

"Behold, a sower went forth to sow." "The seed is the word of God." (Matt. 13:3; Luke 8:11.) "The truth shall make you free."

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THE SOWER

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Eugene Britnell, Editor

"A ROBBER'S DEN" OR THE "HOUSE OF THE LORD" ?

Luther W. Martin, Rolla, Missouri

God spoke through the prophet, Jeremiah, saying: "Has this house which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 7:11.)

In the New Testament, when the money-changers were selling sacrificial lambs, pigeons, or turtle doves, in His righteous wrath, Jesus over-turned the tables of the merchants, saying: "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer;' but you are making it a robbers' den." (Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46)

In modern times, the church of the Lord (or that which claims to be the Lord's House) has prostituted the work and purpose of the body, purchased by the blood of Christ. Many of our brethren today, are putting the church "in business" and by so doing are imitating the "Mother of Harlots" and her offspring.

Martin Luther and His Reformation

The beginning of the "Protestant Reformation" came about through the shocked reaction of a Roman Catholic priest, Martin Luther. He was born in the year 1483, and was ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood in 1507. In 1511, he was sent to Rome as a delegate of some convents in his province (He had been appointed as professor of theology at the University of Wittenburg, in Saxony.)

It was on this journey to Rome, that Martin Luther discovered the apostasy that prevailed in many features and practices of the Roman Church. His total break with Catholicism came in the year 1517, triggered by the buying and selling of "indulgences" . . . "licenses to sin" according to Luther, but defined by Catholicism as follows:

"INDULGENCE (Lat. *indulgentia*, remission). The remission before God of the temporal punishment due to those sins of which the guilt has been forgiven, either in the sacrament of Penance or because of an act of perfect contrition, granted by the competent ecclesiastical authority out of the Treasury of the Church to the living by way of absolution, to the dead by way of suffrage. Indulgences are either plenary or partial. Partial indulgences remit a part of the punishment due to sin at any given moment, the proportion of such part being expressed in terms of time (e. g., 30 days, 7 years)." (Catholic Dictionary by Attwater, page 252.)

Some fifty years after Martin Luther nailed his "Ninety-Five Theses" to the chapel door at Wittenberg, the Roman Catholic Council of Trent laid down the principle, that indulgences must be given everywhere

gratis. Pope Pius V, in 1567, issued the Bull "*Etsi dominici*" in which the indulgences of collectors of alms and quaestors were annulled.

Currently, the Catholic Dictionary states under the heading, "Sale of Indulgences":

"It is simony to buy or sell indulgences, but it is lawful to make an offering on the occasion of receiving an indulgence, providing all danger or suspicion of simony is removed . . ." (Page 446)

The next article in the Catholic Dictionary is headed "Sale of Masses." And it states that it's a sin to "sell" masses, but the priest may accept gifts of money or goods. So, in reality, the exchange of money has sort of gone under cover.

Peter's Pence

This collection for the Pope, annually, is probably the most lucrative source of Papal income. Peter's Pence may average one and a half million dollars each year. The Vatican's issuance of sets of postage stamps brings in another half-million dollars each year. A few years ago, the American Institute of Management, an organization that evaluates the efficiency of commercial operations, analyzed the Vatican's business empire. It was given high scores for (a) operating efficiency (b) effectiveness of leadership, and (c) fiscal policy.

One practice of the Vatican that is of interest, is, that skilled and successful business leaders are used by the Vatican as "lay advisors." They may hold a position of great commercial authority in the Vatican's operations, and their names also show up in the Directorates of numerous Italian companies.

But John Paul Has His Problems!

According to the Wall Street Journal of July 29, 1982:

" . . . His religious authority doesn't shield him from unsavory financial scandals, serious budgetary problems, strike threats by resentful workers, bitter conflicts with powerful lieutenants and even mounting ideological objections to his unbending orthodoxy.

"The pope is awakening to a tremendous tension in the Vatican," observes Prof. Franco Ferrarotti, a sociologist at the University of Rome."

One cardinal complains, that, "We are suffering from over-centralization."

"On the other hand, Pope John Paul risks dangerous dependence on a few aides he has entrusted with certain authority. Despite the deep suspicion and opposi-

(continued on back page)

Isaiah's Portrait of the Messiah

By John Waddey

Isaiah is preeminently the messianic prophet. Among his most spectacular predictions is in Isaiah 9:6-7. might; the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Jehovah" (Psa. 11:2).

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth, even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this.

"Mighty God." Our Christ reflects the same divine nature as His Father (Isa. 7:14). "All the fullness of the Godhead" dwells in Him bodily (Col. 2:9). Paul affirms that our Lord existed "on an equality with God" before he came to dwell among us. With Thomas every redeemed soul must confess him as "my Lord and my God" (John 20:28). To accomplish His mission, the Son could be no less than Deity. As God and Savior He redeemed lost mankind (Tit. 2:14). He "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26). This no creature could do. He vanquished sin and death (I Cor. 15:25-26). To accomplish that feat He had to triumph over Satan (Heb. 2:14). No less than the power of God could accomplish these awesome feats. It is no wonder that Satan and his tribe have worked unceasingly to discredit Christ's claim to Deity. Pity those who accept the lie!

God looked at the needs of a sin-cursed race and sent the needed provision. We needed wisdom; Christ is our Counselor. We needed reconciliation to God; he is our peace. We needed help for life's calamities; he is our mighty God. We needed provision and comfort; he is the Father of Eternity.

"A child is born." His mode of coming into the world is announced. He would not come as a descending angel or conquering king. He came as a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes (Luke 2:11-12). In this we see His humiliation as the mighty Word of God emptied Himself and took the form of a servant and the limitations of a man (Phil. 2:5-8). His incarnation was essential in order to "bring no nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

"A son is given." Not just a child, but a man child was specified. A son, not of an earthly father but of the Heavenly Father (Luke 1:35). In an earlier verse he had predicted the son would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). These unique circumstances of His birth would prove that He was Immanuel, i.e., God with us. Of this child the Psalmist sang, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Ps. 45:6; Heb. 1:8).

"Everlasting Father." This name has troubled many. The footnote has it, "The Father of eternity." Others have translated it "the Father of perpetuity" or "The Father of the forever." The significance of this thought is that Christ is the creator of all existing things (Col. 1:16). He is the master and ruler of all, He is the sustainer of the universe and all living things (Col. 1:17). Let us not blush to ascribe this title to our Lord. In so doing we do not dishonor His Father and ours.

"Prince of Peace." Worldly kings establish themselves by the sword, his kingdom is founded upon peace. Christ removed the cause of war and strife: sin. He reconciled man with God (Rom. 5:1); with Himself (Phil. 4:7) and with his fellowman (Eph. 2:17). He imparts peace (John 20:19), He maintains peace and He perfects peace. Let us adore the Prince of Peace.

"The government shall be upon his shoulder." Messiah would reign as king over God's kingdom. Thus today all the saved are translated into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13). The burden of authority would rest upon his shoulders. Thus, Christ is head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22) and has all authority (Matt. 28:18).

"His name shall be called Wonderful" or wondrous. Messiah is wondrous in his nature for He is divine God (John 1:1-3, 14). He is likewise perfect in manhood (I Pet. 2:22). Truly, He was "God manifested in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16). He is wondrous in His offices. He alone combined in Himself the three sacred offices of Prophet (Deut. 18:15), Priest (Heb. 7:25-26); and King (I Tim. 6:15). He is wondrous in His relationships with us. He shares in our flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14). He is a savior to all who believe (Matt. 1:21). He is a friend unlike all others (John 15:13-14). He invites us to jointly share His eternal inheritance (Rom. 8:16-17).

"Of the increase of his government there shall be no end." His is an eternal kingdom (Dan. 2:44). The extent of His reign daily grows as each new heart is won (Luke 17:21). One day, all His enemies will be destroyed (I Cor. 15:24-26). No power on earth or in hell is sufficient to destroy Christ's kingdom.

"On the throne of David." The prophets foretold that Christ would reign on David's throne. The angel that announced His conception said, "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever . . ." (Luke 1:32-33). This was promised to David 3,000 years ago (II Sam. 7:12-13). It is regrettable that premillennialists have not yet perceived this important fact.

"Counsellor." Man, blinded by sin, desperately needed a wise counsellor. We could not direct our own steps (Jer. 10:23). No man ever spoke as wisely as Jesus. "The Spirit of Jehovah rested upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and

"With justice and with righteousness." This is the nature of His reign. How unlike the administrations of earthly kings and rulers. No man need fear unfair treatment at the hands of our king.

"The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this." Here is the divine guarantee of its success. With a holy
(continued on next page)

A STATEMENT ABOUT A STUDY

Since early in this year (1982) the elders and preachers from the Levy congregation in North Little Rock and the elders and preachers from the Arch Street congregation in Little Rock have been meeting on a regular basis to discuss our differences and try to move toward greater unity. We conducted seven studies of approximately two hours each.

We realize that division is not only a violation of God's plan, it also serves to close the ears of the world to our message. We also realize that it is not possible for brethren to agree on every opinion or idea that may be held. We began our discussions by studying Romans 14 and striving to see where freedom and liberty relate to our differences, and the difference between matters of faith and matters of opinion.

Our goal was: (1) A desire and willingness to study the issues and differences facing the church today. (2) To analyze the issues in the light of the scriptures. (3) To objectively discuss the problems and issues dividing the two congregations.

We determined in the first meeting to have the format of Eugene Britnell and Leon Barnes each presenting what he felt the scriptures taught on the areas of difference and then having open discussion with everybody there commenting, asking questions and sharing thoughts. We discussed the following areas: church co-operation (including the sponsoring church concept); church benevolence toward saints only; whether it is right for churches to support out of their treasuries orphan homes directed by a Board of Directors; and the scriptural use of church buildings (for example, is it right to have fellowship halls, kitchens in the building, or for a congregation to allow its building to be used by a Christian school?).

Throughout the discussion an excellent attitude prevailed. The discussions were open and honest but also friendly and brotherly. There were several noticeable benefits which came from the study. First, it was an accomplishment to get together for several months to study differences and everyone remain friendly and kind in their speech. Secondly, we both learned that some of the things we had heard about each other were not true. On many matters we discussed our differences were either extremely minor or non-existent.

With regard to the different areas studied, the following conclusions were reached:

1. Churches can co-operate in evangelism. One congregation cannot do the work or take the responsibility of others. We were not in complete agreement on the meaning of 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 and the application of the teaching as to when or whether one congregation may send to others in evangelism. One group felt that a church or churches could send to a church or churches only when the receiving church or churches were in need; the other group felt that the co-operation could be broader than that. While differences remain on this, we did make progress toward understanding one another and the principles involved in congregational co-operation.

2. We reached a stand-still on the saints only issue. Much time was spent on the study. We both agreed that the church cannot practice general benevolence

because of such passages as 2 Thessalonians 3:10 and I Timothy 5:1-11. But on where to draw the lines we could not agree. More time and study must be spent in this area.

3. Concerning church support of orphan homes out of the treasury, it was agreed that the church can do everything God meant for it to do in the field of benevolence under its eldership. It was agreed that non-Christian children could be aided through their Christian parents. It was agreed that if Christian parents died, the church could continue to help the children. It was agreed that churches could, if and when necessary, scripturally buy the services of such institutions as a Retirement Center to care for indigent widows or orphan homes to care for children.

4. With regard to the use of the building, it was agreed that the church has the authority to build and maintain buildings which have anything to do with the work and worship of the church, and that it did not have authority to do such for things that were not its work or which it had no right to do to begin with. One group felt that buildings have a primary and a secondary function. The other group agreed, if by "secondary" was included only things incidental to the work and worship of the church, such as greeting one another, announcements, etc. We agreed that there is real danger of the church moving in this area far beyond what is authorized to the building of recreational facilities and such like.

Finally, we would recommend this method of study to others. Under proper circumstances, each group would be willing to engage in similar studies with others. We can never improve our relationship by ignoring one another or by shouting at one another. It is time for quiet reasoning from the scriptures.

SIGNED: Roy Brown, Burt Wilkerson, Jack McGee, L. T. Blevins, J. J. Pace, John Miller and Harry McCorkle, elders of the Levy church.

SIGNED: Eugene Britnell, Basil Copeland, Porter Hancock and J. B. Williams, elders of the Arch St. church.

Many people are troubled about the Scriptures which are mysterious and hard to understand. I am most troubled about those which I can understand.

— Mark Twain

Error is none the better for being common, nor truth the worse for having lain neglected. — John Locke

ISAIAH'S PORTRAIT continued

jealousy he guards His name, His word and His cause. Many human purposes fail because men lack the earnest zeal and devotion to carry through, or they lack the power to accomplish their goal. The omnipotent Jehovah can never be deterred. His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

All of this is given "unto us." A promise and a pledge; all in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us love and serve Him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

— *The Gospel Light*, August, 1982

dion of the Vatican bureaucracy, Archbishop Paul Marcinkus from Cicero, Ill. was placed in charge of all civil functions of the Vatican, including the Vatican Bank.

"Msgr. Marcinkus thus became a central figure in Pope John Paul's current difficulties, as the monsignor has involved the Vatican Bank in the questionable financial dealings and defaulted loans of Banco Ambrosiano, Italy's largest private bank.

"The Ambrosiano affair, being investigated by Italy's central bank, could entail a Vatican Bank liability far beyond its assets of \$300 million or so. The apparent suicide last month of Banco Ambrosiano's president, Roberto Calvi, has added to the mystery surrounding the case. But the Vatican's involvement in the scandal is only the most visible of a lengthening list of papal problems that make John Paul less than adored within the Vatican's walls."

Even the Swiss Guards, the medieval-garbed protectors of the Pope, threatened to strike, after the attempt on the Pope's life, asserting that their responsibilities in protecting the Pope were placing greater stress on them, and that more pay was in order.

Conclusion

The Roman Church gradually evolved over the centuries as an apostate imitation (and a poor imitation at that) of the Lord's church which was established in Jerusalem, A. D. 33. One of the first mistakes of the apostate movement was the reducing of a plurality of bishops in each congregation, to one bishop in each church, and ultimately an "arch-bishop" over several churches. Thus, the centralization of power had its beginning centuries ago, and only now, one cardinal is beginning to complain. Yet, some of our own brethren fail to see the centralization of power that is being established in Lubbock, Abilene, Nashville and other places. When will we ever learn?

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HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Happy folks with joyful shout,
Join to send the Old Year out.
Father time, with beard so white,
Steals away into the night.

These same folks, with shouts so wild,
Welcome in the brand new child.
Infant cherub, child so free,
Dear Nineteen Eighty Three.

Midst the din of chime and bell,
We join in to wish you well.
May you have peace and good cheer,
And a most Happy New Year.

— Guthrie Dean

Yes, we have about reached the end of another year — as time marches on. With this issue, we complete twenty-seven years with this paper. We believe that it has had and continues to have an influence for good in the hearts and lives of the majority of those who have read it. We appreciate each one of our readers.

We have some good material planned for next year, the Lord willing. We plan to devote the next issue to a study of the church, dealing with present conditions and future problems and prospects. It will be something which every Christian should read and study carefully. Don't miss it!

SERIES OF LESSONS ON CATHOLICISM

As many of our readers know, I have been a writer for a gospel paper called *Searching The Scriptures* for many years. It is a 24-page monthly paper, edited by brother Connie W. Adams.

We plan to begin a regular column, which I will prepare, under the heading "The Mystery of Iniquity." We will deal exclusively with the doctrine and practice of Roman Catholicism.

If you do not receive that paper, may I urge you to subscribe. Each issue contains much material which will be profitable for you to read. I hope you will follow the series on Catholicism.


Address: *Searching The Scriptures*, P. O. Box 69, Brooks, KY 40109. The subscription price is \$7.00 per year. — E. B.

If Christ is the Way, why waste time traveling some other way?

Christ sends none away empty but those who are full of themselves.

Jesus Christ forgave voluntarily; He died vicariously; He arose visibly, and He lives victoriously.

Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." What did he mean? Exactly what he said! Have you obeyed?



ON THE AIR

SUNDAY

KXLR (1150)
8:30 A. M.

KAAY (1090)
9:30 P. M.

If possible, tune in and study the Bible with us.

"Behold, a sower went forth to sow." "The seed is the word of God." (Matt. 13:3; Luke 8:11.) "The truth shall make you free."

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THE SOWER

Published monthly by the Church of Christ, 1500 Arch Street, Little Rock, Arkansas. Sent free upon request as a work of the church.

Eugene Britnell, Editor

Problems God's People Must Face & Solve In The 80's If Churches Are To Grow

Donald Townsley, Florence, Alabama

In the beginning let me state that I do not believe that the Lord's church is going to be destroyed from the face of the earth, or even from American soil. I believe God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), and He said that He would set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:28). It cannot be destroyed because we have an indestructible Word which is the seed that produces the kingdom (Luke 8:11; I Pet. 1:23-25). While I believe the church can never be destroyed, I do believe that congregations may die or lose their identity (Rev. 2:5; 3:1-6). The churches that Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Luke and Timothy established and labored with have long ceased to exist. Local churches in a given part of the world may suffer from these same problems and all go into apostasy and lose their identity as the Lord's people, or go totally out of existence.

Brethren, I believe that churches of Christ in the United States do face a survival problem in this decade if we do not wake up and turn some things around! Churches of Christ have some common problems that must be realized and cured or they will bring death to many congregations and will decrease membership in others. The 80s are not like the 40s, the 50s, the 60s or the 70's in churches of Christ. There is a growth problem that must be faced head-on! We cannot make this problem go away by "sticking our heads in the sand" and ignoring it, nor by taking a "business as usual" approach. Let us take a long, hard look at ourselves NOW (I Cor. 1:26; II Cor. 13:5). I don't believe there is anything pessimistic about facing facts.

We are losing ground in many congregations as faithful saints grow old and pass away. Just think of how many we are going to lose in the next ten years! Who will replace them as leaders and stable "pillars" in these congregations? Most of the churches of Christ in the cities have a leadership who came from the rural churches where they were converted and trained. Many rural churches have died (or are dying) and are no longer converting the young and "feeding" city churches with material for leadership. And the city churches in many places are not doing that well in converting and training new leadership either. Many congregations that have been in existence for ten or fifteen years have no eldership — and no immediate prospects for one! One of the great problems we face is a leadership problem, and losing our present leaders in death will compound that problem! Let us face up to this problem NOW and put forth a greater effort to encourage young

family men to begin to prepare themselves to be elders in the Lord's church.

We are losing ground as the world attracts many. Many preachers have divorced their wives and have married again. Elders, deacons, song leaders and Bible class teachers have done the same! Many members of the church are involved in illicit affairs and all kinds of other sins of the flesh. Yes, brethren, worldliness is one of the main issues we face, and it is taking its toll among us. The divorce and remarriage issue will be one of the problems we will have to deal with for years to come. The problem of worldliness must be faced and dealt with because it will have a devastating effect on congregations that do not deal with it!

We are losing ground as people we do baptize fall by the wayside before they can become productive in the Lord's kingdom. Many cannot take tribulation and persecution that comes because of the Word. Others are overcome by the deceitfulness of riches. The love of others waxes cold because of worldliness.

We are losing ground when we are losing 60% to 75% of our young people — and some congregations have lost the last three generations! Some of the causes for this are materialistic homes, division in the local congregation, and brethren who cannot get along with one another. This constant strife has its detrimental effect on our children. Many times we have failed in our teaching programs. There is just a combination of things that have contributed to the loss of our children to the world. This trend must be reversed if the church is to grow. We must not only teach our children the truth, but we must set the proper example by practicing those things that are taught.

Another problem we face is that men in our society are less and less interested in the gospel and the salvation of their souls. We are baptizing more women than men in many places, and if this trend is not reversed we will become a church made up of women. A church made up of women loses its financial base and has a hard time supporting the preaching of the gospel. The "macho" image has caused men to be less and less interested in spiritual things. The "macho man" drinks in bars, wears his shirt open to his belt buckle, and seduces all the women he can. His temper is hot, and he will break your head if you get in his way! Now isn't this a terrible "role model" for our young men? Our young men need to see fathers and grandfathers who strive to do the will of the Lord, and be taught to

honor and respect them. They need to be taught that real strength comes from striving to follow the example of our Master, Jesus Christ.

Basic Problems In Churches of Christ Today

1. Zero-growth in many places. The solution to this problem is for every member to be committed to teaching someone else the gospel. When the church is busy teaching publicly and privately it will grow (Acts 5:42).

2. Fragmentation (or division). Division over non-doctrinal issues. The cause of Christ of late years has (in many places) been disgraced by brethren biting and devouring one another! Division is very unpleasant, hinders progress and growth, and leads to sins of all sorts (Gal. 5:15; James 3:14-18). Fragmentation discourages weak members and they drift away from the church. It disturbs children and keeps young people from obeying the gospel. Our society has produced many self-ambitious men who love to have the pre-eminence among the brethren, and if they don't get their way, division follows. This fragmentation over non-doctrinal issues must stop, and these "Diotrepheses" must be dealt with and exposed for what they really are (3 John 9, 10).

3. Materialism; the seeking after "things and stuff" - such as better cars, houses and furniture. Jesus said that no man can serve two masters (Matt. 6:24) because his affections and obedience would be divided. He would fail altogether in his duty to one or the other. One he would love; the other he would hate. One would be neglected. The man who is serving mammon has taken his eye off of heaven, his eye is evil, and he is filled with darkness (Matt. 6:23). This man may think he is godly because he talks about God, believes in God, and goes to worship God where God is worshipped, but he is really living for earthly things; he serves mammon. He is like the nations that were moved into Samaria: "So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images" (2 Kings 17:41). Many in the church today say they fear God, but spend every waking hour serving mammon! We must wake up and realize that the only thing that is important is serving the Lord, putting His kingdom first, then all the "things" we need will be "added unto" us (Matt. 6:33).

4. The destruction of the family. We live in a nation that grants one million divorces a year! This breakdown in the family has reached into God's people! We are going to have to do more teaching on what God wants the home to be. We are going to have to teach our children that marriage is for life (Gen. 2:24; Mal. 2:14; Rom. 7:2). These principles must be deeply impressed in their minds from childhood.

5. Many professed Christians don't know Christ and God; they have no personal relationship with them. One develops a strong personal relationship with God and Christ by daily Bible study, daily prayer, by tribulation and meditation, by attending the services of the church regularly, and by trusting God for temporal needs. When members of the church develop the relationship with God and Christ that God intended for us to have, we will see a big turn-around in the Lord's church.

• • • •

"The church is fairly well supplied with conductors. It shows a shortage of engineers, but an oversupply of brakemen."

The Church and Crisis

Paul Southern, Abilene, Texas

A crisis is defined as a crucial point or situation in the course of anything. Any unstable condition in economics, international, or political affairs in which an abrupt or decisive change is impending is called a crisis. Simply stated, it is a turning point.

Obviously, the church is not immune to crisis, since it is composed of imperfect human beings that live in a social milieu. There is no way that Christians can exist in social isolation and fulfill their mission in the world.

Some Christians refuse to acknowledge that the church ever faces a crisis, while others panic at the slightest wind of change. It does no good to wish that crisis would disappear and leave a calm sea for the voyage of life. We live in a world of ceaseless change with constant transition going on all around us. Perfect equilibrium in the realm of human existence is synonymous with death.

Crises arose early in the history of the New Testament church. The behavior of Ananias and Sapphira regarding their material possessions created no small stir among the disciples, "and great fear came upon the whole church" (Acts 5:1-11). Fortunately, the Master equipped the disciples for meeting the crisis, "And more than ever were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14).

Another crisis arose in the Jerusalem church regarding the daily distribution of supplies. "The Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected." A peaceable solution was reached readily under the inspired direction of the apostles, "And the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:1-7).

A critical situation likewise emerged when Peter was instructed by the Holy Spirit to call upon Cornelius, a Gentile, since it was unlawful "for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation" (Acts 10:28). Although God showed him that no man was common or unclean, Peter took with him six brethren as a precautionary measure. "So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?'"

Anyone acquainted with the prejudice and hostility existing between Jews and Gentiles in New Testament times knows that Peter's visit to Cornelius was fraught with explosive theological repercussions. Such action would naturally create a brotherhood crisis. Note, however, that the apostle's inspired explanation calmed the troubled waters and the cause of Christ advanced. When the circumcision party heard "the rest of the story," they were silenced, "and they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life.'"

Paul warned the Ephesian elders concerning fierce wolves that would come in among them, "not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30). Such critical conditions would certainly try men's souls, but truly dedicated saints know the balm that heals is the gospel of Christ. Knowledgeable Christians who are alert need only to preach and practice the whole counsel of God in order to resolve any crisis (Cf. Acts 20:27-32).

It is obvious that the church is always going through some kind of crisis. Fiery trials that come upon us should not be considered strange phenomena (I Peter 1:6, 7; 4:12-19). Paul foresaw the time when sound doctrine would be unpopular; when men would "turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). What remedy did he prescribe? "Preach the word," in season and out of season (2 Tim. 4:2).

Yesterday, Today — and . . . Tomorrow

Alvin O. Raney

Yesterday . . .

When, back in March of 1938, I was baptized into the holy Body of Christ, I became a brother to every child of God on earth. Glad hands of fellowship were everywhere extended to me and the wonderful tenderness of true oneness enveloped me. A loving brotherhood so potent its power could actually be felt embraced me, and I knew beyond all doubt that I was one of the great, spiritual family of God.

Within a month, I was encouraged to make my first timorous "assault with intent to preach." I said, "But I don't know how to preach." Now dead elder Lee T. Jones said: "Read the Book, and tell it like it is." I'm still doing just that.

Brethren smiled their good natured tolerance of my blunders and gently corrected my mistakes. A babe in Christ was learning to walk and to talk and they understood that stumbling and mistakes were a part of that learning. Churches all over Houston heard about me and invited me and listened to me and taught me. And we were all one holy, united family with one Father and one Word and there was no other way to walk but by that Word.

Slowly I matured and gained skill in the use of words and deepened in the understanding of God's Word till the hope and the grace and the glory of it compelled me to give my whole life to sharing it with all who would listen. In the prevailing oneness of God's people, every pulpit, every city and every home was open to me and I eventually went from border to border and from sea to shining sea preaching "The Book." First a few, then dozens, then scores were won to Christ as my brethren and I labored together for God's glory and man's salvation.

Error trembled before us and citadels of Denominationalism fell like the walls of Jericho of old. The days were golden and filled with joy, for Heaven was come nigh to the earth and men were touched with the Gospel's healing. The theme "We be brethren!" was in every heart and God's love, like a golden cord, bound us together in "one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism."

The church of our Lord was a family at peace, even as it was also a nation at war. Our war was with the World, the Flesh and the Devil, and day or night, that war never slackened. Our peace was in our hearts and in our family, and neither men nor devils nor circumstances could disrupt or spoil it, for this was a thing of God's building.

Then the sun of that bright day swiftly set. Some unknown trumpet among us rose up to cry: "We were created unto good works! Any good work, therefore, is lawful! The good works of men are as good as the good works of God. If it seemeth good to us we can do it, and if we can do it, we must do it!" And good brethren, confused, turned some this way and some that, and friends became strangers and brethren became strangers and brethren became enemies.

Today . . .

What words can describe today in "the House of God" which is the church of the living God? The firmament is dark with clouds of dissent. Bolts of division lightning, explosive and deadly, lick out like serpents' tongues and no one can foretell

Error cannot stand in the presence of truth faithfully preached and practiced (I Cor. 10:13). Christians are admonished to be strong in the Lord, "and in the strength of his might" (Eph. 6:10). "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." (I John 5:4)

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where they will strike or what havoc will be wrought. Dread and unease permeate the atmosphere and faith is shaken by winds of consternation. Integrity is overclouded by lewd avarice and once-humble men are driven by storms of worldly ambition, competing bitterly even among themselves for places of eminence.

Hands once extended in brotherhood are now clenched into fists of antagonism. Eyes that once mirrored spiritual love are now turned smoky with hate. Minds once eagerly open to Truth are now closed, lest Truth rebuke the error harbored therein.

Hearts that once enthroned Christ are become temples of Idols created to satisfy human ambitions. Tragic history repeats itself as great numbers of God's freedom are again carried into the captivity of human mores. Souls once saved by faith in God's Word now rush back to the slop-troughs of human philosophies. And in defensive desperation, they turn to rend those who would stay their self-destructive madness.

I meet brethren long-loved and they are strangers. I look into eyes once warm with brotherhood and find them cold and hostile. I reach out the hand of Christian fraternity and it is scorned and rejected. I seek pulpits that once welcomed me, bringing the same Bible, the same Gospel and the same God, and find them closed to me. They are open to the Politician or the Sectarian Preacher, but they are closed to me.

"I am a Christian! I am a brother! I am a member of the Lord's church!" This used to be the "Open sesame!" to every Christian heart, home and pulpit. No more. New qualifications must now be offered: strange, alien things, utterly foreign to the religion of the Bible. One must speak also the language of Ash-dod to communicate with many who were once "the peculiar people of God."

No longer does the outnumbered but valiant army of God's heroes stand united, shoulder to shoulder, to live or die for God and Truth. Instead, many who once so stood with us are turned against us, seeking to maim and destroy as no outsider ever could. And somewhere on the sidelines sits Satan, the ancient enemy, enjoying an unaccustomed respite. How he must chuckle in unholy glee at the spectacle of "churches of Christ" trying to negate *the church of Christ* by carrying it into the Babylon of Denominationalism.

I pray that some distant tomorrow may bring a repentance and reconciliation, in and with, the Truth as it is in God — but it will not come today. The worldly are fat with pride and puffed up with progress and rich in the spoils of the Judas price of public popularity, and show no signs of giving these things up. It will be a long, hard winter for the faithful.

Tomorrow . . .

What shall *tomorrow* be? Everyone seems to render lip-service to the self-evident fact that ". . . my brethren, these things ought not so to be." All claim to deplore present conditions and yearn for a remedy. Is an effective remedy to be found? If an effective remedy were found, would any or all of us be willing to pay the price that inevitably must be paid for it?

What would be required of the "conservatives" to be again embraced into the fellowship of the "liberals"? Manifestly, we would have to give up the fight against humanizing the Church of Christ into a man-made institution whose chief functions are to offer a ritualistic worship, a fraternal association, an organizational charity and a program of secular services. In short, we would have to give up "what God hath wrought," and embrace "the Doctrines and Commandments of men."

This we cannot do, simply because it would be wrong. As of

old, we must "obey God rather than men." It is as simple, and as final as that.

What would the "liberals" have to give up to be reconciled to their conservative brethren? Only those things — but *all* those things — that men have intruded into the things of God. It is as simple as that. No more, no less, no different.

Will they do it — ever? Men have fallen into error and then repented. I suppose all as individuals have. Yet, my research into history fails to disclose a single instance of an *organization* ever repenting of anything! I can discover no hope at all that these erring brethren will return to the Faith.

What, then, shall be *tomorrow*? I don't really know — except *tomorrow*, like yesterday, like today — "*the word of the Lord abideth forever!*" Let it be, dear Lord, let it be!

SUMMATION, EXHORTATION, RECOMMENDATION —

If you have read to this point, you have read some excellent and timely material. Each article was selected to compliment the others on one general theme — the church past, present, and future. We wish that every Christian on earth could read this paper. We could and would make it available to thousands more if we had the means for proper distribution.

The article by Donald Townsley reflects justifiable concern about some conditions in the church today. Whether we like to face facts or not, we would do well to heed his warnings and admonitions — for he is exactly right in what he says.

The article by Paul Southern reminds us that God's people have always had problems to solve; that all problems can be solved, and how to do it. The simple solution is to ascertain the will of God on any question or issue and then follow it!

The article by Alvin Raney gives us a three-way view of the church. Surely every true Christian must read it with mixed emotions. Brother Raney departed this life about three years ago, but his teaching lives on. He was one of the most able speakers and writers of his time. Consider what he said!

As brother Townsley has said, one of our problems — maybe the greatest — is a lack of qualified leadership in the church. Like the judges of old, we need men who are "able men, such as

fear God, men of truth," not men who are uninformed, unstable and get up in a new world every morning.

We have too much division among us! Many churches, some with a history of strength and influence, are dividing. It looks like mature, sensible, reasonable and knowledgeable men (and certainly Christians) should be able to solve problems among them — scripturally and peacefully.

I love my preaching brethren, but I cannot appreciate the attitudes and actions of some of them these days. They are the center of many church problems and divisions. I know of three recent divisions in this state which, in my opinion, were caused by preachers or could have been prevented by them with the exercise of a little wisdom and common sense. Too many preachers don't know the difference between faith and opinion, their business and the business of others, or what to take into the pulpit and what to leave out of it. Therefore, a trail of trouble and division follows them everywhere they go.

Brethren, we can have peace and progress by simply following one of the slogans of the restoration era, "In matters of faith let there be unity; in matters of opinion let there be liberty; in all things let there be charity (love)." Follow that formula and you can solve all problems and maintain scriptural peace. *E. B.*

AN INTERESTING LETTER

Dear Brethren:

For some time I have been receiving *The Sower*. I have read every number with great appreciation. Sometimes I do not agree with your conclusions on the "Children's Home" question, but overall I deeply appreciate your good paper and the wonderful attitude of Eugene Britnell, its editor. I am greatly troubled at the trend of many of our churches and papers today. Some of my bound papers go back to 1930, not speaking of those by Campbell, Scott and Stone, and as I read them I am astonished at the difference of 1930 and 1982. The sermon books, etc. of yesterday, as well as other books among my 4,000 or more, say that something has happened! I cry aloud, "What is happening to God's church and its people?"

My visits to other congregations has convinced me that most "pulpits" are without conviction, and love for the truth does not manifest itself. Not long ago I visited 16 congregations and heard 14 different preachers. Only two of those preachers preached sermons that a Methodist Church would not have received. The "social gospel" has replaced "the gospel of Christ."

I am convinced, that to many "members of the church" and not a few preachers, the church is just another denomination. If things do not change soon, I am convinced that most of the church today will be consumed by fellowship with denominations. When the pulpits cease to ring out the message "if you are not born of water and the Spirit you cannot enter into the kingdom of God," the distinctness of the New Testament church and salvation from sin is gone.

Thanks for the paper.

Brotherly yours in the Lord,
J. Leathel Roberts, San Marcos, Texas

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ARCH STREET CHURCH OF CHRIST

HEAD: Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18).

CREED: The New Testament (Heb. 8:13; 9:15).

ELDERS: Eugene Britnell, Basil Copeland, Porter Hancock and J. B. Williams (Acts 14:23; I Tim. 3).

DEACONS: Randy Frazier, Fred Norman, M. W. Nelson, Johnny Pierce and Orland Stringer (I Tim. 3).

SAINTS (Christians): (Philippians 1:1; Romans 1:7).

SERVICES: Sunday — Bible Study, 9:45 A.M.; Worship at 10:45 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. Wednesday — midweek service at 7:30 P.M. (John 4:23, 24; Hebrews 10:25).

RADIO PROGRAMS: Sunday — KXLR, 1150 on the dial, 8:30 A.M. — KAAY, 1090 on the dial, 9:30 P.M.