

# LIGHT

*A Bulletin of the Social Service Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention*  
108 Breckenridge Lane  
Louisville 7, Kentucky

Volume IV

JANUARY, 1951

Number 1



## *The Congregation that Conquered*

BY HUGH A. BRIMM

To a loyal and devoted Negro congregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, there is a peculiar and pungent significance to Jesus' words, "I will build my church . . . and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." To them these words mean that bigotry and race hatred are impotent to thwart the growth of Christ's church. Better, they have discovered that discouragement and disappointment are but incidental when one's faith is firmly fixed upon God.

This story of the triumph of the Mount Zion Baptist Church begins in the year 1921. In the late afternoon of May 31, the slanting rays of the setting sun fell warm upon the growing young city of Tulsa. On the north side, across the railroad tracks, lay the Negro section of town with its unpainted frame houses and its dusty, rutted streets. But glorifying the scene was a striking new building, a church that towered above the homes and streets and reflected all of the pride and love that its devoted members felt for it.

Prior to the final erection of the building there had been anxious years of planning. The congregation had managed to accumulate \$42,000; but the building, as planned, would cost \$82,000. Just when it seemed that the project would have to be abandoned, because there was not enough security for the loan that was needed, a Jewish contractor came forward with a loan of \$50,000 to complete the building. He was soon to see a demonstration of loyalty that more than justified the confidence he had in these Negro friends.

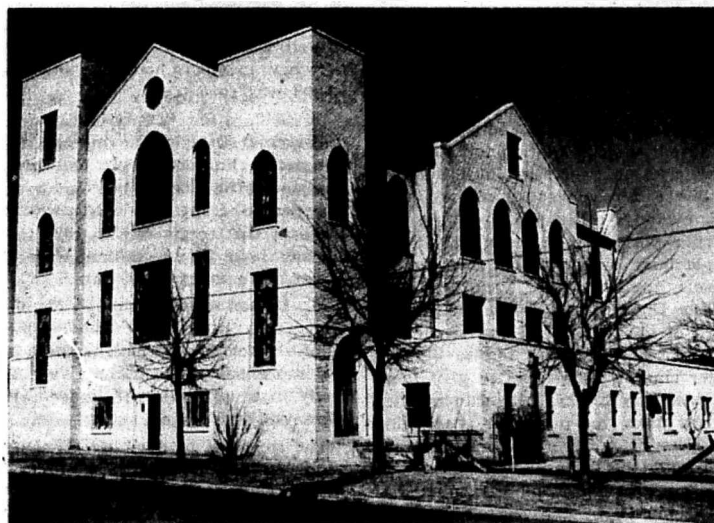
The church went up, and it was the pride of their lives, the fulfillment of a long dream. Into it they had poured, penny by penny, dime by dime, and dollar by dollar, their meager savings.

Then tragedy struck. Across the railroad in the heart of the city two angry milling masses of men—one of whites and the other of Negroes—gathered ominously on opposite sides of the jail. A young Negro had been arrested. He was docked with the "usual charge" for which lynching was considered the "quickest expression of justice." For the moment there seemed to be no disposition on the part of the whites to

determine the boy's guilt or innocence—"everyone" said he was guilty, and, after all, white womanhood had to be protected and avenged.

At first, there were only verbal taunts and insults between the ever-enlarging groups. Then a shot rang out and all restraint gave way as both mobs broke and ran, the Negroes toward their homes, the white men in hot pursuit.

A holocaust of destruction was left in the wake of one of the worst race riots in the life of our country. The morning light broke upon the chaos of blackened, smouldering ruins—and among them the charred remains of the



Negro church. What had been only a few hours before a magnificent and stately church was now nothing but shambles—twisted steel, broken, blackened walls, charred pieces of timber and piles of sooty brick.

But the real Mount Zion Baptist Church was far from destroyed, because in reality it was actually in the hearts and souls of the men and women who had found a new way of life in Christ. Still shaken by the shock of seeing not only their church but most of their homes and possessions destroyed by the fire, and of seeing friends and loved ones shot down like animals by the rioters as they had fled from flaming houses, they gathered in the ruins to take stock. The one thing on which they congratulated themselves was their foresight in taking out insurance.

But even this turned to ashes a few days later when they discovered a clause in the insurance policy which read "... except by act of riot." It meant that not one cent could be collected. Not only was their investment a total loss, but the \$50,000 mortgage stared them in the face.

As though this were not enough, a rumor had spread through the city that Mount Zion Church had been deliberately burned because it was being used by the Negroes as an arsenal in which they were storing guns and ammunition for a planned uprising. Pastor R. A. Whitaker went to some of the city officials and demanded that they and a group of white ministers come to witness the task of clearing out the ruins. A twenty-four hour watch was maintained until every shred of rumor was proven false.

Dazed and shocked by the experience through which they had passed, the members had to make some decision concerning the future. White friends advised them to file bankruptcy or simply dissolve the congregation and join other churches. By using either plan they would not be required to pay the mortgage.

Pastor Whitaker called his people together again. The unanimous vote was not to file bankruptcy, but to pay the staggering debt somehow and by the help of the Lord build another church.

The entire congregation fell to work. There was no expression of bitterness, no desire for vengeance. They gave their evenings to the job, and the scene of ruin was soon a scene of singing people busy with wheelbarrows, picks, shovels, hoes.

When Charles Page, a wealthy Tulsan, heard of the decision of the people not only to pay their debt but to build a larger church, he offered to give them the necessary bricks. But shortly after he had made the offer, Mr. Page died and no written record of his generous offer could be found.

Despite this and a hundred other discouragements, by the end of the year

the new plans were ready for inspection. W. S. Latimer and his brother, both members of the church and both architects and graduates of Tuskegee, had drawn the plans.

The new church was to be much larger and more expensive than the first, but it was what the people wanted. Pastor Whitaker was often heard to say, "The Devil tore our church down; the Lord will help us build it bigger."

For five years the minister courageously led his people in the liquidation of their debt. This they had to do before they could ever dream of starting the new building. With the terrific burden of responsibility, he soon broke under the strain and was forced to resign as pastor. To many in the church this was a greater loss than the fire, because he had been the one who inspired them from the beginning to plan to build. His resignation all but spelled total defeat to the struggling congregation.

Having assumed such a tremendous burden of debt, they often fell behind in payment of the interest. It became more and more difficult to find a minister who would consider becoming their pastor. Many discouraged members left the church, pews were vacant and only a faithful few continued to struggle with the heavy load.

On August 22, 1937, the Rev. J. H. Dotson, a Mississippian by birth, accepted the call to serve Mount Zion. Looking more like a football fullback than a preacher, he brought new hope and confidence to the people. He had accepted the call fully aware of the disintegrating membership and the mortgage that still burdened those who were left. "Somehow I just wanted to see if I could do it, with God's help," he says.

Pastor Dotson revealed his faith by making his first move one that put the church deeper in debt! He ordered several hundred new metal chairs. Some said they would never be paid for because so few were attending the services in the basement sanctuary. But attendance increased until every chair in the church was occupied. In six months, fifty new members had been added and \$3,000 was raised.

In 1942, after twenty-one years of soul-trying struggle, the mortgage was completely liquidated. It had been a long and difficult road, but God had led His people from the wilderness and chaos of that tragic day in 1921 to the glorious hour in which they were able to say, "We are free of debt."

Mr. Dotson reminded his people of the plans that had been drawn up six months after the fire, plans for a new and more beautiful church. Were they ready now to build it? Indeed, they were ready and eager.

The financial plan which Mr. Dotson had established when he came to the church was continued. Every member was expected to contribute to both the

regular expenses of the church and to the building fund.

A pay-as-you-go plan was adopted for the new building. Sometimes the contributions on Sunday would pay for material and labor for only two or three days of work. But if that was all it would do, then the work stopped until more money was received.

Today, if you should stand at the corner of Elgin and Easton in North Tulsa, it would be difficult to imagine the gloom, the disappointment, the discouragement, and the frustration that now are forever in the past. You would see a magnificent new church building—still incomplete, but even in its unfinished state a monument to faith, a memorial to the patience, honesty, forgiveness, tolerance and brotherly love of a noble band of Christians.

No man can stand in the shadow of the Mount Zion Baptist Church and preach the doctrines of the race-baiter. No man can indelict its members with the epithets "shiftless," "unreliable," "dishonest," "vengeful." The work of loving hands, the devotion and loyalty of devout Christians, towers above and overshadows the bitterness of the past. Standing there, you somehow hear anew the words of One who walked one day in the midst of bigotry, intolerance and brutal persecution but who, in the face of it all, said: "I will build my church and not even the powers of darkness will ever be able to overcome it."

Reprinted from the *Christian Herald*, Dec. 1950 by permission of the Editor.

#### ALCOHOL AND VIOLENT DEATH

In the March, 1950, *WESTCHESTER MEDICAL BULLETIN*, is a remarkable report by Doctor David M. Spain, carrying the head, "Sudden and Unexpected Death in Westchester County." It presents a remarkable picture of the influence of alcohol in "Sudden and Unexpected Deaths" in that community.

In 1949, the Medical Examiners office handled 490 cases with 340 autopsies. Of the 490 cases, 69% involved accidental, homicidal or suicidal deaths. The accidental cases are classified as automobile mishaps and non-industrial accidental deaths of adults, alcohol was an important or responsible factor.

In the other groups of accidental deaths, those due to automobile mishaps, we find 68 automobile fatalities (11 pedestrians, 57 passengers or drivers). Forty-six per cent of the responsible individuals were under the influence of varying degrees of alcohol.

There were eight homicides and in seven cases, both parties concerned were under the influence of alcohol.

During the year there were 66 suicides. Alcohol as an immediate precipitating factor in the actual act of suicide, was present in 18% of the cases.

The record requires no comment.

**FREEDOM OF RELIGION**

Extension of Remarks  
of

**HON. BROOKS HAYS**  
of Arkansas

in the House of Representatives  
Monday, December 4, 1950

No study of the meaning of democracy would be adequate without an emphasis upon freedom of worship. The constitutional guarantee that this privilege shall not be invaded is so much a part of our lives that we seldom stop to think of the conditions which produced it. Too often we think in negative terms. Perhaps we gained an impression from textbooks that the framers of the Constitution merely concluded that, since the idea of a state-controlled church had not worked well in the old world or in the Colonies, we would have none of that concept in the new Federal Government. To be sure, the policy of our Nation is definite on the point that we will not have an official religion. Separation of church and state is one of our distinctive contributions to the science of government.

But the first amendment to the Constitution says something else about the place of religious faith in American life. Here are its words: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." In stressing the free exercise of faith, Thomas Jefferson, the author of this amendment, so richly endowed with spiritual insight, was thinking not in governmental terms but rather of the individual citizen, his right to spiritual growth and his privilege of religious expression which should not be impaired.

In prohibiting a tax-supported church, the Constitution represents a break with the past; but it represents, also, the hopes and the dreams of the past for complete freedom for the human spirit.

It was a daring thing that our forefathers did, this assertion that the new Government should not control the patterns of worship and religious belief. The wise men who designed the Constitution were determined that the tremendous power of organized religion should never be used to inhibit the individual in relation to his Creator.

The first amendment to the Constitution is, therefore, one of the most significant instruments in history. There are two facets, and both must be viewed with understanding. First, the framers had a distrust of man; they recognized his frailty, and this applied not only to politicians and military men who had misused power it applied even to the ministers. No man, according to this philosophy, could be trusted with power over the minds of his fellow man. But, again, the first amendment represents something besides distrust of man. Its positive aspect explains the reverence we have for it. It reveals a high opinion of man as God's creation. It encourages individual faith.

**Help Us Write A Book**

The editor would appreciate your help in gathering material for a study on the problem of alcohol advertising. Will you please send us the newspaper clippings from your local paper that report tragedies which occurred where beer or whiskey are involved?

It would be better if the article was written locally and not an AP or UP story. Please be sure to note the dateline and the name of the newspaper.

Send the clippings to:

Dr. Hugh A. Brimm  
Box 38  
St. Mathews Station  
Louisville 7, Ky.

Because it may not be possible to write you personally to thank you, will you permit us to thank you in advance for your help?

A most hearty THANK YOU!

In granting full freedom of worship the authors revealed a faith that men would not abuse the privilege, that social stability would not be lost in the renunciation of control over religious forms. The Constitution reflects a faith that individual judgments in the supremely important issues of human life and destiny would not have a destructive impact. The authors dared to trust the individual in this vital realm of life.

Thus, it should be clear that our democratic ideal of religious freedom is not in disparagement of religion. Our governmental foundations are essentially spiritual. George Washington spoke for the young nation when he said his Farewell Address that decency and morality in public life are not possible without the inspiration of religion. It is the American policy, however, to let the citizen seek an outlet for this divinely-given right in ways that appeal to him so that each man worships God according to the dictates of his own conscience. And, again, as proof of our daring spirit in granting full freedom, we allow each to reserve to himself the privilege of not worshipping at all if he chooses not to do so. The resources of a positive faith recognized by the Constitution will save the Nation from any theoretical damage by those of infirm faith; they, too, must be protected.

It is an experiment, this American plan, but 161 years have proved its wisdom. We, the succeeding generations of Americans who have benefited by the cherished tradition, are sure that upon such a foundation of freedom and reverence for the individual the Republic will endure.

**MILLSAPS COLLEGE STUDENTS DO  
SPECIAL WORK ON ALCOHOL  
PROBLEM**

One of the collegiate America's most energetic and constructive projects on the alcohol problem is taking place among the students at Millsaps college, Jackson, Miss.

Dr. Joseph Price's class in alcohol education has just finished a year-long job as the "secretariat" for the Jackson Committee for Education on Alcoholism, composed of a group of outstanding Jackson residents who made an exacting study of alcoholism in the city under a Carnegie grant. Dr. Price, chemistry professor at Millsaps, was chairman of the committee.

The students sent out questionnaires to hospitals, physicians, ministers, public schools, industries, and labor to ascertain the effect of alcohol in the community. They spent many hours examining closely the police records on drunkenness. At the end of the survey, they compiled the results and published them in a mimeographed summary released in mid-November.

The committee received a letter of commendation from the Yale School of Alcoholic Studies, praising the thorough and scholarly work of the report. Prof. Seldon B. Bacon, director of the Yale school, said the report was among the best turned into the national headquarters. The survey revealed a definite need for a specialized clinic to which problem drinkers and members of their family can be referred for treatment and guidance.

Dr. Price's now famous alcohol education class began in the fall of 1948. An assembly announcement resulted in the signed application and registration of 78 students who wanted to take the course, more than one tenth of the student body. While the college seeks to keep class enrollments as near 30 as possible, this unexpected interest seemed to warrant an exception, so that 73 finished the took the examination, and earned the credits assigned. The course has been given every semester since.

Last year the class went afield, giving programs on the educational approach to alcohol at schools, churches, and civic clubs in 28 cities throughout the state. Ten students participated in the programs. Essentially informal, the meetings used the conversational approach. "Planted" conversations started the ball rolling and in most cases the discussion soon became spontaneous.

"Although the class periods last an hour and fifteen minutes," says Prof. Price, "the students seem never to get bored. The visiting lecturers always are besieged with questions, and at times there are very lively arguments. The lectures for the most part are objective in nature.—Concern

## RACE PROGRESS

**Mississippi:** A remarkable celebration in the heart of the deep South was the recent third annual Tri-Racial Goodwill Festival held in Carthage, Miss., where whites, Negroes and Indians co-operated for the creation of better race relations. The festival took place where there is a large Negro population and near an Indian reservation. Games and contests were shared by racial groups, some of the games being Indian traditions. The recreational features were interspersed with ceremonial activities with citations for distinguished service in race relations to citizens of the state and community. The first citation was presented "to the people of Mississippi" through their Gov. Fielding Wright, "for recognizing the great need to improve the Negro educational program and the appropriation . . . of 4 million dollars for a new Negro college." The second citation was also to the people of Mississippi for "manifesting an unusual degree of emotional maturity as evidenced by the absence of brute disturbances over racial and political issues" during Henry A. Wallace's Progressive Party campaign visit to the state in the 1948 presidential campaign. It will be remembered that Mr. Wallace's excursion did bring about riotous conditions in other areas of the South. The Jefferson Military College, located in Washington, Miss., was cited for "its refusal to accept a desperately needed gift (from Judge George W. Armstrong) estimated to amount to 50 million dollars because it was made conditional on certain racial and religious discriminations in the acceptance of students."—Between the Lines

WHO SMOKES  
YOUR PACKS

Uncle Sam's puffing nieces and nephews are sending a lot of money up in smoke.

The Agriculture Department says that a record 355 billion cigarettes were smoked in the United States in the fiscal year ending June 30. This is three billion

## I PAWNED MY BABIES SHOES

Flames of seething impulse crackled through my brain—like a Christmas tree ablaze, destroying worship of God and symbols of sentiment for my family. That was my condition when I pawned those priceless keepsakes—for another drink of liquor.

Hospitalization afterward and convalescing, I saw my whole picture unfolded before me. That first social drink five years ago, on a dare. My ever-increasing use of it. Then my life became a snarled skein. I envied others, their clothes, cars, and houses. I pitied myself. Blind to the blessings around me. Remorse vanished. Then the pawnshop—and hospital.

When they brought me home, recovered, John and Junior acted as though I was returning from my usual trip to mother's. They were very attentive and loving. I pray daily in gratitude. I feel that God is beside me, listening, watching ready to help, always. When I come to those moments of decision, I stop whatever I am doing and wherever I may be, and pause and ask Him, "What wouldst Thou that I do?" I thank Him for my deliverance, for this beautiful home, for my dear family, and for such calm comfort and happiness as I have never known before. How He would have helped me back in my tragic days, if I had let Him!

(One out of every thirteen drinkers in the U.S.A. today is killed or crippled by alcohol—and I was one of them. Like the rest of them when starting, I said to myself, "I shall always drink 'moderately.'" The next time you see a liquor ad, remember what I have said here. Read my story again, slowly.)  
—H. E. Norton, Listen Magazine.

more smokes than were consumed in the previous 12 months.

The puffing rate, says the department, puts cigarette consumption at 120 packs per person throughout the nation. We didn't smoke any of our allotment. Did you?

FIGURES FROM WASHINGTON  
SHOW UP LIQUOR DRINKING

Walter Trohan, writing for the Chicago Tribune, recently gave some interesting information about "the number one problem of the national capital—alcoholism."

First, he says, the Washington liquor consumption is three times as great as the national average. Per capita across the country the annual number of gallons of liquor was 1.17. In Washington, it was 3.91 gallons.

Second, Trohan says that drunk arrests jumped nearly 300 per cent from 1930 (13,942 arrests) to 1949 (37,643 arrests). The population increased about 50 per cent during the same number of years.

Third, 70 per cent of arrests in districts were for drunkenness.

Fourth, 77 per cent of court cases in districts were for drunkenness.

Fifth, alcoholism was responsible for some 2,000 hospitalizations last year.

Sixth, alcohol was charged with more than 100 deaths.

Seventh, liquor licenses increased in number from 1,962 in 1944 to 2,393 in 1949.

## ALCOHOLISM IN MILWAUKEE

According to a story in the Milwaukee Journal by Frank Sinclair, January 6, 1950, alcoholism is on the rise.

"Excessive drinking is costing an estimated \$10,200,000 a year in Milwaukee county alone—\$7,500,000 in lost wages, \$4,500,000 for treatment and care of victims and support of their families," besides which "there are now 84,000 alcoholics in the state, 25,000 of them in Milwaukee county, with 17,000 of the state total (5,500 in the county) classified as chronic."

Moreover Mr. Sinclair reported that arrests for drunkenness are on the increase, jumping 140 per cent in the city of Milwaukee in nine years."

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108 Breckenridge Lane, Louisville 7, Kentucky.  
Published monthly except July and August.  
HUGH A. BRIMM, Editor

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