

the day of Moses, or during the reign of some minor judge when the life of the people was at low ebb? The world lay in spiritual darkness and sin for thousands of centuries . . . without a Saviour. Was God tardy in releasing His son? One must admit that God alone can see all time from the standpoint of eternity . . . and He knows what is best and when.

BORN TO SUCH PEOPLE

The third mystery is that Jesus should be born to such people. Why the Jews? They surely were not the oldest people, nor the biggest nation. Their standing in the world was far from desirable, being either envied or despised by many other nations. Were they more religious than others? Hardly! Why did He not come, say, to the Babylonians with all their ancient culture of art, literature, astrology, and theology? Theirs was a fine heritage—was it not a proper people of the Saviour's heritage?

Why not the Greeks, that fine group who gave the world its beautiful, universal language, its symmetrical architecture, its philosophers and detachment? Would not Aristotle, Diogenes, Phthogaras have been worthy antecedents to the Messiah?

Why not a Roman? Those orderly masters of construction, law, systemized government, and the builders of the "eternal city". Wasn't the Latin personality an asset to the world's cultures?

Jesus was born among the Jews because they alone had given to the world monotheistic religion . . . that is, a one God

religion. Theirs was the time-defying Shema, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is *One* God." Other religions made places for many gods . . . dividing man's allegiance and holding him down to earthen idols. But Judaism insisting that God is a Spirit . . . that righteousness is His nature. This was the religious climate for Jesus Christ. God had to reveal Himself through that kind of folks . . . all of their weaknesses notwithstanding. A strange people indeed; yet, God became one of them.

They were not Judean Jews . . . the cultured, well-informed, nor for that matter scholarly Jews of great prestige, but the humble Galileans who represent the great majorities of the world. Jesus was born among the unsung—knowing that such identity would place Him on the level with most of the human race. This is why no person on the face of the earth should feel excluded from the fold of Christ's redeeming love.

On the 22nd and 23rd of December, the days are almost exactly the same length, but on the 25th of December, the days begin to lengthen . . . as though some strange hand took scissors and plucked a lock of hair from the head of time and put it on the forehead of days. The longer days point to eventual warmth of spring and summer. Just so in the life of man: the birth of Jesus lengthened man's hope, gave rise to his salvation, pointed toward the springtime of meaningful existence with God here and hereafter.

May the Spirit of the living God be born in the manger of your hearts this Christmas in the year of our Lord, 1957.

OMEGA

December 29, 1957

Farewell and finalities often have a note of pathos, and they sometimes leave us with a sense of sadness. We have come to the end of this year: a year of surprises, tragedies, guided missiles, earthquakes, tornadoes, bayonets, racial strife, prosperity, poverty . . . and some have come to death. But all of these are now wrapped up in the package called the old year. It seems that the one timely question about it all should be: "Has this year brought us closer to God?" The amount

of money made, or real estate acquired, teapot battles are relatively inconsequential compared to this important question.

This was the year begun by good intentions on part of many of us. January found the conscience twinged by dislike for the old self and a new scrubbing of the walls and floors of morals. The months and weeks rolled by and many good intentions were translated into deeds. About these we felt a sense of nobility in ac-

complishment. Then the throes of habit, yielding to the old nature, compromises here and there, cutting the corners of the fabric of rightness, diluting the wine of truth by the water of hearsay . . . by these and other trickeries many lapsed into their old selves. Now, here we are at the end of the year . . . no nearer to God in spiritual growth, but one year nearer to Him in the judgment.

LIKE A HOUSE

Jesus told the parable of a man's life being like a house. A house, furnished and occupied, but then there comes a time when the undesirable tenant needs to be expelled. The owner of the house cleanses, sweeps, repaints, and repairs, but the house remains empty. It needs occupancy. Jesus made it clear that our lives, like that house, can expel the iniquitous inhabitant of Satan. We can clean up the mess that he leaves in the rooms of the soul, burn the trash of the mind, haul off the refuse of ill-companions, while scrubbing cleanly the floors of the will. And in that process, life looks clean and bright.

Yet, this is not enough. The parable goes on to say that the devil, after having been cast out, wanders around in desolation and comes back to the old house to see if anything positively lives there—any clean, constructive habits, new thoughts, discrete speech, and the inhabitants of virtue. Finding little or no such things in the newly renovated life, the devil brings others of his kind and sets up residence in the unoccupied life and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

Let us be honest now by admitting that every life must first expel this intruder. Satan must go! That is no easy process, for he resents your thinking that he is unwelcome or unneeded. As a matter of fact, he is subtle enough to try to convince you that he doesn't even exist . . . that his presence is only the manufacture of priests and preachers . . . that the very reference to him is an old superstition designed to scare little children. Usually he succeeds by such deception.

Call him what you like: a negative force, evil incarnate, corporate sin in ac-

tivation . . . the handle is not the important thing. If anyone has difficulty believing he exists, try resisting him and see his forceful demonstration. But throwing him out is not as easy as we have been led to believe; resenting such force against him, he summons all the arguments that would shame a battery of lawyers to prove why he must stay in. The only effective method is to expel him in "wondrous potency," . . . for once you entertain him, he is not only apt to stay for dinner but also to install himself as a permanent guest—then as landlord and dictator of your life.

NO COEXISTANCE

God and Satan cannot coexist in a single life. The living room cannot be assigned to God and the dining room to Satan. Most of the tensions that are consuming us today result one way or another from this dualism. Human nature trying to appease Satan and mildly serve God. Sunday saints and Saturday sinners. Little wonder that we need tons of aspirin, tranquilizers, and sleeping pills! That combination of inhabitants is enough to keep anybody awake all night.

But assuming that Satan has been thrown out, then let me warn you against the peril of a vacuum. He will not stay out very long if you keep his bed made up and unoccupied. When the devil pulled off with his unsightly furniture, many put a vacancy sign out on the front door. Oh, here is the predicament of millions in the church of Jesus Christ: they have repented of their sins and confessed their guilt and God has forgiven them, but they stopped it at that. Like the man who beamed in his countenance as he told me that he had stopped smoking, given up drinking, quit his gambling, and almost stopped cursing . . . as though these were disciple-making textbooks. Well, of course, a Christian is to cut off any habit that hinders his growth Godward, but to think that being a Christian is wholly a negative matter as to what can be given up is to overlook most of what Jesus said and did. He said that there were things not only to be given up but also to be taken up! That it isn't half so much a matter of "don't" and it is a matter of "do's."

Look at the spiritual vacuum that exists in our world. This fact, in my thinking, more than any thing contributed to the malignant-like spread of Communism in major parts of the world. There, people by the millions, were robbed of their old gods during World War II. They saw the impotence of idols to save them from military defeat; and instead of kissing their blackened idols as they had done for generations, they smashed them to the ground. But what happened then? Their minds and hearts were left open and empty . . . but not for long. In walked that devil of Marxism with its seven-fold companions to make the former idolater worse than his former self.

WILLED TO DEVIL

A Finnish infidel died and left his farm willed to the devil. The courts, deliberating on such a ridiculous set of circumstances, decided that the best way to carry out the wishes of the Finnish infidel was to permit the farm land to grow up in weeds and briars, to allow the houses and barns to remain unpainted and to rot down, to permit the soil to erode and wash away. Said they, "The best way to let Satan have it is to do nothing." Isn't that exactly the truth Jesus is stating in this parable? The best way a human life can be taken over by consuming, defeative habits is to do nothing. Have no consuming passion for human misery, annex yourself to no noble cause, read none of the good books, walk no second mile, sacrifice no sleep nor substance for a needy brother, intercede for no sinner either on your knees or by your lips, count all costs too high for your effort, go along in church for a free ride as others pay your fare, eat your meals, punch the clock, live out your days the way Gertrude Stein characterized the students of Paris by the sin of "nothingness," . . . these are all that are needed for one to be lost! Satan welcomes that vacant sign hung out on the lintels of life . . . then he motions to his old cohorts while moving in without apology.

Friends, real religion consists in the verbs of conquering, giving, loving, suffering, hoping, lifting, praying, sharing, interceding, withstanding, proclaiming, and ex-

celling. It is a way of life that you do something about . . . it isn't a hand-folding affair . . . it is known by the open palm and the outstretched hand—at least two such hands were riven by spikes because they were always open.

I close this message on a low note . . . the dark angle of the picture. Here it is the end of the year . . . the omega . . . finis . . . the finality of days. The end of this year finds many people worse than January found them. So long as good intentions lasted, there was promise, but now just look: Satan wasn't out of the house for a fortnight before he returned in solid entrenchment.

Am I not speaking now to many who have come in and out of religion so many times that there is a certain hardening and passiveness about it all? The old hymns, "Just As I Am Without One Plea," "Almost Persuaded," "Jesus Is Tenderly Calling" fit now into the category of old stuff. No longer does the voice of the preacher activate a stinging conscience. Actually, they regarded it all with the same indifference that they do radio commercials. Then! Hear me: if that is the case, it would be better to have never heard the name of God! For to have done so and heeded for a short season, then returned to the old loves and loyalties of Satan will make it harder in that final judgment day.

I plead in this moment: throw Satan out, for yourself take God in!

JANUARY SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS:

PAUL M. STEVENS

January 12—"Lamp Unto My Feet,"

NBC-Television, New York City

January 24—"M-Night," Honolulu, T.H.

January 26—University Avenue Baptist Church, Honolulu, T.H.

January 31-February 2—University of Hawaii B.S.U. Retreat.

ROY O. McCLAIN

January 13—Kentucky Evangelistic Conference

January 14-15—Florida Evangelistic Conference

January 28—Louisiana Evangelistic Conference