

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The Word and Work



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

JULY, 2001

Some Highlights from **CHURCH HISTORY**

I thought about the former days, the years of long ago.

—Psalm 77:5

I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember
your miracles of long ago.

—Psalm 77:11

Watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things
your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart so long as
you live. Teach them to your children and to their children.

--Deut. 4:9

“God’s creation of the rainbow...tassels on the garments of the
priests...twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan river...the
Passover...the Lord’s Supper...**all serve remembrance of
God’s saving acts in history.**” --George Ezell

<< Barton Stone and the Cane Ridge Awakening, 1801 >>

The Value of Studying History

“To *dwell* on the past is to rob the present; to *ignore* the past is to rob the future.”

--Confucius

* * *

Sally, the younger sister of Charlie Brown of *Peanuts* fame, once began a history report at school, “When writing about church history, we have to go back to the very beginning. Our pastor was born in 1930.”

* * *

“Many people today suffer from historical amnesia. The time between the apostles and their own day is one giant blank. That is hardly what God had in mind.”

--Bruce Shelley

* * *

“Those who ignore history are condemned to repeat it.”

--Santayana

* * *

Some Christians “think that nothing really worth knowing happened in the Christian world between Saint Paul and Billy Graham... Evangelicals should get themselves integrated into the unity and continuity of the cumulative Christian tradition. Christ has shone on many a soul and many a culture in the past, and not only on the Evangelicals of today.”

--Charles Malik

* * *

“One function of a university is to keep alive and usable the knowledge and ideas of the past. This is not because the past has said the *last* word, but because it happens to have said the *first*.”

--Arthur Bestor

* * *

“Among liberals, church historians are the most conservative, and among conservatives, church historians are the least narrow-minded.”

--Stephen Board

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Bennie Hill, News & Notes

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Cane Ridge -- 200 years ago this month

“REVIVE Us Again,” Lord -- but Help us Respond Wisely

Let us visit the U.S.A. back in 1800. Our national Constitution had been written 13 years earlier. George Washington had died the year before. Daniel Boone would live for another 20 years. John Adams was in his last year as our 2nd president.

With that background, we introduce what will seem to be a totally unrelated fact: The experience of being “slain in the spirit” did not begin with the 20th century Pentecostal movement. Strange “bodily exercises” -- such as spasms, loud and repeated crying out in church meetings, and swooning dead away for shorter or longer periods -- these were quite widespread in Kentucky two hundred years ago. They occurred most fantastically at the Cane Ridge, Kentucky, revival of August 1801, as Barton Stone and numerous other men preached the good news that “Jesus saves.” (Barton Stone became one of the founding leaders of what is often called “the restoration movement” from which Churches of Christ developed.)

But such unusual occurrences had also broken out in 1799, 1800, and May 1801 under the ministry of James McGready in Logan County (southwest Kentucky). That area was inhabited by so many murderers, horsethieves and other outlaws that it was called “Rogues Harbor.” The bold McGready’s prayerfulness and hellfire preaching resulted in a number of dramatic conversions, as sinners turned from corrupt practices to holy conduct. Barton Stone -- at that time a Presbyterian, like McGready -- visited those meetings to see for himself the bizarre physical manifestations that some people experienced. He observed, interviewed and even kept track of a number of those who underwent the unusual phenomena. He became convinced that quite a few of the occurrences were from God and resulted in lasting repentance. He felt that the Holy Spirit was producing profound conviction of sin through the prayerful preaching of God’s word. It was this agonizing sense of guilt and lostness that caused the physical effects.

However, he believed other people were just psychologically worked up (as we would put it), and that still other cases were caused by the Devil. After all, Satan often tries to mimic God’s work with counterfeits so as to discredit it. On the other hand, Stone wrote, “That cannot be Satan’s work which brings men to humble confession and forsaking of sin, to solemn prayer... fervent praise and thanksgiving, and to sincere and affectionate exhortation to sinners to repent and go to Jesus the Savior.” After those meetings he thoughtfully returned to

his home and church in Cane Ridge, near Paris (not very far from Lexington).

The Cane Ridge Revival of August 1801

Three months later occurred the great revival at Cane Ridge. Actually it broke forth during a scheduled Lord's Supper festival such as many Presbyterian churches then held each year. These were a combination gospel meeting, revival meeting, and fellowship week. Already that year there had been a dozen or more such four-day communion festivals at churches around central Kentucky. In answer to prayer the Lord's word seemed to be having powerful results, similar to those in Logan County. At Flemingsburg "weeping, trembling, and convulsion of soul" broke out. At Cabin Creek Church over fifty people fell or fainted. But more was happening than striking physical phenomena. People were surrendering to the Lord.

4,000 folks attended at Concord Church. Richard McNemar, a minister who was there, wrote of hearers

"...falling down and crying out, under conviction, or singing and shouting with unspeakable joy." Seven Presbyterian ministers were present, "four of whom were opposed to the work, and spoke against it until the fourth day about noon." By then they all were convinced "that it was the work of God; and one of them addressed the assembly with tears, acknowledging that [though] they had long been praying to the Lord to pour out his Spirit, yet when it came they did not know it; but wickedly opposed the answer of their own prayers."

Soon afterwards at Stony Creek Church 8,000 attended; 250 fell or fainted. As we may imagine, all these unusual happenings led to growing interest, increasing attendance and escalating excitement.

Then came Friday, August 8, 1801. About 800 people arrived at the farm area of Cane Ridge. No motels existed two hundred years ago, so they set up camp on the grounds. No expressways either, so they walked or came by horse or buggy. During the next several days others kept pouring in till at times there were from 10,000-20,000, in a day when Kentucky's largest city, Lexington, had a population under 1,800.

Many of these folks were Presbyterians who came to partake in the prolonged communion services. And numerous Christians from other churches were there to hear the preaching. Even Kentucky's governor came to encourage the work. But according to historian W.W. Sweet, "Many [of the thousands] who attended were dissolute and irreligious characters, and they outnumbered by far those who came with religious intent. There was much drinking of raw whiskey

plentifully supplied by hucksters from wagons on the outskirts of the campgroups." Thieves and prostitutes were in attendance too.

Leonard Allen gives more details. "By Saturday afternoon there was continual preaching from both [a] tent and the meeting-house. Excitement mounted." In that rough throng -- and doubtless among the church-members gathered to commune with the Lord, too -- He was convicting many of their sins. "By sundown the cries and shouts of the penitent could be heard throughout the crowds. Indeed, the noise rose to a level that could be heard several miles away." Soon a number of preachers -- some Presbyterian, some Baptist, some Methodist-- began preaching simultaneously to groups scattered over the surrounding acres. This continued day and night. They didn't preach their denominational doctrines, but the Gospel of Christ. Barton Stone, a non-Calvinist Presbyterian at that time, said they all preached that God loved the whole world and sent His Son as Savior, but that sinners needed to believe and obey if they wanted to be saved. Contrary to Calvinist teaching, he said, "We urged upon sinners to believe now, and receive salvation." He estimated there were 500-1,000 conversions.

During this time there were continual cries, groanings and fallings. An eyewitness reported, "At one time I saw at least 500 swept down in a moment as if a... thousand guns had been opened upon them, and then immediately followed shrieks and shouts that rent the very heavens." Allen explains, "Some who fell remained conscious and talkative, but some fell into a deep coma-like state. Crowds gathered around the fallen." A minister who was there wrote, "Sinners dropping down on every hand... crying for mercy ... [Christians] praying, agonizing ... falling down in distress for sinners, or in raptures of joy! ... Others talking to the distressed, to one another, or to opposers of the work, and all this at once" Stone himself later described various phenomena, including swooning, and what was called the "jerks" -- bodily spasms or contortions -- and "barking" -- which was simply grunts caused by the jerks! He also heard some incredibly beautiful singing by Christians who were usually very ordinary singers.

Edwin Orr says an "eyewitness reported that he 'attended with 18 Presbyterian ministers and Baptist and Methodist preachers I do not know how many, all being either preaching or exhorting the distressed with more harmony than could be expected... The whole number brought to the ground under conviction was about 1,000.'" But according to Sweet, "One of the most... reliable of the Presbyterian ministers in attendance stated that during the course of the meeting the number who fell was about 3,000." Perhaps he stayed longer or visited more of the preaching sites than the other observer.

But remember that these phenomena were results, and strong preaching was the cause. People were being urged to get right with God by turning from evil and becoming followers of Christ Jesus. Many were doing so, while a lot of others were strenuously refusing His call. We shouldn't lose sight of the really important results because of the merely sensational.

The meetings went on for about six days, finally ending because the food supplies ran out. The Cane Ridge revival was over, but it was just part of the kick-off of a mighty movement called **the Second Great Awakening in the U.S.** It broke out on the East Coast too -- primarily among college students, and in quieter ways than were common on the frontier (i.e., Kentucky!). For example, at Yale during the presidency of Timothy Dwight, awakenings swept the campus in 1802, 1808, 1813 and 1815.

Positive Results

Historian Earle Cairns mentions six long range results of the Second Awakening. 1)Improved morals, especially on the frontier. 2)From that time the midweek prayer meeting became a common practice. 3)Sunday schools, which started earlier in England, became widespread in the U.S. 4)Numerous Christian schools and colleges were started. 5)Missionary endeavor here and abroad became more prevalent than before. 6)Various Christian literature projects -- such as the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society -- flourished from then onward.

Regarding that first point, here is the testimony written by a Dr. George Baker to another doctor:

On my way I was informed by settlers on the road that the character of Kentucky was entirely changed, that they were as remarkable for sobriety as they had formerly been for dissoluteness and immorality. And indeed I found Kentucky to all appearances [to be] the most moral place I had ever seen. A profane expression was hardly ever heard. A religious awe seemed to pervade the country. Upon the whole I think the revival in Kentucky was the most extraordinary that ever visited the church.

But what about all that "Craziness"?

Ah yes, the emotionalism. Much of it went on not only during the Cane Ridge revival, but for some years afterwards. For example, B.F. Hall was converted and nurtured in the "Stone movement" that developed in the years following Cane Ridge. But later he sided more with Alexander Campbell's disparagement of emotionalism. Hall recalled the Stone churches through the 1810s:

[At that time] We differed very little...from the sects in our views of spiritual influence, getting religion, the evidence of remis-

sion, and kindred subjects. Hence we practiced the mourners' bench or anxious-seat system throughout. The religion of those days consisted principally of feeling; and those who shouted the loudest and made the greatest ado, were looked upon as the best Christians. Hence our preaching, our prayers and songs were adapted to excite the emotions. We would clap our hands, stamp with our feet, ... speak as loud as possible and scream at the top of our voice, to get up excitement. I often blistered my hands by clapping them together, and my feet were made sore by repeated stamping."

And John Rogers commented in his biography of Barton Stone about some of the extremism he observed,

We have seen that enthusiasm & fanaticism, in their wildest shapes, have attended [these unusual "exercises"] ...and that spiritual pride, censoriousness, a Pharisaic disposition, and a spirit that trusts too much in suggestions, impulses, and consequently, that under-rates the Word of God, is always associated with them.

So we see that excesses similar to those seen in *some* sections of today's charismatic movement were common then as well. But I wish he had not said such extremes were "always" associated with them -- for that is an obvious overstatement. As evidence of that, compare Barton Stone's differing view. In 1830 he looked back at the 1801 Cane Ridge revival and its results:

...Gathering crowds hurrying to the place of worship. All clothed with solemnity -- many wetting their paths with tears -- and thousands anxious to find the way of life -- many sunk under the burden of sin Many praising God alone for delivering grace, and cheerfully uniting with the church of God I then saw, and yet acknowledge some imperfection, some eccentricities ... from what I thought right, among the vast multitudes assembled. But I remembered they were but men, and that I could not reasonably expect to find perfection in such multitudes of imperfect beings. **The good so far exceeded the evil, the latter almost disappeared. I saw the religion of Jesus more clearly exhibited in the lives of Christians then, than I had ever seen before or since to the same extent....**" [Emphasis added.]

Stone went on to give details of what he meant: Preachers spoke earnestly, laboring night and day, privately and publicly. Christians prayed and praised with great love of their Father and Redeemer. Sectarian walls were ignored (but later rebuilt, alas!). The Bible was read with intense desire to find the truth. Believers gathered eagerly at the Lord's Supper. Brotherly kindness, meekness, obedience and all virtues were practiced more and more. Enemies became friends. Christians wept over their unconverted relatives and friends, and prayed for them. And sinners of every age, gender, background and social class turned to God. Stone concluded, "**This, this I call revival. This I call the work of God.**" (*The Christian Messenger*, July 1831.) He was describing not only the days of the camp meeting, but the results of the

Awakening during the years that followed. In Kentucky alone more than 10,000 new church members were enrolled between 1800 and 1803. That doubled the number, from 10,000 to 20,000, in that short time. Praise God!

Review and Conclusions

1) Remember that Stone carefully investigated the earlier happenings in Logan County before reaching an opinion. He concluded, wisely I believe, that the Holy Spirit was producing profound conviction of sin through the prayerful preaching of God's word. It was this agonizing sense of guilt and lostness that caused many of the physical effects. He believed that some of the unusual phenomena were only self-induced, and some seemed to be Satanic in origin. Yet much seemed to be truly from the Lord. How powerfully he expressed that last point: "That cannot be Satan's work which brings men to humble confession and forsaking of sin, to solemn prayer ... fervent praise and thanksgiving, and to sincere and affectionate exhortation to sinners to repent and go to Jesus the Savior."

2) Three decades later he still believed, "The good so far exceeded the evil, the latter almost disappeared. I saw the religion of Jesus more clearly exhibited in the lives of Christians then, than I had ever seen before or since to the same extent...." *O Lord, do it again! Do it again!*

3) For people to be strongly overwhelmed by God's holy presence plus an awareness of their sin is understandable. And Biblical. Ezekiel, Daniel and John are some examples of godly people being thus overawed (Ezek. 1:28; 44:4; Dan. 7:28; 8:16-18,27; 10:7-11,15-19; Rev. 1:17; 19:10; 22:8). And in Acts 2 the unsaved hearers were pierced to the heart and cried out.

But to make these spontaneous responses a ritual which we urge other people to imitate, or to judge people for not having such dramatic experiences -- that would clearly be ridiculous. Yet some Christians do this.

4) In general, folks on the frontier tended to be more emotional than people "back east." Life was rougher, sins were more gross, feelings less inhibited. Revival occurred on the East Coast too, but "special effects" there were much less common.

5) The early "Stoneite churches" obviously went overboard on feelings. As time passed and they came into increasing contact with those congregations mainly influenced by Alexander Campbell, they became less emotional. (Perhaps in some cases too unemotional. That's possible too.) Though by and large they probably remained

more exuberant in worship than the "Campbellite" churches, they grew much more orderly and less dependent on feelings. (The two groups merged in 1832.)

And what about us, here and now, two centuries later? What shall we say about these things? Paul's advice is relevant, "Quench not the Spirit [or, Do not put out the Spirit's fire]; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thes.5:19-22). Again he said, "Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor.14:40). But he did not mean the orderliness of a cemetery! Some of us may be way too scared of the unusual or emotional -- of anything outside our traditional rut. May God free us up. Yet others of us may be prone to the pride, fault-finding, over-dependence on impulses, and undervaluing of Scripture which were mentioned above by John Rogers. May God hold us steady.

Our *emotions* are a God-given part of His divine image. In themselves they are good and not to be denied or rejected. But neither should we allow them to run wild, nor be manipulated. They are good servants but poor masters, and therefore self-control is a needed fruit of the Holy Spirit. *Emotionalism*, in the sense of deliberately seeking to arouse and enflame our feelings, is foolish and wrong. Maturity requires us to distinguish between the two.

But most of all, in the light of God's powerful moving in the Second Great Awakening -- let us humbly seek the Lord and His grace, and deeper holiness of heart, and ever-growing love, and God's "power from on high" (Luke 24:49) which we desperately need in these days.

O Lord, "Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?" (Psa.85:6.)

Introduction:

The Importance of HISTORY

Alex V. Wilson

History is a neglected subject today, and we suffer because of that. One in five American teenagers doesn't know what country we fought against to gain our independence, the Associated Press reported in a news story on July 3, 2001. One in 7 thinks it was France. "One in 10 didn't know George Washington was the first president. 17% didn't know there were 13 original colonies. Nearly one in four didn't know who fought in the Civil War."

If there is that much ignorance about our nation's history, my guess is that the average Christian is just as densely ignorant about the history of God's people since the church began. Thus this special issue on church history, following our issues on the Old Testament and the 400 Silent Years.

Numerous times in God's word He calls our attention to past events, expecting us to learn lessons from them. And He blames us if we don't. Psalm 106:6-21, parts of which we quote here, is just one of many examples of this in the Bible. (See our front cover for more.)

We have sinned, even as our fathers did....

When our fathers were in Egypt, **they gave no thought** to your miracles; **they did not remember** your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea.

Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known.

He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up....

He saved them from the hand of the foe....

But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel.

At Horeb they made a calf and worshipped an idol cast from metal.

They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass.

They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt.

I'm sure you noticed the recurring theme. They gave no thought. They did not remember. They soon forgot. They forgot even the God who saved them. Oh, if only they had studied their history lessons!

Obviously the Lord is trying to drive these points into our thick skulls: LEARN from the Past. To do that, REMEMBER the Past. To do that, STUDY the Past.

Maybe you think I'm exaggerating. If so, consider that **22 books of the Bible are mainly or entirely records of history.** They include Genesis, Joshua, Ruth, 1st and 2nd Samuel, Ezra, Esther, the 4 Gospels, Acts, and ten others. *They add up to 1/3 of the Biblical books!* And many other books in Scripture contain at least some references to historical events, drawing lessons from them. That is true of a lot of psalms, quite a few prophets and epistles, and several sermons in Acts. Paul sums it up this way: "These [past] things happened to them as *examples* and were written down as *warnings* for us." (1 Cor. 10:11.) Examples and warnings are both needful. Someone said, "The people who neglect to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it."

God didn't retire in 95 A.D.

Since the Lord is still the living, active God, He didn't resign and retreat to a front porch rocking chair when the apostle John finished writing the book of Revelation. Therefore, knowing what He has done in the 1900 years since then can be profitable to us. I know Christians whose lives were deeply transformed and enriched when they studied church history. Indeed, we neglect it to our poverty and peril.

Therefore in *Word and Work* this month and next, we shall survey some of the high points of the church's history from its beginning till approximately 1800 A.D. This is an ambitious task. But since far too many Christians are vastly ignorant of this material (except for some snatches here and there), hopefully even this sketch will fill in some of the gaps in a helpful way. A major benefit of studying the past is to see how movements rose and fell, and how trends developed that still affect us to this day. Even a brief survey can provide us with an overall grasp of these movements and trends.

The reason we will end our study about 1800 is due to our focus this month on the amazing revival that occurred at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801. August marks the 200th anniversary of that awakening, so it is appropriate that we examine it. Also, its main human leader was Barton Stone, one of the founding fathers of the "Restoration Movement" from which Churches of Christ, Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ emerged.

So, let's move on to study the Church -- the New Covenant family of God and body of Christ. We could entitle this survey "The book of Acts, chapters 29-1800." But first we should get some Biblical background that helps us understand history. The next article seeks to do that.

Our Lord Attacks, Our Enemy Counterattacks

What is God up to? What is He trying to accomplish? What are His desires and purposes for Himself and His people? Let's ponder some key scriptures, and then see how the facts and principles they reveal have worked out in the past 2,000 years.

1. **Ephesians 1:3-14.** (NIV used throughout, unless designated otherwise.)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will -- 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment -- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession -- to the praise of his glory.

Note the Lord's *choosing* (verse 4), His *pleasure and will* (5), His *will and pleasure and purpose* (9), His *choosing and plan*, and that He "works out everything in conformity with *the purpose of His will*" (11)! Hey, God really has some definite goals He is working toward, doesn't He?

God our Father is up to something. He has a cosmic *Plan* of the ages, from eternity to eternity! It centers on our Lord Jesus Christ (mentioned at least 12 times in these 12 verses). And, wonder of wonders, it includes us! (Paul mentions "we" or "us" 9 times here.) It is based on God's wise understanding (verse 8), motivated by His rich grace (6, 7), and results in His glory (6, 12, 14). It began in the distant Past ("before the creation of the world," 4) and it includes the endtime Future ("when the times will have reached their fulfillment,"

10). It cost nothing less than Christ's death ("his blood," 7), and results in nothing less than our becoming God's children (5). **THIS IS NO SMALL PLAN.** It is incredibly awesome, radiant in living color and fantabulous to the ultimate max!! (Those are not Paul's words, but if he lived here and now he might have expressed it that way.) What a God! What a plan! What privileges for us, His church!

2. Matthew 28:18-20.

Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The church's specific **task** in this divine plan is both **worldwide and agelong**: it includes "all nations" and lasts until "the end of the age." We are to make, not just church members, but "*disciples*" of Jesus Christ--those who *publicly identify* with Him (in baptism), and are *fully committed to obey Him*.

3. Ephesians 4:2-6.

2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit -- just as you were called to one hope when you were called -- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

This passage shows how important **Christian unity** is. (How can we fulfill our task if we don't work together in harmony?) The "unity of the Spirit" (3) is something which real Christians **already have** (because we are all "in Christ" and thus are children of the same Father and have the same Holy Spirit indwelling us). Yet we need to "**make every effort to keep**" that unity, lest we lose it through careless lack of love. We promote unity by exercising humility, gentle patience, and forbearance (2) and by speaking the truth in love (see 15).

This unity is based on the seven "Ones" of verses 4-6. Christians who share in these basic core beliefs or commitments can and should live in unity, though they may disagree on numerous other, less important beliefs and/or practices.

4. Ephesians 6:10-20.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the

full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

God has a fiendish enemy who opposes Him with every cunning trick and power at his command. He longs to wreck God's plan, and ruin His people -- yes, us! -- and prevent the unsaved from being won from his kingdom to God's. The result? **Warfare:** a cosmic conflict between God's redeemed people and the Satanic "powers of this dark world, spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm."

Church History is the arena of this struggle. In its records we read of apostles, intercessors, evangelists, teachers, heretics, leaders, persecutors, martyrs, defectors, reformers, missionaries -- heroes and zeros of many kinds. Through them and through the multitudes of ordinary believers whose names never appear in history books, the War has been waged. Attacks and counterattacks, brave endeavors and cowardly surrenders, wise strategies and stupid blunders, great advances made and entire regiments wiped out, victories won and defeats sustained -- in these ways this War has continued through the centuries. And it continues now, though many sleeping soldiers are criminally unaware that an enemy really exists and a conflict is going on!

How Have We Done in the Past? How Are We Doing Now? During the centuries of the church's history, how well has it accomplished the Heavenly Father's goals? Has the church... 1) understood God's purposes and plans, and taken advantage of its rich, God-given privileges? 2) carried out its task of winning disciples to Jesus in all nations? 3) made strong efforts to keep its God-given unity, co-operating in its task and being coordinated in its warfare? 4) fought the good fight of the faith?

To answer such questions, we must study Church History.

A Survey of Ancient Church History, till 313 A.D.

The Church is Established, Spreads, and Is Persecuted.

(You can read this important and fascinating article in only 16-19 minutes!)

A. Its Establishment

Jesus Christ died and rose again as our redeemer and living Lord. He then established the church by sending *the Holy Spirit* to indwell and empower every member of it. Christ appointed the Apostles, whom He had specially chosen and trained, to be its leaders. Later, "as to one born abnormally late," Saul the Pharisee and persecutor saw Jesus, who changed him into Paul the apostle (1 Cor.15:8).

The apostles were the church's human leaders. Before long James the son of Zebedee was killed at Herod's command. Scripture is mostly silent about the deaths of the others, but according to tradition all of them except John were martyred in various widespread locations where they had gone as witnesses of Christ. When John was an old man he was exiled to the island of Patmos, a penal colony, where he saw and wrote the book of *Revelation*.

The rest of the New Testament books were also written by apostles (Matthew, John, Paul, Peter) or their close co-workers (Mark, Luke, James, and Jude). The gospel message and doctrines taught orally by the apostles were recognized as being not just the word of men but the Word of God (1 Thes.2:13). So as time passed their *writings* also were recognized as belonging to Holy Scripture, along with the Old Testament books. In 1 Tim.5:18 Paul wrote, "The Scripture says..." and goes on to quote not only Deut. 25:4 from the O.T. but also Luke 10:7 from the N.T. And after Peter referred to the letters of Paul, in the very same sentence he mentioned "the other Scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Yet we should realize that most "Bible" study in those days was from the O.T., since most churches had few or no copies of N.T. books. When a church was able to get a copy of a gospel or epistle of their own, it was a red-letter day! (Do we take for granted our privilege of having a whole Bible easily available -- in many versions?)

B. The Church Spreads Rapidly

Lars Qualben writes "Christianity spread with astonishing rapidity during the first three centuries. It spread to all parts of the Empire, even to regions beyond Roman territory." He then enumerates ten

countries including India, plus the large region of Mesopotamia, plus the Roman provinces both of North Africa and in Germany. Next he gives nine “**reasons for this remarkable progress,**” of which we will quote seven.

1) The Christians expected the speedy return of the Lord. There was but little time to organize, no time to be idle. The essential thing was to preach the Gospel “unto the uttermost part of the world” before it was too late.

2) They were imbued with a strong conviction that Christianity was the *only* true and universal religion, the only means of salvation for mankind.

3) The life of the Christians drew the people toward the Gospel. The world at the time of Christ lacked in love. The Church practiced charity, hospitality, and brotherliness.

4) The equality of all Christians before God made a special appeal to people from the lower and the middle classes. In the Kingdom of God, the individual counted. The slave and his master were equally precious in the eyes of the Lord. The young slave girl was protected. The exposure of infants ceased wherever Christianity was firmly established.

5) Heathenism produced no martyrs, while the Christians were ready to die for their faith....

8) Many prominent women helped to spread the Gospel because of the exalted place Christianity gave to womanhood.

9) God was with his people and gave them increase. (*A History of the Christian Church.*)

C. The Church is Persecuted

If Christian conduct and teachings were so appealing, as the preceding paragraph indicates, why were disciples persecuted? There were several causes. Basically, they were misunderstood and vilified due to their **being so different from others**. They were **sometimes accused of being atheists** (“they don’t have any temples, or images of their gods, so they must not believe in them”); or **cannibals** (“they say they eat flesh and drink blood”); or **sexually immoral** (“they meet in homes or private places, often before daybreak or after sundown” [since many slaves could not attend at other times]). Believers in Christ naturally abstained from many of the lewd, violent and ungodly sports and amusements which were popular at that time. For this

reason they were sometimes called **"haters of mankind"** -- an ancient way of saying "You nerds, killjoys, wimps!"

When large numbers of pagans were converted to Christ, the **sale of images declined and attendance at the pagan temples decreased.** When you hurt people's wallets, they'll fight you. (See Acts 19:23-41.) When calamities struck -- floods, drought, storms -- the Christians were accused of causing them: "These tragedies never used to happen like this! **Our city's traditional deities are angry at us** since you Christians have taught many of our people to quit worshipping them."

As time passed, **Emperor-worship** became more popular and widespread. When the apostle John wrote *Revelation*, Domitian was ruler. He began many of his official letters with these words: "I, Caesar Domitian, *your lord and your god*, give you these orders...." No wonder Christians were persecuted at that time -- though the persecution was not empire-wide during his reign.

Trajan (98-117) and some other emperors "directed their attacks mainly against individual Christians. Decius (249-251 A.D.) was the first emperor to initiate a general widespread persecution which **aimed at the complete suppression of Christianity,**" writes Qualben. Persecution had died down for a while before Decius gained the throne. Though anti-Christian laws were on the books, they had been ignored by emperors engrossed in other matters. Thus when Decius struck so suddenly and savagely, a number of Christians were caught off guard and compromised their faith. Here's how it happened.

During that time all people in the empire were required to appear once yearly before a statue of Decius, offer incense to it and **declare, "Caesar is lord."** This was more an act of patriotism to the empire than of worship, and no one was required to stop worshipping his own god(s). But anyone who refused was liable to be executed. Christians knew that **"Jesus is Lord"**; that was their creed in a nutshell (Acts 10:36; Rom.10:9; 1 Cor.12:3; 2 Cor.4:5; Phil.2:11; Col.2:6). They were duty bound to put Him, not Caesar, first. Many did, and suffered martyrdom. But others gave in. In fact, some bishops ordered their congregations to comply with the law, and led them in the ritual! They didn't want to lose all their members; but they ignored the words of King Jesus, "Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." What would you and I have done?

There were other persecutions too -- some more harsh, some less; some local and others widespread. From 260-303 there was little or no persecution at all. The church grew in numbers and prosperity. But the most widespread and violent persecution was yet to come. From **303-313, under Diocletian and Galerius**, the Roman Empire unleashed

its greatest attempt to totally wipe out Christianity. In 303 Diocletian, egged on by his junior emperor Galerius, issued edict after edict in quick succession. All people in the Empire must sacrifice to the ancient gods. Any Christians who were government officials were kicked out of office and reduced to the status of slaves. All Christian buildings were to be destroyed. All Christian scriptures were to be burned. All bishops and elders were to be imprisoned. All who remained Christians were to be tortured. In 304 the emperor gave them only 2 alternatives: totally deny Christ, or die. All forty-seven members of a small congregation in North Africa were slaughtered. A small town in Asia Minor, all of whose inhabitants claimed to be Christians, was besieged and razed to the ground. On and on it went -- the most savage tribulation till that time.

But by 313 conditions would change dramatically.

D. Other Developments before 300 A.D.

1. Various false teachings developed and had to be opposed. a) Some Jews who believed Jesus was indeed the Messiah taught a form of legalism, feeling that Gentiles could not become Christians unless they became practicing Jews first -- being circumcised and keeping Old Covenant feasts, etc. Paul strongly refuted this, mainly in *Galatians*. b) Other teachers went to the opposite extreme. Instead of depending on their own lawkeeping, they taught it doesn't matter how you live so long as you believed in Jesus. Jude 4 describes them as "men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality." c) Certain aspects of a Greek philosophy called Gnosticism penetrated some churches. Believing that all matter was evil, they denied not the deity of Jesus (like many people today) but His humanity. "God, who is spirit, would never defile Himself by becoming man." This explains puzzling passages like 1 Jn. 4:2-4 and 2 Jn. 7.

d) As time passed and 2nd- and 3rd-generation Christians were born, some of them began to take their faith for granted -- especially when there was no persecution. The number and size of churches grew, but "the first zeal flagged and conformity to the world and its ways increased... In view of the increasing worldliness in the Church, and the way in which among the leaders learning was taking the place of spiritual power, many believers were deeply impressed with the desire for a fuller experience of the power of the Holy Spirit, and were looking for spiritual revival...." (E. H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*.)

Qualben writes, "The extraordinary spiritual gifts of miracle-working and prophecy did not cease with the apostles. Justin Martyr (103-166), Irenaeus (d. 202), and Origen (185-254) testify that miracles were performed in the name of the Lord in their time, and that

the gift of prophecy had a place in the regular worship in a number of churches. But the enthusiastic prophetic element in early Christian life was gradually being replaced by a growing formalism in teaching and in worship. Moreover, with the expectation of the speedy return of the Lord growing dim in most of the churches of the second century, strictness of conduct and discipline relaxed.”

Thus a movement called **Montanism** arose in reaction to those conditions, but ended up *over-reacting*. Its founder, Montanus, went to extremes similar to those which Paul sought to correct in *1 Corinthians*. Due to the widespread under-emphasis on God’s supernatural working, Montanus and his closest followers stressed it too much. Though they accepted the Biblical books as God’s Word, they seemed to regard **“their own dreamings and visions as more important than the written word of the Bible.** The main import of the Montanist prophecy was the proclamation of the speedy coming of the Lord. He was to establish the Millennial Kingdom, the New Jerusalem, in the village of Pepuza in Phrygia [modern Turkey], whither the believers should betake themselves. In preparation for the coming of the Lord, [they] imposed upon themselves a **fanatical asceticism and church discipline.** Married life was considered a lower plane than the single state, and second marriage was under all circumstances forbidden” (Qualben). They also **regarded themselves as a higher class spiritually than anyone outside their group.**

There were some Christians who sought a balance, agreeing with the strengths of the movement but trying to avoid its excesses. But such is not always easy, as has been seen throughout the history of the Church. The first, second and fourth false teachings described above have reappeared in one form or another during the past 2000 years.

2. **“In the Apostolic Era the universal, spiritual priesthood of all believers was generally recognized by the Church.... A direct, personal communion with God through faith in Jesus Christ was the essence and the power of the Christian life. [But] toward the close of the first Christian century a change took place. The ministry of the Word and the Sacraments became official, which marked the beginning of the division of the Christians into ‘clergy’ (chosen ones) and ‘laity’ (the masses).”** That significant quote is from Lars Qualben, a Lutheran. It provides food for thought.

To what extent is it advisable to restrict certain ministries to those who are specially trained and also ordained (recognized and appointed)? Or, to what extent should we continue our emphasis upon ministry by many members -- with wide participation in leading in prayer, and at the Lord’s Supper, and preaching? (Or are we still emphasizing that? By the way, the most touching Lord’s Supper medita-

tion I've heard in quite a while was given recently by a brother making his first talk at the Table.) Can we encourage "mere Christians" in that way and not degenerate into mediocrity? On the other hand, can we have high "professional" standards of efficiency and pay trained outsiders to join our "staff," and not degenerate into being spectators only? We should study and discuss such questions.

3. Church organization changed. In those early days the organization was simple. In the NT the words *bishop*, *elder*, and *pastor* are used interchangeably, because they represent the same men holding the same office. They were 3 names describing one ministry. *Bishop* means overseer, showing his position of leader. *Elder* shows his required experience and maturity. *Pastor* means shepherd, showing his tasks of seeking, guiding, guarding, feeding, and caring for the flock.

But by 100 A.D. a new twist began to evolve. Some congregations started appointing a leader over the team of elders, and reserving the title "bishop" for that head elder only. Later on bishops came to be in charge of several congregations, not just one. And later still an able (or at least popular) bishop might be over all the churches in a city or province. Thus a pyramid type of organization grew, and more and more power began to reside in the hands of a few men. In later centuries this developed into the Roman Catholic system, with the pope at the top of the international pyramid.

4. Another example of moving from simplicity to impressiveness was **church buildings**. Most churches in apostolic times met in homes. During times of persecution, believers met in caves, desert places, or burial grounds such as the catacombs of Rome. (An interesting topic for your further study.) There are no records of special church-buildings till nearly 200 A.D. But by 303, when the fiery persecution by Diocletian began, there were forty such chapels in the city of Rome alone.

5. Outstanding leaders, especially those who were martyred, were remembered with honor and a call to follow their faith and courage. That is entirely fitting, if not overdone and if carried out with the attitude of "by the grace of God they were what they were" (1 Cor. 15:10). In this era **Christians did not yet pray to the saints, nor treat their relics as possessing miraculous powers**. Those practices started spreading around the time of Constantine in the early and mid-300s.

6. Here are some quotations from the 2nd century regarding **baptism**: The writer of *The Epistle of Barnabas* (not the Barnabas of the book of Acts; this letter was probably written around 130) says, "Blessed are those who placed their hope in his cross and descended

into the water.... We descend into the water full of sins and uncleanness, and we ascend bearing reverence in our heart and having hope in Jesus in our spirit.” *Justin* was an outstanding leader who later was martyred. Around 150 he wrote, “As many as...believe that the things taught...by us are true and promise to be able to live accordingly are taught to fast, pray, and ask God for the forgiveness of past sins, while we pray and fast with them. Then they are led by us to where there is water, and in the manner of the regeneration by which we ourselves were regenerated they are regenerated. For at that time they obtain for themselves the washing in water....”

Irenaeus, around 185 A.D., is the first early church leader known to even mention **infant baptism**. Then Tertullian, another leader, wrote about it in 197. He “condemns the practice *beginning to be introduced* of ... baptizing infants” (Broadbent). “Infant baptism *did not become the general practice until the fifth century*, and then chiefly on theological grounds. It was now believed that an infant was born in original sin [i.e., *inheriting guilt* from Adam], and without baptism was eternally lost. With such beliefs it seemed dangerous to delay,” writes E. T. Thompson, a Presbyterian. [I’ve added the emphasis. avw]

The history of the past provides profitable lessons for us.

A Pivotal Century: the 300s

(You can read this vitally important article in under 20 minutes.)

A. Persecution ENDS!

Remember that Emperor Diocletian unleashed the most savage and widespread persecution of the Church in 303. His aim was to restore universal worship of Rome’s traditional gods and goddesses, though people could worship any other deities too. Almost all non-Christians except the Jews believed in many gods (already for a long time Rome had given special exemptions to the Jews on religious matters). It was no problem to such poly-theists to add Rome’s ancient gods to their array of objects of worship. **Only the Christians were “intolerant” enough to honor the one true God alone, and claim all other deities were false.** Since they were not politically correct, they must be wiped out! Thus in 300 A.D. every religion in the Empire was legal except Christianity.

Diocletian resigned from being emperor in 305, but was succeeded by Galerius, who had been the main instigator of the persecu-

tion while serving as Diocletian's vice-emperor. He maintained the ferocity of the anti-Christian opposition till 311, when he repealed its most severe measures on his deathbed.

Actually by this time the Roman Empire was governed by 2 emperors and 2 vice-emperors. Constantine held one of these posts from 306 onward, but soon rivalry broke out to see who would become the supreme ruler. In the fighting that resulted, in 312 near Rome Constantine defeated his chief rival. He claimed that before that decisive battle he saw a vision of the Cross, the symbol of Christianity, and was told, "In this sign conquer." Whether that is true or not, he did put the sign of the cross on his soldiers' equipment. Then he won the battle, though it seemed he had little chance of doing so. As a result he began favoring the religion which the government had tried to exterminate only a short time before. In today's world it would be as if Fidel Castro was converted to Christ!

Constantine continued as Emperor till 337. In 313 he signed the Edict of Toleration, which made all religions legal, thus putting the Christian faith on a par with others. And, though he never opposed other faiths, the Emperor now began favoring Christianity in various ways. He appointed Christians to some high government positions. Property formerly seized from churches was restored. The cross replaced the eagle as the symbol used on coins, army banners and soldiers' shields. The "clergy" were exempted from military and civil service, and from taxes. The government subsidized some church activities.

He also carried out a number of needed reforms: He outlawed crucifixion as a form of execution, and abolished gladiator shows. He made slavery less harsh and cruel. Since Sunday was the Christians' worship day, he made it a non-work day, which was a great blessing especially to Christians who were slaves.

Personally, he (and also his mother, a longtime Christian) financed the erecting of church-buildings in various sacred places. Constantine attended church services every Sunday. Sometimes he even wrote and delivered sermons! In the year 325 two other significant events occurred. He issued a general exhortation (but not a command or threat) to all citizens to follow the religion of Christianity! And he called for a conference of bishops from all over the empire, to decide on right doctrine and wipe out heresy. The government paid the travel expenses of the bishops. The Emperor presided at some of the meetings, referring to himself as the Bishop of bishops.

"Hooray -- what a Wonderful VICTORY! The Church has emerged victorious! The kingdom of God has defeated the empire of

pagan Rome! Christ has conquered Caesar! The Millennium is here -- the golden age of peace and universal righteousness! No more persecution, no more shame and fear and embarrassment about being a Christian. Now it's an honor!"

We cannot blame the many Christians (but not all) in that era that believed those sentiments. There had certainly been an incredible turnaround for the better, and the future looked bright. But since hindsight has 20/20 vision, we now can look back, and see much more clearly. And when we do, we notice important additional facts. Not only did Constantine appoint Christians as government officials, but sometimes he appointed retired generals as bishops. (Talk about the state meddling in the church!) As the head of state he had always been the honorary High Priest of the pagan government religion, and during the later years when he preached sermons in church and convened the Council of Nicea to settle doctrinal disputes, he still held that position. He had several people executed who had done no crime but were in the line of succession to his throne -- and thus might become threats to him. One of them was his brother-in-law.

He did not receive "Christian baptism" till on his death-bed. He then promised to live worthily as a disciple of Jesus, never wore his royal robes again, and died a few days later. No doubt he postponed being baptized due to an erroneous view that had become widespread - - that baptism washed away all sins up till that time in your life, but any serious sins from then on could not be forgiven and would damn you.

The facts in the two preceding paragraphs raise grave doubts that he was truly born again. But why then did he convert to Christianity? Probably his motives were mixed, as often happens. It seems to me that what primarily drove him was political advantage. "If we can't destroy the Christians (and years of severe persecution did not accomplish that), let's *use* them. They are numerous, widespread, well-organized, zealous, and extremely loyal to what they think is right. Let's convince them to really back our government, and they will help unify the empire and preserve Roman power and culture."

M. A. Smith writes, Estimates of Constantine vary. To some he is the great hero, the first Christian emperor and the equal of the apostles. To others he is a double-dyed villain who did the devil's work most effectually. Certainly he was neither. To judge from his subsequent career Constantine was no cunning schemer. His behavior as self-appointed chairman at church councils, and his obtuseness in dealing with church affairs show him to be a man with only moderate intelligence, but without any sinister intent.... He was a practical man,

and would be prepared to use anything that would work. (*From Christ to Constantine.*)

His obvious purpose for calling all the bishops to the Council of Nicea was to unify the church so it could help unify the empire. The main doctrinal issue was the deity of Jesus. A man named Arius taught that since there is only one God, it must be the Father. Thus Jesus could not be fully divine. He must have been created by God, so there was a time when he did not exist. (This view is still held by Jehovah's Witnesses.) But a young leader named Athanasius finally persuaded the majority that "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." (Do you know who wrote that, and where?) A mere creature, however exalted, could never atone for the sins of all humanity. Only God Himself could rescue us from sin and death. (Do you agree? What scriptures would you use to support Jesus' full deity?) In the end all but two of the more than 300 bishops agreed with Athanasius, and they wrote the Nicene Creed setting forth this view. E. H. Broadbent rightly observes,

"Although the decision reached was right, the way of reaching it, by the combined efforts of the Emperor and the bishops, and of enforcing it, by the power of the State, manifested the departure of the... church from the Scripture. Two years after the Council of Nicea, Constantine, altering his view, received Arius back from exile, and in the reign of his son Constantius all the bishoprics were filled by Arian bishops. The Government, now Arian, persecuted the [orthodox bishops] as formerly it had done the Arians. (*The Pilgrim Church*; emphasis added.)

That was a time when "separation of church and state" was indeed greatly needed. But the marriage of the two was just beginning, and would plague Christendom through the following centuries.

B. Persecution STARTS!

I used to believe that Constantine was the main villain in establishing a government-supported-and-run Christianity. But I was mistaken. That "honor" must go to **Emperor Theodosius I, who reigned from 379-395.** "Often you hear that Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the empire. He didn't. But he did restore its losses and gave it favored treatment as one among many tolerated religions.... Christianity was officially made the state religion under emperor Theodosius in 381" (*Christian History* magazine). He was a strong and active defender of "the Christian faith," and held orthodox views of Christ's deity. Yet, with good motives, he did a horrible amount of harm. In 381 and even more strongly in 391 he **officially outlawed all forms of non-Christian rituals.** That is, all pagan sacrifices and temple services were banned. (At first that may sound good,

but think about it.) But it was not only pagans who suffered. All “un-orthodox” forms of Christianity were also outlawed. Then in 392, he forbade even *private* pagan worship, and decreed that **Christianity was the only legal religion in the Empire!** Constantine had never thought of going that far.

All unbaptized people were required by law to take catechism classes to prepare for baptism. Any who attended them but then refused to be baptized were **liable to death** (as traitors to the government as well as heretics). That was a highly successful form of evangelism! The churches were flooded with new members. (Doesn't that sound great?)

During Theodosius' reign, for the 1st time “heretics” in the church were executed by the state-and-church working together. This was the seed from which grew the later Inquisition with its terrible tortures and killings. All sorts of questions arise: Who should decide who is or is not heretical? The church? The state? A committee representing both? The sad fact is that through the centuries many such “heretics” (then & later) were *not* heretical, but holy, Bible-believing, Christ-trusting children of God. And even if they *were* heretical, where in the New Covenant scriptures was either the church at large or the state authorized to punish heretics at all, much less to kill them?

Breathtaking Contrast, Disastrous Victory

Consider for a moment the staggering differences that came about within one short century. In 300 A.D. every religion in the Roman Empire was *legal* except Christianity. In 400 A.D. every religion in the Empire was *illegal* except Christianity. It was a near-fatal “Victory” for the one true faith! Christendom has never fully recovered from it.

1. *Before* these enormous changes occurred, it usually cost to be a disciple of the Lord. So there were not many hypocrites. *Afterwards* it was **popular** to be a Christian, and many churches became filled with non-Christian “Christians,” converted to the religion of Christianity but not to Christ personally. 2. *Before*, Christians were often **persecuted** by non-Christians. *Afterwards* “Christians” **persecuted** non-Christians.

3. *Before*, many Christians were urgent about **evangelism**. *Afterwards* some of them came to believe that the Great Commission was intended only for the pre-Constantine era, for Jesus' command was fulfilled by the great “change” that took place during the 300s.

4. *Before*, though some innovations in worship had become common, church meetings in most places were still basically simple, usually stressing internal attitudes more than external ceremonies. *Afterwards* the pagan "Christians" began emphasizing fancy and **elaborate rituals** such as they were accustomed to in their pagan religions. Outward splendor was emphasized, and before long even **images** were used -- contrary to the Ten Commandments and against the protests of spiritually minded leaders. Bishop Cyprian asked, "Why bow down before images? Lift up your eyes and heart to Heaven; that is the place where you should seek God." And Bishop Athanasius declared, "The invocation of idols is a sin, and anything that is sinful at the beginning can never be good later." Both leaders were later "sainted" by the Roman Catholic Church, but their warnings went unheeded.

Historian Ernest T. Thompson writes,

Paganism did not utterly vanish. Traces lived on now within the Christian church... As increasing restrictions were placed on heathenism outside the church, the population moved en masse into the church, bringing with them many of their former beliefs... attitudes... practices.

A single illustration will suffice. In the old Roman religion there were deities for every important process of nature and of human life. A Roman turned to his household gods to keep his larder stocked, to Ceres to make his wheat field flourish, to Silvanus to make his grain grow, and to a host of other deities for other particular wants. After Constantine the functions of these gods were taken over rapidly by the "saints." Thus in Spain San Serapio came to be appealed to in case of stomach-ache, Santa Polonia for toothache, San Jose for headache, San Bernardo for indigestion... and Santa Rita for the impossible. Santa Anna became the patron saint of women in childbirth in Naples. Prayers addressed to her were strikingly like those with which pagan women had appealed to Juno [the Roman goddess]. (*Through the Ages*)

It is interesting but also very sad that John Henry Newman, who became a Catholic cardinal in the 1800s, both admitted and defended the process described in the foregoing quotation. Here is his opinion: "Confiding in the power of Christianity to resist the infection of evil, and to transmute the very instruments of demon worship to an evangelical use... the rulers of the Church from early times were prepared, should the occasion arise, to adopt, to imitate or approve the existing rites and customs of the populace." He lists 17 examples of this principle, including temples dedicated to particular saints; the use of incense and holy water; holydays and seasons (such as Lent); requiring the clergy to wear distinctive clothes and haircuts (the tonsure); "and images at a later date." All these are "of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church."

Satan's strategy was obvious. When he could not wipe out the church, he made it popular, and infiltrated and diluted it. Those tactics were more effective than trying to destroy it by the sword.

Questions and Ideas for Thought and Discussion

1. We rightly deplore **anti-biblical practices** such as using images and praying to saints, *beliefs* such as purgatory and indulgences, and *demands* such as forbidding the clergy to marry. None of these were believed or practiced in apostolic times.

But do we ourselves fully imitate the N.T. Christians? And **should** we? We do some things they didn't -- like having "church buildings," Christian schools, monthly magazines! And we don't do some things they did -- the holy kiss, footwashing, fully supporting some destitute widows. One history book points out that singing in the early churches was unaccompanied and always in unison. If we stress one of those characteristics should we also stress the other?

We need discernment, and also some solid **basis** for deciding what N.T. teachings and practices are still binding. Missionaries learn that **many practices are merely cultural**: the style of church buildings, what attire is proper when believers gather for worship, if it is appropriate for men and women to sit together in public gatherings (Muslims say no, so if you're working in a Muslim community--). There is often no universally right answer to such questions. In most cases they involve customs rather than morals. So potential missionaries need to study carefully *their own* culture, and *Biblical* culture (which practices are still binding and which are not?), and *the foreign culture* to which they are going. Otherwise they sometimes spread U.S. cultural patterns while believing they are teaching a Biblical lifestyle.

Here are some quotes relevant to this matter. "Church history is the story of a tension between two extreme tendencies: the one extreme makes so much of the principle '*in the world*' that the Church loses her identity; the other extreme makes so much of the principle '*not of the world*' that the Church becomes irrelevant." (Leonard Verduin, regarding Jesus' words in John 17:11,14.) Again, "If there is *no accommodation* (to the society or culture in which we live), Christianity is unintelligible and cannot spread. If there is *too much accommodation* it will spread but will no longer be Christianity." (Roland Bainton.) That's something to think about.

2. Several times we have quoted with approval from Professor Qualben's book.

So we should now admit that he would probably think we have over-emphasized the crucial part that Constantine and Theodosius

played in causing spiritual decline in the church. Of course he agrees that the marriage of state and church was important. But he says regarding Christendom *before Constantine*,

Christianity had, like a leaven, permeated... Roman life, but paganism had in turn reacted decidedly upon the Church. The masses began to join the Church some time before Constantine... some of whom remained pagan in thinking and in practice. Worldliness and externalism prevailed....

The Roman world was Christianized, and Christianity was partly paganized. Moral and religious corruptions in the Church began quite some time before Christianity was adopted as the state religion. It is **historically incorrect to make the State Church the scapegoat for all the faults of the Christian Church of succeeding periods.** [Emphasis added]

I believe he understates the disastrous results of what Theodosius did (and to some extent, Constantine too). But perhaps I have presented a bit too starkly the "breathtaking contrast" between 300 and 400. Obviously there was spiritual decline before Constantine. Especially during the easy decades of the late 200s, when there was no persecution, the church in general was walking downhill. But during the 300s, with some bright exceptions, Christendom took a nose-dive!

VOICES from the FIELDS

David Moldez

Manila, Philippines

July 4, 2001

Rejoice with us for 7 people who were baptized at Novaliches (an outlying district of Greater Manila -avw) last Sunday. It is our prayer that more will follow.

Central Bible College's school year 2001-2 began three weeks ago. 104 students have enrolled. We are also starting a CBC extension class at Novaliches. We offered Apologetics (evidences for the Christian faith) with Kuya Herman [David's brother] as instructor. 40 students enrolled in the subject. Please pray that we may be able to build a small library for the extension class (which we hope to keep developing in the Novaliches area) and for the local churches there as well.

The students in Novaliches come from 6 congregations. Last Tuesday we had a fellowship meeting of its pastors and church workers. A graduate this year from our Associate in Theology program was so grateful to CBC because he was accepted as a pastor of a local church after receiving his training. So I thank the Lord for people who pray and support the teaching ministry of CBC. The need is still great. Recently I heard of some alarming research -- that of the 40,000 Bible

believing local churches in the Philippines, 28,000 of the pastors are not trained. Among those preachers and leaders who are growing in our group are several who still study at CBC. Two Sundays ago I met them -- Bobby, Willy, Erning, and Manuel -- to discuss our preaching schedules. [Brother Moldez takes turns visiting several congregations preaching and training leaders. -avw] I thank the Lord that they can now instruct the main church in Novaliches as well as the four smaller outreach groups who worship on Sunday afternoons. I am so thankful that the prayers, time and support invested in them were not wasted. And in Cavite province Brother Edwin preaches in two places. He has also enrolled 2 promising young men at CBC who he hopes can help him later. He himself also studies here still.

The building construction is in its final stage. Tomorrow we trustees will meet and assess the condition and the need for painting. The remaining funds that we have are not enough for painting. CBC hopes to transfer there during the 2nd semester.

In spite of evil times in our country --demonstrations for and against the government, kidnappings (2 New Tribes missionaries were kidnapped by bandits recently), calamities, and poverty -- we are able to continue the work that God entrusted to us.

News from the Ashleys:

According to a short report, James and Karen will soon return to the Solomon Islands to continue their Bible translation ministry there. They had to leave when political & economic conditions became very precarious. They were able to carry on from a distance, that is, from Papua New Guinea.

Philip and Susan will now stay with another Wycliffe family in PNG & study at the missionary children's school there. They will have a 6 week break at Christmas. The family will especially appreciate prayers for the adjustments all will have to make. (Their older son, Kent, studies at Bryan College in Tennessee.)

NARROW IS THE ROAD

Dennis Royse

Young people at Woodland Bible Camp and here at church were asked, "What percentage of the people in the world are going to heaven?" Their answers were mostly above 50%. Some answers even went as high as 80-90%. A large number said 60-75% were going to heaven. Many thought they were being conservative when they said 50%, but were easily drawn higher when they heard the higher answers. Some did go as low as 25%, but they were well outnumbered.

It would be hard for them, or any adult who believed these numbers were right, to see themselves as one of those going to the Lake of Fire. Belief in these numbers shows up the lack of seriousness in living a holy life. Many of our youth show a lack of reverence for God, especially during prayer. If that many people are going to heaven, then surely only the very worst people should fear God. Yet God tells us that the fear of Him is knowledge, wisdom, it lengthens life, it is the key to the treasure of salvation. (Proverbs 1:7; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 10:27; Isaiah 33:6)

We (certainly I) have done our youth a disservice by not telling them the truth about God's wrath. God is most certainly a God of love to offer anyone the gift of salvation. However, most people will not receive God's love when the end has come. Most will receive His wrath. Jesus told us this in His famous "Sermon on the Mount." Matthew 7:13,14 reads, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Clearly (and sadly) most people will not go to heaven. As the young people were shown this they responded "yes" to the question, "Shouldn't you take God and how you act toward Him more seriously?" We're sure they mean it when they say yes, but habits, new or old, are hard to break.

Let's pray that a new reverence for God will be prevalent among those who want to be saved. Let's all teach the youth, and the adults, that God warns them to be in fear of His power and to be still before Him (Zech. 2:13; Ps. 46:10). It is wonderful to speak about God's great love for us, but only when the truth is known that most people will not spend eternity with Him will there ever be a fear and reverence for God.

Remembering our Persecuted Brothers and Sisters

More Christians were martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ during century 20 than in centuries 1-19 all put together! And that sort of fierce extermination continues on and on. In some lands--such as China, North Korea, and Saudi Arabia--such oppression is carried out by the government as part of its regular policy.

In other lands the violence is not supported directly by the government (though often they turn a blind eye to it), but by lawless gangs of bloodthirsty religious extremists who wage what they believe is "holy war." Examples of this are Indonesia and also India, where numerous Christians were slaughtered in the past few years in such uprisings.

The worst persecutions today are probably in the African land of Sudan. Government troops from the North attack Christians (and also animists) in the South. They kidnap and force them to study and memorize the Koran hour after hour, day after day. They kidnap girls and women, selling them into slavery. They sometimes crucify men as Jesus was crucified!

A Prayer for the Persecuted:

O Sovereign Lord, fill the hearts of Your people who are being persecuted. Overflow them with grace, courage, wisdom, peace that passes understanding, and Calvary love--even for their persecutors.

Comfort with Your presence the prisoners, the bereaved, the tortured and maimed, the starving, the homeless. Bless those organizations and individuals who at risk to their own health and safety are ministering to the persecuted--taking food, medicine, clothes and Bibles to them.

Sustain the faith of Your persecuted people. Strengthen their trust in Your love and promises despite all they have suffered.

And now as in the past, may the blood of the martyrs be the seed of the church. We praise You for the conversions and church growth in persecuted lands like Sudan! May there be present-day Sauls who become Pauls, who will preach the name of Christ which they now hate.

We ask this in the name of the Lamb of God, our Living Lord Jesus. Amen.

LETTING GOD FIGHT MY BATTLES

Joyce Broyles

Like most people, I have some days that are better than others. On those days when nothing seems to go right, I get discouraged and worried. That is when I bathe the day in prayer, asking God to help me solve my problems.

Recently, a friend sent me a note that said no matter what my problems were, I should turn them over to God, Who is able to fight all of my battles. He added, "Remember, nothing is going to happen today that God cannot handle."

I decided to check it out. Like he suggested, I read Matthew 6:25-34. These words stood out to me. "I tell you not to worry about your life. . . . Can worry make you live longer? . . . More than anything else, put God's work first and do what He wants. . . . Don't worry about tomorrow." It sounds good to me, but can it work?

Today, another friend sent me this poem.

As children bring their broken toys with tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to God
Because He is my friend.
But then, instead of leaving Him in peace to work alone,
I hung around and tried to help
With ways that were my own.
At last I snatched them back and cried,
"How can you be so slow?"
"My child," He said, "what could I do?
You never did let go."

In the mornings, before I start the day, I leave my problems at the foot of the cross and go my way. Before I know it, though, some thoughts will stray, and then I have picked up my burden again. Each day, instead of packing those burdens around, I need to put God's work first, ahead of everything else. Sometimes it is difficult to do that. It offends some people. In order to please Him, however, we must give up everything for Him.

When I came home tonight and read this poem, I knew that I had to begin again. My prayer will be that God can change me so that I let Him fight my battles while I am busy doing the work He wants me to do. And I will try to keep from worrying while that is happening! In that way, I can trust Him to heal my broken dreams and my broken-hearted personal expressions.

SHOULD I CONFESS AN AFFAIR?

Dennis Kaufman

Question: I had an affair about six years ago that my spouse does not know about. At times, I have thought about confessing this, but our marriage is stronger now, and I don't want to risk the possibility of messing things up for us. Do I need to unveil this secret, or is my confession to God alone sufficient?

Answer: You have raised one of the most difficult and delicate issues in the field of marriage and family therapy. You will likely find counselors who lean either way in dealing with this knotty problem, but I will try to share some principles that may help you with your decision.

Some of the more recent research does seem to indicate that this kind of secret puts a definite ceiling on the level of intimacy a couple will experience. A precious covenant has been broken, and while forgiveness is available in Christ, there are definite earthly consequences. Therefore, to choose not to divulge the past affair may very well mean you are settling for less than your best potential as a couple.

Spouses I have walked with through this process usually get stuck around one key assessment. They are convinced that if they confess, their mate will blow up, and the marriage will be over. Thus, they feel it is better to have a relationship with a secret than to have no relationship at all. It is possible that being truthful could lead to divorce, so this course of action must be prayerfully pondered. However, I find that often people underestimate the power of their marital alliance.

Spouses are generally devastated at the initial news that there has been an affair. But, often they soon realize the courage it took to confess and the deepened integrity that is now desired. Some couples who have walked this journey refer to the pain as horrid, but describe the recovery process as taking them far beyond their former level of marital closeness and joy.

A few other questions you may want to ask yourself include:

1. Has God provided good "containment" of this secret, or do I find it "leaking" into my marriage in ways that negatively affect my relationship?

2. What is my main motive in not confessing? To avoid pain for myself, or my spouse?

3. If you were in your spouse's shoes, would you want to know?

I don't know that anyone can tell you what to do on this one. It must be a matter of prayer and discernment of the Spirit's leading, but if you want my bottom line, here it is. In the long run, I believe it is more appropriate to risk the truth, trusting that God will honor the faith and courage it took to make that step. If that decision simply does not seem feasible, it is my prayer that God's grace will be sufficient for your marriage to grow as much as is possible.

School of Biblical Studies Fall Schedule:

Mon. 9-12 noon	Apologetics (Evidences that the Christian faith is true) - Mike Abbott
Mon. 1-3 pm	Methods of Bible Study - Jerry Carmichael
Mon. 1-4 pm	Christian Ethics - Bennie Hill
Mon. 6:30-9:30 pm	Christian Growth & Development - Alex Wilson
Tue. 9-11 am	Work of the Church - Bud Ridgeway
Tues. 6:30-9:30 pm	Sightsinging & Songleading - James Embree

Classes start Aug.20. Take advantage of these opportunities to better prepare for Christian service. Contact SBS at 502-778-6114 (Portland Christian School) for information and registration.

J-O-Y for the JOURNEY

Ladies Overnight Retreat 2001

Delightful DATE: September 28 & 29

Terrific TIME: FRI. Night @ 6:30 till SAT. @ 3:00

Perfect PLACE: Camp Kavanaugh, Crestwood, Ky.

Contented COST: \$20.00 per person IF paid by Sept. 15.

After the 15th the fee becomes \$25.

Special price for Teens: only \$10.00

***The first 10 Teens to register by Sept. 15 will be FREE!**

The fee covers your overnight accommodations (4 ladies per room) as well as breakfast and lunch on Saturday.

Everyone is asked to bring a dish for the potluck on Fri. evening. Linens and towels are provided by the camp. With your registration you may list any preferred roommate(s).

Questions? Contact Ruth Wilson: 502: 897-2831.

**Make checks payable to Ladies Retreat. Send to:
Jackie Gill, 3103 Lowell Ave., Louisville, KY 40205**

Directions to Camp: From I-65, I-64 or I-71, take the Gene Snyder Freeway (I-265) to exit 30. Turn east on KY 146. Travel 3-1/2 miles. Turn right on Kavanaugh Road. Follow the signs--757 Kavanaugh Road, Crestwood, KY. 502:241-9091.