

Book Review

Telling the other side

Book: *The Hoodlum Preacher*

Author: Burton Barr Jr

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Every one of us, believe you me, has a flip side: that part of life you keep to yourself. It may range from hatred towards fellow man to some really nasty habit that slowly eats you up.

This other angle of you may lead as far as committing murder, to hiding your crimes or just to getting rid of those you hate. Such murder can't be physical all the time: isn't hate a form of murder?

Sadly, this state of affairs is not only true for those who sit on the pews in churches, and are not part of the clergy, or indeed any religious leader. Men of the collar can at times be involved in things that they normally preach against at the pulpit.

This is the core theme of *The Hoodlum Preacher*, written by Burton Barr. In this autobiography, the preacher tells his true life story, that flip side of his which should normally be kept under

wraps.

Although written by an American, the book provides insight for all citizens of the world as it tells the story that is not far from all of us.

Barr writes of his growth in faith. From a little boy, who learns the art of preaching in a kitchen, with a dog and younger brother as the congregation. In his childlike innocence, he tells his mother he wants to grow into a preacher. When his mother tells him you never become a preacher unless you are called by God, the little boy stays by the phone, expecting a call from God.

As he grows, in his search for the 'perfect church', Barr moves from one church to the next. This ends in their founding a ministry, the Worldwide Wonders and Miracles Soul Saving Revivals. This is a typical trend of those who would use faith to attain their own ends.

It is wondrous that there are so many Christian congregations professing to believe in the one and same God. Yet, the teachings of such associations can be really misleading. For instance, this particular ministry taught that children must be kept out of school because Jesus and his disciples never went to school.

With such a rocky start, we see Barr rolling further from the truth. He goes to the worst points of his life, hooked on alcohol and drugs. He becomes a drug and gun peddler, a conman and a hustler in spite of his being an ordained elder.

It is heart-rending to note that he is given to such misconceptions popular among drug addicts, like that if you are high on cocaine, you have to use heroine to neutralize it. It is even touching to see how Barr tries to use prayer when at one particular point police search him for drugs.

He spends time in a jail cell for crimes that go as far as extortion and he admits: "Prison is a culture of hardness. You can never show a sign of weakness or fear."

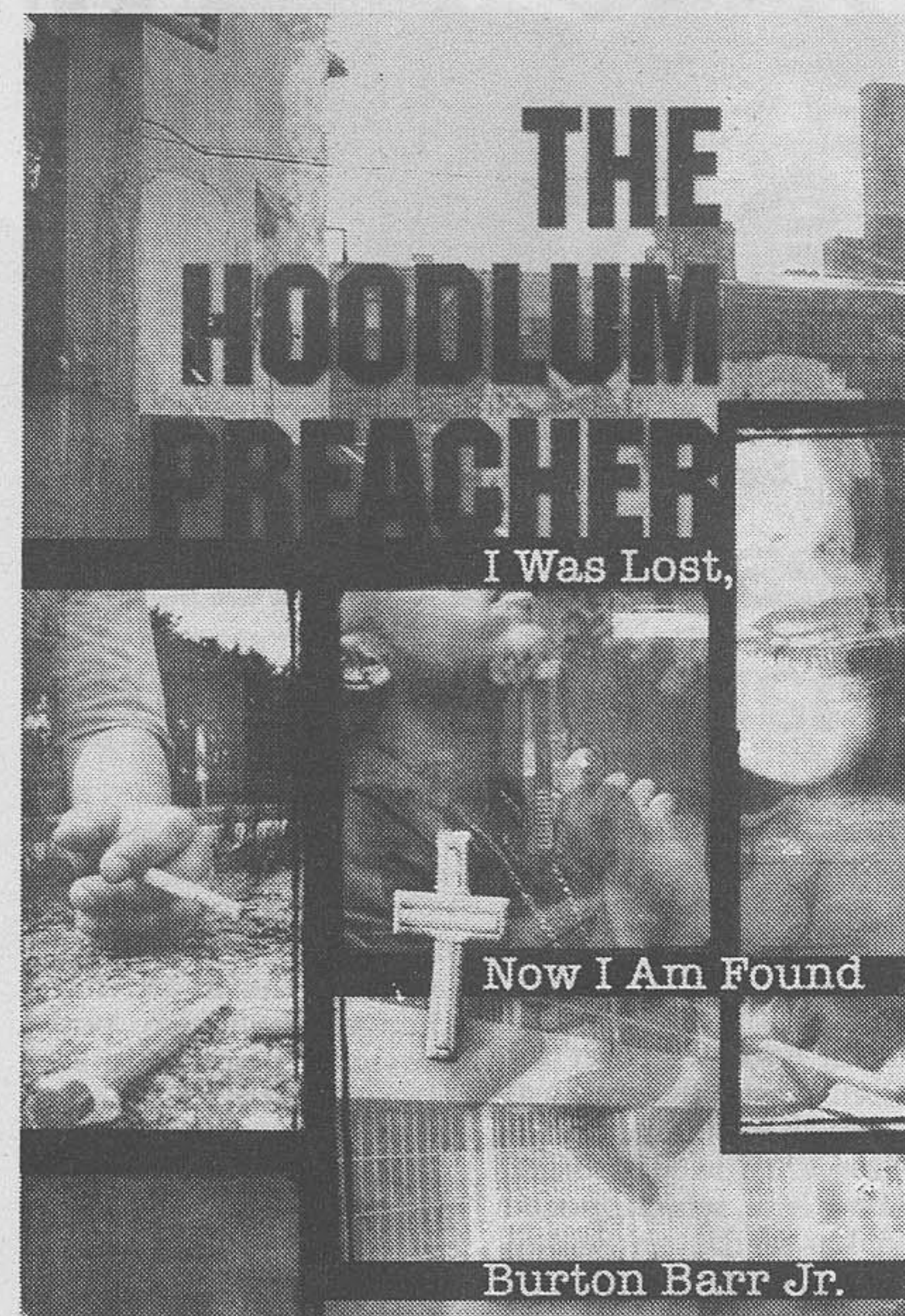
Even the woman he was involved with was one he had met at a drinking joint. During this whole period, Barr remained a preacher and revered man of the collar.

In the end, Barr is married to Charlotte, a woman he had known 35 years earlier on. The two had lost touch when Barr went astray. The two get married and somewhat that marks the beginning of the end for Barr, as he draws back to God.

From the book, we draw the lesson that children must learn to obey their parents, be in school always, choose proper friends and avoid peer pressure. Children should also be taught that God is the same at all times.

Food for thought for our local religious leaders, on reading *The Hoodlum Preacher*, is that we laymen have so much to learn from these blessed men-of-the-collar.

We have our own pastors, bishops, sheikhs, gurus and the like who profess the Word of God. Yet, they have not told us that they are like us, with flip sides and skeletons in the closet. It is time



these men of faith compiled those aspects of life in book form for generations to learn

from. The nation stands to benefit from such biographies.