

940716 What Makes One a Member of the True Church HLH PAM

Since there's an afternoon commitment, I will start immediately and thank Nancy Clire and Hernan Herrera. Hes are silent in Spanish, of course, as many of you know, for one of the more beautiful compositions played. That certainly is, in my judgment, for music in a situation like this, where we don't expect an orchestra, one of the most beautiful that one could imagine. A question should be addressed today. I did not receive from Mr. Washington any other comment. Therefore, I am going ahead with a topic that I need to address also some two weeks from now elsewhere in California. It's one that springs from some things that have been said or written, could have been asked in 1934, just as well as 1994.

What is it that makes people members of the true Church of God? You remember, I used the word true there because there are various groups that are called the Churches of God.

Some are Pentecostal. Many, the largest number, certainly among those who observe Sunday is the Lord's Day, usually in the Pentecostal or similar movement. Then, of course, there are the various Churches of God in some way related to us directly or indirectly or not at all. So what is it that makes someone a Christian in the Biblical sense? There have been some misunderstandings. I am sure that in general, at headquarters here, the question has never arisen to the same extent as sometimes it has elsewhere across the country because so many who are attending our local congregations are also in one way or another employed and we ask each other questions and they are often answered before we ever have to say why doesn't Mr. Washington address the topic? Well, the answer, of course, is that experience and conversation often resolve matters rather quickly.

What we are asking is not a question about the Worldwide Church of God as a corporate name.

We are asking a question about the Church that Jesus Christ founded and where those people would be irrespective of any corporate name that the governments of this world may ask us to use or for that matter that we might have to avoid. In some places, we have to avoid a translation of the Worldwide Church of God.

We have had to function sometimes apart from a religious role for the simple reason that there is no authority to meet as a church.

We functioned as an extension of Ambassador College and, in fact, before the uniting of both East and West Germany, we had, for the first time, received approval to function as a church in East Germany, the former socialist state, as distinct from having such a direct permission in West Germany at that time.

We have had to be very slow in using certain titles in parts of Africa.

It is not quite as free as the United States to go to some of these countries around the world.

But the question is, not are all these churches in this world, God's churches, we have addressed that question long ago.

We are asking instead what brings people to the state of mind, to the spiritual state that individuals become baptized into what is called in the Bible, the body of Christ.

Let me explain that term briefly. When Jesus Christ was on earth, he was a human body.

God worked in and through him. God, in fact, came as the word to dwell on earth as a human being.

That human being died, that person died whom we call Jesus of Nazareth, but he was resurrected from the dead according to the Scripture.

We are not witnesses, we only read the record of those who testified of that matter.

When he left, we discovered that God sent his Holy Spirit to work in a group of people who were called to a specific responsibility, that is the church.

The church is the body of Christ in the sense that all church members together function in accomplishing the work God once done today as Jesus Christ accomplished the work God wanted done in him.

In this sense, the church functions as the body of Christ. That's the sense of the term.

Let me give you a little background that would help you understand that sometimes we may have misunderstood or not thought the question through adequately.

In our fellowship, we have individuals who have become interested in this work or who are married to individuals who are members of the church.

Our fellowship, not only among adults and necessarily children, goes beyond the normal consideration of who is or who is not a member.

We have many times invited individuals to become acquainted with the church.

When I first came to Ambassador College in 1947, I also attended the church services.

Now, you might think it's strange, but there was a man, an Ethiopian, who came and attended for many months with his two wives.

There was no problem. I am sure there are some today who might wonder what kind of a permissive pastor Herbert Armstrong then was.

Now, I think his background was of the Christian community in Ethiopia.

I do not know whether he continued to stay in this country.

In those days as students, we simply didn't have access to the information.

Let's say that now I have access to, if I would like to know where somebody moves.

We just didn't keep track of those things or he may even have returned to Ethiopia or moved elsewhere in this country.

I just say that to interest you.

Then there is the case of a woman who is now deceased, a Mrs. Anderson, a family from Georgia, a Baptist background, who made it possible for students in the third year of Ambassador College in 1950, 49 to 50 that is, to have bedding and sheets and pillows.

Those were special funds in those days.

They didn't come out of the major part of the work and Mr. Armstrong sent out a letter pertaining to those needs and Mrs. Anderson, who was married to a man who didn't regularly attend with her, but she and her sister did in the Fresno congregation later.

But in those days, they simply lived in another town.

There was no Sabbath meeting with any other brethren.

Now, I was there when we had an interesting discussion.

It turns out that we never baptized Mrs. Herbert Anderson.

Later in life, her husband became a member.

Their daughter and husband and family are members.

She was baptized more than 70 years ago as a Baptist by a Baptist minister.

We recognized her baptism as valid.

And it was quite apparent that there were things she understood that others in her congregation did not.

There were things that she had not understood until she heard us.

But I want to give this as an example.

A number of you may remember Mrs. Herbert Anderson.

She attended the festival in Oregon and in California.

And I met Mr. Herbert Anderson for the first time when the festival was held at Siegler Springs in Northern California.

She came to learn about the Sabbath many years after her baptism.

She wondered about a number of these things as she was reading.

And as she understood first one thing, then another, then another, I say as she understood, not as she read, because not everything you read do you understand.

So having read and understood, she did one thing after another.

She understood what repentance meant.

And she noticed many things that Jesus said about the gospel that went far beyond anything that her normal fellowship might have accepted.

When we heard her story and when the knowledge of the Sabbath came to her attention, she recognized immediately what the answer to that question was.

We had to conclude that her baptism was valid and in fact that she had the spirit of God in order to explain her mind during all those years from the early 20s, let's say, to the early 40s.

That's the 1920s, you understand? I don't know when she was baptized in terms of her own age.

Here was a member of the body of Christ in a Baptist church.

This was recognized as many other cases were in times past.

But as the number of congregations grew across the country of the Church of God, it was possible not to meet people who might have been baptized 5, 10, 15, 20 years before and who were growing steadily in spiritual understanding.

It was far more common to meet people who had become interested as a result of our program.

But the fact remains that as we have gone in different areas of this country and especially of other countries where we arrive later with a certain message that Jesus Christ has committed in the pages of the Bible to his church, we discover that there are people who for centuries in fact have a tradition.

We discovered individuals in France who came from a family of people who observed the Sabbath and the Holy Days as a family.

This does not, I do not know what their fellowship was.

I have never made inquiry of that.

But there are clearly in the teaching of the church individuals whom we would recognize over many years as having come from a family or as individually having been called in reading the Bible to see and to understand long before they come into contact with this work.

In fact, there are some strange cases.

Long before we had some local churches outside of Washington, Oregon and Southern California, there were men whom young students sent out officially for baptism.

There were men of whom we learned in areas where the radio may have been important for people who were able to listen to the world tomorrow.

But they did not know anything about a local church and it was never possible in the 1930s and earlier to middle 40s or later 40s to have local churches.

But we met men and women who had been pastored by a local individual who listened to the program and who was their pastor in one particular case.

This man, as far as we know, never contacted us directly.

And he died and he left his congregation with a message.

He said, the man to whom you listen after my death, because his end of life was at hand, is the speaker on the World Tomorrow program.

That's the man to listen to.

He is the one I have finished my role.

These are some interesting things that one discovers.

Then of course we have people who were in the churches of God scattered in Latin America, in the Philippines.

We're not talking about that.

I don't know how many of you and I prefer not to ask publicly because it isn't essential.

But I suspect that one or more here were baptized before you came into contact with the church of God, or at least significantly with the church of God, and we recognize your baptism as valid.

Now, baptism as valid does not include any other than immersion.

I will just state that, and I don't think that is a question, but in case you do not understand that, or how we may have judged the matter, we do baptize many people who have been baptized before because there was no indication whatsoever that they had repented or had actually grasped any of the other prior requirements.

So it's very important to recognize that over the years we have never concluded, and in fact concluded the opposite of somebody who would say that if you are not a known member, let's say, of the Worldwide Church of God, you simply aren't converted, your baptism is invalid.

We have never taken that view.

There are many unusual cases that other ministers can cite that I cannot, because I never had the opportunity to travel first in a region.

My assignments usually have been at headquarters.

I may have been asked to do something away from headquarters, but I was never stationed anywhere else.

Mr. Armstrong, in fact, before I was married, told my wife that I would be at headquarters, which was to tell her to get used to living in California.

He was right.

I suppose different people have different reasons for being called.

My reason essentially has involved those matters which pertain to headquarters, but not church administration.

I have been an editorial.

I have not functioned directly except with Mr. Tkach in 1976 to 79, but apart from that, it has been wholly in the academic area or with respect to editorial publications of the work.

But I hear stories when I do go to these local areas.

So let's now go back and understand a little something about what's happening today, because the reverse situation is setting in.

That is, there was a time it was possible to meet people whom we would certainly have regarded as members of God's church, and so recognize them when we first met them.

Then as a whole, when you finally blanket so much of Canada, the United States, and for that matter, have a magazine whose ads go most everywhere in Australia, New Zealand, the British Isles, France, Germany, later in Italy, et cetera, certainly the Philippines, more and more people will become interested as a result of this work already being there, not as a result of an interesting sermon of a minister in another denomination, or simply as reading the Bible or growing up in a family.

Those people, as the 50s wore on in the 60s and 70s, those people whose baptism was valid came to be far fewer in number.

There were undoubtedly some in Africa, probably the latest areas, where we found that to be valid, because there is a lot of reading of the Bible in the Christian areas of Africa, and we have not reached certain areas until, did not reach until much later.

However, the broadcast at its maximum in 1959, across this country, when every weekend we could reach some 29% of the nation, dwindled to the place that in 1989, for all of our television coverage, we were able to reach 2.9%.

Now that might sound strange, those are facts that Mr. David Hume presented as a responsible person with respect to communicating with others in television.

And that was a result, of course, of the fact that radio in 1959 had some major stations and some minor ones.

But finally, radio ceased to be of any significant value with an extended program.

As we had, we had to finally move into television.

But television has so many channels today, we've gone from, you know, our old set that we have, there are 13, and everything else is added, can't get any more than that, and that was even, this one is a color one, for that matter, then we had the black and white.

And before that, television was already 25 years old before we had one.

But the more television sets, the more channels, the greater the number of people who can do other things when our program is on.

And that's why it was possible with more and more channels.

Some 50 viable channels today in Southern California, as far as I know, viable means that something's going on and not that they are valid.

Just viable in the sense that you can tune them in.

But when you have that, you're competing in a far greater level than if there were only 13.

If you were on one of 13 versus one of 39 or one of 52, you see suddenly what happens.

The percentage drops.

And so what has happened is that with a smaller and smaller audience, there are people who pick us up on occasion and have some interest in the Bible.

And in fact, may generate more interest in the Bible and ask a local pastor.

Let's just use the word that it was an interesting statement.

A lady had written in, it might have been a gentleman, but I think this was a lady to one of our speakers on the World Tomorrow Telecast.

And she said, you know, as a result of your program, I have become a much better Presbyterian.

And I think that is undoubtedly true or she wouldn't have said it.

But that's the start.

We have no way of knowing today how many people are taking the second or the third or the fourth steps.

Partly out of reading the Bible, partly because they may be hearing things from a local pastor in 1994 that they would never have heard in their local church in 1934 and do not assume that the World Tomorrow program has a message that has not influenced other speakers.

I'm waiting to say something else, so that sinks in.

Do not assume that other people in, shall I say the pulpit, have not in fact absorbed ideas that they learned from our literature or the World Tomorrow Radio earlier or the telecast.

In fact, I can listen and say, since I used to hear religious programs in, I remember hearing them in the late 1930s.

I understood them in the 1940s, that is 1940, 41, 42.

I heard the World Tomorrow for the first time in 1944.

And it is amazing what was said in those days versus what can be said or read today.

That is, there is material that in 1994 you would never have found published in the name of most of the major Protestant denominations that we used to speak about.

And now they are being addressed.

A book on the seven annual holy days published by, I think it was the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church, to inform the members about a question that no one ever would have thought to ask 40, 50 years ago or 60.

This work has in fact so affected others that questions that would never have been addressed have come to be addressed in print or from the pulpit.

Even the concept of the second coming of Jesus Christ was seldom even addressed 50 years ago.

And most certainly it was associated with the last judgment.

And now today it is possible for you to listen to many people, especially among certain groups, who look forward to the coming of the government or the kingdom of God on earth.

Answering what for them is now a question that has a meaningful answer in part.

That not everyone is being called today.

And that in fact the world is going to be changed when Christ returns.

And multitudes today who know nothing about the significance of Christianity will understand.

In such a world something else is happening.

In the 1950s, when we began to have local churches, it was very common for people to drive 120 miles to come to Fresno.

That's because I used to go up there, which was about 210.

And we had a congregation there. We went back and forth.

Saturday or Saturday or Sunday, depending on the circumstances of one or two days duration.

People would be willing once a month to drive 120 miles.

Sometimes twice a month.

Financially, others could afford to drive every Sabbath.

But we met with numerous people who could only come once a month.

These were people who lived in farming communities, lived near or far from a farming town.

That's what Fresno was and still to some extent is.

We were not reaching the bulk of the church in those days.

80% came from rural America, small town America, the suburbs.

Only 20% essentially came from the suburbs of major towns and cities.

Major towns and cities.

People thought nothing of driving great distances.

Today, we are discovering something very different.

Mr. Curtis May, many of you know him from his relationship to this congregation, is responsible for a part of the Los Angeles Basin.

A big part.

He is finding that there are people who would never think of driving 120 miles.

They would never think of driving to church.

They simply walk or take a short ride.

Some do, of course I'm not saying they don't.

But they might take a bus.

They, in fact, if they have a car, most of them do, they will go to a neighborhood church.

They will go to the neighborhood that they're familiar with.

They're not about to go to a neighborhood they're not familiar with.

They probably will go on the bus in the neighborhood they're familiar with.

Now they've become interested in this work.

Some of them for a significant period of time.

And what we're finding is an unusual fact that we had never, I had certainly never thought about before.

That whereas the man or woman who lived in the country and we had people where they would pick each other up, you know, drive a little out of the way and share this long distance ride.

Well, at fuel, then 25 to 29 cents a gallon.

Of course, that was still expensive in terms of money of those days in the 1950s.

And it's still very inexpensive.

But because fuel is inexpensive today in terms of the dollar, unlike most other countries in the world, yet there is a new problem, the state of the local community.

You see, people don't live.

And I would say people still drive great distances to get somewhere in Montana or Wyoming.

But we're no longer a people of the churches in the countryside.

We are a people where 80% are in the big cities.

And in the big cities, you can take the underground in some and the bulk of the people who come to New York do not drive their automobiles to church.

They have to have some other means of communication of which, of course, the city has.

They may drive part of the way.

They may drive all the way, but many simply take the train or the bus depending on where they live.

And that presents something that we had never understood.

New York is compact enough that it didn't present the same problem that didn't come to our attention that Los Angeles presents where it is an urban sprawl with very many difficult problems in different parts of the community.

And people are not about to risk life and limb.

We must go to them as distinct from having them come to us.

If we learned this in the Washington, D.C. area, you hold a public meeting in two, three, or four places.

People will come, but you send out a mailing list, not about all four places, but a mailing list for this one, another part of the mailing list for that, another part for the third, and then another for the fourth.

And people will come to those areas they feel safe to come to.

And they simply won't come to the other one, even if they're invited.

And we discovered the problem wasn't the people, the problem was the environment.

So we have a new situation that indeed makes us for the first time realize that the great cities of the United States in the 1990s are not like the cities in the 1960s when we began to make significant inroads, or the 1970s, or for that matter, the earlier 1980s.

The cities today are made up of people who have indeed grown up.

And remember, many of the people who were younger, let's take 64 to 94.

You could be 30 years old and essentially have no knowledge of the 1960s, other than as you might have just started school, but no real sense of the world around until the 1970s in your life.

And being 30 years old is not to be the youngest person in a group.

We have people coming in who are, let's say, 24, who were born in 1970 and don't even remember adequately the first half of the 1970s.

These people who grow up in that situation, they never felt like traveling and moving about.

They know their neighborhood. They know what they can do.

They have established certain habits and they have become used to going to a local church if they had gone at all in a neighborhood and they simply are not about to go somewhere else.

But interestingly, I think it was as early as later 1986 or 1987, Mr. Tkach began to realize and mentioned it in the morning.

We had a weekly meeting for our television programs.

Various groups got together to have input.

He said that he was quite sure there was already developing from his experience in church administration prior to Mr. Herbert Armstrong's death that there were people who were being fed by the television program and were learning things, writing in for our literature, but were in fact simply associating with as a cultural matter the groups that they had always been fellowshiping with.

They simply were, shall we say, Presbyterians who were learning more.

They were Baptists who were learning more.

And I'm not singling out any.

I just illustrate the two same denominations that I had referred to earlier today.

And indeed, this is what we are finding.

We are finding that people are beginning to grow spiritually as a result of having had contact through the Bible to God, contact through religious programs of others as well as our own that make them think they learned something perhaps special from what we have to say.

There are certain things they haven't learned because perhaps they haven't understood the Sabbath.

That would be a very important one in terms of making a decision.

They might have understood part of the biblical teaching of the Sabbath.

But that in terms of meeting every week would make a major difference as you can understand.

So that is why I draw attention to that situation.

Now with this in mind, what we face is the remarkable thing that more and more people in the inner cities, I'm not talking about the farming community or even small-town America, but in the inner cities more and more individuals are going through an experience of conversion before they come that close to us.

And this is what Mr. Tkach and others have come to be aware of.

The level of understanding will vary necessarily.

But I think it would be interesting sometime I would ask Mr. Abner Washington who's here if he would like to talk to Mr. Curtis May or perhaps have the three of us get together sometime.

And that either he or you, since I'm already in part addressing the question, Mr. Washington might like to address this congregation as to the state of mind of people coming to the local church areas where they are being invited here in Southern California in the greater Los Angeles area as distinct from the smaller towns that lie to the east of Los Angeles, one of which is Pasadena, another is Glendale and so forth.

I think it would be a revelation to us.

Now we may find that some of these are people who long ago have heard.

I have no idea how many may have decided to be baptized or what decisions are being made.

We're not trying to rush anybody into anything but at a certain time it would be interesting to see how many people have come a long way before they ultimately come to fellowship with us.

That's the new area in which we must be concerned.

It is not a question to say that other congregations who have no fellowship with us are under the same kind of government that Christ has in this church.

Christ is the head of this church.

This is where the largest number, I don't mean this one congregation, the largest number of converted minds are around the world.

But there are others who are being called step by step through the various means by which others learn, either in directly studying the Bible, studying literature, studying our literature, and I learned the bulk of all that I ever understood.

I was baptized well after I came to Ambassador College.

I didn't just want to be baptized right away because I had to decide whether I would stay with it.

We had just come out of World War II and then the question was, what would you have done if you had lived in Europe in the days of Hitler? What would you have done, died or compromised? So I had to decide that before I would ever have been baptized.

And there were others in Europe who decided and some compromised and some did not in those days.

And some had no choice, even if they wanted to compromise.

They belonged to the wrong religion, the wrong political party, the wrong race, the wrong whatever it was.

But I learned about the Sabbath, I learned about tithing, I learned about the kingdom of God.

I learned about what man basically is.

I learned about the question of evolution, creation.

I learned about water baptism.

I learned about all of these things except of all the basic teaching of the church.

I learned nothing from the World Tomorrow program in those early days that I hadn't already learned before, for the first time there was a voice that put them all together.

I didn't have to go here for one truth, there for another, and somewhere else for the third.

But what I had never heard anybody mention were the annual holy days, except that the Adventists had turned their thumbs down on them.

And when I learned about that, in fact, I came here not even knowing there was a church of God.

I only had heard about the World Tomorrow and about Ambassador Collins.

And I discovered there was such a group as the church of God.

Maybe that was the other part that I, in a sense, learned, but I rather took for granted that that was really the package that I had discovered, so to speak.

How did I learn all of those? I didn't study the Bible to find the answers.

I had studied the Bible and it didn't really make sense to me.

But I could read what other men said about the Bible and sometimes women.

And I found how they argued the point.

It was so clear to me in looking at their arguments where they were right or wrong.

And then I began to be able to look into that subject and it became clear.

It was remarkable how, and let me put it this way, I think it's a mistake to assume that man is so rational that he will always be convinced by a correct argument.

We would not be in this room because the arguments have been presented in Pasadena for years on our program and in our literature.

This is one, and we have some other congregations.

The bulk of the people are going to be somewhere else.

No.

God was certainly leading me to understand, and I could tell when there was an honest argument and one that was a dishonest argument, or where people would choose to use a verse that wasn't clear and never face the verse that was.

I had an interesting call this morning from a man, and his wife usually does not answer the phone he does because he calls.

They had been in the fellowship with the Church of God.

When I first met him I knew he wasn't converted.

I don't know why he was baptized, but sometimes people are zealous.

I have respected him, and he has respected me.

His wife certainly respects us both, and we respect them.

They have a son.

We have taken care of them on some occasions, which is neither here nor there, and we are, let's say, personally acquainted.

They are a part of what would certainly have been the near dropout community of the 60s.

This man is taking our literature.

He's always asked me about the Bible.

I have never tried to force anything on him.

I just want to know how far he's going in his grasp.

We sent him a Bible.

He asked me to send one to him that I thought would be the most useful, where he could read the most in the Bible and have the fewest notes that would be of help, but still notes that would, if used, be the kind of essential things that don't identify doctrine so much as simply things that need to be clarified in translation.

He talked to a fundamentalist minister.

I don't know whether it was yesterday.

The fact he called me today gives me the impression it was yesterday evening.

He wanted to, let's say, assure himself that he was understanding what's in this book.

It's quite clear for the first time he's talking what I would call spiritual sense, and he asked this minister who called on him, whether at his home or at the residence, I don't know, the pastor's residence, and he said, I would like to have you explain what man is and what the purpose of life is.

That is, if we were to start with the story in the Garden of Eden, what meaning should I get out of it? Now, I'm embellishing this for you because I told him we had only a little time and we had to be ready to come this morning.

And when he was finished questioning that man, the man was very distraught.

He said, I simply don't know what the answer is because what you're saying and what seems to be in the Bible is not what I have understood.

I mean, he was simply flustered as the only way to describe it.

He had a very large Bible with all sorts of explanations, none of which, as he saw, made sense when he was face to face with these things.

He said, you know, with all the notes in this Bible, and I still don't have the answer.

Well, one of the things he couldn't answer was the subject of the immortality of the soul.

Why, if man had an immortal soul, why the story is as it is? Now, I don't have to go any further with you on that.

But it would be absolutely inexplicable if there was an immortal soul in man at that state on the basis of the meaning of the word soul and certainly on the story as is given.

He said, I'll just have to go to, you know, theologians who have said more clearly because the notes in this Bible really don't answer the question.

I know the translation, but I don't know what edition it was.

It was full of notes.

Well, a man is only going to find more confusion.

But for the first time, this person who called me said, it gave me a certain confidence or awareness that I was indeed understanding the Bible correctly.

That a minister like that was simply unable to come to a recognition that that particular set of scriptures could ever be justified as a basis for his doctrine.

It simply tells us something quite different.

He would have to go somewhere else in the Bible to try to find an answer.

Now, that was sufficient. I don't want to go further.

But I am telling you, it is possible for people today, as it was possible for me, almost necessary, because until I heard the program in 1944, there was no other.

There was no other voice other than somebody who was right here or right there and wrong here and wrong there.

You know, we listened. We read.

I have taken the Knights of Columbus correspondence course.

I have read the Catholic My Sunday Missal.

We listened to programs published by the Lutherans, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I have read material from the Methodist Church.

Our family essentially were German Methodists, but we long since recognized that there was something different between Bible and what the Church was teaching.

So we essentially didn't go to church except on rare occasions.

People are doing the same today.

They are listening.

Religion is one of the major subject areas on television, and undoubtedly, sometimes on radio, certainly on some days.

It's even possible now, strangely, something that could not have happened 20 to 30 years ago to find a religious subject on the front of U.S. News and World Report.

A religious subject is sometimes addressed.

Now, I don't know whether the new policies would be the same or not, but we actually have situations today where we must reconcile ourselves, and I'm mentioning this since we live in this area.

I'm giving details and not so much of the biblical statement, but there are people who are learning what it does mean to be baptized.

They are learning what it does mean to repent, because they can hear our program and others, and if they look in the Bible and God is calling them, whether they hear the word repentance from one or another is not significant.

That they do is.

You see, many modern translations no longer use the old form that certain major European denominations used to, when you translate it, it says do penance.

Even the Catholic versions now introduce repentance rather than do penance.

And the Lutheran translations in German use other translations that are different than the old tradition.

So people are able to grasp, and then you can go to a Bible dictionary.

We didn't have Bible dictionaries available in those days like we can freely get a single volume when you could have had a large four or five volume work, yes.

But dictionaries where you have a choice of half a dozen single volume ones, you don't have to go to a religious bookstore.

You can go to a secular bookstore, the religious section, and it's amazing what you can have.

So it is possible for people to read and study.

And religion is declining in its overall impact as a percent of the nation.

The nation is going more and more secular.

Yet at the same time, the people who are religious are more and more religious.

You get my point.

That is, there was a time that many people were in the category of in some way being religious, but they really weren't practicing their religion.

Christianity as a whole today is made up of people who are taking religion far more seriously.

And as each generation moves along in age, the impact of religion is having a less or smaller and smaller effect on those who simply aren't religiously responding or inclined.

This is why we have a confrontation today that will not go away over abortion.

Because there are people today who are raising their voices about what is going on, which if Hitler had ever tried it, he would have been castigated all over the world.

Now we have taken it for granted in the United States, in Russia, Japan, China, and Europe.

But Europe is behind.

And there are others who have become secular, who take the opposite view.

That is what is officially the policy of government as a whole.

But there was a time religious people weren't taking these things that seriously.

They really, you know, it wasn't that common.

And this thing won't go away.

And there are people who are being more and more concerned about the decay of religion and don't think Europe isn't concerned.

And don't think Europeans aren't concerned about the possibility that religion, in fact, might intrude in life.

Because there are people who are both secular, there are Marxists, there are Christian Socialists, there are Christian Democrats.

I mean, the world is all divided.

And some are coalescing in one area and many more in the more secular area because of prosperity.

Anyway, we are going to have to go to people.

We don't just bring them to us anymore.

We must go to people in a way we never did before.

Television is no longer adequate. Radio is no longer adequate.

People who know of us, in other words, we have to reap in a different way what has been sown by us and for that matter through the Bible and the pages of the Bible by others.

I learned, some of you learned.

Sometimes if you grew up in the church you never had that experience of having to dig through other people's doctrines.

But we did.

You see, as someone said, many who are reared in the church ask questions after their baptize that those of us who weren't asked before.

And therefore we had to make a decision on a far greater basis and things that might in a sense emotionally surprise you when you face them.

We had to face before we made decisions.

And this is why some young people simply opt out.

They hadn't faced all the decisions.

They hadn't counted the entire cost.

I hope that if any of you know of the brethren who are in the various Los Angeles areas that you inform yourself and I think it would do us good to be informed so that we can better understand both, shall we say, the new faces of people who visit us from time to time whom we have not seen before and recognize that if we do move, as some of us do, to other areas that we have responsibility in helping other people and for that matter with people with you on the job if you don't work here at the work.

Sometimes we even have to help each other on the job because spiritually we're not all as mature.

Some people are hired who have special gifts and talents and aren't as experienced spiritually as perhaps some others.

But we're here to help and we should be all of us wherever we are needed.

We learn not to push and the young man who called me this morning is a man who keeps asking, knock and it shall be opened.

Ask and you shall receive.

I don't go knocking on his door.

I do call on occasion, I did, to see how the family was doing.

But he comes to me.

But we have to make an answer sufficiently attractive that he comes back.

And happily he's now taking those steps.

Others may have gone much further.

Some have even been baptized.

I hope we all profit by understanding that we don't have to get into concern as to whether this is or is not the true church.

The true church is made up of the people whom God has placed in that church.

The bulk of whom you have never met because they are in other congregations around the world in the churches of God.

But you will be surprised sometimes whom you will meet for the first time of people who have grown and developed spiritually and finally come into our fellowship through circumstances unexpected or unique.