

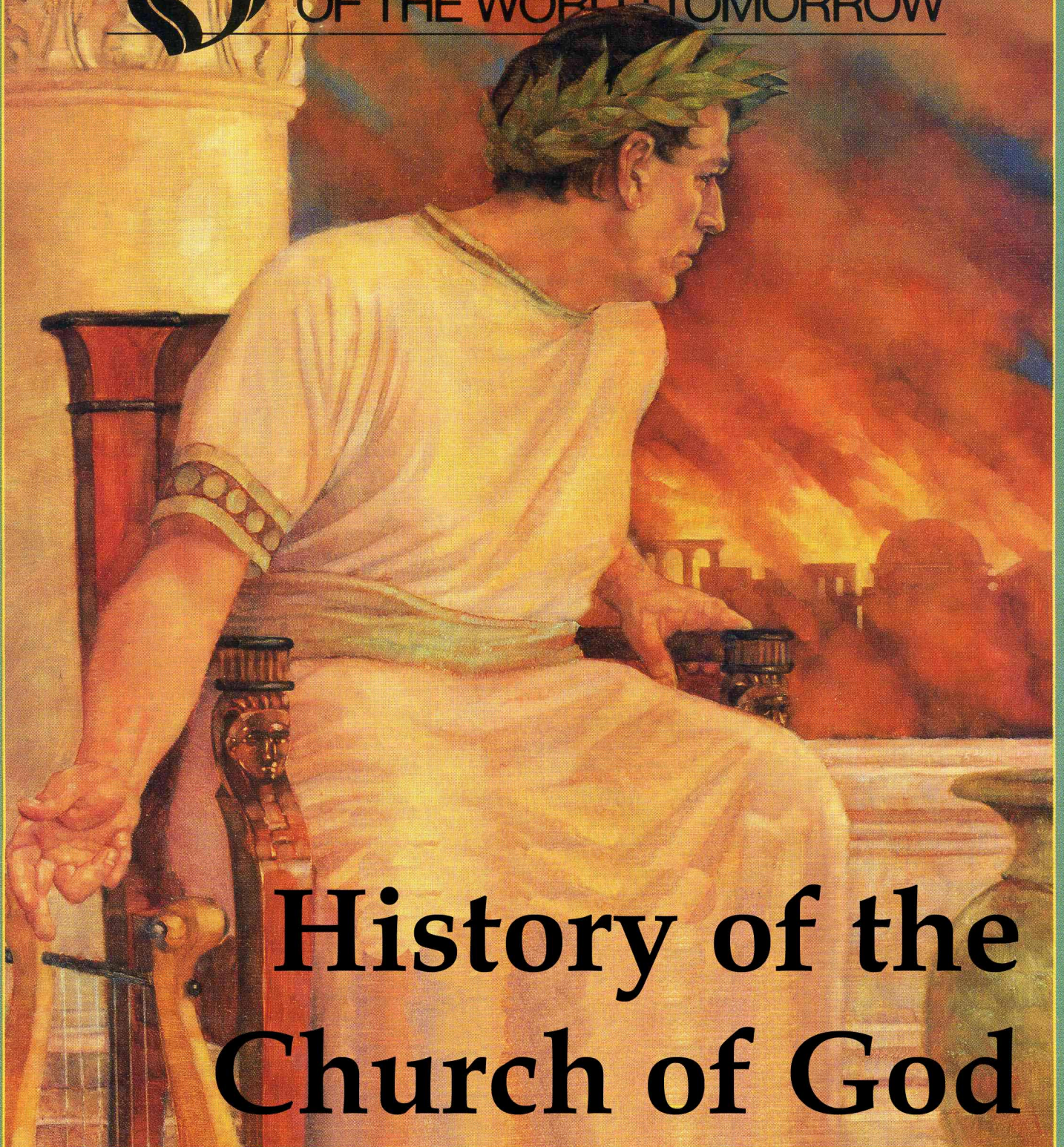
JULY-AUGUST 1990

# The Good News

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OF THE WORLD TOMORROW

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## History of the Church of God

**THE  
HISTORY  
OF THE  
CHURCH  
OF  
GOD**

sketchy, at other times spurious. The true followers of Jesus of Nazareth were often persecuted. During some periods of history, what we know about them comes only from their adversaries.

So sometimes the line of history is thin and questionable.

But there is a line.

Our search is based on this truth: Jesus himself clearly said, "I will build My church, and the

selves with games, tournaments, gambling, talking over valiant battles of the past.

In the confines of this great empire, the New Testament Church began.

**Planned in advance**

It was not an accident that God established the New Testament Church at exactly this time. He had set the stage.

Since the days of Moses, the Hebrew prophets had written of the coming Messiah. In 4 B.C. the time came.

Later, when the apostle Paul wrote of the momentous appearance of the Son of God on earth, he said, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4).

One of the most important preparations for the establishment of the Church was the Jewish dispersion throughout the Western world.

Beginning in the Persian period and continuing through the time of the Greek empire, the Jews established settlements in almost every important city in the Western world.

It would be in the Jewish synagogues where early New Testament ministers would first proclaim the message Jesus gave them. Gradually, then in increasing numbers, gentiles in the cities where the apostles preached were convicted of God's way.

They were baptized. Churches grew. Yet for many years the growth of the Christian Church went practically unnoticed by Roman officials. For all outward intents and purposes, Christians appeared little different from other Jewish sects.

By the time the Roman world really became aware that Christians were not just another Jewish party, tens of thousands of Christians were scattered from one end of the empire to the other.

**The Roman background**

Though they didn't realize it, the Romans had actually pre-

# THE CHURCH BEGINS

BY RONALD D. KELLY

**C**hristianity is by far the largest single religion on earth, with more than 1.6 billion professing Christians. Islam, the world's second-largest religion, has only about half as many followers.

But Christianity is not one harmonious group of believers. The Christian world is divided into hundreds of denominations, splits, schisms and sects.

What happened? How did Christianity become so divided? Even more important, where is the Church Jesus founded?

Is the true Church composed of all these groups? Or is it just one of them? As we search through nearly 2,000 years of history, can we find where the true disciples of Jesus were? Can we know what they believed? Can we know who they are today?

Yes, we can, but our search is not an easy one. Large gaps often appear in the historical records. Information is sometimes very

gates of Hades [the grave, or death] shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

He also said, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

A small Church. An often persecuted Church. But a church that would always be there. That's what the Bible prophesied. And that's what history reveals.

**Before there was a Church**

Let's begin our story in the first century B.C.

By the time Jesus was born, the boundaries of the Roman Empire extended from Britain on the north to the Sahara on the south. Roman banners flew over cities from the Atlantic to the Euphrates. The clatter of horses' hooves, the rumble of war machines and the clamor of marching legions had long since been familiar sounds in the Middle East.

The entire empire was at peace and was prospering. Roman occupation armies now busied them-



*“With the pacification of its shores the Mediterranean served not to separate but to join the lands around it. Improvement in navigational aids increased the safety of sea transport. . . . Freightage by water was inexpensive and customs barriers between the various sections of the empire were sufficiently low that they offered no real restraint of trade. A stable and uniform currency, the construction of good roads, a laissez-faire policy on the part of the government, and the revival of great trading cities such as Corinth and Carthage were added stimulants for a healthy expansion in commercial activity.”*

Bourne, A History of the Romans, p. 359



*"The policy of the Romans was opposed to the existence of separate political unions in countries dependent on them. On the other hand, they seldom interfered with the religions of their subjects or allies if these religions neither disturbed the peace nor encouraged barbarities. . . since it was part of their political tradition to win the good-will of other nations by respecting their gods."*

Jackson-Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, p. 199

*"Jews were found in large numbers in almost all parts of the empire. A multitude of exiles had planted themselves permanently in Babylonia, instead of returning to Jerusalem with the caravans that followed Ezra (457 B.C.) and Nehemiah (444 B.C.). . . and this version, called the Septuagint, was in general use among the Hellenists, or Jews of the Dispersion, beyond the limits of Palestine. In Antioch and in other places in Syria, in the numerous cities of Asia Minor, in Cyprus, Crete, and other islands of the Mediterranean, in the cities of Greece, in Illyricum, in Rome and in other towns of Italy, Jews had settled in large numbers. They followed the example of the Phoenicians: wherever there was a prospect of gain through trade and commerce, Jewish merchants swarmed."*

George Park Fisher,  
*The History of the Christian Church*,  
p. 14

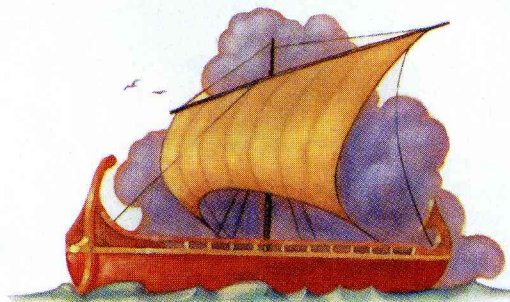
*"The rights of persons and property were well protected. The conquered nations, though often and justly complaining of the rapacity of provincial governors, yet, on the whole, enjoyed greater security against domestic feuds and foreign invasion, a larger share of social comfort, and rose to a higher degree of secular civilization. The ends of the empire were brought into military, commercial, and literary communication by carefully constructed roads, the traces of which still exist in Syria, on the Alps, on the banks of the Rhine. The facilities and security of travel were greater in the reign of the Caesars than in any subsequent period before the nineteenth century."*

Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, volume I, p. 81

pared the way for the gospel to be taken to the world in the first century of the new era.

Romans were great road builders. Roads that at first were constructed to move troops swiftly to battle could also take Christian ministers to far-flung corners of the empire.

After peace was established a few years before the birth of Christ, trade routes, sea lanes, business and commerce began to flourish. The apostles of Jesus could travel by sea or land to



cities throughout the empire.

An effective mail system also played a role. Most of our readers will recall the epistles, or letters, of Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude.

Another important step preparing the way for the New Testament Church was the Hellenization of the pre-Christian world, or the imparting of Greek culture and language.

God had given the Israelite tribe of Judah the responsibility to preserve the sacred Scriptures now known as the Old Testament. But when the New Testament was written, it was preserved, not in Hebrew, not even in the Latin of Rome, but mostly in the Greek language.

Greek had become the language of culture and education more than three centuries before Christ. When the Romans conquered the world, they respected and retained Greek language, literature and architecture.

### **The coming of the Messiah**

Into this Roman world, then, when the fullness of times had come, God sent his Son.

Jesus was born in the autumn of 4 B.C. When he was about 30

years of age, in the fall of A.D. 27, he began his ministry.

Jesus actively taught a comparatively short time—only three-and-a-half years. During that time perhaps many thousands heard him, but only a few hundred really believed what he said. From among those few hundred, Jesus trained 12 to be apostles—the leading ministers of his Church.

On the day of the Passover in A.D. 31, Jesus of Nazareth was crucified.

It appeared for the moment that the movement was over.

But three days after his death, the most momentous event in history took place. Jesus was raised from the dead—not back to mortal, human existence, but to spirit, self-contained life.

For 40 days, he appeared to his apostles and to many of his disciples. They were thoroughly convinced he who had been dead was now alive.

He left them with these final instructions: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Ahead lay the Work of the Church to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to all the world. That Work was to continue till Jesus Christ returns to this earth.

### **The Church begins**

Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem. He promised he would send them help.

Ten days later, on the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 31, the New Testament Church was born. The help Jesus promised was the Holy Spirit—a spiritual power sent from God to inspire those God called into his Church.

We'll see what happened in the early days of that Church, and how it survived the first tumultuous century of its existence, in the next installment. □

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the Church than perhaps any other. He was Saul of Tarsus. His name was changed to Paul.

The New Testament Scriptures tell us only a little about the work of the original apostles Jesus personally trained.

We have the biographies of Jesus compiled by Matthew and John. Later John wrote three letters that became part of the Scriptures. He also penned the

ish Holy Days. For many years the Church suffered persecution because of complaints by the Jewish community. Sometimes those persecutions were severe. At other times years went by with rapid growth and relatively few major problems.

By the early 60s Christian congregations existed in most major cities of the Roman Empire. There was even a growing Christian community in the capital city, Rome.

The apostle Paul was sent to Rome as a prisoner because of charges filed against him in Jerusalem. After two years in the city of Caesarea, Paul appealed his case to Caesar at Rome.

Although a member of a Jewish family, Paul was a free-born Roman citizen. Roman citizens had the right to appeal to Caesar. So Paul, finding he could not obtain justice in Judea, appealed to Rome.

**Changes at Rome**

In the year A.D. 54 the teenage, adopted son of the Roman Caesar Claudius had come to the highest office in the Western world. His name was Nero.

Nero's mother contrived the death of Claudius to bring her son to power. Young Nero was to have a major effect on the now established Christian Church.

When Paul finally arrived in Rome after an arduous Mediterranean voyage, he was placed under house arrest to await trial. It was A.D. 60.

Because no charges from Jerusalem were formally filed against him, he was released two years later.

It does not appear there was anything more than casual contact between this dynamic apostle of the Christian Church and the Roman emperor. But things were to change.

**The fire at Rome**

When Nero viewed the city of Rome from his balcony, the slums of the city spread below him. Nero envisioned Rome as the world's premiere city. He planned fabulous buildings, beau-

**THE AGE  
OF  
SHADOWS**

**BY RONALD D. KELLY**

**M**uch of what we know about the beginning of the Church founded by Jesus Christ, we owe to a man named Luke. He was a physician who became a minister in the first-century Church.

Luke wrote that early Church history in "The Acts of the Apostles," one of the inspired books of the New Testament.

We will not here go into full details of the book of Acts. We advise our readers to carefully read Acts for a better background to what we discuss.

Luke was a frequent traveling companion and fellow-minister with another convert to the Christian Church. That other man was to have more effect on

final book of the New Testament, called the Apocalypse or Book of Revelation.

There are also two letters of Peter, who held the principal position of leadership in the early Church.

**Through Paul, the gospel goes to the world**

Paul made by far the largest single contribution to the New Testament Scriptures—14 letters in all. Paul told the story of his travels and defined doctrines of the Church as he preached the gospel of the kingdom of God throughout the world.

As we noticed last issue, the growth of the Church went largely unnoticed in the Roman Empire. The Church appeared to be no more than a Jewish sect. The early Church kept the seventh-day Sabbath and observed what most people called the Jew-



tiful gardens, impressive statues and fountains. The slums below his palace, where thousands of poor and indigent people lived, had to be replaced.

History is often polluted by legend. But most modern historians feel the account of the fire at Rome in A.D. 64 leads to the conclusion Nero was responsible for the fire.

Whether or not Nero was to blame, the fire was a great tragedy. Ten of Rome's 14 precincts were burned. Thousands were killed. Public and private buildings were ruined.

### **Roman persecution begins**

Who was to blame? Rumors quickly spread that Nero was personally behind the tragedy. Shrewd politicians had to find someone else to point the finger at.

These Christians—they could be blamed.

"They believe the world will be destroyed by fire," one noted.

"Why, they wouldn't lift a hand to extinguish it," another shouted.

"The Christians say this terrible fire was God's fiery vengeance on us," yet another exclaimed.

So Christians became the scapegoat.

The horrors of A.D. 64 make up one of the great tragedies of Church history. It was the first of 10 Roman persecutions to afflict the Church for nearly three centuries. But no persecution could stamp out Christ's Church. Jesus said it would never die (Matthew 16:18).

### **Meanwhile, back in Judea**

Two years after the fire at Rome, in the eastern province of Judea, the Jews attempted to overthrow the Roman government. It was A.D. 66.

A leading Roman general, Vespasian, was dispatched to Judea to put down the rebellion. A bloody four-year war resulted.

During that time, Paul, the best-known leader of the Christian Church, was arrested by Roman officials, although his arrest

was not directly related to the Judean war. Paul was taken to Rome for trial. The government found him guilty of crimes against the state and sentenced him to die.

Since Paul was a Roman citizen, his execution was by beheading. It was the spring of A.D. 68 when the untimely and unfortunate death of this great apostle took place.

Ironically, Nero's political strength had collapsed. Within a

**“The scanty and suspicious materials of ecclesiastical history seldom enable us to dispel the dark cloud that hangs over the first age of the church.”**

*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,*  
Gibbon, chapter 13, 7th edition

few days Nero committed suicide after his military forces revolted.

On the eastern front, Vespasian left his son Titus in charge of the armies to continue the fighting in Judea. Vespasian rushed to Rome. He would soon become Caesar.

During the fighting of the hot summer of A.D. 70, the armies of Titus broke through the walls of Jerusalem. The Jewish insurrection was crushed. Jerusalem was savaged.

Even the great temple King Herod had renovated was torched. Titus carried many temple accoutrements back to Rome. If you travel to Rome today, in the ruins of the ancient city, you can see the conquest of Judah pictured on the arch of Titus.

### **The Church knew to flee**

But what about the Christians? Jesus' followers were commonly called Nazarenes, after Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 24:5).

Jesus had warned his Church,

in the Olivet prophecy of Luke 21: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains" (verses 20-21).

When Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70, believing Christians (Nazarenes) had already fled the city. On an earlier Feast of Pentecost, God miraculously warned those who would heed to get out before the destruction took place.

The Church fled to the northeast—to the town of Pella, beyond the Jordan River.

By A.D. 70, the organized preaching of the gospel was halted. Peter had been crucified. James, the Lord's brother, was killed. Paul had been beheaded. Jerusalem had fallen. Christians were driven from Rome.

The Church was being severely tested. Would it survive? Or would persecution end the Church after only 40 years?

Remember, Christ had assured his apostles, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

The Church would not die.

It would be persecuted. It would be small. But it would not die.

For nearly a hundred years after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, historical evidence of the Church is indeed scanty.

The biblical record closes late in the first century A.D. The aging John was the sole survivor of the first apostles. He was left to combat mounting heresies and endure persecution from within and without.

### **The beginning of heresy**

Among the final battles John had to fight was a mounting heresy that had begun many years before.

Perhaps as early as A.D. 33, the first great heretic to deceive in the name of the new Christian religion came on the scene. The Bible tells of this important figure in Acts 8. This man's name was Simon Magus, or Simon the magician.

Simon was the high priest of

the Samaritans—the peoples who lived just north of Judea. The bulk of the Samaritans descended from the peoples transplanted by the Assyrians into the region in the eighth century B.C. They had brought their Chaldean religious customs with them.

Over the centuries, living near the Jews, the Samaritans had adopted some Jewish practices while retaining their ancient Chaldean customs. They had also added Greek philosophies and Persian customs. This mixing of religious customs and beliefs is called *syncretism*.

When Philip, the first Christian minister to preach in Samaria, powerfully proclaimed Christ's message, the Samaritan high priest believed his preaching—or at least he appeared to.

The apostles at Jerusalem, learning how many Samaritans were becoming believers, sent Peter and John to continue preach-

purchase a church office *simony*, after Simon Magus.

Simon left without truly being converted. He did not have hands laid on him and did not receive the Holy Spirit. But Simon saw the attraction of this new Christian doctrine and way of life.

To his already mixed religious philosophies, Simon added something new—Christian words and practices. Of course those practices were twisted and distorted. They were combined with Jewish ceremony, Babylonian superstitions, Greek mythology and Persian mysteries.

Like the true apostles of Jesus, Simon carried his message from city to city. In time he arrived in the capital city of Rome.

He attracted a significant following. So great were Simon's power and influence that some people honored him as a god. They even erected a statue of him on the Tiber River, an action reserved only for the most important dignitaries.

Then Simon yielded to his great vanity. The traditions about his death vary, but two that are popular involve an attempt to prove his supernatural powers.

One tradition says he asked to be buried alive, promising to reappear in three days just as Jesus had done. Another tradition tells that Simon, to prove his powers, tried to fly off a tall building.

In any case, Simon died. His heresies, however, live on today! Many modern religious practices and concepts are nothing more than

Simon's, with Christian names added.

But the work of Simon was only the beginning of heresies.

### Simon not the only heretic

From the earliest days of the Church, the truth Jesus' apostles proclaimed became distorted.

One deception was Gnosticism. The Gnostics, from the Greek

word *gnosis*, meaning "to know," exerted a powerful influence on first-century religion.

A careful study of the New Testament books reveals numerous confrontations with gnostic influence even among members of the true Church of God. You can read the second chapter of Colossians as an example.

Late in the first century, another influential heretic, Cerinthus, confronted the apostle John. The Bible does not name Cerinthus, but concerns John expressed in his three epistles refer, without a doubt, to this man's teaching and influence.

### The first century ends

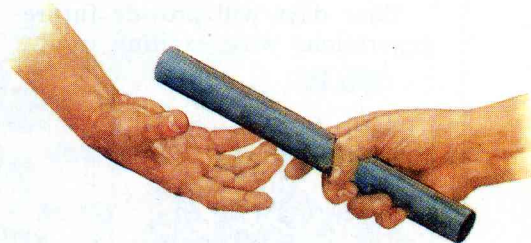
Late in his ministry, the aging John prepared for the passing of leadership in the Church to a new generation.

John probably lived past the turn of the first century. He would have been more than 100 years old when he died.

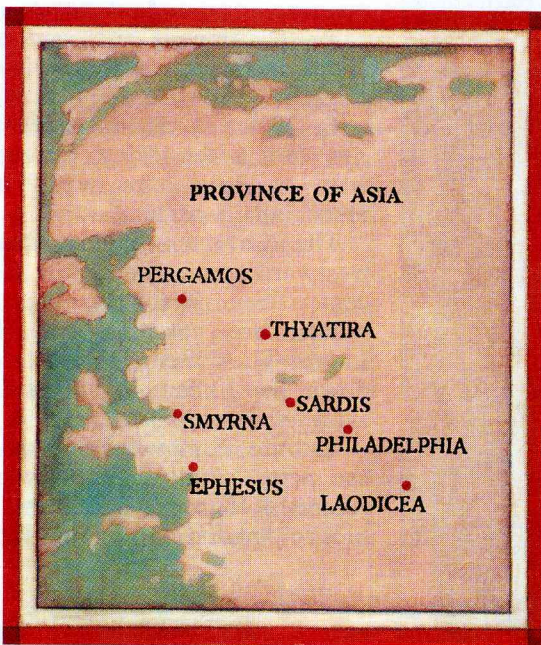
During the decade of the 90s the Roman emperor Domitian (81-96) exiled John to the Aegean isle of Patmos. The Bible does not document much of this period, but God did inspire the visions of the Book of Revelation while John was imprisoned there.

After his release from prison, John continued his ministry in western Asia Minor (modern Turkey) in the seven-congregation circuit mentioned in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation. His principal headquarters was at Smyrna. There he took under his special care and tutelage a young man named Polycarp.

After John's death, the baton



of leadership in the Church of God would be passed to this man. For more than another half century, Polycarp was to direct the affairs of the Church of God in Asia Minor. □



ing and complete the baptism ceremonies begun by Philip. Miracles accompanied those early conversions.

Soon Simon's true spirit was revealed. He offered money to Peter and John for the powers of the ministry they had.

Peter rebuked Simon for his lustful attitude and bribery. To this day we call an attempt to



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Rome. When asked to confirm the rumors of Jesus becoming the Roman king, John's reply is recorded as this: "You also shall reign for many years given you by God, and after you very many others; and when the times of the things upon earth have been fulfilled, out of heaven shall come a King, eternal, true, Judge of the living and the dead, to whom every nation and tribe shall con-

banished him to the prison isle of Patmos.

**A prisoner on Patmos**

John was on Patmos, as is clear from his own writing: "I, John, both your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:9).

While John was imprisoned on Patmos, Christ revealed to him the final book of the sacred writings that would complete the Bible—the Apocalypse, or Book of Revelation.

There, through dreams and symbols, Jesus Christ laid out the flow of events that would culminate in his return to establish the millennial reign of God's government on the earth.

**The struggle against heresy**

After John was released from prison, he not only had to battle the persecution of the Roman government, he had to struggle against false teachers.

One of the most influential heretics of the late first century was Cerinthus. Another tradition from that time was a chance meeting of Cerinthus with John and his young companion Polycarp at the public baths.

Upon seeing the heretic, John is alleged to have said something like this to Polycarp: "Let us flee the baths, lest the wrath of God consume us all with this son of Satan."

Thus we are introduced to Polycarp—the successor to John in the ministry of the Church in Asia Minor.

Born sometime after the fall of Jerusalem, Polycarp trained under John till John died shortly after the turn of the first century.

For more than the next half century, Polycarp struggled to preserve the true faith.

**The struggle continues**

During the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan (A.D. 98-117), Pliny the Younger, governor of

**STRUGGLE  
FOR  
THE TRUTH**

BY RONALD D. KELLY

**A**s the first century drew to a close, only the aging John remained alive of the original 12 apostles trained by Jesus.

Life was difficult. Even though the Christian Church had spread throughout the Roman Empire, efforts to stamp it out continued.

Domitian ruled as Roman emperor from A.D. 81 to 96. He instituted the second great persecution against the Church.

But out of that persecution came a powerful witness of the early Church. Many traditions grew out of John's confrontation with Domitian.

**John and Domitian**

Without a doubt, Domitian had heard of John. Perhaps his greatest concern was the Christian doctrine that Jesus would become king. The Roman emperor could not tolerate another king, so Domitian brought John to

form, through whom every earthly power and dominion shall be brought to nothing, and every mouth speaking great things shall be shut" (from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, by Roberts and Donaldson, the collection of writings that includes the *Acts of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian*, pages 560-562).

One tradition about this confrontation says Domitian asked for proof of these things. At that John asked for a cup of poison, which he mixed and drank with no harmful effects.

Suspecting a plot, Domitian required a condemned criminal to drink the potion. The criminal died instantly. As the story goes, John later took the dead man by the hand and raised him back to life.

Yet another tradition has Domitian immersing John in a cauldron of boiling oil. When no harm came to John, Domitian



**Commanded  
to renounce Christ,  
Polycarp proclaimed:  
"For 86 years I  
have served  
him, and he has  
never done me  
wrong. How can I  
now blaspheme my  
King who saved me?"**

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Bithynia, wrote to the emperor about the growing Christian churches: "The contagion of that superstition [Christianity] has penetrated not only the cities but also the villages and country places."

Pliny the Younger wrote to Trajan for advice on how to deal with Christians. What kind of punishment ought to be inflicted on this group who seemed to be causing local peoples to desert their pagan temples?

In one of his letters to the emperor, Pliny wrote that they "assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as god."

To find out more about their beliefs, he tortured two ladies who may have been deaconesses and reported, "I discovered nothing else than a perverse and extravagant superstition."

After reading Pliny's report, Trajan ordered that Christians who were caught ought to be punished, but they were not to be actively sought out.

The government's tolerance provided opportunity for cautious growth.

But the Church was fragmenting. Doctrine became subject to a variety of interpretations.

Gnostic organizations began to use Christian doctrines and terminology. Followers of Simon the Magician, Carpocrates and Cerinthus were sometimes identified with Christianity. A sect known as Ebionites were said to blend customs and ordinances of the Jews with the Christian teachings.

The complexity of knowing who really were the faithful followers of Christ is shown by this statement from historian Edward Burton: "The fugitives from Jerusalem . . . while some became true disciples of Jesus, others, as in the case in the spreading of new opinions, may have imperfectly learnt, or ignorantly perverted, the real doctrines of Christianity" (*Lectures Upon the Ecclesiastical History of the First Three Centuries*, page 264).

The principal custodians of the faith resided in the churches of

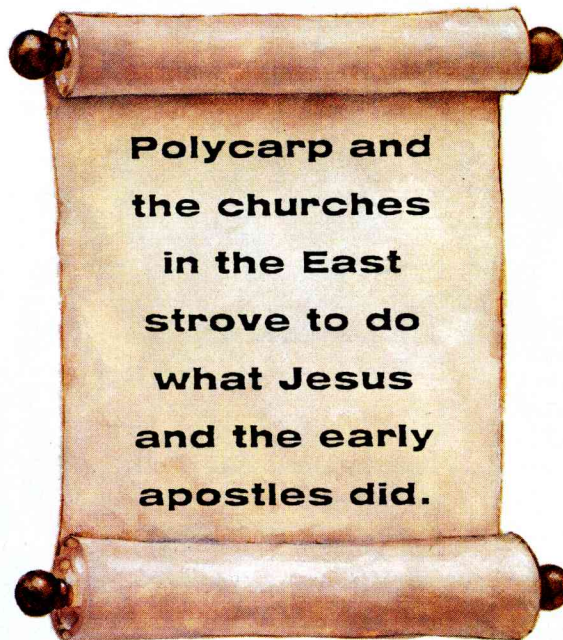
Asia Minor. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, was the best-known leader.

### **Other important second-century figures**

In the large eastern city of Antioch, Syria, traditions preserve Ignatius as the second successor to Peter in that region.

Arrested by the Romans, Ignatius may have paid a visit to Polycarp in Smyrna while on the journey to Rome.

Trajan sentenced Ignatius to die about A.D. 115. Before being thrown to the lions in the arena, Ignatius wrote, "I bid all men know that of my own free will I



die for God . . . only be it mine to attain unto Jesus Christ."

By this time, the western Christian churches at Rome were also gaining strength and authority. It would yet take another two centuries, but in the course of time, Rome, capital of the western empire, would also become the seat of what would be called Christianity.

Philosophers and writers associated with the development of the Christian church were also associated with a changing theology. Men like Clement of Rome (died about A.D. 97), Justin Martyr (100-167), Irenaeus (130-200), Tertullian (150-220),

Origin (185-254) and Eusebius (260-340) provide us with the bulk of information we have from these first three centuries of Church history.

Most of the prominent names are from the church in the West—the church that ultimately would take the name *Roman Catholic*.

### **Changing doctrines and ideologies**

Through these first centuries Christianity struggled with new theological precepts: What should be the place of Mary in worship? Should Sunday be sanctified as a day of worship to honor the resurrection of Jesus?

Should the Church observe the Passover on the 14th of Nisan, or observe an Easter commemoration of Christ's resurrection? What about "Jewish" practices such as Holy Day and Sabbath worship? What was the true nature of God? Who and what was Jesus—man, God or both?

Basically Christianity divided into two areas of theology. In the West, headquartered at Rome, the Roman bishop (not yet called the Pope) was gaining influence and power. There, special consideration of Mary,

Sunday as a day of worship and casting off things "Jewish" grew in popularity.

Polycarp and the churches in the East maintained the traditions of the early Church regarding the seventh-day Sabbath, the Holy Days and the laws of clean and unclean meats.

In other words, Christians in the East strove to do what Jesus and the early apostles did.

### **Polycarp's trip to Rome**

Perhaps the most significant event in Polycarp's ministry was his struggle to preserve the faith once delivered. When the church in the West established Easter

Sunday as a memorial to the resurrection, they discontinued observance of Passover on the 14th of Nisan.

Churches in the East continued the custom of observing the Passover on the same night Jesus instituted the new symbols of bread and wine. The controversy, still with us even all these centuries later, was called the Quartodeciman controversy, its name coming from the Latin words meaning "14th."

Even though he was past 80 years of age, Polycarp undertook a journey to Rome to discuss this matter with the bishop of the Roman church, Anicetus. Neither could persuade the other. Polycarp returned to Smyrna. Even though persecuted by the government and rejected by the growing church at Rome, Polycarp would not yield to the change.

### The last days of Polycarp

Only a few years after that confrontation, Polycarp, then 86, was arrested at Smyrna. The complete tradition is told by the fourth-century writer Eusebius.

On the first Holy Day of the Days of Unleavened Bread, during the night, government officials arrived to arrest him. Rather than attempt an escape, Polycarp arose to meet them. The soldiers were surprised to find an old man, now feeble with years. They had expected a dangerous troublemaker.

To the contrary, Polycarp asked that a meal be prepared for them, then requested an hour of prayer before being taken away.

After his prayer, Polycarp was permitted to ride a mule into the city. Upon arrival, officials rode with him in their carriage trying to persuade him to reject his Christian ways and give honor to Caesar as god. "What harm is there in saying 'Lord Caesar?'" they asked. "Just sacrifice to him and you will be safe."

Polycarp made no reply.

As they persisted, Polycarp finally answered, "I have no intention of taking your advice."

The magistrates angrily turned to threats. He was shoved from

the carriage and had to walk to the stadium where a large crowd was gathering for the games.

### The final hours

As they neared the stadium, now filled with roaring fans, a loud clap of thunder rattled the arena. Because of the clamor most did not hear the voice: "Be strong, Polycarp."

It was announced at the arena, "Polycarp has been arrested."

The proconsul demanded: "Swear by the genius of Caesar. Say 'Away with those who deny the gods.'" Of course, the Roman official meant for Polycarp to acknowledge the Roman gods and deny the God of the Bible and his Son, Jesus.

With a twist of irony, Polycarp waved his hands toward the roaring crowd and cried, "Away with the godless!"

Upon further demands to renounce Christ, Polycarp finally proclaimed: "For 86 years I have served him, and he has never done me wrong. How can I now blaspheme my King who saved me?"

"I have wild beasts," the proconsul roared.

"Call them," the old man calmly replied.

"If you make light of the beasts," retorted the official, "I'll have you destroyed by fire."

Polycarp responded: "The fire you threaten burns for a time and is soon extinguished. In the judgment to come there is a fire of eternal punishment reserved for the wicked."

The huge crowd called for the lions. But the time allotted for that kind of sport was already past.

"Burn him alive," they shouted. Many rushed from the stadium to gather logs and sticks.

A great pyre was built and Polycarp was bound on top. He prayed, "O Father . . . I bless you for counting me worthy of this day and hour."

The men in charge lit the fire. It roared into the air. Those who were there said it took the shape of a great sail. Polycarp's body seemed protected from the

flames. The executioner rushed forward, thrusting a sword into Polycarp's body.

Polycarp's life came to a dramatic and speedy end.

But what he stood for, the preservation of the original and pure truth of the gospel, would never die.



### Leadership passes to Polycrates

Leadership of the Church passed to a young man about to enter the prime of his ministry—Polycrates. He would also live a long and productive life in Christ's service.

In nearly a repeat of Polycarp's trip to Rome, Polycrates also journeyed to the capital to discuss with the bishop of Rome (then Victor I) the matter of Passover versus Easter. Victor held to Easter.

By now the authority of the Roman bishop was sufficient to demand that those in the East give up the 14th of Nisan memorial and observe Easter. Victor threatened excommunication if they did not.

Polycrates refused to give in. He wrote: "We, for our part, keep the day scrupulously, without addition or subtraction. In Asia great luminaries sleep who shall rise again on the day of the Lord's advent, when he is coming with glory from heaven and shall search out all his saints. . . . All of these kept the fourteenth day of the month . . . in accordance with the gospel, not deviating in the least but following the rule of the Faith."

He concluded, "Better people than I have said, 'We must obey God rather than men.'"

Polycrates lived through most of the second century. But great changes were to take place in the coming two centuries. □

# THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF GOD

ings of the apostolic Fathers. . . . The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed. Thus the Passover, with a new conception added to it of Christ as the true Paschal lamb and the first fruits from the dead, continued to be observed. . . .

“Generally speaking, the

the fourteenth day, were named *Quartodecimani*, and the dispute itself is known as the *Quartodeciman controversy*” (article “Easter,” pages 828-829).

Historian Karl Baus writes in his work *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine*:

“The Quartodeciman minority remained faithful to their previous practice. . . . The Council of Nicea [A.D. 325] expelled the Quartodecimans from the ecclesiastical community. Thereafter, their numbers continually declined, though even into the fifth century the great Church had to deal with them on occasion” (pages 271-272).

The fourth century turned out to be a time of monumental change in the Christian world. The church at Rome far overshadowed the smaller groups in the East who strove to remain faithful to the doctrines of the first apostles.

## Government persecution continues

But whether Eastern or Western, for nearly 250 years those who were called Christians had to persevere through trial and tribulation. As the fourth century began there seemed to be no change in sight—persecution continued.

Beginning with Nero’s persecutions in A.D. 64, Christians by the year 303 had weathered nine major persecutions from the Roman government.

The terror that began in 303 was no different. That 10th persecution lasted 10 years. The Roman emperor was Diocletian.

Yet, in spite of every effort to stamp out Christians, God’s Church was able to endure.

And in spite of the persecution, the Western church, with its principal bishop at Rome, gained ever increasing influence.

Early in the fourth century, as Roman persecution raged, a momentous change came. Constantine, a leading Roman general and the man proclaimed Caesar by the Roman armies, commanded his troops in the battle of Mulvian Bridge. Rome was about to become his.

Prior to the battle, Constan-

# A LITTLE FLOCK IN THE WILDERNESS

BY RONALD D. KELLY

**T**he third century found the Western churches, and specifically the bishop at Rome, gaining authority.

The doctrinal debate over whether to observe the memorial of the death of Jesus on the Passover or, instead, to celebrate his resurrection, supposed to have occurred on Easter Sunday, was such an issue that it even received its own label—the *Quartodeciman controversy*. The name comes from the Latin word meaning “fourteenth.”

## The Quartodeciman controversy

The 11th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* discusses the problem:

“There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writ-

Western churches kept Easter on the first day of the week, while the Eastern churches followed the Jewish rule, and kept Easter [Passover] on the fourteenth day.

“St. Polycarp, the disciple of St. John the Evangelist and bishop of Smyrna, visited Rome in 159 to confer with Anicetus, the bishop of that see, on the subject; and urged the tradition, which he had received from the apostle, of observing the fourteenth day. . . . About forty years later (197) the question was discussed in a very different spirit between Victor, bishop of Rome, and Polycrates, metropolitan of proconsular Asia. . . . Victor demanded that all should adopt the usage prevailing at Rome. . . .

“The few who afterwards separated themselves from the unity of the church and continued to keep



tine, a worshiper of the sun, allegedly experienced an amazing vision: He saw a flaming sign of the initial letters of the name of Christ and heard a voice say, "By this sign you will conquer."

Taking it as an omen, Constantine had his soldiers paint those letters, *chi* and *rho*, on their shields.

His armies were victorious, and the Roman relationship to the Christian church was at that moment forever changed.

At Milan, Constantine issued a proclamation that came to be called the Edict of Toleration, or the Edict of Milan. It accepted Christianity as an official religion in the Empire with legal equality to other religions.

It was A.D. 313.

### **Constantine and the church**

But the Christianity that Constantine acknowledged was primarily that of the church in the West. Constantine found that churches in the East and even in other parts of the vast Roman Empire differed significantly in doctrine and practice.

The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* has this to say about what was happening:

"Captivated by Christianity, Constantine wanted to give it the protection of the state; for, in line with the old Roman idea, he regarded himself as Pontifex Maximus of Christianity. . . . As such, he thought it his task to settle a controversy, that was upsetting the politico-religious unity of his Christian empire. . . . When another synod in Antioch late in 324 failed to effect the desired unity, the Emperor decided to settle the controversy by a general synod of the more important bishops of the world" (volume 10, page 432).

Thus the first great ecumenical council was called in the Asia Minor city of Nicea in A.D. 325.

It was a major turning point.

The emperor had already decreed that the day of the sun (called by many Christians the first day) should be kept as a weekly day of rest.

Now, the Council of Nicea would determine the course of ac-

tion for the future of the Church. In a letter to the churches after the council, Constantine announced the outcome: that all churches were to observe Easter Sunday.

So the Church centered at Rome could exercise great power. Christians in the East were at a crossroads.

### **A prophesied time to flee**

Interestingly enough, more than 200 years before the council of Nicea, Christ had revealed an amazing prophecy to the apostle John. Here is that prophecy from Revelation 12:6: "Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days."

In Bible prophecy, a day can symbolize a year in fulfillment. Applying that interpretation to these verses, God's Church, symbolized as a woman, would flee persecution and hide in the wilderness for 1,260 years.

If that flight to the wilderness begins in about A.D. 325, we would expect to see significant events some 1,260 years later—in the late 16th century.

And that's exactly what happened. The 16th century, or the 1500s, also proved to be a vital turning point in world history.

By then the work of Johannes Gutenberg made printing practical. His first great printed works were Bibles.

Then, in the early 16th century, Martin Luther swept the world into a different age, as the Protestant Reformation began on the European continent. In the same century, Henry VIII broke England away from the Roman Catholic Church. By the time of Elizabeth I the Church of England was firmly established.

We'll see in a future installment how God's Church in the wilderness could begin a new chapter of Church history. But that's getting ahead of our story.

### **Called Paulicians**

After the Nicean council, faithful followers of the apostolic

Church and doctrine had to flee the major cities and territories.

Their place in the wilderness was at first in what we now call Armenia. These faithful Christians came to be known as Paulicians. Scholars differ on the origin of that name. Some feel it was because of their devotion to the apostle Paul of the early New Testament Church. Others think the name is derived from a third-century bishop.

Perhaps the origin of the name is not so important, but who they were and what they believed is of great import.

Although these Christians existed in hiding from the early fourth century, they would not become known to the world till the seventh century.

Historian A.H. Newman described the Paulician hiding place in Armenia: "It was the huge recess or circular dam formed by the Taurus mountain range that furnished a comparatively secure abiding place for this ancient form of Christianity" (*A Manual of Church History*, volume 1, page 381).

### **An amazing discovery**

Perhaps the biggest handicap in studying Church history is the lack of original writings from those about whom we desire to know the most.

In fact, a majority of the material available about any non-mainstream Christians is from those who persecuted them. Such sources can hardly be considered the most reliable.

But in the case of the Paulicians a remarkable literary discovery was made in the late 19th century. British scholar and theologian Fred C. Conybeare discovered seventh- or eighth-century Paulician manuscripts that had been stored in an Armenian monastery.

This amazing find was called *The Key of Truth*. In that collection we can read about many Paulician customs and beliefs.

George Fisher says of this discovery: "In the manuscript called *The Key of Truth* we find many of their [the Paulicians'] beliefs. Conybeare says he had at last 'Un-

derstood who these Paulicians really were. All who had written about them had been misled by their Calumnies (slander). I now realized (he said) that I had stumbled on the monument of a phase of the Christian Church so old and so outworn, that the very memory of it was lost.”

### Constantine of Mananeli

One of the most colorful personalities of the Paulician period was a man called Constantine of Mananeli. The time was probably in the early to mid 600s.

You can read his story in chapter 54 of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. For the sake of space, we'll paraphrase that exciting story.

In the town of Mananeli, Constantine received a returning resident who had been held captive in Syria. This man had obtained a manuscript of the New Testament. Together they studied the Scriptures. Constantine took a particular affinity to the writings of the apostle Paul (leading some scholars to conclude the origin of the name, Paulicians).

As more and more people in the area studied and became believers, they took biblical names—Timothy, Sylvanus, Titus, etc. They strove to live by the teachings of the New Testament as they came to understand it.

Their numbers grew rapidly.

To stamp out the movement, the Byzantine emperor dispatched a man named Simeon.

He gathered some of Constantine's followers and, under penalty of death if they did not cooperate, ordered them to stone Constantine to death.

Unfortunately, in a group of believers, some may weaken. In this case at least one did—and he stoned his former leader.

But then developed a story stranger than fiction. Simeon was so moved by the faith of Constantine and his Paulician followers

that after the death of this brave man, Simeon himself became a believer.

Much like the apostle Paul of the New Testament, Simeon embraced the doctrine he was sent to stamp out.

Simeon renounced his former life, his honors and his wealth. He soon became a leader and minister among the persecuted Paulicians.

Simeon also gave his life as a martyr for the Christian cause he embraced.

As Edward Gibbon wrote of these times: “From the blood and ashes of the first victims a succession of teachers and congrega-



**After the Western churches began to dominate the Roman Empire, faithful followers of the apostolic Church and doctrine moved out of the Empire—into Armenia.**

tions repeatedly arose” (*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*).

What an impact these Paulicians made!

Huddled in the wilderness of Armenia for several centuries, God's people had more than occasional impact on the world.

By the mid ninth century, the Empress Theodora severely persecuted Paulician Christians. By some estimates as many as 100,000 were martyred between A.D. 840 and 860.

Yet the Church's years in the

wilderness were not over. The Church would have to move. Many had already migrated toward southeastern Europe. Times would again change. We'll pick up the story in the next chapter, as the persecuted Church of God flees to Europe.

But we conclude this chapter with a summary of the doctrines and beliefs of the Paulicians from a variety of sources including Conybeare's *Key of Truth* and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition.

### Summary of Paulician beliefs

1) They baptized only adults, citing Christ's example that he was 30 years old when he was baptized.

2) They did not baptize in a font, but by immersion.

3) They believed Christ, although he was crucified for man, did not command adoration of the cross.

4) They did not believe in the perpetual virginity of Mary, the mother of Jesus, nor did they consider that she was a mediatrix.

5) They rejected the Catholic mass, communion and confession.

6) They believed that true repentance was a prerequisite for baptism.

7) They believed the Church was not a building, but a body of people.

8) They were characterized by their obedience to the Ten Commandments and believed a Christian was one who knows Christ and keeps his commandments.

In summary, Fred Conybeare says of the Paulicians:

“The Sabbath was perhaps kept, and there were no special Sunday observances. . . . Wednesday and Friday were not kept as fast-days. Of the modern Christmas and of the Annunciation, and of the other feasts connected with the life of Jesus prior to his thirtieth year, this phase of the Church knew nothing. The general impression which the study of it leaves on us is that in it we have before us a form of Church not very remote from the primitive Jewish Christianity of Palestine” (page 193). □





where Jesus' true disciples were? Can we know what they believed? And who they are today?

Our search is not always easy. Large gaps often appear in the story. Information can be sketchy, even spurious. Jesus' followers were often persecuted. During some periods, what we know about them comes only from the slanders of their adversaries.

### World Looks at Wrong Evidence

Strange to say, almost everyone

pire, the New Testament Church began.

One important preparation for the Church's establishment was the Jewish dispersion throughout the Western world. From the Persian period and through the Greek empire, Jews settled in almost every major city.

In the synagogues, early New Testament ministers first proclaimed Jesus' message. In increasing numbers, gentiles were convicted of God's way.

Though they didn't realize it, the Romans prepared the way for the gospel to be taken to the world. The great roads the Romans first built to move troops swiftly to battle also enabled Christian ministers to travel to far-flung corners of the empire.

After peace was established throughout the Roman Empire a few years before the birth of Christ, open trade routes and sea lanes promoted commerce. Christ's apostles could travel by land or sea throughout the empire.

An effective mail system also played a role. Most of our readers will recall the epistles, or letters, of Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude.

Another step preparing the way for the New Testament Church was the hellenization of the pre-Christian world. Greek, the language of education more than three centuries before Christ, was the language to preserve the New Testament.

### The Age of Shadows

The New Testament tells us only a little about the work of Jesus' original apostles.

We have the biographies of Jesus by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Later, John wrote three letters that became part of the Scriptures. He also penned the New Testament's final book, the Apocalypse or book of Revelation.

There are also two letters of Peter, the early Church's principal leader, and single letters of James and Jude.

But much of what we know about the beginning of the Church we owe to Luke. In addition to

# THE CHURCH THEY COULDN'T DESTROY

*Editor's note: A series on Church history has been running in the last four issues of the Good News magazine. With the consolidation of The Good News into The Plain Truth, we bring our Plain Truth readers up-to-date with this summary. Next month the fifth installment on Church history will continue in The Plain Truth.*

**C**HRISTIANITY, by far the world's largest religion, has more than 1.6 billion followers.

But Christianity is not one harmonious group of believers.

What happened? How did Christianity become divided? Even more important, where is the Church that Jesus Christ founded? After all, Jesus prophesied, "I will build my church."

As we probe more than 19 centuries of history, can we find

for these past 19 centuries has been looking in the wrong place for the Church that Jesus built.

A great gap lies between the practices of the apostolic Church Jesus founded and those of today's mainstream Christianity.

To his followers, wherever they are today, Jesus says, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32, New King James). A small Church, often persecuted, but a Church that would obey God and faithfully await the coming of his kingdom.

### How the Church Spread

By the time Jesus was born, the Roman Empire extended from Germania in the north to the Sahara in the south. Roman banners flew over cities from the Atlantic to the Euphrates. In this great em-



*“With the pacification of its shores the Mediterranean served not to separate but to join the lands around it. Improvement in navigational aids increased the safety of sea transport. . . . Freightage by water was inexpensive and customs barriers between the various sections of the empire were sufficiently low that they offered no real restraint of trade. A stable and uniform currency, the construction of good roads, a laissez-faire policy on the part of the government, and the revival of great trading cities such as Corinth and Carthage were added stimulants for a healthy expansion in commercial activity.”*

Bourne, *A History of the Romans*, p. 359



writing the biography of Jesus, Luke recorded early Church history in the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke traveled and worked with another Christian convert who was to have tremendous effect on the Church. His name was Paul.

Paul, in his extensive contributions to the New Testament Scriptures, told of his travels and defined Church doctrines as he preached the gospel of the kingdom of God throughout the Roman world from Syria westward.

The Church's early growth went largely unnoticed in the Roman Empire. The Church appeared to be just a Jewish sect. Only 30 years after Christ's ministry, Christian congregations existed in most major cities. A growing Christian community could be found even in the capital, Rome.

In A.D. 64 a disastrous fire burned 10 of Rome's 14 precincts. Thousands died. Public and private buildings were ruined.

Who was to blame? Unfounded rumors spread that Emperor Nero himself caused the tragedy. Politicians had to fault someone else.

Christians, the scapegoats, were persecuted and put to death.

The horrors of A.D. 64 make up one of the great tragedies of Church history. It was the first of 10 Roman persecutions to afflict all Christians—believers and heretics alike—for some 250 years.

In A.D. 66, two years after the fire at Rome, Jews in the eastern province of Judea rose against Rome. The emperor dispatched legions to smash the rebellion. A bloody four-year war followed.

During that time the Romans arrested Paul, the best-known Christian leader. Condemned by Nero for crimes against the state, Paul was beheaded in the late spring of A.D. 68.

Eastward in Judea, Roman armies broke through Jerusalem's walls in the summer of A.D. 70, crushing the Jewish insurrection and savaging the city.

The Bible record closes late in the first century. The aging John, sole survivor of the first apostles, was left to combat mounting heresies in the Church and endure


persecution from outside.

Late in his ministry, John prepared to pass the Church's leadership to a new generation. At the city of Smyrna, Asia Minor, he took under his special tutelage a young man named Polycarp.

### **Struggle for the Truth**

Born about the time of the fall of Jerusalem, Polycarp trained under John till John died shortly after the end of the first century. For the next 50 years, Polycarp fought for the true faith. We have a record of Polycarp's teachings in his epistle to the church at Philippi.

During the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan (A.D. 98 to 117), the Roman government extended a degree of tolerance toward



## ***The Church's early growth went largely unnoticed in the Roman Empire.***

Christians. This spurred cautious growth in the Church.

But the widely scattered Church was fragmenting. Doctrine became subject to a variety of interpretations. New heresies arose.

The principal custodians of the faith resided in the churches of Asia Minor. Polycarp, then bishop of Smyrna, was the best-known.

By this time, the Western churches were gaining strength and authority. Rome, as the seat of what scholars would call Western Christianity, soon became headquarters of the Church to take the name *Roman Catholic*.

Through these first centuries Christianity struggled with particular questions: Should the Church observe the Passover on Nisan 14, according to the Hebrew calendar,

or establish a Sunday commemoration of Christ's resurrection? (This conflict became known as the Quartodeciman controversy, after the Latin words meaning "14th.")

What about "Jewish" practices such as Holy Days and Sabbath observance? What was God's true nature? Who and what was Jesus—man, God or both?

Christianity divided into two viewpoints. In the West the Roman bishop gained power. There, casting off things "Jewish" grew in popularity, and Sunday became a day of worship. Polycarp and the churches in the East maintained the practices of an earlier time.

Perhaps Polycarp's most significant struggle was over the Passover. When the Western church set aside Sunday to mark the resurrection, they stopped observing Passover on the 14th of Nisan.

The Eastern churches continued to observe it annually, on the same night Jesus instituted the new symbols of bread and wine.

Though past 80, Polycarp undertook a journey to Rome to discuss this with Anicetus, the Roman bishop. Neither could persuade the other, so Polycarp returned to Smyrna.

Shortly after, Polycarp, now 86, was arrested at Smyrna and burned at the stake, according to the historian Irenaeus.

Church leadership passed to a young man named Polycrates.

Later, Polycrates also went to Rome to debate the Passover with Victor, the Roman bishop.

By then the Roman bishop's power was such he could demand that those in the East conform to Roman practice. He threatened excommunication if they did not.

Polycrates refused to give in. He wrote, "Better people than I have said, 'We must obey God rather than men.'" The issue remained unresolved.

Polycrates lived through most of the second century. But great changes were ahead in the next two centuries.

The third century found Western Christianity, and specifically

the bishop at Rome, gaining increasing authority. But whether Eastern or Western, for nearly 250 years those called Christians had to persevere through trial and tribulation. As the fourth century began, a great persecution occurred.

Beginning with Nero's attacks in A.D. 64, the Church by the year 303 had weathered no fewer than nine major Roman persecutions.

The terror beginning in 303 was extremely serious. That 10th persecution, under Emperor Diocletian, lasted 10 years in the Eastern Roman Empire.

The persecution of Western Christianity was much shorter than what Christians in the east had to endure. The bishopric at Rome endured and gained in influence.

Early in the fourth century, a momentous change came. Constantine, a leading general proclaimed Caesar by the Roman armies, led his troops against his rival in the Battle of Mulvian Bridge. Rome was about to become his.

Before the battle, Constantine, a worshiper of the Roman sun god Sol, experienced a vision: a flaming sign—the initial letters of the name Christ, *chi* and *rho*—and a voice say, “By this sign you will conquer.”

Taking the vision as an omen, Constantine had his soldiers paint those letters on their shields. His armies won the battle, and Rome's relationship to the Christian Church changed forever.

Constantine decreed Christianity as an official religion in the empire, having legal equality with other religions. The Edict of Milan (A.D. 312) restored property confiscated from Christians.

But as doctrines and practices differed significantly in the new religion Constantine embraced, he held the first great ecumenical council in the city of Nicea, Asia Minor, in A.D. 325.

The emperor had already decreed (in A.D. 321) that the day of the Sun (called by many Christians the first day) should be the weekly day of rest. The Council of Nicea, after much discussion, or-

dered all churches to observe on a Sunday the annual paschal memorial of the death of Jesus.

### Little Flock in the Wilderness

Most Christians in the East conformed. But after the Nicean council, followers of the apostolic Church's doctrines, who would not conform, fled to the wilderness regions of Armenia.

Some faithful Christians were among those who became known as Paulicians. The name *Paulician* possibly derives from their devotion to the apostle Paul, or to a third-century bishop by the same name in the Church at Antioch.

Perhaps the biggest handicap in studying the history of those who followed apostolic doctrines and practices from this period on, is



## *Most material about nonmainstream Christians comes from their persecutors.*

the lack of original writings by those we wish to study. Most material about nonmainstream Christians comes from their persecutors. Such sources are hardly reliable.

But in the case of the Paulicians, remarkably, in the late 19th century, British scholar Fred C. Conybeare discovered seventh- or eighth-century Paulician manuscripts in an Armenian monastery.

This amazing find that he titled *The Key of Truth* lists many Paulician customs and beliefs.

One of the most colorful personalities of the Paulician period (from the fourth century to the ninth or tenth) was Constantine of Mananelli, who lived in Armenia in the early to mid 600s.

In the town of Mananelli, Constantine came across and began to study a manuscript of the New Testament. He was particularly drawn to the writings of Paul and began to preach.

As people studied and believed, they took various biblical names (Timothy, Sylvanus, Titus), and strove to live by the New Testament teachings they understood.

Their numbers grew rapidly.

At Byzantium, the emperor, displeased, dispatched a man named Simeon to stamp out the movement.

As he interrogated Constantine's followers, Simeon found it impossible to persuade most of them to abandon their beliefs. So he threatened some of them with death if they did not stone Constantine.

Unfortunately, in a group of believers, some weaken. In this case at least one did—and stoned his beloved leader.

But then a story stranger than fiction developed. Simeon, so moved by the faith of Constantine and his Paulician followers, after the death of this brave man became a believer himself.

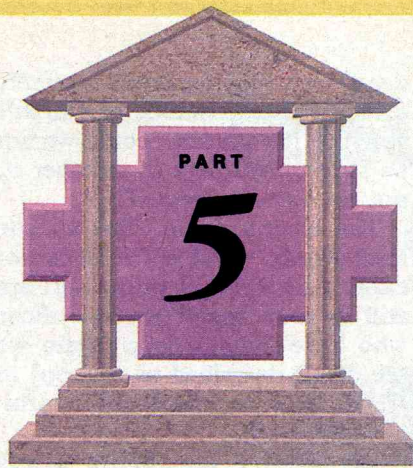
Much like the apostle Paul, Simeon embraced the doctrine he was sent to stamp out.

Simeon renounced his former life, his honors and wealth to become a minister among the persecuted Paulicians. He, too, was eventually martyred for the Christian cause he embraced.

As Edward Gibbon wrote of these times: “From the blood and ashes of the first victims, a succession of teachers and congregations repeatedly arose” (*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 54).

By the mid-ninth century, the Empress Theodora severely persecuted the various Christian groups who came to bear the name *Paulician*. As many as 100,000 were martyred between A.D. 840 and 860. Yet the years in the wilderness were not over for the heirs of the apostolic church. Many had already migrated to southeastern Europe. Circumstances would again change.

*(To be continued)*



era began, all was not well in the Roman Empire. Years of decline led to the ultimate collapse of the greatest political empire in the history of the world to that time.

Outside forces—Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Heruli, Vandals and others—overpowered the Romans. The western capital of the great empire fell in A.D. 476.

However, the power of the Christian church remained strong. Earlier that century the bishop at Rome, Leo I, met the conquering

was the conversion to Christianity of a brilliant young orator named Augustine.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* emphasizes his historic importance to the Church:

“No single name has ever exercised such power over the Christian Church, and no one mind ever made so deep an impression upon Christian thought. . . . The judgment of Catholics still proclaims the ideas of Augustine as the only sound basis of philosophy” (11th edition, volume II, page 910).

Augustine was born in North Africa, the son of a pagan father and a Christian mother. Young Augustine was educated at the University of Carthage.

His first impression of the Bible was that it was full of contradictions.

While at Carthage a woman he took as his mistress bore him a son. He began to struggle against the sexual temptations surrounding him. Life and its meaning became confusing.

Augustine moved to Italy to continue his studies. There he met Ambrose, bishop of Milan, who was instrumental in his conversion.

As Augustine struggled to find the meaning of life, he came upon two passages of Scripture that were to change his direction.

The first recorded Christ’s words to the rich ruler: “Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me” (Mark 10:21, New King James; see also Luke 18:22).

The second scripture encouraged Christians to be found “not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Romans 13:13-14).

Augustine’s discoveries led to his conversion to Christianity. He thereafter formulated his dominant theological positions—to live in austerity and celibacy.

These philosophies would be-

## A CONNECTING LINK

**W**E PICK up the story of the people of God in Armenia in Asia Minor. By the ninth century persecuted commandment-keeping Christians and other sectarians—called in history Paulicians—could no longer safely remain in the remote regions of Armenia. The rise to power of Islam in the Middle East and the power of the Byzantine church in Asia Minor virtually formed a pincer.

Faithful believers were forced to seek shelter in another region far to the west, in the Balkans. More specifically Bulgaria.

Before we pick up their trail in Bulgaria, where they became known as *Bogomils*, we need to look at some of the important religious and political events that shaped the world during much of the first millennium after the time of Jesus.

### Decline of the Roman Empire

As the fifth century of the modern

Attila and convinced him not to sack the city. Rome was spared. The bishop’s strength did not go unnoticed.

The church at Rome was poised to become one of the most important forces in world affairs.

In A.D. 554, with the official recognition of the church at Rome, the eastern Roman emperor, Justinian, completed the formal restoration of the empire in the West. The church and the state would work hand in hand.

Many would speak out against the system. About 1,000 years later real and alleged abuses would cause a great split in the official Christian world in the West. Martin Luther would begin a protest or reform movement that would reshape the religious scene. We’ll see what happened in a later chapter.

### A Religious Philosophy Emerges

Another important incident in the latter half of the fourth century



come an important part of Catholic theology, leading to the establishment of monastic orders and priestly celibacy. Augustine was not the first to expound these principles, but he was a dominant force in establishing them.

Augustine came to believe that sex, other than for procreation, was sin. This teaching is still controversial in religious circles.

The masterpiece of Augustine's written works was *The City of God*, in which he combated the belief of the pagans that Rome was destroyed because the people gave up paganism for Christianity.

Augustine's thesis was that the church on earth is both the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven.

An application of this concept has been at least partly responsible for the Crusades waged on behalf of the church. Later it would have a major effect on Christianity in Europe.

### **The Church in Bulgaria**

Now let us return to those small groups of scattered Christians who fled from Armenia to southeastern Europe to teach what they knew of God's truth.

In history these (and other) people are often called Bogomils. Different theories exist as to the origin of this name.

James Hastings, in his *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, says of the Bogomils:

"The origin of the name has been usually found in the frequent use by them of the two Slavic words *Bog milui*, 'Lord, have mercy.' A more likely explanation derives it from *Bogumil*, 'Beloved of God,' in which case it may be taken to denote the idea of a pious community analogous to the (later) 'Friends of God' in Germany.

"But not less probable is its derivation from a personal name. Two early Bulgarian MSS [manuscripts] have been discovered which are confirmatory of each other in the common point that a 'pope' [leader] Bogomile was the first to promulgate the 'heresy' in the vulgar [common] tongue under Bulgarian Tsar Pe-

ter, who ruled from 927 to 968. This would seem to afford a surer clue to the name, and (if correct) puts back the active emergence of the movement to the middle of the 10th century" (volume 2, page 784).

### **Accurate Information Is Scarce**

It is difficult to accurately trace the history of these small and often persecuted groups, as explained in an *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on the Bogomils:

"It is a complicated task to determine the true character and the tenets of any ancient sect, considering that almost all the information that has reached us has come from the opponents" (volume IV, page 119).

To further emphasize that



***In the depths of  
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point, historian V. Raymond Edman writes in *The Light in Dark Ages*:

"The history of the Bogomils, the 'Friends of God,' in Thrace, Bulgaria and Bosnia, and elsewhere in Europe, is even more difficult to trace than is that of their antecedents, the Paulicians. They kept few records, and these were almost entirely obliterated by their inveterate foes [the Orthodox Church]. They later wrote their own invidious interpretation of these simple and devout disciples of the Paulicians in the Balkans whose manner of life was a rebuke to their contemporaries" (page 296).

With that in mind, the *Britannica* says of these fascinating people:

"The Bogomils were without doubt the connecting link between the so-called heretical [in the eyes of their persecutors] sects of the East and those of the West. They were, moreover, the most active agents in disseminating such teachings in Russia and among all the nations of Europe. They may have found in some places a soil already prepared by more ancient tenets which had been preserved in spite of the persecution of the official Church" (volume IV, page 119).

When the Bogomils arrived in various regions, they may have found later generations of peoples taught by the original apostles of Jesus. The biblical record does not preserve the works of most of the apostles. But we do know they were commissioned to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ even to the world beyond the Greco-Roman cultural area.

These little-known Christians in Europe before the time of the Bogomils could have been remnants of faithful believers who were converted during and after the ministry of Paul. Prophecy shows Christians who kept God's commandments and believed in the gospel of the kingdom of God would be found in the wilderness for 1,260 years (Revelation 12:6).

The Bogomils developed various forms of the following beliefs:

1) They were the direct successors of the apostles and rejected contact with mainstream Christianity.

2) No baptism of infants.

3) Denial of the doctrine of transubstantiation, the belief that in the communion, the bread and wine literally become, by divine miracle, the body and blood of Jesus Christ. (This doctrine has been a source of difference for centuries.)

They contended (as do many sectarian Christians) that the body and blood of Christ are *symbolized* by the bread and wine.

4) No need existed for having church buildings in which to worship.

5) No prayers to and adoration of Mary and other saints.

In his *Handbook of Church His-*

tory, Samuel G. Green states these were "praying people, who had in various ways attempted to solve the mystery of evil, and to counteract the temptations of the flesh by ascetic methods, without the aid of recognized religious methods and institutions. The Bogomils worshipped in private houses and in the open air."

Additional doctrinal beliefs were these: That Satan, the first-born son of God in the angelic realm, went astray, and that Satan created the nature of Adam and Eve. Later, God made Jesus, who overcame Satan and qualified to rule.

Bogomils used primarily the Psalms, the Prophets and the New Testament.

What we know of the Bogomils' teachings comes from what their enemies wrote about them—not from their own works.

Isolated as they were, it is certain they did not understand some points of biblical truth we are privileged to understand today. The world was in a period when learning was suppressed and books like the Bible were rare.

Even more surprising is that they could understand as much as they did. Faithful in spite of the odds against them, their zeal remains an inspiration to this day.

### **An Inspiring Example**

One of the most inspiring examples of zeal and dedication from this period is the story of a Bogomil minister named Basil.

He was so active that the emperor, Alexius Comnenus, decided to handle matters personally regarding him. Apparently the growing work of Basil and his co-workers troubled the Eastern emperor.

Following the example of the early Church, Basil had 12 fellow ministers with him.

The emperor contrived to entrap Basil. First he arrested one of the Bogomil leaders, who confessed Basil was the head of the movement.

Pretending he wanted to learn more of Basil's teachings, the emperor brought the Bogomil leader to his palace with great flattery. A

fine meal was prepared and Basil was asked to discuss his many beliefs.

For a long time the emperor listened attentively while Basil expounded the mysteries of God's word.

It was all a plot. The emperor flung open a curtain to reveal a scribe who had recorded every word. Basil had told nothing but the truth as he perceived it, though it was in various ways contrary to official beliefs. By his own words he was condemned.

Alexius then ordered all Bogomils who would not recant be burned alive. Among those was Basil—one of many faithful believers willing to give their lives for the way of life they professed.

Persecution could not stamp



## ***Persecution could not stamp out the people of God—in that or any other age.***

out the people of God—not in that or any other age. Still hiding in the wilderness, they moved steadily westward, where they found various groups—labeled as heretics in history books.

### **The Church That Would Not Die**

The name changes. Sometimes called by the name of a leading personality, other times by a doctrine and at other times by a region where they lived, the small and persecuted Church that kept the commandments struggled to survive.

In the westward expansion, various groups of Christians and sectarians were called Albigenses (after the name of the French town of Albi), Cathars, Bulgarians, Patereenes, Passagi, Publicani and

various other names.

It would be incorrect to conclude that all these isolated and differing groups represented faithful descendants of the original Church—certainly not the Albigenses. But among these persecuted groups, true beliefs survived.

Of the Bogomils, the 11th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says:

"The popes in Rome whilst leading the Crusade against the Albigenses [about A.D. 1100] did not forget their counterpart in the Balkans and recommended the annihilation of the heretics.

"The Bogomils spread westward, and settled first in Servia [now Yugoslavia]; but at the end of the 12th century, Stephen Nemanja, king of Servia, persecuted them and expelled them from the country. Large numbers took refuge in Bosnia, where they were known under the name of Patereenes or Patareni" (volume IV, page 120).

V. Raymond Edman describes these times:

"Because of persecution and also because of missionary zeal to propagate their faith the Bogomils began to settle elsewhere in Europe, or to travel as merchants or artisans in Italy, France and Germany. . . . Some remained in the mountain fastnesses of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Bosnia, and during the centuries of Turkish rule received more consideration than had been their lot under Byzantium. . . .

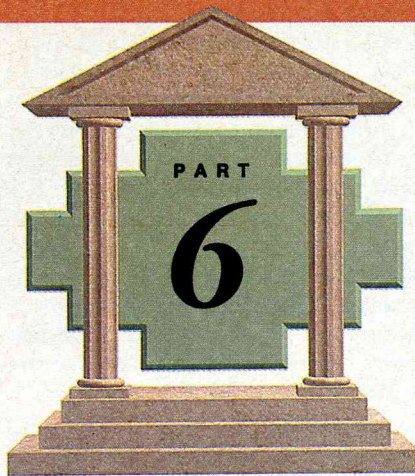
"Over the long centuries of medieval darkness and bloodshed they had some light from the Word, albeit with much error. They were Bogomil candles in the spiritual blackness of the Balkans much as the earlier Paulicians in Armenia and Syria had been bearers of the lamp of Life" (*The Light in Dark Ages*, pages 296-297).

The times the Bogomils struggled in to preserve the word of God were the darkest of the Middle Ages. However, an even greater light was about to shine in the wilderness.

*(To be continued)*

**Ronald Kelly**





Jesus were called Nazarenes. Then, in the region of Armenia, they were numbered among the Paulicians. As they moved westward into Europe, they were to be found among those known as Bogomils. Numerous other names were applied to non-orthodox Christians. We have space to discuss only a few of these groups.

## Sects and Heretics

As religious discontentment grew, numerous dissenting groups arose

ten used in the north; in Italy they were called Patarines. The connection with Balkan sects gave rise to the name Bulgars (or Bogomils). . . . Opponents also revived ancient sect names—Arians, Manichaeans, Marcionites—to apply to them.

“All Europe soon knew those who congregated in southern France as the Albigenses” (page 30).

The Albigenses were so called after the name of the French town of Albi where large numbers of them lived.

Religious leaders undertook many measures to counteract the movement. One such measure can still be seen in the town of Albi today.

To deter the masses from joining what was called by the priests “the Albigensian heresy,” the community constructed a beautiful cathedral in Albi. Its massive size, beautiful stained-glass windows and inspiring organ and acoustics are as impressive today as they must have been hundreds of years ago.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says of the Albigensians: “In the East they were called Bogomils and Paulicians; in the West, Patarienes, Tixerands . . . Bulgars, Concorricii, Albanenses, Albigois, and in both, Cathars and Manicheans” (volume V, page 515, article “Cathars”).

“The heresy, which had penetrated into these regions probably by trade routes, came originally from eastern Europe. The name of Bulgarians (*Bougres*) was often applied to the Albigenses, and they always kept up intercourse with the Bogomil sectaries of Thrace. . . .

“It is exceedingly difficult, however, to form any very precise idea of the Albigensian doctrines, as our knowledge of them is derived from their opponents, and the very rare texts emanating from the Albigenses which have come down to us . . . contain very inadequate information concerning their metaphysical principles and moral practice.

“What is certain is that, above

# SCATTERED REMNANTS

**A**S THE FIRST millennium of the Christian era drew to a close, many people speculated whether they were living in the prophesied “time of the end.”

While the word *millennium* does not appear in the Bible, the book of Revelation mentions a future period of 1,000 years during which the resurrected saints will rule with Christ (Revelation 20:4-6). Had you been alive just before A.D. 1000, it would only have been normal to wonder if something significant was about to happen.

But judgment was not at hand. Jesus Christ did not return. And the kingdom of God was not established.

But the Church Jesus founded continued to hide in “the wilderness” (Revelation 12:6). These were dark days in human history.

During these difficult times, scattered and often persecuted believers preserved remnants of truth from the early Church founded by Jesus Christ. We learned about some of these Christians in the last issue.

First, these faithful followers of

in Western Europe.

Because so little accurate information is known about these groups, it is difficult to discern fact from accusation. As several historical sources note, the primary information we have about them is from those who persecuted them.

The better known of the separatist groups sprang up in Europe just after A.D. 1000. They made possible a measure of political and religious freedom in which the people of God could live. First were those known as Cathars.

As they spread from region to region, different names were ascribed to them. Writing in *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France 1100-1250*, Walter L. Wakefield observed:

“Between about 1140 and 1160 the ‘new’ dualist heresy spread from northern Europe where it appeared in cities such as Köln and Liège southward . . . [It] was probably about 1150 that it penetrated Languedoc.

“The name ‘Cathars’ was first applied to the heretics in the north about 1160. As they spread they acquired others: Publicans was of-



all, they formed an anti-sacerdotal party in permanent opposition to the Roman church, and raised a continued protest against the corruption of the clergy of their time" (volume I, page 505, article "Albigenses").

The article about the Albigenses in the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion* is quite interesting:

"By the beginning of the 13th cent[ury], the Albigenses had become a threat to the very existence of the Church in S. France. Innocent III at first attempted to convert the heretics by sending Cistercian and later Dominican preachers into the infected area, but sermons and disputations proved generally ineffective. When the Papal Legate Peter of Castelnau was murdered in 1208, the Pope decided that the use of force was justified and launched a crusade against the recalcitrant Albigenses. . . .

"Once deprived of baronial protection, the Albigenses found it necessary to flee or go underground. Their final extirpation was accomplished by the Inquisition established by Gregory IX in 1233. By the end of the 14th cent[ury] their power was completely broken" (page 96).

Heretic though they were, when viewed through the eyes of contemporary religious leaders, the Albigenses or Cathari provided the religious ferment in which the people of God could begin to flourish.

### **Apostolic Practices Upheld**

As we've noted, these sectarians appear under many different names. Because of their association with the heirs of the original Jewish Christians of the first century, some individuals and groups came to better understand the doctrines and traditions of the early Church.

One such group were the Pasagini. The Church historian Mosheim says that they seem to have been a remnant of the Nazarenes. They had distinguishing tenets: 1) that the observance of the law of Moses in everything except the offering of sacrifices was obligatory upon Christians; 2)

that Christ was the first and purest creature of God, which appears to be the doctrine of the Arians.

Of course, the latter doctrine, if indeed that is what they taught, was in error. But the point is that so-called "Jewish Christians" or Nazarenes perpetuated the Sabbath, the laws of clean and unclean meats, the Holy Days and other doctrines, just as the Church recorded in the biblical book of Acts practiced.

Another group located around Milan in northern Italy were the Patarines. The *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion* says they were "members of a movement at Milan (c. 1050) against the simony and concubinage of the clergy. The quarter of the city where they



## ***The Albigenses threatened the very existence of the Church in S. France.***

met, Pataria, is probably the origin of the name. . . .

"Their leaders SS. Arialdus and Erlembaldus were martyred by agents of the archbishops. The spirit of the movement spread to other parts of Italy and contributed to the Gregorian Reform. By the end of the 11th cent[ury] the Patarines ceased to be active. For uncertain reasons the same name was applied in the 12th cent[ury] to the Bogomils; Lateran Council IV . . . used it as practically synonymous with Cathari; and in the 13th and 14th cent[uries] it often designated any sort of heretic" (page 2691).

We read further of them in John Henry Blunt's *Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties, and Schools of Religious Thought:*

"They observed the law of Moses except as to sacrifices: circumcision, the Sabbath, and distinctions of clean and unclean food, all forming part of their system, and hence they were called, 'Circumcisi'. . . the Pasagians appealed to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in support of their doctrine" ("Pasagians," pages 408-409).

Thus we find the north of Italy and the south of France in a certain religious turmoil. Some among the groups we study in a history of the Church were faithful to the Sabbath, the New Testament Passover and other customs of the early apostles.

### **Peter de Brueys**

These sectarian Christians—as they are viewed in history—grew in numbers.

Countermeasures taken by both church and state varied in their effectiveness, but none could stamp out the adherents who were deeply committed to their beliefs.

Out of these movements came many leaders—and sometimes martyrs for their causes.

One such man, in the south of France, was Peter de Brueys. His story is told in numerous reference works. Out of this most unusual man's work grew a movement called after his name—the Petrobusians.

His career began in about A.D. 1104 in the town of Bruy or Bruey. He was apparently a member of the secular clergy, but came to oppose the clerical abuses and doctrinal errors.

Much of what we know about Peter de Brueys comes from the writings of another man named Peter—Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Clugny, who rebutted Peter de Brueys' doctrinal position.

The Abbot of Clugny wrote that the heresy of Peter de Brueys had been flourishing for 20 years when the Abbot wrote in A.D. 1125.

Charges of heresy filed against Peter de Brueys included these points:

- 1) He rejected infant baptism.
- 2) He denied that anything special resulted from consecrating church buildings, and in fact ad-

vocated pulling down such pretentious buildings.

3) He objected to adoration and honor given to the cross—feeling the cross should be a symbol of horror to all Christians.

4) He denied the doctrine of transubstantiation.

5) He rejected the use of prayers and other deeds done on behalf of the dead.

Peter de Brueys was not ascetic in his beliefs. He thought of marriage as having the highest value and believed priests ought to marry. He would have abolished the many fasts of the church at that time.

In condemning him, Peter the Venerable called him that “wretched little man,” and wrote: “The people are re-baptized, churches profaned, altars overturned, crosses are burnt, meat eaten openly on the day of the Lord’s Passion, priests scourged, monks cast into dungeons, and by terror or torture constrained to marry” (*Dictionary of Sects, and Heresies*. . . , page 423).

One day, as Peter de Brueys preached, an angry mob seized him and committed him to the flames in the French town of St. Gilles. It was about A.D. 1125. In only two decades one man stirred a whole region of Europe and laid the foundation for what was to follow.

A second personality of the 12th century was Arnold of Brescia. From the south of France all the way to Rome, he preached against the evils and corruption he found in the established church.

As with Peter de Brueys, numerous reference materials are available to read about Arnold of Brescia. He was willing to stand against all opposition for the truths he could understand.

Arnold and those who followed him, called Arnoldists, developed an opposition to the wealth and resultant abuses of the clergy in his area. Arnold believed the civil government should be separated from the church.

Arnold, in his day, paved the way for later civil and religious liberties.

In *History of the Christian*

*Church*, Professor Schaff writes of Arnold:

“It was the political complication which caused his ruin. . . . Arnold sought the welfare of the Church in her complete separation from the State and of the clerical office from secular entanglements” (page 98).

### Henry of Lausanne

A third powerful personality of the 12th century was a former Benedictine monk—Henry from the city of Lausanne.

The *Dictionary of Sects, and Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties, and Schools of Religious Thought* describes Henry or Henri: “He was of imposing stature, wore a cropped beard and flowing hair, went barefooted in winter, with a

buildings made from stone but was, rather, the congregation of believers. He preached that God may be worshiped in a marketplace or stable as well as in a consecrated church building.

Henry and his followers (called Henricians by others) preached in the streets and town squares.

Along with the Petrobusians, they rejected the cross and the sacred music that had become an important function of religious worship.

As a result of his preaching, Henry was seized and imprisoned. The probable date of his death was A.D. 1149.

### Persecution Legalized

We can only strive to imagine how difficult it must have been to live in opposition to established beliefs, customs and practices during these grim times.

Branded as heretics, banished, arrested, sometimes tortured and in the end put to violent death, these remarkable individuals endured to the end.

The first crusade (organized before A.D. 1100) was organized to suppress the heretical Albigenses and for other political purposes before the Crusaders were dispatched to take Jerusalem from the Muslims.

By 1184, so influential were these many nettlesome movements that Pope Lucius III issued his famous decree, excerpts from which show the impact of contrary views during this tumultuous period.

But the most serious method of suppression was yet to come—the Inquisition. The word still makes one shudder to think of man’s inhumanity to his fellowman. And all in the name of religion. In the next chapter we’ll discuss the nightmare that was the Inquisition.

But we’ll also see how the stage was set for later dramatic times. The light of the small group of apostolic believers that had barely flickered in the Middle Ages was about to burn more brightly.

(To be continued)



## Arnold of Brescia paved the way for later civil and religious liberties.

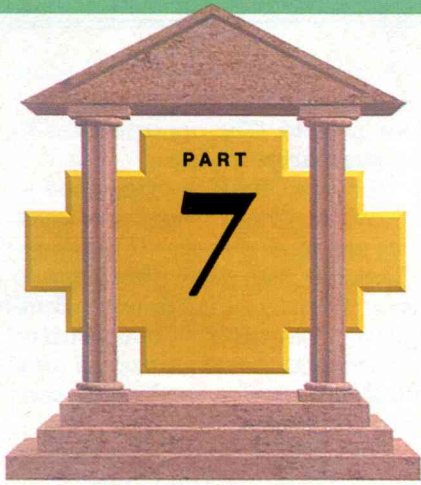
frame so robust as to endure with ease the utmost rigours of the climate, and a voice so powerful that his adversaries compared it to the roar of legions of devils” (page 183).

He was a monk by education, but his studies led him to conclude marriage was honorable for priests. Gradually his opposition to established teachings grew till he was numbered among the heretics.

He continually denounced the vices of the clergy in his area. He was banished from Lausanne by the bishop, and his journeys led him to the south of France where he followed in the way opened by Peter de Brueys.

He, as Peter before, came to see that the Church of God was not

Ronald Kelly



the mainstreams of Christianity in the East and West.

But there were always small groups of scattered, often persecuted, Christians who clung to their beliefs.

We now turn our attention to the latter part of the 12th century—a time that provides one of the most interesting and exciting periods in Church history.

In the city of Lyons in the southeast of France lived a wealthy merchant named Peter

his side. This had a dramatic effect on Waldo. “What,” he wondered, “would happen to me should I die?”

He turned to a theologian in his local parish, asking what he should do with his life to attain perfection.

“Ah,” answered the priest, reciting the words of Jesus, “If you would become perfect, go, sell all that you have, give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come take up your cross and follow me.”

Inspired by those words, Peter Waldo determined to do just that.

In practical fact, he took a vow of poverty, sold his possessions and began distribution of his wealth. He made provision for his wife and children and gave much to the poor.

With the remainder of his money, Peter Waldo did something very unusual. He commissioned parts of the Bible to be translated into the vernacular French of his day—an act virtually unheard of.

The officially accepted text of the Bible of the Church in the West was in Latin, translated centuries earlier from Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Of course few of the laity could read and understand Latin. That effectively meant only the educated few had access to the Scriptures.

### His Zeal for God’s Word

Waldo’s bold move now began to put the Bible into the hands of ordinary people.

Armed with only his new translations in the local language and his zeal to serve Christ, Peter Waldo began to preach. He brought to his sermons that practical common sense that had guided him in his business transactions.

The word of Christ was clear enough. It was simply a matter of furnishing a readable translation.

For several years, Waldo preached within the confines of the Western Church, on one occasion even traveling to Rome to seek permission from the Pope. Pope Alexander III approved his living in poverty, but rejected his

# THE CHURCH THAT LOVED THE BIBLE

IT MAY come as a surprise to many that long before the Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517, there were Christians—usually thought of as sectarians or heretics—who were not a part of the larger Eastern or Western churches.

In previous chapters we saw how such groups known as Ebionites, Paulicians, Bogomils, Albigenses, Cathars, Paterenes and numerous others sprang up in Western Asia and on the European continent.

Some of these groups were heretical and departed far from scriptural norms. Others—often labeled sectarians—sought to reestablish truths of the Bible no longer found in Christianity.

Each of these groups struggled for existence. Most who survived persecution were absorbed into

Waldo. His name in the local language was Pierre Valdès. Waldo would institute a movement that perhaps was to have more of an effect than any since the time of the apostles trained by Jesus.

The story is told in many treatises on Church history, but we refer our readers particularly to *History of the Waldenses of Italy From Their Origin to the Reformation* by Emilio Comba, and *The History of the Christian Church, From the Birth of Christ to the XVIII. Century; Including the Very Interesting Account of the Waldenses and Albigenses* by William Jones.

### Conversion of Peter Waldo

The story begins in about A.D. 1170 in the city of Lyons. At a town gathering, one of Peter Waldo’s friends collapsed dead at



petition to preach the gospel.

But Waldo felt compelled to discuss his understanding of the Scripture with all who would listen. And many began to listen, first in the Alpine regions of Europe, then in lands beyond.

Albert Henry Newman writes about Waldo and his disciples in his *Ancient and Mediaeval Church History (to A.D. 1517)*: "The Archbishop of Lyons forbade their preaching, on the ground that they were laymen; but they replied: 'We must obey God rather than men'" (page 570).

So, by 1184, Waldo and his followers, called the Poor Men of Lyons, were expelled from the Church.

But this did not deter them. They continued to meet, often in secret, and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ as best they could.

Copies of the Bible they had made were sometimes confiscated by religious authorities. New copies were then made as quickly as possible. Even more amazing, because copies of the Scriptures were so few and far between, Waldo and his followers memorized large sections of Holy Scripture.

Those who opposed them were often dismayed at their knowledge. William Jones in his *History of the Christian Church* writes, "They were so well instructed in the Holy Scriptures, that [Jacobus de Riberia, who opposed them] had seen peasants who could recite the book of Job *verbatim*, and several others who could perfectly repeat all the New Testament" (page 288).


Not only were the authorities shocked by their scriptural knowledge, they were equally astonished by the understanding the Waldensians possessed. Jones continues:

"In the time of a great persecution of the Waldenses of Merindol and Provence, a certain monk was deputed by the Bishop of Cavillon, to hold a conference with them, that they might be convinced of their errors, and the effusion of blood prevented. But the monk returned . . . owning that in his whole life he had never known

so much of the Scriptures, as he had learned during those few days that he had been conversing with the heretics.

"The bishop, however, sent among them a number of doctors, young men, who had lately come from the Sorbonne, which, at that time, was the very centre of theological subtlety at Paris. One of these publicly owned, that he had understood more of the doctrine of salvation from the answers of the little children in their catechisms, than by all the disputations which he had ever before heard" (ibid.).

In another work, *A Short History of the Italian Waldenses Who Have Inhabited the Valleys of the Cottian Alps From Ancient Times to the Present*, by Sophia V. Bom-



**Waldo's bold  
move now  
began to put the  
Bible into the  
hands of  
ordinary people.**

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piani, we read:

"Long before the German Reformation they [the Waldenses] were an evangelical people, loving the Bible above all things: making translations of it into the vulgar tongue; spreading it abroad in Bohemia, in Germany, in France and in Italy. They taught their children to memorize whole chapters, so that whatever might befall the written copies of the Bible, large portions of it might be secure in the memories of their youths and maidens.

"In secret meetings, when they went by night barefooted, or with shoes bound with rags, so that they might not be heard in passing, it was their custom to listen to the Gospels recited in turn by the young, each one responsible for a

certain portion" (pages 2-3).

The Waldenses generally had to live in remote and forested mountain valleys.

In the course of time, a small school, a college, if you please, was started in the Cottian Alps of Italy. Their ministers were called "Barbes"—a term of affection akin to the word "uncle."

One can still visit in this remote region of the Angrogna Valley the partially reconstructed small building that once was used to train ministers as far back as the 1300s.

If you wanted to travel there today, you would find the building near the town of Torre Pellice not far from Turin. In that same town are monuments and a museum to the Waldenses of old.

Again, many do not know that a modern Waldensian Church remains to this day. There are congregations in Italy, and others in Latin America and the United States. The Waldensians are today largely associated with Protestantism, having been absorbed into the general Reformation movement in the mid-16th century.

The Waldensian motto or logo is an inspiring one—a lighted candle framed by the Latin phrase "lux lucet in tenebris," which aptly describes the Waldensians. They were a "light shining in darkness."

### **How They Viewed Themselves**

In the days of Peter Waldo and for a time thereafter, the Waldenses saw themselves as custodians of the original faith delivered by Jesus Christ to his apostles.

Emilio Comba in his *History of the Waldenses* writes of their perceptions, as recorded by Reinerius Saccho, who opposed them as heretics:

"They say, however, that at all times there have been God-fearing people who have been saved. They believe . . . that the Church of God had declined in the time of Sylvester [the Bishop of Rome at the time of the Nicean Council, A.D. 325] . . . and that in these days it had been re-established by their efforts, commencing with

Waldo. They call themselves successors of the Apostles . . . and say they are in possession of the apostolic authority, and of the keys to bind and unbind" (page 7).

William Jones quotes Reinerius Saccho concerning the varying beliefs among the widely scattered Waldenses:

"They declare themselves to be the apostles' successors, to have apostolic authority, and the keys of binding and loosing. . . . They hold that none of the ordinances of the church, which have been introduced since Christ's ascension, ought to be observed, as being of no value. . . .

"Some of them hold that baptism is of no advantage to infants, because they cannot actually believe. They reject the sacrament of confirmation, but instead of that, their teachers lay their hands upon their disciples. . . .

"Some of them hold that this sacrament [the Passover or communion service] can only be celebrated by those that are good" (*The History of the Christian Church*, pages 264-265).

### Some Waldensian Beliefs

Many among the Waldenses held beliefs quite different from the mainstream Christianity—such beliefs as:

- They rejected the songs of the church, referring to them as clamor.
- They rejected the ecumenical hour of times to pray and felt prayers are more effective when in secret.
- They opposed all customs not ordained in Scripture.
- They felt pilgrimages were useless.
- They objected to ecclesiastical burials.
- They interpreted the Sermon on the Mount to the strict letter and did not swear or bear arms.

To further their message, ministers were trained and sent out in twos. Often an older pastor would take a younger man along to train him in the ministry.

Waldo never considered himself the founder of a church—rather the perpetuator of a truth. A.W. Mitchell in his work, *The*

*Waldenses: Sketches of the Evangelical Christians of the Valleys of Piedmont*, quotes the Waldenses as believing the following historical background of their religious work:

"We likewise beseech your highness to consider, that this religion we profess, is not ours only, nor hath it been invented by man of late years, as it is falsely reported; but it is the religion of our fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers, and other yet more ancient predecessors of ours, and of the blessed martyrs, confessors, prophets, and apostles. . . .

"The Word of God shall not perish, but remain forever; therefore, if our religion be the true word of God, as we are persuaded, and not the invention of men, no



## Many do not know that a vigorous Waldensian Church remains to this day.

human force shall be able to extinguish the same" (pages 105-106).

### Kept the Laws of God

It is clear the Waldensians attempted to follow the instruction of the Scriptures as best they understood them. They tenaciously adhered to the Commandments, leading some among them in the Alpine passes in Italy to observe the seventh-day Sabbath.

William Jones writes that investigators made a report to Louis XII, King of France, "that they had visited all the parishes where they [the Waldensians] dwelt, had inspected their places of worship, but they had found there no images. . . .

"On the contrary, they kept the sabbath day, observed the ordi-

nance of baptism according to the primitive Church [adult baptism only], instructed their children in the articles of the Christian faith, and the commandments of God" (*History of the Christian Church*, page 289).

There is also clear indication that at least some Waldensian groups who dwelt in the Alpine passes in northern Italy observed the New Testament Passover once a year. There would be many attempts to extinguish these peoples and their beliefs.

### Inquisition

Church and state had earlier combined to put down different groups, particularly the Albigenses in Southern France.

Thus was born the Inquisition. Few words in the course of human history have struck more fear than that one word—*Inquisition*.

Strangely, it is from the Inquisition that we get much of the information we now have about these peoples. Of course, these sources must be viewed with some suspicion since what is written about court trials is based on the presumption that the Waldenses and other groups were heretics.

We will let *The World Book Encyclopedia* description of the Inquisition suffice:

"From the time of the Emperor Constantine (306-337), the teachings of the Christian Church were regarded as the foundation of law and order. Hence heresy was considered an offense against the state as well as against the Church. . . .

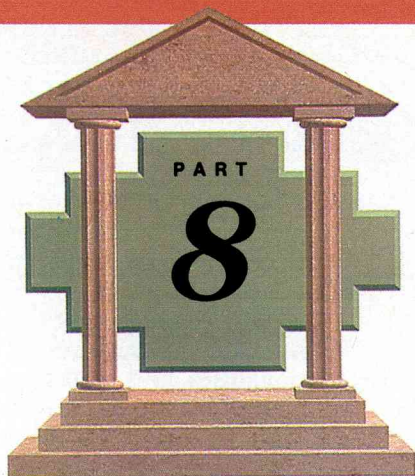
"In the 1100's and 1200's, certain groups existed whose views did not correspond to the teachings of the . . . Church. Chief among them were the Albigenses and Waldenses" (*World Book Encyclopedia*, 1965, volume 10, article, "Inquisition," page 215).

Yet in spite of persecution, these people endured. A light shone in the darkness. And the stage was set for a dramatic turn of events in the history of the Church.

(To be continued)

Ronald Kelly





In Alpine Europe the Waldensians and other pre-Reformation followers of the apostles' doctrine—referred to as sectarians and heretics in contemporary records—had only partial copies and relied heavily on committing large passages of Scripture to memory.

With printed Bibles available, the knowledge of the Scriptures would shortly become known to thousands, then millions.

There are a few personalities

the Sabbath laws as applying to Sunday. Even mainstream Christian views did not adopt that philosophy. Theologians have regarded the seventh day of the week—Saturday—as the Sabbath, but have traditionally observed Sunday as the Christian day of worship.

## ... and in Central Europe

Another important personality of the pre-Reformation era was John Huss. When a student at the University of Prague, Huss was inspired by the teachings of Wycliff. His work in what is today Czechoslovakia would be followed by an important group of Sabbath keepers in Eastern Europe.

He displayed much of the same passion for keeping the Ten Commandments as did his mentor. His zeal and differences with the established Church led to excommunication. He was judged a heretic and burned at the stake in 1415.

These events in Britain and Central Europe helped pave the way for the Sabbath keepers of Eastern Europe and, later, England. So we mention these forerunners not as a part of the Sabbath-keeping community, but as instrumental in changing the world of the Middle Ages enough to bring about the relative religious freedom we appreciate today.

The greatest name from this period of time was Martin Luther. What he did and what followed have had a tremendous influence on the entire Western world.

We have shown in this series on the history of the Church of God that there have always been groups of scattered, often persecuted, Christians apart from the mainstream Church.

Nazarenes, Paulicians, Bogomils and Waldensians were examples of groups among whom were those who strove to preserve the faith of the first apostles. They simply held their faith and beliefs separate from the much larger organized churches.

But any history of the Church should acknowledge the importance of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, or Revo-

## OUT OF THE SHADOWS

**W**E NOW COME, in our series, to the 15th century. After hundreds of years of the Middle Ages, the world entered a new period of learning. The arts, sciences and religion burst forth with new life.

During those ages of human history, the small and persecuted groups of Christians who were not part of organized, mainstream Christianity, preserved their beliefs through great adversity.

The Crusades and the Inquisition often drove them deeper into hiding, but could not stamp them out. Then came the winds of change in the 14th to 16th centuries.

Few events in the history of the world would have a greater effect than the invention in the 1450s of moveable type and the first practical printing press by Johannes Gutenberg. It is interesting that the first books printed were copies of the Holy Bible.

Before this time, the Scriptures were painstakingly and meticulously copied by hand. Relatively few manuscripts were made, and practically none were available for the general public.

from this period whom we should at least briefly discuss. Their effect on the Christian world of that time was great.

### The Bible in England

John Wycliff (1320-1384), an English scholar, was the first to translate the Bible into the English language.

He held the Scriptures in high regard and considered the Bible the source of truth and believed that it showed the way of salvation. His followers would be called Lollards—among whom we find some of the remnants of the Waldensians who moved from the Continent to England.

George Park Fisher writes: "The greatest service which he did the English people was his translation of the Bible, and his open defence of their right to read the Scriptures in their own tongue" (*History of the Christian Church*, page 274).

Wycliff's influence was instrumental in paving the way for the Reformation to be started by Martin Luther.

Wycliff was devoted to the Ten Commandments, but interpreted



lution. What exists today, in many ways, has been made possible by the changing world of the 14th to 16th centuries.

The discovery of the New World, the translation of the Bible into common languages, the printing press, the religious wars, the rebirth of learning—these were critical to what would follow. The Old World was indeed changing.

So on that October day in 1517 when Martin Luther tacked on the door of the church in Wittenburg, in Imperial Germany, 95 theses stating his objections to certain practices within the Church, little did he realize what would result.

Martin Luther did not mean to start a new religious movement. But intending to or not, a revolution was begun—a religious revolution. Protestantism was born.

The impact of what Luther did was carried further by Zwingli and Calvin in Switzerland, and by Knox in Scotland. Henry VIII established the main body of the Church in England under authority of the crown, for domestic reasons. The Christian world would never be the same.

### **Meanwhile, the Lollards**

During the early part of these dynamic centuries a group of people associated with Wycliff, and called Lollards, provided an interesting transition from the Waldensian period.

The *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* by B.B. Edwards describes them:

“Lollards; a religious sect, differing in many points from the church of Rome, which arose in Germany about the beginning of the fourteenth century; so called, as many writers have imagined, from Walter Lollard, their chief leader and champion, a native of Mentz, and equally famous for his eloquence and his writings, who was burnt at Cologne; though others think that Lollard was no surname but merely a term of reproach applied to all heretics who concealed what was deemed error under the appearance of piety” (page 752).

The *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* further describes these

people: “In the reign of Edward III., about A.D. 1315, Walter Lollard, a German preacher, or, (as Perin, in his History of the Waldensians, calls him,) one of their barbs, (Pastors,) of great renown among them, came into England; and who was so eminent in England, that as in France, they were called Berengarians, from Berengarius, and Petrobrusians, from Peter Bruis and in Italy and Flanders, Arnoldists, from the famous Arnold of Brescia; so did the Waldensian Christians for many generations after bear the name of this worthy man, being called Lollards” (page 752).

As in other cases, it is hard to know whether Walter the Lollard gave his name to the movement or the movement gave its name to



## ***Groups of Christians existed apart from mainstream Christianity.***

the man.

At any rate, in the 14th century the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of God again came to England.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, volume XVI, article “Lollards,” has some interesting observations on these fascinating people.

“The organization must have been strong in numbers, but only those who were seized for heresy are known by name, and it is only from the indictments of their accusers that their opinions can be gathered. The preachers were picturesque figures in long russet dress down to the heels, who, staff in hand, preached in the mother tongue to the people in churches and graveyards, in squares, streets

and houses, in gardens and pleasure grounds, and then talked privately with those who had been impressed” (page 929).

The *Britannica* further describes them: “In the earlier stages of Lollardy, when the court and the clergy managed to bring Lollards before ecclesiastical tribunals backed by the civil power, the accused generally recanted and showed no disposition to endure martyrdom for their opinions.

“They became bolder in the beginning of the 15th century. . . . In 1410 John Badby, an artisan, was sent to the stake. His execution was memorable from the part taken in it by the Prince of Wales, who himself tried to reason the Lollard out of his convictions” (page 930).

The Lollards were radically opposed to many doctrines of contemporary Christianity. They rejected the authority of the Church’s hierarchy of their day. They did not take oaths and did not believe in war and capital punishment.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* summarizes: “Lollardy, which continued down to the Reformation, did much to shape the movement in England. The subordination of clerical to laic jurisdiction, the reduction in ecclesiastical possessions, the insisting on a translation of the Bible which could be read by the ‘common’ man, were all inheritances bequeathed by the Lollards” (page 931).

On the Continent a growing number of movements came to be categorized by a common name—Anabaptists. This name comes from the practice of sectarian Christians to reject infant baptism and baptize only adults.

Mennonites, Hutterites, Brethren, selected groups of Sabbatarians and even the large Baptist church organizations trace their roots to groups of Anabaptists in the 14th and 15th centuries, whose heritage was quite diverse.

### **The Sabbath in Central Europe**

We have seen that Eastern Europe was the dwelling place of some of the secluded believers of the past.

After the Protestant Reforma-

tion opened the way for other groups to become more publicly known, we find a most interesting group of Sabbath-keeping Christians in what was geographically known as Transylvania.

Our primary source of knowledge of these Christian Sabbath keepers is *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, July 1890 edition. An article by I. Abrahams and C.G. Montefiore discusses the part the seventh-day Sabbath plays in different religions.

As early as the mid-second century, opposition to the seventh-day Sabbath began to gain ground. By the later 4th century, opponents to the Sabbath were influential in declaring those Christians who kept the day, "Judaizers."

As we have seen in this series, Christians who did not accept the way of mainstream Christianity had to migrate to remote areas to observe their beliefs. They were cut off from the mainstream religious world for more than a thousand years.

But, encouraged by the door that began to open after the Protestant Reformation, Sabbath keepers became more known in some societies.

On page 465 of their *Review* article, Abrahams and Montefiore write: "The celebration of the Sabbath is as much a common religious institution, as one of the most obvious marks of distinction between Judaism and Christianity.

"On the one hand, the whole Christian world observes each seventh day as a hallowed day of rest, thus to some extent pointing from week to week in the most solemn and in the most general and public manner, to the origin of Christianity: on the other hand, it is just by means of this Sabbath celebration—by ordaining that the Sabbath should be observed on a different day from that on which the people of Israel and the founders of Christianity themselves kept it—that Christianity has set itself in conscious and intentional opposition to the first possessors and inheritors of this great institution.


"Thus what was a mark of uniformity became a mark of diver-

sity, and the separate observance of the seventh day developed into the most effective cause of separation between the Christian community and the adherents of the Jewish faith."

During these tumultuous centuries, the Jews, too, were an often persecuted people. But they also clung tenaciously to their historic beliefs.

Sabbath-keeping Christians spread as far north as Russia. Here's what *The Jewish Quarterly Review* says about them: "As regards the *Russian Sabbath-observers*, the so-called Sobotniki or Subbotniki, we have to depend for an account of their origin and present condition, on a few extremely scanty notices.

"They belong to the Russian



## ***Opponents to the Sabbath declared those Christians who kept the day, 'Judaizers.'***

sect, Molokani or milk-drinkers, one of the various sects that arose, during the sixteenth century, in those provinces of Southern Russia which were at that time under the supremacy of the Polish crown, all of which sects displayed a Judaizing tendency. . . .

"The Molokani, so runs the account given by a Russian chronicler, observed the Sabbath and had their children circumcised. . . . In the second half of the eighteenth century, their number in the first-named government had grown to 5,000 souls. By keeping their doctrines secret, they escaped persecution, till they were betrayed in 1769, and made to suffer oppression from the State" (pages 466-467).

One of the most interesting per-

sonalities of these Central and Eastern European Sabbath keepers was a man named Andreas Eössi. His story bears amazing similarities to outstanding men we have mentioned in this series: Polycarp, Polycrates, Constantine of Mananali, Peter de Bruys, Peter Waldo, to name a few.

Quoting from *The Jewish Quarterly Review*: "Andreas Eössi of Szent-Erszébet was a rich Székely of noble birth, who owned three villages and a great number of estates in the counties of Udvarhelyszék, Küküllő, and Fehérvar. . . . Having been visited by severe trials, (he was ailing for many years, and had lost his wife and three sons), he sought consolation in religion. 'He read the Bible so long'—runs the account of the chronicler already mentioned—"that he evolved therefrom the Sabbatarian form of religion."

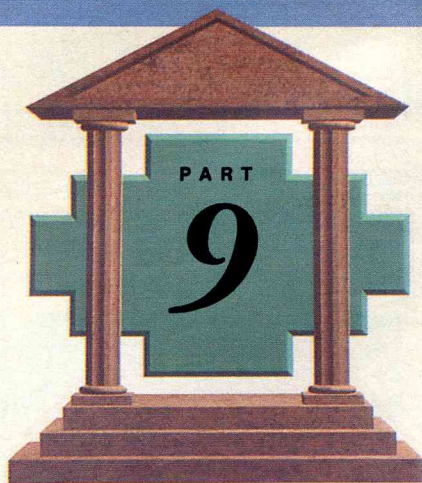
"What he recognized as truth, he endeavored to disseminate in the surrounding district; he composed treatises, prayers, and hymns, caused copies of these and other writings to be prepared, and lent them out in all directions. . . . He was, however, well versed in Church history, and was completely master of the Old and New Testament, from both of which he derived his teaching" (pages 472-473).

These people, called Sabbatarians, spread their faith through preaching and song. From their hymns we glean that they kept the Sabbath, helped feed the poor, and believed in moderate living. They kept the annual Holy Days of the Bible, had hymns for each, and sang with joy the anticipation of the second coming and the millennial reign of Christ on the earth.

That brings to a fitting close another chapter in the history of the New Testament Church. Next chapter, we'll pick up the Sabbatarians in England and see how they came to the New World colony of Rhode Island more than a hundred years before the American Revolution.

*(To be continued)*

**Ronald D. Kelly**



been kindled in the masses by the invention of movable type and the printing of the Gutenberg Bible. Earlier still, John Wycliffe had courageously led the movement to make the Bible available in the common tongue.

Winston Churchill, in his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, volume 2, *The New World*, summed up the brooding ferment of those times as men reached for the freedom to worship according to the dictates of their own con-

of the Church of England in a dispute with Rome over whether he was free to divorce and remarry without papal permission. Later, his daughter Queen Elizabeth I would continue his policy of political and spiritual independence from continental Europe.

After much personal agonizing Elizabeth permitted the execution of a potential rival to her throne, Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary was a staunch Catholic and had become a rallying point for those who wished to restore Vatican control of worship in England.

On the heels of this drastic measure, the Armada of Philip II of Spain launched an attack against the island kingdom in 1588. A combination of naval strategy and the weather gave the English a stunning victory.

The people, with united voice, felt that God had granted them a great deliverance. "To the English people as a whole the defeat of the Armada came as a miracle. For thirty years the shadow of Spanish power had darkened the political scene.

"A wave of religious emotion filled men's minds. One of the medals struck to commemorate the victory bears the inscription '*Afflavit Deus et dissipantur*'—'God blew and they were scattered.'

"Elizabeth and her seamen knew how true this was. The Armada had indeed been bruised in battle, but it was demoralised and set on the run by the weather. Yet the event was decisive. . . . Shakespeare was writing King John a few years later. His words struck into the hearts of his audiences:

"'Come the three corners of the world in arms, and we shall shock them. Naught shall make us rue if England to itself do rest but true'" (ibid., pages 131-132).

And indeed God provided a place where the light of his Church could, once again, be seen

## FREE AT LAST

**I**N THE previous installments of this series we have seen how, between the fourth and sixteenth centuries, many persecuted Christians were driven into hiding. They had to live in desert regions and in remote mountain hideaways on the boundaries of the civilized world.

From Asia Minor to the Balkans, to the Alpine regions of southern France and northern Italy, they had to stay secluded just to survive.

By the late 1500s a prophesied period of 1,260 years in the wilderness (Revelation 12:6) was coming to a close. The Church needed a new area where it could proclaim its message openly.

### A Changing World

Indeed the winds of freedom had already begun to blow. The Renaissance had ushered in a new zeal for learning. Universities had been founded with the implied freedom to inquire and arrive at conclusions without the previous coercion from the State or the official Church.

The desire for an accurate knowledge of the Scriptures had

sciences:

"New ideas were in debate, not only on religious doctrine and Church government, but on the very nature and foundations of political power. . . .

"But in the great turmoil of Europe silence was impossible. Men talked: secretly to one another, openly in their writings, which were now printed in a thousand copies, kindling excitement and curiosity wherever they were carried. Even if it were granted that Affairs of State could only be lawfully debated by those called thereto, common men could still search the Scriptures, and try the doctrines of the Church, its government, its rites and ceremonies, by the words of the Evangelist and Apostles" (pages 105 and 106).

### England Paves the Way

Even the European Reformers had been severe in their discipline of those who did not concur with established doctrine.

Thus as the winds of change continued to blow, England became the place chosen by God to preserve his Church.

Henry VIII had seized control

**Roger Williams, in founding the colony of Rhode Island, provided religious dissenters with full freedom of worship.**



openly. Queen Elizabeth had said that she wished to "make no windows into men's souls." As the result of this approach, a kind of limited freedom was to exist—so long as the established Church was not thought to be threatened by dissent.

### Open Discussion

As the 17th century dawned, open discussion of religious matters began. Joseph Belcher in his *Religious Denominations in the United States* (1861) records the first shot in the renewed struggle for biblical truth:

"The Sabbath controversy commenced in England near the close of the sixteenth century. One Nicholas Bound, D.D., of Norton, in the county of Suffolk, published a book in 1595, in which he advanced the modern notion concerning the Christian Sabbath, that it is a perpetuation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, but that the day specified in that commandment has been changed by divine authority from the seventh to the first day of the week.

"This doctrine was very taking, proclaimed as it was at a time when there was felt to be so much need of greater strictness in regard to the day of rest.

"According to a learned writer of that age, 'In a very little time it became the most bewitching error, and the most popular infatuation, that ever was embraced by the people of England.'

"Dr. Bound's book was suppressed by order of Archbishop Whitgift in 1599. But its suppression only led to the publication of a multitude of other works, in which every variety of opinion was expressed. While this discussion was in progress, several advocates of the seventh day arose, who vindicated its claims with great boldness and ability" (page 228).

### Taking a Stand

Despite the disapproval and even hostility of the authorities, still others began to take a stand for biblical truth.

"John Traske began to speak

and write in favor of the seventh-day Sabbath about the time that the Book of Sports for Sunday was published under the direction of the Archbishop of Canterbury and King James I., in 1618. He took high ground as to the sufficiency of the Scriptures to direct in religious services, and the duty of the State to impose nothing contrary to the Word of God.

"For this he was brought before the Star-Chamber, where a long discussion was held respecting the Sabbath, in which Dr. Andrews, Bishop of Winchester, took a prominent part. Traske was not turned from his opinion, but received a censure in the Star-Chamber.

"Paggitt's Heresiography says that he 'was sentenced, on account



## *The Sabbath was brought to the attention of the highest leaders in the land.*

of being a Sabbatarian, to be set upon the Pillory at Westminster, and from thence to be whipt to the Fleet Prison, there to remain a prisoner for three years. Mrs. Traske, his wife, lay in Maiden-Lane and the Gate-House Prisons fifteen years, where she died, for the same crime'" (ibid., page 229).

Another notable example from Belcher: "Theophilus Brabourne, a learned minister of the Gospel in the Established Church, wrote a book, which was printed at London in 1628, wherein he argued 'That the Lord's Day [Sunday] is not the Sabbath Day by Divine Institution,' but 'That the Seventh-day Sabbath is now in force.'

"This book, not having been replied to, he published another in

1632, entitled, 'A Defense of that most ancient and sacred ordinance of God, the Sabbath Day.' For this he was called to account before the 'Lord Archbishop of Canterbury' and the Court of High Commission. Several lords of his Majesty's Private Council, and many other persons of quality, were present at his examination" (ibid.).

Although encountering hostility from the state Church, the Sabbath was brought to the attention of the highest leaders in the land. The minuscule Church of God was no longer in hiding. However, its work in society began only with great difficulty.

Other advocates of the Sabbath gained significant attention in that century. Persons such as Philip Tandy, James Ockford and Francis Bampffield took their stand on the same biblical truth. By the end of the century, there were said to be 11 Sabbatarian congregations in different parts of England, as well as many scattered brethren.

### Persecution Again

However, in the 1660s, as has so often happened in the history of the Church, a new wave of persecution took place. After the interval of Oliver Cromwell's rule, the monarchy was restored and with it, a renewed desire to impose religious conformity.

Churchill describes how the legal implementation of this revived sentiment was to wreak havoc with religious groups that could have included Sabbatarians and others who differed for reason of conscience:

"Since Clarendon as Lord Chancellor was the chief Minister, and preponderant in the Government, his name is identified with the group of Acts which re-established the Anglican Church and drove the Protestant sects into enduring opposition. . . .

"Parliament recognised that there were religious bodies definitely outside the National Church, and determined, if not to extirpate them, at least to leave them outside under grievous disabilities" (*The New World*, pages 336-337).

This inflamed desire to crack down on dissidents led to another tragic episode in Church history.

Belcher writes: "On the 19th day of October, 1661, while Mr. [John] James was preaching, an officer entered the place of worship, pulled him down from the pulpit, and led him away to the police under a strong guard.

"About thirty members of his congregation were taken before a bench of justices then sitting at a tavern in the vicinity, where the oath of allegiance was tendered to each, and those who refused it were committed to Newgate Prison. Mr. James himself was examined and committed to Newgate, upon the testimony of several profligate witnesses, who accused him of speaking treasonable words against the King.

"His trial took place about a month afterward, at which he conducted himself in a manner to awaken much sympathy. He was, however, sentenced to be 'Hanged, drawn, and quartered.'

"This awful sentence did not dismay him in the least. He calmly said, 'Blessed be God, whom man condemneth, God justifieth.' While he lay in prison under sentence of death, many persons of distinction visited him, who were greatly affected by his piety and resignation.

"At the scaffold, on the day of his execution, Mr. James addressed the assembly in a very affectionate manner. Having finished his address, and kneeling down, he thanked God for covenant mercies... he prayed for the witnesses against him, for the executioner, for the people of God, for the removal of divisions, for the coming of Christ, for the spectators, and for himself....

"Then, having thanked the Sheriff for his courtesy, he said, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit....' After he was dead, his heart was taken out and burned, his quarters were affixed to the gates of the city, and his head was set up in Whitechapel on a pole opposite to the Alley in which his meeting house stood" (*Religious Denominations*, pages 230-231).

Many do not realize the dear price that had to be paid to obtain the religious freedoms we enjoy today. Freedom to openly worship on the seventh-day Sabbath was only just beginning in 17th century England.

### Seeking Freedom in America

With the death of John James, it was clear that the Church would need to find a safer haven, a place where it could grow and prosper without harassment. As had been demonstrated in the past, God's providential care was soon to be made manifest.

A man named Roger Williams had come to the Massachusetts Bay Colony of the New World in 1631. He was excited by the "wonderful, searching, disputing



***Many do not realize the dear price paid for the religious freedoms we enjoy today.***

and dissenting times" in which he lived (*Roger Williams: The Church and The State* by Edmund S. Morgan, page 3).

He soon found himself in profound disagreement with the leaders of the Puritan governed colony. They held that the civil government had a divinely ordained prerogative to impose its religious views on its subjects. In rejecting the supremacy of Rome, they substituted the authority of the civil magistrate in its stead.

Although Williams recognized the right of the state to enforce public morality as expressed in the last six commands of the Decalogue, he maintained the right of absolute freedom for the religious conscience. In addition, although he did have strong per-

sonal convictions himself, he did not believe any group had a monopoly on all truth.

Roger Williams was banished for his nonconformist ideas. The following words eloquently sum up the life and thinking of Williams, as well as the effect he had on the future development of the United States of America.

"In accordance with these principles, Roger Williams insisted in Massachusetts upon allowing entire freedom of conscience, and upon entire separation of Church and State. But he was obliged to flee, and in 1636 he formed in Rhode Island a small and new society, in which perfect freedom in matters of faith was allowed, and which the majority ruled in all civil affairs.

"Here in a little State, the fundamental principles of political and ecclesiastical liberty practically prevailed, before they were even taught in any of the schools of philosophy in Europe. At that time people predicted only a short existence for these democratical experiments—universal suffrage, universal eligibility to office, the annual change of rulers, perfect religious freedom....

"But not only have these ideas and these forms of government maintained themselves here, but precisely from this little State have they extended themselves throughout the United States.... They have given laws to a continent, and formidable through their moral influence, they lie at the bottom of all democratic movements which are now shaking the nations of Europe" (*An Introduction to the History of the Nineteenth Century* by Gervinus, as quoted by Belcher in *Religious Denominations*, page 153).

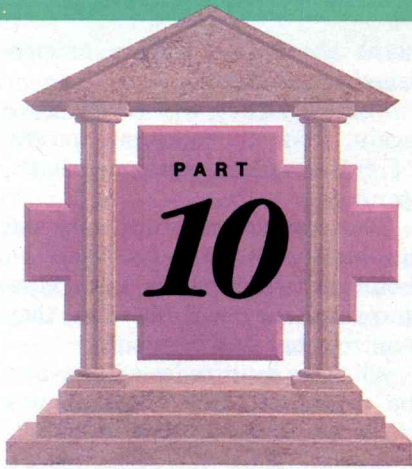
It was to this small but fertile field of religious freedom that a representative of the beleaguered Sabbatarian churches of England came in the year of 1664.

In the next installment we'll see how Sabbath-keeping congregations began to grow in the New World.

(To be continued)

Ronald D. Kelly





in the world of the 17th century?

The newly established colonies of America would provide safety at last for freedom-seeking religious groups from the Old World.

In *The Seventh Day Baptist Memorial, Volume I*, 1852, we read the following: "The Colony of Rhode Island was first settled by Englishmen, in the year 1636. Roger Williams—the first person in modern Christendom to maintain the doctrine of religious liberty and unlimited toleration"—

The first charter for the colony was a remarkable document. It provided, for the first time, freedom of religion. Thus, Rhode Island became the first colony in America to provide a safe haven for those of differing beliefs. Here is an excerpt from the charter which is on display at the Rhode Island state house:

"No person shall 'hereafter be molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question, for any difference in opinion in matters of religion, who do not disturb the civil peace.'"

As a result of this important document, Rhode Island attracted two of the most persecuted groups: Quakers and Baptists. In the surrounding colonies, they were treated with the intolerance they had sought to escape from in England—floggings, imprisonment and even hanging. The stage was now set for the Sabbatharians to arrive in the New World.

**Stephen Mumford**

Sometime around 1660 in England there were two new converts to the seventh-day Sabbath, Stephen and Ann Mumford. They lived in the town of Tewkesbury, where they were members of the Baptist Church.

Though the Baptists of the 17th century shared numerous beliefs with the Sabbatharians, a notable difference was the Sabbath. Baptists maintained the more commonly accepted practice of worshiping on the first day of the week.

According to James McGeachy in his paper titled "The Times of Stephen Mumford," published in 1964 by the Seventh-Day Baptist Historical Society, Stephen Mumford had become a member of the Bell Lane Sabbatarian Church until he left for America.

Based on the available evidence, the Mumfords were the first Christian Sabbath-keepers to

**The "Sabbath Path" alongside the Pawcatuck River, Rhode Island, leading to the Sabbath-keepers' meeting hall.**

# THE SABBATH COMES TO NEW ENGLAND

**A**s we move in our series on the Church of God throughout history into the 17th century, we find that religious freedom in England was hardly more than an aspiration. In spite of the Magna Carta, freedom is as elusive in the year 1660 as it had been 400 years before.

**Hope in the New World**

In the previous installment, we saw the death and mutilation of John James strike terror in the hearts of those who were keeping the seventh-day Sabbath in England. At that same time, laws were enacted making it illegal to hold religious gatherings on the seventh day.

For some Sabbatharians there was only one option. They would have to leave England to continue in the truth that had become their hallmark—the seventh-day Sabbath.

But where could they go? Where could they find religious tolerance

having been, as he says 'unkindly and unchristianly driven from his house,' . . . came over the river to a place called by the Indians *Mooshausick*, and by him named *Providence*" (page 22).

**A Charter for Freedom**

In 1643 Williams sailed to England to obtain a charter for a new colony. On May 19, 1647, "a General Assembly established a body of very good and wholesome laws, agreeable to the English statute book" (ibid.).

In *An Account of the Churches in Rhode-Island*, dated 1854, Henry Jackson wrote about the uniqueness of Roger Williams and what he did in Rhode Island: "I write of Roger Williams, the first missionary to the natives of our soil and the 'first legislator in the world,' (at least in its latter ages), 'who fully and effectually provided for and established a full, free, and absolute liberty of conscience.'"



arrive in America. They landed in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1665.

Stephen Mumford became a successful businessman and, according to the Newport Historical Society, built on Rhode Island one of the most impressive homes of that day. His house still stands in Newport and is today called the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard house.

Newport was a bustling New England village at the time Stephen Mumford arrived with his wife and young son, Stephen.

### **A Question of Fellowship**

There were two established churches in the town at that time: the Quaker Church on Farewell Street and the First Baptist Church, which overlooked Newport harbor.

Having been involved with the Baptist Church most of their lives, the Mumfords began fellowshiping with the Baptists in Newport. But they continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath in their home. Within a few years, nine members of the Baptist Church had begun to observe the Sabbath.

As one might imagine, this upset the Baptist ministers, who preached that Sabbath-keepers "had gone back to Moses." Four of the nine Sabbath-keepers were persuaded to return to Sunday worship.

This created a dilemma for the fledgling group of Sabbath-keepers. They withdrew from fellowship with the Baptist Church. The small group was faced with a difficult decision.

Several letters were written to the Bell Lane Church in England for advice. The Sabbatarians had no problem fellowshiping with those who had never acknowledged the seventh-day Sabbath. But to fellowship with those who had rejected this truth was not acceptable.

Here is an excerpt from a letter addressed to the group from Edward Stennet, a Sabbatarian in England. It is dated March 6, 1670:

"MY DEAR FRIENDS,—As for those that have drawn back from the Sabbath to profaneness, after light and establishment

therein, yourselves must not take pleasure in them, but must withdraw yourselves from them as sinful and disorderly persons; and if the church will hold communion with those apostates from the truth, you ought then to desire to be fairly dismissed from the church; which, if the church refuse, you ought to withdraw yourselves, and not be partakers of other men's sins, but keep yourselves pure, with all humility, meekness, and brokenness of heart." (This can be found in *The History of the Baptists* by Isaac Backus and in *The Seventh Day Baptist Memorial, Volume I* [pages 27-28]).

### **A New Sabbatarian Church**

The ministers of the First Baptist



*Rhode Island  
became the first  
American colony  
to provide a safe  
haven for  
differing beliefs.*

Church in Newport understandably went on the offensive against the Sabbath-keepers.

In several fiery sermons, various ministers, including John Clarke, founding member of Rhode Island and a close friend of Roger Williams, attacked the necessity of the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath in particular. The five Sabbath-keepers who had remained in fellowship with the Baptists realized that something had to be done. A hearing in 1671 was called with the leading ministers and the Sabbath-keepers.

This dramatic confrontation is recorded in *The Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*. All five were given an opportunity to speak, but the first one to speak up was Tacy

Hubbard. She is recorded as being the first colonist to convert to the seventh-day Sabbath.

The minutes from these meetings are preserved in the archives of the First Baptist Church in Newport. The blow-by-blow description gives insight into those willing to be ostracized from their peers because of staunch belief in keeping all ten of the commandments.

In December of 1671, seven people entered into a covenant to form a new Church in America. A plaque, in the old Sabbatarian meeting house in Newport honoring this event, says, in part:

"To the memory of Wm. Hiscox, Stephen Mumford, Samuel Hubbard, Roger Baster, Sister Hubbard, Sister Mumford, Sister Rachel Langworthy. Who for greater freedom in the exercise of religious faith in the observance of God's Holy Sabbath—the Seventh Day of the week—reluctantly severed their connection with the parent church, the First Baptist Church of Newport, and entered into a church covt. the 23rd day Dec., 1671."

### **Some Important Doctrines**

William Hiscox became the first minister of the new Church. They chose not to adopt an official name, because, to them, that would mean state recognition, which they felt was unnecessary.

William Lewis Burdick in *Bi-Centennial Celebration*, written in 1908 for the 200th anniversary of the Hopkinton Church, says: "The Church had neither official name nor articles of faith other than the Bible. . . . As to name, we find in the first minutes in the first record book extant the Church is referred to as 'The Church of Rhode Island and Westerly.' By 'Rhode Island' they meant the island, not the whole colony, and by 'Westerly' the towns of Westerly, Hopkinton, Charlestown, and Richmond. Some times it was spoken of as the 'Church,' at other times the 'Congregation,' but it had no official name" (page 31).

There are several references in the old minutes to the name "Church of God." They were

most commonly called "The Church of Jesus Christ Keeping the Commandments."

They maintained a strong belief in water baptism for adults and did not baptize children. They accepted the doctrine of the "laying on of hands"—a matter on which the Baptists in Rhode Island were divided.

Henry Clarke in *A History of the Sabbatarians or Seventh Day Baptists in America* (1811) claims they were strictly nontrinitarian, rejecting the popular viewpoint of that day: "I conclude they all believe in one God, the Father and Maker of all things, sin excepted, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, or that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and also in the Holy Ghost, as the operative power or spirit of God. But there are few if any, of this denomination, as I conceive, who believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are three absolute distinct persons, coequal, coessential, and coeternal Gods, and yet but one God; as such an idea would be in the face of scripture, and repugnant to right reason" (page 62).

Other characteristics Clarke lists concerning the beliefs of these people are "water-baptism, by way of immersion, and, generally, in the laying on of hands, as also the resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgment; likewise in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. . . .


"Some sections of several of those churches, believe in the washing [of] one another's feet, at appointed times" (pages 63-64).

We also find that they refused to use the title "reverend" for their ministers, since they observed that the Scriptures show only God is reverend.

Tamar Davis in her book *A General History of the Sabbatarian Churches* has this to say about some of the doctrines of this early Church: "The Sabbatarians have repeatedly taken action in their ecclesiastical bodies, against war, intemperance, slavery, secret societies, and the like, and in favour of the great moral reforms and benevolent enterprises of the age" (page 140).

We are indebted to the Newport Historical Society's old church record books, which the society has stored in the vault, for most of our information about these people. The records have the minutes of the Church from its inception. The earliest records still available begin in the year 1692. By that time, the Sabbatarian Church in Newport had 40 members. There were also a few members in western Rhode Island where the Sabbatarians experienced their most impressive growth over the next 100 years.

The Church in Hopkinton, considered a part of the Newport congregation until 1707, grew to become one of the largest in America with almost 1,000 members by 1816.



## *Sabbath-keepers in New England were part of early American history.*

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Stephen Mumford exerted considerable influence over the fledgling congregation of Sabbath-keepers in Rhode Island until his death in 1707. He and his wife, Ann, made a trip to England in 1675 to influence others to come to America. He was successful in securing the services of a Sabbatarian minister to replace the aging William Hiscox.

So now the chain was complete between the Church in England and the one in America with the arrival of William Gibson who became the second pastor of the Rhode Island churches after the death of William Hiscox in 1704.

There is no record of Stephen Mumford's ordination as a minister of the Church, but some records refer to him as a "minis-

ter" or a "missionary."

Stephen and Ann Mumford are buried in the Old Colonial Cemetery in Newport, Rhode Island. There is no record of their children accepting the religious beliefs that obviously meant so much to them.

But Stephen and Ann's faith and endurance provide an outstanding example for all to follow. In the face of many obstacles they held firm to their convictions.

The life of the early Sabbatarian Church in America was exciting. Much growth occurred during these formative years. Virtually every family in Rhode Island was touched by the Church and some of the most influential colonial men and women came out of the Sabbatarian Church of Newport and Hopkinton.

### **Sabbath Influence in the Colonies**

Landmarks in the western part of the state of Rhode Island still attest to the influence of these dedicated Sabbath-keepers. Such names as "Boom Bridge" and "The Sabbath Path" date back to the days of the Sabbatarians.

Boom Bridge is a narrow bridge that crosses the Pawcatuck River from Connecticut into Rhode Island. Its name comes from the days when the more enterprising Sabbatarians in Connecticut created a shortcut by felling a large oak tree and placing it across the stump like a boom and then swinging individuals across the river to attend Sabbath services.

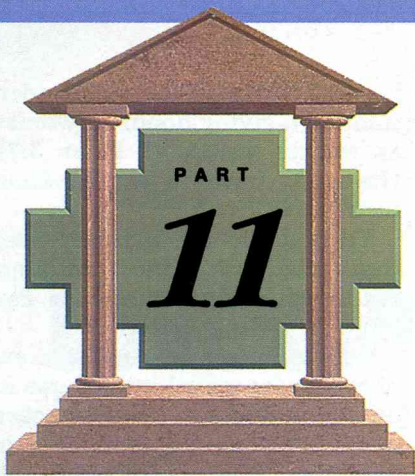
Needless to say, it is recorded that on several occasions people came to services soaking wet! The Sabbath Path was the safer route from Connecticut into Rhode Island for services. It is no longer visible today, but many of the old deeds still make reference to "the Sabbath Path."

Many may not have realized that Sabbath-keepers in Colonial New England were an important part of the history of early America. In the next installment, we'll see how they moved westward with pioneering zeal.

*(To be continued)*

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Ronald D. Kelly and Jimmy Franks



early history of Rhode Island during the 18th century was the Wards. Their ties with the Sabbatarian Churches in Newport and Westerly ran deep.

Thomas Ward came to Newport from England shortly after the death of Oliver Cromwell, and his name appears on the list of freemen in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, in 1655, and on the roll of Newport that same year. He died in 1689, survived by his second wife and an only child, Richard.

Manning, was also a Sabbatarian.

In 1765, during Ward's term as governor, the English Parliament passed the Stamp Act. Governor Ward was the only governor in the colonies who refused to take the supporting oath.

In 1769 Samuel Ward wrote a letter to the Sabbatarian Church requesting baptism. It provides insight into his personal beliefs and those of the Church he was asking to baptize him.

This letter is preserved in *Samuel Ward: Founding Father*, by Kenneth E. Smith:

"To the Sabbatarian Church of Christ in Westerly & Hopkinton: Being fully satisfied that Baptism is a Christian Duty I desire to be admitted to that Ordinance this Day: my Life & Conversation are well known; my religious Sentiments are That there is one God the Father of whom are all things and one Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all Things, That the Universe thus created has been preserved and governed by infinite Wisdom, Power and Goodness from the Beginning, That mankind having fallen into the most gross & unnatural Idolatry, Superstition and Wickedness it pleased God for their Recovery to make a Revelation of his mind & will in the holy Scriptures which (excepting the ceremonial Law and some part of the Judicial Law peculiar to the Jews) It is the Duty of all mankind to whom they are made known sincerely to believe and obey: my Sins I sincerely & heartily repent of and firmly rely upon the unbounded Goodness and Mercy of God in his only begotten Son Christ Jesus for Pardon & eternal Life: and I sincerely desire and Resolve by his Grace for the future to walk in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord."

Sam Ward

August 5, 1769

Samuel Ward counted among

## WAR AND THE NEW FRONTIER

**T**HE 18TH CENTURY was a time of vigorous growth for the Sabbath-keepers of New England. The fledgling group that began in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1671, soon expanded.

Several interesting personalities appeared among the Sabbatarians in this exciting period of history.

Samuel Hubbard and his wife, Tacy, were among the earliest settlers in Rhode Island. Tacy Hubbard is regarded as the first native-born American to convert to Sabbath-keeping.

Samuel Hubbard was one of 15 founding members of the First Baptist Church in Newport in the year 1644. A few years later he became a Sabbath-keeper. In his journal, Samuel goes to great lengths to record the dates his family began observing the Sabbath. He was influential in the community and a close friend of Roger Williams, the colony's founder.

### A Family of Governors

Another family influential in the

Richard later served as Secretary of State for the colony and then as governor (1741-1742). Richard and his wife, Mary, are buried in the Colonial Cemetery on Farewell Street in Newport.

Their headstone mentions their membership in the Sabbatarian Church of Newport. Mary was a member for 55 years, but Richard was not baptized until 1753, after retiring from public office.

Samuel Ward, grandson of Thomas Ward, was born May 27, 1725. He was an energetic young man, and although primarily self-educated, he eventually served as governor of the Colony for three terms during the years before the Revolutionary War. He was a member of the Continental Congress at his death in 1776.

He was also a founder of Rhode Island College, established in 1764 (now Brown University). Of the college's original seven trustees, four were Sabbatarian Church members (not including Samuel). And the first president, James

Some of the younger offspring took conflicting sides in the Revolutionary War, estranging family or social ties.



ANDREASSEN

his personal friends such famous Americans as Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Adams, Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry.

### The Name of the Church

In the early 18th century the Hopkinton congregation outgrew the mother church at Newport to become what may have been the largest single Sabbatarian Church congregation in the New World.

The records of these earliest Sabbatarian congregations mention the name "Church of God." Although fire destroyed the original records of the Newport church, a copy reads:

"Under the former dispensation there was a church and a world as there is now; and as it is the duty of the world now to repent and believe in the Gospel, so it was the duty of the world to be proselyted and joined to the then Church of God" (*Seventh-day Baptist Memorial*. vol. 1, page 36).

In questioning a candidate for the ministry, elders asked: "Have you entire freedom to administer the ordinances of God among them as a Church of God, to pray with them and for them, and endeavor to build them up in the faith?" (*ibid.*, vol. 2, no. 4, page 160).

In 1705, a new congregation was established in Piscataway, New Jersey. The first statement in the old church record book, after the Articles of Faith, is this: "The Church of God keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ, living in Piscataway, and Hopewell, in the Province of New Jersey" (*ibid.*, vol. 2, no. 3, page 121).

In the founding of a church in Shrewsbury, New Jersey, in 1745, the pastor received the following instruction:

"I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, that thou take the charge of the Church of God dwelling at Shrewsbury" (*ibid.*, page 160).

### Continued Growth


By the latter part of the 18th century other Churches of God were founded throughout New Jersey,

Connecticut and New York. Further expansion occurred when, in 1780, some members of the Hopkinton church migrated to Rensselaer County, New York, to found a Sabbatarian church in the community of Berlin.


In the early part of the 18th century, the Sabbatarian doctrine spread in some unusual ways.

In one instance, a Baptist named Edmund Dunham was challenged about the seventh day on his way to church one Sunday. Eventually he and 17 other members of his church decided to form their own fellowship at Piscataway, New Jersey. Dunham, acknowledging the authority of the Hopkinton church, traveled there to be ordained.

He was succeeded by his son,



***Although a time  
of growth, the  
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War proved to  
be a heartache  
for the Church.***



Jonathan, who pastored the church during the devastating days of the Revolutionary War.

In another case, a split in the ranks of the Quakers led to Sabbath-keeping churches in the Philadelphia area. A few of this faith came to believe they needed more than the "inner light" the Quakers taught—that the need to obey the commandments of God was an important key to Christian growth.

Abel Noble, one of their number, became persuaded by a traveling Baptist minister that baptism should be by immersion. Having also become convinced that he should observe the seventh-day Sabbath, Noble led these former Quakers in forming a new congregation in Newtown, Penn-

sylvania. From this beginning, churches at Nottingham and Pennepeck were also established in southeastern Pennsylvania.

One author stated that by the end of the 18th century, there were 1,769 members in all these Sabbatarian churches in the above mentioned states. He estimated that, when all those attending, including children, were counted, the number was more than 7,000 (*A History of the Sabbatarians or Seventh Day Baptists [in] America*, by Henry Clarke, page 59).

### Revolutionary War's Effects

Although this was a time of growth, the Revolutionary War soon proved to be a heartache for these congregations.

Henry Clarke provides this moving personal account: "Mr. Ebenezer David, who was converted in Providence College and took his first degree there in 1772, was admitted as a member of this church, Sept. 12, 1770, and called by the church, to the improvement of his gift... and he was ordained, May 31, 1775. He being a young man, and our churches then supplied with preachers, he accepted the place of chaplain in the American army; where he was much esteemed—He died in the army, near Philadelphia, March 19, 1778, in the bloom of his days.

"I was well acquainted with Mr. David; and may safely say, that few young men can be found more promising than he was.

"The church at Newport, about this time, experienced very heavy afflictions.—Their pastor's death—about the same time this youth died.—As the seat of war was there their deacon, Mr. Tanner, a man much esteemed, with Col. Bennet and a number of their principal members, left the Island to be more secure from the British, and moved into different parts of the country for refuge.—None but those who have experienced the like, can sympathize with them" (*ibid.*, page 21).

The New Jersey churches underwent the same test.

The Pennsylvania churches likewise were tried to the limit: "The close of the Revolutionary War

found the several congregations of Seventh Day Baptists in Pennsylvania depleted in numbers. . . . The tide of war had swept in its fury over the fertile fields of southeastern Pennsylvania. . . . To comply with these enforced demands from friend and foe, brought ruin to many, while to all it proved a serious loss. Then again some of the younger scions took sides with one or the other of the conflicting parties, thereby estranging family and social ties; others who entered the military service, by strange and rude associations were alienated from the faith of their fathers; while the older generation, who, by age, or for their faith or principle's sake, refused to take an active part in the struggle for Independence, were looked upon with suspicion, as harbouring sentiments favouring the enemy" (from *A History of the Sabbatarians*, page 1,208).

Many sincere Christians, as throughout the history of Christianity, were forced to put their lives on the line for the principles they held dear. The consciences of many, based on Jesus Christ's clear teaching that his kingdom was not of this world, did not permit them to take up arms. Others chose to take sides in the conflict and the congregations as a whole paid a terrible price.

### **The Sabbath Is Tested**

Hardly more than a decade after the war, the Sabbatarians of Pennsylvania received another severe blow. The clergy of many faiths began to sound the alarm about the appalling increase in immorality and godlessness that had developed during the war years.

In addition, a devastating yellow fever epidemic swept through Philadelphia in 1793, causing many to proclaim it a visitation of God's wrath upon the people for their sins.

As a consequence, Sabbatarians, along with other clergy, supported a bill titled "Suppression of Vice and Immorality" before the Pennsylvania legislature. One of its provisions stated that it was "peculiarly necessary to make some

effectual provision for the orderly and religious observance of the Lord's-day: for the prevention and punishment of the profanation of the name of God, and every species of impious imprecation" (ibid., page 1,214).

These churches of southeastern Pennsylvania comprehended too late the threat to seventh-day observance. Over much protest even from some of other faiths, the "Blue Law of 1794" was set in motion.

Involvement in political affairs did not prove a rewarding experience to these churches.

Restrictive blue laws constantly harassed Sabbath-keeping churches as they spread from the east. A noted constitutional scholar wrote: "Enforcing Sunday



***Many sincere  
Christians put  
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held dear.***

laws against those observing Saturday . . . would seem clearly to be discriminatory and inconsistent with the American tradition of fair play.

"Moreover, it seems as clearly to restrict the religious liberty of one whose conscience requires him to observe a day other than Sunday as holy time; and it is hardly a sufficient answer to say—as some courts have—that the law does not compel him to violate his conscience by working on Saturday.

"By requiring him to abstain from engaging in his trade or his business two days a week while his Sunday-observing competitor need only abstain one day a week, it obviously imposes on him a competitive disadvantage, and

thus penalizes him for adhering to his religious beliefs" (*Church, State, and Freedom* by Leo Pfeffer, page 235).

### **The Westward Migration**

In the early decades of the 19th century, a definite pattern of movement of Sabbath-keepers occurred with the advancing frontier.

Historian Ray Allen Billington succinctly explains the logic of migration: "Three factors contributed to everyman's decision to move to the frontier, conditions at home, the ease with which he could reach the west, and the attractiveness of the region ahead" (*A Free People In Search of a Free Land*, page 32, quoted from *Western Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*).

Frederick Jackson Turner writes of the Trans-Appalachian route taken by many from the eastern seaboard to the Middle West: "The second generation was ready to seek new lands; and these the Erie Canal and lake navigation opened to them, and the Vermonsters, and other venturesome spirits of New England.

"It was this combined New York-New England stream that in the thirties poured in large volume into the zone north of the settlements which have been described. . . . The newcomers filled in the southern counties of Michigan and Wisconsin, the northern counties of Illinois, and parts of the northern and central areas of Indiana" (ibid., pages 79-80, quoted from *Frontiers in American History*).

And as the magazine *Sabbath Recorder* reported, "The country south and west of the Great Lakes was then tempting people in the East to remove and seek homes in its fertile lands" (ibid., page 80).

From this area a body to be known as the Church of God would arise in the decades before the Civil War. By the middle of the 19th century, this Church of God faced yet another test.

(To be continued)

**Ronald D. Kelly  
and Charles Vorhes**





and locomotives, mining and manufacturing.

### Enter William Miller

In 1831 there stepped into this expanding, modernizing world a prosperous retired farmer from New York named William Miller. His study of the Scriptures led him to believe that Jesus Christ had promised to return.

Armed with a small amount of prophetic knowledge, Miller vigorously preached from the books

been a mistake and held that 1844 had no prophetic meaning.

In the meantime, a young woman named Ellen G. (Harmon) White began to receive visions. A large number of Miller's followers accepted her visions as inspiration from God. Thus began Seventh-day Adventism.

A minority calling themselves the Church of God refused to believe that these visions were divine revelations.

In one of these visions, Mrs. White finally asserted that the name Church of God was no longer to be used: "No name which we can take will be appropriate but that which accords with our profession, and expresses our faith, and marks us as a peculiar people.

"The name Seventh-Day Adventist carries the true features of our faith in front, and will convict the inquiring mind" (*Testimonies of the Church* by Ellen G. White, pages 223-224).

In response to this line of reasoning, Waterman Phelps, an advocate of the name Church of God, was quoted in the pages of *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*:

"I think it not difficult to determine what name they will have, when we consult Rev. 14:1, 'Having his father's name in their foreheads.' Chapter 3:12: 'I will write upon them the name of my God.' And with this agrees the apostle in all his epistles. They are addressed to the Church of God. Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; . . . Galatians 1:13; I Timothy 3:5. Now if we have the right to depart from the simplicity of the gospel in one instance, have we not in another?" (*A History of the Church of God (Seventh Day)* by John Kiesz, pages 13-14).

Other groups came out of William Miller's teachings, maintaining a belief in the return of Christ, but having differing theological viewpoints. They contin-

# CHURCH RECEIVES NEW STRENGTH

ONE OF the most dynamic half-centuries of the modern era in the Western world was 1775 to 1825. The American Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars set the stage for the development of the modern world.

By 1800 London had become the international center of finance. In 1803 the greatest land deal in history took place—the Louisiana Purchase.

For a paltry three cents an acre (seven cents per hectare) the United States purchased about 530,000,000 acres (214,000,000 hectares) of land from France. That opened the door for the United States to begin its ascent to greatness.

The Industrial Revolution, already a half-century old, would change the world with steamships

of Daniel and Revelation the "soon-coming Second Advent." He thought it would happen in 1843-44. His spell-binding oratory influenced thousands to come out of various denominations and to believe the "end was near."

When the date he predicted came and went without the second coming, the great joy of many turned into the "Great Disappointment." This period of deep disillusionment caused the majority to be overcome with discouragement.

But many among those who listened to William Miller and believed in the premillennial return of Christ became Sabbatharians after 1845. They described themselves as the "Church of God."

Those who would continue to use this designation realized that William Miller's date setting had

**From Oregon's Willamette Valley in the mid-1930s sprang the *World Tomorrow* broadcast.**



ued to observe Sunday as a day of worship.

The controversy among the Sabbath-keeping believers resulted in a conference at Battle Creek, Michigan, September 26 to October 1, 1860. A large part of the group chose the name Seventh-day Adventist over the Church of God.

This decision marked the beginning of what were to become two separate organizations proclaiming significantly different messages. Two years later the Church of God established headquarters in Stanberry, Missouri.

### Finding a Common Belief

Those Sabbatarians who rejected the visions of Mrs. White began to coalesce around a publication named *The Hope of Israel*. It was founded in Michigan by churches led by Gilbert Cranmer, a foundational leader of what was to become the Church of God.

The first issue of *The Hope of Israel*, dated August 10, 1863, ran the following letter from a Samuel Davison: "The account you give of the churches of God in Michigan looking for the appearing of the Lord is to us very grateful information. We have often felt like Elijah when he made complaint against Israel, saying, 'I, even I only am left; and they seek my life to take it away.' We hope that it may prove now as then, that the Lord hath reserved unto himself seven thousand in Israel; names that have not bowed the knee to Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed his image.

"It is very encouraging for us to find, that unknown to each other, there are now found to be bands of brethren and sisters, and many individuals, isolated from each other, in several different states, who have believed the same things, taken the same position, set out to seek the same objects, by the same means, and, so far as now appears, filled with the same spirit, and having the same hope of inheriting the kingdom of God; looking for it as nigh at hand" (*History of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*, pages 25-26).


*The Hope* was backed by groups

calling themselves variously "Church of God" (as in Iowa and Wisconsin) or "Church of Christ" (as in Michigan) or "Church of the Firstborn" (as on the East Coast).

However, as Samuel Davison attested, they held a common bond of beliefs. The Seventh-day Adventists held some similar beliefs—the Ten Commandments as being in force, rejection of the immortality of the soul, and belief in the visible and personal second coming of Christ—but they differed in other significant ways.

### Developing Doctrines

The various Churches of God and Christ held that Jesus Christ would reign on earth, not heaven, for the 1,000-year period called the Millennium. The earth, rather



## *The Industrial Revolution would change the world with steamships and locomotives, mining and manufacturing.*

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than being desolate, would be restored to Edenic beauty. They held the "age-to-come" doctrine, that "probation would be open" during the 1,000 years of Christ's rule over the nations. This meant that, contrary to the belief sanctioned by Mrs. White through her visions, all opportunity for salvation would not end with the second coming.

The August 23, 1867, *The Hope of Israel* mentioned rejection of the Trinity doctrine as magazine editorial policy (ibid., page 101).

Also, during the Civil War years, there was an editorial consensus that it was wrong to kill one's fellowman. The April 23, 1865, issue reflected such in its

touching comment on the tragic death of President Abraham Lincoln: "We thank God that President Lincoln, kind and feeling as he was, and pious too, according to his idea of piety, did cause to be made such laws as would deliver God's saints from participating in war. To this end let us pray for our future rulers, a law-abiding and devoted people, to the end that we may be able to live quiet and peaceable lives in his honor and glory" (*History of the Church of God (Seventh Day)*, page 84).

### A National Headquarters

*The Hope of Israel* remained in Michigan until 1866 when it was moved to Marion, Iowa. Later, with greater membership growth, the center of the Church's work shifted to Stanberry, Missouri.

The magazine was moved there in 1888. By the turn of the 20th century, the name was changed to *The Bible Advocate*. It continues to be published by its present administration near Denver, Colorado.

As time passed, an increased sense of organizational unity developed. A General Conference of the Church of God was formed in 1884, mainly from the membership in Missouri, Iowa and Michigan.

In its constitution, this body stated as its purpose: "To unite the different state conferences; to take general oversight over the wants of the cause, and supply the same; to secure unity of action and belief, so that we may be of one mind and one spirit."

In 1899, in its annual meeting, the General Conference incorporated in the state of Missouri. As the story moved into the 20th century, state conferences were found as far afield as South Dakota, Oregon and Louisiana.

The unification process extended also to doctrine. *The Bible Advocate* of March 13, 1917, published what were said to be the official teachings of the Church of God, compiled under the authorship of Andrew N. Dugger, editor.

With time, however, a growing dissatisfaction with Mr. Dugger's leadership surfaced and divided

the Church in 1931. The Oregon Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day), for example, became essentially autonomous.

Meanwhile, a dramatic new development occurred in the history of the Church of God.

### **Herbert Armstrong's Calling**

In 1924 a young advertising man, Herbert Armstrong, moved with his wife and family to the Willamette Valley in Oregon. The Armstrongs were Quakers and Methodists by religious upbringing, but were not especially active in any faith or local church.

A neighbor woman in Salem introduced Mrs. Armstrong to a study of the seventh-day Sabbath. In turn, Loma Armstrong excitedly introduced this "new truth" to her husband.

Rather than receive it with joy, Mr. Armstrong was shocked and embarrassed. He thought his wife had become a religious fanatic, so he set out to convince her that all those churches that kept Sunday couldn't be wrong. "The Bible must state somewhere that Sunday is the Sabbath, not Saturday," he said.

He began an extensive study of the Bible to prove his wife wrong. He spent days, then weeks, then months in the public library.

First, Mr. Armstrong had to prove the existence of God. He, like so many, had simply taken God's existence for granted.

Then he had to determine whether or not the Bible was the inspired word of God. After all, the Bible was the only real source of information about God, Jesus Christ, and this Sabbath question.

Mr. Armstrong's study was long and exciting. After months of study, he proved to himself there really is an Eternal God.

He also proved to his satisfaction that the Bible was the inspired word of God.

To his amazement he found that the Sabbath of the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, is the seventh day of the week.

He and his wife began to observe the Sabbath with a small group of believers, a congregation of the Oregon Conference of the

Church of God (Seventh Day).

### **Fledgling Work Starts**

Because members came to see that Mr. Armstrong had studied the Bible intensely, many came to him with questions about the Bible. Certainly Mr. Armstrong had no intent to become a minister, but his personality, zeal, voice and leadership began to propel him in that direction.

He was asked to speak regularly to a small congregation of the Church of God and in June 1931, was ordained to the ministry.

These were the financially severe days of the Great Depression. In the midst of this trying time, a door opened—a door Mr. Armstrong soon saw would make it possible to proclaim the gospel

gospel. First, the radio broadcast, then known as *The Radio Church of God*. This was the beginning of what is now the *World Tomorrow* broadcast and telecast, which today airs on stations worldwide.

The broadcast was then to be backed up by the magazine. Of *The Plain Truth* Mr. Armstrong wrote: "No publication could have had a more humble, or a smaller start. But it was a start. It grew. It was improved, as scanty funds permitted. It took years before we were able to have it printed on a printing press. But through the years it has been instrumental in making drastic changes in thousands of lives" (*Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, vol. I, page 543).

The third part of this thrust was to be personal evangelistic campaigns. Held mainly in schoolhouses and small rented halls in northern Oregon, they brought vital supporters into the work.

Although this minuscule beginning was to lead to a worldwide work, Mr. Armstrong felt compelled to record in his *Autobiography*: "But I most certainly did not sit down, in the fall of 1933, and lay out detailed plans in my human mind for a great, powerful, earth-encircling program to reach and influence the millions in every nation.

"There was no thought then of a gigantic radio program, and a publishing enterprise, starting in Eugene, Oregon, but soon expanding to every inhabited continent; there certainly was no thought of the massive television program of today" (*ibid.*, page 536).

### **College Founded**

In 1947 Mr. Armstrong moved the small office staff from Eugene to Southern California, where he purchased a small property in the beautiful city of Pasadena. In what had formerly been a private residence, he founded Ambassador College.

As the years went by, Ambassador College grew in numbers of students and in educational opportunities. In 1960 a second campus opened in Hertfordshire, England. And in 1964 a third



## ***The controversy among the Sabbath-keeping believers resulted in a conference at Battle Creek, Michigan.***

of Jesus Christ to hundreds, even thousands of people at one time. The door was radio.

On perhaps the smallest of radio stations, 100 watts of power, in Eugene, Oregon, Mr. Armstrong began to preach, on a regular basis, beginning the first Sunday in January 1934. People began to write in.

One month later, a dream he had had for seven years came true—the birth of *The Plain Truth*, "a magazine of understanding."

### **A Plan to Preach the Gospel**

Mr. Armstrong, with the backing of many Oregon brethren, devised a three-point plan to preach the

campus opened in East Texas.

With the radio program and the magazine widely available, hundreds of families started writing for personal guidance. Many hoped for a church congregation near where they lived.

The college began to provide the much-needed help. Worldwide, graduates became pastors, staffed offices, or started to write for the publications. They became part of a growing organization.

In 1990 the educational arm of the Worldwide Church of God, Ambassador College, consolidated at one location (Big Sandy, Texas). There in the beauty and peaceful calm of the East Texas woods a student enrollment of now nearly 1,500 learn not only how to earn a living, but more importantly how to live. Graduates become pillars in local church congregations, leading happy and successful lives. Some become ministers. Others serve in foreign offices. Still others staff positions at the Church headquarters in Pasadena, California.

In the mid-1950s Mr. Armstrong ventured into the new field of television. But it was premature. Radio was still the better tool for the work then.

### **Mr. Armstrong's Legacy**

But by the late 1960s, television became a much more effective medium to preach the gospel. The *World Tomorrow* television program again began regular weekly broadcasting in 1967.

*The Plain Truth* grew in quality and scope. First it became a "legitimate" magazine, not just a mimeographed paper. Then photographs and other graphic elements were added. It finally became a full-color, high-quality magazine.

Today, the *World Tomorrow* program and the *Plain Truth* magazine continue to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ to almost every nation on earth.

In January 1986 Mr. Armstrong at age 93, after more than 55 years of faithful service to the Church of God, died peacefully. He had worked up to his last days, writing, editing and producing televi-

sion programs.

He could joyfully look back on a lifetime of dedication. He could clearly remember that the great work God had used him to begin started like a mustard seed, then grew to where it had branched worldwide.

### **Passing the Baton**

As Mr. Armstrong realized his physical strength was failing, he appointed Joseph W. Tkach to take over the office of Pastor General—the chief administrative office for the Church. Mr. Tkach immediately took that responsibility in January 1986.

Joseph W. Tkach had been director of the Church ministry worldwide for several years preceding the death of Herbert Arm-



## ***The Church founded by Jesus Christ will not die—but will prevail against all odds.***

strong. In that capacity, he had worked on virtually a day-to-day basis with Mr. Armstrong.

The television crew prepared a special tribute program after the death of Mr. Armstrong. And the next week new presenters were selected. Rather than continue with just one television personality, Mr. Tkach appointed David Hulme to prepare the first programs and then added Richard Ames, David Albert and later Ronald Kelly to the team of television presenters.

Under Mr. Tkach's direction and encouragement, the *World Tomorrow* television program has continued to grow. According to the Arbitron and Nielsen rating services, *The World Tomorrow* is consistently in one of the top two

positions among religious programs in the United States.

The *Plain Truth* magazine continues to proclaim the way of salvation to the world. It is produced in seven language editions and mailed to readers in 197 countries and dependencies.

In addition to the Church work and the College, Ambassador Foundation, the cultural and service arm of the Church, serves peoples of many languages and cultures.

### **Looking to the Future**

As we have seen in this 12-part series, the history of the Church of God is a living study of trials and triumphs, difficulties and successes. We can only guess how, at different periods of time, a faithful few believers managed to survive. But when all hope seemed lost, we saw God send someone to rekindle the message of the Bible.

We started our history with the words of Jesus Christ: "I will build my church; and the gates of hell [the grave or death] shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). The Church founded by Jesus Christ will not die—but will prevail against any and all odds.

Christ's work through the Church started with the work of the apostles Jesus personally chose. And from the first century to our day, countless thousands have striven to follow the way and teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Under the leadership of Joseph W. Tkach, the Church of God is carefully planning for the 21st century. What it will be like no one knows for certain, for these are dynamic times. The world plunges ahead not knowing where it is headed.

What we do know is that Jesus Christ promised to guide his Church and to come again—to bring this world the peace, happiness and prosperity everyone so desperately desires. That's the good news of the world tomorrow. Until Christ comes, his Church works to spread that good news around the world.

**Ronald D. Kelly**

**The Plain Truth**