



Let my people go!
Ministry of Cpt. Gordon Nelson
The Old Ship of Zion
Only believers "shall take up
serpents" (of the sea). (Mk. 16:18)

MESSAGE 21 - 2006

A LEGACY OF DR. BEBE PATTEN OF OAKLAND
"NOT EVERYONE THAT SAYETH UNTO ME, LORD, LORD!"
By Cpt. Gordon Nelson

"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (lawless, no government)." (Matt. 7:23)

God allows His own sun in the heavens to shine on both the evil and on the good. Likewise, God's rain falls on the just and the unjust. This is a principal that we, as Pentecostal believers, fail to comprehend. God will rain His Spirit upon a hungry heart, regardless of the potentate ruling the house of God. *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."* (Matt. 23:15)

Captain's first introduction to LaBelle Bebe

I first heard Dr. Bebe H. Patten in her Chicago citywide revival. My hometown was Evanston, Ill., a suburb of Chicago, and the home of Northwestern University. I was a baby in the Lord, having been saved only six months when I attended Bebe's Chicago Revival Campaign in 1942. Bebe wore an Adrian-designed gown, all in white, which sparkled in the floodlights. She was a remarkably beautiful woman, having the body of an athlete, being a champion swimmer. Adrian was a famous designer of women's clothes who was used frequently by the movie stars in Hollywood. This gown was therefore very expensive, which flowed to the floor with a split just below the crouch thereby revealing a beautiful set of legs. To top all this, LaBelle Bebe wore a rock the size of a man's thumb that sparkled like a rainbow as the floodlights hit this huge diamond she was wearing on her finger. What a scene! It is a scene the Holy Spirit would burn into my memory bank for purposes of my own salvation. For I would never again see that particular Adrian gown or diamond ring on Bebe again. Perhaps the Christians in Chicago stumbled over the attire of this lady evangelist who frightened little sheep by her attire. To them, it was reprehensible that she represent the voice of God for the entire city of Chicago. What happened in Chicago, we'll never know for sure. Even wolves learn by trial and error what frightens sheep.

The modern day evangelist is a pastor, teacher, apostle, and prophet and will compass land and sea, ever searching for people who are hungry for God. When you adopt an evangelist today, you've adopted the whole nine yards of Ephesians 4:11. *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."*

The Pentecostal religion has its roots in the old-fashioned holiness movement, like John Wesley's Methodism. *"And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him:*

for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.” (Jn. 10:4-5) These “wolves in sheep’s clothing” frightened the Pentecostal sheep of Chicago and in the Bible Belt states of the South where the Pattens had been preaching freely. They arrived in Oakland flat broke.

This was in 1941. No congregation would be frightened by such apparel today! Today, we readily adopt the world right into the church by our “rap ‘n roll” music. The world must feel at home in the church, is the thought of the hour. But Hebrews calls such as bastards, not sons. *“But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”* (Heb. 12:8)

Only two ways to have church

Strangely, in our Pentecostal religion, we only know two ways to conduct church. We either hire a preacher (the “hireling” – Jn. 10:12), or we allow the preacher to own the church (a “lord over God’s heritage” – 1 Pet. 5:3) If you talk to any Pentecostal, you’ll find he belongs to one of these churches. All the Patten story is about is my experience with the latter, the “lord over God’s heritage.” I first rejected the “hireling” of the Assemblies of God only to become prey to the “lord.”

With a careful reading of John 10:1-18, you’ll discover that Jesus knew about both these types of shepherds, who are both strangers to the voice of the True Shepherd. *“But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth.”* (Jn. 10:12) The hireling is no match for the wolf. It is like a small businessman attempting to survive after Walmart has put up a new store in the neighborhood. I remember hearing Dr. Bebe Patten preach her sermon, “A Tree Planted in Oakland” in the largest auditorium in Oakland.

“Bebe Patten expatiated on this very theme: the Pattens were going to plant and prune the tree; others would harvest the fruit...To finance their initial activities in Oakland, the Pattens had borrowed money from some of the city’s established churches, the pastor’s assumption being that when the Pattens moved on, they would be leaving numerous converts behind, who would settle down and become regular Sunday churchgoers...But by this time (after the 19-week revival), apparently, the Pattens were beginning to think what a shame it would be to go off and leave all that lovely fruit. At the end of the nineteenth week, they closed their revival, amid the tears and blessings of the faithful; accepted a Chrysler station wagon, presented to them as a token of the everlasting gratitude of those they had converted; and drove to the outskirts of town, where they made a U turn and came back. God, they said, had spoken.”¹

Captain wanted to write a book, but Sinclair Lewis already had

I wanted to write a book about this pair, only to discover it had already been written by Sinclair Lewis in his book, Elmer Gantry. It was also made into a movie starring Burt Lancaster as Elmer Gantry. Who shall deliver us Pentecostals from the horror of men dressed in sheep’s clothing, giving us a Masonic sign of allegiance to another “god”? With this question constantly on my mind, how can we escape the pitfalls of the Assemblies of God “hireling” and the “lords over God’s heritage”?

The word, “Laodicea,” actually means from the Greek, “people rule.” The people own the church, hence must “hire” a preacher. The Bible schools are a sort of factory to produce preachers for the

¹ Annals of Crime Somebody is Going to Get Hit by Bernard Taper (see excerpts at end of this message)

Assemblies of God churches. Detroit, Mich. produces cars in a similar fashion, hence all Fords come out squeaking the same way. The factory produces preachers that all squeak alike. They all have the same hang-ups eulogizing the tombs of the prophets. *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous.”* (Matt. 23:29)

Benny Hinn would visit the tombs of both Aimee Semple McPherson and Katherine Kuhlman for spiritual communication and adoration. If I hadn’t obeyed God to stop this Goliath, the church would have had one more tomb for Pentecostal preachers to “garnish.” Bebe has a university named in her honor as her legacy; enough to “garnish” her tomb.

I’ve been in this one religion called Pentecostalism for almost 65 years. I’ve seen the various stages of growth from its infancy. When I first became a Pentecostal, it was considered a cult. Whenever the churches had citywide revival meetings, Pentecostal preachers were never invited to participate. It was William Branham, Oral Roberts, Mildred Wicks, William Freeman, Tommy Hicks, T.L. Osborn and Gordon Lindsay’s Voice of Healing publication, through “signs and wonders” during the late 1950’s and 1960’s that laid a foundation that the other religions could no longer ignore.

Captain had a dream

We had graduated from the storefront rented buildings to the largest churches in every city across America without the help of television. I always thank God that I obeyed the Lord and not procrastinated, for the Pattens would have easily deceived Paul and Jan Crouch to preach and raise money on TBN. But God! God gave me a dream and I saw myself on a witness stand. I knew I had my marching orders from heaven and nothing would stop me until Goliath had been slain. Goliath was slain, just as television was being birthed. We didn’t need “Elmer Gantry” displaying his powers of persuasion on worldwide television raising money.

In scripture, a church is depicted as a woman. For instance, the true church is *“prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”* (Rev. 21:2), whereas the false church is *“the great whore”* (Rev. 17:1). In a previous newsletter entitled, “And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou?”, I wrote about how I, as a virgin at the age of 27, married the “black widow.” But even more vicious than the black widow is “the cat,” that pur-r-r’s like a kitten on the honeymoon. Just as you need to learn about women, one must also learn about churches. Either could destroy you! Every man’s dream is to marry “the cat”! He’ll live to regret it.

Captain has another dream of two whirlpools

After leaving the Patten’s church, I went to another church called The Oakland Revival Tabernacle, where Dr. Cecil J. Lowry was the pastor. While attending this church, I heard words coming from the lips of this Assemblies of God ordained preacher that C. (for Cash) Tom Patten had used in his church. “My deacons are nothing more than a bunch of ushers. If you don’t like it, the doors swing both ways, and you can swing on out of here!”

Upon hearing such a confession from the pulpit, the entire congregation should have immediately stood up and headed for the doors. He is telling you, “I own this church, along with my young wife,

Rose Lowry, who leads the church in singing, banging on her tambourine, wearing a short skirted dress so tight to the body it seems she was poured into it.” Talk about a floorshow on Sunday morning in the church! No wonder the crowds came!

One night, God gave me a dream about two whirlpools. The one whirlpool represented LaBelle Bebe’s church, while the other whirlpool represented the church of Cecil J. Lowry. God told me in my dream that He had gotten me out of the first whirlpool, but if I stepped into the second whirlpool, I was never coming out!

Following that dream, I visited the California Secretary of State’s office to look for the non-profit religious incorporation records that are available to the public. Both Articles of Incorporation were identical, giving the pastor absolute power over the sheep. This is the reason Apostle John in John 10:10 writes, *“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.”* Who is the thief, but the wolf of John 10:12. If the preacher owns the church, please get out! It is not God’s kingdom, but only another whirlpool. Folks are simply too lazy to visit the courthouse to find out who owns the church to find the thief. The thief not only steals your money, but installs himself as god. You have no recourse but to leave. By law, he owns all the real estate.



Oakland was ripe to be plucked!
(Dressed in white for purity.)

A Tree Planted in Oakland

Evangelist Bebe H. Patten and her business-manager husband, C. (for Cash) Thomas Patten (alias Jack Groves of Lyles, TN), commence a 19-week revival meeting in Oakland’s largest auditorium by Lake Merritt in late 1943, after which they promise to leave the fruit for others to pluck, in a sermon entitled, “A Tree Planted in Oakland.”

ANNALS OF CRIME SOMEBODY IS GOING TO GET HIT ²

By Bernard Taper
(Written in 1959)

(Headings added by the Captain)

The old fraud the King in "Huckleberry Finn" made his rascally way through the world by free-lance preaching, fortune-telling, faith healing, and what he lumped under the heading of "missionaryin' around." For bilking the gullible, as he saw it there was simply nothing that could beat taking up collections at revival meetings, where he got his richest results from some of his most bogus appeals. The King, as a thoughtful

student of the techniques required to rouse such gatherings to the fervent belief that their best chance of laying up treasures in Heaven consisted in depositing their earthly treasures in the collection plates, would undoubtedly have derived considerable edification from watching the operations of a fundamentalist minister named C. Thomas Patten, who once boasted, "I am the only man in the world who ever made a million dollars three times over from religion," and who, in the heyday of his operations as the dominant member of a husband-and-wife evangelical team, during and soon after the Second World War, may well have been one of the greatest virtuosos of all time in the art of exploiting the honest spiritual urges of others for his own dishonest ends. Patten, who died last year of a heart attack at the age of forty-five, was a burly, brash, unlettered man with a powerful gift for the sort of rhetoric that passes understanding; considerable charm of a backwoods variety; an uncommon flair for the whimsical, ludicrous, and outrageous; and a round ruddy face of the kind often described as "frank and honest." When

² Read the full, complete article under “Articles” at www.shipofzion.com

in form, he could not only take up collections of extraordinary size for his ostensibly godly purposes, but could also persuade his followers to donate money to buy him such manifestly secular items as peacocks, pet bulldogs, and cowboy boots. Once, giving a bravura demonstration of his talents--as Paganini might have dashed off a breath-taking cadenza--he even took up a collection for money to throw into a lake. It was, by all accounts, a goodly offering. No witnesses can be found who saw him actually throw the money into the lake, but there are some who can recall that when he received the collection plates at the pulpit on this occasion, he dramatically tore a bill in half--to show his good faith, presumably--and then carefully stuffed both halves into his pocket. Though naturally proud of his abilities, Patten did not claim sole credit for them. "God gave me the power to take money from people," he used to say, with pious modesty.

Patten Didn't Believe In Keeping Records

It was in California that Patten's career flourished after years of barren effort elsewhere in the country. There, he and his wife set up what they called a permanent revival and gathered the congregation whose faith and pocket-books he was to drain in succeeding years. Though it might be thought that even a minor talent for fraudulent evangelism would stand a good chance of being richly rewarded in California, it must also be recognized that nowhere else does an entrepreneur of Patten's sort have to put up with such stiff competition from so many varieties of prophets, quacks, eccentrics, and fanatics. The most impressive measure of Patten's success in the face of such rivalry was the wealth he amassed during the years between 1944, when he arrived in California, practically penniless, and 1950, when after the state had indicted him on various charges of fraud and embezzlement, he was packed off to jail. No one has ever discovered exactly how much he persuaded his congregation to donate to him during those six years, since Patten didn't believe in keeping records, but it's known for a fact that in that period he and his wife made deposits of more than a million dollars in their personal bank accounts, acquired real estate that included a quarter-million-dollar building and two well-stocked ranches, and set themselves up as proprietors of a thriving, though unaccredited, college and seminary, and of an assortment of business enterprises. In filling Patten's collection plates to the brim, most members of his congregation had the impression, which he assiduously fostered, that they were contributing to God's work. The fact that a large part of these donations were used by Patten for private speculations, and even for gambling, did not emerge until a few of his parishioners finally, and with deep reluctance, decided to take legal action against him. It was during the ensuing trial, which turned out to be one of the longest and gaudiest in the State of California, that the full scope of Patten's talent for charming or wringing money from a bedazzled congregation became generally known.

Aimee Semple McPherson Was Run Out of Oakland, Her First Choice to Build a Temple

The principal scene of Patten's activities was the city of Oakland, a sprawling, shapeless community of about four hundred thousand people, just across the bay from San Francisco. Geographically, and in a number of other respects as well, Oakland's relationship to San Francisco is comparable to that of Jersey City to New York. Oakland has long envied San Francisco its dramatic site, its colorful history, and its fame, and has resented its own status as something of a metropolitan joke. Dreary, unadventurous, inevitably second-best in everything, the city seems to be waiting for some miracle that will completely transform its life and quality. Its chief geographical ornament, Lake Merritt, an obviously artificial body of water, was clearly intended to make up for the natural marvels Oakland felt it lacked. Though the city is situated on San Francisco Bay, few of the streets and homes afford maritime vistas; rather, they seem to turn inward on themselves. The prevailing westerlies, which sweep invigoratingly across San Francisco, ruffling the canopies of the outdoor flower stands and bringing to San Franciscans the challenge of the Pacific and a sense of broad destiny, have conveyed to Oaklanders chiefly the persistent reminder of their sewage problems. When Aimee Semple McPherson, the Patten's most celebrated predecessor in California evangelical circles, went West, during the First World War, looking for the right place to set up her evangelistic temple, Oakland struck her as the



perfect location; as it happened, she was run out of town by an inhospitable chief of police, and only then did she settle in Los Angeles, her second choice.

Both Pattens Born in Hickman County, TN

C. Thomas Patten (the "C" was for Carl, but it gratified his odd sense of humor to tell people that it stood for Cash) and his wife, Bebe, first appeared in Oakland in January, 1944. They had been travelling revivalism's sawdust trail through the South and Midwest for nearly a decade, and when they drove into Oakland, they were fed up with wandering and, as Patten told it subsequently, were so poor that their only assets were three dollars and a spare tire. "We sold the spare tire," Patten told his Oakland congregation in days of later opulence. "Then we got down so low we had only enough to buy a bowl of soup between us. My wife ate the soup and I ate the crackers." At the time of their arrival in Oakland, Patten was thirty years old, and his wife--a tall, imperious brunette with a rather long nose, a dazzling but impersonal smile, and a voice that was resonant, commanding, and most important, tireless--was twenty-nine. On the platform, they made a striking pair, Bebe Patten usually being attired in resplendent white satin robes, while her husband favored wild neckties (including one with dollar signs rampant), suits of assorted flavorsome hues, from pistachio to raspberry, and invariably, cowboy boots. Both Pattens had been born in rural Hickman County, Tennessee. Bebe Patten, who had been brought up in Detroit, affected a citified manner and never mentioned her Tennessee origins, but Patten--who could not have disguised his broad backwoods drawl if he had wanted to--gloried in them. When relating some Bible story, which he told with homely and absurd detail, he would almost inevitably be led, by way of illustration or reminiscence, into anecdotes about his own past and his family's doings down in Tennessee, and would then at last wander back to his Biblical tale--his listeners being left with the impression that Patten, Moses, Elijah, Jonah, Patten's father (or daddy, as he always called him), Jesus, The Twelve Apostles, and Patten's ten brothers and sisters had all been running around Hickman County at about the same time and were all figures in the same grand comic myth. In these reminiscences, Patten's father figured as a man of enormous wealth, learning, and political power, who had, unhappily, nourished a grudge against religion ever since the time a crawfish nipped him on the toe while he was being baptized in a mountain stream. According to the legend, he had disinherited the younger Patten when the latter was converted. "I have seen the time" Patten recounted in one of his sketches of Patten Senior, "when my daddy had bodyguards. One in front of him, one on either side, and one behind him, and in crooked politics up to his neck. He was a college teacher, and I believe he is one of the most brilliant men I have ever met. I went home one time and my daddy was worth a million dollars and was sitting right in the middle of the bed. He used to wear big old red flannel pajamas, and he used to have them tailor-made. He would be right in the middle of the bed and I would say, 'Daddy, you're going to Hell.'"

C. Thomas Patten-"Bootlegger" at 17

Disentangling the reality from the myth in Patten's life story is an involved task. The facts, as compiled by investigators at the time of the evangelist's trial, were that his father, Thomas Hendrix Patten, had run a small country store in Lyles, Tennessee (pop. 500), and had owned a scrubby, run-down farm. He had been four times convicted of bootlegging by the federal authorities and had served three terms in the Atlanta Penitentiary (which may have been where he had had the bodyguards). At the age of seventeen, young C. Thomas Patten was kicked out of high school for making whiskey in the school basement. When he was twenty-one, he was arrested in Florida on a charge of transporting stolen cars across state lines. On that occasion, when he was asked by the police what his occupation was, he forthrightly replied, "Bootlegger." He was convicted on the stolen-car charge and given a two-year sentence, suspended. Shortly after this, he met the twenty-year-old Bebe Harrison, who was visiting relatives in Hickman County while recovering from a brief, unfortunate marriage. "She was the only girl I ever met I couldn't get fresh with, so I married her," Patten used to tell his congregation, which doted on each detail of the Patten's romance. "And, folks, if that woman was to ask me for the moon, I'd go a-huntin' for a ladder." Before she met Patten, Bebe had lived for a time in Los Angeles, where she graduated with honors from Aimee Semple McPherson's Lighthouse of International Four Square Evangelism. According to the Pattens, Bebe had insisted on her fiancé's conversion as a condition of their marriage. After the newlyweds set out on the road together, he studied the Bible under her tutelage, and was ultimately ordained a minister of the gospel by the Fundamental

Ministerial Association, a group loosely uniting various Pentecostal and Southern Baptist denominations. The Patten's longest ministerial sojourn before they reached Oakland was a year in Cleveland, at a place of worship known as the Broadside Tabernacle. The rest of the time, they moved from town to town, organizing revivals that lasted anywhere from one day to eight weeks, and often barely making what Patten called "eating money."

Bankers Are Conned

Although Patten liked to claim that the initial "C" in his name stood for Cash, he might have said, with almost equal aptness, that it stood for Credit. Throughout his years in Oakland, he borrowed constantly from every source he could tap. "God's business man of the hour" was what he often styled himself, and the bankers of Oakland seem to have been just as charmed as the congregation was by his bold, hearty manner, his open countenance, and his air of purposeful sincerity. For instance, as soon as he had collected enough money to make the first payment on the lot he had chosen as the site of his tabernacle, he engaged in what had become his standard practice: he negotiated a loan on the property. In this case, he managed to obtain a bank loan of ten thousand dollars immediately after making a down payment of eight thousand dollars. The pleasure of obtaining a loan amounting to a hundred and twenty-five per cent of the collateral is something that the average citizen can never hope to experience, but it was by no means unusual for Patten. In one year, one bank alone lent him a total of \$448,000, most of which, commingled in riotously unbusiness-like confusion with funds contributed by his congregation, he used in real-estate speculations, which he liked to call "business adventures for God." From the Bank of America and the Bank of Commerce, he obtained, during 1947, ten completely unsecured loans, totaling ninety-five thousand dollars. For several months in 1946, the Bank of Commerce permitted him to go along without making any payment at all on a loan of a hundred and seventy-nine thousand dollars, and almost daily during that time this same institution where he had one of his personal checking accounts, tolerated overdrafts running as high as twenty-nine thousand dollars. When he presently decided that he wanted to start a radio station, he had no trouble in getting a number of leading bank officials (one of whom later became Oakland's city manager) to vouch for his character and probity to the Federal Communications Commission. (Patten's success with banks furnishes substantiation of a theory once propounded by Joseph R. Weil, who as the Yellow Kid, was famous as one of the shrewdest confidence men of our era; according to Weil, bankers are among the best marks to be found, and if a con man can't fool a banker, he should really consider taking up some other line of work.)

Aimee Semple McPherson's Ears Offended By Jangle Of Coins

Comparisons of the results that Patten obtained by his outrageous methods with the collections of other evangelists are difficult to make. With only a few exceptions--Dwight Moody, Gipsy Smith, and Billy Graham are the outstanding ones--evangelists have tended to be closemouthed about the size of their offerings. Many of them have maintained that they were financially accountable to nobody but their Maker--a claim that Patten's attorneys also made, as a defense, at his trial. The rip-roaring Billy Sunday, whose income from revivalism shortly after the First World War was rumored to be around a hundred thousand dollars a year, is known on occasion to have challenged his audience with "If there's any man here feels it's his business how much money I'm receiving, let him step forward and I'll knock his block off." During the twenties, it is said, Aimee Semple McPherson--who used to tell her audiences that her delicate ears were offended by the jangle of coins, and who passed clotheslines down into the auditorium for people to pin their greenbacks to--raised as much as twenty thousand dollars at one meeting of around five thousand people. The collections made in recent years at Billy Graham's meetings are quite another matter, both in the way they are taken up and in the way records of them are kept and published. Graham is, in face, a sort of organization man of evangelism. A central corporation--the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Inc.--handles the financial aspect of his general religious activities, and a separate corporation is set up in every city where he conducts one of his campaigns. Each corporation is run by local businessmen, church officials, and other community leaders, and at services it is one of these people who calls for the offering. The largest collection ever made at a Graham meeting was in the neighborhood of forty thousand dollars, from a crowd estimated at a hundred thousand people in Yankee Stadium in 1957. Graham himself takes up no collections, though at times he has been known to utter a crisp reminder of how costly it is to rent an arena these days. All the proceeds from Graham's books, films, television programs, and so on, go to the Billy Graham

Evangelistic Association, from which he receives a salary of fifteen thousand dollars a year. This glass-fishbowl type of operation has been worked out by Graham only in the last decade. Before 1950, he was a free, unincorporated agent, taking up his own collections and making his living from the customary "love offerings" accounting to no one, like most evangelists. The impulse that led him to break this pattern, he has said, was his distress at seeing, in an Atlanta newspaper, a photograph of stacks of cartons full of the money collected at one of his meetings, which seemed to him to convey the implication that he was capitalizing on religion. Such misgivings, it would seem, never disturbed C. Thomas Patten, who once posed for newspaper photographers wearing his dollar-sign-emblazoned necktie and with a bouquet of greenbacks sprouting from his lapel, and who used to say, "I read the Bible through, and I never found any place where it said a preacher had to be broke."

"If I Throw The Money Into Lake Merritt, It Is Nobody's Business!"

This was the greatest disillusionment the congregation could have suffered, and for the first time some members were bold enough to remonstrate with Patten. In his usual highhanded fashion, he retorted, "it's nobody's business what my wife and I do with our property." He brushed aside the suggestion that he was obligated to use for church purposes the money he had solicited at church meetings, declaring that evangelists couldn't be held financially accountable. "If I'd wanted to, I could have thrown that money into Lake Merritt," he said. It was soon after this that, as an ultimate demonstration of his persuasiveness, he took up his collection for money to throw into that body of water. Despite such bravado, he presently decided that it would be expedient to pay off some of the loans his parishioners had made to him at the time he purchased the building. Walking into the auditorium one Sunday when the congregation had assembled for the service, he began taking wads of green-backs out of his pockets and piling them on the pulpit. "All right, now," he called, "Come and get it, everybody here I've borrowed money from." He claimed to have paid off forty-five thousand dollar's worth of debts then and there, and even though the total was probably not as high as that, Patten being congenitally unable to resist the temptation to exaggerate, those who were present agree that the occasion was spectacular. The sight of Patten passing out money to members of his congregation, instead of taking it from them, was something many of them had never expected to see this side of Paradise. When he had disbursed all the greenbacks on the pulpit, the service proceeded on its normal course--hymns, prayers, announcements, and then, of course, a collection by Patten. There is no record of how much of his money he took right back...

Reno Escapades!

With these various unpleasantnesses developing in Oakland, Patten began to seek diversion by slipping off to Reno for gambling sessions. The atmosphere of the casinos--the display of large amounts of cash, the sudden strokes of fortune, the swift gain and loss, the opportunities for suicidal recklessness and large ruinous gestures--was probably very congenial to his spirit. But in Reno, as in Oakland, he pushed his luck too far. After his second visit, he paid for his losses at a casino called the Palace Club with two checks amounting to forty-two hundred dollars, which bounced. When the club sent a collection agent to Oakland, the amused Patten allowed that there must have been some mistake at the bank, and wrote out two more checks, which proved to be just as worthless. The collector came again, and Patten grandly traded him two brand-new rubber checks for the old ones. This episode quite disturbed the faith of the manager of the Palace Club, a man known as Baldy West. By Baldy West's standards, it was all right if ministers wanted to gamble, but it was unthinkable that they should welsh on their debts--not because West deemed them more honest than secular gamblers but because he took it for granted that they were more vulnerable to public exposure. "I knew he was a minister all along--that was why I took his checks," West later told a district attorney's investigator rather sorrowfully. "I figured he wouldn't dare run the risk of any trouble."

Patten Before a Grand Jury

On November 4, 1949, Patten was summoned before a grand jury, which asked him if he believed in God. Patten refused to answer the question, on the ground that his reply might tend to degrade or incriminate him. He responded in the same way to the jury's hundred or more subsequent questions, most of which, more pertinent to a jury's inquiry than that about his private beliefs, concerned his collections and what he had done with the proceeds. Shortly thereafter, he was indicted on ten counts of grand theft, embodying charges of embezzlement and two forms of fraud: taking money under false pretenses, and obtaining

money by trick and device. On February 14, 1950, his trial began. It was unique in California's judicial annals not only because of its length--four and a half months, which set a record for criminal jury trials in the state--but also because of the camp-meeting atmosphere that Patten and his followers brought to the proceedings. Soon after the case began, a procession of Patten's embattled faithful, carrying signs that read "GIVE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BACK TO THE UNITED STATES!" and praying for miraculous intervention, marched for hours round and round the county courthouse, like Joshua's army at Jericho. To their disappointment, the courthouse--a fireproof, earthquake-proof, and apparently prayer proof building--didn't even tremble. As the trial proceeded, these disciples, wearing their "P" sweaters packed the courtroom day after day; they chorused "Amen!" to the testimony of defense witnesses, glowered at the prosecution table, laughed with delight at Patten's constant sallies and asides, and ran errands that he kept thinking up for them--all to the increasing exasperation of the judge and bailiff.....

Sentenced to 7 Years in Prison, But Served 3

At the end of nineteen weeks, a period that spectators with a sense of form may have recognized as that of the Patten's revival when they first came to Oakland, the trial ended, with Patten found guilty on five counts. He was sentenced to seven years in prison, of which he served only three, before his release on account of a cardiac condition. During his stay in the penitentiary, his wife maintained the church and seminary in Oakland, in much reduced circumstances, as she still does. After his parole in 1953, and until his death last May, Patten assisted her with various duties, but only in a desultory fashion, being seriously hampered by the terms of his parole. These terms--probably as unusual as any that have ever been promulgated--were that he could go back into church work if he wished but that he must never again take up a collection.

Captain's warning to the church

If we don't repent of being Laodicean (Gk.-people rule), or of these "*lord's over God's heritage*" (1 Pet. 5:3), the church will return to Rome once again. We'll repeat the Dark Ages. Does anyone care? God called us to go two-by-two, thus indicative of belonging to a brotherhood (1 Pet. 2:17), over which Jesus Christ, our elder brother, presides as "the Captain of our salvation."