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## The Dean of West Coast Preachers

Jerry Rushford, *Pepperdine University*



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A. L. Cassius:

## The Dean of West Coast Preachers

JERRY RUSHFORD

In recognition of his long years of faithful service to the cause of Christ, Pepperdine University recently conferred upon A. L. Cassius the Distinguished Diploma of Honor. The setting for this special event was a preacher's luncheon which convenes monthly on the Malibu campus.

Amos Lincoln Cassius was born in Sigourney, Iowa on December 18, 1889. His father, Samuel Robert Cassius, was a well known gospel preacher who did most of his preaching in Illinois, Iowa, Oklahoma and Colorado. As a small child, S. R. Cassius was privileged to visit the White House where he shook hands with President Abraham Lincoln.

Since S. R. Cassius began his long preaching career in 1880, it can now be said that this father and son team has been preaching continuously for more than a century. How many other father and son preaching teams can lay claim to such longevity?

A. L. Cassius grew up around Luther, Oklahoma. In 1906 he journeyed to Alabama to enroll at Tuskegee Institute. Booker T. Washington, the noted American educator, had been the president of Tuskegee Institute since its founding in 1880. A. L. Cassius was pleased to be given a campus job at the president's house. In addition to this close association with Booker T. Washington, young Cassius had the unique privilege of studying under Dr. George Washington Carver, the famed agricultural chemist.

Although he attended Tuskegee Institute for nearly four years, A. L. Cassius did not receive his diploma. Insufficient funds forced him to drop out of school just one semester before graduation. (It was this unfortunate development which prompted Pepperdine University to award the deserving candidate an honorary diploma seventy-one years later.)

A. L. Cassius returned to Luther, Oklahoma in 1910 and obeyed the gospel there. He was baptized into Christ by a brother Weeks, but he had not yet decided to give all of his time to preaching the gospel. He devoted the next few years to developing his skills as a chef cook, and he served in this capacity in large hotels in Chicago, Dallas and Houston. He married Beulah Middleton, a member of the church of Christ in Mineral Wells, Texas, in 1914.

When the Cassiuses moved to Los Angeles in 1919, there was only one black church of Christ in the entire state of California. This was the congregation which had been established in Oakland through the pioneering efforts of a black evangelist named D. C. Allen. (By way of comparison, there are 56 congregations in the state today with predominantly black memberships.)

In 1922 A. L. Cassius, along with his wife and a few others, established the first church of Christ among blacks in Southern California. They first met in the Watts area in the home of James Arnold, an ex-slave from Arkansas. The congregation eventually moved into a church building that was built by A. L.

Cassius on 109th Street and Compton Avenue. By this time, brother Cassius had become a general contractor and was buying and selling real estate.

The growing congregation next moved into another church building constructed by brother Cassius at 9512 Compton Avenue. Among the outstanding preachers who held gospel meetings at the Compton Avenue church in its early years were: T. M. Merchant, G. P. Bowser, Marshall Keeble, J. E. Wainwright, A. E. Harper, and R. N. Hogan. A. L. Cassius preached for this great church for 35 years (1922-1957), and he built another building for them in 1950.

The growth of the Compton Avenue church led to the establishment of the 137th and Avalon church in 1957. The Compton Avenue church contributed two elders, two deacons, about 25 other members, and their preacher, A. L. Cassius, to the new work. Through the years, brother Cassius built church buildings in Statesville, South Carolina; Del Rey Beach, Florida; Clearview, Okmulgee, Wewoka and Tulsa, Oklahoma; Barstow and Riverside, California; Hobbs, New Mexico; and Nassau and Long Island in the Bahamas.

In addition to the Compton and Avalon churches, A. L. Cassius was instrumental in encouraging the establishment of several other churches of Christ in Los Angeles. Among these were: the 110th and Wilmington church in 1937 (now located on Figueroa Street); the West Adams Boulevard church in 1955; and the 64th and Normandie church in 1963. He also personally established congregations in Bakersfield and Riverside, California; Hobbs, New Mexico; El Paso, Texas; Phoenix, Chandler and Tucson, Arizona; and Denver, Colorado. Brother Cassius has preached in 15 states and was a missionary in the Bahama Islands for five years. In the mid 1960's he made four missionary trips to Jamaica.

This brief sketch of the life of A. L. Cassius would be incomplete without mentioning his unwavering support of Christian education across the years. He attended some of the first meetings in 1936 which resulted in the founding of George Pepperdine College in 1937. In recognition of his services to the college, Pepperdine gave him the Founders's Award in 1959 and the Christian Service Award in 1961.

A. L. Cassius and Marshall Keeble were close friends for over 50 years, and as a result of this deep friendship, brother Cassius helped to raise money for the Nashville Christian Institute from its very beginning in 1940. He has also maintained an interest in Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas since its beginning in 1949.

"The Dean of West Coast Preachers" has truly been a blessing to the cause of Christ. Along with a grateful brotherhood, we salute you brother Cassius!

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