

Five Reasons for Church Reform (Continued from page 5)  
much greater.

When we do right things in the world--things to bring joy to others, suddenly we find joy for ourselves, and fellowship with those of similar and like persuasion.

If we are in Christ and learn to respect each other, humbly walk side by side with fellow-Christians; if we do not seek to force our own way; if we seek to understand others--their good motives and their problems; and when we seek that which is above, unity will arrive--the kind of unity that is coveted.

We should not insist on unity of personal thoughts, for then we destroy the source of light and life, and deny the working of the Spirit. In differences, there can be exploration of truth, exercise in patience and charity, and a firm arrival at a strong unity of faith and teaching of God's word--and unity in the love of God.

The message of the Church of God--its essential, established message--has been overshadowed by corrupt systems which reform seeks to correct. The message has become of little effect in a setting of human chaos and lack of Christian dignity.

The message will become strong, powerful, and converting, the day that we are restored to the principles of Christian reform and revival.

If we who have questioned and raised our voices in warning are silenced and destroyed, the questioning will cease for a time. The silence might please and comfort the opposers of reform. But, a confused church, under bondage to that which is wrong, will continue to follow in an ever-narrowing circle, until the circle is at last irrevocably closed; and "the closing of the circle may represent the end of something precious to us all."

Such will be the lament--the epitaph--of an unreformed and unconverted church, or people. May it now be our lament.

Instead of disappearing, we hope first to show the conditions which have appalled us and led us to our firm stand, so that reform can be realized.

We trust in a holy God, that our course of action will help to resolve the more serious problems which have plagued the Church of God, 7th Day, and have caused such loss to the Cause.

May our efforts be in keeping with our responsibility to God; to the church in all fidelity to its mission; and to the saints everywhere, is our prayer.

--Lois Merriam

Suit Filed in Civil Court by General Conference Officials (Continued from page 1)

The Rev. Straub said three directors--Blanke, Pidilla, and Perry--have voted in favor of the action of the General Conference (Perry, Blanke, and Pidilla are not directors, terms having expired in January and were not reelected --Ed.).

Robert Mertz, attorney for the plaintiff said, '...The State Conference serves as an advisory board for the assistance of the overseer, the Rev. Israel Haeger of North Sacramento, and serves to plan for the welfare of the churches under its jurisdiction. However, churches do not have to abide by any rulings other than those issued by the General Conference....'

The General Conference, a world-wide organization with headquarters in Denver, and incorporation in Missouri, filed suit in the San Joaquin County Superior Court in Stockton, asking the state group be dissolved and its privileges be forfeited because of alleged abuse of authority....

'The members in California want the dissolution of the State Conference for their own protection,' said Rev. Straub. 'The people presently ignore the state board rulings because they want to cooperate with the General Conference.' ...

Pastor of the local church at Poplar and Washington Streets is Leo S. Merriam, who is one of the 10 state directors named as defendants in the suit (the state board is composed of seven members, not 10--Ed.).

And so it goes, splashed in newspaper headlines. This further emphasizes the fact that some General Conference officials will go to great lengths in their efforts to "rule or ruin" (the Lodi Report is available for those who request it).

Statements by the official (or officials) named in the above newspaper report, will doubtless not go unchallenged. The California State Conference officials, elected by the people, are deemed capable of defending the (Continued on page 10)

## LOCAL CHURCH AUTONOMY

and

THE PASTOR

Greater Incentive and Keener Sense of Responsibility

Since local autonomy or congregational administration of the Church has been stressed, many having membership in the Church of God, 7th Day, are perhaps troubled in mind as to how the pastor can adjust himself to a change in church government. Does a pastor have proper incentives to meet his responsibilities in a congregational church? Does ecclesiastical history reveal instances in congregational forms of church government with proper incentives to inspire the ministers in their work? Have churches under other forms of government better incentives?

The late Laymen's Research Committee advocated local autonomy. The present Reform and Planning Association advocates local church autonomy also. Neither has had the blessing of the General Conference Executive Committee. Because they have advocated local autonomy, both the LRC and the RPA have been accused of causing division or split in the Church of God organization.

More Whys!

Will any of the Executive Board name a time within the last third of a century when the Church of God, 7th Day, has been united? The attempts to form mergers of the existing factions are proof unity has not existed. Why continue a system that has been unable to bring about unity and harmony? Where and what are the incentives in such a set-up? Why accuse others of causing a split when there has not been unity? Why not acknowledge the fact that there is disunity, and seek the real cause of disunity? Why, at the present time, are some churches under the direction of the Executive Board losing members? Why is it some pastors under the present set-up have been petitioned to resign by the local people, and have been kept on by the District Overseer without respecting the wishes of the people? Why is the total membership of the Church of God in the United States decreasing? Are there proper incentives for loyalty under this set-up? And loyalty to whom (God or man)? Will the Executive Board deny these conditions exist?

Time for Facts to Be Considered

It is time facts are considered. It is time for General Conference leadership to investigate new Scriptural and historical evidence regarding early church practices. It is time ministers of the Church of God took a solemn view of their responsibilities as leaders in the work they pretend to be doing, and be less critical of those who are exposing errors that exist in the administration of the denomination. It is a known fact that it is growing more difficult to interest people in Scriptural matters. There are many causes for this. One big cause is the divided state of Christendom. If all the churches were led by the Holy Spirit there would be a solid front to face the unbelieving world. Divisions are a shame to the Christian world, and divisions within an organization are causes of weakness.

A Serious Charge

The charge came from a member of the Executive Board, that local autonomy offers no incentive to the pastor to develop ministerial responsibility. Will the brother consider what is written regarding early, New Testament churches in this respect? Will we compare incentives offered by other forms of administration? Were the apostles without proper incentives?

Historical Record

Church history reveals that early New Testament churches were congregational in government. Church history also reveals that this form of church government declined as the apostasy grew. And as the apostasy grew and spread, many of a Diotrephes character cast out of church fellowship those who dared to differ with them (1 John 1:10). Could there be legitimate incentives under conditions like that, in which a minister or lay member stood in jeopardy if he dared to differ with those (Cont'd on page 8)

Local Church Autonomy and the Pastor (Continued from page 7)

assuming authority to cast out members? Some bishops gained more authority than others, and they issued orders to bishops and priests of the lower ranks. If those in the lower ecclesiastical ranks dared to disobey the higher-ups, they were dealt with, and not always in a Christian spirit. If one in the lower grades desired to continue in office he was forced to obey those in the higher brackets. Could there be an incentive, except for a desire for personal promotion to a higher office by court ing the favor of those above him? That would be a selfish motive; pure and simple.

After the Reformation began, denominations were formed. At the present there are many denominations, to the disgust of many Christians. And these denominations, following the pattern of Roman Catholicism, exercise undue, dominating authority over local churches. Pastors of the local churches are supposed to support any and every program approved by denominational leaders, and if he dissents in any way he is a marked man. What incentive exists in such a case, save for hopes of personal gain and power. Does the pastor, in order to keep his position in such a case, feed the flock "meat in due season," or does he preach what he is told to preach by those who lord it over the churches?

Free and Honest Thinking Discouraged

Regimented and overly organized denominations discourage free and honest thinking. A pastor and the laity are to let the higher-ups do all the thinking and planning. Can proper incentives exist under such conditions? Many organized denominations have their schools and colleges, and will not approve or recommend a pastor who has not studied a course of theology in said schools. And a pastor from such a school feels under obligation to follow what he has been taught in the schools. All incentives for doing otherwise are thus removed. Many examples could be given to show that under such a set-up, local autonomy has been lost.

It is not the purpose of this article to degrade an educated ministry. Minister need to be educated. They need a preparation for their work that will enable them to meet other ministers and people in general without embarrassment. Above all, minister need to be trained to recognize the leading of the Holy Spirit. Without this, all the training from denominational schools will not qualify them for proper leadership as pastors of their respective churches.

What More from History?

Church history reveals the fact that the early New Testament churches were granted local autonomy. No conference, no assembly, no association, no convention, no synod, and no presbytery had authority over them. The Apostles did not form themselves into an executive board, and demand the various churches to honor them as such. The New Testament is silent in this respect.

According to Bible students who have made a close study of the subject, in over ninety percent of references where the word "church" is used in the New Testament, it refers to local churches. Paul addressed his epistles mostly to local churches. The reproof, warning and instruction to the "seven churches" given in Revelation are to local churches. Early church history indicates the New Testament churches were independent bodies, everyone choosing its elders and whatever assistants that were needed, without interference or aid from a general executive board. But as years passed and the Apostasy developed, bishops assumed power and authority not delegated to them.

Responsibility rests upon every local church. To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote: "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5:12,13). By this, Paul meant that the church was to choose elders and deacons with care after knowing who and what they were. But consider those who were to be chosen by the church at Thessalonica. From the record given in Acts the elders and deacons were probably Jews or Greeks (or both). Some of the Jews believed, and so did some of the Greeks. Some prominent women were included among the believers. In general, the Jews did not believe the Gospel, and the Greeks were idolaters and had to be shown the futility of idolatry. But elders and deacons were to be chosen from the believers. Were they Jews or Greeks? The record does not state. And how long a period of training did they have? It could not have been very long. But the church was to know whom it chose. (Cont'd on page 9)

Local Church Autonomy and the Pastor (Continued from page 7)

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Local Church Autonomy and the Pastor (Continued from page 8)

They were to be men who could meet the qualifications given in his epistles, for Paul guided by the Holy Spirit, would give the same qualifications everywhere. Certainly they were not men trained in theological seminaries, for among the early churches none existed. No general executive board had to approve the selection, for no such board existed.

Paul taught that all believers were to be guided by the Holy Spirit. If so, they all had the mind of Christ, and none were contending for selfish rights. The Old Testament was all the Scripture they had. The Old Testament gives no evidence there were executive boards to tell the people what they were to do and what they were to believe. To be sure, the Priests and Scribes had much power over the Jews. But Christ never gave approval to such rule. He was continually at odds with most of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Paul's Further Admonition

If Paul's admonition to the church at Thessalonica were followed, and harmony existed in the church (he advised them to be at peace among themselves), the church had the right to know whom it was choosing. In such a case, could not the officials chosen begin their duties with confidence, and the church would support them and stand by them? Would not such confidence inspire them with proper incentives to perform their duties to the best of their abilities? And as long as such officials regarded themselves as under-shepherds to the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), and serve in humility, constantly laboring for spiritual growth in their charge, would not evidence of such growth be proper incentive to continue their efforts? To show himself profitable and fruitful before the local congregation that determines his standing and tenure, is a necessary incentive for a pastor.

True, it cannot be said the New Testament churches were perfect, and without carnal members. Paul told some of the Corinthian brethren they were carnal (1 Cor. 3). There may have been some of the Ananias and Sapphira type in the churches; or a Simon Magus. And more than one church had a Diotrephes. Paul knew that some of the elders at Ephesus would fall away in the apostasy he saw at work in his day. Their only safety and security was a daily dying to carnal tendencies. But church history reveals the apostasy led men away from the congregational form of church government as well as away from God. And it will take a complete reformation to bring men back to God and the New Testament rule of local autonomy in churches. Other forms of church government offer impure incentives, for they are tainted with the apostasy.

Christ's Instruction about a Local Church Problem

Christ gave a rule for dealing with an offended or offensive brother, in Matt. 18. Such a member was to be approached privately, in the spirit Paul recommended in Galatians 6:11. If private, personal contact failed to reclaim this trespassing member, witnesses were to be brought in to help settle this personal grievance. If this failed, the situation was to be reported to the church (its membership--the whole local church). It is evident Christ meant only the local church. No supervisory board was to be involved in any way. It was strictly a matter for the local church group, for Christ nowhere and at no time inferred there existed a higher form of human government for the church. And when the local church membership has taken action in harmony with this New Testament teaching, such action should be final, so far as that particular local church is concerned. One church's regulations and acts were not made obligatory on other churches.

Teaching and practicing of other forms of church government are not sound, regardless of how hard men try to show they are. How did Paul class those who refused sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:9,10)? Incentives encouraged or stimulated other than those in accord with sound doctrine are not good. Pastors and individual members should be constrained by the love of Christ (2nd Cor. 4:14). This should be compelling and serve as a constant force in the lives of Christians.

The inspired Word of God is sufficient guidance for those born of the Spirit of God. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, anyone will be guided in a clear understanding of the teachings of the Bible. The local church, its entire membership and pastor must be free from detrimental, denominational authority. (Continued on page 10)

Local Church Autonomy and the Pastor (Continued from page 9)

Denominationally regimented programs require denominational authority which takes from the pastor the right to guide the flock under his direction, as pertaining to the local needs and activities of the church. The Local pastor has authority from the local church, and the church receives its authority from the Word of God. The authority given the pastor is a gift of love and respect, sufficient to inspire him to serve the church. Responsibility is defined, and freedom is granted in faith and practice, limited only by the Scriptures. Loyalty is rendered primarily to God, and not man. With a high regard for loyalty, the pastor has proper incentive for service. Fidelity must be first to God. But tendency in modern practice is to brand a pastor and his congregation as non-cooperative, if the program outlined by some executive board is not followed.

The primary duty of the pastor is "to feed the church of God." This requires tact on his part to know how and when to give the proper spiritual food for the need of the local church. And the primary duty of the church is to shine as a light in a darkened world. Love for fallen man, and a desire to see restored in man the image of God, which makes men holy in God's sight, were incentives in the life of Christ. If His church is to be like Him, it will have a like desire and persuasion. The pastor of such a church will be constrained by the same love that constrained Christ and the Apostles. --Glenn Willhelm

Suit Filed in Civil Court by General Conference Officials (Continued from page 6)

truth and justice, and may be trusted to assert themselves properly (by God's help) in such an attack.

May God have mercy on men who seek to be "lords over God's heritage," instead of fulfilling Biblical obligations and responsibilities in process of the "Great Commission"--to take the Gospel Message of the Kingdom to the world.

## CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Though Biblical, Does It Work?

In checking through "A Guide to the Religions of America," it is interesting to note the views of various denominational and church organizations.

Mr. Lippard (author for the Baptists), with more than 40 years of professional experience and association with the American Baptist Convention, makes it clear that Baptists prefer to be known as a denomination instead of a church, since they are organized into local churches, with the local church being the sovereign ecclesiastical unit.

Although for convenience the term "Baptist Church" is used, "denomination" is preferred by most Baptists, according to Mr. Lippard.

The Baptists have no hierarchy--centralized control, and no headquarters or central oversight of regulations and practices in the local churches.

The relationship of the individual local church with others of the denomination its adherence to recommendations from national headquarters, its acceptance of regulations passed at a convention, are voluntary and without compulsion.

Baptists (neither the American nor Southern Convention) have not set up an official doctrinal and faith test of fellowship. Minor differences are not considered official variations, but individual differences.

Congregational church government is Biblical and was practiced in the Early Church. But does this type of church government work in this modern age? This question is answered by the fact that in the American Baptist Convention alone, there are more than 6,500 churches.

YOUR HELP (prayerful and financial) is always appreciated and vitally necessary. Funds are promptly receipted with gratitude to those who are so kind and faithful. To carry on our work both at home and in foreign fields requires a certain amount of available funds. To extend it as we hope to do, will naturally increase our expenditure. Thanks again for your past and present help, and in advance, for your future support. The RPA semiannual financial report has been posted to all contributors.

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FROM MISSIONS ABROAD

(The Reform and Planning Association, through its office in Denver, is supporting three foreign mission fields: Africa, India, and the Philippines.)

In Eastern Nigeria, West Africa, Pastor Nelson I. Dimkpa supervises the work in the Ahoada area where full-time and part-time workers (previously mentioned) are engaged. We hope to be of greater help to them, both spiritually and financially. Your tithes and offerings will be much appreciated and used well in these mission fields.

In India, Pastor Jalli Prakasam is chairman of the mission board and editor of our church publications there. One regular, monthly magazine is being published, plus tracts and pamphlets in the native language, which are of exceptional help in the Indian work. In India too, there are both full-time and part-time workers in the work as supervised by the Mission Committee. In this field also, we hope to be increasing our financial aid.

In the Philippines, Elder H. C. Rosell, with others, supervises the work, principally in Mindanao (in southern Philippines--2nd largest island of the Philippine group). Elder Peniaredondo is of special help in mission efforts there. In a recent letter from Elder Rosell were enclosed a map showing locations of church groups in the island of Mindanao, and a list of 15 elders in 15 different places respectively. He had hoped to get a school started in the interior of Mindanao (in the province of Bukidnon) in August of this year. The above information is interesting and of much help to us here.

We are not without personal acquaintance in all these fields, and with the personnel named. This experience is valuable in management of efforts and determination of proposed projects in these distant places. Your help in assistance to these and other mission fields is solicited. Your prayers for the dear people in these places are sincerely requested. --Ed.)

INDIA--After a terrible summer it is now raining. Many cattle and people died in many places in India.

The due date for getting in work reports from the workers is the 25th of every month. So I will give...a missionary report in the first week of every month.

Thank you very much for your good help (\$50.00) for printing tracts. Four tracts may be printed with this help. Soon after I receive money from the treasury, I will begin the printing, and will send a copy of each by air mail.

I am busy with the literature work. The press is six miles from home. I have to go there daily. Due to heavy rains, some places are drowned in water.... Please pray for us.

Our workers divided into two groups and preached the Gospel in 10 villages. Due to rain they suffered very much, and by the grace of God they all returned home safely....

Thank the children of God who are helping us so much for the advancement of the Lord's work in the closing days of history.

Please pray for the progress of the Lord's work in this benighted country.

--Jalli Prakasam

PHILIPPINES--For your information and guidance as to the locations of our little churches and companies here in Mindanao Island, I am sending you this map...with the list of members of each group (mentioned previously in editorial notes--Ed.). The Maranatha Association, headed by Sister Ora Haeber in Los Angeles, has asked me to do so for their information and guidance, so they will have an idea about our work here in the Philippines....

I am now aiming to open the work in the Visayan Islands with headquarters in the city of Cebu, as soon as money is available.

I greatly appreciate your love for the work here in the Philippines, shown by giving me the...amount every month....

I hope you will be glad to see me at work in those islands scattered in the sea, with the help of our true and sincere people in the churches who are now assisting me in the field voluntarily....

While waiting for the...funds to work in the Visayan Islands, I am working at present in the neighboring towns of Tubod (his home village), (Cont'd on page 12).

REFORM AND PLANNING ASSOCIATION  
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Denver 1, Colorado



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Riverside, Calif.

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From Missions Abroad--Philippines (Continued from page 11)

which are yet untouched with our message.... We have to work in season and out of season, as our time is too short, to tell those people who are daily perishing in sin. I am also very much encouraged by the good news about the money from Los Angeles... for me to buy a loud speaker which I really need in the field, especially

when I'll be working some day in the city of Cebu....

May the Lord bless...with His richest blessings, and guide...in all...activities for Him, in making good plans to preach His Gospel of the Kingdom in all places and corners of the world....

The bad condition of my old mother does not allow me at this time to go to some places which are far from home. She is now in the most critical condition...and I believe her days will not be long till she will rest in peace in the grave.

Please give my best regards to all our brothers and sisters in the Reform and Planning Association, who are heartily helping the work here in the Philippines.

Please remember me in your prayers. --H. C. Rosell

(The Visayan Islands mentioned by Elder Rosell, are in the central area of the Philippines, some distance north of Tubod, Elder Rosell's home village in Mindanao. Some chief islands there are Panay, Samar, Leyte, Cebu, and Negros, all of which are in great need of <sup>^</sup>real Gospel Message--the Gospel of the Kingdom. Cebu City, on the island of Cebu, is a very convenient place for headquarters in the Philippines. We observed the place in 1954, with the idea of building a mission station there, to be used also as headquarters.

The dear old mother mentioned above must be of considerable age, and has been very energetic and active. Several years ago her husband was killed (beheaded) by a Moro, as he was overseeing a group of Moros (dangerous people) while, with their bolos, they were cutting grass along the road. When his head was turned, he was attacked and slain.

May the prayer requests all be remembered.)

\*the