

ELDER MARK E. PETERSEN

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

Living in the great city of London, Sister Petersen and I feel as if we are in the middle of the stage of the world watching a tremendous drama move forward. We are living in a most interesting period of the world's history. Sweeping changes are taking place, and events are moving forward with tremendous speed.

Revolution

Actually we are passing through a world-wide revolution in thought, education, politics, science, and religion. Values have changed; aims and objectives are widely different.

In no area is there a more interesting adjustment going on than in the field of religion. We are passing through a modern reformation, literally. In many respects it is similar to that of the sixteenth century, and yet it is totally different in other ways.

The most astonishing thing about it is that both Catholics and the major Protestant groups want it and agree that it is needed. Both are working to bring it about, each group trying to reform its own rituals and dogmas at first, with serious intentions toward a union of some of the denominations afterward.

Modern Reformation

It is significant and encouraging that in this modern reformation both Catholics and Protestants have in mind one great goal: to remodel their creeds and practices in order to bring them back to the teachings of Christ and the Bible.

That Christendom needs such a change, no one will deny. The churches themselves are the first to admit it, and are more vocal than any other group in calling for whatever steps are necessary to bring spirituality back to the people and the people back to the churches. But even some of the clergy have contributed to the weakened Christian position, which now makes this reformation necessary.

Clergy-weakened Religion

An archbishop in one great church

recently challenged the miracles of Christ. A bishop wrote a book in which he repudiated the Christian concept of Deity and earned for himself the title: *A Bishop without God*. Another preacher warned his parish not to believe the book of Genesis, and certainly not to accept the story of Adam and Eve.

A Brooklyn pastor read to his congregation and recommended as good literature, excerpts from a book which was pronounced obscene by the New York State Supreme Court. Another pastor refused a request to read the 23rd Psalm at the funeral service of a mother because it was not in the printed liturgy. A group of divinity students at Oxford University told newspapers in England that the dominant church needed a "shock treatment," and they proceeded to provide it with a book entitled *Objections to Christian Belief*. As this sort of thing has grown in the world, it has become more than ever apparent to the leaders of Christendom that a change is urgently needed to save their crumbling structure.

Reformation, How Accomplished

The puzzling question is: How shall it be accomplished? Among the proposals are:

First—consolidate the denominations so that the strong will bolster the weak.

Second—Make the scriptures more readable. This point has resulted in a rash of new translations of both Protestant and Catholic versions of the Bible in modern English.

Third—Reform and modernize the teachings and rituals originating in the Middle Ages, which are ineffectual now in holding the interest of space-age worshippers.

One of the great Roman Catholic cardinals, taking a leading part in promoting this movement, publicly announced that a reformation of his own church is definitely required to meet the modern challenge.

His Eminence Julius Cardinal Dopfner, who governs the powerful See of Munich in Germany, was one of the four prelates chosen by Pope Paul VI

to guide the debates in the last session of the Vatican Council. He recently voiced the most direct statement yet made by any high Catholic official on the necessity of extensive reforms in that church. In fact, he asserted, the reformation has already begun, for that is the principle aim of the Vatican Council.

Speaking in Munich's Congress Hall, following his return from the meetings in Rome, he told an audience of 2,800 people that the time has come for the church to change, and that the adjustment must be both a reformation and a renovation.

He said that many church members have been lost to Catholicism because in their eyes the church appeared to be a "superannuated souvenir of a past age" which opposes the principle of human freedom.

The church speaks to its members in an ancient tongue through incomprehensible rituals, he explained, adding that its preaching has little relation to present-day life. And then he said: "The reformation of the church must be based on the teachings of Christ and the Holy Scripture."

You may read a detailed account of his address in the Atlantic edition of *Time* magazine for February 7, 1964.

Newsweek magazine for March 30, 1964, reports that twenty-seven priests of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States have joined in writing a new book about the failure of the churches. They point to what they call "worn-out practices and attitudes" and call for a reformation "from top to bottom."

When the Douay Version of the Bible was revised and published in London in 1947, a special introductory note was included to explain that a number of changes had been made in the footnotes and annotations because those published in earlier editions "reflected the mentality of the reformation period."

Revisions of Doctrines at Variance with the Bible

The Church of England recently published a book called *This Church of England*. It is intensely interesting and illuminating. After asserting that extensive reforms are urgently needed, it cites specific instances where doctrines

and practices of the church are at variance with the Bible; for instance, it points out that the baptism of infants is not taught in the scripture. It says further that baptism in the days of Jesus was performed by immersion, usually in a river, and that it was symbolic of the burial and resurrection of Christ.

A modern interpretation of the Ten Commandments is called for, as well as a revision of the prayer book, which is the basic liturgy of the church. As it now stands the prayer book is regarded as being too characteristic of the sixteenth century.

Phases of the reformation of that church are being debated currently in Parliament which has the last word on changes in the form of worship.

The Central Advisory Council of the Anglican Church is presently attempting to reform the parish system which it says is "quaint" since it dates back to the seventh century.

Infant Baptism

The attitude of some of the clergy in regard to returning to Bible practices, especially with respect to infant baptism, is shown in the publication of the *Woodford Parish* magazine in England for February 1964. In this issue the rector of that church said:

"Generations of English babies have been nurtured on this hypocrisy. Their first contact with Christ and his church, through infant baptism, is an unreal mixture of humbug and nonsense. As one vicar said to me, 'I have no desire to increase the number of baptized pagans walking about in this parish.'"

And then the rector continues: "It is high time honesty began again in the House of God. And where better than in the service of Christian initiation, baptism? Why not keep it for grown-ups as in New Testament times, and have some simpler, more genuine service for babies?"

"We never read in the New Testament of our Lord baptising babies. But we do read of him blessing them.

Blessing of Babies

"Why then don't we adopt this New Testament practice, the practice of the

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Lord himself, and bring children to church for blessing?

"In my church at Woodford we have just such a service. I call it an order of infant naming and blessing, with thanksgiving of parents."

And then the good rector continues: "Do we cling to infant baptism because we are too superstitious? Let us never forget that God is as sweetly reasonable as we are. If we think that a dying baby must be baptized, we must look carefully to see whether we have not gone over the border of true religion into the realm of superstition and magic."

Products of Dark Ages

When the doctrines of Christendom are studied carefully, it is seen that much of our present-day worship is a product of the Middle and Dark Ages, with relatively little of it going back to the time of Christ.

As a result, any return to Jesus and the Bible will be revolutionary in its effect because most of the liturgies of today originated long after Christ and centuries after the Bible was compiled.

They would, therefore, have to be discarded if a literal return to the early Christian Church is seriously considered. When today's religious scholars speak of returning to Christ and the Bible we are inclined to ask:

Return to Bible?

Will the church membership respond to the radical adjustment that will be required to return to Bible practices, steeped as they are in tradition?

Does the Bible contain enough detail to instruct them fully regarding the original Christian Church and its doctrines, so that they really may accomplish this return?

On this latter point, the clerics say that the Bible is sufficient, for it contains all of God's word. And yet the Bible itself admits that it is an incomplete record and does not contain all of God's word. It mentions other books of scripture which are not within its covers and therefore are not available for study by anyone seeking the full truth of the gospel.

Missing Books

Moses spoke of the "Book of the Covenant," which we do not have. He also mentions the "Book of the Wars of Israel," which has never been found.

We might not miss reading about their wars, but it would be most helpful in a return to God if mankind had the book of the sacred covenants which the Almighty made with his people.

The "Book of Jasher," referred to by Joshua, is not in the Bible. The same is true of the "Book of the Acts of Solomon," referred to in First Kings.

The books of Nathan and Gad, both of whom were prophets and seers, are missing. As inspired men, their writings would be an enlightening guide on the way of truth.

Ahijah and Iddo were prophets and seers likewise. Would their works not inspire modern people if they were available? But where are they? Can we say that our Bible is actually complete without them?

The "Book of Jehu" is mentioned in the Old Testament but is not included in it. Isaiah wrote a second book known as the "Acts of Uzziah," but where is it? Will anyone say that Isaiah's writings are not inspirational? His second book might prove to be most invaluable if we had it.

"The Sayings of the Seers," another book of sacred writings, is referred to in the Bible. Where is it now? Would it not be good for today's Christians in their spiritual meanderings?

Paul wrote letters, in addition to those we have in our Bible, and speaks of them. He wrote a third letter to the Corinthians, and at least another one to the Ephesians. Where are they? He also wrote an Epistle to the Laodiceans, but it is not in our possession. Is the Bible then complete? Does it contain all of God's word?

Jude wrote another Epistle in addition to the one in the New Testament. He also mentions a volume of scripture known as the "Prophecies of Enoch" to which he evidently had access, but which we do not have today.

The Saviour's Teachings

Then there is the matter of the Savior's teachings. He lived an inten-

sive and full life during the three years of his public ministry. He preached to multitudes repeatedly. He conversed with individuals almost constantly, and gave many intimate instructions to the Twelve.

Can anyone say that his three years of instruction are contained in the Bible? May they be read in the few hours it takes to peruse what he said in the four Gospels? Can three years of the Savior's eloquent teachings be condensed into three hours of reading material? The Apostle John says twice in his Gospel that not a fraction of the Savior's ministry is recorded.

Much as we love it, sincerely as we believe it, can we in all truth say that the Bible is complete, that it contains all of God's word, or even the full text of the Savior's instructions?

Obviously the Lord gave other revelations anciently. He had prophets in addition to those usually mentioned in the Bible. They spoke for him. They gave enlightenment to ancient men, and they would give us light, too, if only we had their writings.

Since men have strayed so far in the past with the Bible in their possession, is it likely that this same Bible by itself can bring them back to Christ?

The reformers of the sixteenth century had the Bible, but it did not keep them from drifting in different directions and disputing violently among themselves as to which way was right.

Can the reformers of today do any better?

Revelation Needed

Have they any more light and understanding? If so, where did they get it?

Further enlightenment, dependable enough to guide men back to God, must come from God. That means revelation—prophecy—today.

If our learned men really believe their Bibles to which they now hope to return, they will also believe that modern revelation must come to rescue them from the morass into which they have fallen, for that is what the Bible teaches.

When they seek a return to Christ and the Bible, they publicly and honestly admit that they have strayed from him and his teachings, and that the

doctrines which they have taught all these years differ from the revealed word.

The scriptures predicted this departure from early Christianity; and when men return to the Bible, we hope they will read those predictions in it, for they are many.

But the Bible also foretells a new revelation in latter days—the actual revelation which is so greatly needed now to lead men back to Christ. A reformation cannot lead them back, but this new revelation can!

New Revelation

We Latter-day Saints have that new revelation. We have a new prophet and new scriptures also, which, added to the Bible, now point the way. This new revelation brought with it the true understanding of the nature of God and a restoration of primitive Christianity. That restoration is Mormonism. It came about through the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jun. He saw God and communed with him, even as did Moses. He received revelations from heaven, as did Isaiah. Angelic ministers commissioned him for the work, giving him divine authority.

Through him the Church of Jesus Christ, as it was originally organized on the earth, has been restored in our day, with all its powers and blessings. And it is true. It is the beginning of a modern ministry of Jesus the Christ, whom we declare to be the Divine Son of God; that he lives, and that he has been seen of modern men in modern times in modern America. And this is the testimony which we bear in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

President David O. McKay:

He to whom we have just listened is Elder Mark E. Petersen of the Council of the Twelve, and also the president of the West European Mission.

We shall conclude this opening session of the one hundred and thirty-fourth Annual Conference of the Church with the Choir singing, "Thanks Be To God," conducted by Elder Richard P. Condie. Following the singing the benediction will be pronounced