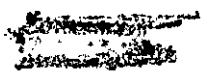


THE
ERA
OF

A. J. Farnsworth



by Daniel D. Preston



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DANIEL D. PRESTON

PREFACE

A study of Scripture involves the study of many individuals, most of whom were great men but some of whom were despicable characters. The Bible included all because it necessitated incorporating all to present the truth in its entirety. Some events of history are not pleasant, just as it is not pleasant to read about some of the individuals in Scripture who started so well and finished so poorly. Events, however, must be placed in their proper perspective and given the weight deserved. One great American theme is an individuals bringing himself from rigorous surroundings and realizing success through his perseverance and fortitude.

Studying about impressive, determined and ingenious people helps to encourage the same attitudes. Books may be written but it is difficult to exhaust a good theme. Worthy of further study is the era of Church history which involved the period of the life of A. J. Tomlinson, whose impact is continuing. Looking at the guiding purpose and the major decisions reached remains significant to the present time. No structure can exist for a long period of time without a strong foundation. Periodically, it is necessary to examine the old foundations and make a comparison as to whether fidelity to those major precepts are continuing to be maintained.

A. J. Tomlinson proved himself to be a leader in several facets: he lived a deeply spiritual life, he was an educator, a preacher, a teacher, and an administrator. At this time in Church history there was no one in the movement who was his equal. He became the guiding light of a young group who, in a very real sense, did not know who they were nor where they were going until A. J. Tomlinson, through inspiration, informed them. That many religious denominations existed at this time in American history is an uncontested fact. One could find almost any group who would condone his concepts of the Bible. However, there was a deep longing within the heart of A. J. Tomlinson to uncover the true, unencumbered Church which Jesus Christ had set in order. During his time he looked with fervent desire for this pure Scriptural entity, but his search was in vain. Meeting the small group in the home of W. F. Bryant, he had come in close communication with others of like mind. They, too, were eager

to accept the complete precepts of Scripture and be the divine Body of Christ set in order. It was not that they wanted to start another small sect or religion, but they desired to uncover the true Body and restore it to its original purpose and beauty.

The work of uncovering is at once tedious and laborious, with some failings and mistakes made along the way. Some who joined with the group to help in the uncovering of the Body of Christ actually helped to further litter. So, in effect, their litter had to be purged. This work of purging would include a continuous process until the return of the Lord when the work would be finished. At no time did A. J. Tomlinson indicate that ultimate truth with no need for further development had been reached by the group. Indeed, each assembly seemed to bring new issues and new problems in need of resolution. Not only was it necessary to study and implement the Scriptures, but it was also necessary to communicate with some who were illiterate and uninformed on the Bible. These individuals demanded special care and guidance.

THE ERA OF A. J. TOMLINSON is an exciting time of discovery and depicts what can be done with a few who are dedicated to a single purpose. The bitter and the sweet must be taken together, but when the complete story is finished, the dynamic leader of the Church of God comes out in an overall conclusion of victory.

Prepare yourself for a journey into exciting and informative adventure with twentieth century Church leadership. Hopefully, the writer can say with the writer of Maccabees: "If I have written well and to the point, this is what I myself desired; but if meanly and indifferently, this is all I could attain unto."

INTRODUCTION

All Christians look forward to the glorious climax to the plan of Salvation for man and to the consumation of God's work upon earth. This plan was in God's mind before the foundation of this earth was established and was set into motion after the fall of man.

Truth relative to this plan of God has been a winding road. It is the truth, however, which is still being sought by Christians today.

Daniel Preston writes, in *The Era of A. J. Tomlinson*, about a man and an era when further truth of the plan of God was received. He relates what consequences can often come to one who is committed to knowing absolute Bible truth. Victories and defeats are both common to such a one, but truth remains truth when once received, regardless of one's future reaction to it.

Daniel Preston has written *The Era of A. J. Tomlinson* from his extensive studies about the man and his time. You will recognize his perception of the plan of God as he relates the activities of *The Era of A. J. Tomlinson* to it.

Brother Preston was converted at the age of nineteen. Shortly thereafter he entered the ministry. He has given several years to the pastoral ministry and has taught Bible at Tomlinson College for several years. He also has taught in public schools.

He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Belmont College, Nashville, Tennessee in 1960, and a Master of Arts from Middle Tennessee State University in 1965. He has done doctoral work at George Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee.

Daniel is supported in his work by his wife, Dorothy, and their children David, Janice, Bernice and Mary Kristi. He has called his family the nucleus of his world.

Henry O'Neal
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CHAPTER I

THE WINDING ROAD TOWARD TRUTH

1. The Early Church

What a glorious day when Jesus Christ came from His heavenly home to the sinful earth to redeem fallen man! Every individual born in the world since the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has been marked with the death that results from the power of sin. Our Lord came to the earth with the express purpose of being the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth. He came to the earth to give His life a ransom for all, saving those from destruction who come to Him in repentance of their sins. His blood shed on the cross is the cleansing agent for all who accept Him by faith. Jesus Christ was offered for our transgressions and raised again for our justification.

Not only did Christ come to the earth to save fallen man, but He also provided for the perpetuation of the faith through the medium of His Church which He established from a small nucleus of twelve men. These words will always ring with clarity and eternal truth: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). That Christ established the Church to exist for an eternity is shown by this passage of Holy Scripture. No power could ever totally destroy the divine creation of our Lord, even though fervent fidelity to the principles of the gospel deteriorated after the apostolic age.

The Lord Jesus Christ bought and paid for the Church with His own blood upon the cross at Calvary. In writing to the Church at Ephesus Paul made this very pungent: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which

the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Before He left the earth, Christ had set in motion the Church of God which was destined to do the work ordered by the Lord. This small nucleus of disciples would have to present the Gospel of the Kingdom to the ends of the earth before they were through. Their task was not easy but it was not impossible. When God has ordained a task to be done, He will take care of the impossible, but the disciples were given power to accomplish God's will.

Before His ascension into heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ had appeared to hundreds of people who would be honest witnesses to His resurrection. This very fact of His coming from the tomb would ever be a cardinal point of doctrine in Christian belief. The gospel according to Luke eloquently records the last appearance: "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen" (Luke 24:49-53).

Luke followed through with the injunction that they would necessarily have to go on with the work and refrain from continuing to gaze longingly after the Lord. The place of Judas Iscariot had to be filled by a sincere believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthias became the choice of the Lord who guided in the selection process. After this necessary business was carried out, the followers of Christ were filled with the Spirit, and this was evidenced by the speaking in other tongues or languages. With tremendous power they could present to the people of the world the story of the resurrected Christ. THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES is a book which tells of the sudden and gigantic expansion of the early Church. They literally fulfilled the passage of Scripture which stated: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

This inbreathing power of the Holy Ghost added noticeable power which could not be explained by natural phenomena. Peter preached a powerful sermon on the same day he had received this experience and three thousand were added to their number. Shortly afterward a nameless lame man was healed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter used His Name to accomplish great

works, and five thousand were added to their numbers. Philip preached a great revival in Samaria, with large throngs formally accepting Jesus Christ. Peter and John completed the revival by informing them about the power of the Holy Ghost. This power was so forcible that Simon Magus desired to commercialize the power to his own benefit. Simon Peter issued a stern rebuke to him, bringing down the power of the Lord against his actions. Meanwhile, the early Church was making a relentless attack on paganism. New vitality and impetus was given to the infant Church when a great enemy of Christianity yielded to the love of God and surrendered his life to Him. Saul of Tarsus was stricken to the ground by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ while on his journey to Damascus to persecute the saints, but what humility in the words: "... Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Throughout the remainder of his life God's will was inseparably his will.

With the addition to the ranks of the Christians of Saul of Tarsus, the Church was ready for a thrust into the entire world. After a period of growth in Christ, Saul and Barnabas were separated by the Holy Spirit from the saints at Antioch of Syria for the purpose of evangelizing the world. City after city fell to the power of the Word of God. Scripture lists such places as the following: Cyprus, Salamis, Paphos, Perga, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and Jerusalem. These places were uprooted by the power of the Gospel.

It was inevitable that when the doctrine of Christ began to conflict with zealots of the law, there would be martyrdoms. Stephen became the first martyr of the young Church, suffering stoning at the hands of bigots who thought they were honoring God. Opposition came from the ranks of the Pharisees and Sadducees who banded together, despite major theological differences, to stamp out the early Church. Later, trouble came from the Judaizers who sought to compel the Mosaic Law upon all and demand that all had to submit to the rite of circumcision to be saved. Then the Roman Empire itself entered the arena and began to persecute Christians with an intense fervor. The followers of Christ were treated as no more than animals, being placed in sports contests with vicious lions. Faith could not be stamped out regardless of persecution, and the futility of liquidation became evident.

Paganism was a fatalistic religion based on pleasure for the present and no hope of life after death. Christianity offered joy in the present life and eternal life for the believer. In view of the powerful appeal presented by the followers of Jesus Christ,

paganism began to crumble. Vast numbers embraced Christianity, including the Roman Emperor Constantine. There has been question as to the sincerity of the Roman prelate, but it is known that the large numbers of Christians enhanced his position against his enemies.

2. Teachers of Error

Long before Constantine professed the faith, workers of evil had begun their malicious sowing of heretical doctrine. Paul alluded to their evil work when he stated, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). James put the leaders of error in the spotlight when he said, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:1-3).

Peter wrote in a clear and incisive manner concerning the teachers of error who had infiltrated the very ranks of God's people. They appeared to be in league with those sincere believers while in reality they were busy at work to destroy the very foundations and principles of the Church. Note the following passage:

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever (2 Peter 2:12-17).

John, the beloved apostle, wrote in his gentle and loving style, pleading with the saints to beware of the spirit of heresy which

was running rampant in an effort to beguile the Lord's people: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. . . . Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:18, 19, 22). These warnings were directed primarily toward the Gnostics who denied the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. through an intellectual phenomenon which they referred to as "gnosis," or knowledge, they believed that one could reach God. Therefore, they would rule the work of Christ in His redemptive work as useless. They placed human wisdom above the power of God and simply worked out their own system of salvation. The smooth way in which this heresy was presented fooled many unsuspecting souls. It was a deceptive appeal which was directed to the intellectual class.

Heresy in its various forms has always sought to discredit the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and draw away believers. Jude wrote, in part, to warn against a very destructive heresy. Although somewhat different in its appeal, its results were the same—the destruction of the believer in Christ. The word does not appear in Scripture, but the words of Jude point to the antinomian theory concerning man. Proponents of this teaching urged the thought that a truly spiritual man has no obligation to follow any moral law. Consequently, the followers of this teaching naturally yielded to depraved lustfulness, while at the same time maintaining that they were compatible with Christ. It must be noted that heresy has not died out. With only minor reflection, one can see evidence of the lingering quality of this heresy to this day. Jude warned against those who practiced sin: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not" (Jude 3-5).

It is clear when Jude wrote his brief epistle that the major

enemy was not without but was very much within. While the heretics claimed to believe, they were at work destroying the divine gospel through perversion of the truth.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit the gospel writers were aware of the evil work being perpetrated by those who wished to have their way and make the gospel fit their evil schemes. Great men of God warned, in their writing of divine Scripture, against those who would seek salvation in any way except the precepts laid down by the Lord Jesus Christ and propounded by His anointed servants.

3. The Dark Ages

An accumulation of events led the Church into the period of what has been aptly designated the Dark Ages. Some of the contributing factors are as follows: (1) the success of the early Church in gaining large numbers of people, some of whom were not truly believers; (2) the teachers of error who deceived many; (3) the decline in spiritual leadership after the death of the apostles; (4) the decline in the power of the Spirit operating in the Church; (5) the large numbers of pagans joining the Church who never gave up their codes of morality; (6) the adoption of creeds instead of plunging into the Scripture itself. Ideas revolving around theocracy were relegated to the background while men were intent on operating the Church to fit their own desires.

By the year A.D. 325, the arch heretic Arius had gained a large following. As all heretics, he attacked the divinity of Jesus Christ and denied that He was truly God and truly man. It is interesting to note at this time that the spiritual leadership of the Church had so declined that the Roman Emperor Constantine called a Council of Nicea to deal with the matter and set forth a body of Christian beliefs. Following is the creed quoted from the Book of Common Prayer:

I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible: and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made: who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and

the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. And I believe in one Catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.¹

The Christian believer is obligated to accept and practice the whole Bible rightly divided. A prayer book or group of beliefs will not suffice for the Scripture in its totality. Adoption of creeds have helped to initiate a crack which has widened the gap between the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man. Creeds, while they may seem innocuous within themselves, can lead man to quote them instead of divine Scripture. The very term *creed* means I believe—"a brief statement of religious belief; confession of faith."² It is interesting that the term *creed* is derived from the Apostles Creed and the Nicean Creed. A statement of belief is a short synopsis of truth which is only a small part of a whole. Therefore, there can be a danger when a statement of beliefs is equated with Scripture or quoted as though it is Scripture itself.

Bible writers wrote under the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, the standard on which all belief is based is found in the totality of Scripture. Any statement of belief, or creed, must be presented in exactly that light—as statements of belief, but the Scripture must ever and always remain the Scripture. Therefore, the Church was founded upon the concepts of the whole Bible. The early Church adhered to the total principles of the entire "God-breathed" Word which was given to them. Creeds have a tendency to expand into prayer books, constitutions, and other statements contrived through the power of men's minds to claim equal authority with the Scriptures. Consequently, in a seemingly benign and innocent way, in many instances, the adoption of creeds played an unwitting role in the undermining of the early Church.

A central theme of all heretical teaching is to attack the divine Person of Jesus Christ. Without the incarnation there would be no authoritative Christian belief, and the very pillar and foundation would be eliminated. One insidious method of discrediting the power of the Lord Jesus Christ is through syncretism. This belief would give credit to the great power of the Lord Jesus Christ and recognize His healing, but at the same time, other persons would be placed on an equal basis with Him. This would be unacceptable because Jesus Christ must ever be the only way to eternal salvation. In the epistle of John, the

aged apostle warns the Church against those who would lead others astray from the paths of truth. One writer stated this in a very firm manner in the following passage: "John desires to warn his readers against certain prevalent errors of belief and practice. There were those who once professed Christianity who went out from the church who denied that our Lord is truly God and truly man, at once human and divine."³

With this kind of false teaching even during the time of John, it is small wonder that the early Church was soon beguiled from the faith "that was once delivered to the saints." When the early Church entered into the tunnel of error, it would not emerge for more than a thousand years. James Moffatt, eminent scholar and writer, examined this period of time in the following manner:

At the end of the apostolic age, church history, it has been said, enters a tunnel. When it emerges, in the middle of the second century, we discover a central body which is the Catholic Church, surrounded by a medley of sects claiming in some sense the Christian name, and varying from recognizable though somewhat eccentric presentations of the Gospel through various half-Christian or near-Christian systems of belief, to downright caricatures.⁴

The prophet Isaiah seemed to allude to the dark period of Church history and made statements that surely fit the spirit of the times: "I did forsake you for awhile, but I will take you back right tenderly; I did turn from you in a rush of wrath, but with a lasting love I pity you: so promises the Eternal your redeemer" (Isaiah 54:7, 8—Moffatt). Weak Roman Emperors and strong religious leaders served to place the Roman Catholic Church in a very powerful position. By the fifth century Leo the Great gained the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church and exercised full authority. It was he who began to use the title of "pope" and enjoined the entire world to honor his title of authority and the authority of the church. Men were told what to believe. The mode of worship was controlled and the Bible was not available to the people. Consequently, there was complete reliance upon the power of the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church.

Ignorance and religious perversion were in the driver's seat during this period of time. The beautiful doctrine given the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ and preached by the apostles and membership of the early Church had vanished. Such practices as asceticism, monasticism, celibacy of the clergy, the infallibility of the pope, the veneration of Mary and the saints,

creeds, unholiness, and every form of perversion from the simple Gospel prevailed until the Reformation. One evil practice which came into existence was the practice of praying for those who were thought to be in purgatory. Varying amounts of money could be needed to consummate the prayer successfully. Confession was made to the priest instead of to God. Indulgences gave the ignorant parishoner a chance to buy his way out of a period of time in purgatory. Money and valuables secured in this manner helped to finance large, ornate church edifices.

Perhaps no books of history could adequately portray the absence of spiritual light, but they did give a good account of the lack of progress generally in the world at this time. The Middle Ages were generally a period of little noticeable progress in any area. Church history is an especially pathetic spectacle. The following quotation taken from *The Church Triumphant* points out more clearly some of the practices prevailing:

God's word had been abandoned and in its place came the perversion of truth. Error on top of error began to pile up, and this Dark Age period was filled with the worship of angels, saints, relics, and Mary. Jesus Christ and His glorious doctrine had been left out of the picture, and in His place came the ideas of perverted allegory. The pulpit was destroyed; preachers were corrupt, and the liturgy took the place of the preached word. In this period the sacerdotal spirit grew until the preacher became the priest who held the keys of life and death. Delusion was so deep it seemed nothing could bring a better day.⁵

When the time is dark, God is still present. He has a way of bringing light out of darkness, and so a better day did come. What better words could describe the longsuffering of the Lord than the words of Peter: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God has promised to keep His Church through all the perils which will come against it. That God would not allow the continuation of error is seen by the fact of His working with men of God who would not continue to perpetuate a doctrine out of harmony with the Word of God.

Attacks were made upon the absolutism of the Roman Catholic Church which at first seemed but a faint spark which would die out and come to nothing. Religious philosophers, of whom William of Occam took the lead, attacked the authority of the pope. Marsiglio of Padua and John of Jandun wrote *Defensor Pacis* which propounded the idea that the sovereign

power rests with the people and is delegated to rulers only as they fulfill their function by ruling wisely. Further, the crusades, mysticism, and the preaching orders, who sought to bring reform to the Church, helped pave the way for the reformers of a later date.

God's program will be carried out regardless of the apparent impossibility which looms in the minds of men. The very instant human reasoning seeks to decipher the ways in which God will accomplish His work, there comes about a total breakdown of comprehension. God will have His people who will break out of chains to see the light. This idea is illustrated so clearly in one of the great ideas of history presented by the philosopher Plato. His idea centered around the thought of the real as opposed to what merely seemed to be real. To a group of individuals chained in a cave, shadows of images lifted up behind a parapet were real. This was all they knew because they were chained to one place and had no opportunity to observe anything except what they could see in front of them. To the prisoners, truth was what they were seeing.

After a period of time one of the men broke loose from his chains and began to wander around the cave, investigating for himself what was happening. Upon close examination he could readily see that the fire and parapet were used by individuals who were flashing pictures before the prisoners. They were not really seeing the real thing but mere images of the real. Earnestly, the freed man sought to inform his fellow prisoners of the truth, but this was in vain, because they could comprehend only what they could see. Becoming bolder, the former chained man worked his way out of the cave to freedom, but the blinding light of the sun forced him to shield his eyes. The truth was so forceful that he had to become accustomed to it. However, after his eyes became acclimated to the light, he could see the real world. He re-entered the cave and continued to relate the truth to the chained men.⁶ Those who know the truth are under solemn injunction from the Lord to share it with those who do not know it.

4. A Gleam of Light

Perhaps the early reformers did not know all the truth, but they did know more than most of the people of that day. Wyclif and Huss were considered pre-reformers. The former escaped a martyr's death but the latter was burned at the stake. Henry S. Lucas, in his book *The Renaissance and the Reformation*, explains conditions preceding the Reformation in these words:

The Renaissance papacy came into existence, absolute, wealthy, and corrupt. This was a dangerous condition, for sooner or later some intrepid spirit like Wyclif or Huss would surely rise to protest against the worldliness of this divinely established institution. Two generations after the bull EXECRABILIS Martin Luther, an Augustinian friar, voiced a national protest and broke with the church because of the scandalous methods employed in hawking indulgences.⁷

Martin Luther is a name which will forever be attached to the first rays of light which beamed truth to chained souls. In 1501, at the age of eighteen, Luther entered the university at Erfurt and for four years studied the classics and the Nominalist philosophy, which still dominated the old school. While lecturing at the University of Wittenberg, Luther read Scripture which later changed his life and his entire goals: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17). He reasoned later that since this is the fact of Scripture, nothing he could do would make him good enough to be saved. This naturally led to his rejection of fasts, pilgrimages, and even the sacraments to grant him salvation. With the nailing of his ninety-five theses on the church door at Wittenburg, the die had been cast and his break with the Roman Catholic Church was imminent. Luther's success was followed by other leaders of the Reformation in other parts of the world. Huldreich Zwingli led the Reformation in Switzerland, while John Calvin imbued the Reformed Church with spirit.

The spirit of Reformation continued after the death of the preceding leaders. In the seventeenth century, preachers such as Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, the writer of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Jeremy Taylor, and John Donne preached the Word of God with power. In the eighteenth century, preaching took on a new intensity with the preaching of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. They preached a genuine conversion experience and sanctification as a cleansing work wrought in the heart by the blood of Jesus Christ. In the nineteenth century many preachers declared with power the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The following names are remembered when any mention of the great spiritual awakening is made: Charles G. Finney, Horace Bushnell, Henry Ward Beecher, Phillips Brooks, John A. Broadus, Thomas de Witt Talmage, Dwight L. Moody, Thomas Chalmers, F. W. Robertson, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Alexander McClaren, and Joseph Parker, among a host of others.

5. Summary

When the fulness of time was come, God sent His Son to this earth to consummate the plan of God from the foundation of the world. Gathering a group of twelve disciples, He began to set in motion His framework for the evangelization of the entire world. Jesus Christ set up His Church, declaring that the "gates of hell will not prevail against it." His Church would be the Body through which He would work to accomplish His complete plan for the ages. Through the medium of the Church, Jesus Christ will one day see every man presented perfect in His own image.

Even though heresy reigned for many hundreds of years after the death of the apostles, the creation of Jesus Christ was never completely destroyed. It had been distorted by error, but the basic truth of what He had set in order could never be destroyed. God used such men, during the Middle Ages, as Wyclif, Huss, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin to begin a move back to Scriptural authority. Each one in his own way played a part in uncovering a portion of the Scripture which had been discarded. It must be stated, however, that all of the reformers fell short of complete New Testament Christianity.

Until complete Bible truth is taught, there can be no claim that full compatibility with the teaching of the early Church has been reached. The Bible is the standard by which all doctrine must be gauged. Regardless of what truth any group may claim, it must be measured with the Bible. There are those who are as conspicuous for what they leave out as they are for what they teach.

FOOTNOTES

¹Wallace K. Ferguson and Geoffrey Bruun, *A Survey of European Civilization*, 3rd Ed. (Atlanta: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), p. 93.

²*Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1957), p. 346.

³Charles R. Erdman, *The General Epistles* (James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, Jude) (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, MCMLXVI), p. 138.

⁴James Moffatt, *The Johannine Epistles* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), p. 18.

⁵Daniel D. Preston, *The Church Triumphant* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1969), p. 187.

⁶Francis MacDonald Cornford, *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 227, 228.

⁷Henry S. Lucas, *The Renaissance and the Reformation* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers), p. 106.

CHAPTER II

THE ROAD BEGINS TO STRAIGHTEN

1. The Reformation Reaches America

Hard Working Lutherans, Baptists, Calvinists, Congregationalists, Puritans, and others helped to make America strong and independent. Many of the groups came to America to find religious freedom and found it. That the work of the early reformers was not completed is attested to by the fact of several "Great Awakenings" in America. Religious fervor would die out almost entirely, and yet there were those who kept alive the hope for great religious revival. Unity of doctrine and oneness was the prayer of Jesus Christ. However, various groups of believers read the same Scripture and reach varying interpretations and come up with varying modes of worship. Each reformation movement emphasized a different portion of Bible doctrine, fragmenting doctrinal purity.

Great preachers stirred large segments of the population in America. For example, Jonathan Edwards proclaimed the Bible doctrine of repentance so strongly in 1740 that hundreds ran forward in his meetings, begging forgiveness for their sins. Following is an example of his ministerial technique:

Edwards warned, O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over; a great moaning reverberated through the church. People cried out: What shall I do to be saved? and O I am going to hell. As one witness later recorded, the shrieks and cries were piercing and amazing.¹

During the early nineteenth century the Methodists and Baptists were the leaders in another "Great Awakening." Leading the way at this time was James McGready, a preacher who "could so array hell before the wicked that they would tremble

and quake, imagining a lake of fire and brimstone yawning to overwhelm them."² These religious services were charged with high emotion. Perhaps the people were so accustomed to the binding dullness of their previous worship that they felt a welcome relief in giving vent to freedom in the spirit. It is stated the people sobbed, shrieked, barked like animals, and were seized by the jerks.³

This rough and tumble era of the nineteenth century seemed to give rise to individuals able to cope with the time. Peter Cartwright was a free-wheeling preacher who was at once ready with tongue or first to bring salvation to the rough group of his day. His biography is an absorbing piece of writing which will grip the heart and give one an idea of his desire to assure Bible conversion. Quite often in the services of Peter Cartwright some would attempt to break up his meetings. One biographer commented on this in these words: "If, as not infrequently happened, intruders attempted to break up his meetings, he was quick to meet force with force and seems to have been uniformly victorious in these physical encounters."⁴

That the religious fervor was powerful can be seen through the physical phenomenons which took place during the meetings. A new-found freedom of worship was the initiation of physical interaction with the spirit. An interesting piece of information is found in the biography of Peter Cartwright concerning the "jerks." "The first jerk or so, you would see their fine bonnets, caps, and combs fly; and so sudden would be the jerking of the head that their long loose hair would crack almost as loud as a wagoner's whip"⁵ Scoffers were in abundance at these meetings and sought with all force to give the worshippers a difficult time. One scoffer is mentioned in these terms:

In one of Cartwright's revivals the reflexes seized a large scoffer who had a bottle of whiskey in his pocket. He tried to run away but the paroxysms were too severe. He halted among some saplings, took out his bottle of whiskey and swore he would drink the damned jerks to death. But he could not get the bottle to his mouth, though he tried hard. At this he became greatly enraged, fetched a very violent jerk, snapped his neck, fell and soon expired, with his mouth full of cursing and bitterness.⁶

Religious persecution is not a new event to true followers of Jesus Christ, but it can be verified that in any period of history, it has failed to eradicate Christian worship.

2. A Tempest in the Breast

Religious fervor seemingly could not be maintained on a constant basis, but rather rose or declined according to the preachers of the day. After the death of Peter Cartwright and others, the churches regressed to their stilted, formal mode of worship, suppressing all freedom of the individual to give vent to his spiritual urgings. The Reformation had not reached full fruition Scripturally and definitely had not organized after the manner of the primitive Church of Bible times. This idea would give rise to others who would seek to bring about a restoration of New Testament theology. No one individual can claim an exclusive attitude that God has not used others to complete His plan. God has used those individuals throughout the ages who would be His instrument at a particular time to a particular group who would carry out His will.

Recognizing that the Reformation had fallen short, Richard G. Spurling, Sr., set out to do something about it in the year 1884. He was dissatisfied with the organizational structure of the Missionary Baptist Church, in which he was a minister. He could feel no freedom of the spirit in the face of creeds and traditions which were exceedingly binding on the membership.⁷ Just as Luther desired reform in the Roman Catholic Church, Richard G. Spurling desired reform in the church in which he was a minister. However, tradition and creed prevailed and Spurling could not initiate reform. It was his strong feeling that the earlier Reformation failed to eradicate creeds from the Church and the early reformers had adopted the law of faith instead of the law of love. Further, they had failed to reserve "a right of way for leadership of the Holy Ghost and conscience."⁸

Facing the fact that there could be no reconciliation of his ideas with those of the Baptist faith, Richard G. Spurling gathered a small company of like-minded believers and congregated at the Barney Creek meeting house, Monroe County, Tennessee. They were charged with zeal and religious fervor, preaching the need for further reformation. A small group of followers gravitated to his thinking and in a move of faith stepped out with him. Some guiding principles were set forth in the following wording:

As many Christians as are here present that are desirous to be free from all man made creeds and traditions, and are willing to take the New Testament, or law of Christ, for your only rule of faith and practice; giving each other equal rights and privilege to read and interpret for yourselves as your conscience may dictate, and are willing to sit together as the

Church of God to transact business as the same, come forward.⁹

Response to the above proposition was so slight that to many it was ludicrous, with only eight moving forward. They were Richard Spurling, Jr., John Plemons, Sr., Polly Plemons, Barbara Spurling, Margaret Lauftus, Melinda Plemons, John Plemons, Jr., and Adeline Lauftus.

This small body of believers called themselves "Christian Union," desiring to please God in all things. Just what method or thought was involved in selecting this particular name for the group is not known. It was not a stated point of belief that they intended to establish a church which would be the unifying instrument in the last days. Therefore, Elmer T. Clark's assertion in his book that the Christian Union was established "to restore primitive Christianity and bring about the union of all denominations" cannot be substantiated.¹⁰ Spurling's emphasis seemed to revolve around the thought of complete freedom of worship and a back to the Bible thrust rather than the expansive idea of establishing one unifying body.

The Christian Union welcomed other ministers to join with the group, assuring them that they would be received with their same rank of ministry that they had held with their prior organization. Richard G. Spurling, Sr. served as pastor of the church until ill health forced him to pass on the leadership to his son in September, 1881. Shortly thereafter Richard G. Spurling, Sr. died at the age of seventy-four, having been a Gospel pioneer in search of further truth. The fledgling Christian Union did not enjoy a period of growth and seemed to stagnate for a period of ten years. During this time Richard Spurling, Jr., preached in every church that would welcome him, but he did not escape religious persecution. Others seemed to follow in the path of those who had begun the Christian Union. Three men, William Martin, Joe M. Tipton, and Milton McNabb preached with a religious fervor and conviction seldom seen at that time. They emphasized the Bible principle of sanctification, which insured holiness of life. Souls were stirred for miles around the Schearer Schoolhouse, in which they were conducting revival meetings. Some old-line denominations did not accept the preaching amicably and denounced those who claimed the possibility of living a holy life as heretics.¹¹ As a result of the revival about thirty members of the Baptist and Methodist churches in the area were excluded from membership and denounced.

Revival fires continued to burn long after the three evangel-

ists left the community. A new spirit and desire had been touched which would not die out, and God seemed to point out to them that He was not finished with the work that had started. Regular prayer meetings and Sunday school were conducted in the small home of William F. Bryant, a respected Christian man in the community. During the gatherings an enactment of Pentecost occurred. Men, women and children received the Holy Ghost baptism, speaking in other tongues as the Holy Spirit gave them power to speak. This progression into the full plan of Bible experiences as it was in the early Church was markedly different from other reformation movements.

As a natural consequence, the spiritual stirring which reached for miles around the Bryant home aroused protest from hard-line religious groups who looked upon the movement with disfavor. This refusal to accept any mode in the worship of the Lord led many to move from the standpoint of disfavor to outright persecution, which took on many forms. There was verbal abuse, with the believers being branded as "fanatics" who were a blot on the community. Persecution also took the form of physical violence. It is stated that at one time a storm of persecution broke out with such fury that one hundred and six men composed of Methodist, Baptist, and other ministers, stewards and deacons, and one justice of the peace with the sheriff, banded themselves together to put down the revival. One house was torn down and burned even though many had been in fervent prayer night and day.¹²

Religious persecution was one primary reason so many people came to America, yet those who initiated the abuse during this time were apparently impervious to the ideas of religious freedom. Neither William F. Bryant nor those who gathered in his home were physically safe. A delegation of seven men represented the wishes of many in the community and sought to enjoin Bryant and his followers from praying. There was no turning back, even though lead and stones were hurled at them.

Abuse in its multifaceted forms merely brought the group closer together as Christian followers of the Lord's teachings. It became evident that this form of oppression would fail. However, another problem seemed to be more effective against the work of the Lord than outward pressure, and this was the failure of the group to effect a workable organization for keeping and guarding the saints. Many came down the path to conversion only to be lost through the means of false teaching and fanaticism. Splinter groups were organized and left the fellowship of the Christian Union. It had become apparent that without organization they would perish.

Significantly, on May 15, 1902, a plan of government was formulated and presented to the group. A small group of humble people met in the home of William F. Bryant, Cherokee County, North Carolina, and finally listened to the instructions of Richard Spurling, Jr. An organization was effected which countenanced the same ideas as the Christian Union. To give emphasis to their belief in holiness of life, and to the particular geographical area, they named the church "The Holiness Church at Camp Creek." W. F. Bryant was presented by the church and was ordained as its first minister. Richard G. Spurling, Jr. was selected as pastor of the church.

There was no lack of enthusiasm and zeal but this was not enough to thrust forward as they had hoped. During the entire first year of organization, they were faced with persecution from several areas and not a single addition was made in their original numbers. They had become stagnant and were pressed for answers as to why they were not enjoying progress in God's work. It was time for re-evaluation of their sense of purpose and Scriptural authority. They must make a full investigation and study into the Scriptures. Consequently, a momentous meeting was called on June 13, 1903, at the home of W. F. Bryant to study more carefully the New Testament order. Unaware and unsuspecting, a dramatic event would take place which was destined to infuse the small gathering with purpose and leadership.

3. Set Ablaze by a Spark

A small group of believers in the home of W. F. Bryant were seeking for answers from Scripture; they were re-examining their purpose for being. At the same time, another man, directed by the Lord, was searching for the true Bible Church. He was searching for others of like faith with him who were willing to give first place of honor and authority to the divine Scripture. Destiny seemed to be at work for the momentous meeting of the two. While God had been at work with the Christian Union and The Holiness Church at Camp Creek, A. J. Tomlinson had been preparing himself to answer the call to obey the will of God. His name was to become so inextricably associated with the Church of God that history is incomplete concerning this body without including his inspired work.

A. J. Tomlinson was born in 1865, a year which marked the end of a disastrous blood bath called the War Between the States, which had claimed more than six hundred thousand lives. It was the same year that Abraham Lincoln had been

assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, with Andrew Johnson becoming President of the United States of America. So often those born for a work of God are unpretentious and unknown, being born into families of indistinguished esteem. A. J. Tomlinson's great grandfather, William Tomlinson was born in Ireland, March 29, 1749. William and his two brothers, Josiah and Samuel, later sought a better life in America, leaving their native Ireland. William and Martha (Coppeck) Tomlinson were blessed with a large family in America. One of their sons, Hobert Tomlinson, was the father of Milton Tomlinson, who was the father of A. J. Tomlinson. Irish blood ran in the family tree, and this would account for the enthusiasm and drive which later exposed itself in A. J. Tomlinson.

There were tears of joy and sadness when A. J. Tomlinson was born. Delilah Tomlinson looked upon the frail baby with a heart pounding with compassion. How could he overcome his anemic condition and battle for strength to live? These were no doubt the thoughts of Delilah as she approached God in her simple and straightforward manner: "If this child is never going to amount to anything let him die. He is such a care. If Thou hast something special for him to do, heal him up and let him live."¹³ Not only was the prayer answered, but records show that the young Tomlinson, in later life, had amazing stamina, usually winning in marathon runs. There was a compelling drive within him to be a winner. This tremendous energy and desire would later be directed in the Lord's work and would bring about advancement to His cause.

In his early life, A. J. Tomlinson was reared without the benefit of a regular pattern of worship. Even though the Tomlinsons lived in a Quaker community, they were not adherents to this faith and seldom attended religious services. Undoubtedly, this was a blessing because his mind did not become encumbered with beliefs which would later have to be purged from his mind. It was A. J. Tomlinson's firm feeling that God had a very special work for him to do. An event took place in his life which enhanced his belief in God's call:

One day while father and myself were alone in the field a mile from home, sawing a large log with an oldfashioned "Hoosier" cross-cut saw, I heard my name called, and thought father spoke to me. It was my familiar family, pet name, but father said he did not speak it. In a few minutes I heard the same voice and the same name. Again father said he did not say a word. I was in a state of wonder. After a stillness of several minutes the voice spoke again, with that familiarity that is only recognized by the closest family ties. Father still

said he did not call me nor speak my name. I was mystified, and although I never spoke to a soul about it, and father never said anything about it, it was enough to awaken a nature that had never been touched before, and it was awakened to never sleep again.¹⁴

Not for many years after this event did A. J. Tomlinson yield his heart to God. His mind became consumed with the politics of the day. That he was an able speaker is shown by the enthusiasm of his speaking for the candidates of his choice. He cast himself into the debates with complete devotion, believing that the candidate of his choice was right for the office. His emotions became so strong during a political campaign that he promised to quit the United States if his party lost and he would go to Australia. If his party won, however, he vowed to marry and settle down. Events worked out so that he was able to perform the latter, marrying a young Christian woman, Mary Jane Taylor, who became an inspiration and strength to him as long as he lived. They were united in marriage on April 24, 1889, and were the parents of four children: Halcy, Iris, Homer, and Milton, who succeeded his father in church leadership.

In educational qualification, A. J. Tomlinson was ahead of many in that day. He possessed an inquiring and inquisitive nature which helped to set the conditions for learning on his own initiative. At the age of seventeen he graduated from school and began to attend high school. His love of education is seen by his having to work during the spring and summer and attend school in the winter.¹⁵ Two other institutions playing a part in his formal education were the Westfield Academy in Westfield, Indiana and God's Bible School, Mount of Blessings, Cincinnati, Ohio. It was while in attendance at God's Bible School that he became known as "The Prevailer" because of his regular prayer life.¹⁶ Gaining a respect and love for the Word of God was a great asset for later work in the Christian field.

A. J. Tomlinson underwent a very powerful conversion experience which made a lasting impact upon him. Other great leaders had undergone somewhat similar experiences in yielding their hearts to the King of kings. While involved in the activity of hauling hay, A. J. Tomlinson found himself caught in a sudden and violent storm. He ran as quickly as possible to get to his wife and to safety. Lightning struck the chimney, of the house, travelled through the cook stove and burst out through the ceiling and weatherboarding of the house. While only minor damage was sustained by the house, a great impression was made upon him. Praying to the Lord, albeit in halting and

unsure words, A. J. Tomlinson surrendered his heart to the Lord and received the experience of justification by faith.

There was nowhere to go but forward in the work of the Lord, and A. J. Tomlinson wasted no time in becoming active in a nearby church. Accepting the position of Sunday School Superintendent, he soon proved his leadership qualities with the school doubling in size in a short time. Speaking before the people did not come easy and fluid in the beginning, as he described in the following manner:

So I would go and get up before the congregation, and sometimes lose my text and could not find it, but I'd read whatever my eye caught, and talk a little, and after a few stammering, broken utterances, the people would fall into the altar and get converted. The influence spread so that some were converted at home who had not been to the meeting. Up to that time I had not studied my Bible.¹⁷

Observing and becoming involved in Christian service brought about increased inquisitiveness which placed serious questions in his mind. Every church he attended seemed to fall short of complete Bible truth. Many of the people were good and sincere Christians, but their failure to accept and practice some significant Bible doctrines greatly concerned him. Surely, in his thinking, there is a true Bible Church somewhere, but where could it be found? This question had to be answered even if he had to become part of the answer.

There was a desire to go deeper in spiritual truth. A. J. Tomlinson prayed for the experience of sanctification, desiring to completely dedicate himself to the service of the Lord. In describing the experience there was a death of the carnal and sinful nature. Therefore, in vivid and dramatic terms he described the experience as follows:

It was about twelve o'clock in the day. I cried out in the bitterness of my soul: Now! Now! Now! You've got to give it up now! Now! I felt him begin to weaken and quiver. I kept the Sword right in him, and never let go. That sharp two-edged Sword was doing its deadly work. I did not pity him. I showed him no quarters. There we were at that altitude when all of a sudden there came from above, like a thunderbolt from the skies, a sensational power that ended the conflict, and there lay the "old man" dead at my feet, and I was free from his grasp. Thank God! I could get a good free breath once more. It was an awful struggle, but the victory was won.¹⁸

That A. J. Tomlinson was a master of metaphorical writing can be seen in the preceding passage. This was an experience unique to him and he made no allusion to the idea that others would encounter the same phenomenal experience, exactly as he did.

Desiring to spread the Gospel, A. J. Tomlinson journeyed to the mountains of East Tennessee and North Carolina to work among the poor and uneducated inhabitants in this region. Joining J. B. Mitchell, who held the position of colporteur for the American Tract Society, he assisted in the distribution of Bibles and tracts. He and Mitchell arrived in Murphy, North Carolina, on July 14, 1899, using this as a base of operations. The Tomlinson family moved to Culberson, North Carolina on October 16, 1899. During this time he started a school which ran for three terms to assist in educating the poor. To facilitate the spread of the Gospel, an eight page publication was written and called "Samson's Foxes."

Although his work was humanitarian and Christian in its aspect, A. J. Tomlinson had to face severe repercussion from the citizenry of Culberson, especially from the middle and upper class groups who deeply resented his teaching of the youth. It was their feeling that the community could take care of its own educational system. Their strong resentment took the form of violence when they showered the Tomlinson home with bullets. Listening to the gentle urging of the Holy Spirit, A. J. Tomlinson fled on foot, journeying as far as the state of Maine. He did not return to Culberson until November 16, 1901, when it was safe to return.

Sometimes a chance incident can result in lasting benefits; such was the meeting of W. F. Bryant and A. J. Tomlinson. This segment was related through a lecture given at Tomlinson College. No date is recorded for the incident, but A. J. Tomlinson had stopped at Shoal Creek to let his team of horses drink. Two boys were sitting on a footlog. They had been squirrel hunting. One of the young boys was Luther Bryant, son of W. F. Bryant. A. J. Tomlinson told the boys about his work of selling and giving out Bibles and Testaments. Luther expressed to him his need to become acquainted with his father. Thus in this way a momentous meeting took place between two church leaders.¹⁹

Impressions and events began to take shape which were unexplainable during the early summer of 1903. He wrote in his diary that he was "laboring under peculiar difficulties."²⁰ Perhaps the answer to many of his queries would come to a head in the near future. A meeting had been scheduled in the home of W. F. Bryant for June 13, 1903, for the purpose of praying and

searching the Scriptures. A. J. Tomlinson accepted the invitation with the understanding that they would see if they could find the Church of God. He arrived at Bryant's home on June 12, and after breakfast early on the morning of June 13, 1903, he went to a secluded section of the mountainous area and prayed earnestly for guidance. After the session of prayer, he could feel in his heart a spirit of satisfaction and confirmation concerning the group with whom he had come in contact.

When A. J. Tomlinson returned to the Bryant home after his prayers to God, an unusual encounter took place with the group. Instead of the leaders issuing questions, the picture was oriented to them and it became a questioning by A. J. Tomlinson. The queries were put in a form so that they were able to see just who they were and what their sense of purpose would be. Thus from the very beginning it was A. J. Tomlinson who implemented the thought process which was to set the fledgling group ablaze with fervent zeal. Positive responses were given by W. F. Bryant to questions concerning the infallibility of the Word of God. He pointed out to the group that the name of the church is the Church of God not "Holiness Church at Camp Creek." The group was apparently captivated by the bold and incisive questioning put to them by A. J. Tomlinson. They agreed together that the composite statements put to them and the positive answers fit the description of the Bible Church. A. J. Tomlinson, after the series of questions, asked to be included in the fellowship. "Will you take me in with the understanding that it is the Church of God—not going to be, but IS the Church of God?" To this they agreed and the covenant was administered to him. With the consummation of this event, he felt that his search for the one, true Bible Church had ended. Work now would center on finding the exact Bible pattern for every procedure.

In his own words, A. J. Tomlinson gave an account of the events:

I heard of the little band (Holiness Church at Camp Creek) in Western North Carolina, and was acquainted with almost all of them, having preached for them several times and been with them in their meetings occasionally for four or five years before they had any form of organization. I enjoyed their good free spirit and appreciated the warm welcome they always gave me when I would visit them.

These friends had been definitely organized about thirteen months when I visited them at the time mentioned above, when we met for prayer and the study of God's Word. I learned more about the organization at this time, and when I understood

fully that they meant to stand for the whole Bible rightly divided and take the New Testament as their only rule of faith and practice, it appealed to me and I became very much interested at once. I poured in the questions and Bible answers were given which perfectly satisfied all of my inquiries. I then said, "This means that it is the Church of God." To this they assented. Then I ventured to ask if they would be willing to receive me into the church with the understanding that it is the Church of God of the Bible. They were willing and soon proceeded in regular order. I took the obligation with deep sincerity and extreme sacredness never to be forgotten.²¹

This bold, meaningful approach of A. J. Tomlinson was significant in that they had started with a purpose to be the fulfillment of the Bible Church. Although the Christian Union and the Holiness Church at Camp Creek played a role in the quest for complete identification with New Testament Scripture, they were incomplete as to clarity of direction. The bold assertion of A. J. Tomlinson concerning just who they were and what their purpose would be seemed to be the cure for their lack of progress. Therefore, the history of the Church of God cannot be dealt with factually and intellectually honestly without placing this man in the leading position as the dynamic church leader. It may be stated without an undue strain on the credulity of history that the Church of God came to light at this time and the preceding works helped to pave the way.

The point cannot be over-emphasized that A. J. Tomlinson made no claims that he was founding a Church. In his mind this was unnecessary since the Lord had already accomplished the fact more than two thousand years before. He felt that his part in the process was to help remove false doctrine which had obscured the beauty of the Body, preventing it from being seen in its full light. Consequently, Elmer T. Clark, in his book, *The Small Sects in America*, continues the inaccurate reasoning by stating that "A. J. Tomlinson is the founder and general overseer of the Church of God."²² Exact wording is important to this era of Church history or readers will be left with a complete misconception of the intent of the Church leaders at this time. Founding a Church would mean that an organization was initiated in which the perpetuation of man and his desires would be prevalent. This was not the intent because Jesus Christ was to be given the preeminent position in all proceedings. It is His Church and His work that is to be promoted. All Scripture is written for our edification and in an encompassing way the prophets could see the vast sweep of history to its complete conclusion. Writing concerning the future glory of

God's people, the prophet Isaiah waxed eloquent:

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising, (Isaiah 60:1-3).

Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited, (Isaiah 54:2, 3).

Lift thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth. For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away (Isaiah 49:18, 19).

FOOTNOTES

¹John A. Garraty, *The American Nation a History of the United States* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 54.

²Ibid. p. 250.

³Garraty, Loc. cit.

⁴Garraty, Loc. cit.

⁵Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (New York: Harper & Row, n.d.), pp. 50, 51.

⁶Ibid.

⁷*Book of Minutes* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), p. 7.

⁸Ibid. p. 8.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Clark, Elmer T., (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1937), p. 100.

¹¹*Book of Minutes*, op. cit. p. 10.

¹²Ibid. p. 12.

¹³Lillie Duggar, A. J. Tomlinson (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), p. 18.

¹⁴A. J. Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), p. 18.

¹⁵Ibid. p. 3.

¹⁶Homer Tomlinson, *The Great Vision of the Church of God* (Queens Village, New York: Published by the author, 1939), p. 2.

¹⁷Tomlinson, op. cit. p. 5.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 6.

¹⁹R. O. Covey (Lecture delivered at Tomlinson College, Tennessee, January 1973).

²⁰Duggar, op. cit. p. 31.

²¹A. J. Tomlinson, *Historical Notes* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1970), pp. 7, 8.

²²Clark, op. cit. p. 101.

CHAPTER III

THE COVERING REMOVED

1. Back to Primitive Christianity

Keeping the purity of the teaching of Jesus Christ has been a never ending process since the time of the apostles. There were those who misinterpreted the word of Jesus concerning the death of John and spread the rumor that he would not die. Evil does its most destructive work when it is accomplished from within a group. While claiming to be Christians, there were many in the early Church who had not converted from the insidious doctrine of paganism. Yet there were others who missed the point of Christianity. They would have the Christian belief presented in a philosophical way which would serve to elevate the speaker and diminish the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Corinthian Church contained many converts from the Greek culture. Many among them looked for the smooth, oratorical presentation which would present the gospel of Christ in a high-sounding style, elevating the power of words: Paul addressed this problem in the following way:

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:19-24).

A steady erosion of fidelity to early principles of church doctrine led to the decline in spiritual impact over three hundred years and reached a climatic event in A.D. 325 at the

Council of Nicea. During the early Middle Ages technology was practically non-existent, and ignorance and illiteracy prevailed. There was no printing press and consequently very little reading and writing. For many hundreds of years individuals were dependent on a very small group of priests to disseminate the few Biblical texts which were in existence and teach from them. In time much of the teaching became mere forms and administering of the sacraments. Misinterpretation of Scripture and incompatibility of life with the Scripture were all passed on to the people. Hundreds of years of abuse and Biblical darkness could not be cured through the power of one man. God used a number of individuals through whom He worked to bring about what has been called the Reformation. This idea incorporates the process of reform in the Roman Catholic Church as well as going further to the point of a complete break with that body as Luther had done.

The validity of any latter day movement must be governed by the fact that there is absolutely no purpose in starting a new church. Jesus Christ set up the Church to endure until He returns for it and presents it to Himself a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle or anything to marr its perfect beauty. Clearly, the pervading thought must be the removal of heresy and unscriptural practice from the Body which the Lord set up. That the task would not be easy can be attested through the fact that hundreds of years of reformation which encompassed many different individuals were used to bring about the project.

2. Vesuvius and Pompeii

Since there is no purpose in seeking the establishment of a new Church, A. J. Tomlinson desired to purge the Church which had been so obliterated with false teaching and allow it to shine in its primitive brilliance. To find the exact Bible pattern for all teaching and conduct must ever be the driving thrust. History records an event concerning the eruption of the volcano Mt. Vesuvius which completely covered the city of Pompeii in Italy. The city was not totally destroyed but was covered over with the magma and debris of the volcanic explosion. Archeologists later uncovered the city and found much of the city preserved in the original. This event was used as a type to explain the purpose of the Church of God in the last days. It is not intended as a part of Scripture but is used merely as a comparison to enlighten one's mind concerning the continued process of uncovering the true Scriptural Body established by the Lord Jesus Christ. The following piece of writing serves to elucidate

the guiding ecclesiastical principles of the Church of God:

The Covering Removed

The Church of God is Christ's own building. It is wrong to suppose some man is its founder. Jesus plainly told the disciples that He would build His Church and I believe what the disciples said about it. And nobody has any right to dispute their word. I fully believe that Christ did just what He said He would do.

There is a beauty and power about the Church of God that are not about other churches. Jesus said of His Church, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." No doubt Jesus said this because He knew it would have strong opposition. But to encourage its members, He said it would hold its anchor and not be overthrown.

True, it has been beaten down and bruised and forsaken, but not entirely overthrown. It is strong now and full of glory and power. It is still holding steady and battling against sin with a strong hand. And while the enemy rages the Church still shines and looks good to those who have eyes to see it.

As for myself, I believe that Jesus knew what He was doing when He built His Church. I believe He knew just what name to give it. I do not think any name could have been found more appropriate. If there could have been, I believe He would have found it and used it. But no, He said, "I will build my Church." The expression would indicate that others were engaged in building churches, or would do so later on, so he wanted it distinctly understood that he would build His own Church, and that no other would be allowed to do it. Others might build churches, but they could not build His Church. He would do that Himself. And this He did.

Some seem to think that we had a hand in establishing the Church of God as it is today, but this is a mistake. We have only been assisting in removing the covering that was put upon it when the first creed was formed in the year 325. It was "snowed under" with creeds. It was covered over with men's laws and ways like a city covered over with ashes from the mouth of a belching volcano. Underneath is the city just like it was. The city of Pompeii lay buried under the cinders, ashes and volcanic stones that belched forth from the great Vesuvius, for nearly seventeen centuries. So completely was the unfortunate city buried under this overwhelming mass, that its very site was forgotten. It was not till 1748, that an accidental discovery drew attention to its remains, and revealed the fact that beneath the vineyards and mulberry grounds which covered the site, there lay entombed the ruins of a city, far more accessible, if not more interesting, than another that had previously been discovered.

In the year 1775, systematic excavations on the site were

begun. As this work continued, it revealed the fact that there, beneath eighteen and twenty feet of mixed material, was a beautiful city with streets laid off in regular order and a huge wall with towers and gates around it. As the excavations have continued, the buildings and writings are found and writers have been able to give a good description of the entire city. Once a flourishing beautiful city on top of the ground, then buried and remained covered for seventeen centuries, now uncovered so that it can be seen and occupied again.

This is similar to the Church of God. It was once beautiful and flourishing, and a refuge and a blessing to thousands. Then it was covered over and remained hidden until its very site and laws were forgotten. But it has been discovered, and on digging down it is found to be the very same Church that was built by our Lord. We do not build. We do not institute laws to govern it. It is already built. We only have to uncover. We only have to throw off the creeds and unbelief that have held it in darkness for about sixteen centuries.

There it is with the same laws, the same Holy Ghost, the same sanctified life of its members, the same sacredness, the same healings, the same miracles, the same officers, the same power, the same glory, and everything preserved and without decay. It has kept well. It is time for it to show to the world again. Like Pompeii, it has been unearthed, and the more of it that is uncovered, the more beautiful and regular in form it appears. No special surprise about Pompeii being discovered and uncovered. Nobody says of it that they are building a new city. No, for it is plain to be seen they are only uncovering an old one. But when the Church of God is being uncovered they begin to say at once that they are building a "new Church." But we know we are not building a new one. The gates of hell have not prevailed against the Lord's Church that He built any more than Vesuvius prevailed against the great city of Pompeii. Pompeii is out again. Its streets that were paved are traveled again. Many of its buildings are still in fair condition. Its former inhabitants are gone, but the city itself is still there. Peter and James, and John and Paul are gone, but their writings and instructions are preserved; the same form of government and everything pertaining to the building (Church) itself is sound and solid, just like it was when it was covered up centuries ago.

The Church, "My Church," the Church of God! Jesus and Paul named it, and who has a right to object to it? We had nothing more to do with naming it than we had in building it at the first. We only accept the name given by them. Paul said he received the knowledge about it by revelation, and he said he followed Christ, and he hands it down to us as the Church of God and we do not expect to change it for anybody's whims or criticisms. We are going to let it remain just as it is—just like

we found it, except we are trying to clear off the filth and rubbish that was piled upon it by men who took the reins into their own hands and drove recklessly over it and dumped and belched and vomited as they went.

Vesuvius could not have belched more filth upon the beautiful city of Pompeii than was wantonly smeared upon the beautiful face of the Body of Christ. And this has continued for years, but it shall proceed no further. Jesus Christ will not submit to it any longer. He is going to take care of His own. The building has been preserved, but is now being uncovered and people are now flocking to it. They see in this beautiful form just what their hearts have been craving.

The Church of God! Hallelujah! People sometimes talk of establishing the "real Church of God." Let them try it if they want to. They will meet with defeat like hundreds of others have done. His Church is already established, and has been for nineteen centuries, and never has been overthrown. Hallelujah! No, it never has been overthrown! And it never will be overthrown! The words of Jesus cannot be broken and He said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). That is good enough for me. I'm fearless and bold. I'm not afraid.

Doubt Paul, when he holds up so strong for the Church of God? No! Because He said it, we can say it, and say it fearlessly. Hallelujah! God is giving wisdom and knowledge as well as the other gifts. Some people are still looking for the gifts as if they have not yet been given, but where is one mentioned by Paul that has not been manifested?

Don't doubt God any longer by praying such a prayer. Why, just think of the wisdom God has showered down upon His humble followers; and knowledge, too. Many who can scarcely read and never went to school a day in their lives, have stood before large congregations with shining faces, and have spoken the Word of Life as if they had taken a three-year course in a university. Then, look at the faith that has been displayed so marvelously at times by many. Instantaneous healings and many other miraculous things, all by a manifestation of the gift of faith. Gifts of healings! What's the use to say that the gift of healing is not operating when thousands of cases have been instantly healed by the laying on of hands, or speaking the Word, right before your eyes?

The miracles, too! Why look for something miraculous to come from some unknown corner, when you see displays of this gift right before your eyes? Handling fire with no harm! Healings where people have been helpless for years, suddenly leap right out of bed—well in a moment! Lame made to walk! Blind to see! Dead called back to life! Swellings or tumors melted away under your hands, goiters disappear before your eyes! Hallelujah! It is wonderful! It is hardly necessary to

mention the other four—prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues and interpretations. These have all been displayed before our eyes, and are manifest more or less in all of our services.

Beloved, be not faithless, but believing. Do not be doubtful about this when God has already given the whole catalogue of gifts. He will do more if you will stop doubting and acknowledge what He has already done and give Him praise and glory for it.

These gifts belong to the Church of God. Let them be manifested more and more. They are already here. They are now in the Church where they belong. Do not weaken them or get bound up yourself by doubting and begging the Lord for what we already have. If you have the Holy Ghost would you continue to ask God to give you the Holy Ghost? Of course not. But He may not manifest Himself every moment. But you do not say you do not have Him just because you do not talk in tongues all the time. By no means. You commence to honor Him and claim Him and say He abides and soon He will manifest Himself.

This analogy is just as true with the gifts. You may not see them displayed every moment, possibly not for several days or weeks, but they have been manifested and will be again if it is necessary and you keep the doubts away. I'm sure many of you have seen all these gifts displayed. Then why not accept them as being in the Church and believe God for a display at any time when it will be to the best interests to the Church and a glory to Him?

The Church of God! I will talk about it more and more. I love it because it is built by my Saviour. Hallelujah! It is a sacred institution. It will soon outshine all other institutions and governments. By honoring the Church we honor its Divine Founder. Jesus and Paul named it and who has a right to object to it?¹

3. Spiritual Archeology

The purpose and tone of the Church had been set—setting about the primary task of uncovering the divine Body set in order by Jesus Christ. Just as the archeologist works about in a meticulous and persevering manner to uncover his “find,” the ministry and membership of the Church of God must set about the spiritual task of uncovering the error from the Church. During the first year of the pastorate of A. J. Tomlinson, others were captivated by the Biblical stance of the Church and began to join the fellowship. One convert was M. S. Lemons. Together they published a Gospel presentation called “The Way.” Although it was discontinued after approximately two years, it became the forerunner of more successful works in the future. In this early period, A. J. Tomlinson served as general moderator while

serving as pastor of the Camp Creek Church, Union Grove and Luskville, Tennessee. It was no small matter just to maintain physical contact with the circuit in those days of horse and buggy travel.

In 1904 the Tomlinson family moved to Cleveland, Tennessee and resided at 2525 Gaut Street, where he was destined to reside for the remainder of his life. Much of his written work was done here, as home doubled for office as well.

4. From Toehold to Firmness

Reacting to the needs as they developed, the young Church was faced with the need, in the latter part of 1905, for a general gathering to further study the Bible for more direction. A study of the Word made it clear that this was in harmony with the fifteenth chapter of Acts, so the date was set for January 26, 27, 1906, at the home of J. C. Murphy, Cherokee County, North Carolina. There were larger and more commodious buildings, but their doors were hardly open for the members of the Church of God. Not many welcomed this small group whom many enjoyed designating "holy rollers" and religious fanatics.

The members knew the way to the J. C. Murphy home, and with sense of purpose and dedication, they boarded their buggies and wagons and snaked their way through the mountains to his home. Over the mud, through the forest, to the humble weatherbeaten house nestled at the foot of a mountain—the end of the journey. Perhaps only a few realized the full significance of the journey.

They could not be measured by their professional training or status in society. For the most part they were humble folk who did not possess formal education or professional status, but they did possess faith in God and a deep desire to follow Him completely. At this time the gathering numbered twenty-one persons whose names were recorded: R. G. Spurling, T. N. Elrod, W. F. Bryant, Nettie Bryant, Agnes Bryant, J. C. Murphy, Malissie M. Murphy, John Ellison, Johnnie Brown, Andrew Freeman, Alex Hamby, R. R. Jones, Balford Abercromby, Sallie Hamby, T. Ellis, Ella Robinson, Lucy Coleman, W. M. Coleman, M. S. Lemons and A. J. Tomlinson. The spirit of cooperation was prevalent with the women preparing the food and the men helping to keep the warmth with huge logs placed in the fireplace. This was necessary because a dense snow had covered the ground and the inadequately insulated house offered little resistance to the cold blasts which forced their way inside. There was a general hunger to learn more about God's Word and God's will for them.

Since A. J. Tomlinson was pastor of the local church, he called the meeting to order and served as moderator and clerk for the proceedings. One of the first acts of business was the recommendation that records be kept for the general sessions and that local congregations also keep records. The subject of the Lord's Supper and washing the saint's feet was considered and decided to be Scriptural. Prayer meetings and evangelism were encouraged and given strong endorsement.

Tobacco was in wide use at this time with many people using it and growing it for the retail market. It was a money crop which found wide acceptance, with its habitual users finding it wholesome and enjoyable. They found its benefits to outweigh its unclean and obnoxious appearance. In fact, most of the religious denominations permitted its use and even provided cuspidors for its users. Consequently, the Church would be the focal point of intense ridicule for taking any stance against its use. After a discourse by M. S. Lemons, the group decided to go on record as opposing the use of tobacco in any form. Ministers were to use much love and concern with those entrapped by the habit and teach them until they could see the harmful effects of it. Many years later, to the dismay of those who continued the use of tobacco, the Surgeon General declared that smoking is harmful to one's health. Once again it has been proved that the unction of the Spirit is more accurate than the whims of man.

With the nettlesome question of tobacco denounced, progression was made on more positive issues involving Sunday school. This teaching session must be carried out to present the Word of God so that all could grow thereby. It was further decided that a general assembly of the Church would convene each year. With the conclusion of this meeting it could be stated that a definite pattern had been initiated whereby God's Word would have preeminence. The Word was to guide all decisions, being the standard by which rules are found for government. A definite stance was taken concerning the form of government for the Church: "We do not consider ourselves a legislative or executive body but judicial only."² This thought was reiterated in each succeeding assembly, with perhaps some never fully understanding the wording or how the precept would work in actual practice. However, the persevering job of teaching and purging error from their midst must continue.

5. Union Grove

Leaving the home of J. C. Murphy with its limited accommodations, the second assembly met on the outskirts of

Cleveland, Tennessee, at the Union Grove Church. The Church had shown progress during the year, having gained a number of followers. This second assembly convened January 9-13 to enable farmers to attend during their off season. Even though the Church had proceeded under the title of the Church of God, this name had not been officially adopted. It was moved and accepted that the name of the Church be the Church of God. Scriptural references used were 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1. Another important point of doctrine was emphasized, namely, divine healing for the body. It was the thinking that since the Lord had made our bodies, He could heal them through His power. Isaiah, chapter fifty-three and Psalms 103:1, 2 were used as partial references. That this doctrine was taken earnestly can be attested to through the fact that A. J. Tomlinson never sought the services of a physician, even though he suffered excruciating pain which ended in his demise.

One interesting question dealt with the length of time a local church should forbear with a member who had failed God. The answer to the question has been a standard of discipline to the present: "Until we as a church do our Scriptural duty toward the sinner and all efforts to reinstate him fail and the Spirit satisfies us that we should disfellowship him."³

A highlight of the entire meeting was the consecration service. There was a pervading sense of unity and dedication to the task of presenting the Gospel of the Kingdom to the entire world. Their numbers were small and the physical equipment meager, but the enthusiasm and spiritual determination were very intense. The compelling force of the Great Commission fell upon the shoulders of those assembled together. Strong men wept, a weeping for the burden of evangelizing the world and for carrying out a divine mission. Some of the statements are as follows:

A. J. Tomlinson—"I expect to spend all my time this year in the ministry of the Word and prayer.

R. G. Spurling—"I expect to give all my time to the Lord's work this year."

Alex Hamby—"I expect to walk in the light. When I feel that He needs me in the field, I expect to go. When I feel I ought to be at home, I expect to be there, but I hold myself ready to go."

M. S. Lemons—"I expect to give all my time to the ministry of the Word and prayer, but I expect to work some in the garden and at home if the time is given, but if I am required to be in the work I'll let that go."

W. F. Bryant—"I expect to be in the work all the year on some

line, I am at His service. I am in it with all my power, my very bones are on fire for God."

H. L. Trim—"I've been going part of my time; I have felt I ought to give it all. If God opens up a field of labor before me I expect to go into it. I mean to go on. I expect to go, God being my helper."

L. W. Smith—"I expect to do more than I have in the past. God has blessed me in many ways."⁴

This whole-hearted dedication to the work of the Lord would bear its good fruit. Efforts put forth for the Lord never return void and this firm resolved formed a sure foundation for future growth. During this assembly A. J. Tomlinson preached a very powerful sermon on the need for being filled with the Holy Ghost, even though at this time he had not received the experience. His hunger for this inbreathing of the Holy Ghost would be rewarded in the following year. A. J. Tomlinson had performed his duties as a servant to the Church and as moderator of the assembly. Again this position seemed to devolve upon him by virtue of his being pastor of the church at Union Grove. It is evident, however, that his leadership and towering faith was being counted upon by the constituency attending the assemblies.

6. A Move to the City

The first two assemblies were held in rural areas and this seemed to work well for this time. However, the Church was undergoing a period of growth, evidenced by the Cleveland Church obtaining a membership of sixty. Measured by denominational standards this would not be a large number, but for a young group it represented solid growth and strength, the membership being devoted and hard-working.

Assembly number three was held at the local church in Cleveland, Tennessee, with A. J. Tomlinson again serving as moderator by virtue of the fact that he was pastor of the local church. Other strong personalities were added to the Church by this time of January 8-12, 1908, and they gave their voices to the proceedings of the assembly. Two such individuals were A. J. Lawson and J. H. Simpson, who participated actively in the discussions.⁵

A. Divorce and Remarriage

The sorrowful conditions of divorce and remarriage were

rampant throughout the land. While statistical data was relatively incomplete, it had touched so many families that its devastating effects could be felt. In this important Biblical question the Church could not be guided by the actions of the courts of the land, nor by personal feeling on the matter, but only by God's Word. Sincere discussion prevailed for many hours on the subject, evoking strong feelings both pro and con. While there was no definite decision reached on the question, some formulating ideas were set in motion which would be used at a later date to resolve the issue. The following thoughts were presented at the convocation:

However, it was decided that there was only one cause granted for a divorce that would leave either party innocent and at liberty to marry again, and that was fornication or adultery. It was advised that it was really the safest for all parties who are divorced for any cause to remain unmarried. It was further decided that none who are divorced and married again are eligible for membership in the Lord's Church except the innocent party of Matthew 5:32, or perchance it might be the woman who was the innocent party.⁶

This question would not be more fully dealt with for several more years, reaching the year 1923 before a more definitive proposal would be made.

B. Deaconesses

That the Church was searching for the Biblical pattern can be readily seen. In an earnest seeking, there was no claim laid for the thought that they were infallible or would not revise certain actions in the future. One such action would involve the action taken during this assembly concerning the office of deacon for female members. Scriptural references were given supporting the office of the deaconess as follows: Romans 16:2; Acts 6:3; Titus 2:3-5. It was further added that she should take her part of 1 Peter 5:1-4. An important closing note was issued which remains a standard element of Church doctrine: "The above minutes are not laws made by the assembly but only the laws given us by Christ and His disciples, searched out by that body and brought to light that the churches might take action on the same as they see fit."⁷ At this time these rulings were not compelled upon the local churches. In the judicial process there was necessity for clarification and revision where a Scriptural reference had been misinterpreted or given the incorrect emphasis.

C. Baptized with the Holy Ghost

Even though A. J. Tomlinson believed strongly in the doctrine of the Holy Ghost Baptism, and had preached the concept fervently, he had not received the experience. After preaching an inspired sermon on the subject in the assembly of 1907, he became fired with the idea of receiving the experience. In gripping detail he relates in the following passages how this experience changed his life:

In January, 1907, I became more fully awakened on the subject of receiving the Holy Ghost as He was poured out on the day of Pentecost. The whole year I ceased not to preach that it was our privilege to receive the Holy Ghost and speak in tongues as they did on the day of Pentecost. I did not have the experience, so I was almost always among the seekers at the altar. The Lord gave great revivals, and souls were converted and sanctified, and some really went through and were baptized with the Holy Ghost evidenced by the speaking in tongues.

By the close of the year I was so hungry for the Holy Ghost that I scarcely cared for food, friendship or anything else. I wanted the one thing—the baptism with the Holy Ghost. I wrote to G. B. Cashwell, who had been to Los Angeles, California and received the baptism there, and asked him to come to our place for a few days. He arrived January 10, 1908. He preached on Saturday night, and on Sunday morning, January 12, while he was preaching, a peculiar sensation took hold of me, and almost unconsciously I slipped off my chair in a heap on the rostrum at Brother Cashwell's feet. I did not know what such an experience meant. My mind was clear, but a peculiar power so enveloped and thrilled my whole being that I concluded to yield myself up to God and await results. I was soon lost to my surroundings as I lay there on the floor, occupied only with God and eternal things. Soon one of my feet began to shake and clatter against the wall. I could not hold it still. When it got quiet the other one acted the same way. Then my arms and head were operated. My jaws seemed to be set, my lips were moved and twisted about as if a physician was making a special examination. My tongue and eyes were operated on in like manner. Several examinations seemed to be taken, and every limb and my whole body examined.

My body was rolled and tossed about beyond my control, and finally while lying on my back, my feet were raised up several times, and my tongue would stick out of my mouth in spite of my efforts to keep it inside my mouth.

At one time, while lying flat on my back, I seemed to see a great sheet let down, and as it came to me I felt it as it

enveloped me in its folds, and I really felt myself literally lifted up and off the floor several inches, and carried in that sheet several feet in the direction my feet pointed, and then let down on the floor again. As I lay there great joy flooded my soul; the happiest moments I had ever known up to that time. I never knew what real joy was before. My hands clasped together with no effort on my part. Oh, such floods and billows of glory ran through my whole being for several minutes! There were times that I suffered the most excruciating pain and agony, but my spirit always said yes to God.

Then came a very interesting part of the experience. They shall see visions. In vision I was carried to Central America, and was shown the awful condition of the people there. A paroxysm of suffering came over me as I seemed to be in soul-travail for their salvation. Then I spoke in tongues as the Spirit gave utterance, same language of the Indian tribes with whom I was surrounded.

Then, after a little rest, I was carried in vision to South America, and of all the black pictures that were ever painted that was surely the blackest. The vision settled on Brazil, and after another paroxysm of suffering or soul-travail the Spirit spoke again in another tongue; then after a little relaxation I was carried to Chili, with the same effects and results; then in like manner to Patagonia, away down among those illiterate Indians. Each place I was shown, I gave assent in my spirit to go to them.

From Patagonia to Africa, and on to Jerusalem; and while there I endured the most intense suffering, as if I might have been suffering similar to that of my Saviour on Mount Calvary. I never can describe the awful agony that I felt in my body. After every paroxysm of suffering came a tongue. From Jerusalem I was carried to Northern Russia, then to France, thence to Japan; and then I seemed to get back to the United States, but soon I was taken away north among the Esquimaux. While there, the language of the Spirit spoken through me seemed similar to the bark of a dog. I was carried to a number of other places in a similar manner.⁸

It would be grossly erroneous and futile to ask God for a duplication of the experience just as A. J. Tomlinson received Him. This experience was unique to him and at no time did he state that others would receive the experience in a similar manner. Perhaps God dealt with him in a particular way because of the length of time involved before he received the Baptism. Further, his work would be far-reaching and this experience would help formulate this plan for a great expanse in his ministry. On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost filled all those who were in the house and they spoke with other tongues

as the Spirit gave utterance. Later they appeared as inebriated individuals and were ridiculed. At the house of Cornelius, a Gentile soldier, the Holy Ghost came upon them as Peter was preaching, and this was accompanied by the evidence of speaking in tongues. In the nineteenth chapter of Acts, Paul laid hands on some disciples of John and they received the Holy Ghost, evidenced by the speaking in tongues. Bible evidence substantiates that there is no set, prescribed way in which the Holy Ghost comes to dwell within an individual. Being submissive to the will of the Spirit is of utmost importance.

7. General Moderator

At assembly time, January 6, 1909, A. J. Tomlinson again moderated. Encouraging reports were given, depicting continuing increases in the work. The question of female ministers was raised in the gathering with the thought that wives of deacons be considered deaconesses by virtue of the position and ordination of their husbands. It was suggested that they be given a certificate by the local church depicting their place in the ministry.

For the past three assemblies A. J. Tomlinson had served, by virtue of his position as pastor, as moderator of the assembly. It was fitting by this time that the Church make a selection and this was done, designating that the term "General Moderator" be used.⁹ The duties of the Moderator were listed as follows:

...To issue credentials to ministers, to keep a record of all the preachers and evangelists within the bounds of the assembly, to look after the general interests of the churches, to fill vacancies either in person or by sending someone who in his judgment would edify the Body of Christ, and to act as moderator and clerk of the General Assembly.¹⁰

A. J. Tomlinson was given official recognition for the capacity in which he had served during the past three assemblies. He was selected by the assembly as General Moderator for the year. Progression was made toward a more orderly system of operation in the annual convocations, while authority was given for the smooth progress of the church throughout the year. The groundwork is being steadily consummated for the continued press forward in the work of the Gospel.

FOOTNOTES

¹A. J. Tomlinson, *The Covering Removed*, Tract (Cleveland: The White

Wing Publishing House, n.d.).

²Lillie Duggar, *A. J. Tomlinson* (Cleveland: The White Wing Publishing House, 1964), p. 39.

³*Book of Minutes* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), p. 21.

⁴*Ibid.* pp. 23, 24.

⁵Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1955), p. 81.

⁶*Book of Minutes*, op. cit., pp. 27, 28.

⁷*Ibid.* p. 30.

⁸A. J. Tomlinson, *Answered the Call of God* (Cleveland: The White Wing Publishing House, 1969), pp. 10-12.

⁹*Book of Minutes*, op. cit. p. 35.

¹⁰*Ibid.* pp. 35, 36.

CHAPTER IV

YE SHALL RECEIVE POWER

The Lord Jesus Christ promised power to the early Church to carry out the Great Commission. This power would result from the Holy Ghost who would come upon them imbuing the Church with the necessary thrust to plant the Gospel throughout the world at that time. The words of Jesus stated: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Just as the dramatic power of the Holy Ghost was needed in the work of the early Church, it is needed in the Church of the last days. New impetus seemed to be gained after the Holy Ghost experience came upon A. J. Tomlinson. Power was present to face all manner of opposition. There were malcontents in the Church at this time, just as can be found in any era of time. Two such men caused trouble during the year of 1909. J. H. Simpson and a minister by the name of Goins preached contrary to the doctrine of the Church, at length, walking out of the Church and taking with them some forty-three members. This was a temporary setback in that particular local church, but overall the work continued to move forward at a steady gait.

In the summer of 1909 a tent was raised in Cleveland for the purpose of winning the lost to Jesus Christ. From the beginning services there was stern and bitter opposition to the services. However, in the face of persecution many souls accepted the Gospel and followed the Lord. In his diary, A. J. Tomlinson explained the nature of the resistance:

The opposition began while the tent was being erected. But even with the forces of the enemy loosed against the meeting, from the very beginning the Lord blessed and souls were saved, believers sanctified and baptized with the Holy Ghost, the sick were healed and the manifestations of the presence and power of God was wonderful.¹

During the fifth annual assembly held in Cleveland, Tennessee, January 10-16, 1910, the important matter of approving credentials for the ministry was discussed. Since the Church was experiencing steady growth and a number of ministers were seeking recognition for the pulpit ministry, it was necessary to form some system of standards.

The term "General Moderator" was dropped and the term "General Overseer" instituted because it was felt this description was more akin to Scripture. A further decision was one concerning the publication of a Church paper. The committee consisted of the following individuals: "A. J. Tomlinson, M. S. Lemons, F. J. Lee, T. L. McLain, Sam C. Perry, A. J. Lawson, and George T. Brouayer."² Again this year A. J. Tomlinson was chosen as General Overseer for the year 1910.

1. First Annual Address

It was during the assembly held January 3-8, 1911, at Cleveland, Tennessee, that the first annual address was presented by the General Overseer. This would become a major part of each succeeding assembly and the delegates would look forward to this event as a highlight of the progress of the Church. In this address A. J. Tomlinson reported that his work was a comparative failure (he had a tendency to downplay his efforts regardless of how much was accomplished). A nagging problem was ministerial support, which in many cases forced working in a secular area in order to survive. This was troublesome and forced a statement: "There is evidently a lack somewhere for I'm sure a preacher is to preach."³

Evangelization was stressed with a sense of urgency. There was so much work to be done with so few to do it. Personal work was emphasized which should fit the pattern of the early Church when so many of the members witnessed for Christ wherever they went. Education for the ministry was a topic of great importance. At this time it was difficult to obtain even a high school education. The more highly trained, according to the thinking of the General Overseer, the more effectively an individual could fulfill the commission of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it was urged that a preparatory school be established with the intent of preparing workers for the harvest. This urging for a preparatory school took the following course:

Eleventh hour laborers are needed, and there are such lying around because no man has hired them. This class ought to be picked up and sent into the vineyard, and they might be able to

carry in to the Master of the vineyard a basket of large lucious grapes that otherwise would be lost. It should be and is the business of the Church of God to hasten the gospel to every creature during our lifetime."⁴

2. Topics of Importance

Water baptism incorporated a very significant Bible doctrine. Going into the water represented the thought of dying with Christ and coming alive with Him to live forever. Baptism involves a complete plunging into the water, but it was decided to delete the connotation "by immersion" because it could not be found in the Scripture.

The subject of tithing and giving arose with some difference of viewpoint on the subject. Some favored the dual approach of tithing and giving while there were others who favored giving to support the Lord's work. An agreement was made that there should be no compulsion placed upon the membership, but that each member walk in the light of God's Word as he understood it.

Again the subject of tobacco arose even though it had been discussed previously with the Church going on record as opposing its use. There were those who wished to become members of the Church but they did not intend to give up their habit of using tobacco. The ministry was encouraged to treat those who were entrapped by the habit with love and compassion, but refuse to administer the covenant to those who did not abstain from its use.

Since the need was great for a Bible school, definite plans were made to initiate the project. Several names became prominent in this effort: F. J. Lee, Sam C. Perry, J. W. Buckalew, V. W. Kennedy and George C. Barron. They were instructed to locate a place to erect a building for a school. The publication for the Church was called "The Church of God Evangel," with the editorial staff composed of A. J. Tomlinson, George C. Barron, and F. J. Lee.⁵

Progress in gaining churches and members was steady in a number of areas. For the first time it became necessary to appoint Overseers of states to give direction to the work. The first list of Overseers was relatively miniscule when one considers the numerous states and countries of the world. However, the work had to start before it could finish:

1. Tennessee, W. F. Bryant, Cleveland, Tenn.
2. Kentucky, Sam C. Perry, London, Ky.
3. North Carolina, C. R. Curtis, Hayesville, N.C.
4. Virginia, J. J. Lowman, Hiwassee, Va.

5. Georgia, H. W. McArthur, Gainesville, Ga.
6. Alabama, V. W. Kennedy, Adamsville, Ala.
7. Florida, J. A. Giddens, Clearwater, Fla.
8. Bahama Islands, R. M. Evans, Nassau, Bahama Islands.⁶

Once again as in the previous assemblies, A. J. Tomlinson was selected as the General Overseer. His responsibilities were growing just as the Church itself was experiencing growth. The General Overseer continued to serve as pastor of the Cleveland Church and fill the office of editor of the Church paper. This became an increasingly difficult responsibility since calls began to come in to secure the services of the General Overseer. For example, in the latter part of the year 1910, he received a call to Alabama to organize seven or eight churches. He remarked: "I am very tired and worn this morning but all is well in my soul."⁷

3. A Straight Ministry—A Straight Church

The seventh annual assembly was held in the local church at Cleveland, Tennessee, January 9-14, 1912. Steady growth with continuity in the format of the Assembly can be seen by this time. In his annual address the General Overseer reiterated: "We do not consider ourselves a legislative or executive body, but judicial only."⁸ This incorporated the idea that the only authority of the assembly was to find the law already written in the Scriptures and present it to the membership. Of necessity great responsibility would devolve upon those searching out the injunctions of the Scripture to correctly interpret the true intent and meaning of the Word. To issue a statement of belief concerning a Scriptural reference which, in the light of accurate interpretation, is incorrect does not negate the Scripture but does nullify the purported interpretation. As a natural progression from this thought, the Christian, spiritual man, is not bound by an erroneous interpretation which will not stand the light of honest evaluation.

In his hard work and efforts, A. J. Tomlinson was constantly in search of the Biblical pattern for each segment of the Church. During this year he was interested in finding the Bible pattern for the pastoral ministry. Qualification was needed to keep and guard the sheep as well as the gathering process needed to implement the Great Commission. The importance of the ministry could not be overemphasized: "In the ministry is vested the very life of the church. A straight ministry, a straight church; a crooked ministry a crooked church; an unwise ministry, an unwise church."⁹ So overcome with compassion from the thought

that wolves were destroying the flock, many prostrated themselves on the floor, weeping with concern.

4. "Stupendous Immensity"

So great had been the outreach by the year 1913 that the General Overseer remarked that the Church had reached a plane of "stupendous immensity." This set the stage for an overall good feeling during the assembly conducted January 7-12, 1913 in Cleveland, Tennessee. His remarks for the gathering were prepared during the midnight hours when he could compose himself for the most accurate appraisal of the work.

Financial matters, although foreign to the presentation of the Gospel itself, were a matter of concern. Most of the membership at this time were good, honest, hard-working folk, but they lacked the financial power of many churches. Moreover, the ministry could consider their efforts more in the labor of love than remunerative benefits. Even in the face of a relatively small church constituency with inadequate financial power, finding the Bible plan could greatly alleviate suffering. Therefore, the search must continue to find Bible answers to questions affecting the church. In a comparative illustration between the early Church and the Church of today it is stated: "They were dealing with subjects to try to prevent apostasy. We are dealing with subjects to bring us back from apostasy. They were commencing the great work; we are to finish it and prepare the Church for presentation to Him without spot or wrinkle."¹⁰

It was no easy task to give leadership to a large, composite group drawing people from differing cultures and levels of educational and emotional maturity. Spiritual enlightenment was a constant and perennial need. The General Overseer wished to steer clear of frivolous questions which merely gendered strife, but some of them could not be quenched. Such questions in the unimportant category were those concerning the drinking of coffee and other beverages. At this time the assembly made no recommendations concerning the abstinence from certain drinks, meats, etc.

5. The Office of General Overseer

Questions began to arise concerning the Scriptural authority for the office of General Overseer, and the appointment of State Overseers. A. J. Tomlinson had acted in the position of moderator until 1910 when the title of "General Moderator" was conferred upon him. In the next assembly this title was changed

to that of "General Overseer," which seemed to be more compatible with Scriptural authority. James, in his capacity as leader and spokesman in the Jerusalem Council, was taken as a precedent. Perhaps James was serving as pastor of the Jerusalem Church when he acted as spokesman for the group. Although the term "General Overseer" was not a Scriptural term used in reference to him, this designation of his capacity would not be unthoughtfully applied with reference to his area of service. The Gospel first went out from Jerusalem and many of the original apostles resided around Jerusalem, thus any question of doctrine would be resolved in this historic area. Concerning James and the decision of the Council concerning circumcision for the Gentiles, the question was resolved in favor of the preaching of Paul and the answer was sent to the churches.

A strong Jewish party known as the Judaizers sought to tear the Church apart by forcing the Gentiles to submit to the rite of circumcision before they could be saved. At the Jerusalem Council both Peter and Paul and perhaps others were permitted to speak, giving their points of view on the question. Peter could relate how the Holy Ghost descended upon the believers at the Gentile residence of Cornelius. Paul could relate how the Holy Ghost filled Gentiles during his missionary travels, making no discrimination whatsoever. If they were filled with this wonderful Comforter, why should Gentiles submit to circumcision? The presentation of the facts were potent and far-reaching. James could say, when all had been concluded, that "... it seemed good to the Holy Ghost..." (Acts 15:28). Summing up the decision for the entire Council he stated: "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God" (Acts 15:19).

After a discourse by M. S. Lemons in which he mentioned the appointment of Timothy and Titus by Paul for the missionary work, justification was given for the appointment of State Overseers. It was agreed that in each province or state the State Overseer and General Overseer would form the presbytery. Just what method would be used for the selection of the General Overseer? This became a prevalent idea to be investigated. It was decided that the following course of action should be employed:

That the General Overseer be selected by the entire body as represented at the Annual Assembly by acclamation, and that the State Overseers be appointed by the General Overseer. If the office of General Overseer should be declared vacant, a General Overseer shall be selected by the State Overseers to fill the office until the next Annual Assembly.¹¹

With only slight revision this plan is still in operation.

As a leader A. J. Tomlinson stood head and shoulders above the group. He was a man of experience and deep spiritual commitment. His loyalty concerning the direction of the Church of God and plans to implement its continued growth were unquestioned. Consequently, when he was presented to the gathering it is stated: "The Holy Ghost set His seal upon the suggestion that the same one should retain his position, and that he was the one chosen of God for General Overseer. The power fell on some and the Spirit gave a message which was interpreted as follows, 'The smile of the Lord is upon him.'"¹²

A. J. Tomlinson accepted the accolade of the Annual Assembly with humility and candor. He reminded them that "I may make mistakes—I am only a man. If I should make mistakes won't you bear with me and tell me of them and not the other fellow? I am determined by the help of God to do my best."¹³ It was evident in the mind of A. J. Tomlinson that the Holy Ghost had approved of his leadership and placed him in the position. "Although they have more people under their jurisdiction (referring to King George of England and the Presidents of the United States), yet this is a government and position under God, for the Holy Ghost has placed me in it as you all know."¹⁴

Many of the Church leaders at this time did not wish, apparently, to continue the discussion of another General Overseer. A. J. Tomlinson had fulfilled his duties so admirably and no other individual came close to filling his place. Concerning this matter, a number of individuals expressed their opinions: George T. Brouayer stated: "As long as the horse works well I see no need of a change." M. S. Lemons stated: "We ought not discuss that question at all." J. W. Buckalew stated: "Reports have gone out that Brother Tomlinson has put himself in this place to rule over us. Let us not allow this impression to go out from here." After these words the Holy Ghost worked through a member and a message was interpreted in the following words: "Brother Tomlinson is in his place. I placed him there and I will take him away when I am ready."¹⁵ Again, during the Annual Assembly in 1914, there was a strong feeling confirming the position of A. J. Tomlinson. He felt that the mind of the Spirit had been made indisputably clear concerning his remaining in the position of General Overseer until his death. Further, he believed that since the Lord Himself confirmed through the workings of the Holy Ghost that his position was secure for life, he felt that only God could remove him. A. J. Tomlinson explains the events of a momentous meeting:

The General Overseer stated, Now is a good time to ask the

Lord to give a new General Overseer.

Immediately after he made the above statement he stepped back and kneeled down. The congregation became quiet and all seemed almost as still as death. No one spoke a word for a few moments. At length the silence was broken by Brother Lemons who said, "Brethren, the place is vacant, let us pray for God to give us an overseer." All fell upon their faces and cried out to God for several minutes, after this there was a great calm again. When the silence became almost painful, one spoke in tongues and the interpretation followed immediately. "My beloved, you can't do better than what you have. Hold on to what you've got." A joyous cry arose from almost everybody present. A second message was given and the interpretation followed. "He has been so faithful, as he was led by me and has governed and led the little flock. So follow him as he follows me." With this the power fell upon many and the one chosen was literally covered up by the brethren as they fell upon him and kissed him. He was so overcome that he was unable to rise for several minutes. People laughed, shouted, cried, danced, made speeches, and finally Brother Lemons took the one named by the Holy Ghost by the arm and lifted him up and led him to the stand and placed him before the great congregation who shouted their approval and greetings for several seconds.¹⁶

Several commented concerning the events that had taken place and were high in appreciation and respect for A. J. Tomlinson. Some of the remarks centered around the work of James and the fact that there was no Scriptural reference pertaining to his being changed from his position. The General Overseer's faithfulness was cited despite the fact of extremely limited remunerative conditions. F. J. Lee stated:

I have known Brother Tomlinson for several years. I love him. I honor him. I honor him more because God honors him. God has given him special wisdom. I went to him with a burdened heart because it seemed the devil was going to try to make an inroad into the Assembly and cause division. My fears did not disturb him. He took it so calm and quiet that it made me feel ashamed. He quietly remarked that he had no fears and that the Church of God is not like other churches. The burden that was on my heart vanished away. There is such unity and harmony prevailing in this section that I don't see any need of ever making any change until God takes him away.

M. S. Lemons stated "I think you can all see that God's approval is on this selection, and I don't see any use of ever saying anything more about a change."¹⁷ A. J. Tomlinson stated his

view of what the Spirit had directed: the Holy Ghost set me in as General Overseer again. This time it was made plain that I should continue in the position until Jesus comes or calls. Tears form in my eyes as I write. I am unable to express my gratitude to God for His strength and care bestowed upon me."¹⁸ Therefore, the General Overseer moved about convinced of the fact that the Spirit had spoken expressly concerning his position. In his viewpoint he would be held responsible in all things directly by God Himself. He would join the other appointments which God had made and would not be terminated until death. James, Saul, David, Solomon, and others served until God terminated their work on earth. This was exactly the stance taken by the General Overseer in viewing how the Lord had spoken through the Holy Ghost.

FOOTNOTES

¹Lillie Duggar, A. J. Tomlinson (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), p. 77.

²*Book of Minutes* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), p. 39.

³*Ibid.* p. 43.

⁴*Ibid.* p. 44.

⁵*Ibid.* p. 50.

⁶*Ibid.* pp. 51, 52.

⁷Duggar, op. cit. p. 89.

⁸*Book of Minutes*, op. cit. p. 55.

⁹*Ibid.* p. 57.

¹⁰*Ibid.* p. 83.

¹¹*Ibid.* p. 97.

¹²*Ibid.* p. 101.

¹³*Ibid.* p. 102.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.* p. 145.

¹⁶*Ibid.* pp. 172, 173.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Duggar, op. cit. p. 156.

CHAPTER V

TOWARD COMPLETE THEOCRACY

From the beginning of history there has been a form of government. This form began within families who looked to the father as the leader and later the patriarch of larger numbers. Some system of order and discipline is necessary to bring out the best productiveness possible in a group. Countries have sought government in a monarchy, democracy, anarchy, tyranny, oligarchy, benevolent despotisms, socialism, communism, and the leadership of wise philosophers. Each type of government would, perhaps, have some beneficial elements which would be supported by a segment of people. However, governments instituted by man have an innate quality of imperfection. The one perfect system of order has not been found, even though an earnest search has been made for the utopian system which would bring about complete happiness.

Because the perfect system of government has not been reached the resulting factor of wars and rumors of wars everywhere abound. Today there is a tremendous struggle between the philosophy of democracy and the philosophy of communism. These systems are antagonistic toward each other and consequently, the struggle in various forms continues day by day. One side would argue that the state is more important than the individual, while the democratic countries would stand firmly for individual freedom and the right to participate in the activities of their government. A tyranny is a rule by force which would keep the populace in control by police state tactics. A monarchy is the rule by one man with his counselors whom he may choose whenever he pleases. An oligarchy is the rule of the state by a circle of a few individuals. Socialism looks to the state to solve all the problems with the individual incentives and drives negated for the service to the state. Communism, in

its pure form, seeks to bring about equality for all people. It works, theoretically, toward the disposal of all classes.

1. Biblical Patterns

When Israel left the land of Goshen in Egypt after they had been captive for more than four hundred years, the government was in a relatively simple form. Moses stood out above all the people as the supreme ruler of the people. However, his instructions came from God and he served as mediator between God and the people. This worked well during this period, but it is not to say that in this system there was perfect harmony. Often the rebellious nature of man, perceiving all things from his restrictive and myopic vision, opposed the command of God and brought His wrath upon them. Therefore, it can be seen that while theocracy was perfect from the standpoint of God, it was imperfect from the standpoint of man. This resulted from the innate sinful and rebellious nature of humanity whose continuous searching for ways to satisfy the flesh never abated. No rule can be higher or greater than the "rule of a state by God."¹

The term "theocracy" is not used in either the Old or New Testaments depicting a form of government. Therefore, it is a term implemented by man to describe roughly the type of rulership employed during the time of Moses and through the period of the Judges. Flavius Josephus, eminent Jewish historian, describes the theocracy of the Bible in the following terms:

The term theocracy was coined by Josephus to describe the government instituted at Sinai. Jehovah was the head of the nation, dwelling in its midst between the cherubim. The theocratic government was proposed by God at Sinai on condition of obedience. The terms were accepted by the elders of the people. At the institution of the theocratic government at Sinai, the idea before the people was simply that God was ruler and Moses his accredited representative through whom he exercised his legislative, judicial, and executive offices. The stability of the state under theocratic government depended upon the faithfulness of God to his election and his promises; but the success of the theocracy at any given period was conditioned by the attitude of the people toward God and toward the provisions of the covenant.²

In political governments instituted by man for his orderly functioning, recalcitrant and law-breaking individuals can be dealt with harshly by the state. Man can sometimes prove his inhumanity to man in a rigorous manner. God's government,

theocracy, can be greatly hindered because its success is dependent upon the willingness of man to work with God. God is always faithful to his promises, but the same cannot be said of man. At one time or another because of a lustful desire or his own desire for self-government, he has repudiated theocratic government.

That God displayed His supreme love for the nation of Israel is shown by the way in which He delivered them from the land of bondage. Their every need was cared for by Him. In no point did God ever fail to take care of them, but their complaints and lack of trust in Him proved their undoing on many different occasions. God instructed the nation of Israel in the following manner:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord (Exodus 19:5-9).

No more perfect, just, and humane government could have been instituted than this that God proposed to them. But selfwill and rebellion seem to find ways to thwart the good and perfect will of God. Israel rejected the injunctions of God and sought to depose Moses, God's accredited leader. Korah led a large insurgency which necessitated the direct intervention of God to quell, with the Lord Himself causing the ground to open up and swallow the rebels. Constant pressure by mortal leaders of men finally prevailed in an ultimate and complete sense when Israel asked for a king so they could be like other nations. Although they were seeking the very system which would lead them on the downward road away from God, their wish was granted and God gave them kings to rule over them, much to His displeasure and dismay. When the kings were good, the people had a tendency to be good, but when the kings were idolatrous the people followed them. A Scriptural principle remains in effect that when a nation or an individual rejects theocracy, he brings doom and ultimate destruction upon himself.

Complete theocracy in its ultimate and pure form has never worked upon this earth to complete perfection. This has not been the fault of God, but it has been the fault of imperfect man. Pure theocracy as a government cannot work until the sinful and rebellious nature of man is completely conquered. During the millenium age the powers of Satan will be completely subdued for a period of one thousand years. This will be the perfect, complete rule of God in which there will be no disharmony whatsoever. All will be at peace; even the most vicious animals of today will be at perfect peace during this perfect reign of God.

While we continue to live upon this earth, there is an incessant need to implement theocracy as the guiding rule of government in our spiritual lives. The meaning of theocracy as it was used in the early Church and as it is implemented today is that God's Word, the Scriptures, takes precedence over every rule of faith in the world. Scripture is our guide to the good life and our instruction manual, telling us about God and His mighty acts and pointing us to the path to eternal life. Theocracy does not supplant any physical government on the face of this earth, and neither is it a threat to any government on earth. When the Church acts under the principles of theocratic government there can only be harmony and peace prevailing on every hand. We are enjoined by Scripture to pray for our rulers, and this we can do, pray for our political rulers and our spiritual leaders. Scripture is theocracy. Read these beautiful words: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Timothy 3:16) The spiritual man must continue to resist the temptation to depart from the principles of theocracy. Paul warned in his epistle to Timothy: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Timothy 4:16). Pointing to the supreme authority of God's Word Paul placed the matter in clear perspective: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

An essential element involved in theocracy is submission to the complete will of God. One sure way to know that theocracy is in operation when the Holy Spirit works in total freedom. It was through the power of the Spirit that Annanias and Sapphira were exposed in their falsehood. Theocracy was in operation when a need arose in the early Church concerning the distribu-

tion of food to the needy. When they beseeched God for an answer to the problem, He gave the direction for the method to be use: "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:3, 4). Looking to God for the right answers and for the proper direction is an integral part of theocracy. When a group of Christian believers assemble with the driving thought of placing God's Word in the position of supreme authority, this is theocracy. Therefore, it is not so important to obtain specific mechanical organizational structure, but it is important that God be given authority in all things. In the early Church when the problems concerning circumcision arose with its divisive nature, the leadership turned to God. When the matter was concluded through the theocratic process it could be said: "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things" (Acts 15:28).

2. Rejection of Theocracy

To the spiritual man it becomes almost incomprehensible how any group can renounce theocracy and turn to the dark and destructive elements of the world. The rejection of theocracy did not come suddenly during the early Church period. When the Church began to thrust out to the world of that day, numerous people of all backgrounds united with the Church. Many of these individuals did not renounce their paganism and were not truly converted to Christianity. Yet when they found an opening into the body of Christ, they began to wreck havoc in many areas: their teaching was false and insidious; their manner of living equated with their teaching; and the effect on others was devastating. Gospel writers sought to dispel the heretical teachings through precept and example, but the cancerous growth of substituting man's desires continued until the Church became interwoven with false doctrine. The Gnostics, the Judaizers, and the antinomians played a large role in undermining the Christian fabric of the Church. Once heretical ideas gained a foothold, they continued with unhindered progress toward covering the Church with ecclesiastical error. Commenting on this period it is stated: "In time the Church came to be ruled by bishops and men of great authority. The use of idols or statues in worship services came into practice, and certain members of the clergy refrained from marrying. This false doctrine was mentioned in the official canons as early as 314 A.D."³

3. Government of God

Church leaders in the early twentieth century were thoroughly convinced of the need to fully incorporate the precepts of theocratic government in the Church. Decisions were based on how they corresponded with the Scripture. Reaching for the ideal government of God, M. S. Lemons remarked in his message: "There is only one true government and that is the Church of God. But we are on the climb for the real thing. God's is a theocratic form of government. The Church is His Church, the government is His, so we should submit ourselves to His government and thus fulfill prophecy and nations will tremble."⁴ He stated further: "Beloved, run every thing according to the Word. He has set up the Church, and government is the principal thing of the Church of God. We are going to have it exactly like the apostles had it."⁵ Walking hand in hand is peace with the increase of government. In the world it is the exact paradox, with increase of government draining out the freedom and spirit of the individual. Finding the exact Bible pattern can only lead to joy and contentment, just as Solomon's servants who went about their work with happiness. Heavy-handed, repressive government without the Spirit serves to bring sadness and disharmony, often resulting in revolt. God's plan will work just as the prophet pointed out: "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:7).

During the seventeenth Annual Assembly in 1922, A. J. Tomlinson touched on the subject of theocratic government as it should be practiced in the Church of God. He stated: "Under democracies the majority rules, but under theocratic form God rules. To settle questions with us we go to the Bible to see what God says about the subject." Fearing that a departure from theocracy was imminent, he warned: "We must have God's favor no matter what the cost may be. We must have His approval. We must not take the government out of His hands. To do so the Church would cease to be the Church of God. We must still hold to the form given us by James, the Lord's brother, when he said, It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and us."⁶ Turning to God's Word for answers is the crowning beauty of theocracy. Further it is stated: "But our definition of the word as we mean it in practice is that we are following God's Bible, and we recognize His Bible as His words to us."⁷

4. Theocracy in Practice

Sometimes during the Annual Assemblies during this period of time, many more questions were presented than could be Scripturally answered. Occasionally, questions were issued with such vehemence and fervor that answers were given that, when investigated in stronger light of Scripture, had to be revised. There those individuals, some of whom were completely uninformed in the Scriptures, who doted on the physical natural man. The questions took the path of frivolity. Questions such as the practice of some bobbing the hair, about drinking from bottles, about selling and drinking soda pop, about chewing gum, about drinking coffee, about eating meats, about the Sabbath and other issues. It can be seen that the impulse to pass one's own ideas of holiness on to others and force them to conform was deeply set in the minds of some. But issues of a personal nature that did no injustice to the Scriptures had to be left to the discretion of the individual. Passing on every rule of conduct was time-consuming and distracting from the sincere study of the Word. A. J. Tomlinson stated concerning some of the questions: "I humbly and sincerely entreat the members of this Assembly to dispense with all little frivolous questions that would have a tendency to gender strife and division and plunge into the weightier matters."⁸ One statement does not always eradicate the ridiculous and trivial. Some of the attitudes concerning certain issues hung around for a time, but eventually died out in the light of more understanding of the Scripture and greater maturity of the membership. It can be seen that the General Overseer had a gigantic task to guide the Church on the path of Biblical truth in the face of some who were completely illiterate and devoid of Scriptural understanding.

5. Teachings

Although the Church had manifestly declared that the whole Bible must be taken rightly divided, it was felt that some nucleus Scriptures should be emphasized in order to give a general format of belief. With this thought in mind a group of teachings were cited from the Scripture and pointed out as prominent. There is nothing sacred as to the number chosen and nothing stating that there will never be any additions. The following teachings were not intended to be a declaration of faith nor as a creed by which the Church would stand exclusive of other Scriptures. In 1910 the following list was issued:

1. Repentance: Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3; Acts 3:19.
2. Justification: Romans 5:1; Titus 3:7.
3. Regeneration: Titus 3:5.
4. New Birth: John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:9.
5. Sanctification subsequent to justification: Romans 5:2; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 13:12.
6. Holiness: Luke 1:75; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; Hebrews 12:14.
7. Water Baptism by Immersion: Matthew 28:18; Mark 1:9, 10; John 3:22, 23; Acts 8:36-38.
8. Baptism with the Holy Ghost subsequent to cleansing: The Enduement of Power for service: Matthew 3:11; Luke 24:49-53; Acts 1:4-8.
9. The Speaking in Tongues as the evidence of the baptism with the Holy Ghost: John 15:26; Acts 2:4; Acts 10:44-46; Acts 19:1-7.
10. The Full Restoration of the Gifts to the Church: 1 Corinthians 12:1, 7, 10, 28, 31; 1 Corinthians 14:1.
11. Signs Following Believers: Mark 16:17-20; Romans 15:18, 19; Hebrews 2:4.
12. Fruits of the Spirit: Romans 6:22; Galatians 5:22, 23; Ephesians 5:9; Philippians 1:11.
13. Divine Healing provided for all in the atonement: Psalms 103:3; Isaiah 53:4, 5; Matthew 8:17; James 5:14-16; 1 Peter 2:24.
14. The Lord's Supper: Luke 22: 17-20; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26.
15. Washing the Saint's Feet: John 13:4-17, 1 Timothy 5:9, 10.
16. Tithing and Giving: Genesis 14:18-20; Genesis 28: 20-22; Malachi 3:10; Luke 11:42; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-9; Hebrews 7:4-9, 21.
17. Restitution where possible: Matthew 3:8; Luke 19:9.
18. Premillennial Second Coming of Jesus: First, to resurrect the dead saints and to catch away the living saints to meet Him in the air: Matthew 24:27, 28; 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.
Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years: Zechariah 14:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Jude 14, 15; Revelations 5:10; Revelations 19:11-21; Revelations 20:4-6.
19. Resurrection: John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:15; Revelations 20:5, 6.
20. Eternal Life for the Righteous: Matthew 25:46; Luke 18:30; John 10:28; Romans 6:22; 1 John 5:11-13.
21. Eternal Punishment for the Wicked: No liberation nor annihilation: Matthew 25:41-46; Mark 3:29; 2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9; Revelations 20:1; Proverbs 23:29-32; Isaiah 28:7; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 1 Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 5:21.

22. Total Abstinence from all liquor or strong drinks: Proverbs 20:1; Proverbs 23:29-32; Isaiah 28:7; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 1 Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 5:21.
23. Against the Use of Tobacco in Any Form, Opium, Morphine, etc.: Isaiah 55:2, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 32; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:3-8; James 1:21.
24. Meats and Drinks: Romans 14:2-17; 1 Corinthians 8:8; 1 Timothy 4:1-5.
25. The Sabbath: Hosea 2:11; Romans 14:5, 6; Colossians 2:16, 17; Romans 13:1, 2.⁹

The preceding teachings were accepted by the sixth Assembly, 1911. They were first printed in the "Evangel" and in tract form.¹⁰ The precise wording of the teachings need not be considered divinely inspired and may be revised, but the Scriptural references themselves are inspired of God. In 1912, the teachings were printed in the Minutes and have continued since that date. At one time there was very strong feeling on the part of many members against going to war. This teaching was advocated by A. J. Tomlinson and included as the last teaching. However, after more study and consideration, this teaching was deleted. In the eleventh Annual Assembly the following teachings were added in the year 1915:

26. Against Members Wearing Gold for Ornament or decoration; such as finger rings, bracelets, ear rings, lockets, etc.: Isaiah 55:2; 1 Peter 3:3.
27. Against Members Belonging to Lodges: John 18:20; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17.
28. Against Members Swearing: Matthew 5:34; James 5:12.¹¹

Rounding out the teachings list would be concerning the divorce and remarriage issue. This question had been presented in a number of prior assemblies with no definitive answer. It was a very far-reaching and emotional issue which touched many lives, and consequently, deliberation was necessary. However, during the Twenty-Second Annual Assembly, 1927, the teaching was added to the list, becoming number twenty-nine.¹²

29. Against the Divorce and Remarriage Evil: Matthew 5:32; Matthew 19:3-12; Mark 10:12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2, 3; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 13; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 13, 16-18; 1 Corinthians 7:2, 10, 11; Revelations 2:20-22; Acts 15:28, 29; Matthew 14:3, 4.

This selection of prominent Bible themes amount to twenty-nine in number and form a nucleus of Bible belief which serves to guide the Church. They have never been used in a manner of total inclusiveness but form merely a framework. Further, they have not been presented as a basis for creed. Total Scripture is the intention for complete Church direction, with true interpretation as its complete objective. Delving into the Scripture for answers to every problem was the intent of the Church leaders at this time. A. J. Tomlinson wrote concerning the pastoral problem: "The pastoral problem must be solved." Ideas were presented to the Assembly in the following words.

God is enlightening our minds. I've enjoyed these discussions, but had the matter settled before hand. I reached a conclusion for the present needs at 2:30 this morning. The Church of God is a theocratic form of government, but we may not be able to reach the perfect form at once. My sentence, therefore, is this: Where a church is well established the elders (officers and stronger members) select their pastor, subject to the approval of the state overseer. The state overseer should know his men. The reason for not being independent of the state overseer is not because such a one the church might select might be deficient in Christian character, but he might be deficient in knowledge and qualifications needful for that particular place.¹³

Searching the Scriptures is an essential element in theocratic government in practice. Not always does one person or a group gain the full light on a subject in the first look into the Word. Sometimes a partial enlightenment comes about, initiating a need to study the issue more fully as the light comes upon a group. The continued search for complete truth must continue until the Lord returns for His Church which He will present to Himself without spot or wrinkle. In its pure form theocratic government will reach a purity of operation through the will of God working through God-fearing individuals. This will continue a flow of truth and joy in government that will bring all men in harmony with the Spirit of the Word and the Spirit of Christ. One of the strong reasons for the existence of the Church is to present every man mature in the image of Christ. At this time in Church history the General Overseer could see error and weakness in the implementation of theocratic government. He stated: "We do not claim to have reached absolute perfection in the government we accepted, but we are close observing students of the Bible and sincere followers of the Lamb of God, and have a deep desire to be wholly guided by the Holy Ghost, and we

cannot believe that the Lord will allow us to follow the wrong course very long."¹⁴ He proved himself willing to revise and shift his position when he saw that a wrong move had been made. This attitude is in order at any point in time of Church history: revision in the reasoning about deaconesses; revision later on the idea of the twelve and seventy; revision on the idea of the constitution of the Church in 1921, and revision on the tobacco issue, finally decided in 1943. Completion of the work of searching out the Scripture and revising until complete perfection is reached in Christ will not be completed until the Lord returns for His Church. It would not be in the realm of impossibility before the return of the Lord to witness revision in the interpretation of certain Scriptures. Moreover, every point of doctrine, including the twenty-nine prominent teachings may be scrutinized to assure accuracy of meaning in every concept. Those references which fall in the realm of conduct and dress would be placed in an advisory capacity, while those which refer directly to the salvation of the soul would be given prominent emphasis. Reaching for maturity in practical and spiritual matters must continue until the Lord returns.

FOOTNOTES

¹*Webster's New World Dictionary*, (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1962), p. 1511.

²J. D. Davis, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Theocracy).

³M. A. Tomlinson, *The Glorious Church of God* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1968), p. 79.

⁴*Book of Minutes* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), p. 106.

⁵*Ibid.* p. 109.

⁶*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, n.d.), p. 138.

⁷*Ibid.* p. 139.

⁸*Book of Minutes*, op. cit. p. 84.

⁹Charles W. Conn, *Like A Mighty Army Moves the Church of God* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1955), pp. 118, 119.

¹⁰*Book of Minutes*, op. cit. p. 47.

¹¹*Ibid.* p. 202.

¹²*Assembly Minutes The Church of God of Prophecy* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1967), p. 188.

¹³*Book of Minutes*, op. cit. p. 150.

¹⁴*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes*, op. cit. p. 139.

CHAPTER VI

HARNESSED TO THE LOAD

A marked progression can be seen in the writing ministry of A. J. Tomlinson from the inception of the written addresses given each year at the Annual Assembly. Often, the key points of progress covering the entire year were emphasized in his reports. So intent was the General Overseer on promoting the gospel effort that little time was given for sleep, but there was no complaint because the intense drive toward planting the Word provided impetus.

Concerning the burden of the work he wrote: "I feel like raising my hands to heaven and crying out to God for help. Our new building is not yet complete and the financing of this is a heavy burden as well as all the other departments with the limited means at hand."¹ Physical rest was a necessity because strain was beginning to take its toll: "Very seldom I get to bed at night till midnight, then up at five in the morning. I feel very much worn tonight at ten, but I do not have time for sleep at all, only I have to sleep some."² There was no respite even in illness. When the influenza epidemic was raging, he felt that he had contracted the illness, but his work continued despite the fact. He stated concerning this:

I am convinced now that I had a case of the influenza. I was very sick and went down to the house and laid down, but was called up in about 15 minutes to attend to some business. The second time I went to bed and had to get up again in a few minutes. I thought, well, if I haven't time to be sick I'll just stay up. So I never went to bed any more only at night. But I had the same symptoms and was affected just like all that have the disease. I was sick about two weeks but God held me up.³

While there are those who help provide the financial and physical means to promote the gospel, there are the inevitable members in the group who do very little other than occasional

activity. With this thought in mind the illustration was written concerning two mares pulling a heavy load, while their colts jogged along behind, playing and feeling no burden. The two mares continued to trudge along pulling their heavy load, making slow but steady progress. That there was a great need for all to feel the burden and help carry the load was evident. The General Overseer used the illustration in a gentle manner of stirring up interest and zeal among those who lacked. He did not use this in a harsh manner but rather in "a general manner to show the need of all putting their shoulders to the wheel in the great work of promoting Christ and the Church."⁴ In every age, apparently, there are a few who cannot fathom a sense of urgency concerning the great work of the Lord. Satisfaction with the status quo has a devastating effect. Becoming active on the part of one and all is necessary for the progress that must be made. Just as members of the early Church were fired with the zeal to witness to others and were willing to put forth the effort to reach others, the same spirit must prevail in the last days.

Clearly, the great task of the Church remained to present the gospel of the kingdom to every creature. The one great need was to unite against a common foe, the one who sets himself against all truth. It was nettlesome and disconcerting to the General Overseer that some had apparently forgotten the common enemy and had begun to contest with each other. His statements concerning this problem are as follows:

The ministers who engage in criticising and picking flaws with one another in private conversation, make me think they have quit the fight against the one great enemy. What is the use to cavil over small matters of small importance such as coffee, meats, etc.? Let us deal with weightier things! Let us notice the government of Jesus! Paul did not depend on visions and interpretations, but on the Word of God.⁵

Obviously, a constant effort had to be made to steer the Church away from the distracting effects of fanaticism and a constant emphasis on personal, meaningless criticism. A spirit of fault-finding, and the "holier than thou" attitude was a detriment to the work of the Lord. That the ministers should be sober, dignified, straightforward, honest, and bridle the tongue is evidenced by the following statement: "All division that has come during this convention has been caused by too much talk in private conversation."⁶ Any use of agitation should be used for meaningful results, not to discourage. This was placed in lucid language: "Let us agitate something that will push

forward the work of God and that which will keep men and women from hell."⁷

1. Two Assemblies in One Year, 1913

The year 1913 was a significant one for the Church of God because two great Annual Assemblies were held during this year. The dates were January 7-12, 1913, and November 4-9, 1913. Both assemblies were held in the local church in Cleveland. One of the most important themes of the first assembly during the year centered around the office of the General Overseer. For years the assembly had been selecting him by acclamation, apparently with no thought of nominating any others to fill the position. In this position there was need for Scriptural direction. Therefore, a search was made to determine the standpoint of Scripture concerning this position.

F. J. Lee preached on the subject "Confirmation of Actions of Past Assemblies." Often the thought for a particular sermon would be presented by the General Overseer, who would appoint someone to prepare a message on the topic. This technique served the purpose of clarifying to the people more definitely how a particular topic should be emphasized by the entire group. Unity of purpose and direction was the guiding thought behind the sermon presentation. In this instance, Lee's address pointed out very effectively the Scriptural position of the General Overseer and the powers which fell to his span of control. The General Overseer then was compared with James in the New Testament. He stated in part: "I see the moderator, James, sitting quietly listening to the speeches made by the brethren—such men as Peter, Paul and Simon, after which James gave in his sentence which proved satisfactory to the assembly."⁸ That the sermon brought about thought on the manner of selection of the General Overseer is attested by the fact that a committee was selected to study the matter. The committee composed the following persons: W. F. Bryant, J. B. Ellis, W. R. Hadsock, and F. J. Lee. After study on the question the following proposal was made:

Committee to recommend Bible plan for selecting General and state overseers reported that they could find no better plan than the one found in the Word. That the General Overseer be selected by the entire body as represented at the Annual Assembly by acclamation, and that the state overseers be appointed by the General Overseer. If the office of General Overseer should be declared vacant, a General Overseer shall be selected by the state overseers to fill the office until the next Annual Assembly.⁹

All the people in attendance seemed to favor this written statement on a course of action and the Holy Ghost seemed to grant confirmation on the matter. "The Holy Ghost set His seal upon the suggestion that the same one should retain his position, and that he was the one chosen of God for General Overseer."¹⁰ Following the thought of the position of James during the period of the early Church, there was growing feeling that the office of the General Overseer should compare with his. It should compare in the area of responsibilities and in the area of tenure of the office. This same thought was reaffirmed strongly in the next Annual Assembly, and was made a point of stronger clarity and perspective in 1914.¹¹

In the viewpoint of A. J. Tomlinson and many others at this point in time, the Holy Ghost had approved of his continuing leadership until the time of death. There would be no further need to relinquish time for the choosing of the General Overseer by a concerted acclamation. No individual at this time was even remotely considered for the office which required so much time and effort. So popular and beloved by most of the Church membership at this time, A. J. Tomlinson was the favored leader to continue his work until some event directed by God Himself would necessitate any removal from his position.

At a later date this would become an issue of prime importance. With the introduction and passage of a constitution during the early part of 1920, the power of the General Overseer was shared with two other individuals. To the understanding of A. J. Tomlinson, this was a departure from the events which surrounded the approval of the General Overseer through the unction of the Holy Ghost.

With the growth of the Church, there was an inevitable growth in the nagging problems which kept the leadership active in finding Biblical principles to apply for every situation. Although there were sincere efforts made to discover Scriptural injunctions on every issue, there were, nevertheless, decisions made which led to future disharmony and damage. Persistence on the part of some, perhaps, led to hasty actions which would later have to be reviewed and revised in the brighter light of Scripture.

2. Some Motivating Thoughts

As each year passed, problems became more numerous. Evidence can be seen pointing to the fact that it was a difficult task to keep the Church clean and pure in doctrine while at the same time keep it from heading down the road to extremism and

harshness in its dealings with the membership. One prime thought which pervaded the ranks of the Church was the undeniable fact of the injurious effects of tobacco. So strongly were the minds of most of the people motivated in this direction that steps were taken which would lead to much hurt, even though the point was made that individuals in the Church should not use it.

In a message entitled "A Mourning for Pastors" preached by J. W. Buckalew, there were strong statements concerning cleaning up the Church from all types of corruption. He stated:

"We have some who say let them chew a little tobacco, they will grow out of it. You remember Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep.' At this juncture in his address the people spoke out with the statement: 'But He did not say feed them on tobacco.'" ¹²

This feeling led the Church to prohibit the selling, raising, and even handling of tobacco. Therefore, it can be seen in the light of a later day that some intemperance and over-reaction led to decisions which later had to be revised in the light of more love and understanding. ¹³

Committees were appointed in each Assembly to study and review questions to be placed before the entire group. Difficult questions which required concentrated study of the Bible for answers were usually delegated to a committee for study. However, many of the questions were answered before the Assemblies by A. J. Tomlinson himself. His answers display a wisdom seldom seen in the Church at this time. However, he usually gave his judgment on a particular question or referred back to a previous Assembly where the question had been answered. Some of the answers were given as his own feeling on a particular matter and were not intended to be interpreted as laws to bind the people from year to year. When he spoke with the backing of Scripture, this became the rule to follow.

In the Eighth Annual Assembly (January 7-12, 1913), some important issues were placed before the Assembly. An insight into the thinking of the people can be grasped by studying these questions. Following is an example of their queries:

Q. Can a man hold an office in the Church of God who has not been baptized with the Holy Ghost?

A. Referring to bishops, deacons and evangelists, no. One without the Baptism could serve as clerk, merely for the keeping of records, if otherwise suitable.

Q. Should children who have the Holy Ghost be allowed to go to school where their parents are persecuted?

A. If the children are able to bear such without being overcome

it will make them stronger, but the parents will have to look into such matters and decide for themselves.

Q. How may we discern interpretations?

A. By being in close touch with the Lord yourself, and being assured that the interpreter is clean and pure in every sense.

Q. What must be done with a member who has the Holy Ghost and must have just a little bit of tobacco?

A. This question gave rise to considerable discussion and careful consideration of the tobacco subject. The sentiment of the Assembly was finally obtained and a decision made.

All of our ministers and local churches are to refuse to accept any who use tobacco into the Church under any circumstances. Those who are already in the Church who use it are to be dealt with in love, given ample time only a few weeks, and if they fail to abstain they are to be disfellowshipped.

Q. Can any one belonging to a lodge or secret order be received into the Church of God?

A. This question has been amply dealt with in the past and the answer is emphatically, No!

Q. Can any one belonging to the United Coal Miners' Association be received into the Church of God?

A. The question might cover labor unions of all kinds. This matter has been looked into and studied carefully from every viewpoint. The time will come when we cannot buy or sell unless we have the mark of the beast in hand or forehead. It is a matter of bread and butter, but we do not dare to compromise and be bound by an order to bestow a favor upon a member of such order in preference to a brother of the household of faith. The question has been answered before with a positive, No!

Q. Is any one having more than one husband or wife, with or without divorce eligible to membership in the Church of God?

A. This question has been answered over and over from year to year as far as it has been decided by the Assembly. We can do no better than to refer all inquirers to page 27. It is recommended that none who have been divorced and remarried should present themselves for membership. If any of this class wish to join they should speak privately to the minister and investigation and answer will be given. This subject should have ample attention given it in receiving members into the Church.

This question was submitted to five men for further investigation until next Assembly. Each one is instructed to write out his convictions during his search and at the next Assembly they are to compare notes and the Assembly will expect to reach a final conclusion pertaining to all points in connection with the subject. (Committee: M. S. Lemons, R. M. Singleton, J. B. Ellis, F. J. Lee, and S. W. Latimer).

Q. Can we afford to adorn our bodies with gold or pearls or costly array? (Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3).

A. Unnecessary jewelry, such as finger rings, bracelets, earbobs, lockets, and other kinds for mere adornment should not be worn. Gold teeth, gold rimmed spectacles, watch cases and things specially useful are left for the individual to decide.¹⁴

Answers given to the many questions point out the wisdom and deep desire to stay in the path of truth. It was not an easy task for the General Overseer to keep moderation before the people. Sometimes a strong group would press an issue until there was nothing to do but make the best of the situation until the proper time and mood for a revision of certain actions. Ever and always the Church has sought for the right course of action in complete harmony with the Word of God.

3. Purpose of the Assembly

Assembly time was always a time of rejoicing and fellowship together, sharing ideas, meeting friends, and gaining a brief respite from the toil during the year. This was good and encouraged by the leadership of the Church. However, it had to be made clear on occasion the specific purpose of the Annual Assembly. The General Overseer pointed out forcefully in his Annual Address to the Ninth Annual Assembly, 1913, that there was serious business to be done in the annual convocations. Following is the section of his address dealing with this topic:

This is not a convention for mere pleasure or pastime, neither is it expected to be like a revival or camp meeting, but it is for the purpose of considering matters of government, and to obtain Bible knowledge which, when in perfect operation, will lead to more extensive revivals and greater camp meetings.¹⁵

In his Annual Address A. J. Tomlinson gave some serious challenges and questions for consideration. There was concern expressed over those who did not desire proper government but merely desired to go their own way without any form of governing force. Concern was pointed out over the need for an organized effort in evangelistic and mission work. There was a need to solve the pastoral problem. Consideration must be shown for the proper financial system which would receive the applause of God.

4. Divorce and Remarriage

As long as the membership of the Church remained pre-

dominantly rural, the question of divorce and remarriage did not loom very prominently. However, when the Church began to reach into the urban areas, this age-old problem brought about by the rebellious nature in humanity, began to show itself in large measure. Many individuals who had, for one reason or another, been victims of divorce and remarriage desired to become members of the Church of God. Year after year the question was studied and was passed from Assembly to Assembly without any definite conclusion.

The committee from the preceding year reported that they had studied the question but had come to no decision. Shortly after this report, the questions began to pour out:

1. If a man legally puts away his wife may he become a bishop or deacon?

2. If a man puts away his wife and afterwards gets right with God, should he take her back?

3. Can a wife that commits fornication and then gets right with God be joined unto her first husband?

J. S. Llewellyn—"If we continue this subject another year provision should be made for the innocent ones concerning receiving them into the church." He continued to show that the wealthy people are forming themselves into trusts and combines, and the poorer class into labor unions. **EVERY THING SEEMS TO BE SYSTEMATIZED EXCEPT A FEW PENTECOSTAL AND HOLINESS PEOPLE.**¹⁶

More questions were being asked than could be answered at this particular time. One thing was certain, there would be no relaxing until the answers to every question could be addressed scripturally and in a way in which it could be said that it was "good to the Holy Ghost." This question was answered by the General Overseer in his Annual Address given in 1922. In these major questions which presented themselves before the Church, there was remarkable restraint shown in giving an answer until there could be a definite stand taken. Questions were answered in accordance with what the Scriptures stated and not according to the popularity of the issue. Never did the Church intend to compromise Bible truth to satisfy any segment of the constituency.

In the Tenth Annual Assembly, 1914, the question was asked again about the divorce and remarriage issue. Following is the statement which was made:

All who are divorced for any cause other than fornication and remarried while their husbands or wives are living should not be received into the church.

The man or woman who puts away husband or wife for the cause of fornication and marries again may be received into the church. Investigation should be made when such people wish to join the church to see whether they are of the former or latter class.

This question is not finally settled, but the above rule can be followed while the subject is still undecided.¹⁷

5. Watchers Over Tens

As the Church continued to grow, there was need for a more complete organization to meet the needs of the membership. It was apparent that the pastors, State Overseers, and the General Overseer would be unable to adequately look after the sheep without help. What could be better than to follow the plan of the Bible. Moses was faced with a tremendous problem. All issues were brought before him regardless of how minor and he had to take his time to deal with each one. Obviously, the heavy toll on his body could not continue. It was an impossibility for him to continue the massive counseling which the people demanded. At length, his father-in-law suggested a plan which was placed in operation. Small matters could be dealt with by subordinates and important matters could be brought directly to Moses. This suggestion was accepted and implemented into the plan of assisting the people with their problems. It was this same line of thought that prompted the Church of God to implement a similar plan for assisting in the work of keeping the sheep.

The committee on Bible plans of order submitted the following plan, which was a prelude to the plan presented by A. J. Tomlinson in the Twelfth Annual Assembly, 1916:

Moses appointed rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties and rulers of tens. All small matters were judged by them and only hard causes were taken to Moses. All small matters should be adjusted by the local churches and pastors, and if a case is too hard for them they should call the assistance of the state overseer, and any case that still can't be adjusted should be taken to the General Overseer or Assembly.¹⁸

This was a highlight Assembly in the mind of A. J. Tomlinson. It was very impressive to him how the Holy Ghost approved him as the General Overseer. On other occasions he had made it clear to the Church that he had not worked for the position, but when the Holy Spirit directed, he could not refuse—he was afraid to do so. Concerning this great feast he wrote: “It was wonderful and beyond description. God made me able to manage everything with wisdom and love. There was a greater display of love than I ever saw.”¹⁹

Manifestations of the power of God were unmistakable. Not in every Annual Assembly did God demonstrate His power in the same manner. In this Assembly, however, it was totally joyous as mortal men were allowed to witness the great power of God. It is stated: "Many saw the like as of fire as it flashed about. People shouted, wept, screamed, danced, prayed, sang and pen cannot describe the scene."²⁰

6. Preview of Coming Events, 1915

Again in 1915 the Annual Assembly was held in Cleveland, Tennessee, November 1-7. This was a momentous year in one respect because little did most of the people know at this time that this would be the last Assembly held in the local church in Cleveland. That the Church had grown is evidenced by the fact of a necessity to move to larger quarters. When the time of the Annual Assembly was changed in 1913 to the autumn, a large increase in the numbers attending was an immediate result.

The Assembly of 1913 is very significant concerning several actions and ideas which would bear fruit later. In the introduction to his Annual Address, A. J. Tomlinson seemed to take aim at those who felt that he was despotic, wishing merely to rule over the people. He stated: "I wish it to be distinctly understood now and forever that your General Overseer is a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, and more or less subject to the Assembly and not a despotic ruler."²¹

At that time as is always the case, one man who takes the lead and seeks to pave the way becomes the object or target for some who wish to destroy the man. No doubt even before and at this time there were those who hurled charges and counter-charges at the man and the office. It is premature at this time for any individual or small group to exercise enough power to force the resignation of the General Overseer. Most of the people loved and recognized the spiritual leadership of A. J. Tomlinson and appreciated his devoted efforts.

In his Annual Address, the General Overseer gave a brief review of the apostasy of the Church and how different types of governments fall short of the plan of God. "Anarchy leaves nothing but chaos and ruin in its track. Democracy is a breeder of heartaches and jealousies. Under it men are trained to work underhanded trickery for advantage. Monarchy, either absolute or limited, is more or less cruel."²² The one right government is the government of God—theocracy. He continued with his line of thought that the Church is the government of God. Only when the government of God is in complete command can there

be total justice. To this end the entire Church never ceased to aspire.

A. Council of Elders

Precisely what inspired the General Overseer along the lines of a Council of Elders is not known. Perhaps someone in conversation or someone with a specific purpose mentioned the idea, or perhaps there was motivation because of overwork, or perhaps the drive to duplicate the plan of action of the early Church. A short time after the Assembly of 1915, the General Overseer wrote of his exhaustion and need for help in propagating the Gospel: "My work is still too much for me, but the Lord helps me and still I go on."²³ Again he stated: "My nerves are strained to the uttermost nearly all the time with responsibilities and work. God alone has been sustaining me both with health and wisdom. He shall have all the glory. Hallelujah!"²⁴

No official group of ministers had ever been appointed to assist the General Overseer in the work. Using Acts 21:18 concerning the group of elders who were present with James and the idea of the twelve apostles and the seventy men who were chosen to assist Moses in the work, it seemed good to present this idea to the Church. Although A. J. Tomlinson presented this line of thinking strongly and in a detailed manner in his Annual Address, nothing was said about it nor was there any action on the subject during the Assembly. He presented the details of the Council of Elders in this manner: "If there should be a council of elders in session constantly, or at intervals or stated times, before whom Lukes and Pauls can come we ought to proceed in its establishment."²⁵ In another statement which seemed to point out the fear of God and the thought of making a mistake, the General Overseer added: "We would rather die tonight than make a mistake that would bring reproach on the great cause we love so well, and have forsaken everything else to maintain."²⁶

B. Spread the Gospel

Organization in the primitive Church had led to their reaching the entire known world with the gospel of Christ and the Church of God. The gospel was planted in the very heart of the Roman Empire and spread to the world of that day. In the reasoning of the General Overseer, the Council of Elders had played a part in the overall structure which made possible the propagation of the gospel. If this had worked so well for the

early Church, surely it would work for the last days Church of God. Primary in the minds of the people was the spreading of the gospel by every means available. Through evangelism and means of the printed Word, the Church was making great inroads into many parts of the world. With this greater organization, would the work progress even better?

7. An Epithet That Would Not Stick

Other questions and ideas predominated in the Assembly in 1915 and the Annual Address of the General Overseer was heard but not acted upon to any measurable extent. In the community and in the schools the members and the children of the Church of God members were often confronted with the derisive epithet "Holy Rollers." This term possibly emanated from the period of the "Great Awakening" when there was considerable rolling on the ground. However, this physical action was extremely infrequent in most places and even non-existent in most of the churches. There was no apologizing the fact that the Church of God encouraged the freedom of the Spirit. Dancing under the influence of the Spirit, speaking in tongues, laughing in the Spirit, rejoicing in praises to God were entirely frequent in the services.

No religious group who has led out from the general group of Christians has escaped epithets which sometimes remained. The Methodists, the Quakers, the Shakers, to name only three, are more modern examples. Even the term "Christian" was more than likely not intended as a name to be revered. Shepard states in his book that they came to be called Christians at Antioch "because of the central place Christ occupied in the teachings of the two evangelists and in the evident Christ-like character of the converts."²⁷ David Smith, in his book, takes the approach that the title of Christian was no honor. He expressed the idea in these terms: "This unamiable propensity of the Antiochenes has conferred one lasting benefit. The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. The name was originally no title of honour; it was a nickname, a derisive epithet wherewith the followers of Christ were branded by the mocking Antiochenes."²⁸ This name stuck with the followers of Christ because it encompassed the total idea of all their activities.

The term "Holy Roller" was doing damage to the members of the Church and did not represent the idea of their actions or activities. It must be denounced and rejected in the strongest possible terms. This was repudiated in the following manner:

Whereas, The Church of God is suffering undue reproach by the slanderous title "Holy Rollers" that is in common use before the public in referring to its members and work,

Be it known to all men everywhere and unto all nations that we, the Church of God assembled in this the Eleventh Annual Assembly at Cleveland, Tennessee, November 1-7 do hereby and hereafter disclaim and repudiate the title "Holy Rollers" in reference to the Church of God.

In consequence of this decision we herewith give general notice to the public that all reference to the Church of God by the use of the above title "Holy Rollers" by the public, press or otherwise will be considered and treated as a slanderous and malignant offense.²⁹

8. Burning Questions

Passed on from year to year the question on the problem of divorce and remarriage again came to the attention of the group. It was discussed most of an entire day with some wanting to take strong action. A move was made to force the General Overseer to a decision on the matter, and he offered to resign his position and let someone else assume the responsibilities. At this juncture, the Holy Spirit worked in such a way that this movement was unsuccessful. A. J. Tomlinson stated his motives in the following manner:

I never have sought this position. I would gladly step out and give place to some one else if the Lord wills. Heretofore we have always given place on the program for selection of General Overseer, but this year when making out the program I remembered the messages given by the Holy Ghost and, and. . . (Here he broke down and never finished the sentence).³⁰

Another burning question was one which had claimed much attention during several of the preceding Assemblies. Sentiment was very strong in favor of the membership having nothing in any manner to do with tobacco (raising, selling, or using). During this Assembly the question presented itself in the following manner:

Q. What shall be done with members of the Church that grow, sell or handle tobacco?

A. Our members are required to abstain from growing and selling tobacco, either owners, renters or clerks in stores, but that each one be dealt with wisely and always tenderly and when such dealers or producers obstinately refuse to concur with the advice of the Assembly after all has been done to

teach that is necessary under the surrounding circumstances connected with the individual case, then such individuals should be dismissed.

Amendment—In no case should any one be finally dismissed from the Church without the approval of the state overseers and General Overseer.³¹

This amendment proved to be the only ray of hope to save many hundreds from being disfellowshipped. A. J. Tomlinson was very understanding on the issue as he made clear in a later address on the treatise on tobacco. Despite the amendment, however, many hundreds of people were lost to the Church because of this position which proved to be untenable and too restrictive. This problem would be set on the right course in time, but the time was rather long in coming. The General Overseer stated that an extreme view had been taken and had caused hurt to the Church.³² Never did the leadership of the Church intend to continue with an idea which proved unscriptural or injurious. The drive toward perfection and complete maturity will not end until this condition is reached.

9. A Journey from Cleveland

The small building in Cleveland could no longer accommodate the large numbers attending the Assembly. In view of this fact a building committee had been appointed to look into the matter of providing a building. During the year they had raised a total of \$235.35. It was advised that the pastors and evangelists be responsible to help raise additional funds. Members of the committee were: J. S. Llewellyn, A. J. Lawson, S. W. Latimer, D. W. Haworth, A. Horn, F. J. Lee, and A. J. Tomlinson. The latter two were added by virtue of their positions. On January 15, 1916, the committee purchased the W.C.T.U. Temple in Harriman, Tennessee, for the sum of \$3,000.³³ There would be a change of scenery in 1916 and a new group of issues to be solved.

FOOTNOTES

¹Lillie Duggar, *A. J. Tomlinson* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), p. 177.

²*Ibid.* p. 175.

³*Ibid.* p. 173.

⁴*Book of Minutes* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), p. 139.

⁵*Ibid.* p. 116.

⁶*Ibid.* p. 114.

- ⁷Ibid.
- ⁸Ibid. p. 91.
- ⁹Ibid. p. 97.
- ¹⁰Ibid. p. 101.
- ¹¹Ibid. p. 173.
- ¹²Ibid. pp. 122, 123.
- ¹³"Treatise on Tobacco," *Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, n.d.), p. 314 ff.
- ¹⁴*Book of Minutes*, op. cit. pp. 125, 126.
- ¹⁵Ibid. p. 138.
- ¹⁶Ibid. p. 149.
- ¹⁷Ibid. p. 177.
- ¹⁸Ibid. p. 178.
- ¹⁹Duggar, op. cit. p. 155.
- ²⁰*Book of Minutes*, op. cit. p. 180.
- ²¹Ibid. pp. 181, 182.
- ²²Ibid. p. 184.
- ²³Duggar, op. cit. p. 161.
- ²⁴Duggar, Loc. cit.
- ²⁵*Book of Minutes*, op. cit. p. 193.
- ²⁶Ibid. p. 195.
- ²⁷J. W. Shepard, *The Life and Letters of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 93.
- ²⁸David Smith, *The Life and Letters of St. Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, n.d.), p. 67.
- ²⁹*Book of Minutes*, op. cit. pp. 201, 202.
- ³⁰Ibid. p. 204.
- ³¹Ibid. p. 205.
- ³²*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes*, op. cit. p. 317.
- ³³*Book of Minutes*, op. cit. p. 241.

CHAPTER VII

TOWARD SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

1. Twelfth Annual Assembly, Harriman, Tennessee, November 1-7, 1916.

The very atmosphere was charged with jubilation and excitement as the large structure was dedicated to the Lord. The place was Harriman, Tennessee and the date was November 1, 1916. For several years the local church building in Cleveland, Tennessee, had been too small to accomodate the large throngs which attended the annual feasts. This year there was a noticeable increase in the numbers of delegates to the Twelfth Annual Assembly. Outgrowing a structure and reaching forward to greater things is always the keynote for even more expectations and advancements.

Moving to a new place with much better accomodations seemed to key some new ideas and a different line of thinking. Every year the progress of the Church could be determined and measured by the General Overseer's Annual Address. In this message could be deciphered the advancements and the needs for the future. As a general rule, the General Overseer made recommendations in his Annual Address which would be taken up by the appropriate committee and dealt with as the Assembly wished. If the feeling of the General Overseer was very strong on an issue, this was generally sufficient for a measure to pass. For this reason, he approached issues with extreme prayerfulness and humility. Never did he desire to lead the Church into a path of error.

2. Council of Elders

In the preceding Assembly, the General Overseer had approached the subject of a Council of Elders, pointing out the

Scriptural examples of Moses and James. This idea seemed to be the key theme of the Assembly in 1916—Shared Responsibility. It was too much to ask one human being to do all the planning and thinking for an entire body which was growing by relatively large numbers each year. There was need for assistance and counsel. There was need for others to share the load with the General Overseer and assist him to be more effective in the work of the Church of God.

Strangely, the suggestion pointed out by A. J. Tomlinson in 1915 (Eleventh Annual Assembly), concerning a body of Elders did not have any marked effect on the Assembly. As a matter of fact, the subject was not even mentioned by the committee. In principle the idea was very good and would serve to be a great help to the General Overseer. There was not even a hint of suggestion that this body would one day assume authority beyond the bounds of any idea the General Overseer ever intended. In his way of thinking, this group of individuals would work with him, recognizing at all times his position as leader of the Church. Even at this time, however, there seemed to be some question about the suggestion he had made to implement the plan for Elders:

All of these matters must have the most prayerful and careful consideration if this subject is thought worthy of notice by this venerable body. If this is only a fanciful notion of your General Overseer, born out of feeling of weakness on his part, and not to the best interest of the Church or according to the Bible, I hope the very thought of such a thing may be blown to atoms before it makes any impression on the minds of these honorable and wise counselors in this presence.¹

His slight hesitancy as evidenced by the preceding statements would not be understood fully until six years in the future.

3. Division of States

Continuing the theme of "Shared Responsibility," the General Overseer saw the need for making a division of the states for better control and progress for the work of the Lord. This was an entirely new concept for the Church. Prior to this time, most of the states were struggling for churches, and the Overseers could quite adequately service the small number. However, with the growth of the Church, there was need for further organization to meet the needs. As the General Overseer quoted on many occasions: "Necessity is the mother of invention." It was this thought which prodded him to organize for greater efficiency.

His mind and Spirit never rested concerning the search for better ways to present the gospel of Christ and the knowledge of the Church of God.

Concerning the dividing of the states into divisions, the General Overseer stated:

The first is the propriety and advisability of dividing the states into sections or districts with a superintendent over each district, and still retain the state overseers, or divide the states and have two or more overseers. The second point is that of a better system about the location and arrangement of pastors.²

His plan suggested at this early date is largely carried out and used effectively for the organization of states and countries. It can be seen that not only is the General Overseer concerned about his own need for assistance and counsel, but he is also interested in each Overseer and pastor securing the help of others for more efficient work. Therefore, he is concerned with a plan which will reach from the top echelon to the leaders over small groups.

4. Caring For The Sheep—Watchers Over Tens

In the preceding Assembly a report suggested the need for this particular type of organizational structure for the Church. This idea was not presented in its complete form until this section of the Annual Address placed the idea in clear focus. Following the line of thought—The General Overseer would be assisted in his work by a Council of Twelve Elders. The Overseers of states would be assisted in their work by the division into districts with men to work in the district endeavor. Pastors would be assisted in their work by leaders over a small number in the church to help care for their souls and watch out for their spiritual needs.

One may wonder why the system was not thought out sooner since it had been a part of the Bible. It must be understood that growth and searching for the proper Bible plan did not come totally at any one time. It was ever and always the desire of the Church to search for the Bible plan for every decision. When the correct plan was purportedly found, but later learned to be inoperable or unscriptural, it was abandoned. Rather than point out the failure of the Church, this very desire to be in harmony with the plan of God drove the early Church leaders to search unceasingly for proper Bible plans of order. They were much more ready to abandon a plan that was not working than

continue to bolster it regardless of its success or failure. The concept of "Watchers Over Tens" would prove itself over the years to be a plan which would bring much fruit into the fold of God.

5. A Pastor For Every Church

Year after year there was the pressing problem of pastors for the churches. Most of the churches were small in number and weak financially. These facts made the supplying of each church a difficult problem which pressed relentlessly upon the shoulders of the General Overseer and the Overseers of the States. Pastors would sometimes remain at a local church for a few months and leave for better fields of labor. Some of the churches were able to support the pastor very well while others were hardly able to keep the minister in food, clothing and shelter. Indeed, it was necessary for many pastors to supplement their income by resorting to secular work. Concerning the appointment of pastors, the General Overseer remarked: "The manner in which pastors are selected has never given perfect satisfaction."³ There would be a constant look at this problem but it would not be resolved for many years in the future. Growth of the Church would help in the numbers of pastors for the churches.

6. The Problem of Finance

There was never a year that passed which could boast of no problems with finance. This was a perennial problem which seemed to defy adequate answers. True, there were answers sought in each Assembly, and there were recommendations made, but still the total answer to the problem of need for finance to properly promote the work seemed to elude the Church each year. While some of the pastors had plenty to satisfy the physical needs of their families, there were others who had to do without or make their own way in other work.

The General Overseer looked on the problem with heaviness of heart and a deep desire to rectify the situation according to Bible plans. One passage of Scripture pointed out that there was a plan whereby an equitable distribution of finance would satisfy the needs of all. Scripture states:

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all

things common. . . . Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need (Acts 4:32, 34, 35).

It was this plan that the General Overseer wanted desperately to see in operation. That this worked for the early Church is evidenced by the fact that no one among them had need. Every need was supplied. Although this idea seemed impossible to many and impractical to many others, it worked unquestionably at one time, and it could work again. All selfishness would have to be abolished before this plan could work to perfection. This idea of perfect equality was the guiding light of every action taken concerning financial matters which was sanctioned by the General Overseer.

Not all of the proposals mentioned by the General Overseer would be acted upon during this Assembly, but these ideas would be discussed for several years. Actions taken on some of the suggestions would not bear good fruit, but other actions would remain to bless the Church. That a delicate balance was being maintained by the leadership of the Church can be seen with each passing year. It would be easy for an action to pass which would not advantage the total advancement of the Church. A. J. Tomlinson delegated authority and placed complete confidence in the individuals to whom he entrusted a responsibility. This is shown by the way in which he would often leave the local church which he pastored in the hands of ministers, some of whom proceeded to attach him personally in the pulpit. The General Overseer trusted people, perhaps even too greatly as some events later proved heartbreaking.

7. Publishing the Gospel

No work of the Church was engaged with more fervor than the business of publishing the gospel. With the steady growth of the Church there was a demand for more literature printed for the Sunday school. Materials printed for the other denominations did not seem to fit the needs of the Church, which was seeking to present the total gospel of Christ. The printing had been contracted to other publishing firms for many years, but growing concern was pointing toward securing a publishing plant owned and operated by the Church. There was a desire to have the printing done by "consecrated hands."⁴

A. J. Tomlinson, F. J. Lee and T. S. Payne composed the new

publishing committee. That the publishing of the gospel was no small work is proved by records in 1916: "For the present quarter we issued 2,800 quarterlies, 1,100 lesson leaves, and about 3,000 sets of cards."⁵ This was the beginning of a much greater endeavor in the work of publishing the gospel. The *Evangel* told the story of the Church and its activities very efficiently, as messages and articles appeared from the pens of qualified writers.

Statistical reports showed an appreciable gain in several areas during this year:

Total number of churches	230
Total number of ministers	418
Total number of members	7,690 ⁶

8. Committee Recommendations

Following the suggestion of the General Overseer concerning a body of Elders, the committee on Bible Plans of Order submitted the following recommendations:

We recommend that a body of elders be selected, whose duty it shall be to have jurisdiction over all questions of every nature that may properly come before them, their actions and decisions to be ratified by the Assembly in session.

This body of elders to be composed of not less than twelve members and never more than seventy. The twelve to be selected soon and additions to be made from time to time as necessity demands until the number seventy is reached. (Acts 15:22). Said body shall be composed of bishops—men of ability—who should be appointed by the General Overseer and two bishops, corresponding to James, Cephas and John (Gal. 2:9). The two men shall be appointed by the Assembly and numbered in the twelve. We also recommend that these three men take ample time and consider well before making the selection.

The time for this body of elders to meet in session shall be as often as necessity demands. The time and place to be decided by the General Overseer.⁷

Later during the Assembly the section concerning the appointing of the elders was clarified to read that the General Overseer would appoint the first two, and they would appoint the other ten. This action was agreeable to the entire Assembly and the power of the Spirit was felt by many in the audience.⁸ Members of the committee were the following: F. J. Lee, M. S. Lemons, George T. Brouayer, J. S. Llewellyn, W. S. Caruthers, S. W. Latimer, Z. D. Simpson.

The report of the Finance Committee is very interesting, not because their recommendations were adopted by the Assembly, but because this report would be adopted later with much regret. That they were striving for an equitable plan is evidenced by the wording of the report, but the method by which they had proposed that this equality be brought about could not be worked then nor later with any measure of satisfaction. Following is the report submitted by T. S. Payne, T. L. McLain, M. S. Haynes, A. J. Lawson, J.W. Pitcher, W. H. Cross and W. M. Rumler:

We recommend that every member of the Church of God tithe his income and place it in the hands of a local treasurer. On general principles the net income to be tithed.

We recommend further that all these tithes received by the local treasurers be forwarded to a general treasury instituted at the headquarters of the Church of God with properly qualified men over this treasury to receive them. When the tithes come to this treasury each week a tithe of these tithes shall be taken out and passed to a treasury for the use of the General Overseer and his helpers the General Overseer to have supervision of the treasury where all tithes are received.

The nine-tenths remaining after the tithe of tithes are separated shall be distributed to all the ministers engaged in active service either as overseer, pastors or evangelists, having no other occupation and having proven themselves to be worthy of the same, according to every one's need.

We believe this system to be in harmony with New Testament Scripture so there can be equality according to Paul's instructions in 2 Cor. 8:13-15; Phil. 4:19. Also as outlined under the shadow or type as practiced by Israel. Num. 18:20, 21.⁹

The preceding plan became known as the general treasury plan of operation in which all the tithes from the local churches were sent to the headquarters treasury to be disbursed as each one had need. In a word, it was an idealistic plan but would be very difficult if not impossible to operate. To determine an individual's need would necessarily demand that judgment factors would impinge themselves upon the leadership of the Church, which would be exhausting, time-consuming, and would lead to utter frustration.

With the appointment of seventeen State Overseers the Assembly came to a close. Seeds had been sown, progress had been made, and the seeds would sprout up in the near future with some destructive tares in the midst.

9. Thirteenth Annual Assembly, Harriman Tennessee, November 1-6, 1917

A war was raging in Europe during this year, but the work of the Church continued and the minds of the leaders were very much on getting people saved rather than to emphasize the war. Very little was said about the world conditions in the Annual Assemblies. Too much work for God had to be done to consume time with political matters. One of the distinguishing marks of the Church of God is its emphasis on the work of the gospel, with a de-emphasis on world conditions and secular matters.

This had been a good year for the Church with a sizeable increase in membership added to the rolls of the Church. The total number of churches this year was 309, with 474 ministers and 10,076 members. Steady, constant growth is a mark of each year's efforts, as more and more people were being exposed to the gospel of Christ and understanding of the Church of God.

10. Bible Training School

Inspirational preaching came from the pen of the General Overseer during this Assembly. He seemed to depart to a large extent from the presentation of a large number of needs for the Church and preached in a spiritual format which was a great blessing. True, there was still concern over the matter of finance, particularly the matter of providing for the needs of the twelve elders who had been recommended during the preceding Assembly. There was need to be reminded of the purpose of the work of the Church and the fact that multitudes were looking for the truth.

Concerning the thought of the multitudes looking for the true Body of Christ, A. J. Tomlinson used a thought from the book of Isaiah:

But who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? This is as if the prophet is describing some who have not yet found a resting place. They are flitting about, unsettled, looking for the light and only seem to see it enough to fly about the windows. And this expression is in the same chapter that describes the people flowing together and the light of the Church of God shining so brilliantly.¹⁰

Every action taken during the Assemblies had this idea in mind. Preparation was being made for a greater organization to receive those who would one day knock at the doors of the

Church seeking entry and the right to sit with the saints in the total light of God's Word.

The pervading thought of the message this year seemed to direct itself toward preparation to get ready to do a greater work for God. A. J. Tomlinson was convinced of the need for a more adequately trained ministry for the utmost effectiveness for Christ and the Church. He looked with disfavor on other organizations training workers for the Church. Therefore, he was prompted to recommend a Bible Training School which would emphasize the needs of the Church of God. To this time there was the thought that the Church was unable to finance such a venture as a training school, but with renewed faith the General Overseer stated that now the Church was ready to embark on this important journey.

Perhaps the overzealous, and those who were doing harm to the Church by unlearned and false teaching, helped to point out more fully the need for a brief session of training. For example, the General Overseer specifically mentioned that some had taught that the handling of serpents is the test of salvation. With strong words the General Overseer stated: "The Church of God . . . does not stand for making such experiences a test of salvation."¹¹ Clearly, there was a great need pressing toward the unity of the Spirit and the unity of the faith. Just how much a Bible Training School could assist in this matter could not be assessed totally—but this would greatly benefit the program of the Church.

11. Missions

For many years the Church had been a missions-minded community. Much stress had been placed on the world-wide mission of the Church. Although many of the small churches were struggling for their very existence, they did not fail to contribute to the purpose of winning others to the cause of Christ. A. J. Tomlinson and others had made many trips to the Carribean Islands and preached Christ and the Church to the people. Missionaries were given the whole-hearted support of the Church.

After the Assembly in 1916, another important phase of the work received an impetus. A. J. Tomlinson received a letter from a gentleman outside the Church containing \$26.00. In the letter were the words which stated that the money "was to be used to send the ministers where they ought to go."¹² The General Overseer decided to name this "Home Mission Fund."¹³ Thus in this small way was the beginning of a great work, of which the total

value will never be known by mortal man. God has His way of working things out according to His own will.

12. Appointment of Elders

In harmony with the decision of the preceding Assembly, the General Overseer appointed two of the elders: F. J. Lee and T. L. McLain. With the help of these two men the General Overseer appointed T. S. Payne, M. S. Lemons, J. B. Ellis, and Sam C. Perry. In one other meeting the others were named: M. S. Haynes, George T. Brouayer, S. W. Latimer, E. J. Boehmer, S. O. Gillaspie, and J. S. Llewellyn.¹⁴ With this appointment, the Church had embarked on a new course of direction. There was a need for shared responsibility, but their powers were to be limited according to the needs of the General Overseer.

13. Questions and Answers

Many of the questions asked and answered during these years are not pertinent to this time and bordered on triviality even in that age. However, the questions reveal the nature of the people and their desire to totally please the Lord in all their actions. Complete knowledge was lacking on some issues and on others there was not the complete understanding of doctrine. One case in point was the issue of life insurance policies. It was felt that indigent members should be cared for by the Church. The idea prevailed that the Church should completely assume the responsibility of its members through providing funds necessary for the times of crisis. This was following the pattern of the early Church, it was felt, but purchasing insurance policies was not made a test of fellowship.

Marriage and divorce was still an issue, but those who asked questions were referred back to the preceding minutes. Coca Cola and other soft drinks became the object of skepticism. The precise ingredients were not known and some felt that it was wrong to consume the beverages. Later information proved them to be healthful, containing no drugs. Year after year the question of tobacco came to the floor of the Assembly. There was still the strong stand against members buying and selling, or using it. At a later time, as has been stated, this was revised so that members could grow tobacco. The question of coffee and chewing gum was dealt with in a similar manner. Neither received the endorsement of the General Overseer, but he left it to the discretion of the individual. It was his feeling that coffee was not completely healthful for the body, while gum-chewing

seemed ill-mannered and repulsive to him. Further, this could give someone the thought that tobacco was being used and consumed. It would have been foreign to the nature of the General Overseer to impose his thoughts on individuals concerning these matters which could be left to personal discretion. The primary thought is that a minister must carry himself with decorum and dignity worthy of his office.

Christ is the Great Physician and this thought was emphasized concerning the healing of the body. It was thought out of harmony with the Scripture for members of the Church to resort to patent medicines and physicians when Christ could heal the body. Medical science during those days resorted to treatments on the human body which were sometimes more harmful than beneficial. Divine healing was stressed very strongly, but it was not made a test of fellowship even though some sought to present the thought in that manner.

14. Bullets and Bugs, 1918

Men were being slain by the thousands in Europe during 1918 by every type of missile and weapon known to the mind of man. This was the "Great War" which was presumably the one to end all wars, and, in the words of Woodrow Wilson, "make the world safe for democracy." The world breathed a sigh of relief when the armistice was signed during the latter half of the year.

With many thousands being killed on the war front, a small virus that had to be seen through a microscope brought havoc in America. Thousands succumbed to the relentless attacks of the killer. Large group meetings were canceled because of the contagious nature of the disease. There was no Assembly held in the year 1918, but according to the words of the General Overseer, the work continued to progress just as though there had been an Assembly.

A few notes of interest about the year are recorded in the diary of A. J. Tomlinson. Concerning the epidemic and the publishing of the paper he stated:

We were deprived of having the Assembly on account of the influenza epidemic that has been raging for more than two months. Thousands and thousands have died of the plague. Some of our people succumbed but not many. We are printing ten thousand *Evangels* every week.¹⁵

A. J. Tomlinson made one reference to the war in these terms:

"The announcement came that the World War had closed and preparations are being made for terms of peace."¹⁶ After this statement he began to write about the work of the Church and the need to continue to purchase machinery to keep the publishing interest moving. Seldom has a man been more consumed with getting the work of the Lord accomplished than was the General Overseer of the Church of God.

15. Home Again, 1919

For two years the building in Harriman, Tennessee served the Assembly well. With the increase in the numbers in attendance in 1917, it became evident that the building was too small and another building program would be demanded. Even though the Spirit of God blessed the efforts of the Church of God during the two years in Harriman, there was, nevertheless, the unexpressed yet prevalent feeling among the membership that Cleveland, Tennessee, was the place to be for the Annual Assembly.

The building was sold and the Assembly moved from the city of Harriman never to return. Selling price for the structure was three thousand dollars. The sale of the property prompted some leaders of the Church to recommend that the money be placed on a new tabernacle which would accommodate several thousands. After an absence from the Annual Assembly for a period of one year, the Fourteenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God was held in Cleveland, Tennessee, October 29-November 4, 1919. All seemed to be happy to be back in Cleveland for the annual feast. The numbers were large, the enthusiasm was high, and the Spirit of God was present to bless in a mighty way.

16. Annual Address

The General Overseer discussed a broad scope of issues and suggestions for the improvement of the working machinery of the Church of God. Some subjects discussed were forward-looking and entirely pertinent to this day. It would be many years before the idea of integration of the races would come before the American people. This topic was almost unheard of during this period of time. However, the General Overseer pointed out in his message that the Colored are to be accepted on an equal basis because there is no respect of persons with God. His vision of the work reached beyond the limits of a narrow racial boundary. A. J. Tomlinson believed in the Scriptural truth of one blood from which all nations of men originated. He was very eager to gain the black race to the kingdom of God and

employ their help in spreading the gospel, which was the obligation of the Church. On this topic the General Overseer wrote:

Our dark-skinned brothers and sisters have received the Holy Ghost as well as we, and we have long ago learned that God is no respecter of persons. In certain places, and in some states of the United States, it is more expedient for them to have their own churches and schools separate, but when it comes to religion there is no difference, and we feel it is right for them to be recognized in the Assembly.¹⁷

There were some subjects which came before the people every year. One of these subjects was the matter of finance. In his address A. J. Tomlinson pointed out the advantageous benefits of the tithing system. He was pleased that it has worked so well, but he felt that better distribution had to be made so that all would benefit better. This idea of equal distribution and the need for all to receive their adequate share of the benefits of the system led to a plan which later proved unworkable. It was very close at this time to the adoption of a plan to send all tithes to headquarters. The Church constantly searched for the proper plan which would be equal for all the ministers.

Some of the membership did not wish to be controlled by any government in the Church. A. J. Tomlinson spotted this tendency and wrote against it with full vigor. He knew the benefits of government and the disaster which is caused when the government is weak and inefficient. Addressing himself to the problem he stated:

Many have said, "I am going to do what the Lord shows me to do," whether it harmonized with the spirit of others or not. They have, in many cases, disregarded the instructions of the wise man who said, "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14).

A frequent expression among some classes has been, "I am under God and I will not let any man rule over me." And this, in the very face of the teaching of Scripture which says, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account . . ." (Heb. 13:17).¹⁸

In the never ending search for total Bible truth, the General Overseer recognized the need for continual change until the proper interpretation had been made upon the Scriptures. Even when a regulation seemed to be right and later proved to be in error, A. J. Tomlinson was quick to admit the missing of the

mark of excellence and total accuracy and revise his stand. This was not a sign of weakness nor a loss of prestige or honor for the Church. When he saw that something was wrong, he could not rest until the matter had been properly rectified. Concerning this matter of change, he made it clear that it was not always an injudicious idea:

It is almost amusing now to call to mind some of the eloquent discourses delivered by the brethren expressive of their views on certain lines, and today if these same brethren were given a chance they would cheerfully discourse in favor of the very thing they once opposed.

But what is this? Is it fickle-mindedness? Is it a sign of weakness? No! a thousand times no! It is a sign of submission, and shows a willingness to bend rather than be staked up to a false notion or theory. . . .

It is not bad to change. I, myself, have been like the pendulum of a clock, swinging from side to side on a subject. This was because I was unsettled, but I usually tried to keep my thoughts to myself until I could quit dangling around. I wanted to be sure I was right before I settled. This is a sign that a person is not full of prejudice. He is willing to go the right way; and when he finds it he is willing to settle there although it is directly contrary to his former opinions.¹⁹

For many years the Church had been instructed on government, but there seemed to be a need to remind the membership often concerning the difference in Church of God government and the governments of the nations. Theocracy in its full practice would be the only form of government to bring the complete peace of God to the Church. One great statement on the subject of the nature of the Church A. J. Tomlinson stated:

The Church of God is not a Church by counties, or by states, or districts. It is the Church everywhere. In the early centuries it became a common thing for the church to be mentioned as the eastern and western churches. . . . But we must not pattern after them. Our pattern is the very beginning of the Church, during the lifetime of the Apostles—The Assembly at Jerusalem.²⁰

In the viewpoint of A. J. Tomlinson and his original reason for recommending a Council of Elders, they were to act in the capacity of counselors to help him. He made it very clear in this Annual Address that they were not a representative body. Perhaps, there was a tendency even at this time for many to begin to regard them in this light and treat them in this

manner. A. J. Tomlinson stated concerning the council: "It was only meant to pattern after the practice of the early Church, and for a strength and stay for the General Overseer."²¹

The General Overseer made it clear concerning the powers of the Council of Elders. Without his being aware of the fact, he was speaking in a prophetic way concerning events which would develop in a future day. Just what information he had at this time concerning the trends in thinking is not known, but the following statements point out the fact that he must have been aware of some thinking which was in opposition to the original purpose of the group:

The Councilors, as a council, are not expected to frame and present measures to be adopted at the Assembly independent of the General Overseer, but in council there may be measures framed for presentation to the Assembly by and through the General Overseer. It should be emphasized that these counselors are not a body to themselves to represent the people, but they are selected for counselors and assistants to the General Overseer after a similar order that the president's cabinet composed of eight men are counselors to the President of the United States.²²

Much concern and deep emotion swept the Assembly when the General Overseer spoke on the subject of an orphanage for homeless children. It greatly moved A. J. Tomlinson to learn that a member of the Church of God had requested that her children be left in the care of a good Church orphanage. It came to him that the Church had provided no home for these children. During this part of the message there was an interlude of crying and deep-felt emotional response to this need. Offerings and pledges began to pour into the collection. This was a subject which evoked a response for immediate action.

17. Murmurings in the Camp

Subscriptions to the *Evangel* had increased from 5,000 to 15,000 in one year.²³ Not only did the General Overseer assume the responsibility of the entire Church, but he proved himself an astute business man in his development of the publishing interests of the Church. Equipment had been installed, the building, which started as a small one room structure, was enlarged and the business developed toward an active and effective arm of the presentation of the gospel of Christ and the Church.

Due to considerable murmurings among some of the people,

the General Overseer suggested that the books be audited: "Will be much pleased to have this Assembly appoint a committee, if you think best, to audit the books."²⁴ This pointed out that the General Overseer was not opposed to an audit of the books, but it did seem to him superfluous because the attitudes of Christian principles governed the affairs of the Church. Mutual trust and dependence in the integrity and honesty of the leadership of the Church doing what was in the interest of the entire Body was the governing thought of all his acts. Therefore, it hurt him deeply that anyone would even infer that some of the management had been subject to question. This simply was not the way the Church of God had ever carried on its affairs in any business management.

Some had spread the rumor that the General Overseer made no reports. To this charge M. S. Lemons addressed himself with firmness: "It is reported that Brother Tomlinson makes no report but we know he does."²⁵ Immediately after this statement J. S. Llewellyn made several remarks about the rumors which had gone through the country concerning the General Overseer:

"All kinds of false reports have gone out about Brother Tomlinson, but this is one report that we are thankful for. When you go home, you tell the people that the General Overseer does make reports. (Many amens by the people.) Some people say the Church of God is going down, but I say it is going up. I suggest that we all accept the report."²⁶

Only a short time after the Assembly of 1919, the General Overseer mentioned the strong pressure against him and his office. Just who organized the efforts against him is not known, but this year brought such strong accusations against him that he felt compelled to write about it in his personal diary:

Personally, the past few months have brought the bitterest opposition against me that I have ever known. This opposition, however, brought no danger to my life like previous years, but the opposition has been more far reaching in extent, but the Lord has wonderfully sustained and given grace. The greatest victory was won at the Assembly that has ever been known.²⁷

Just as the Judaizers dogged the steps of Paul and sought to destroy him at every opportunity, the opposition against the General Overseer and his office would not cease until they had gained a victory. Each move of the General Overseer was watched with ravenous eyes, and those who would depose him

were ready to gather like a group of vultures when he showed signs of staggering.

18. Advice to Members

For the first time there was written in the minutes a body of attitudes which represented the feeling of the Church in general. These statements were not intended as a creed or a group of laws to be imposed on the membership. They were offered in the form of instructions which would benefit every member of the Body of Christ. As a general line of thought, the advice given was merely a compilation of the acts which should govern the life of every child of God. Every thought presented was rather general and did not lend itself as a law or rule whereby others should be tried as by a court. The statements are given in a gentle and fatherly attitude which gives the impression of pleading for uprightness and Christian love in every action:

As a member you count one and should attend every regular service as far as possible. Remember no one can fill your place and the service will be that much dwarfed and crippled without your presence.

Show your love and fellowship to every one without partiality. Don't wait for others to greet you, but you greet them.

Show special courtesy to strangers who may chance to fall in with you in your meetings.

As a rule take part in the singing.

Be ready for vocal prayer when called on or prompted by the Spirit.

Be ready for testimony when such is in order.

Stand by your pastor or appointed leader and assist him every way you can.

Always pray silently for the preacher while he delivers the message.

Always live a good straight life at home and abroad so no one can justly think or speak of you as a hypocrite. Guard your conversation. Be careful what you say about a brother, sister or anyone.

Don't be a critic and try to find something in others to criticize.

Examine yourself occasionally and see if you are in the faith.

Don't yield to discouragement or despondency.

Be cheerful and happy and try to make others the same.

Spend as much time as you can in secret prayer. Give yourself all you can to intercessory prayer.

Your dress should be with moderation neat and clean, but

not for show. You should never wear gold for ornament or decoration. Finger rings, bracelets, earrings, necklaces, lockets and large showy pins are unbecoming for a saint of God.

Always tithe your income and put it in the church treasury. Make free-will offerings besides your tithes.

Younger members should not company or associate too intimately with worldly outsiders.

Members should never marry sinners. Great care should be taken, with much prayer and careful consideration, regarding matrimony.

REMEMBER

These are the last days and perilous times have come, so it will require much watchfulness and humble prayer on your part to so live and act that you will never bring reproach on the worthy name of Christ and His Church that you so much love.

Never form too close an intimacy with the opposite sex even if they are your brothers and sisters in the Lord. Give no place to the adversary. Abstain from the very appearance of evil.

These kindly instructions and advices are given by those who are watching for your soul as they that must give an account (Heb. 13:17), and it is hoped they will be received with the same meek gentle spirit in which they are given.

That every member, and especially every minister, should be a paid up subscriber and an earnest worker for our church paper, *The Church of God Evangel*.²⁸

FOOTNOTES

¹*Book of Minutes* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), Twelfth Annual Assembly, pp. 219, 220.

²*Ibid.* p. 221.

³*Ibid.* p. 223.

⁴*Ibid.* p. 234.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.* p. 244.

⁷*Ibid.* p. 242.

⁸*Ibid.* p. 244.

⁹*Ibid.* p. 243.

¹⁰*Ibid.* p. 256

¹¹*Ibid.* p. 268.

¹²*Ibid.* p. 271.

¹³*Book of Minutes*, Loc. cit.

¹⁴*Ibid.* pp. 275, 276.

¹⁵Lillie Duggar, A. J. Tomlinson (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), p. 172.

¹⁶Duggar, Loc. cit.

- ¹⁷*Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God*
(Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, n.d.), p. 13.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.* p. 6.
- ¹⁹*Ibid.* pp. 7, 8.
- ²⁰*Ibid.* p. 17.
- ²¹*Ibid.* p. 18.
- ²²*Ibid.* p. 18.
- ²³*Ibid.* p. 25.
- ²⁴*Ibid.* p. 26.
- ²⁵*Minutes of Fourteenth Assembly*, Loc. cit.
- ²⁶*Minutes of the Fourteenth Assembly*, Loc. cit.
- ²⁷Duggar, op. cit. p. 177.
- ²⁸*Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God*, op.
cit. pp. 55, 56.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GATHERING TEMPEST

1. Steps Toward Constitutional Government

The Fifteenth Annual Assembly held in Cleveland, Tennessee, November 3-9, 1920, started very little differently than any others. There was an air of excitement and a feeling of exuberance among those who came to the Annual gathering. There was every reason to be happy because the Church had shown signs of bursting forth on every side. Provision had been made to publish the gospel, a Bible Training School had been established to help educate the ministers and laity, a new auditorium was in the building stages, and many people were looking toward the Church of God.

Most of the people did not understand the inside workings of the Church and neither were they interested in all the business affairs. Generally, the laity of the Church were dependent on those whom they approved to present programs which would be beneficial to the entire Body of Christ. For this reason, it was never very difficult to gain approval for any measure which was presented either by the General Overseer or a measure endorsed by a well-respected minister of the Church. Sometimes even a hint or suggestion that something was desired by the General Overseer was sufficient to touch off strong sentiment in favor of an idea.

Just how the Church drifted toward the idea of legislation is somewhat difficult to understand in light of the constant fact kept before the people that the Church is not a legislative body. Often the idea was brought forcefully before the people that the Annual General Assemblies were not held for the purpose of making laws and rules which would bind the people. Rather the General Assembly merely sought to present the rules and regulations already written in the Bible. Consequently, the only rule of law was that of the Bible. It was confirmed that the Assembly Minutes did not represent a rule of law but were the

accounts of what happened in the Annual Assemblies.

These preceding ideas were firmly stated on numerous occasions. Even so there came a change in thought—not a swift change of thought but a very deliberate metamorphoses from one line of Biblical thought to that of an entirely different nature. Just who were the individuals who provided the thinking power for the movement toward constitutional government can not be known because their names do not appear in the formal records of Church history. However, it can be seen in a careful study of the minutes each year that there was a slow, definite, seemingly predetermined movement of the Church toward a legislative body.

All along, the Church had maintained that it stood firmly for the principles of theocratic government, which recognized the guidance and direction of God in all matters. All the people had a part in the operation of the Church. The Church was the people under government and they had a voice in all the proceedings of every Assembly. Much concern was given to the fact of how the Holy Spirit approved of the measures which were brought before the entire Assembly. For this reason, there was perhaps some overzealousness on the part of some who, at the very hint or suggestion of some measure which was believed desired by some Church leader, would verbalize a message in tongues. Very quickly, this would be interpreted by another overzealous person who would translate the message in terms favorable to what had been presented. Scripture supports the speaking in tongues and the interpretations, but some of the interpretations did more harm than good because some of the measures supposedly authorized by the Holy Spirit proved detrimental to the unity of the Church.

Some of the steps toward constitutional government seemed innocuous, so trivial that it would hardly bear mentioning. One of the first steps toward a legislative body came with the installation of the twelve elders. That they gained power and exerted it against positive ideas which turned the Church from theocracy is seen in the year 1922. Secondly, the attitude of some was to make the Assembly a rule-making body in its extreme form. One example of this concerns itself with the attempt to compel ministers to remain through the entire Assembly each year. The General Overseer had expressed a concern over the fact that many ministers were leaving the Assembly before the closing session. S. W. Latimer made the following suggestion:

“That the Assembly make it a rule requiring all bishops, deacons and evangelists who come to the Assembly to remain

until it closes." He added further, "that the General Overseer publish this in the *Evangel*, on the first page, some time prior to the Assembly. In case they leave before the Assembly closes without giving proper reason, standing will not be so good with the Assembly."¹

This statement within itself is not sufficient to build a case on the movement of the Church in the direction of legislation, but it does point out the sentiment of the people concerning this attitude.

Thirdly, there was a general spirit working among the people to be like others. It was not taken lightly by many members of the Church concerning the attitudes of persecution toward them. They did not relish the idea of being branded illiterate and emotional because there was freedom in the Spirit of God. Therefore, there were movements in the direction of putting the Church "on the map," of presenting it with a system of standards which would prove its place among the churches of the world. There were some in the Church who had some legal training and ability to write. From this built-in structure there began to appear documents which had never been seen or thought about before. Most of the people looking upon the surface and seeing only the veneer and hearing the good words were caught completely by surprise.

2. The Declaration

The first positive writing which headed the Church toward a written constitution was what appeared in the form of a Declaration. This piece of writing was innocent-looking within itself and the wording appealed to most of the people who heard it. Yet, the truth or falsity of the document is not on trial. Creeds appear good, creeds can contain much good, creeds can set forth in an unashamed manner the general beliefs of a group, yet in the strict sense of the term, "creeds" had been banned from the Church as leading toward error. Creeds helped to cover the early Church with voluminous statements and high-sounding phrases when in actuality the church had departed from the Word of God. Strange as it may seem, this was precisely the direction taken by the Church in an unwitting and almost totally innocent manner.

Almost out of nowhere the Declaration appeared in print and descended upon the General Assembly of the Church of God. It makes little difference who wrote the document because the party or parties were undoubtedly unaware of the consequences

of future eventualities. This Declaration paved the way for a more extensive writing which bound the Church to another form of government foreign to its original purpose. Following is the Declaration which appeared in the minutes:

Be it known to all people everywhere that we, the General Assembly of the Churches of God, now convened in business conference, at Headquarters in the city of Cleveland, Tenn., set forth the following declaration:

First. That the minutes of all previous Assemblies are a true official record in substance and in fact as kept by the authorized clerks by said Assembly, and published by those fully and legally authorized to do so, and not the product of individual statements of A. J. Tomlinson, the General Overseer.

Second. That the names of all the local churches recorded in various minutes including this one are the result of the faithful services of the ministers and representatives of the General Assembly and when thus received by the said representatives of the General Assembly they then became and composed a part of the General Assembly. We, therefore, do not recognize the right of any local church to withdraw from the General Assembly as a whole, but those who prove disloyal to the Government and teachings as promulgated from time to time by the General Assembly or otherwise disorderly are to be dealt with in individual manner and excluded as a member of said church.

Third. That all the ministers, whether General Overseer, elders, bishops deacons or evangelists have been and are construed legal representative of the Church of God while in harmony with its government and teaching.

Fourth. That the General Assembly of the Church of God is that organized body with full power and authority to designate the teaching, government, principles and practices of all the local churches composing said Assembly.

Fifth. That the name of this church is the Church of God.

Sixth. That one of the first principles accepted in the earliest history of its organization was that we accept the whole Bible rightly divided, which is today one of its most sacred principles, therefore we meet together in annual conference to search the Scriptures and put them into practice. Our teachings and faith are the same as originally accepted in its original organization and all of the changes in government and management have been duly authorized by the General Assembly in its various annual sessions.

This read and unanimously approved by the Fifteenth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God on the 8th day of November, 1920.²

This document, while attempting to point out some of the

primary tenets of the Church, was a creed. However, at this time possibly no one could see this. As a matter of fact, there were many who rejoiced in the fact that the Church was reaching a plateau of respectability. With strongly worded statements of belief that could be registered and confirmed by state and federal governments, the Church felt that positive advancement would result.

3. The General Treasury Adventure

Never in the short history of the Church to this time had a satisfactory financial system been worked out. No Assembly passed into history without the mention of a need for a more equitable system to finance the work of the Church and to propagate the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some of the ministers were cared for very well while others suffered great hardships, hardly obtaining enough food and clothing. Hunger reigned under the roofs of many sincere workers in the Church and small children did not escape the suffering. Surely, in the thinking of the leadership of the Church, there would be a way to properly finance the work of the gospel and make the finance equitable for all. There was a precedent in the early Church when they employed the "community of goods" and met the needs of the membership and ministry of the Church. None of those early pioneers lacked the necessities of life. Since this plan operated in the early Church, it could be employed successfully again.

In an earlier Assembly (Twelfth Annual Assembly), the report of the Finance Committee had recommended the General Treasury Plan whereby all tithes would be sent to the headquarters treasury with the funds being disbursed as each one had need.³ Although this plan was not adopted at this time, there was a lingering sentiment for the adoption of the plan. This sentiment had mushroomed to the extent that a majority favored such a plan in 1920.

When A. J. Tomlinson presented the idea in his Annual Address to the Assembly, there was immediate response to the suggestion of the feeling toward the General Treasury Plan. Rather than make direct and strong recommendation for the plan, he intended to show the benefits which would accrue to the Church through the plan. He stated in part concerning the plan:

I am only to speak now of a sentiment among our people, and it may be stronger than some of us realize. That sentiment is in favor of a general headquarters treasury into which all

the tithes are to be placed, with seven men to regulate and make, or order, the distribution among the ministers according to their needs and the efficiency of their work, and the responsibility of the positions in which they serve.

And this may be the Scriptural System. And the Scriptural System is what we are driving for. We want to make the goal at this Assembly. If this is it I'm sure the Lord will let us see eye to eye about it, and when we make the decision it will seem good to the Holy Ghost and us.⁴

Hardly had the words proceeded from the mouth of the General Overseer when, suddenly, messages and interpretations urged the adoption of the plan. In reality, he did not have time to complete his line of thought concerning the matter, and there could not have been proper time to study all the ramifications of such a drastic move. With clear reasoning the General Overseer pointed out the positive benefits of the plan:

If this plan is accepted the tithe of tithes would drop off. That which appears to be a second tithe paid to the state overseer would disappear It would land us back to our Father Abraham and Melchisedec. Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec, and Melchisedec, was a priest of the most high God, and Christ was made a high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec The change then with respect to the tithes is apparent. No more heave offering. No more tithe of tithes, but all the tithes given to our High Priest— Jesus. And since the Church is the body of Christ, the tithes are to be paid to the Church. This special point has been taught for years. But now, since Abraham paid all the tithes to Melchisedec, and Christ is a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec, this surely puts the tithes all in one place with no tithe (of local) tithes. Then the distribution can be made with perfect safety, and give no chance for a surplus to pile up unused unless there is really more than it takes to supply all the ministers It would remove the temptation for ministers to feel led to go to a certain place where they had heard the treasury was well filled.⁵

Without a dissenting voice the General Treasury Plan was adopted by the Assembly, with the note that the General Overseer and elders work out the plan for distribution of monies. While the plan had a noble and exalted purpose and was ideologically good and honest, it had within it the ingredients of complete chaos and utter impossibilities. It would be generally impossible to keep down dissent and ill-feeling with such a plan in operation. There were insufficient guidelines and written information to allow the plan to work smoothly. Further, there

would be no possible way to explain to numerous individuals why they did not receive more of the tithes since their particular church had sent in an amount which added to more than their minister received. There was confusion, utter confusion when the plan was put into operation in a quick, unstudied manner. This plan was destined to cause immeasurable trouble and only heaven will reveal how many were lost because of bitterness within themselves, or gossip and accusations of mismanagement.

4. Seething Discontent

Another year passed swiftly and soon the Sixteenth Annual Assembly convened, November 2-8, 1921. There was reason for jubilation because they had moved to new quarters in a spacious auditorium. It was a relief to many of the delegates to finally have enough room to enjoy the Assembly in more comfort than they had ever known. With exuding joy the General Overseer preached the dedicatory sermon using a Scripture lesson from 2 Chronicles 20:5-16. The General Overseer stated that a sum of \$36,096.10 had accrued on the structure, but there was strong faith that the amount would be taken care of by the people. He stated:

I wonder how big the Lord is, as we think of Him sitting in the heavens and by His Word spoke the world into existence and peopled it with people. How big is He anyhow? Where could be our enemies—only look up to Him. What will happen to them some time?⁶

In his Annual Address the General Overseer spoke about love, perseverance, the Assembly, and other topics, but he mentioned in a carefully worded section the problems of the financial system passed the previous year. His reasoning was that he was not responsible for the passage of the system because he did not recommend it: "Some may have thought I recommended it, but I did not. I only referred to it as being favored by many."⁷

A. J. Tomlinson went on to add that tithes were insufficient to operate the plan. Some had thought that the adoption of the plan would immediately institute a panacea for the financial ills of the Church. Somehow there was the feeling that all would receive enough assistance to stay in the ministry. To the contrary, there were far too few dollars to relieve the suffering of the ministers. The General Overseer remarked on this topic:

It seems that at first both the ministers and churches got

into their minds that the tithes would be sufficient to support the ministry and they were all looking to headquarters, but they all took it good naturedly while they were learning their lesson. And while they were learning their lesson those who had the business in charge at headquarters were learning some things too. Take it altogether the experience of the past ten months has been worth much to all of us. If the system has not been a success it is certainly no fault of the system—the fault is in the operators. And if the operators have failed it is due to inexperience; the past ten months have brought in boat loads of this kind of merchandise.⁸

Therefore, a plan was set in motion which had to be carried out primarily by the General Overseer. In the Assembly of 1920, the General Assembly had authorized the General Overseer and the elders to appoint seven men to work out the plan. However, as it developed, the General Overseer received no assistance along this line:

When the system was adopted unanimously it was also decided that the General Overseer and the elders work out the plan, or in other words, the Assembly selected the General Overseer and elders to take hold of the business and organize the system and put it into practice. And this seemed to please the Holy Ghost and the whole Assembly.

In council afterwards the elders did not feel like taking the responsibility of selecting seven men to do business since the Assembly authorized the General Overseer and twelve elders to take it in hand.⁹

Even though the tithing system seemed to be impractical and impossible to operate, the General Overseer desired to see the system undergo further trial before disposing of it. He stated that, "the dissatisfaction about the tithing system disappeared gradually when it was remembered that the Bible reads tithes and offerings."¹⁰ A merit system which would be very complicated was forced upon the General Overseer. This system meant that he must determine how much each minister should receive from the relatively scant supply of tithes which came in to headquarters. The Church imposed a tremendous burden upon the shoulders of one who was already carrying more than he should.

5. Impressive Growth

Every year the Church showed signs of dynamic growth. There was growth in every phase of the work with new ideas and

a new approach taken toward the problems presenting themselves. In a time of growth and expansion some mistakes would be made but overall there was positive movement forward in numbers and strength. In 1921 there was an impressive report of the progress of the work of the church:

AGGREGATION

575 Churches	106 Bishops
18,564 Members	542 Evangelists

\$265,199.65 Approximate value of local church property.

75,000.00 Approximate value of Auditorium.

40,000.00 Approximate value of Publishing House.

6,000.00 Approximate value of School Building and Dormitory.

12,000.00 Approximate value of Orphanage, Houses and Land.

398,199.65 Approximate value of all property.¹¹

Some of the discontent concerning the General Treasury Plan did not seem to dampen the growth and steady move forward of the Church. A tempest was gathering, but no doubt most of the people could not see it approaching. Several factors were fusing together to cause a tremendous uproar which would embroil many in its clutches before it would cease.

6. The Seventy

In the Twelfth Annual Assembly, 1916, it was decided to increase the Council of Twelve Elders to the number of seventy. These were Bible numbers which had been used during the Old and New Testament periods. There were twelve disciples who followed the Lord. Further, Jesus Christ sent out the seventy disciples who went through the land proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom. Even though provision was made to increase the Council of Elders, this move was never acted upon. During this Assembly in 1921, however, the General Overseer suggested that there be "other seventy" in addition to the twelve instead of the total of seventy. Concerning the idea of the "other seventy," A. J. Tomlinson commented in the following manner:

I think it was in August of this year when meditating upon a plan to give the Church new life, and make it seem more secure for the last day's voyage, that, like a flash, these words, "other seventy" rolled through my mind. They came

with such force that I was startled at first . . . Finally, on looking deeper into the Scriptures, I came to the conclusion that instead of merely increasing the number of elders to seventy that it was near Scriptural to appoint other seventy also.¹²

This idea was presented to the Assembly and adopted. Another measure was presented before the Assembly which was adopted also. This measure provided for the creation of a Court of Justice, which was composed of a board of seven Supreme Judges. M. S. Lemons preached on the subject and brought out the following ideas concerning the court of judges: "There is to be a court of judges in the Church of God just like there is in the state of Tennessee. The saints shall judge the world."¹³ The first judges selected by the Supreme Council for terms of one year were the following: M. S. Lemons, F. J. Lee, J. S. Llewellyn, T. L. McLain, S. W. Latimer, J. B. Ellis, and E. J. Boehmer. It can be seen that the machinery is being set up for a complete system of government—legislative, executive, and judicial. Some felt that to fulfill the Scripture indicating that the saints would judge the world the Church would have to provide the system to do the job.

Before the very eyes of the people and the leadership of the Church a Pandora's box was being opened. Sweeping changes were in the making in the Church of God. That it is departing from the principles of Bible Government and its original guiding principles can be seen by those who study the times. However, to those who were living through this time, few, if any, could see what they were propagating for the Church. Moves were being made to apparently make improvements over what had been in the past, but instead the measures adopted by the Assembly diminished its purpose and clouded its goals. Further, the measures meant a departure from the system of theocracy, which had been defined throughout the preceding years.

7. The Constitution

Happiness reigned in the United States when those dedicated Americans hammered out a constitution for the nation. They were not seeking to establish a nation based on the principles of the New Testament, even though there were many God-fearing men among the number who had a part in formulating the document. They were seeking to write down a group of guiding principles by which the nation could be governed and by which all could have a share in the government of the country.

Contrary to a written constitution, the Church of God started

on the premise that there was no need for laws or rules, or documents by which the Church would need to govern itself. The reason for this thinking was because the Bible was the only Book by which the Church would govern itself. In the Word of God could be found every rule and regulation needed to pilot the great Church of God over any sea. One of the primary statements by which the Church lived was the fact that it did not consider itself a legislative body but judicial only because the Church only sought to put into practice the rules already written in the Bible.

That the constitution presented before the Assembly in 1921 was a departure from this original thinking of the Church is an indisputable fact. One strange fact is how did it reach the status to be presented before the Assembly? It is stated that A. J. Tomlinson helped write the constitution, but just what sections is not known.¹⁴ Most of the work was done by a committee, in whom the General Overseer placed unquestioned confidence. This committee was composed of the following men: M. S. Lemons, F. J. Lee and J. S. Llewellyn.¹⁵ That A. J. Tomlinson read the constitution after it was drafted by the committee was an apparent fact. However, his reading of the document did not reveal to him at that particular time the deadly and erroneous nature of the document. It took some time before the preponderance of the decision to draft the constitution reflected upon the General Overseer.

In the beginning the General Overseer was impervious to the nature of the constitution and seemed convinced that it was not a departure from the Bible status which the Church had always maintained. In eloquent words he endorsed the constitution in his Annual Address:

With its full constitution or system of fundamental laws properly displayed it will consider the fiercest onslaughts of the enemy nothing more than play things and will playfully laugh at the hottest, hardest, fiercest belchings from the depth of hell with the millions of demons sending forth their fiery darts and most furious explosives.¹⁶

Feeling confident that the constitution was good for the Church and that those whom he trusted to the fullest extent had counseled him in the path of total truth, he presented the idea of the constitution to the Assembly. There were only a few statements made about the constitution and then it was read to the Assembly. The following is recorded concerning its presentation:

The General Overseer made a few remarks in which he mentioned a written constitution. Some of them are:

The elders in council with General Overseer have concluded there is need of a constitution for the Church of God. Remember this is not setting forth any laws or creeds that are binding us. We are only setting forth that which we have been practicing for years.

The General Overseer then read the constitution which was drawn up by the General Overseer and elders in council.¹⁷

Like any document presented to set forth the beliefs of a body of people, there are many statements with which all can agree. All creeds have much good in them, and herein lies their power to deceive and to point to the creed rather than the Word of God itself. There are sections of the constitution which are definitely a departure from Bible truth and from the practices of the Church of God to that time. The entire constitution is written in the appendix, but there are sections which should be placed in focus and viewed on an inspection basis.

Section 3 of the constitution states: To promulgate rules and regulations to govern the local churches of said organization, and otherwise promote the general interest of the General Assembly.

The preceding article is a departure from the previous practice because the Assembly never considered itself a rule-making body which imposed its rules upon the churches. The minutes of the Assemblies were more a record of findings from the Scriptures rather than rules simply put forth by the body in session.

Article 4, Section 1 states: The officers of the General Assembly of the Churches of God are and shall consist of General Overseer, general secretary, council of twelve elders and other seventy elders, presbytery, state overseers and trustees.

The preceding section seemed innocent enough, but a close examination pointed out that the large majority of the membership of the Church had been disfranchised. Only a small group, the twelve and seventy and the General Overseer, composed the official Assembly. Although the membership were permitted to discuss, if they felt bold enough, they had no official voice in the proceedings of the Assembly.

At the time they were agreeing to implement the constitution, it is hardly conceivable that most of the membership understood that they were agreeing to take away their voice and influence from the proceedings of the Assembly. This small group became a representative body for the entire Church. This one point was a total departure from the posture the Church had taken since its project of uncovering the truth in 1903.

Section 6 states: The twelve elders and the seventy elders shall together with the General Overseer be understood and so construed to be the official Assembly while in joint session, which shall have full power and authority to designate rules of government, teachings and principles for the local churches, those present to constitute a quorum.¹⁸

The constitution also provided for the impeachment of an official "who committed an offense rendering him unworthy of the position he occupies."¹⁹ Therefore, it can be seen that the entire nature of the constitution was binding and demanding in many sections. Its tone was authoritative and legalistic rather than exuding the characteristics of love, grace, and faith. It was the epitome of a giant step backward into the very entanglement from which the Church had many years previously declared itself free. This document was repudiated in no unclear terms by the General Overseer in 1922 and would be repudiated by the Church of God in the year 1926. A. J. Tomlinson did not try to hide the fact that he had erred in giving his influence to the passage of the constitution, but when he came to the conclusion of what he had done, he repented of using his influence to get it accepted by the Assembly. He suffered untold heartache because he presented the constitution in an acceptable way. When it was accepted by the Assembly he stated: "In order to show our appreciation of His presence and it seeming good to us and the Holy Ghost, let us all kneel before the Lord and reverence Him."²⁰ After the prayer the General Overseer exclaimed: "BEHOLD WHAT GOD HATH WROUGHT!"²¹ In the next Assembly, however, he used forceful language and pleaded with the Church to abrogate the entire constitution. He knew a mistake had been made and he wanted it corrected.

Momentous decisions had been made during the Sixteenth Annual Assembly in 1921. Everything had seemed wonderful on the surface. Most of the people left the Annual gathering happy and ready to return to their respective places of work with a heart full of enthusiasm and renewed determination. In a few short months hardly one church would escape trouble of some major proportion. The Church had overstepped the bounds of the will of God and had to suffer for this. There is no agony which equals that of being out of God's will.

FOOTNOTES

¹*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes* "Minutes of the Fifteenth Annual Assembly" (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, n.d.), p. 106.

²*Ibid.* p. 113.

³*Book of Minutes, "Twelfth Annual Assembly"* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), p. 243.

⁴*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes*, op. cit. p. 117.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Minutes of the Sixteenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1921), p. 7.

⁷*Ibid.* p. 28.

⁸*Ibid.* p. 29.

⁹*Ibid.* p. 28.

¹⁰*Ibid.* p. 29.

¹¹*Ibid.* p. 60.

¹²*Ibid.* pp. 24, 25.

¹³*Ibid.* p. 35.

¹⁴Charles W. Conn, *Like A Mighty Army Moves the Church of God* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1955), p. 170.

¹⁵*Ibid.* p. 166.

¹⁶*Minutes of the Sixteenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God*, op. cit. p. 27.

¹⁷*Ibid.* p. 60.

¹⁸*Ibid.* pp. 61, 62.

¹⁹*Ibid.* p. 63.

²⁰*Ibid.* p. 65.

²¹*Ibid.*

CHAPTER IX

WRECKAGE OF THE STORM

For a period of seventeen years A. J. Tomlinson had provided leadership for the Church of God. Most of the progressive thoughts and the inspiration for movement into new areas of progress were the result of his foresight and anointing of the Spirit. So full of leadership qualities was he that the Church could not bestow enough responsibility upon him. Not only did he serve in the capacity of General Overseer of the entire Church of God but often he served, in addition to this awesome responsibility, as Editor and Publisher of the paper, pastor of the local church, and chairman of a number of committees. In addition to these responsibilities he found time to visit in state conventions, preach in numerous churches, and hold crusades in a number of states.

That the Church placed undaunted faith in him is an unquestioned fact. The essential facts of the matter are that the Church relied upon him too heavily and placed too many responsibilities in his hands. Never was his honesty, integrity, or Christian principles questioned or even suspicioned. There was no reason for a question when he had led the Church to obvious progress in spiritual, governmental, and material affairs. There was, however, a strong clique of ministers who had gained prominence in the Church who had worked with unswerving determination to dispose of the General Overseer. On every occasion possible he was attacked privately and when the tide seemed to turn against the General Overseer, there was an open attack.

Just as every heresy aims at complete destruction, the opposition in 1922 sought to discredit the highest position in the Church—General Overseer. Obviously there were many who never accepted the fact of the Holy Spirit approving A. J. Tomlinson until death separated him from the position. There were many, honest-hearted no doubt, who felt that the office of General Overseer should be an elective office. While A. J. Tomlinson allowed the Assembly to express individual wishes

each year until 1914, he could not refuse to honor the working of the Holy Spirit who had made it perfectly clear that he was the man for the office until death intervened.

1. Sweeping Changes

A slow erosion from the principles of theocratic government began to wear away the solid foundation which had been laid in 1903 and the years after that date. Perhaps the start was the introduction of the idea of the twelve elders in 1915 and the adoption of the idea in 1916 and their appointment. A. J. Tomlinson sought for counselors to help him with the vast decisions which came before him every day and which needed the answer of a group. The twelve elders, however, augmented their power with the people and began to dictate to the General Overseer.

The General Treasury Plan which was intended to bring equality and equity to all the ministers was an exercise in total frustration and futility. It was hastily passed—being “snapped off like a photographer’s camera.”¹ There were no real guidelines and no one or group who actually helped the General Overseer to operate the plan. It was left to his discretion to distribute the tithe monies to every minister according to his needs and the effectiveness of his work. It would have taken a financial genius to work such a plan, and the General Overseer did not have sufficient time to perfect the plan. That there was discontent and even suspicion among the ministers concerning the distribution of the funds by the General Overseer was an evident fact. Talk spread like wildfire, charges and counter-charges were made in private and in public. How adequately the first General Overseer described the situation in these words: “Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth” (James 3:5).

Perhaps the one greatest factor which led the Church from theocratic government which had been practiced since 1903 was what came to be called “The Constitution.” At first glance one may read the preamble and its eight articles and fail to see its latent flaws. However, when the constitution was seen in the light of practice, it had placed the Church under a creed, with laws dictating to the churches and providing penalties for those who did not observe its precepts. That the Church had changed its government for judicial only to one of legislation is an evident fact. The Church of God had entered into the abyss of error; it had departed from the paths of Bible truth; it had

followed the example of the early Church and gone into a tunnel of darkness. When the General Overseer became awakened to the indisputable facts of the document to which he had given his approval, he wrestled with himself in terror over what he had done. He could not rest until the mistake had been corrected in the proper way—to abrogate the entire constitution and return to theocratic government.

Just how did the constitution come into being? It is true that A. J. Tomlinson was blind to the inner workings within the minds of those who first contrived the idea of putting the Church under legislative authority. He had delegated much of the work of the Church. When he delegated authority, he placed unquestioned confidence in those whom he had chosen to do a particular job. A. J. Tomlinson stated in detail how the idea of the constitution evolved:

While having our trouble with J. L. Scott, J. S. Llewellyn said that our order of business did not amount to anything and recommended that they have a new order. Later he began to talk Constitution, and for more than a year he talked Constitution. And he showed it up that it would not change our affairs. Those appointed to draft it: F. J. Lee, J. S. Llewellyn and M. S. Lemons. I was busy and did not pay any special attention to the matter until they had it complete.²

In view of the preceding statements, A. J. Tomlinson merely portrayed the views of those who had drafted the constitution when he presented it to the General Assembly. That he did not understand the total concepts presented in the document is shown by his later reaction to it.

2. Prelude to the Assembly, 1922

A stirring of discontent unsettled the membership of the Church before the beginning of the Assembly in 1922. Much of the discontent resulted from statements that monies sent in to headquarters had been diverted to purposes other than they were intended. The object of suspicion was the General Overseer since he had been given the obligation to distribute the funds to the ministers. Some prominent ministers in the Church had taken the General Overseer to task over some of the statements and gave their support to the negative accusations against him. Enough support was given to many of the statements directed in opposition to the General Overseer that some were emboldened to press the attack.

News concerning those who were most violent in their conver-

sation against the General Overseer could not be kept secret. Indeed, there was no attempt to keep the bitter accusations secret. Some ministers who had supported A. J. Tomlinson and had given their unstinted favor toward him, turned against him and sought to destroy his influence and undermine his office. That he was aware of all the workings of these men is shown by his following statements:

Last year (1922) was an awful year. I was editor of the *Evangel*, manager of the publishing house, with Iris' help prepared the Sunday School lessons, superintendent of Bible school, both the home and by correspondence, and superintendent of the Sunday School at Cleveland. All of this time I did my work with an aching heart because four men, all of whom I had always considered my best and most to be depended on friends, rose up against me and made it awful hard for me. These men, I hate to name them, but I feel I must, were M. S. Lemons, J. S. Llewellyn, J. B. Ellis and T. L. McLain, and I might also add W. F. Bryant. I can't tell all they did against me, but letters (filed) came in from places where they had been, tells of their opposition in personal talk and influence. It is definitely known that J. B. Ellis and J. S. Llewellyn took me quite often as a target in the pulpit. Their influence turned a few others. While I was working and wearing my life away for the Church of God, they were wireworking and planning against me so they could oust me from my positions at the Assembly One time during the summer it developed in proof that J. S. Llewellyn instigated a strike among my publishing house force which I believe caused a loss to the house of not less than \$3,000, besides the disgrace and trouble it brought . . . I took abuse from J. S. Llewellyn both over the phone and to the face, worse than was scarcely ever, if ever, given to a criminal. He declared he would have me out of that office if it cost him every cent he was worth. He said this in a rage. Such as this went on until the Assembly.³

Power in the hands of a few men who had gained the approval of hundreds of members of the Church was sufficient to bring alarming changes in the Church during this year. The position of the General Overseer was in jeopardy, and one strong point used against him was that he had mismanaged and even misappropriated Church funds. This was the gunpowder used to load the shell which exploded the General Overseer from the elevated position he had filled for seventeen years.

3. The Annual Address, 1922

One session of the Annual Assembly was not enough time for

an address which had so consumed the thoughts and spiritual nature of the General Overseer. His heart had been thoroughly stirred by events which he determined to be disastrous for the Church. That the Church was on a collision course was definite. With a heart full of love and respect to the Lord Jesus Christ, the General Overseer sought to place the Church back on course. He was totally cognizant of the wild accusations which had gone the rounds in the Church. He was totally aware of those who were working with intense fervor to destroy him and to undermine the position of General Overseer. Regardless of all this knowledge, the General Overseer went headlong into the fierce teeth of the storm. God was with him and he was unafraid to "beard the lion in his den."

A. The Government

In the thinking of the Church from its early days, the government of the Church was considered to be the greatest government on the face of the earth. This was believed because the government of the Church was patterned after the principles presented in the Bible. A. J. Tomlinson saw a departure from this beautiful government. Because of this departure he was inspired to state the following:

Indeed it is no child's play to pilot the great Church of God over the rugged sea and follow the instructions of the chart and the pointing of the magnetic needle.⁴

B. Courts of Justice

The Church had travelled far down the road toward an elaborate court system. It seemed that more effort was given to rectifying wrongs than to the procedure of simply obeying the Scripture and living accordingly as children of God. There was a move to duplicate the vast court system practiced in some of the states. The General Overseer recommended that this system of courts of justice be abolished and that a simpler system be implemented.

C. Divorce and Remarriage

The number of people in the world who had divorced and remarried was unknown. This problem had been a thorny issue for many years. It had been discussed and varying views were held by the people. So volatile was the issue that many became very emotional and demanding when the question came before the people. During his address, A. J. Tomlinson pointed out very clearly the Scriptural injunctions against the evils of divorce and remarriage. By the use of an illustration he brought into focus the meaning of fornication.

D. The Constitution

No measure ever brought as much pangs of conscience to the General Overseer as the passage of the constitution through the General Assembly in 1921. That he used his influence to have the measure adopted by the Assembly did not deter him from admitting it was wrong. Concerning this point he stated:

I consider that we made a grave mistake one year ago when we adopted what we called our Constitution. When I awoke to what we had done in the early part of this year, I became frightened and have never been free from this scare. I am afraid God has been plaguing us to bring us back to our senses. Nearly all of the churches have had more or less trouble this year in one way and another

We must cling to the blessed old Book for our laws if we keep the favor of God

What can be done? There is only one thing to do, and I may lose my position for saying it, and that is to abrogate the whole thing and make a record to that effect and as far as possible even erase it from our memory, and once more raise the Book high up in the air and declare, **THIS IS OUR ONLY RULE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE.**⁵

Following his leadership in repudiating this document would have led the Church back on the road to the government they once enjoyed. The leader of the Church had found and demonstrated the courage and Spirit-filled life to declare the truth but the Church became unwilling to walk in truth.

E. Financial Strait

A. J. Tomlinson never became obsessed with his position and neither did he love authority. He feared God and acted in humility before Him and before his fellow man. Leading the Church of God was a burden of responsibility which he carried in the fear and admonition of the Lord. When the Assembly approved him as the General Overseer he accepted the position with humility and a feeling of inadequacy. When pressure was put on him to make a bold declaration concerning the issue of divorce and remarriage, he offered to resign his position. That he did not love authority is pointed out by the fact of his suggesting twelve elders and later the seventy to be added to the group to help guide the Church in its decisions. In private counsel with the leaders of the Church, he offered to resign and let someone else carry the load of responsibility. He could not abandon the position without fear because he was convinced, indeed as were the majority of the people present in 1914, that God had placed him in the position until death.

It is indeed unfortunate that a cloud of suspicion descended upon the General Overseer over his discretionary use of Church funds. All the tithes were sent to headquarters and he had the responsibility of distributing the funds to each minister according to his need and the efficiency of his work. Not only was the General Overseer responsible for the distribution of monies to the ministers, but he was equally responsible to keep the debts of the General Church paid. When he was faced with the facts of bankruptcy for the Church, he was confronted with a discretionary decision to distribute a small amount of money to each minister and allow the publishing house and the tabernacle be lost or divert this money to save the Church. He had the authority to use his power as General Overseer to act according to the interest of the entire Church. Acting on behalf of the Church when it was not in General Assembly, it was his feeling that the ministry would be gladly willing to donate their share of tithes to save the Church. It was a hard decision but it was his to make and he was willing to bear the brunt of the consequences. Never did he intend to take food from the ministry or deprive them of their share of the tithes. A careful record was kept of the debt owed to each minister. He himself shared in the debt, contributing more than any other minister in the Church, \$600.00. Most of the ministers held secular jobs, and those who did not were receiving gifts, food, and offerings from the members. No one starved because of the small amount used to save the Church.

The General Overseer explained his actions concerning the use of the tithe money in the following terms:

In order to save the Church and publishing house from bankruptcy I felt compelled to use some of the tithes. I decided that I would rather suffer the shame and reproach of whatever would be heaped upon me and risk incurring the ill-will of all the ministers than for the shame and reproach of bankruptcy to be heaped upon the Church⁶

The General Overseer went on to point out that he had borrowed money on his own responsibility to pay the debts owed by the Church. A financial crisis had enveloped the country because it was seeking to recover from the disaster of the Great War. This crisis had hit all the people and especially members in the Church who worked in agriculture and the factories of the nation. The policies of Andrew Mellon, who was Secretary of the Treasury, did not help to solve the dilemma. Part of his policy was to allow the wealthy to pay a relatively small tax

while the primary burden of taxes fell upon the average worker. Industries in which many Church members were employed had suffered badly. It is stated: "Certain industries such as chemicals, silks and rayons, and toys, which had sprung up in the United States for the first time during the Great War, were suffering acutely from German and Japanese competition now that the fighting had ended."⁷

Tithe money was used in small portions with the hope that enough money would accrue from the sale of books and literature to replenish the fund. Contrary to this thought, the financial crisis had hit the nation and the world, and currency was very difficult to obtain. A. J. Tomlinson explained it in these terms:

A little later a number of the notes on the orphanage property and the auditorium property came due besides a lot of bills and dues on both that had to be taken care of, besides the insurance and running expenses of the Publishing House and the payments on the machinery. All of this required thousands of dollars, but I only used the tithes little at a time, each time with a hope that I would get enough back in a few days to replace them and save the ministers as well as the Publishing House and Church. But as often it failed and I was so distressed at times that I was almost sick. And all this time I had to keep the business going.

A careful record has been kept which shows the exact amount due each minister and this can be paid when the *Evangel* debt is met, however, quite a number of the ministers have already gladly donated everything due them to the Publishing House debt and I believe most of the others will gladly do the same thing when they thoroughly understand the situation.⁸

The General Overseer had the obligation to look after the interest of the total Church. In his own wisdom and power of discretion in this case, he chose to save the Church at that particular instant, knowing that the ministers would be cared for by the members who were in their care. Had he taken another direction, there would have been no church to save. Its prestige and station among the churches would have been so severely shaken that it would doubtless have never recovered. In his humility and totally unselfish action he offered himself, even to the point of martyrdom, to save the Church. For this action he would later be accused of misappropriation, misuse, and mismanagement of funds. His antagonists would seek to put him behind bars for saving the Church, but later he was completely vindicated in the courts of the land. The first General Overseer

of the Church "was beat and stoned by the Jews; and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club."⁹ The General Overseer suffered the abuse of many who sought to destroy him, and his hard work of seventeen years went down the drain when a number of prominent leaders repudiated his leadership and impugned his character.

F. The General Overseer

That the General Overseer was privy to the fact of a move against his position was evident from some of the statements he made in his Annual Address. He made a reference to the fact of the move of the Holy Spirit in the Assembly in 1914. To make an attempt to remove him from office or to tamper with the method of how he was placed in the position would be a direct assault upon the office work of the Holy Ghost and would be a most dangerous move. Concerning this matter he wrote:

I did not put myself in and I am afraid to put myself out. If God put me in I must let Him put me out. If the Assembly put me in in the year 1914, and God had nothing to do with it then let the Assembly put me out. Or if the Assembly wants to assume the responsibility of putting me out I shall offer no objections. It would be a relief and a pleasure to me to return to private life if the Lord is through with me and that is His way of taking me out of the position in which I would be afraid not to acknowledge He had placed me. And what would it be for this Assembly to put me out just to get to put me back in again? Put me out if you want to and I'll consider that as God's way of putting me out, but if you do, for heaven's sake don't mock God by trying to put me back in again. This would look too much like this Assembly does not want to recognize God's work, but wants to take things in their own hands and make the selection in order to be like other people, and to comply with a puny little clause or section in our constitution.¹⁰

Threats had been made to the effect that he would be removed from his position, and the preceding section of his address pointed out his feeling concerning this impending action. The extent of his authority was to give a solemn warning before any conclusive move was consummated.

G. The Twelve

Some confusion over the method of selection of the twelve elders erupted in 1916. It was decided after some time that the General Overseer would appoint the first two and with their help would appoint the remaining ten. Since they were helpers to the General Overseer in the area of counseling, his feeling was that they be appointed by him exclusively. He was convinced

that the Scriptural system was the appointive method and this had not been followed. In his reasoning the President of the United States, in an inferior type of government to that of the Church, had the right to appoint the members of his cabinet. Much more, therefore, he should be granted the privilege to appoint those whom he desired as his counselors. This was not illogical reasoning.

4. No Confidence

Committees came on the floor of the Assembly and gave their reports with very little of the unusual taking place. Action started in a dramatic and forceful manner when the Committee on Better Government gave their report. It was this committee which would react to the proposals made by the General Overseer in his Annual Address. A number of changes were suggested by him and in the following moments he and the entire Annual Assembly would know their feelings on his requests.

In every item the committee rejected his suggestions and proposals for progress. A very small but influential group had gained total control of the Assembly and were in the driver's seat. Regardless of the overall confidence and good feeling of the people toward the General Overseer, the leadership of the group had moved noticeably in the direction of antagonism toward him. Each step taken was merely a prelude to repudiating him completely and unseating him from his office.

A. Committee On Better Government

The members of the Committee on Better Government were: Alonzo Gann, Chairman, J. A. Self, M. W. Letsinger, J. W. Culpepper, John Attey, Z. R. Thomas, and J. A. Davis. They gave the following report to the Assembly:

We, your committee on Better Government, recommend the following:

First, That this official Assembly select two as co-workers with our General Overseer.

Second, Their position, duties, power, manner of appointment and length of term to be determined by this Assembly.

Third, That the appointment of elders remain unchanged.

Fourth, In regard to our constitution, we recommend that it be retained with such amendments as may be deemed necessary for the preservation of the Church of God.

Fifth, We recommend that the financial system remain as it is being practiced at present.

Sixth, We recommend that such adjustment be made of labor unions as may be necessary for our benefits.

Seventh, We recommend that a colored overseer be appointed over all the colored churches with the same authority as state overseers, however, this territory of labor is not to be limited.¹¹

What a crushing blow this must have been to the General Overseer who so deeply desired changes which would lead the Church back on the path of gospel truth. The preceding action meant a vote of no confidence in the program outlined by the General Overseer of the Church. Regardless of how hard he endeavored to promote the Church, he must do so with the thought that the Church was no longer following his leadership. From this time on he would be no more than a figurehead whose authority was greatly fragmented.

B. Amendments

This report was obnoxious enough in its very nature, but the amendments proposed by J. S. Llewellyn were even more binding and restrictive. That they aimed directly at totally destroying the influence of the General Overseer is clearly seen upon a close reading of the material. For quite some time prior to the Assembly the amendments were no doubt in the making. That the amendments were demanding and restrictive in tone is seen in the following paragraph:

We further advise that the General Assembly create the office of Superintendent of Education who shall have the general supervision of all our work of education. We further advise that from and after this assembly that it shall be the imperative duty of the General Overseer to travel over the states and oversee the work in general, hold state conventions and sit in council with the overseers of the respective states on their fields of labor and give all matters of importance his personal attention.¹²

Notice words such as "it shall be the imperative duty." This was a harsh and unnecessary statement to be made toward the man who had given his life for seventeen years to build up the Church of God. In effect, this statement amounted to a virtual exile for the General Overseer. It was his duty to oversee the Church of God and direct the affairs of the Church, but at the same time he must spend most of his time on the field. This suggestion was unworkable, unfair, and undeserving for the man who epitomized the Church more than any other individual who held membership in the organization on that date. If the General Overseer seemed hurt and ill-treated and abused, this was the only rational way he could react in the face of such eventualities.

A further note in the amendment reads as follows:

We further advise and recommend that the General Overseer, the Editor and Publisher, and the Superintendent of Education shall form an Executive Council who shall council together on all matters of general interest to the Church of God and any and all departments of the Church work, such as selecting teachers, managers, clerks, book-keepers, etc.¹³

After the Annual Address delivered by the General Overseer a great show of feeling favorable toward him was demonstrated. The people, excluding some leaders, loved him and wanted to prove that they were with him. They most gladly gave him their feeling of approval over his move to save the Church from bankruptcy. Concerning this massive demonstration, A. J. Tomlinson wrote:

For two hours, I suppose, amidst shouts, music by the brass band, and songs, cheers and weeping, about twenty-five hundred people marched by and shook my hand and many of the men fell on my neck and kissed me and wept for joy. One precious old mother kissed me, too. My hand was sore for two months from the tight grips of love.¹⁴

Unhappily, however, his good feeling did not convey itself to many of those who were determined to implement drastic changes in the structure of the Church. Preceding the discussion on the amendment put forward by J. S. Llewellyn, the General Overseer commented on the happenings in this way:

And when the measure that was so obnoxious to me was before the house for consideration, I called the Assembly to prayer as has always been my custom, and when we were in prayer J. S. Llewellyn ran up to me in a rage and shook his fist and pointed his finger almost against my face and said, "How dare you block this measure in any such way. You dare not do it, you shall not do it," and walked away, white with madness. I took all such abuse without resentment—without talking back, without trying to defend myself.¹⁵

The amendment passed the Assembly the following day, and the General Overseer was no longer in his capacity as he had served for seventeen years. His position carried the authority of titular head of the Church but the real power was in the hands of an Executive Committee. It is stated: "After some time of counseling together the following named brethren were suggested: A. J. Tomlinson, General Overseer, J. S. Llewellyn, Editor and Publisher, and F. J. Lee, Superintendent of Education."¹⁶

This is the beginning of an unwieldy triumvirate who would, presumably, give the Church better leadership. Even the three were not together in heart, philosophy, and inspiration. Clearly, A. J. Tomlinson was the inspired man who should lead the Church and who had led the Church to enormous growth in a relatively brief period of time. That J. S. Llewellyn was at severe loggerheads with the General Overseer was a fact that few thinking people did not know at that time. His ill-feeling toward the General Overseer went to the extreme of definitely wanting him out of office and out of the Church, if possible. Just how this ill-spirit could work for the betterment of the Church was a mystery. Howbeit, the author of *Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God* stated the matter in this way: "Lee was a strong supporter of Tomlinson, and Llewellyn was his foremost critic, so the Assembly felt that with this balance things would be better at Headquarters."¹⁷

C. The General Overseer Resigns

With the vote of no confidence in his program, and with one of his bitterest antagonists on the Executive Committee, and with the General Overseer being virtually exiled to the field, he resigned his position.¹⁸ He could not feel that he could work under such binding restrictions. Although he reconsidered his resignation at the pleadings of some of his best friends who desired that he remain in the position with the hope that things would improve, this action was to be short-lived. Tragically, conditions grew regressively worse until it became an impossibility for him to continue to labor under the galling yoke. The Seventeenth Annual Assembly held at Cleveland, Tennessee, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred twenty-two, was the last United Assembly presided over by the General Overseer, A. J. Tomlinson. His blood, sweat, tears, and toil had become an inseparable part of the Church of God. In his feeling the Church of God had departed from the Bible and had forfeited its right to lay claim to being the Bible Church. For this reason he staunchly defended the thought that he was still General Overseer of the Church of God until God was finished with his leadership.

FOOTNOTES

¹*Minutes of The Sixteenth Annual Assembly of The Church of God* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1921), p. 28.

²*Minutes of the Call Council of The Church of God, (Chattanooga, Tennessee), p. 7.*

³Lillie Duggar, A. J. Tomlinson (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), pp. 194, 195.

⁴*Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly of The Church of God*

- (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1922), p. 15.
- ⁵Ibid. p. 27.
- ⁶Ibid. p. 29.
- ⁷John A. Garraty, *The American Nation—a History of the United States* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Incorporated, 1966), p. 713.
- ⁸*Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly*, op. cit. p. 29.
- ⁹William Bryon Forbush, ed., *Fox's Book of Martyrs* (Philadelphia: Universal Book and Bible House, 1926), p. 3.
- ¹⁰*Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly*, op. cit. p. 31.
- ¹¹Ibid. pp. 48, 49.
- ¹²Ibid.
- ¹³Ibid pp. 49, 50.
- ¹⁴Duggar, op. cit. p. 196.
- ¹⁵Ibid.
- ¹⁶*Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly*, op. cit. p. 51.
- ¹⁷Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1955), p. 173.
- ¹⁸*Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Assembly*, op. cit. p. 52.

CHAPTER X

BROKEN PIECES

1. Scriptural Precedents

A deplorable sight is to view something broken and put out of use. At one time the object may have been useful and may have served a good purpose. Putting the broken pieces together may be possible in some instances, but permanent damage is usually the rule.

Broken fellowship and broken trust are difficult matters to piece together. When a controversy reaches the point of schism, much hurt is done which may never be totally mended. People are drawn into the matter and feelings become very pronounced. Pride can become a part of the proceedings and this very attitude may prevent many from accepting the truth even when it is presented.

When a great man serves in the role of leadership and he accomplishes much great work for the Lord, he cannot remain aloof from the constant attacks of those who would diminish or destroy his influence or position. That the work of the devil played a significant role in undermining A. J. Tomlinson cannot be denied. There were those who were totally committed to the proposition of disposing of him. No leader between the lids of the Bible escaped the attempts of the workers of opposition to discredit and seek to dispose in various ways his leadership.

A. Antioch of Syria

Because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul had to face the opposition of the Judaizers in Antioch of Syria. They were so adamant against him that some even claimed authority from James to tell the people that they had to be circumcised according to the Mosaic Law in order to be saved. In the face of this action, Paul had to take a firm stand, even opposing Peter and Barnabas. He won his point in the Jerusalem Council and all Gentiles were free from subscribing to the rites of circumcision. (Acts, chapter 15.)

B. Antioch of Pisidia

Paul and Barnabas met with immediate success in the city of Antioch of Pisidia on the first missionary journey. The people loved the message they heard and wanted to hear it on the following Sabbath. However, due to the work of the Judaizers in this city, Paul stated that they would turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). This made the Gentiles very happy, but sadness was also involved because it caused a broken fellowship and a great pause in the work of the gospel. Ultimately, the cause of Christ was advanced and the gospel continued. Very clearly, Paul and others had to pick up the broken pieces and put them together in a more formidable way than had ever been done before. In the same way, A. J. Tomlinson could not quit the great work of propagating the gospel of Christ in the face of the facts he knew were true.

C. The Corinthian Correspondence

According to David Smith, eminent Bible scholar, the apostle Paul faced charges from his enemies of "MISAPPROPRIATION," "MISUSE," and "MISMANAGEMENT," of Church funds. Paul, who had written at least thirteen books of the New Testament, had to bear this terrible reproach and stigma which was leveled toward him by some of his enemies. The only element missing was the presence of an auditor, which has come into existence in rather recent times. A. J. Tomlinson was faced by an audit, whereas the apostle Paul merely vindicated himself with a statement of the facts. Jesus Christ, Stephen, and Paul were falsely accused and came out of the false accusations declaring the truth even though they lost their lives. Regardless of this fact the TRUTH REMAINED THE TRUTH.

David Smith comments on the charges against Paul concerning alleged dishonesty in financial matters:

Already, it would seem, there were mutterings of a calumny which was afterwards unblushingly alleged—that in his zeal for the poor Paul had a dishonest end in view, and under the pretext of charity was seeking his own enrichment.¹

J. W. Shepard discussed this matter in the following terms:

His Judaizing enemies were whispering around that Paul was a keen rogue, refusing with great show any help for his maintenance, while secretly appropriating for his own use the money raised in the collection for the poor saints of Jerusalem. They said he was a crafty rogue making use at deceit to catch them.²

Paul himself made the statement concerning their charges of dishonesty in the following manner: "Did I take advantage of you or make any money out of you through any of those whom I sent to you?" (Amplified Bible p. 285.) This man who had suffered all kinds of indignities for the Lord Jesus Christ had to suffer the shameful charges of being a thief. Little in stature, he reached the sky in courage because he would neither admit nor submit to these false and demeaning charges. Neither would A. J. Tomlinson, the General Overseer of the Church of God, admit or submit to the charges of "Misappropriation."

2. Laboring Under Difficulties

A. J. Tomlinson was laboring faithfully to lead the unsaved to Christ and further encourage those who were followers of Him when he was abruptly informed of charges brought against him. The brunt of the charges revolved around statements that he had "misused," "misappropriated," or "mishandled," certain Church monies. On September 5, 1922, a committee composed of F. J. Lee, J. B. Ellis, and J. S. Llewellyn had been selected to investigate all affairs of the Church. It was not enough to accept the statements made by A. J. Tomlinson concerning the use of the funds to save the Church from bankruptcy. Even the more than two thousand people who willingly forgave him and stood for him were not enough to convince some to discontinue to press for charges against him.

A. A Cloud of Pollution

With the circulation of "misappropriation" of Church funds, many people believed this report without question. Charges of thievery were running rampant and the talk was loose and free. After all, some of the most prominent ministers in the Church were repeating the reports so why would they be denied? It would take time to vindicate such charges and during the time that was taken, a firm foothold had been gained against the General Overseer. Clearly, he could not counsel with everyone who had been convinced by others; he did not seek to clear himself in this manner, but depended upon the clear thinking of the people who observed his total commitment to the Church for seventeen years to believe in his complete honesty. Tragically, there were many who were carried away with the charges and accepted them as complete truth.

The air was polluted with falsehood and suspicion. While A. J. Tomlinson was having great services in the Bahama Islands, he was asked to return to Cleveland until the cloud of suspicion could be lifted from him. His response to this suggestion was

not immediate because he felt he was discharging his duties as General Overseer and he would continue the work. By June of 1923, the charges were presented so strongly that he was compelled to respond. He stated, concerning this matter:

I reconsidered the matter (that of remaining for a year as General Overseer) and consented to try to pull through another year. But this was without good results and by the twelfth of June, 1923, the opposition forces had got a set of false charges against me, accusing me of appropriating several thousands of dollars of church funds to my own use. This was for the purpose of turning our people against me. I met them bravely, and after the charges had been duly made against me it came my time to speak.³

Therefore, the Church was thoroughly permeated with suspicion and ill-feeling concerning matters of finance. Some on the Council of Twelve were determined to press the issue until some ultimate action was taken on the General Overseer.

B. The "June Council"

The Council of Twelve had usurped the right to call a council meeting together to consider the charges against the General Overseer. Originally, they were in position to serve as counselors to A. J. Tomlinson but at this time they were acting in the capacity of a Grand Jury. Seven of these men served in the capacity of Supreme Judges. They had all, with the exception of two men, become convinced of the guilt of A. J. Tomlinson. F. J. Lee, J. S. Llewellyn, and J. B. Ellis resided in Cleveland and had worked perseveringly gathering alleged information which would prove beyond a doubt the misuse of funds. J. S. Llewellyn was a particular antagonist of A. J. Tomlinson and J. B. Ellis was only slightly less antagonistic. Therefore, it was a definite order of matters that every issue would be exploited to its full extent. Seemingly, there was no attempt to ameliorate or conciliate matters whatsoever. The General Overseer was put on defense of his ministry, his ethical standards, his honesty, and his Christian standing with God.

Even before the final abrogation of the Constitution in the Call Council in Chattanooga, A. J. Tomlinson did not feel bound by the galling precepts of that instrument. That he considered it offensive and a departure from the precepts of the Bible became evident with his very actions. Therefore, he did not give the appearance of going along with it in any form. Under the Constitution, impeachment proceedings could be carried out and an official could be turned out of office. This was the type of governmental structure under which the Church operated during

the proceedings against A. J. Tomlinson. It is interesting that the Constitution was abrogated by the Church of God in 1926 with some of the wording and reasoning used against it by A. J. Tomlinson in his Annual Address in 1922. It is stated in these terms: "Be it further resolved that we reaffirm, as we have done from the beginning, our unwavering faith and unconditional acceptance of the whole Bible rightly divided and the New Testament for the government and discipline."⁴ This action came five years too late to save the effects of some "Broken Pieces."

C. Closing Days

The opposition forces felt that they had the General Overseer in a mortally wounded condition. He had been pierced with severe charges which carried much weight during this time when finances were very hard to come by. The membership were particularly moved by any hint that funds had been used in a way which would deprive the people of an honest accounting for their money which had been sent to headquarters. Giving strength to the charges brought forward, the committee of three secured the services of an auditing firm headquartered in Chattanooga, Lee H. Battle Audit Company. This maneuver was suddenly thrust into the series of events with flabbergasting effect. The preceding statement is based upon the fact that the Church had never had an auditing firm to check the books. It would be difficult enough to prepare for an audit if this procedure were worked toward each day and week and month. A. J. Tomlinson was not an efficient bookkeeper and the funds were not available to hire competent individuals. Further, the Church operated on the basis of mutual trust; the General Overseer used the funds for the Church and he himself knew he was taking care of the best interests of the total Church when he made disbursements.

There were many individuals who quickly equated the fact of not being able to account for every transaction with a check or receipt as proof of dishonesty or "misappropriation." This simply was not the case and the General Overseer made an account of the transactions he had made. Perhaps his account was not enough to satisfy the perceptive eyes of an auditor who sought for numbers and figures on specific documents, but his account of the business was enough to satisfy every court who heard the case. It is stated:

The auditor's report revealed a shortage of \$14,141.83, which could not be accounted for in any record of the various funds. Approximately \$31,000 had been misappropriated, \$3,973.23 of which came from the orphanage fund and most of the remainder from the tithe fund.⁵

"Misappropriate" is a word with a bad connotation and does not apply to the actions of A. J. Tomlinson. The term is defined as: "To appropriate to a bad, incorrect, or dishonest use" (*Webster's New World Dictionary*, p. 940). True, the General Overseer used his prerogative to use funds earmarked for the ministry to save the tabernacle and publishing house from seizure, but this action could not be termed "bad," "dishonest," or "incorrect" under the prevailing circumstances.

One of the primary mediums used to disseminate information damaging to the General Overseer was the *Evangel*. It is ironic that so much concern was shown for monies used to save the publishing interest and this particular business was the one used so forcefully to demean and undermine the leader of the Church of God. J. S. Llewellyn was editor and publisher of the paper and it is a definite fact that the readers of the paper received a full report of all unfavorable information against the General Overseer. Just what motivated this Church leader to so vehemently oppose A. J. Tomlinson is not completely known.

The judge of the Bradley Chancery Court criticised J. S. Llewellyn for his business affairs with the Church. In one item he criticised him for receiving \$3,000.00 as architect on the tabernacle when he was only a common carpenter.⁶ (Chancery Court p. 26) He bought machinery in Knoxville when he learned that the Church would need it for the publishing business and sold it for a profit to the Church. The judge stated: "The record shows that Mr. Llewellyn did not hesitate to combine business with his religion, much to the profit of his business."⁷ Drawing a bead on the business affairs of J. S. Llewellyn, the judge related this piece of information:

Mr. Llewellyn states that he sold the church a second-hand truck worth \$1,600 for \$1,600, but that he donated \$500.00 of this purchase price to the church. On cross-examination he admits that his truck only originally cost him \$1,100, and that he sold it to the church for the original price, but as a second-hand truck.⁸

His work in the capacity of editor and publisher was not entirely satisfactory in the year 1924 because the statement is made: "... J. S. Llewellyn continued as Editor and Publisher, even though not everything was satisfactory about his work."⁹ In 1927 S. W. Latimer replaced J. S. Llewellyn as editor and publisher. These words were used to explain the circumstances: "J. S. Llewellyn's ... services had become increasingly undesirable. The gross receipts at the Publishing House had decreased more than \$8,000 during the five years Llewellyn served."¹⁰ During

the mid-thirties J. S. Llewellyn repented of the injury he had done to A. J. Tomlinson and sought to make things right in every way possible. Perhaps in the fervor of emotion and zeal he felt he had done the right thing, but he awakened one day with the bitter thoughts that he had done a gross injustice to the General Overseer.¹¹

D. The Audit

Much strength was gained by means of an audit by those who opposed A. J. Tomlinson. It was related in *The Church of God Evangel* by F. J. Lee that: "he explained away the \$14,141.83 . . . he made two attempts, but both fell down in the presence of the auditor."¹² It is further stated that, "When Tomlinson's unsatisfactory explanations were dissipated by the accountant's revelation of facts, he countered by attacking the report."¹³ Later, ten of the twelve elders filed a total of fifteen charges against A. J. Tomlinson with five of the fifteen related to monetary matters.¹⁴

Not immediately did the facts concerning the audit come to the surface even though A. J. Tomlinson explained the method used in the disbursal of all funds. In his journal the General Overseer did not make voluminous statements on the matter but stated in rather brief words: "They claim I am defaulter of \$14,000, but I am not."¹⁵ He later made the statement: "I made some statements and explanations of matters in question, including the alleged auditor's report that tried to show I owed the Church \$14,141.83. I stated that I was not short that amount, and explained in detail my reasons for not accepting that report as dependable."¹⁶

A. J. Tomlinson's words were totally discounted at this time by those who were seeking to disqualify him from the robes of office and from membership in the Church of God. It was not until 1925 that his actions in monetary matters were totally vindicated by the judge of the Bradley County Chancery Court. In this trial emerged several notable facts which completely cleared the General Overseer of any thought of the misuse of funds.

Even before Mr. Blackwell testified before the Court of Appeals, A. J. Tomlinson had already shown the report to be misleading and inaccurate. During the trial this evidence came out in full truth. Blackwell had made only a preliminary report of the books on file and stated that a full audit would not be worth the expense. There were errors in his method of checking the books. A notation of receipts sometimes would be placed in the report but there was no reporting of expenditures. If there was no record of a transaction, it would be charged to A. J. Tomlinson. Concerning some of the major points in the testimony of Mr.

Blackwell, they are related as follows:

While the books may be fairly accurate, so far as they go, it is our opinion that the chief difficulty is in the transactions which have not been recorded.

After making this statement of the conditions and taking into account the records of the office, the auditor made a report to the committee showing that the books of the office did not contain the records of the expenditure of about \$14,000 of the church money, and therefore, A. J. Tomlinson was charged with this amount as a shortage or defalcation.

His report was checked up by counsel for the purpose of examining Blackwell, and a great many mistakes were discovered in addition, etc., in the original books, and these mistakes were carried forward in the audited report, so upon examination he admitted that he had taken the books and the totals as found in the books in a great number of instances without adding them himself. His methods and admissions made it necessary that he make a supplemental report and again go over the record for the purpose of correcting these admitted errors. This he did and reduced the total from \$14,000 to \$12,000, but upon examination he admits that his supplemental report was only a partial report and covered only one year. Without going into great detail in analyzing the report of the auditor, we are content to state that a reading of the deposition of Mr. Blackwell, telling his methods and the reasons for charging Tomlinson with said funds, demonstrates the utter worthlessness of the report.¹⁷

Therefore it can be seen that the total conclusion of the audit of the books demonstrated the idea of "TOTAL WORTHLESSNESS."

Further statements were made which showed beyond doubt the unstinted commitment of A. J. Tomlinson to the cause of the Church of God. He had placed his entire life in the Church and had worked to the best of his ability to build the Church spiritually, economically, and physically. It is stated concerning his total unselfishness that he left the Church greatly enhanced in every way:

Tomlinson came to the church when there were only a few members; he built the church up from nothing to an institution worth many thousands of dollars, the property at the least estimate being worth more than \$150,000. As stated before, he undertook this work with no money in view, trusting on his own efforts to raise it, and in his efforts to carry on the work and meet the pay rolls it became necessary to use the tithe fund (and he had previously been authorized by the assembly to use the money in one fund for another to save

interest), and this brought on dissatisfaction and finally the investigation. About ten years previous to this trouble he had inherited about \$2,000, which he invested in property in Cleveland, notwithstanding enormous sums had gone through his hands, he now possesses only the property which he purchased with the money given him, and which he found necessary to mortgage in order to send his son through the University of Tennessee. Had he been a defaulter and a dishonest man, it is indeed doubtful whether the church would have had the valuable property which he has created for it, and whether he would have been the poor man that he is.¹⁸

The judge summarized the entire proceedings concerning the audit in the following incisive terminology: "There is no question but what they have used this purported audit as a means to destroy his influence with many of his church members and to brand him as a dishonest man." This branding did not stick with many hundreds at this time who knew too well about the integrity of the man to believe the reports which had circulated freely.

E. Impeachment Sustained

Calmness and sanity did not prevail during those proceedings in the hot June month of 1923. Conspicuously missing was the guidance of the Holy Spirit and men had taken matters into their own hands and were doing the presumed business of the Church. In the feeling of ten of the twelve elders they were disciplining a malefactor who had wronged the Church. As a matter of fact, they were attempting to dismiss the one man who had put more into the Church than any other individual living at that day. He had given dedication, leadership, and unwavering effort to the cause of Christ and His Body. He was imperfect and never claimed to be free from mistakes of judgment and wisdom. That he was thoroughly honest and sincere in all he attempted to do has been vindicated beyond question.

In the stormy "June Council," A. J. Tomlinson proceeded to moderate the Council and charges were brought against M. S. Lemons, J. B. Ellis, and J. S. Llewellyn. Although some of the members of the Council were convinced that measures should have been taken against them, nothing was done about the charges. When matters relative to A. J. Tomlinson were brought up for consideration, he relinquished the gavel to a temporary chairman, Efford Haynes. In this Council, A. J. Tomlinson related an interesting illustration which explained his feeling about the proceedings:

I gave them a short story about an old mule that had fallen

into a well and the owner decided that since he was not worth the cost of getting him out he would fill up the well and let the mule stay in the bottom thereof. Accordingly he began to dump rocks and earth in on top of the mule, and he shook it off and got on top of it until he finally walked out at the top and began grazing as if nothing had happened. I told them to go ahead and cover me up and bruise me all they could, and in due time I would walk out at the top and go on grazing as if nothing had ever happened. And this statement has been fully verified and realized.¹⁹

Concerning the period of time succeeding the relinquishing of the gavel to Efford Haynes it is related that "for a week the hearing proceeded in order, during which Tomlinson freely spoke in his defense. He still could not justify his actions, so impeachment charges against him were filed with the Supreme Judges-Court of Justice, at 9:15 p.m., June 21, 1923.²⁰ On this very subject A. J. Tomlinson commented with a difference of opinion. In part he related the facts of the matter in this manner:

They selected another (Efford Haynes) and proceeded with the business behind closed doors in my absence. I was to go back to the chair later, but they finally dismissed the council in my absence and dispersed without giving me any more privileges. Other records will show the proceedings and results. I regard all of their proceedings as unjust and illegal and I have utterly ignored the whole thing except to take action as recorded elsewhere, but this was done because they became so corrupt in their proceedings and work.²¹

Under the rules and regulations set in motion by the Constitution, A. J. Tomlinson, S. O. Gillaspie, and George Brouayer were impeached and they were removed from office. Later, A. J. Tomlinson and his wife were disfellowshipped from the local church. Injustice had reigned supreme and men's minds were clouded so they could not comprehend the truth. Just as Paul had appealed to Rome so he could obtain justice in a heathen court and, therefore, refused to reappear before the Jewish Sanhedrin, A. J. Tomlinson could see the utter futility of appearing before the Supreme Judges of the Church of God. Several terms could be used concerning the action taken by A. J. Tomlinson and those who continued their allegiance to him. Perhaps a matter of semantics is involved but what happened has been termed "split," "schism," and disruption." F. J. Lee took issue with the term "split," no doubt thinking in terms of numbers. He commented on this issue as follows:

We don't consider that there has really been a split in the Church. We only had to deal with Tomlinson for his misdeeds, and also dealt with some others because they stood with him, but the Church of God is going on the same as ever before with its thousands of members and hundreds of preachers . . . After he was turned out, he, with several others that we have had to turn out, many of them for living crooked lives, went to another part of town and built a tabernacle and called themselves the Church of God . . . ²²

It is further related in taking issue with the term "split" that "The Church admitted to no split or division, since no appreciable number had been lost; and those who began the new tabernacle in Cleveland were mostly men who, for various reasons, were out of harmony with the Church."²³ The preceding statement attempts to link all who loved A. J. Tomlinson and worshiped with him as misfits and malcontents who were living according to the principles of the devil. This was not the case as history has proved. Whether or not any Church leaders admitted to a "schism," this is what occurred. A "schism" is "a split or division in an organized group or society, as the result of difference of opinion, of doctrine, etc."²⁴ The real reason for strong action being taken against A. J. Tomlinson was his stand against the Constitution and the direction toward a legislative body. The financial allegation against him was the charge used to dismiss him. It must be emphasized that even though the Council of Elders and the Supreme Judges convicted A. J. Tomlinson of charges leveled against him—HE WAS TOTALLY CLEARED (EXONERATED) OF ANY CHARGES OF THE MISUSE, MISMANAGEMENT, OR MISAPPROPRIATION OF FUNDS by the Civil Courts. Writers who do not emphasize this fact become guilty of the wrong of omission. A. J. Tomlinson stated his observations on the real reason for his dismissal from the Church of God: "It is not the financial situation that brought this thing about, but it came handy to use this as a means to get rid of me."²⁵

3. The Church Moves On

The Church of God (often referred to as Elders because of the ten elders who opposed A. J. Tomlinson) continued in strength. Only about five percent of the membership remained loyal to A. J. Tomlinson. It is related that "the Church suffered no great loss in numbers, but the disillusionment was a great blow."²⁶ As time went by, the idea of numbers became less and less a point of consideration. The main point during this period of history,

just as in the period of history being made today, is who continued the "faith that was once delivered to the saints"? The Church of God pointed to numbers, the fact of excluding A. J. Tomlinson for alleged misconduct, and the strength of the organizational structure. A. J. Tomlinson maintained that the Church of God had departed from the faith just as definitely as had the early Church when it abrogated theocratic government and added the creeds. In his sincere judgment the Church of God had adopted a Constitution which changed the basic structure of the church and thus had forfeited its claim to being the Bible Church. Rose A. Joy of the Bradley County Chancery Court put the matter in the following language:

The Llewellyn faction, who tried, convicted and expelled Tomlinson through the plan instituted by the constitution, expelled him only from their faction, that at the time had usurped the authority of the Church of God, but was powerless to destroy the rights of dissenting and protesting members of the original church by expulsion.²⁷

A. J. Tomlinson felt that the action taken against him was illegal and opposed to all Christian principles listed between the lids of the Bible.

A. Ecclesiastical Controversy

For a number of years the Church of God staunchly held to the title of being the Bible Church and fought desperately to keep the name unchanged and unchallenged. A. J. Tomlinson had been reduced from the position of General Overseer of over 21,000 members to General Overseer of several hundred. Time has dealt kindly with A. J. Tomlinson and the work he continued in the Church of God. After the death of F. J. Lee and many of the early leaders, the Church of God lost sight of the idea of being the Bible Church. At this time there is no claim to being the Bible Church, but that all sincere Christians compose the Church of God. The Church of God of Prophecy has not changed its stand from the stated reason for being listed in 1903. History has tended to vindicate thoroughly the position taken by A. J. Tomlinson in 1923. That he never claimed to be the originator of another Church faction is a matter of record. He, in simple terms, was continuing the work begun in 1903 when he took the covenant, "with the understanding that it is the Church of God."

Doctrinally, the Church of God departed from the faith with the adoption of the Constitution:

Since the passage of this Constitution we have not been the

Church of God. Note that this organization is to accept the New Testament only as interpreted by its officials. No one but the officials can decide or make laws. This is what caused the Revolutionary war: Taxation without representation.

My first impulse when I saw it was to take matters in hand in true revolutionary style and combat the thing, but more mature judgment decided on a better course. Another rein thrown over us by this ironclad rule: No church shall withdraw as a whole from this organization. This is meant to put a padlock on our mouth.²⁸

Civil courts were grossly unprepared to deal with points of doctrine which are of vital importance to the Church. The civil courts tend to look at the organizational structure and the numbers of followers involved in a particular controversy. Later actions in the civil courts in the long process of litigation proved the inadequacy of the law of the land to fathom the law of the Lord.

B. No Place to Quit

Truth has a way of rearing its head above falsehood and coming forth with a resilience which cannot be submerged. Wrong had been done to A. J. Tomlinson and he could have retired to private life, feeling sorry for himself and admitting bitter defeat. Quite easily he could have thrown up his hands in abject defeat and cried that he had given up the fight. Quite possibly he could have become bitter toward those who heaped charge upon charge on his person and secured his humiliation. The fact of the matter was he could find no place to quit. The prodding of the Holy Ghost, the power of Christ who rested in his life would not let him retire. God was not finished with His man and would extend his years to the passing of twenty summers before He would call him home to glory. At the age of fifty-eight, A. J. Tomlinson would pick up the fragments scattered by the storm and continue the work of building the Church of God. It is related that he was so tender and humble about those who had wronged him that he would permit no discussion of the problems or of individuals in his presence.²⁹ On the other hand, M. A. Tomlinson related that he attended the Church of God in Cleveland after the schism because many of his friends attended, and heard, with sadness, accusations made against his father.³⁰

C. The Call Council

After the terrible fallout from the storm which erupted in June and July of 1923, definite steps had to be taken to continue the work which had been started in the early period of the twentieth century. Therefore, the Call Council of the Church of

God was held in Chattanooga, Tennessee, August 8, 1923, in the home of H. A. Pressgrove. In this meeting A. J. Tomlinson related some pertinent points about the happenings during the preceding months. That the power of the Holy Ghost was present in the meeting was a definite fact. Plans were made to continue with full speed ahead in the work of winning the lost to Christ and moving forward as though nothing had happened to interrupt the work of the Lord. Consecration to God was a predominant theme in the meeting:

We do not want to say that we have sworn allegiance, but we want to stand even firmer. We want to do it with a stronger tie than a worldly oath. God will surely stand with us if we do this. If we do this the power of God will be with us as never before. Let us to this end have a prayer and consecrate ourselves anew to God.³¹

1. A Brief Review

A. J. Tomlinson gave a brief review of the history of the Church and confirmed that the Church of God of the Bible could not bind itself to any man-made creeds such as that presented in the constitution which had been adopted by the Church of God in 1921. He reiterated the actions passed upon in the first assembly and confirmed in others that "We do not consider ourselves a legislative or executive body but judicial only."³²

The General Overseer asked a rhetorical question: "Have we departed from the Church of God by the acceptance of this constitution?" This question was answered in the following manner:

Under Article 4 section 6, the members of the church created by this constitution no longer have the right to meet in annual assembly to consider and discuss with brotherly love all perplexing questions and settle them with mutual agreement in perfect harmony with Scriptures, but now the Official Assembly composed of such of the twelve elders, the seventy elders and the General Overseer as may meet in joint session (only a few need meet, even all the Official Assembly need not agree), shall designate the rule of government, teachings and principles for the local churches.

Are we now following in the way of the apostles and the early Church according to the government of God as set out in the blessed Bible or have we departed therefrom to accept a man-made creed? . . .

This is not the way of the Church of God. It takes us away from the Apostles' doctrines. It makes the "Official Assembly"

created by this constitution our lawmaker and guide instead of God and the Holy Ghost.

Shall we take this "Official Assembly" as our guardian and guide instead of the Holy Ghost?

No! WE MUST NOT! The Church of God can not fail.

The organized body created by the constitution is the General Assembly—It is not the Church of God.

By accepting this constitution we have discarded the Church of God and formed an organization known as the "General Assembly of the Churches of God." For the constitution says—Article 1 Sec. 1 "This organization is and shall be known as the General Assembly of the Church of God."

The error having been discovered, we are going to correct it. We are going back to the Church of God for we want to do things in God's way. We want the Holy Bible for our only rule of Faith and practice with the Holy Ghost for our guide. We are going back to the Church of God as it was before the Declaration approved at the fourteenth Assembly.³³

All present in the meeting were in agreement that the constitution must be officially abrogated and the Church returned to the principles of government approved by the Holy Ghost.

2. Momentous Decisions

There was no adequate place for an assembly in the year of 1923, but there still remained the question of whether or not one should be held. Faith prevailed and it was decided to have an Annual Assembly. Many were in the valley of decision concerning the Church and it was suggested that the Assembly was the place of decision for these souls.

Vacancies were announced for Ten Elders, Seven Judges, Directors of Bible Training School, Home Missionary Secretary, Foreign Missionary Secretary, and the Orphanage Committee. This action was taken because the preceding remained with the Church of God and continued under the rule of government presented in the constitution.

Plans were made for the continuation of a Church paper to present the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some discussion over the name of the paper continued for some time before a decision was reached. The name of the paper came about in the following manner:

It was announced that a brother, we failed to record his name, had a vision when we were praying over the name of the paper at another meeting time of the Council. He came forward and gave this testimony: When I was praying this morning I saw a vision which showed me the name of the paper in the most beautiful form that I have ever seen. The name appeared in arched form, THE WHITE WING MESSENGER, with a

beautiful dove bearing an olive branch in its claws just beneath the arch.³⁴

Staggered by what had happened only a few weeks earlier, the Church of God began to clear its head and renew the attack on the forces of evil. No one could deny the powerful working of the Holy Ghost who gave direction and inspiration to press the battle, pick up the pieces, remold into a position of unity, lift high the Bible standard, and declare that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church of God.

FOOTNOTES

¹David Smith, *The Life and Letters of St. Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, n.d.), pp. 321, 322.

²J. W. Shepard, *The Life and Letters of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), p. 317.

³A. J. Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God* (Cleveland: The White Wing Publishing House, 1969), p. 22.

⁴Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1955), p. 199.

⁵*Ibid.* p. 175.

⁶Bradley Chancery Court, "Church of God vs. A. J. Tomlinson," (July 3, 1925), p. 26.

⁷*Ibid.* p. 28.

⁸Bradley Chancery Court, *Loc. cit.*

⁹Conn, *op. cit.* p. 196.

¹⁰*Ibid.* p. 203.

¹¹F. F. Johnson, (interview at Tomlinson College, January, 1973).

¹²Conn, *op. cit.* p. 176.

¹³Conn, *Loc. cit.*

¹⁴*Ibid.* p. 178.

¹⁵Lillie Duggar, A. J. Tomlinson (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), p. 207.

¹⁶*Ibid.* p. 209.

¹⁷Bradley County Chancery Court, *op. cit.* pp. 23, 24

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Conn, *op. cit.* p. 177.

²¹Duggar, *op. cit.* pp. 209, 210.

²²Conn, *op. cit.* p. 188.

²³Conn, *Loc. cit.*

²⁴Joseph H. Friend and David B. Guralinik, Gen. Ed.s, *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1962), p. 1303.

²⁵Call Council of The Church of God (Chattanooga, Tennessee), August 8, 1923, p. 7.

²⁶Conn, *op. cit.* p. 180.

²⁷Bradley County Chancery Court, *op. cit.* p. 19.

²⁸Call Council of The Church of God, *op. cit.* p. 7.

²⁹Ina Mae Tomlinson, (related in class presentation at Tomlinson College, January, 1973).

³⁰M. A. Tomlinson (interview at Tomlinson College, January, 1973).

³¹Call Council of The Church of God, op. cit. p. 6.

³²Ibid. p. 9.

³³Ibid. p. 12.

³⁴Ibid. p. 23.

CHAPTER XI

COUNTING THE COST

1. Gathering Strength to Build

It is easy to stand and look at the ruins when disaster strikes and do nothing. In the midst of such tragedy the strength of a real man of God comes to the front. A. J. Tomlinson could have meekly looked over the ruins of his work and resigned himself to a life of reminiscence of what once had been. Conversely, he was renewed with vigor and the power of the Spirit to press forward to the tedious task of rebuilding. When the battle pressed hardest, he seemed to find a renewed strength to calmly and purposefully put the pieces together again.

Nehemiah looked at the battered walls of Jerusalem in sorrow and could not relax until the work was begun to rebuild. Tobias and Sanballat gave much trouble and the men working with Nehemiah had to work with one hand and hold their weapons in the other. The giant task was completed in the face of opposition. For many years after the stormy year of 1923, opposition was in abundance on every hand, but A. J. Tomlinson worked with exuberance in the face of all opposition. He had an inner strength powered by the Holy Spirit and the definite knowledge that he was guiltless of the false charges circulated against him and which he had to face every place he went.

Definite steps were taken during the Assembly in 1923 to move forward with the work. Land had been purchased on Central Avenue and a small tabernacle had been erected under the direction of A. J. Lawson. Services started on a high note with people gathering in to enjoy the presence of the Lord. It was remarkable that such unity and harmony prevailed during the Assembly when the air was filled with confusion and discontent among so many in the city of Cleveland, Tennessee. A large number of people did not have any understanding concerning the trouble which had come about after the Assembly of 1922.

There was honest lack of knowledge, and the Assembly of 1923 would provide an important impetus to the continuation of the work of the Church.

2. Answering The Challenge

The Annual Address in 1923 was delivered with power and determination. The General Overseer encouraged the people and challenged them to be determined to work without pay if necessary to get the job done for the Lord. In part he stated: "Although the odds may appear to be against us at present we have the assurance that we are in the right. This gives us great boldness and when we know we are right we do not care to give our lives in service or martyrdom or both."¹

A very strong point in the Annual Address was the reaffirmation of the abrogation of the Constitution adopted in 1921. He had come to know fully the detrimental nature of the instrument and wanted no part of it whatsoever. Another point brought out was the fact that in the past the elders had been appointed for life. He had come to see the ill-effects of their power and was grappling, in his mind, with whether or not that type of structure should be continued. Concerning the questions presented to him about the false charges of misappropriation, he stated:

I have been asked to make an explanation. I have thought I would not make any defense, but some want it. One reason I have not said anything before is because I was not afraid to wait for the truth to come out. Finally he brought out a copy of the Auditor's Report and proceeded to explain some things. A good many things have been said about me being a thief, he continued. This report was explained in the June Council. The auditor himself acknowledged that it was not an audit. Here the auditor says 'approximately' which is the first admission that it was not a complete audit.²

In an official manner the offices of the twelve elders were declared vacant by virtue of their refusal to renounce the Constitution and align themselves with the Church of God. A. J. Tomlinson was convinced that the Church of God had departed from the truth with the adoption of the Constitution and since it refused to accept the Bible totally as the "only rule of faith and practice," it had renounced its claim to being the Bible Church. Never did A. J. Tomlinson believe that the charge concerning financial matters was the primary reason for his being dealt with by the ten elders. Concerning the continuation

of the twelve elders as an appointive office the General Overseer stated:

I have been waiting to see if the Holy Ghost would help us out and I believe He is working. Now it can be said, It seems good to the Holy Ghost and to us. I look on all bishops and ordained deacons as elders. The Assembly is watching over me, and at any time may bring me to account, but I have never consented for the ten elders to bring me to account.

I am ready to give my sentence now. It is my decision that both bishops and deacons are Bible elders and so my sentence is that I recognize all ordained bishops and deacons as elders, and from these I shall proceed to select my counsellors and call them together any time they are needed but not to have them as a definite office above their fellows—the other elders.³

The Declaration which passed the Assembly in 1920 was officially repealed. These actions indicated that A. J. Tomlinson never considered the possibility that he had been disciplined by the Church, but rather he felt that the Church had departed from theocratic government and did not continue to represent the Church. In his feeling he was never deposed as General Overseer of the Church of God, and he was, in fact, simply continuing the work begun in 1903. So strongly did he feel that he was representing the Church of the Bible that he responded to a question concerning the receiving of mail in the following manner:

The question was asked, If a letter were addressed to The Church of God, Cleveland, Tenn., who would get it? "I would," Brother Tomlinson replied, "I have received this mail and shall continue."⁴

Since the Church of God (Elders) were much larger in number and felt that they truly were the continuation of the Church of God which received its impetus from the time of R. G. Spurling, and the group led by A. J. Tomlinson was comparatively small in number, friction was inevitable. Both the Church of God (Elders) and the Church of God (A. J. Tomlinson, General Overseer) were very firm and would not waver. Consequently, a collision was imminent.

3. Civil Court Action

On February 26, 1924, the Church of God obtained legal counsel and served an injunction on A. J. Tomlinson which read as follows:

(That the Church of God, A. J. Tomlinson, General Overseer) . . . desist and restrain from claiming or representing themselves to be connected in any way with the Church of God . . . from keeping and retaining any remittance or contribution sent to the Church of God; and from receiving any members . . . upon the claim or representation that the same is the original Church of God.⁵

A. J. Tomlinson was very busy traveling all over the country and to the islands of the Carribean preaching the message of the gospel of Christ. He viewed this court action, and all others, as an infringement upon his time in the work of the ministry and had no desire to enter the civil courts. He would have been perfectly satisfied to have been left alone to continue the work. However, he was compelled to appear before the courts and spend much time in preparation for the trials. At one time he was on the witness stand intermittently for eleven days giving testimony.

On April 15, 1925, the Chancery Court ruled against the Church of God, A. J. Tomlinson, General Overseer. In part, the Court decreed that the Church of God represented by F. J. Lee as General Overseer is the true and original Church of God, and as such is exclusively entitled to the name and properties of the said Church.⁶

The preceding decree was so stringent that A. J. Tomlinson could not accept the dictates, so he promptly appealed the decision to the Court of Appeals. Involved in the charges against him was the charge of misappropriating Church funds. This was a damaging charge which hung over him like a pall and had to be cleared. In this trial, the Court of Appeals ruled in favor of A. J. Tomlinson and made a lengthy address vindicating him completely of charges of misappropriation. On this point the Chancery Court had ruled that the evidence was not sufficient to sustain a charge of misuse of Church funds.

Just as A. J. Tomlinson would not accept the decision of the Chancery Court, F. J. Lee and the Church of God would not accept the decision of the Court of Appeals. They promptly appealed to the Supreme Court of Tennessee. Like a game of leapfrog the Supreme Court, in a lengthy decision, overruled the decision of the Court of Appeals and rendered a decision favorable to F. J. Lee and the Church of God. The judges of the Supreme Court were visibly moved in their decision by the fact of numbers. There was much more strength with F. J. Lee and the Church of God than with A. J. Tomlinson who received no property, did not control the paper, and had few ministers to

follow him. One important point presented in the Supreme Court was the following statement:

"We are still of the opinion that no fundamental question of faith or doctrine was involved, and that, in such matters the majority should rule."⁷

No doubt the judges were supremely happy to be clear of litigation concerning Church affairs. Those who studied the case perhaps did not comprehend the doctrinal significance in questions presented to them for clarification. They had no jurisdiction over the idea of "majority rule" or any type of rule for the Church of God. It was a sad state of affairs to be dragged through the courts over questions pertaining to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some conciliation between both groups would have saved much money and much heartache.

Briefly, the summary of the three trials revolve around the facts that A. J. Tomlinson was totally cleared of charges of misappropriation of Church funds. F. J. Lee and the Church of God were granted the use of the name Church of God. All property and publishing interests remained in the hands of the Church of God. This was not a complete solution and more trials would ensue.

4. A Struggle For Survival

Problems came heavily from every angle. On one hand the Church had to rebuild again and gain property to carry on the work of the Lord. On the other hand, there was hanging over the Church the problem of legal maneuvers which kept the people on edge, not knowing what would result from the proceedings. Troublesome times helped to bring out the best of the leadership in the Church during the middle twenties. A. J. Tomlinson had become accustomed to problems arising and was inured to them. When they arose he dealt with them in a spirit of love and humility. Most of the people in the Bahama Islands aligned themselves solidly with A. J. Tomlinson. They loved him and he loved them and had proved this many times on his visits with them. He wanted to be like them while he was there even to the point of dressing like them.

One problem related in his journal concerned Brother Eneas who made it clear that he would not accept the appointment of Brother Stanley as Overseer. When A. J. Tomlinson arrived for the services in the local church, Brother Eneas refused to let them have service, pointing out that he had total rule in the church of which he was pastor. A result of this action was that A. J. Tomlinson and others who went with him were compelled

to start service on a vacant lot on the corner. A. J. Tomlinson related part of the reason for the strong stand taken by Brother Eneas:

... Brother Eneas spoke against our convention because we held it in a theater where the Lord would not display His power. Then I had a good laugh at him and told him how the Lord honored us with His presence all the way through, thus proving we had the favor of God. He then spoke very slightly of the brethren from the out islands and informed me that they did not belong to his crowd of elders and deacons and his church. I quietly but boldly informed him that they were my people and the Lord was blessing us all together.⁸

The preceding problem was only one among many during those days when feeling ran high and there was need to take a bold stand for the Lee faction or A. J. Tomlinson. This period of history was often referred to as a "revolution." Many good people who did not understand all the arguments were caught in a crossfire and were inevitably hurt. That there was at that time honest Christian people on both sides of the issue just as there are today cannot be denied.

The Fourteenth Annual Address was written in power. Almost every statement hurls out a challenge to battle for the Lord in a greater measure than ever before. There was a different tenor in the words spoken during this time. There was a deep, determined fervor which filled the thoughts and transferred themselves to paper in the mind of the General Overseer. No recommendations were presented in the address but the thought was propounded that the Church should "go forward on the trail we have struck."⁹ Sentence after sentence seemed to build to a tremendous climax with these words sparking the message: "Courage, did you say, with a thousand things hurled against you to defame your name and to disgrace your family? Yes sir, such wireworking, slander and opposition only serves as a stimulant."¹⁰ Courage was displayed in abundance in those days insomuch that the General Overseer could state: "I feel right now like I could run through a troop, leap over a wall and dash down the streets shouting victory, victory for my Lord."¹¹

With the fervency of the Spirit and trust in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ there could be no defeat. Truth may take some time to emerge to the forefront, but truth would ultimately win in the face of the most devastating and discouraging odds. Indecision in the hearts of many was beginning to wear itself out and sincere Christians were determined to center their attacks on the forces of evil instead of on their fellow man.

5. Bold Preaching

The Annual Address preached in 1925 was one of outstanding boldness which was written under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. A number of subjects were covered and could be classified as instructional, doctrinal, and inspirational. This was a time when the very best efforts were needed to press forth with the message of the Lord Jesus Christ. There was much dissension with charges being leveled against the Church and against individuals. Some quotations used in the message were thought-provoking and challenging. Henry Ward Beecher stated: "It makes no difference where I came from if I am not going anywhere."¹² This statement was made in relation to the battle going on concerning evolution and the attacks on the Bible.

The Word of God must be held up at all times as the only rule of faith and practice. This was a primary thought in the opening remarks by the General Overseer. A. J. Tomlinson felt that many who were associated with the Church of God wanted to stop him in all his work for the Lord. He stated: "Opposition shows that somebody is afraid of us and therefore they want to stop us."¹³

A warning was given by the General Overseer concerning the danger of doing business for God in a dry, formal way, and too much reliance on messages and interpretations of tongues. Perhaps both these tendencies were in abundance during and before this time. The General Overseer pointed out that there is no record in the early Church of doing business by the method of tongues and interpretations. No doubt these words fell quite hard on those who had gone to an extreme in this direction.

There was no time for idleness in the gigantic work of the Lord. This point was made in concise yet powerful terms by the following statements:

But God does not anoint people while they are idle. The anointing comes while in action. A man that is always afraid to make a move for fear he will make a mistake never does anything. I'd rather see a man try and fail a dozen times and then succeed than to see a man never try because he is afraid he will fail.¹⁴

Work was necessary even before the thought of remuneration for the labor. The General Overseer related how he would not ask for his expense even to get to a place where he was called out of fear that he would not do an adequate job in his preaching. In his thinking when the work was done with power and done in the correct manner the finance would come. He related that

when he came home many times with very little financial benefits it was because it was "poor preach and poor pay."¹⁵

On the subject of interfering with the work of others the message waxed eloquent. There was a mote-hunting spirit among many at that time just as there has been since the beginning of the human race. This spirit of criticism was put in its proper focus in the following manner:

We are naturally inclined to criticize and pass judgment. The mote-hunting spirit is not dead yet. And I wish to say this kindly—that I find a tendency among some of our people to want to criticize and pass a judgment without knowing the full particulars concerning a matter . . . Every preacher has his own individuality and cannot afford to try to be another person—he must just be himself.¹⁶

There were those who had taken on the nature of extreme formality. While the General Overseer recognized the need for every kind of service, he could not condone the continued lack of spirituality. Some were very quick to state that someone was in the "flesh" when he was exercised by the Holy Spirit. Even the tendency toward criticism in this direction served to dampen the spirit of many who were at one time very spiritual. To pour water upon the fire of the Spirit was much worse than pouring on the oil at this time. It concerned the General Overseer when people could not rejoice in the power of the Holy Spirit. He stated on this subject: "A preacher said, 'they bother me when they shout,' but I said they come nearer bothering me if they don't shout."¹⁷ His feelings concerning spirituality were conveyed without question. A dry church would cause the Spirit to depart, while sincere souls were searching for the power of God.

6. Pressing Questions

In 1925 there was a complete equating of physical appearance with salvation. Many questions came up which ceased to be an issue in the years ahead, but they were important to those who at this time were so interested in finding the perfect will of God in every course of conduct. Questions were asked concerning working in a bottling company, drinking coffee or pop, and chewing gum. A. J. Tomlinson was not stern on these issues but felt at that time that members should be counseled in love. He stated:

My opinion is that such things are wrong. But in dealing with such cases we should not use harshness or try to throw

them out of the Church, but advise in the right spirit that it is not good for God's people to do such things.¹⁸

In this time of economic deprivation few luxuries were known and even if they were there was little money to spend on them. Perhaps this tempered the thinking on items which could just as well be done without. One question which obviously centered around the Southeastern section of the country among Caucasians was that concerning "bobbed" or short hair. Some considered this a point of pride and symbolic of falling into the throes of sin. A. J. Tomlinson had traveled in many parts of the country and to several islands of the Carribean. He was well aware of the fact that the question could not be applied that all have long hair. Some races of people could not grow hair longer than one inch. How gently and filled with wisdom he dealt with the issue! It was not his intension to make light of any sincere question. Following is the method he used to deal with the problem:

I have not heard much about bobbed hair where I have been and do not know whether our people are disturbed about the matter much or not. I don't know that we should take up such matters and bother with them very much. Most of our women wear long hair. I do not think this subject need to concern us very much as there is but little in the Bible about it. Paul says in regard to long and short hair that "if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the Churches of God" (1 Cor. 11:16). Another translation uses the word censorious, that is, if any man go to censuring women about the matter he should be informed that the Church has no special custom about hair As for myself I prefer that our women wear long hair, but do not regard it as a sin if she cut it off and I'm sure that bobbed hair should not be a test of membership.¹⁹

The nettlesome question of tobacco came to the front again in 1925. It seemed to unsettle the General Overseer for the question to continue to arise because he felt it gave more problem than alcoholic beverages. A strong feeling prevailed that it was not in harmony with the Church to even rent a barn for the storage of tobacco. Regardless of whether a person raised tobacco or had it stored in his barn, he was not to be dealt with by the Church before his case could be reviewed by the State and General Overseer. An atmosphere was created for the strict observing of the conduct of each other. Perhaps this spirit prompted the ideas presented by the General Overseer in his Annual Address concerning mote-hunting.

7. Not A Moment to Lose

Too much time had already been lost in countless hours of litigation and controversy which led to discontent and disharmony. It was distressing to A. J. Tomlinson to enter any type of controversy. His mind was absorbed in building the Church of God and seeing it reach its full potential of power. The General Overseer had traveled more than twenty thousand miles in 1926 in behalf of the work of the Church. He stated concerning his travels:

During the past Assembly year I traveled twenty thousand, one hundred and sixty-one miles. The modes of travel have been varied, viz.: railroad, steamship, automobile, autobus, taxi, rowboat, gasoline launch, trolley car, and on my two feet.²⁰

The General Overseer was convinced of the fact that there could be no retreat for the Church of God. To emphasize this point he related an incident concerning Napoleon Bonaparte, whom he did not commend for his overweening ambition, but commended for his courage and determination. Napoleon's forces were losing the battle of Marengo and the General asked his drummer boy to beat a retreat. The young boy replied: "Sir I do not know how to beat a retreat . . . (but) I can beat a charge that will make the dead fall into line."²¹ That battle was won that day because the charge meant victory. This could be applicable to the period of church history which demanded moving forward under stress.

There was nowhere for the Church to go but forward to victory even though much had been done to dull the progress. A. J. Tomlinson related his feeling on the happenings during the early part of the 1920's. He stated the conditions in these terms:

We have lost much good time during this four-year period of conflict. I mean by this that the disruption in the Church has hindered our progress, and our plans and models were all demolished, so that we are four years behind what we could have been had we been permitted to continue without any interruption. We have been busy and worked hard, but if we could have put our work on top of what it was in the year 1921 where would it have been today?

But without raising any complaint or speaking evil of any man, it is now up to us to awake, and arise, and put on strength, tighten our tensions and work hard enough and fast enough to redeem the time and get the same amount of work done that would have been done, and finish up the job by the time the contract calls for.²²

8. The Pull And Push Year, 1927

In a New Year's message in the *White Wing Messenger*, the General Overseer seemed to sense the tremendous decisions of the coming year. Members would have to become settled and make their firm decision to stand for the gospel of Christ. As A. J. Tomlinson put it: "Decisions will be made that will mean heaven or hell."²³ Just as Elijah brought the prophets of Baal to a decision, every individual must reach a point of decision concerning his experience with the Lord. That A. J. Tomlinson had fully committed himself to the work of pushing and pulling for the Lord is evidenced by these statements:

My very bones tingle with delight. My whole being is thrilled as this message pours forth, my head shakes, my fingers tingle, my breathing is broad and deep . . . Surely there is life-giving power back of this somewhere. I hope it will strike every one of you and quicken you into a 1927 dose of quickening power that you can give to others the whole year through.²⁴

This tingle and delight in the work of the Lord remained with the General Overseer through the year and translated itself into positive power in the Assembly of 1927. One important item which seemed to dominate the thinking in 1927 was the subject of reporting. This was a difficult matter to convey to the ministers at this time. There was need to remain up-to-date concerning the overall work and a regular report would help both the ministers and the entire church know the extent of the progress or lack of progress.

Reporting was not a compulsory issue. Although Scripture was used to point out how a good report could be beneficial, it was not presented in the form of an ultimatum for all to observe. Rather, the subject was presented with the aim in view of helping each one see the necessity and do it willingly. Concerning this point the statement was made in this way: "The grace dispensation spirit carries with it that free, glad, good will experience that makes one do the things that are right of one's own choice, and free good will without being forced by the fear of some severe penalty."²⁵

9. Divorce And Remarriage

The subject of fornication had been dealt with in full in the Annual Address in 1922. This seemed to be the primary point which placed a stumbling block to reaching a definite conclusion on the matter. In practice the Church had been following

the biblical pattern on the question of divorce and remarriage. Even at this time, most of the churches were accepting "the innocent party" into their churches.

It was a definite decision by the Church of God, A. J. Tomlinson General Overseer, to reject anyone for membership who had more than one living companion, unless it was for the cause of fornication (having married a person who had been married, whose wife or husband was still living). Therefore, the principle had to be upheld—one man for one woman for one lifetime. This idea was placed in the teachings made prominent, becoming number twenty-nine. Following is the statement made concerning the question:

The General Overseer asked the Assembly about adding the teaching concerning the divorce and remarriage to the teachings made prominent. He stated that the matter had been overlooked for three or four years. The Assembly gave orders to have this added to the list of teachings made prominent.²⁶

This last teaching completed the list of prominent doctrines adhered to by the Church of God of Prophecy. No necessity has been seen to the present of adding to the list, but no statement has ever been issued to reject the possibility in view of additional light on the Scriptures. A constant guiding principle is the "acceptance of the whole Bible rightly divided."

FOOTNOTES

¹Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual Assembly of The Church of God, (Historical Annual Addresses, Annual Address excerpt), p. 200.

²Ibid. p. 13.

³Ibid. p. 21.

⁴Call Council of The Church of God (Chattanooga, Tennessee), August 8, 1923, p. 7.

⁵Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army Moves The Church of God* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1955), p. 189.

⁶Ibid. p. 190.

⁷Volume of Supreme Court Opinions, 1927, p. 91.

⁸Lillie Dugger, *A. J. Tomlinson* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), p. 249.

⁹*Historical Annual Addresses*, Vol. I, Perry E. Gillum, Comp. (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1970), p. 233.

¹⁰Ibid. p. 240.

¹¹*Historical Annual Addresses*, Loc. cit.

¹²Ibid. p. 243.

¹³Ibid. p. 250.

¹⁴Ibid. p. 258.

¹⁵Ibid. p. 259.

¹⁶Ibid. p. 262.

¹⁷Ibid. p. 268.

¹⁸*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes* (1906-1949) (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, n. d.), p. 164.

¹⁹*Cyclopedic Index*, Loc. cit.

²⁰*Historical Annual Addresses*, op. cit. p. 281.

²¹Ibid. p. 295.

²²Ibid. p. 297.

²³Duggar, op. cit. p. 291.

²⁴A. J. Tomlinson, (New Year's message) *White Wing Messenger*, January 1, 1927, (Cleveland: The White Wing Publishing House).

²⁵*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes* (1906-1949), op. cit. p. 172.

²⁶Ibid. p. 174.

CHAPTER XII

GO FORWARD

1. Prayer Brings Results

Every year was a year of prayer because the Church could not make progress without fervent prayer. From the humble beginnings when the first Assembly was held within the diameter of only a few dozen feet with twenty-one individuals present to enjoy the blessings of God, the Church had literally advanced on their knees. In 1928 there seemed an urgency to resort to prayer as never before. It seemed that the General Overseer was driven to advance to greater heights in the work of God on his knees before God. This spirit of prayer—fervent, earnest seeking of the will of God—must be transferred to every member of the Church of God.

If the Church could unite together in prayer for the advancement of the Great Commission there would be no force which would prevail against such endeavor. A. J. Tomlinson sought to convey his message to every member of the Church through the means of the printed word as well as the fervent messages preached from the pulpit. With such earnest pleading for the guidance of the power of God, the Church was compelled to move into areas of unexplored greatness. There would be a new drive to organize for the work of the gospel. God would lead His servants into fresh ideas which would bring a greater unity to all the people.

The theme of prayer prevailed in the New Year's Message to the entire Church. The General Overseer made an impassioned plea for prayer:

Beloved, let us really get this load and by much prayer and supplication and real agonizing prevailing prayer that will move God and the people to action. Let us get so desperately in earnest in prayer that the very atmosphere about us will be one continuous breath of prayer.¹

In the reasoning of the General Overseer the Church of God could claim the same power the prophets of old enjoyed with

Him. Jacob prayed until he prevailed with God and won the blessing. Until the Church of God in the unity of the Spirit reached the point of prevailing prayer, success would be minimal. Members needed to understand the great power which can only come through the prayer of faith. No man of the entire Bible who accomplished great things for God did so without fervent prayer. The power to preach, to teach, to heal the sick, to comfort the brokenhearted, to build up the Body of Christ would come through the power of prayer. In his second message the General Overseer continued his theme on the power of prayer:

So sure am I that God has prompted us to call for a year of prayer that I feel the destiny of the lost around us is laid at our feet. We can pass lightly over this and fail, or we can enter into it with earnestness and humility and be successful in our efforts to save the lost.²

With this deep desire to see men saved and the work of the Lord advance, the mood and drive for the year 1928 was set. This year would be a momentous one for the Church of God. Years in the future, thousands would look back on that year and proclaim that it was one of tremendous groundwork for progress. Even in the month of May the General Overseer continued to press the need for white-heated prayers: "Kindle up the fire and fan it to a white-heated glow by your prayers and bone burning zeal. Amen!"³

There is hardly any need to try to keep up with all the travels of the General Overseer during the year 1928. It seemed he was everywhere preaching, teaching, doing the business of the Church of God. Convention after convention heard his urgent preaching and thrilled with him as he told of certain victory for the Church. That he was convinced that there was nothing ahead but victory for the Church of God depicted itself in every message. It did not concern him that multitudes were following all sorts of doctrines yet claiming all the time to be reading from the same Bible and praying to the same God. He steadfastly believed the message of the Great Commission was given to the Church of God and the Church would be compelled to carry this message of love and unity to the entire earth. What God had promised, He would perform. With this thought prevailing in the mind of the General Overseer he could generate enthusiasm and zeal in the breast of all who heard him. Moreover, he led the way in the work of the Lord, disdaining the growing exhaustion

and somehow reaching back for an added burst of energy to deliver a telling blow for the Kingdom of God and the Church of God. He wrote concerning his physical condition:

I am continually on the move, scarcely have time to sleep and then can't fill all the calls, and keep my office work going. I preached thirty-two sermons in April. I received word last week that the court had dismissed the charges that were against me of shortage in the notorious lawsuit that has been on since February 26, 1924, more than four years.⁴

The continual friction resulting from the lawsuits took much time and energy from the physical stamina of the General Overseer. His viewpoint was to continue to preach the doctrine of the Church of God without any hindrance. However, according to his own words, civil war broke out in 1923 and the battle was continuing. It would take time to heal old wounds and bind up the hurt of those who had suffered in the struggle, but the General Overseer was determined to continue what he knew to be the right course of action. He had traveled too far in the race to quit or turn back so he was compelled by the Holy Spirit to press forward to total and complete victory. More trials and more arrests would come, but the year of 1928 was one of laying groundwork for progress.

2. The Eighteenth Annual Address

Perhaps tape recorders were not present in that year when the radio was just beginning to make its presence felt, but what a joy it would have been for those present to have had the opportunity to continue to taste the message which had been delivered with such eloquence before the Annual Assembly in 1928. This message was one of power, determination, and challenge. The Church of God must move forward and seek new ways of accomplishing the task given it by the Lord Jesus Christ. A. J. Tomlinson found strength in history concerning Christopher Columbus who found a new land and opened up a new area for those seeking independence and hope. However, the story of Columbus was not one which depicted a man living a life of ease and dreaming of things which would be. He did not content himself to merely crouch over his charts and graphs and hope for a new journey. He had to put into practical use the knowledge which he had gained from his study. In the same way the Church of God would need to put into practice the things learned in the past. The Church would need to review the charts

listed in the Word of God and then act on the knowledge learned. This would demand a doing of the work rather than being content with the knowledge and doing nothing. Definite programs would need to be implemented to move the Church in the direction of positive action.

Christopher Columbus had to face many different kinds of ordeals before his ship landed safely on the soil of the New World. Many times he could have turned back and in his turning back have failed to receive the benefits of victory. When his men were starving and wanted to turn back, he commanded the ship to "Sail On." When the men threatened to mutiny and kill all aboard, Columbus sternly stated: "Sail On." His strength saved the day and saved history from a sad tale of cowardice in the midst of trouble. Sailing on the rough sea would cause the heart to pound, it would cause the spirit in man to shrink in terror, but there was one who could see the shores of another land—glorious in its appearance. Columbus was driven with this hope and this desire.

The Church of God is analogous to a ship sailing over troubled waters. Tossing up and down, side to side, buffeted by the winds and the storms of opposition. In a time of weakness there were those who would say "turn back." However, strong men were at the helm and could not relinquish the hold on the helm. Jesus Christ of Nazareth set the ship on course and things have happened to draw it off course, but the ship is still sailing. The gates of hell could not prevail against it and no storm could sink her. Jesus Christ had decreed that the ship must "Sail On," it must "Sail On" until it reaches the portals of heaven with its cargo of saints who have made themselves "white in the blood of the Lamb." This vision and this hope make all difficulties seem small and all trouble seem temporary. The Lord Jesus Christ is at the helm and He has charted the course all the way to heaven. He walked the stormy Sea of Galilee and told the trembling fishermen: "... It is I; be not afraid," (John 6:20). Total confidence in Christ means total victory over any storm concocted by the devil.

3. God's Business Is Big Business

For a period of five years, the Church sought to get back on course and reconstruct from shambles to a positive program. Carefully and tediously, the work was carried on with firm determination that no force would be able to deter the Church of God from its course. During the five-year period, 1923 through 1928, there were the problems of litigation and the construction

of local churches as well as the construction of a large tabernacle for the Annual Assemblies. Intermingled with these problems was the constant need to communicate with those who were spread abroad over the states. The General Overseer made himself available to as many people as possible while continuing to direct the entire Church program at headquarters.

A. J. Tomlinson was thrilled by the Scripture passage found in 1 Corinthians 12:28: "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." Two of the preceding thoughts were of particular interest to him—"helps" or helpers and "governments." That the Church of God was in need at this time of reaching out into a far greater ministry was a fact realized by all. With this thought in mind, the General Overseer proposed a "Big Business Program" for the Church. His plan may seem very infinitesimal in the eyes of businessmen, but he had a definite inspiration of the consequences which would result in launching the program.

Three new programs came into being in 1928—the Womens Missionary Band, the Victory Leaders Band, and the State Overseer's Pay Association. These organizations came under the category of "helps," or helpers. They would help to put the message of Christ and the Church across the world. In the beginning these organizations would start in a very inauspicious manner but they would gain momentum as time passed. In the viewpoint of the General Overseer each church would be a headquarters from which workers would go out into all areas of the country. In the words of the General Overseer: "The way to keep up life and have it constantly renewed and blazing is to reach out after new people. A live church is a missionary church and a missionary church is a live church."⁵

In brief, the Womens Missionary Band would primarily be composed of women who would be charged with the zeal of getting the message of missions to people of the entire world. They would band together in prayer, unity of the Spirit, and in finance-raising efforts to propagate the gospel of Jesus Christ. All women would be eligible for membership in the missionary band. The proposal for the initiation of the Womens Missionary Band was placed in these words:

We, therefore, make the following suggestion:

1. That each church organize a Church of God Women's Missionary Band, with the leader and an assistant leader, selected by the church and approved by the pastor, with the titles of missionary leader and assistant missionary leader.

2. All women are eligible for membership in this Missionary Band.
3. The purpose of this band would be to stimulate and solicit missionary funds, clothing, etc., for Home and Foreign Missions, all funds and material to be distributed through the local church treasurer to the proper State Treasurer and 25 per cent of the missionary funds to headquarters, as recommended by Missionary Committee No. 5.
4. This Women's Missionary Band will assist the pastor in providing suitable methods of increasing the missionary offering on the second Sunday of each month, and in such other ways as may seem good to the band.⁶

No organization in the Church of God was destined to be of more dynamic impact to the propagation of the gospel than this band with its humble beginning. The first General Missionary Secretary was Clara Mabe from Virginia, who served for a period of one year in the capacity without any financial remuneration.

That the State Overseers were in need of more financial assistance to continue the work of the Lord in each state became more evident as the years passed. During the period of the latter 20's and early 30's, churches were very few in number and the State Overseers did much work in new fields as well as to manage the churches which were already in operation. Some relief could be realized by means of the State Overseer's Pay Association which would be managed through the medium of the band offerings from each meeting of the small group. This coupled with the offering on each fourth Sunday would help bring the necessary finance to keep the State Overseers on the field of labor.

The Victory Leaders Band would be composed of young people, male and female, between the ages of 16 and 30. While some revisions of age have come about over the years with married persons also making up the band, it has not changed its immediate purpose:

We believe that our Young People could be far happier in the service of the Lord, of far greater value to the work of the Church and themselves rooted and grounded in the Church, if they were organized into bands, for prayer, for Bible study, for Christian service.⁷

The youth of the Church have been responsible for the finance of publishing much of the gospel for the people of the world. Finance raised by the young people of the Church has done

immeasurable preaching and teaching through the means of the printed word. This organization started in a dynamic manner and has continued its momentum through the years.

Not only did these "helps," or helpers provide for a greater thrust in the church to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Church of God, but they also became "governments within government." Each organization had its own leader, assistant leader and other officers, but it was, nevertheless, under the government of the local church and the General Church. With the initiation of these primary organizations within the Church, definite plans were laid for the progress of the church in a greater measure than was known to this time. It would take some time to refine the program so each one would work smoothly, but the years ahead would prove the wisdom of their initiation.

4. Tithing

Since the inception of the tithing system, it had proved to be a blessing to individuals and to the financial structure of the Church. For many years the question continued to present itself concerning those who would not pay their tithes into the treasury of the local churches. It was a sad fact revealed by the General Overseer that despite the fact of preaching on the subject for many years and the firm stand of the Church concerning the subject, perhaps less than twenty-five percent of the membership tithed their income. There were those who were very firm on the question, feeling that those who rejected strict tithing should be dealt with firmly by the Church. The General Overseer did not desire to approach the question in an attitude of retribution toward those who did not tithe. Rather he desired to present the positive attitude concerning the joy which would come to those who practiced tithing. As A. J. Tomlinson put it:

Observation proves to me that the financial burdens fall upon less than half of our members. I am afraid that a checking up of all of our members would reveal the sad fact that less than twenty-five percent of our members pay tithes

Now the problem before us is how to get them into the channel of blessing—how to get them to pay tithe and offerings, too. We have learned that calling them robbers and thieves and scorning and scolding and trying to force them does not do it. Preaching this part of the teaching in a good, gentle, loving way helps them to see it, and our people have

been improving very nicely for years—that is, members are falling in line along and along.⁸

This general principle concerning the tithing of income has not changed through the years. Although some have abused the principle presented by the General Overseer, this remains the standing of the Church of God on the subject.

5. The Year of Interest, Enthusiasm, and Persecution—1929

Quite a large segment of time was given during the year 1929 to the purpose of further explanations concerning the business program launched in the preceding year. Great expectations were seen for the advancement of the Church through the means of these organizations. There was a noticeable increase in interest during the year and this was in such evidence that the General Overseer remarked: "In all of my twenty-four years of experience with these annual feasts, I do not think I ever witnessed quite so much interest and enthusiasm beforehand as this year."⁹ There was a spirit of building prevailing in the minds of the people. This spirit needed further encouragement and, indeed, it received encouragement by the General Overseer. That he wanted no negative reactions and no divisiveness is evidenced by the following statements:

And this building program is what I want to emphasize—that is, I want us to give our time and strength to building and shining more than to wrecking and destroying. And this kind of work and progress makes us happy.¹⁰

Even though the General Overseer was completely engrossed with the fact of building for progress, there would come persecution in its various forms to reach out its tentacles to discourage. That there was much ill-feeling concerning the name of the Church was evidenced by the fact of court actions initiated against the Church of God, A. J. Tomlinson General Overseer. Therefore, it seemed very strange during this year that opposites would dwell together—enthusiasm, interest, and persecution. However, a close reading of the Scripture reveals that this has been the pattern throughout the centuries.

Seeking to offset the impending court actions, the General Assembly sought to circumvent the issue by passing a resolution concerning the name of the Church. The resolution read in part:

Therefore, be it resolved first, that this General Assembly

now in session September 11-17, 1929, expressly states that we are willing and really desire to distinguish ourselves from said complainant church by the use of the words Church of God over which A. J. Tomlinson is Overseer, or preferably Church of God, A. J. Tomlinson General Overseer as a shorter term, in our business necessary to prevent any confusion and to keep from deceiving the public in any wise.¹¹

The preceding resolution came as a reaction against the court-decreed name given to the Church as "Tomlinson Church of God." It is stated that "On April 8, 1929, Tomlinson and his group adopted the name Tomlinson Church of God."¹² In no way can the term "adopted" be used concerning the action taken by the court. This prefix before the name of the Church was a bitter piece of legislation under which the Church was unwilling to labor.

A. J. Tomlinson, in numerous statements, made it clear that he had no church. It was not he who had started the Church and, therefore, he could not condone any inference that he had a church of which he could claim ownership. This idea he put very succinctly and forcefully in the following statements:

No, I did not start this institution. I was not its founder. Its founder was the Man that spake as never man spake—He that said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." I only found that which had already been built many centuries before. Others were also engaged with me in the search. Its rules and laws were discovered written in the Bible. The only thing we had to do was to apply them to ourselves and submit to them, which we did. And additional light and knowledge have been imparted to us year after year until many of us feel that the sun is now almost at high noon, because the view is so clear and beautiful.¹³

Rather than diminish the drive of the Church of God, it seemed that the court cases merely augmented the resolution of the membership. A. J. Tomlinson did not let interference in any form dampen his ardor for the work of the gospel. Always he was in a winning attitude, and this exuberance of spirit transmitted itself to others. Every year the Church was undergoing a period of growth. The General Overseer encouraged in every message the idea that victory would come with the accompanying works and faith. Sometimes every individual would not know the exact cause of an order but would be compelled to obey out of obedience to the command. The illustration was given concerning an order to a group of soldiers to fire their weapons into the ground. To their dismay a cloud of dust

was all they achieved for their obedience, but this was what was needed because while the dust was in the air the group was allowed to escape uninjured.

6. Issues and Answers, 1929-1933

Out of extreme zeal there were those inevitable few who went beyond the bounds of the General Assembly and exercised their own judgment on different matters. Perhaps there was a desire to perfect the Church in a short period of time and even extend beyond the Work of God Himself. For this reason there were questions which would present themselves before the General Assembly and demand an answer. For example, the Church of God had taught and practiced for years that its membership should not wear gold for ornament. Some were persisting in the wearing of wedding bands in the face of a definite teaching against the practice. Undoubtedly there were many who would purge the Church from those who would not agree to discontinue this.

During the Assembly of 1929, the committee and A. J. Tomlinson addressed themselves to the question in a rather conciliatory tone:

What are we going to do about our good women wearing their wedding rings? Our people are stumbling over this because we teach against it in our minutes. In our state we are having lots of complaint.

The subject was discussed at some length, and the sentiment was quite strong against the wearing of rings, but several stated they did not favor making it a test of membership. At the close of the discussion the General Overseer stated that it resulted about like similar discussions of the subject had in the past, so unless an agreement could be reached it would remain as it is.¹⁴

The preceding statement on this issue remains basically unchanged to the present time. Those who do not measure to the complete standard are taught until they can understand and agree to do what is right on their own volition. While the teachings made prominent in the Church of God number twenty-nine, the majority are not used as means of disciplinary action by the local church. Prevailing in the thinking of the Church of God is that members should be taught until they can come to complete understanding of the Scripture on every point of doctrine.

Regardless of the questions asked and the response given to

them, the General Overseer always wanted love and understanding to prevail. Moreover, he wanted to know that a question was settled according to the will of the Holy Spirit. During the questioning in 1930—Twenty-Fifth Annual Assembly—on the subject of when the treasurer should close his books, a demanding spirit was used. The General Overseer recognized the spirit as the same one used during the 1922 fiasco. That this spirit could not continue was a definite fact and the General Overseer reacted quickly:

Before the business was taken up there was a call for prayer by the General Overseer who stated that the wrong spirit is trying to get into the Assembly. Volumes of prayer were offered, interspersed with music and short talks and exhortations by the General Overseer. This fight against wicked spirits continued for an hour or more. The General Overseer declared we must have the victory so we can go on with our work with liberty and freedom. The climax was reached in a manifestation that laid Brother Gillaspie on the floor as dead as if to show that the spirit that had undertaken to interfere in the Assembly work would be crushed and buried. Much prayer was made for those who had allowed the wrong spirit to dominate them. General Overseer stated that the same spirit that wrought havoc in 1922 had undertaken to work in this Assembly, but he was determined it should be defeated this time. It was pretty well subdued after much prayer and the pleading of the blood until the business could be resumed.¹⁵

Not all questions could be answered to the satisfaction of all. Following is an example: When Jesus catches away His Bride will all children under the age of accountability be caught away, too? The General Overseer answered the question in the following manner: "I will tell you when we get over. That is going too far for me. If anybody else knows I will let you answer, but I can't."¹⁶ Undoubtedly, there had been much discussion among the members concerning those who would compose the Bride of Christ. Notice the following question and answer concerning this point:

Q. Will the bride of Christ consist of all the Church of God or only a part? If only a part, what part is that?

A. I tell you what I believe you had better do—I believe you had better leave that with the Bride and Bride-groom. The Bride-groom knows who He wants, and I don't think I will tell it. I will say, however, that there are several Scriptures that indicate that not all the Church will be the Bride, and there are

also some that makes it look like they are all the Bride. And I am not far enough along to say. I have decided to talk about it like the Bible says. He is going to present It to Himself a glorious Church, and that is the whole Church.¹⁷

Never did the General Overseer presume to have the answer to every question. He was willing to leave the membership with an attitude of waiting for further knowledge rather than to lead them in a direction which, to him, was unclear. Until the Church of God has the full light on every point of Scripture, the General Overseer did not commit himself to a specific definition. There were those who would compel him to make a statement, but always he was determined not to do so until he could make a statement with the backing of Scripture. When there was no Scriptural authority, he answered according to the wisdom given him by the Lord.

The full restoration of the gifts of the Spirit to the Church of God was a Bible teaching accepted by the Church from its early beginnings. A question came to the front concerning the gift of knowledge. This question was answered in the following manner:

We have had all the gifts manifested in the Church. Some people think, when they get a gift it is like putting a gift in their pocket and using it when they get ready. But these gifts are to be used when the Spirit of God comes upon a person and manifests that gift. There is a gift of the word of knowledge. This word of knowledge is manifested when one is operated under the anointing in imparting sacred truth. Sometimes when I have been giving out instructions under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost I have imparted knowledge that I never knew before, and proved it by the Bible. That is what I call the manifestation of this gift. Others have had similar experiences.¹⁸

7. Lifting Up the Ensign

Studious perusal must be given to the design of a flag for any nation. Careful study of how the flag of a nation was adopted will uncover details which point to a whole body of thought. The nation seeks to have in its design the primary thoughts it wishes to convey to all the world. The design will show what the nation considers to be of prime importance. While the Church of God never claimed to be a nation as compared to the governments of the world, it is a government under God. Therefore, in this context thought was given to the preparation of an ensign which would point out to the entire world the

primary thoughts motivating the Church of God.

Honor must be given to the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Lord Jesus Christ. There must be honor given to His Person, His sacrifice on Calvary, and His purchasing of the Church of God. Notice must be given to the world-wide mission of the Church of God to carry the Great Commission to the entire world. Colors must be used in the design which would show the purity of the gospel. Therefore, the colors selected were red, white, blue, and purple.

For more than ten years A. J. Tomlinson had been contemplating the presentation of a flag to the Church for its consideration. However, he desired to wait upon the Holy Spirit for direction and be sure that He was agreeable on the subject. After a time others began to mention the need for a flag, and the General Overseer listened with a feeling of satisfaction that the Spirit was beginning to move in unison among others. That he was on the right line of thinking seemed evident when several came out with the suggestion for a flag. Concerning the mention of a flag by one minister A. J. Tomlinson wrote: "In one of the conventions this year Brother O. S. Carter made mention of a flag for the Church in one of his discourses."¹⁹

Knowing that he was not alone in the matter, the General Overseer suggested that members submit a design for a flag. Numerous Scriptural references were given concerning the scepter, the star, and the crown, representing different areas of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Taking the Scriptures in a composite group, there seemed to be insurmountable evidence that a design for a flag for the Church of God would be in order and would not do an injustice to the Word. Following is the manner in which the flag was adopted by the Church:

1. We recommend that this flag (flag to be exhibited) be adopted and that different sizes of the flag be made by a reliable flag company and supplied to our churches, Sunday schools and members through the White Wing Publishing House.

2. We further recommend that this Annual Assembly prohibit any church, Sunday school, or individual outside or inside of the church, attempting to draw or have drawn the likeness of this flag. This is very necessary in order to keep this flag standardized so that every Church of God flag will be exactly alike in colors, design and form.²⁰

After the mighty demonstration of the Holy Spirit working through many members of the Church, it could be felt by all

that the adoption of a flag for the Church was good to the Holy Ghost. Since that time the flag has proved itself and made a definite place for itself in the Church of God. Wherever the flag is displayed, it conveys the spirit of love and the desire to please God in all things. The flag has become a sign to all the membership that the love of God will prevail and the Body of Christ for which He died will one day reach to the entire inhabitants of the earth inviting them to share in the blessed unity for which Christ died upon the cross. Planting the flag in every nation does not mean that the Church desires to conquer but that it desires to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ which will bring peace and good will to all. The flag does not supplant the flag of any nation but flies along side the flag of others. There need be no fear of war or upheaval when the flag of the Church waves in the wind because it signifies obedience to The Prince of Peace. Consequently, the all nation's flag has won a place of distinction for its design and purpose as a symbol. While the Scripture is silent concerning specific instructions as to the necessity of this symbol, it has served the Church of God in an identifying nature.

FOOTNOTES

¹A. J. Tomlinson, *White Wing Messenger*, "Power of Prayer," January 7, 1928 (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House).

²A. J. Tomlinson *Ibid.*, January 21, 1928.

³A. J. Tomlinson *Ibid.*, May 12, 1928.

⁴Lillie Duggar, *A. J. Tomlinson* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), p. 325.

⁵*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes of the Church of God Over Which A. J. Tomlinson was General Overseer* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, n.d.), p. 182.

⁶*Ibid.* pp. 191, 192.

⁷*Ibid.* p. 197.

⁸*Ibid.* p. 184.

⁹*Historical Annual Addresses*, (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1971), p. 84.

¹⁰*Ibid.* p. 85.

¹¹*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes*, op. cit. pp. 204, 205.

¹²Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God* (Cleveland: Church of God Publishing House, 1955), p. 190.

¹³*Historical Annual Addresses*, op. cit. p. 55.

¹⁴*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes*, op. cit. p. 208.

¹⁵*Ibid.* p. 225.

¹⁶*Ibid.* p. 232.

¹⁷*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes*, Loc. cit.

¹⁸*Ibid.* p. 240.

¹⁹Duggar, op. cit. p. 427.

²⁰*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes*, op. cit. p. 251.

CHAPTER XIII

THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE

1. Scripture Points To Unity

Disunity is foreign to the nature of God. It is the work of the devil to unsettle the harmony and unity which God wishes to prevail over the earth. Scripture as a composite whole points to unity which will be brought about by the work of God. Everywhere there is disunity and disharmony brought about by the desires of man put into practice. However, when the total Scripture is fulfilled, there will be the glorious unity presented in the Word. The unity will be complete, lacking nothing because God Himself will bring it about through His people who are willing to follow Him completely.

When man failed God so miserably in the Garden of Eden, God, in His love and kindness, determined to provide a way whereby he could be redeemed from the clutches of Satan. God's revelation of Himself to humanity took several thousand years to complete. He worked through certain individuals to convey His will to the people who lived in that day to continue the progress of faith which would be a legacy to the entire human race. Such names as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob continue to echo through the endless ages because they chose to obey the promptings of God. Moses was the instrument used by God to give the Law of the Lord to the people. This Law became a schoolmaster to bring all honest-hearted people to a knowledge of Jesus Christ.

That the prophets were more fully aware of the plan of God for the entire human race became apparent with their message to the people. For example, it was they who informed the people that sacrifice made to God without the accompanying righteousness of the heart would be unacceptable to Him. It can be seen that they were given a greater revelation of the plan of God than had been given before. Isaiah told the people the words of the Lord concerning their method of worship: "To what purpose

is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord . . . I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats" (Isaiah 1:11). What God was telling the people through the mouth of the prophet was that He required deeds to accompany works. God said: "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isaiah 1:19).

Through the eyes of faith the prophets could see to the end of the age. They prophesied to the people during the period in which they lived, but their message transcended the time in which they lived. They could, through the eyes of faith, see the coming of the Son of God to the earth. They could see the coming of the Church age and the perfection of the saints. They could see the great flowing together of the children of God from the ends of the earth. The prophets could see the beautiful unity which would be enjoyed by the people of God in every country of the world. It is true that the tower of Babel brought the confusion of tongues and confusion of thinking, but when the Lord brings about the unity of the Spirit, this confusion will vanish, and His people will be under one government and will look to one eternal Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah alluded to the great ingathering into the fold of God when he stated: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited" (Isaiah 54:2, 3). The prophet seemed to be encouraging the people of God to enlarge their thinking to get ready for the great work God will do before the ending of the age. That God will bring about what He has promised to do is an indisputable fact. Something is left for individuals to do—they must enlarge their vision to receive what God will do.

Just as physical Israel was restored and brought to prominence by the power of God, the Church of God will be brought to prominence before the eyes of the people of the entire world. Perhaps Isaiah alluded to the restoration of Israel in the following verse of Scripture, but included in this description is clear evidence that the Church of God will be a receiving station for all individuals who are earnestly seeking to obey Christ in all things. The prophet stated: "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee . . ." (Isaiah 49:18). There must be a Church, a government of God for all the people. When the cleansing becomes complete in the Body of Christ, its brilliance will so outshine all religious movements that they will turn away from them with vigor and

determination and embrace the beautiful government of God.

Waxing eloquent under the anointed thoughts poured into his mind by the power of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah continues to write. The following passage is one of the most beautiful in the entire Bible concerning the last day's Church of God, of which Israel was a type:

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.

And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.

Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee

Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" (Isaiah 60:1-5, 8).

That this prophecy will be fulfilled is a definite fact, and that it will be fulfilled before the return of the Lord is also a definite fact. This passage of Scripture cannot apply merely to the physical aspects of Israel, pointing to their restoration as a nation. Scripture primarily points humanity to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and to the fold which He died to purchase. For this reason, this passage must apply to the ending of time when God brings about a glorious climax to the plan of Salvation which was begun after the fall of our first parents.

Through the eyes of faith Jeremiah could see the great climax of the ages. Even though Jeremiah had sought to shirk the call of God and place the burden upon the shoulders of others, God would not release him. Through many toils, troubles, heart-aches, and disillusionings, this man of God saw perfectly, before his death, the plan of God for the people of all the world. By faith he could see beyond the narrow confines of the nation of Judah to which he addressed his message. They were not appreciative of his labors among them and tried on several occasions to kill him. Finally, his own people succeeded in placing him in a miry pit and taking his life. However, they could not destroy the undimmed vision which looked beyond the turmoil of the day in which he lived. He could see the end of the

ages and this he stated in the following terms: "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten" (Jeremiah 50:5). With this vision and this great inspiration from God, it made little difference to him when the end of his mortal life came. He had his eyes fixed upon the vision given him by God that all His plan would be fulfilled and every individual would inquire their way to Zion and would not cease until they had found it.

Jesus Christ came in the very image of the words of the prophets. He did not deviate in one single item from the prophecies which were given concerning Him. To see Jesus, one could read the words of the prophets. To see the Body of Christ which He died to purchase, one need only to read the words of the prophets. They saw the Church of God in its perfected state when the all nations would not be contented to dwell any longer in a state of incomplete knowledge and incomplete fulness in God.

God revealed Himself to the human race through individuals, through the Law, through the prophets, and finally through His Only Begotten Son. The Lord Jesus Christ became the full revelation of God to humanity. In Him is the only path to full salvation from sin. To a group of Hebrews who were considering a departure from salvation given through the power of Christ, the writer stated: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son..." (Hebrews 1:1, 2). It is an impossibility to reject the Person of Jesus Christ and be saved from one's sins. His words will be fulfilled in utter completeness. John made the point very clear that if one does not know Jesus Christ, he cannot know the Father: "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also" (1 John 2:23).

Only the Gospel of John records what can be called in accuracy the Lord's Prayer. This prayer of Christ will be utterly fulfilled even in the face of overwhelming odds, even in the face of the statement of millions that it is an impossibility. Even though confusion reigns among the Christian people of the world today, and even though there are multitudes laboring under varying governments teaching some truths and discarding others, Christ declared that there would one day be unity: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). This prayer for unity has not

yet been fulfilled, but it will be fulfilled before the return of the Lord.

Unity will come about by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. While at the present time the Bride of Christ is making herself ready for the return of the Lord, she is not yet completely ready. Therefore, Christ cannot claim His Bride until her complete readiness becomes a fact: "... it would be impossible for the Lord to claim the Church as His Bride, because the process of making herself ready has not been completed."¹ The apostle Paul commented on the process by which the Body of Christ would make ready for the return of the Lord:

"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:26, 27).

God has provided for the perfection of the saints. He has already planned how this work would be done. It would not be a quick, effortless process, and He would not take charge and do all the work Himself. The skeptical, faithless, and faint-hearted will be unable to comprehend how the work of the Lord could possibly be accomplished, but His plan will be fulfilled by those who have totally committed themselves to obeying the will of God in all things. Paul discussed how God's people would react when they had given themselves to full obedience to the will of God:

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

May be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19).

God will provide leaders with one mind and one accord who will do what God has declared must be done. Every office of the Church of God will be filled by those who are determined to carry out the plan of God for the perfecting of the saints. In one of his greatest letters Paul made this very clear:

"He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some,

evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:10-15).

Regardless of the thoughts of men concerning the plan of God to bring about His will, the preceding passage points out how the Lord intends to accomplish His will for His Church. Flesh and blood human beings imbued with the power of the Holy Spirit will be the instruments God will use to complete His plan.

Toward the completion of the plan of God for His Church, A. J. Tomlinson worked faithfully. Just as the prophets who saw the completion of the work of the Lord, the General Overseer could see the ultimate work of the Church of God. He stated concerning this subject that: "Unfailing prophecies show that the Church of the last days shall prosper and be in health. The world shall be subjugated to our Christ."² That the General Overseer looked forward to the return of the Lord is seen in the following quotation: "We want the Lord to return. We think He is the only hope for this world of confusion and distress; thus we want Him to come back and set everything right and in perfect harmony."³

2. Expansion and Progress

The Thirtieth Annual Assembly, 1935 was held in newly expanded facilities, seating double what had previously been possible. With the expansion of the physical facilities came an expansion of thoughts for the present and the future. Emphasis was given to the *Joyful News* magazine which was intended to enhance the work of certain auxiliaries in the Church. That the Church of God had begun to think in a positive manner concerning the Great Commission into all the world is evidenced through the move to organize the world. Concerning this subject it is stated:

By organizing the world, I mean each country in the world, as we organize each state in our own country. I am forced to admit that none of our states are perfectly organized yet, but

some of them are so well organized that the prospects for the future are very flattering.⁴

The All States Big Street Parade was a beautiful sight to behold in 1935. The General Overseer enjoyed the colorful display of the Church in this way. All the city could enjoy the pageantry of the Church of God marching to the sound of the big brass band, waving the flag, and giving evidence of joy in knowing Christ and being a member of the Church of God. This year was only a prelude to the greatest parade which would come two years in the future. Enthusiasm, zeal, and growth were the order of the day during the middle thirties. Depression had reached out to snarl the economic progress of the nation, but many souls had found rest and contentment in following the Lord and enjoying the fellowship in the Church of God.

In 1936 there was growth in other areas of the Church work. A great need was discovered in the area of keeping and caring for souls (ABM). Someone needed to give full time in promoting the work on a large scale. Therefore, in this assembly it was recommended that a General Secretary be appointed to look after the interest of souls in the Body of Christ.

The city of Cleveland, Tennessee was very crowded during the Thirty-Second Annual Assembly, 1937. Those who attended the gigantic assembly were literally buzzing with enthusiasm because they were witness to thousands of others who had come to love and respect the Church of God. Some 16,549 registered during the assembly and many of them participated in the greatest parade ever presented by the Church.⁵ There were 30 floats and 123 decorated cars taking part. Hundreds of flags and banners waved as the bands played briskly. What a sight to behold as the Church of God was in glorious display before the citizens of Cleveland.

Thoughts of Bible Training were never very remote to the thinking of A. J. Tomlinson. He could see the advantage of knowing the Scriptures and having an understanding of how to present the message of Christ and the Church. These thoughts prompted the recommendation of Bible Training Camp in 1939. There were those who were skeptical of any kind of Bible training or education because of a fear that formality would seize individuals and the Church would cease to be spiritual and dependent upon the leading of the Holy Ghost. However, the majority of the membership could see the need and advantage of an institution which would further the ability of the membership to cope with the problems of disseminating the gospel of Christ to the entire world. A committee was selected to consider

the matter of Bible Training Camp and those selected were the following individuals: A. D. Evans, A. J. Lawson and R. C. Cannon, Sr.⁶ Due to extensive building of the World Capitol Building in 1940, the school did not commence but was destined to begin operation in 1941. Also, in the year 1940, a secretary of language was selected to help the Church in reaching all people through means of the printed word.

A new auxiliary appeared during the Thirty-Sixth Annual Assembly, in 1941. This auxiliary was known as the Church of Prophecy Marker Association. Following are statements which point out the purpose of the auxiliary:

This association is formed as another auxiliary of the Church of God of Prophecy with A. J. Tomlinson, General Overseer. Its purpose is for the locating, marking, beautifying and maintaining prominent places in the world in connection with the Church of God of the Bible of which A. J. Tomlinson is General Overseer. Places and markings to be approved by the Chief Executive or a committee selected for the purpose.⁷

One of the primary places scheduled for marking and beautifying was Fields of the Wood which had been purchased as a memorial project of the Church of God. It was very significant to purchase this piece of land because it was here that A. J. Tomlinson prayed and shortly afterward joined the Church of the last days. Concerning the marking of Burger Mountain and Fields of the Wood, A. J. Tomlinson stated: "It is my desire to place appropriate markers at Burger Mountain and the Fields of the Wood where the Church of the last days was found, and also where the first Assembly was held."⁸

The Thirty-Seventh Annual Assembly, 1942, was conducted during a time when world war was raging over the land. The very air seemed to breathe the feeling of death and the United States was in the midst of a life or death struggle in a world war crisis. This year seemed to be a time of reflection on the past with emphasis on the guiding principles under which the Church of God had received its motivation. The General Overseer recounted some of the most significant events of the early assemblies and made applicable statements to bring all the past events in relation to the present. He stated: "It has never been our custom to try to bend the Scriptures to suit our conveniences and accommodations, but have always proposed to yield our own views and harmonize everything to suit the Scriptures, which we are obligated to defend."⁹

Little did those delegates who attended the Thirty-Eighth Annual Assembly, 1943, realize that they would see A. J.

Tomlinson for the last time. He moderated the Assembly with zeal and exuberance, giving little evidence of being on the threshold of death. During the Address to the Assembly, the General Overseer gave noted emphasis to what he termed as "Crimes" causing distress. In his instructions he urged chastity for the women and faithfulness of the men to obey the injunctions of Scripture concerning morality. It seemed that Satan had taken the ministry as a target to tempt them to immorality, and some had partaken of the forbidden fruit, bringing shame on themselves and on the Body of Christ.

3. The Tobacco Dilemma

For almost forty years the Church had held a strict standard against the use of tobacco in any form. Those who were using tobacco could not become members of the Church of God until they had abstained from its use. Those who were engaged in raising, selling, handling, or storing tobacco were enjoined to cease and find other employment. However, it was recommended that no member be dealt with until the State Overseer and the General Overseer approved such action. This was an amendment which saved many from being disfellowshipped from the Church. In the Thirty-Second Annual Assembly, 1937, the question of tobacco came to the front so pronounced that the General Overseer made a series of statements on the subject. Primarily, he reiterated what had been previously decided on the issue:

If any are taken into the Church who are in the business of raising or handling tobacco, it should be with the understanding they are to work themselves out of it as quickly as possible. This would mean, those raising tobacco should dispose of the crop already on and make other arrangements for a livelihood and not start another crop the next year. Those handling it should not be too long in securing other employment.¹⁰

This restatement of the action of previous Assemblies on the subject of tobacco seemed to suffice for a period of time, but by the time of the Thirty-Fifth Annual Assembly in 1940, the question had grown to large proportions. Too many people were being lost to the Church who had to find their employment working in some way with tobacco. Many would be won to the Church of God only to find out that they would be forced to relinquish their jobs or be excluded from the Church. These

prevalent and nagging facts forced a decision and a deeper study on the entire question.

A. J. Tomlinson delivered one of his most complete and most eloquent addresses on the subject to tobacco. In brief, he pointed out that there were some useful purposes to which tobacco could be applied. He pointed out that for a long period of time the Church was unaware that there were any useful benefits which could be derived from raising tobacco. There were those throughout the years who were very stern against those who raised tobacco or handled it in any form. If it had not been for the amendment whereby the State Overseer and the General Overseer would have to approve the dealing with a member over the matter, there would have been little relief. A. J. Tomlinson was very understanding and lenient with those who were earning their livelihood from the handling of tobacco, but he could hardly advance beyond the strong feeling of a large mass who were prone for quick and precipitate action. The General Overseer stated that the Church had exercised some extreme views on the subject:

I wonder if we have not dropped into some extreme views and practices when we ruled that our members should not grow tobacco, or handle tobacco, or work with it in any way. I wonder why we did not have our people to stop growing corn and rye because large quantities are used in making whiskey. Another kind of extreme way of doing things would be to stop our members from working in paper mills because of the millions of tons of paper being used in the manufacture of billions of cigarettes. Has it not been on the extreme to turn women and children out of the Church because they assisted their husbands and fathers in growing tobacco?¹¹

The General Overseer made it clear that there was no compromise involved in the decision to allow members to raise and handle tobacco in the course of their livelihood. He pointed out that the Church of God was not bound by a decision which was found to be militant against the advancement of the Church:

This is not compromising with sin and Satan. It is only showing good and wise judgment. We have made many changes in our rulings. We have promised to walk in the light. When the ruling was made to ban our members from growing, selling and handling tobacco we did not know of it being used in other ways and for other purposes so extensively, but now since we have learned of tobacco being used for so many other valuable purposes besides chewing and smoking, and it being a money crop besides, what would we make ourselves to fail to

give it our attention enough for reconsideration? We do not want to allow ourselves to become so set in our ways until we cannot change, when a change would show wisdom and good judgment. It has been said that a wise man changes often, but a fool never does.¹²

This treatise was adopted by the Assembly and members were permitted to grow and handle it but not use it in any form. The action taken by the General Overseer concerning the matter of tobacco proved that he was not unyielding on a subject even when he had previously agreed to it. He was willing to study a matter even though it had been practiced for years. If more light was revealed on a subject, he proved that he was willing to walk in the light, regardless of previous practice.

4. The Curtain Falls

God gave A. J. Tomlinson the strength at the age of seventy-eight to moderate his last Annual Assembly in 1943. There was no evidence of his impending death and the delegates left the Assembly with joy and determination to plant the Church of God in every community possible. Concerning his last days on earth it is stated:

The last place Brother Tomlinson visited was Fields of the Wood. The day following the close of the Assembly, he went there with some brethren, and his interest in marking and beautifying Fields of the Wood was as intense as ever. He became ill that night, September 15, and grew worse from day to day until the end came October 2, 1943. He freely gave his life for others and the Church. He had no other interests. His entire time was given to the work. Nothing was too hard for him to undertake, and nothing was too small for his attention.¹³

God can use anyone who will yield himself to His will. Undoubtedly, A. J. Tomlinson did not feel he would be used of the Lord in the manner in which he was used. But every servant of God meets with favor from the Lord when he does what is required of him. Shakespeare spoke through one of his characters: "the good that men do is oft interred with their bones." To the contrary, the good that A. J. Tomlinson did continues to live after him.

FOOTNOTES

¹²M. A. Tomlinson, *The Glorious Church of God* (Cleveland: White Wing

Publishing House and Press, 1968), p. 118.

²Lillie Duggar, *A. J. Tomlinson* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1964), p. 504.

³*Ibid.* p. 505.

⁴*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes of the Church of God Over Which A. J. Tomlinson Was General Overseer* (1906-1949) (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, n.d.), p. 271.

⁵A. J. Tomlinson, *Historical Notes* (Second Edition) (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1970), pp. 31, 32.

⁶*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes*, op. cit. p. 301.

⁷*Ibid.* p. 325.

⁸*Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes*, Loc. cit.

⁹*Ibid.* p. 332.

¹⁰*Ibid.* p. 290.

¹¹*Ibid.* p. 317.

¹²*Ibid.* p. 322.

¹³A. J. Tomlinson, *Answering the Call of God* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1969), pp. 28, 29.

APPENDIX

The Constitution 1921-1923

Preamble

We, the Church of God, the ministry and membership of the General Assembly of the Churches of God in conference assembled at Cleveland, Tenn.

In order to form a more perfect union, establish the principles of Theocratic Government, set forth the teaching, principles and practices as heretofore interpreted by the General Assembly as further herein provided and for the general welfare of its membership; do ordain and establish this constitution for the General Assembly of the Churches of God.

Article I

Purpose of Organization

- Section 1. This organization is and shall be known as the General Assembly of the Churches of God.
- Section 2. The object and purpose of this organization is to propagate the doctrine, principles and practices of the Church of God, as set forth in the New Testament, as interpreted by the legally authorized officials of this organization, which interpretations may be found in the minutes of the annual sessions of the General Assembly, also filed at the business headquarters of the Church of God.
- Section 3. To promulgate rules and regulations to govern the local churches of said organization, and otherwise promote the general interest of the General Assembly.
- Section 4. To search out the Bible plans of government and discipline and interpret the same.
- Section 5. To provide a general government in which is vested full power and authority to dictate and promulgate rules and regulations from time to time to govern the local churches composing said Assembly.
- Section 6. To provide a general convocation for the mutual fellowship, spiritual development and general welfare of its membership.

Article 2

Membership

- Section 1. The Membership of the General Assembly is and shall be composed of all the local churches as recorded in the minutes of said Assemblies.
- Section 2. When a new church is set in order by any legally authorized minister of the Church of God, this new church as a product of his labor becomes a member of the General Assembly and shall be subject to the government, teachings, principles, and practices as promulgated from time to time by said General Assembly.
- Section 3. No local church shall withdraw from the General Assembly as a whole, but such individual members of said local church who may become disloyal or otherwise disorderly, shall be dealt with and excluded from membership in such local church.

Article 3

Government

- Section 1. The government of this organization is and shall be Theocratic in form, as interpreted by its officials.

Article 4

Officers

- Section 1. The officers of the General Assembly of the Churches of God are and shall consist of General Overseer, general secretary, council of twelve elders and other seventy elders, presbytery, state overseers and trustees.
- Section 2. The duties of the General Overseer shall be the general supervision of all the work of the General Assembly, and to sit as chairman of said Assembly when in session.
- Section 3. The duties of the general secretary shall be to keep a careful record of the General Assembly, and act in conjunction with the General Overseer in execution of any and all legal documents authorized by the General Assembly.
- Section 4. The duties and powers of the council of the twelve elders shall be to consider all questions that may properly come before them pertaining to the gen-

eral interest and welfare of the Church of God. It is, and shall so be understood, that the twelve in conjunction with the General Overseer shall be the supreme council.

- Section 5. The duties of the seventy elders shall be to faithfully represent the government and teaching of the Church of God in their various fields of labor, and to sit in joint session with the twelve in the Assembly to make final decisions on all questions that shall come before said Assembly.
- Section 6. The twelve elders and the seventy elders shall together with the General Overseer be understood and so construed to be the official Assembly while in joint session, which shall have full power and authority to designate rules of government, teachings and principles for the local churches, those present to constitute a quorum.
- Section 7. The duties of the trustees of the General Assembly is and shall be to hold in trust all property belonging to the General Assembly for the full use and benefit of said Assembly, and to see that no property or part of the same shall be converted to any other use than that which is in harmony with the plan and purposes, government and teachings of said General Assembly.
- Section 8. The presbytery and their duties: The General Overseer and the state overseer shall constitute the presbytery in the respective states or provinces, who, after all investigations necessary and other proceedings provided and authorized by the General Assembly shall have full power and authority to license or ordain candidates for the ministry. It is further understood that it shall be within the power of the presbytery to take final action in revoking the license or ordination of any minister for any reason or cause satisfactory to themselves.
- Section 9. The duties of the state overseer is and shall be to have the oversight of his state or territory and as much as possible conduct or order a general evangelistic campaign over his state during the year. To see that every church is supplied with a pastor as much as lieth in his power. In short, oversee every interest of the work in his territory.
- Section 10. The term of all officials shall be fixed by the General Assembly while in session.

Section 11. Any official is subject to impeachment for an offence rendering him unworthy of the position that he occupies.

Article 5

Judicial

- Section 1. There shall be a supreme judicial body composed of seven of the twelve elders who shall decide all matters which shall properly come before them, whose decision shall be final.
- Section 2. There shall be a judicial body who shall sit in the various states where churches are established, to consider all matters coming under their jurisdiction, said body shall be composed of the state overseer, one of the seventy elders, and one bishop.
- Section 3. It shall be the duty of the board designated in section 2 of this article to examine all candidates for the ministry, and if found satisfactory they shall refer them to the presbytery for license or ordination.
- Section 4. It shall be the duty of the board designated in section 3 of this article to try all ministers for any offence committed within the state where they shall convene; if, for any reason their decision should be unsatisfactory to either of the litigants, he shall have right to appeal to the body mentioned in section 1 of this article.
- Section 5. It is and shall be within the power of the local church to try its members for any offence contrary to the government, teaching, principles or practices of the Church of God. Their jurisdiction, however, is limited to lay members only.
- Section 6. No business conference or any act shall be legal unless presided over by a legally authorized moderator.
- Section 7. Any lay member of the local church who has been tried for any offense and convicted and excommunicated who, for any reason, may feel that he has been improperly or illegally dealt with, shall have the right to appeal from such decision to the body set forth in section 2 of this article. And if, for any reason, he may be dissatisfied with the decision of this body, he shall have right to appeal to the body set forth in section 1 of this article.

Also if there be a litigation between two or more members of a local church, and if, for any reason, they be dissatisfied with the decision of the local church, they may have a right to appeal to the board set forth in section 2 of this article, and if, for any reason, they should be dissatisfied with the decision of the board set forth in section 2 they may have right to appeal to the board set forth in section 1 of this article.

Article 6

Finance

- Section 1. It is and shall be recognized as an accepted principle, and a part of God's financial plan that all the membership shall pay tithes of their net earnings or income.
- Section 2. It is and shall be ordained that the tithes are for the support of the ministry only.
- Section 3. For the love of the gospel and the general welfare of the Church it shall be the duty of the membership to make free-will offerings from time to time as the needs may require.
- Section 4. It shall be the duty of all persons intrusted with finance belonging to the Church of God for any purpose, as treasurer of said church, to desposit the same in a reliable bank to the credit of the Church of God.
- Section 5. The power to regulate and operate the financial system shall be vested in the supreme council.

Article 7

Education

- Section 1. A Bible Training School shall be maintained as long as advisable, for the education of our ministers and workers, which shall include the extension department of the Bible Training Correspondence Course and any other education pursuits that the General Assembly may from time to time deem necessary.

Article 8

Amendments

- Section 1. As the work of this organization progresses, the

number of churches increase, the General Assembly may create new and other positions and fill them as needs may require.

Section 2. This constitution may be amended by unanimous agreement of the official Assembly in any regular session.

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