

When an Organization Heads Downward

Why is it that we encounter so many problems as a people and as individual Christian believers?

We can be thankful that we do! The closer we are living to God, the more earnestly He will be working to purify us of the dross of pride and self-seeking.

This is why housecleaning is going on in the Independent Ministries. Our kind Father is going through with His broom to keep them clean.

It is an intriguing fact that, when the early church was in its greatest purity—just after the ascension of Christ,—that Ananias and Sapphira were so harshly dealt with. In later centuries, the popes of Rome committed every kind of evil and atrocity, yet they did not drop dead on the spot. The truth is that God purifies His own. In contrast, **He frequently lets those dedicated to wickedness go on in their evil deeds until they are broken without remedy. God only purifies individuals and groups able to be purified.**

(But think not just because a crisis is occurring in an organization, that it is being purified. That depends on the willingness of the people to unitedly put away their sins and return to obedience to God and His Word.)

Why are there crises in the Independent Ministries, and in your and my life? Let us be thankful for it all. God is trying to show us things we need to learn, and get us ready for heaven. And more,—He is preparing us for the Final Crisis which is soon to break.

I spoke recently by phone with a friend who pastors a small independent church. All of its members were forced out of nearby conference churches by the worldliness carried on there. They are trying to do what was right and, as a result, are now having to meet separately from their beloved denomination.

But my friend told me that many of those members are experiencing a variety of personal problems, including sickness. **My friend, I tell you,—God is preparing us for greater things in**

the future, either in this life or in the next! Rejoice in His good work; know that He is caring for you—and will be with you to the end!

Having said that, what would happen if God did not keep purifying His own people?

They would become self-satisfied, and turn their attention to caring for themselves and amassing wealth. They would become proud and think they were in need of nothing. **They would begin worshiping men.** They would exalt men. Indeed, **the exaltation of man is always a keynote, a hallmark of apostasy!**

It is so very easy to change over from an apostolic spirit to a papal frame of mind. **What are the symptoms of the papal mentality? Let us consider several of them:**

First, there is a fascination with applauding men. Slavishly following men simply because they are leaders, quite apart from their words or conduct. Accepting and defending doctrines and standards just because that is what the leaders are teaching. A determination to defend leaders, in spite of their conduct or errors.

Second, there is a fascination with the organization, as being more important than the principles upon which it is founded. Maintaining and furthering the organization becomes more important than believing truth, studying and defending Scripture, or even promoting and defending the honor of God. The organization becomes more important than the teachings that brought it into existence.

That is the papal mentality. Given enough time, every new organization becomes infected with it. **What is the solution? Put God and His Word first, never the leaders or the organization!** And that can only be done on an individual basis. Each one must do it for himself. But if enough individuals in the organization stand for the right, the organization will not—while they are in

it—become solidly corrupt.

But that brings us to an ominous fact: **One of the quickest ways to corrupt an organization is to eliminate those trying to protect the organization from apostasy.** When wrong living and wrong doing becomes evident, there will be a few who may speak up, and then be dealt with. But when it becomes too obvious, then a far larger number of members of the organization or group arise in protest. When that happens, **if the leaders are able to suppress or oust the opposition, then the organization is purging out the godliness from its ranks. All that remains in the ranks are the yes-men, the time-servers, the hirelings, and the Jesuit agents. Is there nothing else left? Yes, a few faithful souls will remain, but they will be the timid ones who favor silence to standing in defense of right in a crisis.**

This is what is happening right now in the Oregon Conference. It has been carried on there for several years. But it is occurring elsewhere as well, both in individual local churches and in entire church entities.

For example, we have reported on Adventist-owned retirement centers (nursing homes) which regularly show Hollywood movie videos on Sabbath afternoons. **In such a situation, the evil is so blatant that, soon, all the protesters have been ousted and everyone else with principles has quit. The organization—in this case a nursing home—becomes a desolation.**

The same is taking place in local congregations, when liberal, new theology pastors introduce modernism. As long as a majority of the members do not vigorously protest, the conference president will always back the local pastor. **So, even if 49 percent of the members on the board and constituency have principles, ere long they will either be squashed, silenced, or ousted.** That local church becomes a haunt for doleful creatures.

The same can occur among any of

us. When so much wrong doing occurs that a large number of workers in a given ministry are either fired or forced to resign, then you can know that only policy people remain behind. They will support their leader to the end, and all their problems they will attribute to those who have revealed what they were doing wrong.

But what happens when an organization has successfully undergone the purging process—and those who advocate truth and righteousness have either been kicked out or sidelined into silence? What is a corrupt organization like?

As mentioned earlier, *it is a special hallmark of such organizations to exalt men—especially men in positions of power. When influential men are exalted, while the pleadings of the just are ignored, you can know that the organization has turned downward.*

Our kind, heavenly Father is trying to spare each one of us, as well as our Independent Ministries from such a fate. That is why He sends trials into our lives. It is also why He calls whistle blowers into action to also sound warnings.

When the organization drops far enough down, the worship of men becomes especially obnoxious. Every wish is obeyed, regardless of whether it is a principled one. Flattery of leaders is continual. Everyone becomes a stepping stone to a higher position, and the way you are treated depends on how it will advance your position.

Here are two examples of organizations which are corrupting themselves. They are strikingly similar in many respects. Both instances were shared with me by friends.

The first example is from a book about a Soviet pilot, at the time living in the eastern Soviet Union:

“The Minister of Defense himself was coming to the Far East and to Chuguyevka.

“The career of every officer would depend upon his impressions, and to make a good impression, it would

be necessary to build a paved road from the base to the helicopter pad where the Minister would land, about four miles away. The entire regiment would begin work on the road tomorrow.

“It never was clear just where in the chain of command the order originated; certainly Shevsov had no authority to initiate such a costly undertaking. In any case, the Dark Forces [the United States], the SR-71s, the Chinese, the desirability of maintaining flying proficiency—all were forgotten now. Pilots, engineers, technicians, mechanics, cooks, everybody turned to road building—digging a base, laying gravel, pouring concrete, and covering it with macadam.

“It’s unbelievable. For this we could have built everything, barracks, mess hall, everything. We could have built a palace [Lt. Belenko thought]!”

“But the crowning order was yet to come. Within a radius of about a mile, the land around the base had been cleared of trees to facilitate take-offs and landings. The Minister, it was said, was a devotee of nature and its verdancy. He would want to see green trees as he rode to the base. Therefore, trees would have to be transplanted to line the mile or so of road.

“You can’t transplant trees here in the middle of the summer! Everybody knows that!”

“But transplanted they were, hundreds of them, pines, spruces, poplars, dug up from the forest, hauled by truck and placed every fifteen yards along the road. By the first week in July they were dead, shriveling and yellowing.

“Dig them up and replace them. So they did, with the same results.

“Do it again. He may be here anytime now.

“So again saplings and some fairly tall trees were imported by the hundreds from the forest. Again they all died. Finally acknowledging that nature would not change its ways for them, someone had an idea. Leave them there, and just before he arrives, we’ll spray them all with green

paint. We’ll drive fast, and he won’t know the difference.

“It was all to no avail. In early August they were advised that illness had forced cancellation of the Minister’s inspection. He wasn’t coming after all. It was time to fly again.”—*MIG Pilot: the Final Escape of Lt. Belenko*, pp. 105-106.

Such fawning adulation of a leader! Where but in the Soviet Union or the papacy would we encounter such idolatry, such organizational corruption!

The above incident occurred in the summer of 1976. The second occurred only six months ago: in October 1993. The Annual Council of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination was held on October 5-11 last year. If it had been held in the Takoma Park Church, in Maryland, as is often done, it would have been a staid procedure—since under the purview of the American press.

But this council was held in a location far from Western Civilization—in Bangalore, in south India. Most Advent believers would never learn what occurred there. But, providentially, we did. A full report appeared in an Australian newspaper. A friend sent it to us.

In startling detail, we learn that, **on behalf of leaders throughout the world field, the Adventist leadership of the Southern Asia Division decided to present—what amounted to—an idolatrous procession in honor of an earthly god-king.**

After you have read the account, read again the excerpt from *MIG Pilot*, above. **The similarities are striking. Fawning adulation of an organizational leader, at immense expense, in order to make the jobs of local leaders more secure.**

We can expect such things from atheists in the Soviet Union, but when we see it in our own leaders—we must say, This is not Christianity, it is only a cheap, pretended imitation of it.

Worldlings have special names for such conduct: bootlicking, servility, flummery, sycophancy, currying favor, pandering to, and honeying. They recognize it for what it is. *The Australian article is on the next page:*

Keep in mind that the occasion was the second-most important meeting by the denomination: the *Annual Council*. Next to the quinquennial (5-year) *General Conference Session*, the *Annual Council* is the most weighty in its decisions. This is because, next to the session, it has the largest representation of leadership in attendance.

With such a background, the implications of the above idolatrous affair are terrific. That our leaders throughout the world (the presidents, secretaries, and treasurers of every division and union, along with leaders of many conferences, hospitals, colleges, publishing houses, and a large number of General Conference personnel) would all gather to watch such a craven spectacle is horrifying. **That they would condone such an orgy in pride is totally astounding! That our leaders would, without protest, condone such large amounts of precious mission offering money (perhaps including tithe funds, for it is 50 percent of the mission funds used by our leaders) being used to lavish adulation on the General Conference president—is amazing.**

And Robert Folkenberg, the one at the center of the ingratiating orgy who was treated as a god-king,—went through with the whole sordid affair. He could have held up his hand in protest at the beginning, and said, “Wait, wait; stop! We will not have this. Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve!”

But, instead, he accepted the fawn-

ing adulation, took his seat on the throne, and was carried along in the procession as spirit-music played and pagan dancers minced and did him obeisance.

Someone will say that this incident should not be mentioned, but that we should all keep quiet. I say we should stop sleeping, but wake up and protest what is taking place in our denomination! Who are we serving when we keep silent: God or man? When we keep silent in the face of such golden-calf idolatry, we become tarnished with the evil. Some of the responsibility for what happens adheres to us.

Why were you and I put into this world? to serve self and keep the good will of those around us, or to serve the God of heaven and come up to the help of the Lord when ungodly acts are done in the church? **When Achan commits his sins, do we put our hand over our mouth and join him in his tent?**

This everlasting complacency is destroying the people of God. It is placing them in a dream-like daze, a hypnotic slumber. Yet they cannot, will not admit the cause of their condition: **They will not deal with sin in the camp of Isreal.** They would rather hide their faces, plead, as did Chamberlain, for “peace in our time,” and, when finally roused, complain that the only problem is the few who plead for repentance and reform.

Let us put away the evil from us, that we may have the blessing of God

in our midst.

My friend, if we would stay with our historic beliefs and standards, we would not be led into sin! That is the root cause of such apostasy. This man willing to be idolized in Bangalore, India, in the first week of October 1993, is the same Robert Folkenberg who, only four months later (on February 19 or 20, 1994, at an area-wide meeting in Sacramento, California), declared to the assembled laymen and workers: *“I am so happy I have unconditional justification!”* Only a man holding such a view could, in silence, accept such idolatrous worship in India from our world leaders. **A man freed from condemnation for his actions is a man who can indulge in sin without fear of reprisal from God. He has only man to fear, and they are idolizing him.**

I said earlier that the quickest way for an organization to head downward would be for its leaders to conduct themselves so brazenly that workers and members either have to depart or silently accept it. For when that occurs, those who leave take the godliness out of the organization and those who remain became less sensitive to the wrongs they are continually witnessing.

It is clear that we live in perilous times. Each one among us must carefully, prayerfully think through our present responsibility, position, and duty.

May God have mercy on us all; we surely need it in this hour of crisis.

—Vance Ferrell

“Satan is constantly endeavoring to attract attention to man in the place of God. He leads the people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of searching the Scriptures to learn their duty for themselves. Then, by controlling the minds of these leaders, he can influence the multitudes according to his will.”

—*Great Controversy*, 595