he turned down an honorary doctorate from the divinity school of Texas Christian University on matters of principle. He detested religious titles – "Brother Word" was good enough for him.)⁴⁶

In the annual Christmas letter the Words sent out at the end of a most remarkable year, Archie wrote,

All things considered it has been a good year. We are

drawing nearer to heaven every day and we hope you are all doing the same. Remember the mansions are in preparation and we should be preparing for them.⁴⁷

Archie's mansion was less than five years away.

Notes

1. Letter to Archie Word from Don DeWalt, June 30, 1976
2. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, Aug. 26, 1976
3. Letter to Richard Ellis from Archie Word, Oct. 28, 1976
4. Diary of Florence Word, Dec. 11, 1976
5. *Ibid*, Dec. 12, 1976
6. *Ibid*, Jan. 5, 1977
7. Letter of disfellowship from 7th and Q church in Gering, Nebr., April 13, 1977
8. Letter to Richard Ellis from Archie Word, Jan. 23, 1977
9. Letter to author from Charles Dailey, Sept. 18, 1989
10. *Ibid*
11. Letter to Richard Ellis from Archie Word, May 26, 1977
12. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, Nov. 11, 1977
13. *Ibid*
14. Letter to Richard Ellis from Archie Word, Sept. 11, 1978
15. *Ibid*, Oct. 24, 1978
16. *Ibid*
17. Letter to author from Rodney Reyman, July 25, 1990
18. Letter to Don DeWalt from Archie Word, Aug. 19, 1978
19. *The Coos Bay World*, July 14, 1979
20. *Ibid*
21. Letter to Richard Ellis from Archie Word, Oct. 22, 1979
22. Letter to Don DeWalt from Archie Word, Sept. 1, 1980
23. General form letter from Archie Word, June 18, 1980
24. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, Mar. 25, 1980
25. *Ibid*, April 21, 1981
26. Undated letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, 1981
27. *Ibid*
28. *Springfield News*, May 30, 1981
29. *Ibid*
30. *Eugene Register-Guard*, June 14, 1981
31. *Salem Statesman-Journal*, July 16, 1981
32. *Eugene Register-Guard*, Dec. 30, 1981
33. *Ibid*
34. *Galax Gazette*, April 7, 1982

35. *Ibid*
36. Undated letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, 1982
37. Author's interview with Alpha Engleking, April 21, 1990
38. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, July 26, 1982
39. *Portland Oregonian*, July 17, 1962
40. *Oregon Journal*, July 8, 1982
41. *The Builder*, Nov. 1982
42. *The Life Story of Archie Word*, p. 110
43. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, Feb. 8, 1984
44. *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, Nov. 24, 1983
45. *Ibid*
46. Conversation with William E. Paul, Dec. 6, 1988; *One Body*, Spring 1989
47. Annual letter of greeting (1983) from Archie Word

24

MENDING FENCES
(1984-1987)

I shall never forget our last farewell. Archie Word, whose heart was more tender and caring than many surmised, could not take his turn in the prayer circle as we parted. I treasure that memory.

—Russell Boatman

The man who had held hundreds of revivals across America was not able to conduct one in 1984; only the second time in 56 years of preaching that he had failed to preach at least one revival. At the age of 83, however, he continued to keep a busy schedule: preaching on Sunday nights, teaching 8 hours a week in the college. (Biblical Introduction, Christian Evidences, Major Prophets, Church History), and doing some writing for *The Builder*, *One Body*, and *The Voice of Evangelism*.

ALZHEIMERS STRIKES FLORENCE

Although not identified as such at the time, Alzheimer's disease began to afflict Florence in 1984. Archie cut his teaching load in half so he could be at home with his wife. He would often read to her from the Bible and comb her hair. "She looks prettier every day," he wrote in her diary. When Florence managed to make an entry in the diary her handwriting was feeble and shaky. . . . Sometimes she would leave a sentence unfinished and often she would place entries on the wrong page. On January 18 Archie wrote, "Mom seems some better but her memory is something else."

Prayer meeting had always been a highlight of Florence's week. She considered it to be the perfect end to a day. But now prayer meeting became a nightmare for her. In May this sad entry: "When it was my turn to pray I could not speak. I felt very bad, ashamed, chagrined. I must do better." A September entry read, "How I wish I could pray as others do, but my mind does not allow me to." Soon all this began to take its toll on Archie, both emotionally and physically. He began having difficulty sleeping at night, sometimes sitting up all night in his easy chair. His doctor advised him to start wearing a nitroglycerin patch for his recurring chest pains.

"I'M GLAD HEAVEN IS REAL"

Death had always been real to Archie Word. He had buried his father, mother, and brother, along with hundreds of other people, saved and lost. But in 1984 death seemed to make a greater impression than ever on him. In February he wrote an article, "When Death Comes":

Life and friendships on this earth are fleeting, short lived, and life is passing away swiftly. All too soon we too will be a memory, either good or evil. . . .

Let us live in such a way, while we sojourn here, that when our summons comes, whether by lingering and prolonged illness or by some tragic accident, that we will be right with God, be a real Christian, washed in the blood of the Lamb, trusting in Him and in His church and faithful to it, helping to get the message out to those 'out of Christ' or lost still. Let us give our lives, time, work, and money to do the will of the Lord we are all soon going to meet.¹

When he learned that Don DeWalt's mother was very ill, he took time to write to his "son in the faith" (who had nearly died himself in 1983):

I know how you must feel, going to see your Mom and knowing she will soon receive her crown. Life is so uncertain. You came close to graduating before she is expected to. Our faith is peculiar — two-sided. We all talk and sing about heaven but when it is one of our close loved ones, leaving us, we are torn emotionally. I'm glad heaven is real and God knows how we feel.²

THE WORD WILL GET US TO HEAVEN

In the same letter, Archie commented on DeWalt's unity efforts with the noninstrumental Church of Christ brethren.

Scripturally a group of Christians could meet and worship God acceptably with not one congregational song in the whole service. There *is* no reference in God's Word to ANY church singing as a congregation. *Individuals* sang, which *Anti*-"tradition" will not allow in church. And we all know for sure all church people know more songs — Scriptural and Anti-Scriptural — than they know of God's Word. It's "The Word," not our songs, that get us to heaven.³

(At the first Restoration Forum in Joplin, Missouri, Aug. 7-9, 1984, Don DeWelt went from one discussion group to the next introducing the idea that the Bible does not really authorize congregational singing.)

The day before his 83rd birthday, he wrote to Charles Crane: "I am 83 tomorrow. Pray that my faith may increase up to the very finishing line."⁴

MAKING PEACE

By June the Words were feeling good enough to take another trip out West, spending several weeks with family and friends in Lindsay, Los Gatos, and San Jose. While visiting Central Christian Church in San Jose, he talked briefly with Woodrow Phillips.

"You know, Woody, there was a time when I called you 'God's prince'."

Woody quietly asked, "Whose prince am I now?" Archie's eyes twinkled. "You're still 'God's prince.'"⁵

From California the Words drove to Portland where I was then serving as Director of Northwest College of the Bible, the school Archie had started in 1952, along with Warren Bell and Lee Turner. At a special service, plaques were presented to each of the men in appreciation for their vision, faith and contributions to the lives of many. Charles Dailey, who though not a founder had been an integral part of the faculty for many years, was present in the audience that day — "the day that the break came."

The original school faculty members had each presented a sermon. The mood had shifted to appreciation for those who had made the school "go" in the past and the present. Brother Word took the microphone and said, "There is someone here that has worked faithfully since the early days of the school

and should be recognized for his labors. Charles Dailey, stand up!"

I was dumbfounded, not for the recognition, but for the source of it. But knowing Brother Word, I knew this was his way of publicly making peace. From that occasion onward, he conversed with me just as if the silent years had never happened.⁶

In August Archie Word was on the Centerville rally once again (he had been brought back on the Portland rally the year before). He was also asked to preach on a three-day rally in Rutland, Vermont, but would not go unless he could bring Florence with him. The church flew them to Vermont, but when they returned to their home in Gering on Oct. 15, they were both exhausted. "Home looks so good," wrote Archie.

LOVE SLAVES FOREVER

In October 1984 *The Voice of Evangelism* published an article by Archie on "Conversion." Conviction, he said, was not enough. "The old alarm clock rings and convicts you, wakes you up, but it is not enough to lie there awake and miserable. We must get up and get going for God!" He had not lost his passion for preaching genuine conversion through authentic repentance. You can sense his power and pathos in the following excerpt:

Oh, good people, if I die in the pulpit, let me die preaching the faith and repentance, and if I die out of the pulpit, let me die IN the faith and practicing repentance.⁷

He closed with a heart-touching illustration of a man who was devoted to his invalid wife, "The Love Slave."

"What a shame for a big strong man to be such a slave to an invalid wife," were the words spoken a little too loudly by a young lady in the saloon of a great ocean liner as a couple went down the ladder below. An hour or so later the man in question took a seat beside the critic who had uttered her hasty judgment.

"I think your remark, which I accidentally overheard, justifies me telling you a little bit about my 'slavery', as you called it. . . .

"It began thirty years ago when my bride nursed me through Yellow Fever alone because everyone else had fled in panic. She did not have an hour's sleep for over three weeks. . . . She fell ill with it herself and nearly died. . . .

"When I lost my money and position, she did the work of three women. When sickness and death visited our home, she met them with God-given courage. For twenty-five years she did not spare herself. Five years ago her health gave way.

"She will never be well again. My 'slavery' is the slavery of a whole-hearted devotion to one of the noblest women ever given to the earth. "Young lady, I pray that you someday will command as happy a slave."⁸

Perhaps Archie was thinking of his own relationship with his beloved Billy, who would never be well again, as he told this story. He closed with an urgent appeal:

O sinner friend, when you realize what Jesus went through for you, does not it make you want to be His "love slave" forever? . . . Become CONVERTED! . . . turn your whole life over to Christ and let Him be your LORD!"

The diaries of Florence Word came to an end in 1984 — her final entry on New Year's Eve: "The last day of December — the last day of the year — has been

so pleasant. . . . The old year out and the new year in. . . . Daddy has a cold." The last four words reveal her concern for Archie — "love slaves" to each other to the very end.

Dr. Charles Crane, one of Archie's many converts, preserved over 200 letters that Archie wrote to him between 1975 and 1988. (He had been in correspondence with him since 1962, but failed to keep the earlier letters.) The "Crane correspondence" provides us with much vital information concerning the thoughts and activities of Archie Word during the last four years of his life. He had a special place in his heart for the boy from Sweet Home whom he had converted in a revival and helped train for the ministry.

"I'D BE ASHAMED TO RETIRE"

Early in 1985 the Scottsbluff congregation purchased three acres of land on the west side of town and prepared to erect a new church building that would seat 300 for worship. Additional offices and classrooms were planned for the School of Evangelism. In spite of his wife's worsening condition Archie wanted to continue teaching and preaching, although he was considerably uncertain as to how long he could continue in his role as an associate minister and college instructor.

As to our being in the area (Northwest) this summer, I do not know for sure what I will be doing. They want me to stay here, but my wife is having some trouble and a lot depends on how she holds up as to whether I can keep on teaching or not. She is 83 in May, the 13th, and with the years comes problems health-wise. Then, too, my heart has been acting up, or should I say, it has almost stopped acting at all, a time or two. I

am carrying on 8 hours a week teaching, and preaching twice a week, but the Lord only knows how long or short I will be able to do my job. I do not want to quit. Would like to die on the job. . . . I love to preach, but my physical condition is not what it was 40 years ago.¹⁰

In March, after spending three days in the hospital, Archie was interviewed by Ken Campbell of the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*. The front-page story ran under the headline, **After 6 decades, Gering man still preaches 'Word'**. Campbell wrote:

Does A. Word take after his mother's father, who ran away from a Catholic seminary in Ireland to become a sailor, and who later preached Christianity in the living room of his home in the American backwoods?

Or does the Gering resident take after his father's father, a Kentucky politician and distiller who chased his whiskey with a string of oaths?

At 84, Archie James Word carries a bit of both: the sincere piety of the reformed sinner, the energy and dash of the romantic bootlegger.¹¹

Campbell saw Word as:

a strongly built man of medium height whose silver hair gleams under the lone light in his study. A neatly trimmed mustache and pointed Vandyke beard give him a properly professorial air, but the twinkle behind his wire-rimmed glasses implies a sense of good humor.¹²

After recounting Word's colorful past and conversion to Christ, Campbell described Archie's preaching "to the corners of the continent, from Alaska to Jamaica, from Maine to Mexico, even to Palestine,"

noting that every summer found him on the road with Florence, "carrying the evangelical flame to churches across the nation." He also mentioned the octogenarian's "zest for living and his desire to preach and learn."

"It's been a happy life," he says with satisfaction. "I thank the Lord for my conversion.

"I'm still preaching because I love to preach, and I believe it's God's message to the World," Word says forcefully. "I'd be ashamed to retire."¹³

THE CRIPPLED TEAM

Once again the Words were on the road, preaching 16 times in six weeks on the West Coast although holding no revivals — the second straight year of "drought" in that regard. Perhaps sensing that he was now "coming down to the finish line,"¹⁴ he consented to a taped interview when his grandson, Don Hunt, Jr., came for a visit Oct. 5, 1985. In that interview he shared details of his life from his birth in Kentucky up to the Depression-era revivals of the 30s. Hunt would again interview him in 1988 (the transcripts of both interviews provided to me for this biography).

In November he confided to Charles Crane,

I am afraid my busy days are getting slimmer every year. . . . It seems to me the nearer I get to that old 85 mark, the slower I get. I am thankful for the long life the Lord has allowed me to have and for some of the fruit of my ministry. I count you among my best, along with Don DeWelt, Russell Boatman, K.O. Backstrand along with many other faithful men who are not so well known. . . .

Mom has been having a bad time with her memory this year. I may have to quit and stay home with her.

She is still sweet as ever, but it sure handicaps her. Please pray for her. A team that is only half there is crippled.¹⁵

"PREACHING COMES FIRST"

During the winter and spring of 1986 work continued on the new church building in Scottsbluff — Archie himself sometimes lending a hand in the construction. The congregation moved into its new edifice in April. The building was on the west edge of town, facing the majestic 800-foot landmark that towered above the town. At sunset the rugged bluff made a spectacular sight on the Nebraska skyline. The congregation chose an appropriate new name: Bluffview Church of Christ.

For over 60 years Archie Word had been a looming figure on the skyline of the kingdom of God. He was still gripped with a holy desire to see the lost brought to Christ through the ministry of the Word. In February he wrote Charles Crane:

Your attitude toward the 'lost' is mine too and I try to get talented young men to give up wanting to do anything else on earth; preaching comes first! Too many Reverends are hirelings and never challenge anyone to preach. They never do anything for God.¹⁶

In April "the old man of the mountains" turned 85. One week after his birthday, he wrote Crane.

I have been down. Haven't preached for a whole month. I do have strength enough to teach my class and talk to the students at chapel, but to preach? We moved into our new building yesterday and I really wanted to preach, but had to cancel out about five o'clock Sunday p.m. This has been my first 'time out' experience for quite a spell.¹⁷

Florence also continued to suffer, but her suffering was of a different nature. Her memory, so keen for so long, now seemed "to come and go; so undependable." "But," said Archie, "thank the Lord, she still keeps sweet." Were it not for that fact, he admitted, "It would be awfully hard for me to take."¹⁸

When you have been a rugged individualist all your life, it is quite difficult to accept the diminishing loss of physical strength and health. But perhaps the loss of mental powers is worse. In May Archie confessed:

I guess my letters do sound a bit tired. Possibly my 85 years are catching up with me. I am back preaching once again, but I am not up to par. I just do NOT have the push I once had. I take a nap every afternoon, but that does not knock off 50 years. Mom's mind keeps deteriorating and I may have to give up teaching, or get some one to stay with her while I am in class. She gets so confused now. . . . It makes me realize how wonderfully put together we are. . . . But thank the Lord she keeps sweet so far.¹⁹

60 YEARS TOGETHER

On the 11th of July Archie and Florence were honored at a 60th wedding anniversary gathering in Portland. All the children were present and long-time friends came by all day to wish the Briar and the Lily a truly happy "Diamond Anniversary." A diamond is a hard but beautiful stone: Archie represented the strength, Florence the beauty, and together they made a precious stone in Zion.

While in Oregon Archie managed to preach at Crossroads and Duke Street in Portland, Gresham, Salem, and a family camp near Reedsport. "It is a great life serving God's Son and His Church!" he rejoiced in a letter to Charles Crane. At his daughter Barbara's

house he attempted to write his letters on a computer. "But after three lines, I said, 'Where's my pen?'"²⁰

In September Jenelle's husband died and she moved in with Archie and Florence, to help, comfort and be comforted herself by her aging parents. Once again Archie had cut back his teaching load to only 8 hours a week. In November, however, recurring heart problems sent him to the hospital where he stayed for 10 days. I spoke to him by phone and his voice was husky and weak, but he was so appreciative of the call. Before the month was over he was back to preaching again. "I feel pretty good now and am getting stronger each day!" he told Crane. "Look out, Samson – if I live long enough!"²¹

But while his own health seemed to be somewhat improved, Florence's mental health continued to deteriorate. "Mom has been having a bad time of waking up in the middle of the night, just scared to death – panicked. I would walk and talk with her until she would quiet down. . . . We prayed earnestly for something to happen to stop the the scary time."²² After praying about it, Florence began sleeping peacefully through the night. "God answers prayer!" cried a grateful Archie.

"I WANT TO BE SURE!"

"The old year (1986) is history now and we are in the new one with both feet and hands," wrote Archie in the first week of 1987. "Battles behind us are more pleasant than when they were ahead of us." Charles Crane was "one of the few" whom he was now keeping up with in his correspondence. "I did have a lovely letter from Russell Boatman in St. Louis. . . . He is a good old War Horse." The mention of Boatman is

significant because in 1987 Archie Word became very concerned over a new book written by Russell Boatman, whom Word considered to be one of the finest scholars in the Restoration Movement.

Don DeWelt – another A. Word convert – had asked Boatman to write a book for College Press, *What the Bible Says About the End Time*. College Press, however, did not include Boatman's views on eternal punishment in the book. Boatman later had the stricken chapters published, "sans the College Press imprimatur and publicity," under the title *Beyond Death: What the Bible Says About the Hereafter*, a 141-page treatise on the interim state of the dead, the fate and final state of the unredeemed, and the estate and rewards of the redeemed. The St. Louis scholar spelled out his position in terms of "Grace Redemption/Equitable Punishment." He declared that everlasting life is ours by *grace*, not according to what we deserve; and that the punishment of the unredeemed will be an *equitable* punishment – not a "class judgment," where a school boy who died while wrestling with his decision to accept Christ would suffer the exact same fate as a fiend like Adolf Hitler. The *duration* of the punishment would not be the same for everyone. Satan and his angels, of course, would be tormented forever, but the unredeemed would "suffer punishment, even eternal *destruction* from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (II Thess. 1:9).

Archie Word, who had always preached that hell was equal and eternal punishment for everyone, was troubled over his good friend's published views in *Beyond Death*. He mailed a copy of the book to Charles Crane, along with these words:

He (Boatman) has almost a photographic mind. Makes his sermons, puts them in his pocket and gives them by memory every time I have heard him preach. He has met in discussion some of the biggest brains in the Restoration Movement, both left and right, and for the most part . . . they have not been able to answer him. I have not made the change yet; however, he has made me do some thinking.²⁵

Word went on to plead with Crane to study Boatman's book and let him know what he thought of it. He admitted,

I have been teaching . . . where men go after death for about 61 years and it will be hard for me to believe otherwise, but if I am wrong I do NOT want to preach an untruth. . . . Russell does not believe that hell is going to be a little puff of smoke and its all over. He believes that men shall be punished according to their evil works; what God thinks they deserve. . . . I believe that Hitler will get what he deserves in God's sight and so will the young man or woman who dies at an early age, not having accepted Christ. I am thinking! But not thoroughly convinced yet! It is hard to change at my age. I want to be sure! I do not want to judge God wrongly either.²⁶

Throughout 1987, the next-to-last-year of his life, Boatman's thought-provoking *Beyond Death* continued to be on Archie's mind. He confessed, "I am not student enough to go to the mat with him," but also conceded, "if we have been handed good old Roman Catholic doctrine, we ought to find it out and expose it. Hell is bad enough in any length of duration to scare the pants off me."²⁷ As the spiritual father of the "good old War Horse" came down the stretch of his own life, he was seeing, more than ever, his need of "Grace Redemption."

There is no doubt about it. The GRACE of God will have to be on our side at the Judgment and God has promised it fully if we in faith, repent of our sins and pray for His forgiveness, trusting the Lord to deliver.²⁸

Russell Boatman, who loved Archie Word with all his heart, recalled his last meeting on earth with the great man who had been such an influence on his life.

Despite several differences of opinion Brother Word never ceased to love me, and let me know it, and I reciprocated unstintingly. On my last trip to the West Coast we chased the Words all the way from Gering to Portland ere catching up with them at the home of Tom Burgess. I shall never forget our last farewell. Archie Word, whose heart was more tender and caring than many surmised, could not take his turn in the prayer circle as we parted. I treasure that memory. I did not need the reinforcement, but it did underscore what I believe was one secret of his power. He was a man of compassion, and remained ever mindful of what he once had been.²⁹

"I'VE BEEN WRONG"

On Archie Word's next-to-last trip to his beloved Oregon, he made up with an old friend that he had turned his back on for many years. His son-in-law, Tom Burgess, tells the story.

I could probably cite numerous illustrations of living examples from Brother Word's ministry that have impacted my life. Perhaps one of the most important and meaningful to me comes to mind because it was in his 86th year of life, and it demonstrates the heart of the man which is where God's Spirit has His greatest power.

The incident occurred in the summer of 1987. For ten years strained relationships had existed between

A. Word and another brother in the Lord. That June Brother Word was moved by the Lord to mend that tear. He went to the hospital room of the man with whom he had differences. With tears in his eyes he reached out his hand in a moving gesture of reconciliation and said, "I've been wrong to act this way. One can't go into eternity with these feelings toward a Christian brother." Embracing each other and with tears flowing each one assured the other of his love and appreciation.³⁰

Burgess drew a conclusion from the emotional scene in the hospital room:

When one has been a preacher of the Gospel for 50 years and has thousands of converts, scores of men influenced to go into the ministry, and hundreds of admirers, he might be tempted to think he was above needing to take the initiative toward reconciliation with an isolated brother in a hospital room hundreds of miles from his home town.

They say the older we get the more set we get in our ways. A. Word taught me that God's spirit of reconciliation knows no age barriers. He taught me by example what God has written, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity."³¹

"MY HEART REJOICES"

A relieved Archie Word found renewed strength in the summer of 1987 — preaching every Sunday except one. He returned from Oregon to preach at a family camp in Colorado and to prepare for his Church History class in the Scottsbluff School of Evangelism that fall. He addressed a group of 40 preachers and their wives on "A Preacher's Bible Study and Prayer Life." He continued to rise at 5:30 each morning for personal worship, teaching the adult Sunday School class,

preaching Sunday nights, and speaking in chapel once a week. He made a special trip to Denver to be interviewed on a radio talk show, but continued to decline any television opportunities — or even to be filmed on video tape while preaching.

In November he attended several nights of Don DeWalt's revival in nearby Bridgeport, Neb. "My heart rejoices in having a part in his salvation, too"³² he told Charles Crane. As the year drew to a close, however, he became very ill. He felt unweakened as water," but managed to wish Crane a "great, God-blessed year and victories innumerable."³³

As the clock struck midnight, Dec. 31, 1987, and shotguns went off in the streets of Gering in celebration of the New Year, Archie Word slept peacefully, unaware that 1988 would be his last year on earth.

Notes

1. *The Builder*, Feb. 1964); *The Voice of Evangelism*, June 1984.
2. Letter to Don DeWalt from Archie Word, Mar. 29, 1984
3. *Ibid*
4. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, April 20, 1984
5. Author's interview with Woodrow Phillips, July 13, 1990
6. Letter to author from Charles Dailey, Sept. 16, 1989
7. *The Voice of Evangelism*, Oct. 1984
8. *Ibid*
9. *Ibid*
10. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, Feb. 12, 1985
11. *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*, Mar. 24, 1985
12. *Ibid*
13. *Ibid*
14. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, Dec. 10, 1985
15. *Ibid*, Nov. 24, 1985
16. *Ibid*, Feb. 8, 1986
17. *Ibid*, April 28, 1986
18. *Ibid*
19. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, May 19, 1986

20. *Ibid*, June 14, 1986
21. *Ibid*, Nov. 29, 1986
22. *Ibid*
23. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, Jan. 7, 1987
24. Letter to author from Russell Boatman, Oct. 4, 1990
25. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, Mar. 23, 1987
26. *Ibid*
27. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, 1987
28. *Ibid*
29. Letter to author from Russell Boatman, Oct. 4, 1990
30. *The Life Story of Archie Word*, pp. 105, 106
31. *Ibid*
32. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, Nov. 7, 1987
33. *Ibid*, Dec. 29, 1987

25

"HE IS NOT DEAD!" (1988)

One day you will read in the *Christian Standard* that Archie Word is dead. Don't you believe it! In the hearts of thousands there is a warm memory of that day and hour when they stepped across that line of decision and came down the aisle to see Brother Word waiting for them, hand out-stretched in welcome. As long as these people are alive and can remember, he is not dead!

—Don DeWelt

It was Tennyson who wrote, "The last red leaf is whirl'd away, the rooks are blown about the skies." The last year of Archie Word's life was filled with whirling red leaves. Then he himself, as he had preached so often, was "gone with his last breath."

HER LAST DAYS AT HOME

The hardest thing Archie Word ever had to do in his life was to put his beloved wife of 62 years in a nursing home early in 1988. For four years he had done his best to care for her at home, but now Alzheimer's disease had progressed to the point that he could no longer care for her in their home. "I have had to have Mom put in a nursing home," he wrote Charles Crane in March. "Alzheimer's disease has ruined her. She is semi-conscious most of the time. Sometimes she does not even know me."¹ Archie left the nursing home a broken man. Those who know him best say that he virtually grieved himself into the grave over Florence's sad condition.

In June he told Crane, "Mom is no better — in fact, she seems to be going down hill. No hope as far as this world is concerned, but thank God for Heaven and the promises of the King of kings. I did not realize what stress can do to a person."² In July, her condition was described as "helpless." Archie wrote: "Jenelle feeds her her meals most of the time. I see her, when I'm home, every day. So sorry — sad!"³

The family in Oregon wanted Archie and Florence to move back to the Northwest, but Archie said, "We are sorry to be so far away from most of our family, but we have gone where the Lord has led us — no regrets. We would like to be in the Portland area, but as of now I don't see how we can manage. Mom is in no condition to move 1500 miles. We'll just take off for heaven from Gering. Heaven is better than Nebraska."

HIS LAST TRIP TO IOWA

The brethren in Ottumwa, Iowa, invited Archie

Word to appear on the annual February Gathering in 1988. Unbeknownst to him Donald Hunt and Don Hunt, Jr. had been working on a special book on Archie's life, *A Dedicated Decision: The Life Story of Archie Word*, which they planned to present to him after his message. But four weeks of double pneumonia and prostate surgery had weakened him so that he was not able to preach at the rally, although he did accept a plaque recognizing his years of "faithful preaching" and "fruitful service." After hearing his grandson read a long list of tributes that had been mailed to him, Archie said, "Usually such things are said at one's funeral, and he doesn't get to hear them."⁵

Lafe Culver's tribute merits special attention:

I well remember telling my family as we walked into a Centerville Rally in the mid 1950s, "You are going to have the opportunity to hear an historic individual tonight. . . ."

To those of us who have sat under his preaching, we can relate with Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." There are teachers and there are preachers, but few have mastered the effective balance of being both. A. Word thoroughly enjoys being both. . . . He loves to use charts to illustrate Biblical truths, and he uses a variety of pointers to whack the chart or furniture nearby to help drive the point home. Sometimes the front row listeners feel a little endangered by his wildly swinging "baton" to the delight of the rest of the audience.

When it comes to using illustrations, he is a master. . . . One could vividly see the hardened sinner he described, the weeping, repentant adulteress, the wayward son or daughter who finally came back. . . .

I can still hear his booming voice rattling the rafters, "This ONE THING I do!" he would shout as he

pounded the pulpit with unmistakable fire in his eye. What priceless memories all of us have who have heard his preaching at rallies and revivals! Unforgettable!⁶

Charles Dailey spoke of his "great compassion for people in need." Harold Buckles recalled a time Archie had loaned him money when he didn't know where to turn. Dr. Charles Crane said, "He still remains one of the most influential teachers that I had during over 11 years of college and graduate school." Burton Barber testified that Word's book, *The Church Revealed in the Scriptures*, had "impressive influences on his career plans." Malburt Prater noted that Word's meeting in Washington, Indiana, where he was the local preacher, was "the beginning of my real conversion."

Dr. Bruce Oberst said that Word's impact and influence on his life was "tremendous and immeasurable." Don Pinon confessed, "I feel unworthy of such a great man sharing his life with me." Warren Bell remembered the day Brother Word's big arm went around his shoulder as he stood sobbing at the grave of his mother. Marion McKee remarked, "No one can hear him and not be impressed with the spiritual issues of life." I noted, "Brother Word does not just love to preach — he lives to preach!"

Bill Jessup counted Archie Word as one of five special people who helped him the most in his ministry. Rodney Reyman likened him to Elijah and Elisha in spirit and power. Russell Boatman testified, "Evangelistically, energetically, he is the senior of every man I have ever known." Don DeWelt said, "Everyone needs a living hero . . . he is my hero for the Lord."

During the Ottumwa visit in February, when Don Hunt Jr. got Archie to agree to a long tape-recorded

interview, he picked up with the great Depression-era revivals of the 30s and brought Don up to where he was in 1988. At the conclusion of the interview, he told Don, "The meeting at Lindsay means more to me than anything else. 136 converted. Those I had played cards with, drunk with, cussed with, and everything else. To see them converted, in my own hometown!"⁷

When Don asked him, "Grandpa, if you had one thing to share with generations to come about how to live for God, what would it be?", Archie thought for a moment, then replied:

"Get right with God" is the first thing I would tell them. "Get converted." That's where it all starts. If you don't get converted, you'll never start. You can be a church member all your life, but if you don't get converted, you'll never amount to anything.

There has to be a change — a purpose in your life, and that is what conversion is. If I had one thing to say, I'd say, "Get right with God, and then try to live right. Treat your wife right, if you are a man; and if you're a woman, learn to be what a Christian woman is from the Bible — and be it. It pays off in the end."

We have had a happy home — a very happy home. I had my heart attack and Mom has had her memory trouble and we're still happy. It's all due to one thing — CHRISTIANITY!⁷

HIS LAST SERMON

On Sunday evening, May 29, 1988, Archie Word preached the last sermon he would ever preach on this earth. The message was delivered at the Bluffview Church of Christ in Scottsbluff and was recorded on cassette tape. He chose as his text Matthew 25:14-30 and preached a sermon entitled "Give An Account of Your Stewardship." After reading the text in his

familiar style, he “hooked” his audience with this zinger: “God gave you everything — except your sins!” He then proceeded to list four things God has given us that we must give an account for some day.

First, God gave us our *Life*. God is the giver of life and all the money that Aristotle Onassis, J. Paul Getty, and John D. Rockefeller had couldn’t buy life. In a voice that started to break he said that he himself was now coming down to the end of his own life. “We’re alive only by the grace of God!” he cried. “Your life is a sermon!”

Second, we must give an account of the stewardship of our *Body*. “You’re a renter,” he told the crowd that night. “You have no lease on life. No 30-day notice.” He read from I Corinthians 6:19, then said, “You are not your own! Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit!” The man who returns borrowed tools clean should return a clean body to the God who loaned him his body. He cited potential body destroyers: overwork, overeating, lack of sleep, tobacco, booze, drugs. He recalled a visit to a Veteran’s hospital in Cheyenne where he saw men dying from emphysema and lung cancer, adding that it was a great comfort to him, knowing as he came down to the end of his life, that he had presented his body to God as Romans 12:1,2 commands.

Third, he spoke of our *Mind*. Here his voice again broke as he recalled what Alzheimer’s had done to his dear wife’s mind. He remembered a visit to an insane asylum in Salem when he was in college, where he visited the son of a doctor whose mind was gone. “I’d rather be in his shoes at Judgment than to have a mind and act like an idiot!” he thundered. He urged his listeners to spend much time in the Word of God

because a godly mind was more important than a farm, house, boat, camper, money, bonds, or anything else.

His fourth and final point was our *Money*. From the text he said that five gold talents equalled about \$65,000, then challenged his listeners: “Figure out how much you’ve made in a lifetime.” He reminded them that they would give an account for their bank account. Reading from Acts 5:1-11 and I Corinthians 5:11-13, he dealt for awhile with the sin of covetousness. He quoted J.W. McGarvey in one of his great sermons at the Broadway church in Lexington, Kentucky, saying, “A covetous man is the most wicked man in God’s sight.” He testified that during his years of preaching, “Only one man came down the aisle and admitted covetousness. Old Bill Shoemake, a one-armed man, Burl Shoemake’s dad.”

Then, for the third time in his final sermon, his voice broke as he went into the invitation. “I’m coming down to the end of my life,” he said with quavering voice. “I’m closer to Judgment than any of you.” He then led the invitation song with that grand and glorious voice that was still strong —

There’s a great day coming, a great day coming,
There’s a great day coming by and by;
When the saints and the sinners shall be parted right
and left,
Are you ready for that day to come?
Are you ready? Are you ready?
Are you ready for the Judgment day?
Are you ready? Are you ready?
For the Judgment day?⁸

(He was so worn out at the end of the invitation that he sat down in a chair on the platform. He was

heard to whisper in a weary voice, "That's it. That's my last one.")

HIS LAST TRIP TO OREGON

Archie Word had preached his last sermon. He had also taught his last class in his beloved seminary work. The Scottsbluff church gave him a small monthly pension. He wrote to Charles Crane, "My Grandson Stan Rodda is coming with big family from St. Joseph, Missouri, to take my place. I'll be on pension and free to do anything else I can do. These people have been sooo good to me. I'd like to move back out West but the ties here are hard to break."⁹ In June he received an invitation from William E. Paul to preach in Seattle. "I will call you from Portland the first part of July," he wrote. "I really appreciate your desiring to have an old wind-broken 'Has-Been' to speak for you. It means a great deal to me to know someone wants to hear me again."¹⁰

In July Donald and Margaret Hunt were to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary in Portland, Oregon. Another of Archie's grandsons, David Brink, had bought Archie's Ford pickup and Archie volunteered to drive it out for him. He and Jenelle went to the nursing home where they kissed Florence good-bye and set out by themselves in the un-air-conditioned truck for Oregon. What thoughts must have filled his mind as he drove down the beautiful Columbia Gorge, past majestic Multnomah Falls, and into the Rose City where he and Florence had lived for more than a third of a century! (The Crossroads church in Portland, recognizing his past labors, presented him with a gift of \$5,000. The last thing Arch Jr. saw his father do was write out a tithe check on the gift.)

HIS LAST ARTICLE

While in Oregon Archie visited Dr. John Wood in Forest Grove. He confided to Charles Crane, "Personally, I'm looking forward to a new resurrected body. This one is about shot. I'm hoping I can stay to take care of my invalid wife (but) who knows?"¹¹ By August he was back in Gering again — and back in the hospital as well. Margaret Hunt came to spend two weeks with him until he had recovered from another bout with pneumonia and kidney problems. Don Hunt Jr. visited him in the hospital where Archie consented to another, but briefer, interview. He told Don, "Suppose I had quit in 1968 (the year he left Montavilla). There would have been 20 years I would have lost. I probably would have been dead a long time ago if I had quit. I want to do something for the Lord as long as I live, even now."¹²

He spoke with great emotion about Florence:

You don't realize how much one means to you until death comes. I sit and talk to Mom and she just doesn't get it. Yes, it's just a body. In July we would have been married 62 years. I sing that song, "Count Your Many Blessings" and see what God has done. . . . Mom helped make the years.¹³

As Don turned to leave, Archie said,

Thanks for coming by, for thinking of me . . . I hope I can get out of here and get my strength back. If I can, I'll preach again. That's my life. If I can't preach, what's there to live for? I have a family to live for, but it isn't accomplishing what preaching is — to glorify God.¹⁴

The September *Voice of Evangelism* carried what

proved to be the last article he wrote, "The Unusual Story of My Mother's Father, Tom Kenny." It was the 200th article he had published in the magazine edited by his son-in-law Donald Hunt. Maggie Word's father, like her first-born son, was a runaway. Tom Kenny lived in Ireland and was placed in a Roman Catholic school by his parents to study for the priesthood. But at age 14 he ran away from the school, boarded a "wind jammer" and sailed for America, arriving when he was 15, just before the Civil War began. Eventually Kenny came to a saving knowledge of the truth by studying his Bible and soon he was preaching the gospel in the hills of Tennessee. Archie wrote, "That is the story as my mother told it to me. Thus, through her father my mother learned the gospel, and through her I was led to know the truth. I thank God for the honesty and the courage of my Granddad Kenny and for the influence of his life upon each succeeding generation of my family."¹⁵

HIS LAST LETTER

By September the strong heart medicine Archie had been taking for his heart condition began affecting his kidneys. For six weeks he underwent dialysis treatment (twice a week). In what proved to be his last letter to Charles Crane, he confessed, "I have been sick and I am not having a speedy recovery. . . I am up walking again now and *should* be preaching some by the first of the year."¹⁶ For the first time in his life he was using a stenographer, Donetta Pinon, to do his letters. After wishing Crane well in his upcoming preaching trip to Zimbabwe, Africa, Archie dictated: "You have a blessed pleasure of preaching the truth to those who are in such evident need. . . . We have

been praying for you. . . . May God shower you with blessings as you continue to walk in the faith, in Jesus' name. Love, A. Word."¹⁷ The letter was dated Oct. 11, 1988, a little over a month before his death.

HIS LAST DAYS

During the last part of October and the first part of November Archie Word was a very sick man. Most of the time he would stay at home, sitting in his big recliner reading his Bible. One day, about two weeks before his death, he was feeling good enough to visit Florence in the nursing home. The ravages of Alzheimer's on Florence's mind now took its toll on Archie's health. The visit was a traumatic, even terminal one. Donald Hunt said, "It was so hard on him (that) his health took an immediate nose dive."¹⁸ Church members and friends called but he was beyond solace. Concerned family members conferred about what should be done.

On Nov. 15 Margaret Hunt and Don Hunt Jr. arrived in Gering to spend some time with Archie. The next two days Archie sat in his chair, day and night, wearing his favorite blue jacket with snap buttons (he called it "The Shroud"), a flannel check shirt, dark blue slacks, and slippers. When Don returned from a visit to Florence one afternoon and told Archie, "Grandma really looks good," he remained impassive.

On Nov. 16 Don Pinon came for a visit with his old friend and fellow laborer of 20 years. Pinon recalls, "He leaned over to me and reiterated the statement he felt so good about: 'Two old sore heads like you and me have worked together for nearly twenty years and never one harsh word between us.'"¹⁹

HIS LAST DAY

Thursday, Nov. 17, was an overcast, gray day. As the day wore on Archie became increasingly uncomfortable. Finally, about 3:30 in the afternoon, he put down his newspaper and said, "I can't breathe. I've got pneumonia. Get me to the hospital."

His daughter and grandson first took him to a medical clinic to see a doctor. Archie was very quiet, as though expecting the worst. The doctor said Archie "looked like death warmed over." In the hall the doctor told Margaret, "I hear the brush of angel wings."

Archie was immediately admitted to Regional West Medical Center in Scottsbluff. He was placed in a semi-private room on the fourth floor (Room 418). His bed was next to the wall, with a curtain separating him from the other bed which was situated by a window. By this time he was suffering, fighting to breathe even with the aid of oxygen. But the nurses who were assigned to Archie told Margaret they thought he was going to make it.

HIS LAST HOURS

At 6 p.m. Margaret sat by her father's side and fed him what proved to be his last supper, a bowl of peaches. Visitors from the church came in briefly and left quietly as the evening waned. Archie's breathing continued to be labored.

At 9 p.m. Don Pinon entered the room to read scripture and pray with Archie Word for the final time. He read aloud the 15th chapter of I Corinthians, closing with these familiar words:

O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy

sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.²⁰

Pinon then clasped Word's hand and prayed. When he was finished, Archie opened his eyes, and spoke his final words:

I will probably wake up in eternity — or, on the other hand, I may be better in the morning.²¹

HIS LAST BREATH

At 9:30 p.m. Pinon left the room, mentioning to Don Hunt Jr. that it looked as if Brother Word had gone to sleep. But he was not asleep. He saw Don in the doorway and beckoned with his hand for Don to come to the bedside. He took Don's hand and squeezed it — hard, hard. Don prayed for his grandfather whom he loved so dearly.

By 11 p.m. Archie could hardly breathe. Margaret and Don were by his bedside, Don "lovingly holding his granddad's hand."²² Don was thinking of what he could say, when Archie Word breathed for the last time and was gone — gone with his last breath. The hands of time stood still for Archie James Word at 11:10 p.m. — November 17, 1988.

HIS LAST THOUGHTS

Some say that when a man dies his whole life flashes before his mind in a milli-second. Perhaps for Archie Word it went something like this.

"Where's my pillow? . . . I'm leaving Kentucky,

leaving Kentucky . . . clickety-clack, clickety-clack . . . Mr. Proctor? Here's your daughter. I'm going to marry her! . . . Billy, I love you, but I've got to leave . . . Hey, Mitch! Come on! Let's go fight Kaiser Bill! . . . Torpedo, torpedo, torpedo! . . . God, save me! . . . Billy, I don't love you anymore . . . You're a Lily but I'm a Briar . . . Look out! Look out! We're going to crash! . . . What's that, Mr. Lemmon? Sing in church you say? . . . Say, Willis. Does every blankety-blank fool that comes here preach? . . .

"Why, Brother Knott! Thank you for convincing me . . . Bill! Roy! Hutch! Thanks for praying for me . . . What's that, Garland? Leave this cannery to preach in Toledo? . . . Billy, I do love you . . . Let's get married . . . Let's hit the road . . . 136 converts . . . in my own hometown . . . means more to me than anything . . . Tonight I'm going to give you 21 reasons why I would not be a Mormon . . . Bang! . . . That was close . . . Band leader, give me the ruffles . . . Now listen, all you jazzhounds . . .

"Billy, let's settle down . . . for the kid's sake . . . Alley, where's my tie? . . . Warren, Lee, let's start a school . . . Radical? Of course I'm a radical . . . John the Baptist was a radical . . . I have decided to resign . . . Florence, let's hit the road again . . . Tonight my sermon is "Real Christians" . . . Teach in your school? I'd be glad to . . .

"I'll preach 'til my toes turn up . . . Bill? I'm out here in the desert . . . Could you come? . . . Lindsay is the only place I'd go . . . Florence? Florence? Don't you know me? It's Daddy . . . We'll take off for heaven from Gering . . . It's better than Nebraska anyway . . . If I don't see you in the morning, I'll be in heaven . . . heaven . . . heaven . . .

"Who are you? . . . Gabriel? . . . Glad to meet you . . . Where are we going? . . . We are? . . . Now? . . . Can't I say 'good-bye'? . . . No? . . . O.K. . . . Say, this is a smoother ride than my old '35 Plymouth . . . Have you ever been to Pomona? . . . You have? . . . Of course you have . . . You've been everywhere . . .

"We're here? . . . Say, isn't this grand! . . . Is there a seminary here? . . . I love to teach you know . . . always use the American Standard Version . . . is there a place where I could hang up my charts? . . ."

TRIBUTE TO WHOM TRIBUTE

When news of Archie Word's death was made known a local radio personality, Dan Johnson of KCNI radio in Scottsbluff, played appropriate Christian music and announced that "a great servant of the Lord has gone home to be with the Lord."²³ The front page of the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald* Sunday edition ran a banner headline, **Word lived life the way he taught it**. News Editor Ted Brackish wrote, "Archie Word's life was the Word. . . . Spreading the word of Christ was his life."²⁴ He quoted Don Pinon: "He was the most dynamic preacher I've ever met. He has probably placed more men in the ministry than any man I know."²⁵

News stories on Word's death were also carried in the *Portland Oregonian* and *Eugene Register-Guard*, the latter newspaper announcing **Bible college founder dies**. "The Rev. Archie Word, founder of Northwest College of the Bible in Portland is dead at age 87."²⁶ The Oregon paper also quoted Pinon, who said Word "preached longer than anyone in my acquaintance."²⁷

Christian Standard carried a long account of

Archie Word's life, calling him, "one of the Restoration Movement's foremost evangelists."²⁸ *One Body* published a special four-page commemorative insert, **Brother Word is swept up to glory**. I wrote "The Restoration Movement lost one of its most colorful, successful and dynamic revivalists Nov. 17, 1988, when Archie Word departed from this life to the next."²⁹ Don DeWelt and I published the commemorative "that there might never be a generation who 'knew not Brother Word.' "

Other journals joined in tribute. *Crossroads Family Circle*, the weekly newsletter of the Crossroads Church of Christ in Portland, devoted all four pages to pictures and tributes to Brother Word from family and friends. *The Builder*, the monthly publication of the Bluffview Church of Christ in Scottsbluff, likewise devoted the entire November issue, **In Memory of ARCHIE WORD**, calling him "a dynamic man of God who has left an impact on virtually thousands of lives."³⁰ *The Voice of Evangelism*, following suit, included a four-page tribute, **Archie Word**, in its December issue. Donald Hunt described the two funeral services in Scottsbluff and Portland as "one of the most historical events involving the church in many years." In both places, he said, "people came from near and far to honor one of the most forceful, influential preachers this generation has known."³¹

THE SCOTTSBLUFF SERVICE

Florence was not able to attend the funeral service for her husband of 62 years, but members of the family did take her to the funeral home on Nov. 20, the night before the service. There she stood by the open casket and cried, "O, Daddy."

I had just finished a revival with my father in Rock Port, Missouri, when news came of Archie Word's death. I drove all night to Lexington, Nebraska, and then proceeded to Scottsbluff with friends. When I arrived at the church the morning of the funeral, I stood by the beautiful oak casket the family had chosen and looked upon the still form of Archie Word, looking distinguished even in death. I thought of the many illustrations I had heard him tell of death and funerals and then thought, "O Brother Word, this time it's you."

By 1:00 p.m. the church building was filled to overflowing. At 2:00 p.m. the service began. Tributes were spoken by seven preachers: Eddie Werner, L.H. Tyree, Harold Rhea, Jerry Smith, Tom Burgess, Donald Hunt, and myself. Archie's son, Arch Word Jr., also spoke.

Werner, who had once preached at Montavilla, recalled that Archie Word "never swerved from God's Word." Tyree, a retired Lieutenant Colonel who became a preacher, said, "His life was a continual testimony and challenge to any man who enters the pulpit." Rhea, a former student at Scottsbluff School of Evangelism, chose to read II Timothy 4:1,2, saying, "Brother Word was certainly a man that fulfilled that passage — 'Preach the word'." Smith, a fellow faculty member and former student of Word, called him "one of the kindest, most gentle, most concerned men I've ever seen." Burgess, Word's son-in-law, said, "He reminded me of a man with an independent spirit, but with a great deal of tenderness." Another preaching son-in-law, Donald Hunt, likened his father-in-law to Joshua, a leader with great influence, who was cut out to affect his elders all his days. I spoke of his great voice, his great influence, and his great compassion for the lost.

Then his son and namesake, Arch Word Jr., stood in the pulpit and said with familiar breaking voice:

Some people will remember A. Word as a "Fire and Brimstone" preacher; he was, no doubt, but he was far more than that. Members of the church where he preached remember a tender hearted man who came to their homes, to the hospitals, to the funeral home or anywhere else he was needed to help them through their difficult times.

I remember a man who served God with all his heart and wanted everyone to do the same most of all. There was never a doubt as to the place God and His Kingdom held in his life. He didn't compromise his principles. My father lived the principles that he preached to the best of his abilities. No son could ask for a more genuine example of how Jesus wants us to live.³²

When he had finished, there was not a dry eye in the house. Then Don Pinon brought the funeral message from II Timothy 4:7,8, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing." Pinon declared, "Brother Word was no ordinary man and he did not conduct an ordinary ministry . . . he was a man among men and a genuine Christian who lived what he preached . . . words can never express the greatness of this man's work and influence for the cause of Christ."³³

The tearful, emotional service concluded with the congregation singing one of Archie's favorite songs.

Shall we gather at the river,
Where bright angel feet have trod,

With its crystal tide forever
Flowing by the throne of God?

Yes, we'll gather at the river,
The beautiful, the beautiful river,
Gather with the saints at the river,
That flows by the throne of God.³⁴

THE PORTLAND SERVICE

The body of Archie Word was returned to his beloved Oregon for burial. At 1:00 p.m. on Nov. 25, 1988, a second funeral service was held at the Crossroads Church of Christ in Portland. A capacity crowd filled the gymnasium to witness a slide presentation of Archie Word's life as it was narrated by Tom Burgess. Seven preachers also gave tributes at the Portland service: Loren Brink, Donald Hunt, Warren Bell, Lee Turner, Charles Crane, Russell Boatman, and Don DeWalt. Arch Word Jr. gave his tribute to his father once more.

Son-in-law Brink said Archie had "touched thousands" and had influenced himself to "reach out and touch someone for Christ." Hunt recalled the first time he met Word, at the 1946 Conference on Evangelism at San Jose. "Who would have thought then that before long I would be a part of his family, and that our lives would become so closely associated?" Bell remembered the great heart of Archie when he befriended him as a 12-year-old boy, but also cited his "boldness with an edge on it." He rejoiced that Archie had now "gone through gates of splendor" where "Hutch and Shaw and Arch are together again."

Turner, another former associate of Brother Word declared, "An era has ended." He praised his "clarion call to godliness" and said that Archie Word "saw the

original concept and departure of the Restoration Movement and called the movement back to greater loyalty." Crane, converted and trained for the ministry by Word, said that the only ones left in the pew the night he was converted was the preacher, the elders and their wives. Over 100 people had responded to the invitation. "No teacher had a greater influence on my life," he testified. "One day it dawned on me that I was in the presence of greatness." Boatman could not be present at the service, but a tape recording was played over the public address system. He said,

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psa. 116:15). God has now called to Him one of His most precious saints and valiant messengers, a son in whom he is surely well pleased. . . .

But, O what a sense of loss comes to us as we are left behind to continue our earthly pilgrimage with Archie Word in another country — suddenly unreachable by handclasp, letter, or phone or by plane or car. . . .

Well over a half-century ago my life was changed by the power of The Word as preached by A. Word. When Brother Tom Burgess phoned me Monday morning to tell me Archie had died, I was stunned. I had to ask him to repeat what he said . . . I was not quite prepared to believe that Archie Word had died. How could that great heart stop beating? Or his voice of evangelism and call to repentance be silenced? . . .

Archie, my brother, my father in the gospel, my friend: this is one of your many sons in the gospel calling out to to you, saying, "Thank you, thank you for all you've done for me. Farewell, farewell, 'til at Jesus' feet we meet again. I love you." May God bless.

Don DeWalt then arose and gave a stirring tribute:

He raised his voice to a decibel you just could not ignore. How I loved it! It was accompanied with a

flash in his eyes and an earnestness of expression no one could miss.

Then there was a movement from the platform to being seated on top of the piano! We all watched him because he moved around so much we never really knew where he would be next. . . .

Most of all Brother Word could tell a story like no one else I know. He had pathos and emotion in his voice — and tears in his eyes. I thank the Lord for the powerful, practical teaching ability of my father in the faith. . . .

I thank my Lord for the courage our Lord gave Brother Word to "swim upstream," even if everyone else — or so it would seem — was drifting with the tide. He wanted to ride in the front of the ship and call out a warning against the possible rocks that could sink the ship. He was never anything but a leader to the very day he left us. . . .

Most of all, I thank our Lord for his constant emphasis on winning the lost. . . .³⁵

Then the voice of DeWalt rang loud and clear throughout the auditorium in the very city where Archie Word had won him to Christ:

One day you will read in the *Christian Standard* that Archie Word is dead! Don't you believe it! It is *not* true! He is alive, much more alive, than any who hear these words. I can almost hear his voice in the choir — high and firm and lifted above all the others who sing — just like I used to hear him sing in the long ago at 550 N.E. 76th Avenue. . . .

Archie Word is much more alive than we are! There he is even now, sitting before his mother with her hands in his. Now he is throwing his arms around her. There is an expression of aliveness on his face — surprise — and eternal joy! Do not tell me he is dead. I hear him from a hundred pulpits every Sunday! . . . No, indeed! He is a hundred more times more alive than ever before!

In the hearts of thousands there is a warm memory of that day, that hour, when they stepped across the line of decision and came down the aisle to see Brother Word through their tears waiting for them with his hand outstretched in welcome. As long as these people are alive and can remember, he is not dead!³⁶

Tom Burgess brought the funeral message, reading from Numbers 23:10, "Let me die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his." He quoted James Russell Lowell, who wrote

They are slaves who fear to speak
for the fallen and the weak;
They are slaves who will not choose
hatred, scoffing, and abuse,
rather than in silence shrink
from the truth they needs must think:
They are slaves who dare not be
in the right with two or three.

"When Mr. Word served the Devil, he served him with his whole heart," said Burgess. "But when he served the Lord, he did the same." "God called him to preach, and he felt that every man who breathed ought to give it a shot. His influence stirred the hearts of many a young man to 'preach the Word.' His concern was that he would be able to continue to preach God's Word with conviction until his dying day. We who are here today can attest that he did." Then, as though speaking to Archie in person, Burgess concluded, "You have fought the good fight, you have finished the course, you have made it miserable for the Devil. We'll miss you, Mr. Word. God bless. Maranatha. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus."

Archie Word left a sister, a wife, a son, five daugh-

ters, 15 grandchildren, 27 great-grandchildren, hundreds of men in the ministry, and multiplied thousands of people "converted to Christ" because they had heard "A. Word Preach the Word."

On Monday, Nov. 28, 1988, his body was laid to rest in Willamette National Cemetery on the lower grassy slope of Mount Scott, overlooking the city of Portland.

SCENES AT THE CEMETERY

On April 21, 1990, on what would have been Archie's 89th birthday, I visited the grave of Archie Word along with Tom and Esther Burgess and Dr. Wayne Shaw of Lincoln Christian Seminary. As we stood beside the grave in the warmth of the sunlight, I noticed a woman sitting on the emerald green grass at a nearby grave, her legs drawn up and her face cupped in her hands. When I saw that she was biting her lip and crying, I walked over and knelt down beside her.

I looked at the grave marker. It read,

JOHN HENRY _____ May 31-40 Aug. 8-88
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I asked, "Your husband?" She nodded.

"Vietman vet?"

"Yes," she answered. Then a big sigh. "He just came home one day, went into the bedroom, and shot himself. I come up here often and just sit and cry. They say it's supposed to get easier, but it doesn't."

I learned that the woman, Joyce, had no family — no friends, no church. "No one cares," she said in a dull voice. She continued to cry softly.

"I know I'm a stranger and you don't know me at all," I said. "But has it been a long time since anyone has held your hand?" Again she nodded. "May I?" I asked. She looked up with eyes brimming with tears, the hint of a smile on her wan face.

Then I took her hand with both of mine and told her why I was at the cemetery that day. I told her briefly of Archie and the hope the ex-World War I man had found in Jesus Christ. I explained that at the very church where he had once preached there were warm and loving people who would be her friend.

When we returned to the car to leave the cemetery, Dr. Shaw leaned over to me and said, "Victor, that was a beautiful thing you just did." And as we drove away I looked back over my shoulder at the grave of Archie Word — and the lonely lady still sitting on the hillside. I swallowed a big lump in my throat and managed to reply, "It's the kind of thing he would have done."

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On April 21, 1992, after completing this biography, I asked Esther to visit Archie's grave for me, with the simple request that she place a single flower on his grave — a lily.

Notes

1. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, Mar. 28, 1988
2. *Ibid*, June 13, 1988
3. *Ibid*, July 22, 1988
4. *Ibid*, Sept. 11, 1988
5. *The Voice of Evangelism*, Dec. 1988
6. *The Life Story of Archie Word*, pp. 130-132
7. Interview with Archie Word by Don Hunt Jr., Feb. 1988
8. "There's a Great Day Coming" by Will L. Thompson

9. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, June 1, 1988
10. Letter to William E. Paul from Archie Word, June 13, 1988
11. *Ibid*, July 22, 1988
12. Interview with Archie Word by Don Hunt Jr., Oct. 1988
13. *Ibid*
14. *Ibid*
15. *The Voice of Evangelism*, Sept. 1988
16. Letter to Charles Crane from Archie Word, Oct. 11, 1988
17. *Ibid*
18. *The Voice of Evangelism*, Dec. 1988
19. *The Builder*, Nov. 1988
20. I Corinthians 15:55-58, American Standard Version, 1901
21. *The Voice of Evangelism*, Dec. 1988
22. *Ibid*
23. Author's conversation with Clifford Shaw, Aug. 7, 1989
24. *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*, Nov. 20, 1988
25. *Ibid*
26. *Eugene Register-Guard*, Nov. 21, 1988
27. *Ibid*
28. *Christian Standard*, Jan. 15, 1989
29. *One Body*, Spring 1989
30. *The Builder*, Nov. 1988
31. *The Voice of Evangelism*, Dec. 1988
32. *Crossroads Family Circle*, Nov. 23, 1988
33. *The Builder*, Nov. 1988
34. "Shall We Gather at the River" by Robert Lowry
35. *One Body*, Spring 1989
36. *Ibid*