

Navigator History and Folklore

Jim Downing

I. Introduction.

II. Background.

A. In the 1930s the military in the US was in great disrepute.

B. Dawson Trotman became the “guiding genius” of the Navigators during this time, one secular article stated.

C. The Navigators were described as always working on the wicked, converting sinners, holding revivals and praying with lost souls. Every ship in the Navy on the West Coast had a group of Navigators.

D. Dawson Trotman like Paul quit living in sin and was converted suddenly becoming the head of a new way of life. His home became a training ground for men in the military for the Navigators.

E. Trotman gave his life saving someone’s life in a boating accident.

F. The beginnings.

1. Trotman was converted through Scripture memory.

2. Discipleship began through the Navigators when he evangelized before a young man who said that he would give his right arm to do something like that. His discipleship began.

III. Detailed testimony.

A. Trotman was convinced to memorize Scripture for a church group to win the prize at the end of the week.

B. Although he was the only one in his group that memorized the verses, he came to Christ through one of them - John 5:24. Here he understood what abundant life really was. (Proverbs 8:37)

C. Trotman began working with men to evangelize. He found that there were four key things to discipleship - the Word, prayer, witnessing, and obedience. This is the Christian life in action and was developed through a wheel illustration.

D. His earliest witnessing team was called the Minute Men.

1. Their early tasks included these duties: memorize a verse a day, have an hour a day with the Lord, touch a life a day, have a definite work to do, keep a journal, have ammunition ready, have team business up to date, read two hours a week, tackle a new task, memorize a half a hymn, review seven verses a day, and spend some definite time on a filing system.

2. Men reacted early to this kind of discipline negatively.

E. With the lack of success with the Minute Men, Trotman began praying with one of the men in the early mornings for the men in the team, and for others outside the meeting until they were praying for the nations.

F. Dawson Trotman was encouraged to meet up with a young sailor needing spiritual discipline. They met and Trotman began witnessing to a police officer who was converted through the process.

1. The man with him asked Trotman to give him what he had, and Trotman trained him with what he had.

2. Eventually, the man came across another for Trotman to teach, but he refused to teach him saying that his own disciple should be able to train another disciple otherwise his own training had not been effective.

G. House ministry for the Navy became a focus for him and people from every State had passed through his living room.

H. Trotman was a perfectionist, but this helped him found the Navigators.

1. He concluded that the reason that the gospel had not been preached throughout the world is that Christ's command had not been carried out. He felt like the key was a certain type of person, and discipleship was the best way to produce this person.

2. What has always been agreed upon for a summary of the Navigators is the Great Commission and reproduction.

I. Trotman never made any attempt to start an organization but he worked with other organizations such as Youth for Christ. However, people he had ministered to began to gravitate back.

1. In developing leaders he found that he needed a place for an international headquarters, a training program, and a summer conference program.

2. People were eventually brought in for counsel for the operation that was growing after Trotman had passed away.

J. The growing organization.

1. Lorne Sanny who was running the operation after Trotman felt God speaking to him from Isaiah 54. He felt like God was saying that the movement was going to break forth and spread throughout the whole world. Therefore, he felt they were being called to strengthen the stakes.

2. The Navigators began to be convinced that Christianity when successful was a supra-national entity. Priorities were arranged among countries as targets for evangelization.

IV. Discussion.

A. The name “Navigators” came about when Trotman was trying to establish a relationship with a man who was learning celestial navigation. As Trotman saw this whole thing of celestial navigation he was impressed that you could move from one place to another with a great degree of certainty. He saw a spiritual metaphor and began calling his Serviceman’s Bible Group the Navigators.

B. One early Navigator became a professor retracing Paul’s journeys. Another became a missionary with Wycliffe giving his life to one tribe of Indians. Another Navigator evangelized throughout Tibet.

C. The speaker was primarily witnessed to by the last one whose life testified to Christ in that his happiness did not come from outward experiences.

D. Many of the early disciples were plugged into Biola Bible Institute.

Application questions.

1. Retrace the major events in the development of the Navigators. Which ones stand out?

2. How is the Navigators a reflection of its founder Dawson Trotman?

3. What is unique about the Navigator movement? What is important about these principles and how will you carry them out in your life?
