

(Continued from Part 1)

Understand this, that every one of us needs to understand what awaits us. The Scripture has been left to us for many reasons, but one is to show us what's ahead for those who dare to break with ritual and become part of a living, moving, breathing, organic entity, a girl.

I speak to you across my own lifetime. How long is that? How far back does that go? When Franklin Roosevelt was running for reelection? No. Further back than that. Back to the first century, back to the Priscillianists, back to the Celtic Church, back to the Lollards, to the Hittites, to Henry Phillips, who betrayed William Tyndale; Henry was my favorite villain. And oh, Henry Phillips, how many times have we met your kin? Not only did you betray William Tyndale to be burned at the stake, but before Tyndale was tried and burned, you sat outside his prison cell, and no one could visit William Tyndale without you, Henry Phillips, telling the people what a horrible human being with whom they were about to meet, and who testified under oath of the wickedness of William Tyndale.

Across those ages, I have reached back and studied in depth and detail what each generation of dissenters has gone through, and now I have been in the presence of the Little Flock (Watchman Nee in China). I have heard the tales of the Jesus family, which was virtually liquidated. I have walked among and known the leaders of what is usually called the Bakht Singh churches of India. I have lived with, cried with, prayed with, commiserated with, and praised God with the Prem Pradhan of India. Oh, have I heard the stories of the Plymouth brethren, whom we are told have gone through more splits than any other denomination in the evangelical world. I tell you that the splits are so similar you could interchange them. What happened during the days of Wycliffe, or those that happened among the Little Flock, or the followers of Prem Pradhan, over against the Waldensians, and the Anabaptists, and can exchange their story with the Moravians. Yet on every occasion, those who listen to their call, their clarion call, always succeed.

But this I can add as a child of God who has lived for over half of a century outside the institutional church, and inside the joys of the church that is pioneering into the heavens, that not one man I have ever known who has split a church was following the Lord a few years later; not one. The piper's pipe is real; words are captivating, the reasoning is impeccable, the vision so clear and so Christian, and usually so free of suffering. But after the piper has played his tune, he doesn't have another one to play. He cannot abide nor deal with those who have followed his song. Without exception, they have all crashed and burned. Not one of them was ever able to deliver to the point that most have either renounced their faith or gone into the world. They only have a song. Such has been the experience all of us have had, and in every generation and every work on this earth.

During my visit to the little flock in Asia, the first thing I learned when I stepped off the plane in the Philippines was that the church and its churches were embroiled in a lawsuit, and as one of them said, "We who have so cherished our unity are now in court." It is but one example among hundreds. With every person who walks through that door, the potential of insisting on something

or upon insisting that they themselves have a unique contribution to make. And without that contribution being laid at the church, then there will be problems.

So, what do we do? One of the things we do is to make sure we know everything God's people went through in the generations before our arrival that we have touched on today. We will one day have the whole story, beginning with the Priscillians and continuing up to the year 2000. This will make us wise about the past and help us understand where we are right now. As I've said about the predictability of the human psyche, we can know pretty well what we will also face.

Is there a price to be paid? Yes, there's a price to be paid. Does the glory, the beauty of restoration, make it come out even? Yes, sometimes. No, sometimes, but it beats within the heart of every believer who has ever caught a vision of what the church of Jesus Christ has been, and could be, the knowledge that someone must pay this price of endurance and this price of unity. Please never think that this is something that is an isolated way, native only to Americans. I have known no exception anywhere on this entire planet.

When we begin to read the story, there will always be those who seek to turn that story to prove that these were Bible-centered Christians. We have been fishing from that pond for a long time. The promise of what we can be and will be if we'll just be Bible-centered has a 200-year history, and it is backed by seminaries and Bible schools all over this planet. Yet it is never proven to be all that is told it will be. Why? Because the center of this universe is not the Bible. The center is Jesus Christ. Knowing Him and experiencing His church.

We draw from the Scripture, but we draw there not to prove the scripture, nor to make the scripture central, nor to demand obedience to...not the Scripture, but a belief that if we learn the Scripture, all things will turn out right. Bible-centered churches have as much or more wreckage than any other group of Christians in this world. It is the Life of Jesus Christ that softens our hearts. It is Christ who overwhelms us. It is Christ who dwells within us. It has given us, therefore, to find this Christ of scripture and this Christ who dwells within us and to know Him.

I have sat in classes and meetings where the Bible is held up as the ultimate end. I have never yet seen anyone stand up, cheering and praising God at what they have learned about the scripture, where I have seen God's people caught in glory as they discover how rich Christ is. There is one flaw in a man standing and telling us to read, study, and obey the Bible, and the flaw is quite remarkable: you can't do what he tells you that you must do. When someone tells you to obey the Bible, he might as well be Moses standing up on Mount Sinai, giving you a list of 613 things to do to please God. The Hebrews were never able to do it, and now we Christians are being told just as many things that we are to do. Each Sunday, it shifts a little bit; something more is added to the list. Our frustration is as great as that of the Hebrews. We cannot, and there is only One who can. His name is Jesus, and the Christian life is only Christ's to live, and it's not for the individual to do. It is for Christ in the church, through the body...His own body. These precious desires of ours to know Him are fulfilled. No, it is not the Bible. It is Christ who possesses these people, and it will be Christ, and it will be Christ, and it will be Christ.

It is this torch that we reach for. It is this torch we take to join that long train of those whose paramount witness is to Christ. This is that torch. This is that testimony. It is Christ. It is Christ. The Priscillians no longer exist. The Celtic church no longer exists. The Bogomils, the Cathars, the Paulicians; all of these no longer exist, but there must be men who will at least for one day touch the Waldensians, the Moravians, the United Brethren, the Anabaptists. There's much to learn from them, not for what they are today, but what they used to be, and what they ought not to be this day. It is quite awful to discover that all of these groups that do exist have yielded to the pulpit, yielded to the pastor, yielded to the sermon, yielded to the pew, and yielded to an absolutely mute laity.

Such is the legacy, the traditions, that prevail in the world as a result of what we picked up during the reformation. I repeat, it is imperative that we reach back to learn of those who no longer exist and to look at those who came from hundreds of years ago. It has been my privilege to just about meet every one of those groups somewhere on this earth and then come to work among the people closest to T. Austin Sparks, the very, very closest friends of Watchmen Nee, that of Prem Pradhan's, and to associate as closely as I can with the Bakht Singh movement.

God, give us a few men born with the passion to see, know, hear, and learn so that we can go on where they left off. Yes, and to understand their weaknesses, their blind spots and their unique contributions and to warm our hands at the fire, the fading fire of those people, and meet and speak with those whose lives, even in this modern age, are willing to lay down all, not only for Christ, the church, but to endure the sufferings, the trials, the dangers and yes, the divisions of which all of them pass through.

There is no group, there will be no groups that will seize that torch in the future, but what these things that we have looked upon in these last few minutes, those are the things which will befall them and us. Yet knowing that for the sake of His bride and for the knowledge of knowing Him, and failing both, to know that we have given our all in the highest understanding and vision and practice of which the Lord has revealed to us.

Won't you come and join us? Won't you join in our crusade? Won't you be strong and stand with us? Beyond this veil of flesh, beyond this body of ours, this flesh of ours, there is a realm, a world for us to discover and explore.