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No Time to Quit

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Five days short of his 95th birthday, one of Canada's most prolific and widely read authors went to his reward. Robert Edward Harlow (1908-2003) wrote some ninety books, which were translated into a score or more languages. Everyday Publications of Port Colborne, Ontario, has distributed more than two million copies, but this has probably been matched or exceeded by publications in many other countries. In addition to his books, he was co-founder of Emmaus Bible College, now of Dubuque, Iowa, but begun in Toronto in 1941; and founder of the Emmaus Correspondence School, the largest evangelical Bible correspondence program in the world, for whom he wrote key courses. In addition to books and Bible correspondence courses, he wrote editorials and articles regularly in a variety of mission magazines, pamphlets on Christian mission work, and developed a missionary prayer hotline. Even though he should be in the list of the top twenty-five Canadian writers of the twentieth century in terms of book sales, his name has appeared on no bestseller lists, and he was relatively unknown even among Christians in Canada, other than mission-minded Christian Brethren, with whom he worked.

Ed Harlow was born in Toronto. When he was six, his father abandoned his family, which forced him to work at an early age to help support his family and later to drop out of school before graduating. He was able to finish high school, Bible college, and also university, earning a BA, MA, and PhD from the University of Toronto.

In 1935, Ed and his wife, Margaret, set sail as missionaries to the Belgium Congo, where their two children were born. Even though they were to return to Canada in 1941, he was to maintain a life-long connection with the Christian community in Zaire/Congo, for whom

some of his earliest books were written. Forced home by World War II, Ed teamed up with two like-minded colleagues among the Brethren to launch Emmaus Bible College, first as an evening school in Toronto, then as a dual campus program in Toronto and Chicago, then as a consolidated campus in Oak Park, Illinois. He also completed his graduate studies during this time. During his studies at the University of Toronto, Ed moved from Semitic Languages (in which he had done his MA) to Education, focusing on measurement, methods, and statistics. This was to give him an ideal foundation for the development of the Emmaus correspondence courses (from 1949) and his Everyday Publications (from 1958).

Hardly the image of an entrepreneur, Dr Harlow was hard of hearing, reserved, self-effacing, and genuinely humble. He was not a particularly effective speaker and could hardly have been described as dynamic. Yet he created the vision, plan, academic curriculum, and administrative structures for the first, and, to date, the most influential, Christian Brethren Bible college, which he led for a decade (1948-58). While at Emmaus, he launched the correspondence program, writing several of the foundational courses himself. He demonstrated his leadership skill by drafting younger colleagues to join the faculty and to staff the correspondence school and mentored them in their work, including several key founders of International Teams.

In 1958, he moved to New York to become the executive secretary of The Fields (Christian Missions in Many Lands), the main Brethren mission-serving agency. During this time he began to write a series of six books surveying the work of missionaries around the world. He continued to edit the major Brethren mission magazine when he returned to Canada in 1966; after turning over the editorship to younger people, he continued to write monthly editorials up to the time of his death.

After the death of his first wife, Ed married Gertrud Koppel, whom he had known for many years and who had served as a missionary in Congo. At the age when most North Americans think of retiring, Ed and Gertrud revved up their productivity. From the time of his early missionary activity, Ed had observed the need for good literature to be given to new Christians in the developing countries,

where the faith seemed to be growing much faster than in North America. Whatever inadequacies there may have been in the USA and Canada as far as Christian literature is concerned, this lack paled into insignificance compared to the need outside of the West.

What is needed, Ed thought, are books that are accessible to people who have only a basic knowledge of English or some other European language (or, better still, in the native languages of people whose mother tongues are not European in origin). Let other people serve the Westerners. Ed would focus on writing for the emerging, non-Western church. In 1958, Ed had written the first of a series of books in simple English. It was an introduction to basic Christian doctrine, entitled, *Can We Know God?* Today, this volume has sold about a half million copies and has been translated into more than a dozen languages.

As time went on, Ed refined the style of English he attempted to produce for people who read English as a second language. Beginning with Basic English (which has a vocabulary of 800 words) he expanded his Everyday English to 2,000 words, written in a straightforward, non-complex style. He wanted anyone with a basic knowledge of English to be able to understand what he was writing, some of whom would translate the volume into another language, intended to serve the needs of new Christians.

The books he produced were introductions to basic Christian doctrine and simple commentary/introductions to the various books and sections of Scripture. Gertrud had earlier translated some of the Emmaus courses he had written into Swahili. In the meantime, she had learned other African languages, along with typesetting. So they now were set to become an international publishing company!

For nearly forty years, Ed and Gertrud, joined by a small number of colleagues, all 'living by faith' without any guaranteed income, engaged in one of the most impressive publishing ventures in the story of modern missions. Day in and day out, they lived focused lives, aimed at getting basic biblical and theological materials into the hands of God's people around the world.

Ed did not know the meaning of retirement. Even though he eventually established a pattern of spending a few of the colder months

in Florida each year, he did not invest his time in golf or fishing; rather, he (and Gertrud) continued working on the writing and publishing projects. 'There will be rewards for late starters,' he had written in 1989, 'but not for early quitters.' He had a heart attack in the same year that he wrote that, but this only slowed him down for a moment. Before he left the hospital, he was back into his regime of writing. And so he continued until the end. He often said, "Why stop working for the Lord just because you die? If you write a book, your work can carry on for years after you are gone." Bill Letkeman, his publisher, adds: 'The day of his death we produced the first copy of his small commentary on the book of Hebrews, freshly translated into Portuguese.'

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