

PERSECUTION OVERCOME IN BROTHERLY LOVE

Brethren in the Winnipeg area of Canada were forced to leave their homes. Here's how the Philadelphia Era of God's Church, which depicts brotherly love, proved it in a heartwarming solution to a heartbreaking situation.

by Dean R. Wilson

DOES this era of God's Church have the same zeal, love and driving desire to serve God that the early New Testament Church had?

This is undoubtedly a question that has gone through the minds of many of you. What if we were to be subjected to the same trials that the early New Testament Church was subjected to? Would we pass the test and remain true and loyal to God?

Most of us in God's Church today have not been required to go through the things we find recorded in the book of Acts and in various other scriptures. We live in an affluent society where many of the physical things we have are taken for granted, where really we are not deprived of any of the necessities of life. We also live in a society where basically we have freedom to practice our religious beliefs. Religious persecution usually is restricted to past friends, associates or relatives.

Philadelphia Era

We are called the Philadelphia era of God's Church. Interestingly enough this word means brotherly love or love of the brethren. Do we have that love for the brethren that this word denotes? Do we have that same zeal and love that the early Church had as recorded in Acts 2:44-45, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

What if circumstances presented themselves today so that there was a dire need for help by some of the brethren in God's Church in a given

area? What would be the reaction in the Philadelphia era?

According to I John 3:16-18, we know what the reaction should be, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in Him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and truth."

Brethren Persecuted in Winnipeg

Recently here in Canada this part of God's Church was put to this test with an amazing and gratifying result.

Over the past few months and years about 90 to 100 people in the Winnipeg Church area have been called out of another religious group into the Church of God. Due to circumstances over which they had no control they were required for a period of time to remain in the circumstances where they were called.

The story goes back several years. It began with Mr. Schnee, Sr., who now works in the German Department in Pasadena, and his son Frank, who is now a minister of God and over the German office in Germany. In the process of doing business with the various farmers in Manitoba and other areas of northern United States they came in contact with a group of people known as the Hutterites. The Hutterites are a group that practices the belief of having all things in common, based on an erroneous interpretation of Acts 4:32.

They live on communal farms of approximately 100 to a farm including children. There are many of these farms scattered in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta in Canada.

These people have a standard dress that all adherents wear. They also have various other doctrines such as forbidding radios, newspapers and other modern conveniences to be used by members. The farm is owned and operated by the members, each sharing in the responsibilities as well as living off the proceeds. They have a common dining hall where all eat as well as having their own schools, ministers and churches right on the colony. For all practical purposes, other than for doing business, these people are supposed to be virtually cut off from the outside world.

These peculiar doctrines and practices, of course, are "the way that seemeth right to a man" (Prov. 14:12 and 16:25). Such ways are, as Israel of old did, following the way that is right in their own eyes, instead of the ways God instructs and commands. (Deut. 12:8, Judges 17:6 and 21:25.)

In the process of doing business with these people, the Schnee's had several occasions to be in their homes and become well acquainted with them, and in the process introduced several to *The PLAIN TRUTH* as well as the broadcast. Several years went by, but as usual in the process of time God began to call some of these people. They took the usual course of action and upon learning from the Bible many new things, began to take it to their ministers with exactly the same results many of us have experienced—outright rejection, along with a stern warning of

the consequences if they persisted in their course of action.

They persisted in studying their Bibles, reading *The PLAIN TRUTH*, taking the Correspondence Course and listening to the broadcast as they could by secretly bringing in radios where possible. In due time the obvious happened — they were ejected from the Hutterite Church which meant that they would also, if they did not change, be asked to vacate the colony.

One group that God had called in one colony proceeded with court action in order to obtain what they felt was their fair share of the property and proceeds of the colony. During this period of time they were obliged to remain in the colony while the court action was in process which took a long period of time. Others in other colonies also remained in their respective colonies awaiting the results of the court action before moving. As it turned out, this meant that from 90 to 100 brethren in God's Church were living in Hutterite colonies under very adverse circumstances awaiting court action in the province of Manitoba to determine the distribution of property.

Court Decision

The results of this trial have now been brought down, "Four members of a Hutterite colony have failed in their attempt to have a receiver appointed to wind up the affairs of the colony and distribute the assets among the members.

"In a 96-page judgment, Mr. Justice R. C. B. Dickson has declared that the colony leaders were within their rights when they expelled the four, because they had embraced a religion fundamentally opposed to that of the rest of the community.

"The decision brings to a close, for the time being at least, a fight which has set brother against brother in the Interlake Colony of Hutterian Brethren, near Teulon . . .

"The four plaintiffs and two of the three defendants are brothers — Zacharias and Jacob — while Jacob S. Hofer is a cousin. The colony has a population of 84 persons.

"The plaintiffs argued during the hearing that they had been mistreated

in many ways and other members of the colony had attempted to expel them. It is no longer possible for the colony to continue in harmony and therefore it should be wound up.

"The trustees say that no member of the colony has any property rights, the four have forsaken the faith and practice of the church, and all have therefore been validly excommunicated from the church and expelled from the colony.

"In his judgment, which is divided into 11 separate sections, Mr. Justice Dickson rules that the plaintiffs are not entitled to any portion of the real or personal property of the colony.

"Further, he orders that the four, with their families, shall permanently vacate the colony and deliver up all personal property owned by the colony, which may have come into their possession.

"He criticizes some of the indignities and mistreatment which evidence showed had been suffered by the plaintiffs, terming it 'strange and repellent, and on occasion excessive,' but observes there can be no doubt that within a religious community, stern discipline must be observed if the community is to survive.

"Such indignities were not a cause for winding up the colony or for giving plaintiffs assets to which they would not otherwise be entitled, Mr. Justice Dickson observes" (*Winnipeg Tribune*, November 17, 1966, article "Court Upholds Expulsion of Four From Hutterite Colony").

As a result of the decision, this left these families destitute with no visible means of support or providing for themselves and nothing to get started with.

Church of God Responds

The Philadelphia era of God's Church was facing a test. Would it pass that test and qualify to hold the name that God gave it? The answer is yes! The test came and God's Church met the test and passed it, from our Pastor-General, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, on down to the laymen in the local churches.

A telephone call was made to Pasadena and here was Mr. Herbert W.

Armstrong's response, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Mat. 19:29). Mr. Armstrong instructed us that we were to take immediate steps to alleviate these people's distress and gave permission for us to take up an offering to help the brethren in Manitoba, offering any assistance or help that we might need from Headquarters. It was decided that the Canadian Churches would handle the situation if they could, calling on others if necessary.

What was the response in the Canadian Churches? Immediately upon announcing the need for clothing, household goods and funds in the Vancouver Church, it became obvious that if similar announcements were to be made in all the churches that more goods than could ever be used would be forthcoming.

In the Vancouver Church alone, almost 80 large boxes of clothing, bedding and other household items were collected. Over 40 boxes of dishes, pots and pans were collected. *The outpouring was so great it became necessary to ask the people to stop as we had more than could be used already!*

All of these items were of highest quality. Many went out and bought new items because they did not have extras in their homes. Others who did not have material to turn in and had no finances to buy items went so far as to go to stores and put things on charge accounts so they could have something to send.

The response for funds was spontaneous and certainly exemplary of the heart and attitude the Church of God should have. Yes, we are the Philadelphia era of God's Church and under given circumstances will respond in exactly the same manner the early Church responded. Jesus Christ dwells in His Church and Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8).

The results of this heartfelt attitude on the part of God's people is seen in this letter dated December 24 from Mr. and Mrs. Edward Hofer:

"We don't know how to even begin to thank you and the whole church for just *everything*. You all know how it feels to give, for you have given tremendously. But we, the receivers or recipients, do you know how we feel? I believe you do know. Just letting us know we should move out of the colonies was such a joy to us, we were just overwhelmed and so were the others. And then the church members helped us move out. I didn't even know just which house I was moving into before our furniture was moved in, and then Mr. White took me and the younger children to our new home. (My husband had paid the rent and selected it the day before.) We were more than satisfied. We hadn't dreamed we'd ever live in a home where there was a kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms and a living room, but here we are living in one. And after we moved in, everything just poured in on us so fast, we couldn't even say thank you properly. A new washer was delivered to our home, two bunk beds (Oh, they are wonderful), a living-room lamp, someone sent us a couch and chair, a group of ladies with Mrs. White came over and cleaned and waxed all our floors, someone took all our soiled clothes the first day and washed and dried them and then delivered them again. Mrs. White brought over some pots and pans. Mr. White bought our children a crokinole game. Mr. White went with my husband and Mr. Dave Hofer and Mr. Jonathan Hofer and helped them all select cars. So today we will all be able to go to Sabbath Service without stalling and without trying to start one another's car with whichever car *would* go, like we did up to now. (We hope to spend this extra time in Bible study.) We are also 20 miles closer to the church now. And also food is being sent to us. A half sack of whole wheat, a bag of potatoes, even some beef, which we rarely had before. Oh, we could go on and on and on and on. I hope we never ever take all this for granted. No other church could do all this with the same attitude I'm sure. We wish we could thank each and every one of those in the church for helping out so much. We do say thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We hope we can in some way repay."

No Split in the Body

Brethren, there is no schism or split in the body of Jesus Christ. When one member suffers we all suffer and when one member is honored we all rejoice (I Cor. 12:25-26). When one part of the body is in need the other part will supply that need and so we help one another just as the example we find in II Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9. "For if the [eager] readiness to give is there, then it is acceptable and welcomed in proportion to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For it is not [intended] that other people be eased and relieved [of

their responsibility] and you be burdened and suffer [unfairly]. But to have equality — share and share alike; your surplus over necessity at the present time going to meet their want and to equalize the difference created by it, so that [at some other time] their surplus in turn may be given to supply your want. Thus there may be equality. As it is written, He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little did not lack" (II Cor. 8:13-15, *Amplified* version).

There is a great lesson in this, Breth-

ren! God's True Church responded to this emergency in the *true* fulfillment and spiritual intent of Acts 4:32 — we "were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them [those of us who gave] that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." In *this* emergency, as in the emergency situation in Acts 4, the same Church of God responded in the same way — a selfless giving to those in need! This truly is the *Philadelphia* era of God's Church!

What Is Your Goal?

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The householder promised to give "whatsoever is right" unto those hired at the third, sixth and ninth hours.

But some were still standing idle near the end of the day. They hadn't been hired at all. So the householder went out late in the afternoon and hired them at "about the *eleventh* hour."

But when the time came to settle up, the ones who had only worked an hour or so received a penny — a full day's wage!

Those who had worked most or all of the day saw this. They were very happy. They thought, "We'll receive much more because we've worked all day."

But, when the householder came to settle up with them, he gave them just a penny — exactly what he had agreed to pay them.

But those servants, who had been hired earlier in the day, murmured and complained "against the goodman of the house" (verse 11).

They said, "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them *equal* unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But He answered one of them and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Verses 12-15.)

Now, what vital lesson are we to learn from this parable?

The "*day*," mentioned in this parable, represents the *lifespan* of each Christian. Some are called into God's Church (into His vineyard) early in life — early in the morning. Others are called at noon — in middle age. Some are not called until they approach the sunset of life — old age!

When Jesus Christ literally returns to this earth to judge every Christian according to his *works*, He will take this important *time factor* into account. Any who were called into God's Church early in life, will be expected by Christ to have accomplished more in God's service — than those who were called later in life.

Unequal Opportunities

Let us see how this actually will work. God Almighty calls some to repentance in their teens. Such people have been blessed with the wonderful opportunity of *knowing* God's truth and *applying* it in their lives in their youth. Such individuals are better equipped to properly develop both their *minds* and their *bodies*. As a result, they will be able to accomplish more than they would, had they never known God's precious truth.

This gives such individuals a great *advantage* over other people who grow up in spiritual blindness — in utter darkness. These spiritually ignorant usually continue to eat unclean foods, fat, blood, and may also continue to indulge in many filthy habits and do other things which would tear them-