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A Faith That Saves

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REVIEW

and Herald

May 14, 1964

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Church** —Page 2

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Dedication** —Page 14

First of four articles on fundamental Christian beliefs

a faith that saves

BY DANIEL WALTHER

Professor of Church History, Andrews University

SOME time ago a student was in my office at the Seminary discussing with me what he considered to be the "essentials" of the three angels' messages, as contrasted with the "minor" points—beliefs that are not basic. He noticed, when pressed a little, how difficult it is to separate our "minor" teachings from our major ones. He wondered whether he had the correct understanding and was moving in the right direction.

This young man is a fine student, a gentleman, and has already proved himself to be a successful evangelist. It had not occurred to him, however, that he could be a church member and observe to the letter our church polity, yet not be a Christian in the basic sense. I reminded him of numerous passages in the Spirit of Prophecy writings where Sister White emphasizes the true spiritual aspect of the Christian life. This student had the accepted pattern of prophetic interpretation and the stock answers that we usually expect from a denominationally conditioned Christian, yet he had not understood clearly certain major tenets of our faith.

In the course of our conversation he became convinced that what he sometimes termed the "most holy faith" (to use an expression that is being used increasingly of late) came to him as a spiritual inheritance from

his parents and his environment: the home, the church, the school. The "message" that he has cherished and preached reached him only from without rather than also from within. Faith to him was a doctrinal yardstick by which he measured the "world."

When the student left, I spent some quiet time in my little study, asking myself, "What do *you* really believe?"; not what I argue about, nor necessarily what reason can endorse, but what is the nature of that personal faith without which there is no living experience? I had realized

before how difficult it is to make an accurate inventory of a spiritual gift such as faith, but now it came to me with new force. "Is it possible to discuss my faith publicly?" I asked. Often the simplest terms are the most difficult to define. The early Christians had a powerful faith but only later was it defined. Nevertheless, there is a personal, basic element that is the outgrowth of my personal relationship with God, as I meet Him in that "closet" into which our Lord has asked me to enter, closing the door behind me.

In the early apostolic church the simple, powerful preaching of the word touched thousands of people and led them to ask, "What shall we do to be saved?" The usual answer was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." No need to do any meritorious work or to bring a peace offering or to offer a sacrifice. Their faith in Jesus Christ was the key to the kingdom. It was so simple, so powerful. In the course of time other tenets were added, mostly in church councils, until eventually the Apostle's Creed was adopted. But
(Continued on page 4)



To the Philippian jailer Paul and Silas set forth the requirements of salvation in their most simple form: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

AT NO time in history has God's church been perfect. It will not be perfect until Christ comes. "Although there are evils existing in the church, and will be until the end of the world," wrote Ellen G. White 70 years ago, "the church in these last days is to be the light of the world. . . . The church, enfeebled and defective, needing to be reproved, warned, and counseled, is the only object upon earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 49.

On page 15 of the volume just quoted is a similar statement. There are many others on pages 50 to 56 and elsewhere. Surely we should hold God's church, its members and leaders, in high regard, refraining from any act or word that might cast reproach upon God's citadel of truth in a sinful, hostile world. "Accusing the brethren is the very work Satan has been engaged in since his fall."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 287. "The worst enemies we have are those who are trying to destroy the influence of the watchmen upon the walls of Zion."—*Ibid.*, p. 294.

One would think that any loyal Adventist who might temporarily be irked with some of his brethren in the church would withhold divisive or destructive criticism, especially if at the same time he claims to have light and revival for the church. A certain man of known critical tendencies writes that "the officers of the General Conference give evidence that either they have largely lost the

spiritual eyesight to distinguish clearly the difference between Christ and Satan, or having the requisite eyesight are unwilling to shoulder the cross of Christ and bear the shame." This statement and many others like it appear in a book purporting to give us new and sanctifying light on the sanctuary. Surely this unhappy man needs our prayers to save him from his bitter judgment.

Some charge our church leaders with (1) blindness in discarding the third angel's message; (2) erasing the truth of Christ's final atonement; (3) casting the heart of the third angel's message "out of the back door of the church to the graveyard of our pioneers' theological 'misconceptions'"; (4) "inability to distinguish between the Christ of the remnant, and the Christ of Babylon"; (5) "intellectual dishonesty"; (6) apostasy "on some of the cardinal doctrines of the SDA Church"; (7) "serious betrayal of sacred trusts"; (8) removing "any possibility for the true remnant church to distinguish between the truth and error, between the work of the true Holy Spirit and the work of Satan"; (9) worshipping a false Christ; (10) refusing "to recognize the difference between the remnant church and Babylon"; (11) "refusing to stand for truth"; (12) "leading out in the illicit relations with Babylon"; (13) perpetrating "the most perfect 'sell out' in Adventist history."

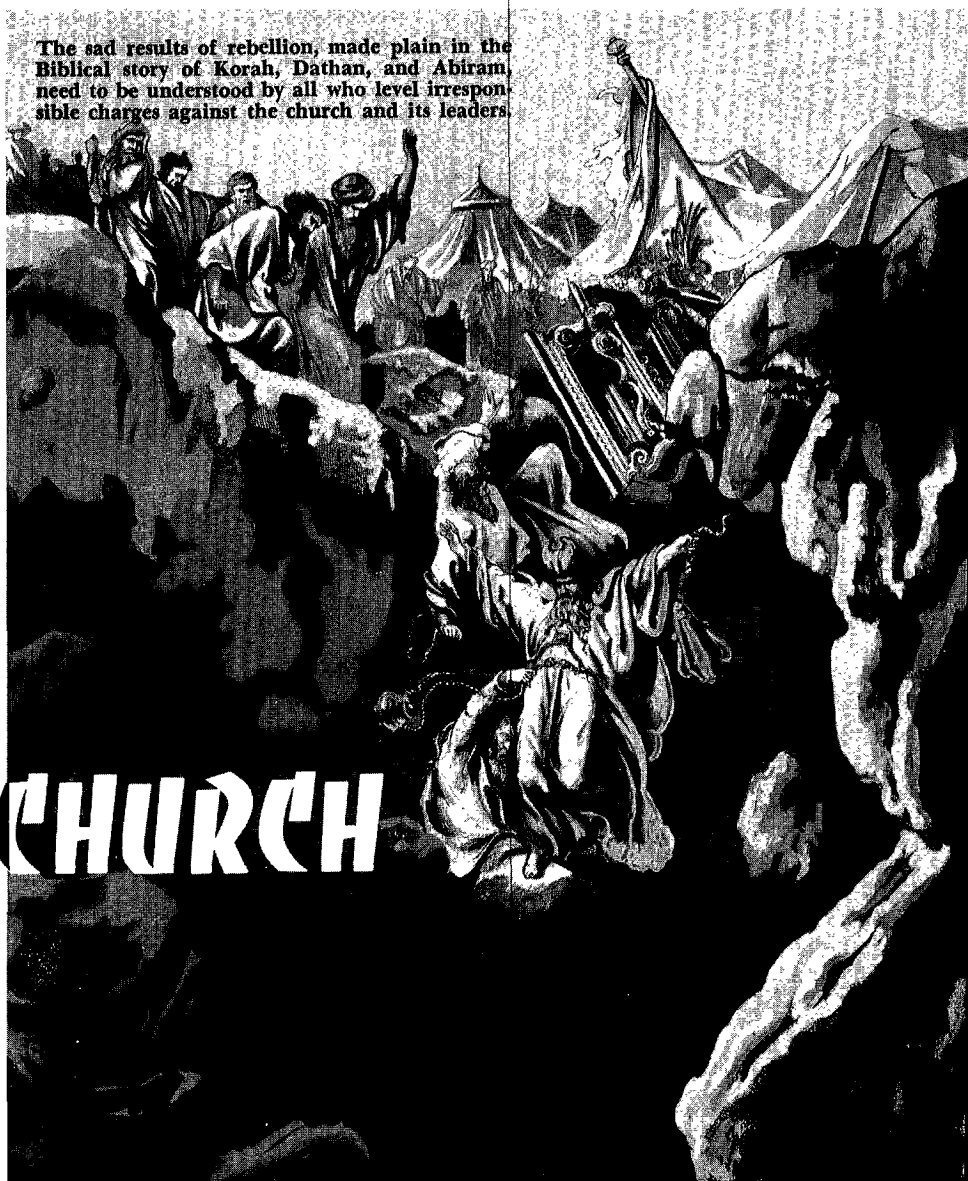
Other Charges

Scores of other acid, unchristian, untruthful charges are made in various pieces of literature currently being scattered in the interests of revival, so called. For example,

BY HARRY W. LOWE

IN DEFENSE OF GOD'S CHURCH

The sad results of rebellion, made plain in the Biblical story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, need to be understood by all who level irresponsible charges against the church and its leaders.



when our leaders urge our preachers to make their preaching Christ-centered, the critics retort viciously: "Much of this 'Christ-centered preaching' was in reality anti-Christ-centered, a preaching of Baal instead of Christ." In this connection we should note these inspired words:

"Suppose he [Brother D] makes them believe that the leaders in this work are designing, dishonest men, engaged in deceiving the people; what great and good work has he done? It is a work exactly similar to that of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and with all whom he has influenced the result will be disastrous."—*Ibid.*, p. 290.

When I think of the earnest, soul-taxing work of our ministers and missionaries in lifting up Christ before the people, I can only pray God to forgive these acid critics, who do not concern themselves to preach Christ to an unbelieving world, but love to harass and divide the church and its workers.

In 1950 two respected workers presented a document on righteousness by faith, with much of which the brethren agreed; but they could not see eye to eye on certain conclusions set forth in it, some of which have now been taken up by critics and made a cause of contention. They have charged that the authors of the document have suffered "virulent attacks and stubborn opposition." This is wholly untrue, for the two men who wrote the document are still respected workers of the denomination. These workers have of their own volition (1) asked the critics not to duplicate, advertise, or sell their document—a Christian, ethical request by the authors, a request which any upright person would comply with; (2) stated that "victimizing and muzzling by a dominating kingly power clique" is untrue. Humble and honorable Christians do not generate the kind of bitter attacks hurled by such critics of the church and its leaders.

Attack on Manual

One of the latest acts of hostility by the critical group we are considering is an attack on the *Church Manual*. In the early days A. T. Jones, whose controversies this critical group seeks to revive, opposed our present plan of church organization because he did not wish to be like the "nominal" churches. But a growing work cried out for some kind of effective organization, and the publication of a manual became necessary. That critical group now declares:

"By 1932, matters had deteriorated to such a degree that it is hardly surprising to note that the *Church Manual* was published in that year. . . . And so we have a church creed or discipline other than the Bible which is being enforced by those in power in our conferences. These man-made rules are being enforced under penalty of excommunication. Dissenters are regarded as being out of harmony with the Bible. . . . Were our church leaders right in 1883 but wrong in 1932 and 1962?" The *Church Manual* is denounced as a "man-made authority—that of the uninspired *Church Manual*, slavishly copied from the churches in Babylon!"

It is well to know of this hostility to our organization and to the *Church Manual*, because intelligent, consecrated people will not expect truth and revival from those who possess such a spirit. We must remind the persons who penned this confused bitterness that (1) a church manual and a doctrinal creed are *not* one and the same thing. We have a manual, which is in harmony with Bible principles, but we do not have a doctrinal creed. (2) What was not so necessary in 1883, when our organization was small, might well be needed in 1932 and 1962 due to the growth of the work. (3) The "excommunications" the critic refers to were duly and properly voted disfellowshipment of certain members for misconduct or subversive activities that were in-

jurjng God's cause and disrupting its spirit of unity.

Such opposition to the *Church Manual* usually concerns pages 224 and 225 (1963 ed.), which discuss subversion. Subversives cannot expect to remain in the employ of an organization in which they do not believe, and it is very doubtful that members who embrace and abet this dissident group's opposition to the church and its leadership can remain indefinitely in church membership. Those who attack the *Manual* speak of their own critical work as "God's method of bypassing the regular channels and taking the reins in His own hands." This is rebellion rather than revival. Their work certainly is not of God.

Church Authority

A person joins the church because Christian witness in the world is rendered more effective by unity and orderly procedures, and also for the mutual inspiration derived from worship in which things are "done decently and in order." In accepting church membership we receive great blessing. We also must give something more than money. We give our loyal support to every effort to advance God's cause, and we respect the opinions of the church even when on occasion they may not be our own. There is the blessing

of consecrated discipline in this. Call it what you will, the church must use its voice, its influence, its discipline, when necessary, or it would sink into confusion. Its authority must be exercised in the spirit of Christ.

"The Lord desires His followers to exercise great care in dealing with one another. They are to lift up, to restore, to heal. But there is to be in the church no neglect of proper discipline."—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 264. "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18).

"This statement [Matt. 18:18] holds its force in all ages. On the church has been conferred the power to act in Christ's stead. It is God's instrumentality for the preservation of order and discipline among His people. To it [the church] the Lord has delegated the power to settle all questions respecting its prosperity, purity, and order."—*Ibid.*, p. 263. There is much more counsel of this kind in the inspired writings.

Critics' reports of persecution, disfellowshipment, and dismissal are always grossly exaggerated and generally devoid of all truth. The Advent believer should check the reports carefully before accepting them as relayed by embittered people who would bring political methods into the church were it not for the gospel principles set forth in the *Church Manual*. Thousands of sincere Christians supporting and loving the church are a strong assurance that gospel order will be administered in the spirit of Christ.

"Order is the law of heaven, and it should be the law of God's people on the earth."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 26.

"How Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in his efforts to get in among this people and disorganize the work at a time when thorough organization is essential and will be the greatest power to keep out spurious uprisings and to refute claims not endorsed by the word of God! . . . License must not be given to disorderly elements that desire to control the work at this time."—*Ibid.*, p. 489.

Need for Repentance

A few who have espoused critical views are having second thoughts about the extreme bitterness behind them. One of them, who joined the so-called (German) "Reform Movement" (and there are several who have this unfor-

tunate background), has written some timely cautions against attacks on the church. In July of 1961 the man left in charge of this "reform" movement in Australia returned to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and wrote to the dissident leader, then in America:

"We desire to appeal to you . . . to discontinue your present activities, and to fulfill the first condition of the sanctuary message you preach—repentance."

To another dissident leader in America he wrote that they should publish a last edition of their journal, full of "repentance for activity and attitudes militating against church order and authority."

Listen to these inspired words:

"I warn the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be careful how you receive every new notion and those who claim to have great light. The character of their work seems to be to accuse and to tear down. . . .

"Let the believers heed the voice of the angel who has said to the church, 'Press together.'"—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 69.

A Sincere Invitation

Unfortunately, some sincere people seeking for revival get caught up in critical offshoots before they perceive the rebellious spirit motivating them. This is true in the present instance. We earnestly invite such persons to consider these things carefully and throw their influence on the side of God's church. Those who have already returned to the church have been received into fellowship with Christian love and are once more happy in God's service. This appeal has been extended to the leaders of this offshoot, and this is still our sincere desire for all concerned.

We are happy to record that one group of people who had circulated some exceedingly bitter criticisms recently broke apart. One part honestly published its recantation of the teachings and activities of the embittered offshoot, while the other part continued on its pitiful path of insubordination. This latter part is even mailing its critical literature to known religious opponents of Seventh-day Adventism. This is surely the work of embittered men who are willing to take such discreditable steps to embarrass and injure the church.

We appeal to these men to rethink their position and attitude and come back into harmony with their brethren. We are too near the end and too close to the kingdom to pull away from the church and be engulfed in divisive teachings and bitter controversy.

A Faith That Saves

(Continued from page 1)

creeds did not save the church from drifting away from the Christian fundamentals.

The sixteenth-century Reformation stressed salvation by faith alone. The Reformers, most of whom were predestinarians, conceived of God as being altogether holy, good, and just, while man was entirely depraved, incapable of good works, and absolutely unable to do any meritorious deeds. Salvation was an arbitrary decision of God made before the creation of the world.

Many of the reformed ideas had their origin in the Augustinian idea of irresistible grace and divine election. The reformed doctrine stressed the invisibility of the means of grace in contrast to Roman Catholicism, which endeavors to visualize the divine in its rites, and especially the sacraments (which are to the Catholics a means of grace and salvation).

The Reformed Evangelicals took a position against what they termed "Roman idolatry." Whenever you leave the domain of faith, you depart from the basic Protestant concept which places the center of religious life in the individual heart rather than in a visible church. For the Reformers, God comes face to face with the sinner, and the church is not indispensable for salvation; for Catholics there is no salvation outside the church; the priest is a director of conscience. The inner religion gives to the evangelical believer an element of freedom.

I once had a conversation with the well-known Swiss theologian, Emil Brunner, in his home in Zurich. He expressed the usual misconception about Seventh-day Adventists: "It is unfortunate that you are as a people

preaching that the law must be observed as a condition to salvation."

"I beg to correct this view," I said. "For my church Christ is Redeemer and Lord; there is no other salvation except through Christ Jesus." I also pointed out that when we endeavor to keep God's commandments this is a natural sequel of our faith and trust in God, our Creator and Redeemer.

Professor Brunner was pleased by this and said, "I am glad to hear that. If all your people understand this basic truth you surely are going in the right direction."

As a people we do not need a theologian not of our faith to endorse our beliefs but it is always gratifying to set the record straight and to establish another point of contact of Christian fellowship.

At times we are faced with an earnest inquirer who asks, "How can I be saved? What are you people offering to us by way of Christian certainty? What is your faith all about?" And we reply that the third angel's message is not merely a fabric of theological interpretation. It is not mere "opinion." It is not solely a system of prophetic interpretation. The message is basically the communion of those who have the faith of Jesus and expect to see Him return soon in the clouds of heaven.

What then is faith? In my study are scores of impressive, profound treatises that attempt to convey an answer and to define faith. I could open some of these volumes and select a number of quotations, much as an antique shop would display its costly items. But I prefer to bypass these guides, no matter how erudite they may be, and try myself to evaluate what is that gift of God—faith, faith without which it is impossible to please God.

(To be continued)

Fellowship of Prayer

"Thank You With All My Heart"

"Some years ago I wrote concerning my eldest daughter who had left the church. Accept my heartfelt thanks for your prayers. The Lord has honored them, and my daughter is back in the church. Her interest is stronger than ever. She is making Christian friends and taking an active part. Would you please pray now for the conversion of my husband and my youngest daughter? Thank you with all my heart."—Mrs. J., of British Columbia, Canada.

This column is dedicated to the encouragement of prayer for others at the sunset hour each Friday evening. Because of the large number of requests received and the complexities of the problems presented, it is impossible for us to answer each letter personally, but all requests will be acknowledged and will be kept on file in our office. Portions of letters, especially those that tell of answers to prayer, will be published as space permits.