

(Written April 1977 and published in "The Voice" bulletin of Underwood Heights church of Christ, the author Donald Townsley saw a lot of things come to pass that he predicted during his lifetime before he died.)

THE CHANGES I HAVE SEEN IN CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN TWENTY-SIX YEARS OF PREACHING

I have been trying to preach the gospel of Christ for the past twenty-six years. If you will bear with me, I want to look back at the changes that have come among God's people during this time, and also at where these changes will carry many of God's people in the next twenty-five years.

As I began preaching the gospel in the fifties, I saw a united people who had all things common and whose hands were joined in love and fellowship. I saw a people who had great zeal for the salvation of man -- a people who emphasized the spiritual, not the carnal! Churches had no "kitchens and fellowship halls", nor did they believe it was the mission of the church to furnish entertainment for the young people! Any church that did have such things was considered to be out of harmony with the New Testament teaching!

In just a few years after I started preaching, great issues arose among God's people universally. These issues had been around for several years, but they were now affecting His people everywhere. These issues were the "sponsoring church arrangement", "institutional homes", and "colleges in the budget". "Herald of Truth" was started in 1952, and this caused brethren to give more attention to the "sponsoring church arrangement" than they ever had before in our generation.

These issues were receiving a complete airing among brethren, but there were those who were filled with the spirit of sectarianism and they wanted the church to be like the denominations around us! They wanted the church to be "prominent and popular" with the masses! They wanted it to have all the "trappings" of denominationalism! Many who shared this attitude toward the church were in powerful places of influence -- such as college presidents, editors of papers, and "popular" meeting preachers. One such man was the late brother B. C. Goodpasture. He was the editor of the "Gospel Advocate" -- the most influential paper being read among the brethren in the fifties. He closed the pages of the "Advocate" to any opposing views to the "sponsoring church arrangement", "institutional homes" and "colleges in the budget". He printed a letter on the editorial page of the "Advocate" on Dec. 9, 1954 in which the suggestion was made by whoever wrote the letter (he withheld the name) that the "Advocate" spearhead a movement to "quarantine" the preachers who opposed these innovations! Here is the quotation from the letter: "*I trust you will not consider me presumptuous if I suggest that perhaps the writers for the gospel Advocate might wisely spearhead a movement to 'quarantine' those among the preachers who today are sowing seeds of discord among the brotherhood and to thus prevent further divisions.*" This move on the part of the "Gospel Advocate" (under the editorship of brother B. C. Goodpasture) to close its pages to opposition and to "quarantine" preachers who opposed these inter-congregational arrangements played a great role in the division and strife that we experienced in the fifties and sixties. We who opposed these things were branded as "anti" and "orphan haters", and "opposers of good works". Yes, we were branded and quarantined! Brethren were told "You had better leave those "antis" alone -- they are nothing but radicals"! So, the battle raged, churches divided, and friends and kinfolk were alienated! Church after church aligned with the "institutional movement".

Many of us tried to warn brethren night and day that they had opened the door to digression with the "sponsoring church arrangement" and "institutional homes" and that there would be no shutting of that door, because through it would come all other kinds of denominational practices. But, they would not hear the warning, and now it is too late because all great things -- good or bad -- have grown from very small trends unnoticed by the multitude! The beginning of the kingdom of heaven was compared by the Lord to a grain of mustard seed. The idea of the "sponsoring church" and "institutional homes" was a seed of error -- a trend away from the spirit and teaching of the word of the Lord. When you plant a seed, it will produce after its kind. History teaches us that fundamental trends away from the word of God that are not stopped in the very beginning will mature into apostasy! Examples are seen in the Roman Catholic church and the Christian church. Both of these denominational bodies are the result of "innocent" trends away from the truth.

Brethren need to always keep in mind that the gospel way has always been simple -- not organized and complex. God's will teaches that His work should be done by individuals and congregations. Any religious organization different from or larger than a congregation has always led to apostasy. I realize that these schemes of the fifties and sixties

seemed so plausible that they deceived the hearts of the multitudes of brethren who sincerely wanted to be loyal to the word of God! I also realize that these brethren did not realize they were "nursing the infant" that would grow up into a denominational body with all of the practices of denominationalism! Many of these brethren who "nursed the infant" have now in grief lived to view the finished work of their own hands!

Now, in the last quarter of the twentieth century we see that our brethren who aligned with the "sponsoring church" and "institutional homes" in the fifties and sixties are in a struggle in their own ranks. The "old guard" would like to see the movement "crystallized" with the practices of the fifties and sixties, but the "young princes" of the movement want it to continually make changes and to bring in more and more denominational practices!

In the future we will see more and more emphasis on the "social gospel"! We will see more camps, more recreation, and schools receiving more money from church treasuries! Emphasis will continue to be on the "youth movement"! Many colleges where they train their preachers will be "shot through" with modernism! More and more of their preachers who are trained in these schools will scoff at the idea of plenary (verbal) inspiration! There will be more and more people who are poorly taught on the Holy Spirit who will be teaching that they are guided by the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the word! There will be more departures from the pattern of the New Testament worship! You will see more and more money being raised by the selling of goods! You will see collections being taken on other days than the first day of the week! You will see great emphasis given to special days -- "Homecomings", days of "special honor to men" and other days! "Special music" will be more and more a part of the worship -- choruses, choirs, and quartets! "Women preachers" will also be a part of this movement before the end of the century! There are moves underway right now in some places to give the woman an unauthorized role that God never intended her to have!

Yes, with sadness I have seen these changes and I know I will see more! I now plead with brethren who were deceived by this movement in the fifties and sixties to come back to the New Testament pattern.

~Donald Townsley