



1-1-1965

The Life and Contribution of Robert Monroe Bell

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Date January 18, 1965

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Thesis title:

"The Life & Contribution of
R. M. Reel"

Thesis approved in final form:

Date Jan 25, 1965

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THE LIFE AND CONTRIBUTION OF ROBERT MONROE BELL

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BY

Claire E. Berry

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Division of Graduate Instruction
Butler University
Indianapolis
1965

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since 1941, R. M. Bell has devoted his life to the training of ministers as the President of Johnson Bible College, Kimberlin Heights, Tennessee. During his tenure as president he has represented a point of view that has played both a distinctive and controversial role in the life of our Brotherhood. It is the purpose of this study to examine his life historically with emphasis on the events and influences that helped shape his life and thought. His theological positions will be surveyed and a critique given regarding the contribution his life and thought has had in our church.

In order to provide as large a vista as possible from which to view President Bell's life and work, an introductory chapter on Johnson Bible College and its former Presidents, Ashley S. Johnson and Alva Ross Brown, will be included. In this brief review, we shall examine the founding of Johnson Bible College and the lives and policies of the former Presidents. This will enable us later to see how Dr. Bell's administration has fitted into this larger historical picture.

I estimate that directly or indirectly I have caused one hundred thousand people to be added to the church, and the work of preaching, converting, adding, transforming has only begun; to say nothing of the hosts unnumbered whose lives have been brightened by my books, my boys, my influence, and the hosts that shall be.¹

¹A. S. Johnson, The Resurrection and Future Life (Knoxville: Knoxville Lithographing Co., 1913), p. 490.

These words were spoken by Ashley S. Johnson concerning the witness of his life through Johnson Bible College. It was not said boastingly, but, rather, to the glory of God.

Johnson Bible College was the one consuming passion that occupied the adult life of Dr. Johnson. It would be appropriate at the outset to ask, "How did the dream of Johnson Bible College begin? What events shaped the fulfillment of that dream?"

It is impossible to answer these questions without probing into the life of Dr. Johnson. For the life of the school and his life are intertwined. Dr. Johnson was born with pioneer blood coursing through his veins. The ancestry of Ashley Johnson came into Tennessee on the first waves of westward immigration from the Carolinas and Virginia, and Dr. Johnson was three or four generations removed from the early immigrating group.¹ Describing his humble birth, Alva Ross Brown, a close friend, and later president of the school, wrote,

"In an old log cabin, built shortly after the close of the Revolution by his great grandfather, Jacob Kimberlin, in Knox County, Tennessee, twelve miles east of Knoxville, on the northern side of the French-Broad River, Ashley S. Johnson, well-known author, educator and 'father of the poor young preacher', was born."²

His early life was no different from that of any other young boy reared in a rural setting. Like many in his day, the only thing he lacked toward securing an education was an opportunity. He wrote:

My parents were poor, but my father being naturally ambitious for his firstborn son, impressed me when a small child with the belief that I could be and do something in the world... My father

¹Frank E. Davis, "A Survey Of The Doctrinal Emphasis of Ashley S. Johnson" (unpublished B. D. dissertation, Dept. of Christian Doctrine, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1953), p. 20.

²A. R. Brown, Standing on the Promises (Knoxville: S. B. Newman & Co., 1928), p. 170. (June 22, 1857.)

taught me to work.... He taught me the value of honor, and brought me strictly to the straight line. I can remember when I was two years old, but I cannot remember when I learned the alphabet. I distinctly remember when I began to learn to write. My paper was the family hearthstone, and my pen a piece of soft-stone.¹

Dr. Johnson was not only described as being ambitious but also precocious. As a lad he found a statement on the fly leaf of an old arithmetic book that became a part of his outlook toward life: "What man has done, man can do."²

When he was seventeen years old, he passed the county examination for a teacher's certificate. He taught occasionally in the following year, took an active part in the neighborhood debating society, and read such books as he could get. In the fall of 1875, he entered the University of Tennessee, where he remained for a time, and then entered the law office of General J. C. J. Williams, of Knoxville.

In early years his parents were indifferent about church. They were religious in one sense of the word, but Dr. Johnson never attended Sunday School until he was a grown man. His religious background was chiefly Baptist. However, his family came under the influence of John Adcock, and they joined the Christian Church.

Dr. Johnson was indifferent to the Christian Faith during this period even though he had been exposed to excellent Bible teachers. Then, in October, 1877, he attended a mourner's bench style Baptist revival. In the midst of the excitement this uninvited thought came to him: "Here I am, trifling my time away, knowing the truth, and these people are drifting to judgement in ignorance: I will turn over a new leaf and be a preacher."³ This conversion touched the very roots of Dr. Johnson.

¹A. S. Johnson, The Story of a Hundred Dollars (Kimberlin Heights: 1898), pp. 2-3.

²Brown, op. cit., p. 173.

³Ibid., p. 180.

Whereas most of us postpone absolute surrender to the process of time, his experience was complete. He remarked:

If conversion is a complete turning, I was converted, for I turned my back on all my life-plans and ambitions and gave myself unreservedly to the work of Christ. I preached my first sermon within a week of my baptism and, from that day to this, I have laid my life on God's altar, counting everything loss, nothing worthwhile but the proclamation of the Gospel.¹

Dr. Johnson truly channeled all his native talents to the work of Christ. Besides debating, he was a prolific and persuasive writer. In 1881 he wrote the "Great Controversy" of which one hundred thousand copies were published. He wrote articles for the Christian Standard. From 1888-1892 he issued Johnson's Quarterly. In all, he wrote fourteen books.

Feeling the need for further voice training, he left his home in the summer of 1884 and attended a school of oratory in Canada. Here he met and married Miss Emma Elizabeth Strawn who became his indefatigable co-worker in Christ.

Following their marriage they served the churches at Clarence and North Lancaster, New York. During the following summer they conducted revival meetings and then accepted a church in South Carolina. Concerning the work in South Carolina, he wrote:

I was more than ever brought face to face with the Great Harvest and the need of more preachers. I was the only man in that large state who was giving his entire time to the work; indeed, there were very few preachers in the state. One night I was sick, in the cabin of a good man, and I got up and built a fire and sat by it and thought. And there, as suddenly as had come my resolution to preach, came the thought that I could train men to preach by mail. The correspondence Bible College was born!²

¹Brown, op. cit., p. 183. ²Ibid., p. 187

The Correspondence Bible College was a complete success. He soon decided to give up regular preaching and settled in Knoxville, Tennessee, where he gave full time to this new work. Although the work flourished, Dr. Johnson was thoroughly convinced by now that the Correspondence Bible College did not meet the needs of the poor young man who could not avail himself because of the lack of an English education. For nearly two years he was burdened with this unsatisfied longing.

It seemed the Lord was leading him into a real life of trust. For it was not long until the opportunity came for Dr. Johnson to purchase the old homestead at Kimberlin Heights, Tennessee. The Johnsons sold their home in Knoxville and built a house in the country. Writing of his passion for a college, he said:

The School of the Evangelists was burning on the altar of my heart. I told my wife about it. She could not comprehend it. I wrote to my friends about it. They gave me the greatest discouragement of which they were capable. I was alone as far as "like flesh and blood" was concerned, and yet not alone, for the Lord was with me. I kept the thing in my heart when I could, and talked about it when I could not help it. The Lord was leading me, but I knew it not.¹

In the fall of 1892 he shared his vision of a college publicly after an evening sermon to the church at Bearden, Tennessee. At the conclusion of his remarks, Mr. W. F. Crippen came and whispered in his ear what Dr. Johnson truly believed to be his commission to go forward: "Go ahead, and I will give you a hundred dollars."² In a very real sense it was here the college was born.

¹A. S. Johnson, The Story of a Hundred Dollars, The Evangelistic Library (898, XXIX, 4, 6.

²Ibid.

Reflecting on this incident Alva Ross Brown wrote:

Is it faith that prompts a man to go into debt thousands of dollars upon the promise of a mere hundred? This fact is worthy of being stressed: Everything which the Lord has brought to fruition at Kimberlin Heights has been builded upon an original gift of one hundred dollars! Yet not one hundred dollars alone! Rather one hundred dollars plus faith in God! Consider the wondrous growth here. No mortal can tell just how it all happened, but the institution does exist and its work goes on to the glory of God and man.¹

Trusting in God, Dr. Johnson contacted a friend in Atlanta to draw up a set of blueprints for the first building. He sent out an appeal to friends soliciting their support of his plans. On faith, he had ordered lumber, brick and nails. He also had contracted workmen to avoid delay in the erection of the building, but there was hardly a response to the appeal. Rather than discouraging him, this lack of response spurred him on to utter dependence on God.

On May 12, 1893, a special service was held and the corner stone was laid for the School of the Evangelists. At the conclusion of the ceremony, Lewis Tillman, a Knoxville lawyer and friend, gave a book to Dr. Johnson entitled, The Life of Trust, by George Müller. Two years this book laid on Dr. Johnson's shelf unread. Then, one day he took it down and read it, and a whole new dimension of life was opened. Referring to the book, Ashley S. Johnson said:

Its title page is as follows: "The Life of Trust; being a narrative of the Lord's dealings with George Müller, written by himself." I began to read. I was charmed, enthralled, lifted into a clearer atmosphere. The book contains 528 pages and every page is afire with the exemplification of Bible truth the fulfillment of God's promises to those who believe and pray and work. It narrates in detail the dealings of the Lord with His servant from the time of

¹A. R. Brown, Standing on the Promises (Knoxville: S. B. Newman & Co., 1928), p. 11.

his conversion, not to give a view of a most wretched life in sin previous to the time when he had, in answer to prayer, without asking a human being for a cent, erected buildings on Ashley Down, Bristol, England, and was actually housing, training and feeding over 2,000 orphan children with no one and nothing to which or to whom he could appeal in the day of trouble, but the Throne of God's grace. This book worked in me mightily. Here was a man, who before I was born, had been walking in the light and path which I had been trying to find. Here was a man who believed the great promises of the New Testament and was acting like a man who did believe, and was proving by actual tests that these promises are for us - for every believing soul who is willing to submit himself to God... I read and re-read. I began, in a feeble way, to follow his steps....I pray this prayer: "Lord teach me to pray as Thou didst teach George Müller to pray; and answer my prayers as Thou didst answer his prayers."¹

It was through his zealous and penetrating study of scripture and the splendid influence of the life of George Müller that Ashley S. Johnson became yoked in partnership with God. Dr. Johnson's emphasis on faith, prayer, and works led him to a complete dependence on the promises of God. They became the warp and woof of the institution he founded.

Ashley S. Johnson had his own definite policies to serve as guidelines for this new institution. He was influenced by Alexander Campbell and J. W. McGarvey in his philosophy of educating ministers. Moreover, Dr. Johnson seemed possessed with a passion to provide an opportunity for poor young men to preach the Gospel. Over the entrance into the main building have been inscribed the words, "The Poor Have the Gospel Preached Unto Them," and by the side of the same entrance are these words, "Open day and night to the poor young man who desires above every other desire to preach the Gospel of Christ." It became a pledge of the institution not to turn away any young man for lack of finances. Alva Ross Brown

¹Robert E. Black, The Story of Johnson Bible College (Kimberlin Heights: Tennessee Valley Printing Co., 1951), p. 43.

spoke of this in his book, Standing on the Promises, by pointing out three distinct propositions offered to students:

- First: The student may work for eight months and ten days and receive a scholarship for two years, which scholarship entitles him to all school expenses, including tuition, board, heated room, and electric current.
- Second: The student may pay eighty-five dollars in advance and work twenty-five and one half hours per week and receive his schooling complete for one year.
- Third: The student may pay two hundred and twenty dollars in advance and receive his schooling complete for one year.¹

Another feature of the school is its stress on preaching New Testament Christianity with the Bible as the chief text book. Very early Dr. Johnson asserted:

The School of the Evangelists was founded to meet the great and ever-increasing need of the cause of New Testament Christianity, for more laborers in the world's harvest. It was founded on and is conducted on God's promises to those who trust and work with and for Him. It was, in endeavoring to meet the want for preachers, designed also to help young men of limited means or no means to prepare themselves for work of the Lord.²

The school came to be known as a "Preacher Training Institution in a Preacher Growing Atmosphere." In 1909 the school changed its name to Johnson Bible College, which name it bears at the present time.

From its inception it was dedicated to the "ancient order of things." Dr. Johnson was firmly committed to the "Restoration Plea" as proclaimed by the "Restoration Fathers." He felt that the New Testament provided a sufficient plan to unite Christendom and end division.

¹Brown, op. cit., P. 80.

²Catalogue, School of the Evangelists, (1900-01), p. 5.

Expressing his profound faith in this message, he said:

We can find and walk in the "old paths." We can live for Christ and the publication of the pure Gospel. Nothing short of "one body," "one spirit," "one hope," "one Lord," "one faith," "one baptism," "one God and Father," and one name, will settle us on the old foundation. The signs of the times are full of encouragement for sectarianism is slowly but surely dying. The Lord is preparing His army for the coming triumph. I unfurl His banner today. Upon its shining folds are written letters of fire: "The Bible, And The Bible Alone."¹

In the fullest sense Johnson was a Bible College. "Approximately one-fourth of its college work was centered in the Bible."² The type of study in the Bible was not in the nature of a survey. Rather, it was verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book analysis.

Dr. Johnson was convinced that the "Word of God" must be planted as a seed in the hearts of young ministers. He felt the chief need was to concern them with the spiritual. Consequently, since the Bible was the source of all spirituality, it must be the focal point of their study.

He was concerned, too, that once in the history of the Church many well-to-do and eminent men gave their sons to the ministry of the Word. But now it had drastically changed. He said:

During seventeen years' experience, I have assisted in the ordination of only one son of well-to-do parents! This was really remarkable and is yet, and bear in mind that I have dealt with hundreds. Where are the sons of our big bankers? Where are the sons of our big farmers? Where are the sons of our big doctors? Where - I hesitate to ask it - are the sons of most of our big preachers? Gone in the mad rush for fame and fortune in the race with the ungodly. There is a remedy for this appalling weakness. It lies first in this: The standard of success must be changed. It must be pounded into the very life of our churches - take the leaders individually - that a man can be successfully useful if he never makes a dollar. It must become apparent that life is not money; is not houses; is not land; is not bonds, but deeds; that life, like the Kingdom, is within men.³

¹A. S. Johnson, The Great Controversy (Cincinnati: F.L.Rome, Publishers, 1946), p. 191.

²Brown, op. cit., p. 59.

³Ibid., p. 258.

With all the stress that Dr. Johnson made upon the Bible, he did not succumb to the trap of bibliolatry. To him the Bible was ever a witness to Jesus Christ. He wrote:

The object of a prayer-meeting talk, an exhortation, a Bible reading, a sermon, is to move men to see in Jesus Christ the Savior of men, and to make it easy for them to obey the Gospel of truth.¹

We would be remiss if we did not stress a principle, even the guiding light of Dr. Johnson's life, in our remarks concerning guidelines in the school's program. We are referring, of course, to his belief in prayer.

Dr. Johnson often spoke of the importance of prayer in the life of Christ. He pointed to the many and varied occasions that Jesus depended upon prayer. He prayed following a battle with the Pharisees. The night was spent in prayer before he chose the twelve Apostles. It was during prayer that the transfiguration took place. Dr. Johnson asserted that the whole object of Jesus in becoming dependent, when he took on human form, was to teach men how to pray.

He who was the world's creator and man's redeemer could not during His life here work His wonders save by "prayer and fasting." This is a part of the voluntary humility of Jesus; it was not necessary to Him, but He did us the favor of showing us in real life how to pray.²

He further pointed out:

Who will say that, during the forty days and nights of temptation in the wilderness, Jesus was not arming Himself by prayer as well as by fasting for the mighty conflicts that were before Him? Who will say that in the long night of prayer on the mountain on the night before He chose the twelve apostles He was not seeking Divine

¹A. S. Johnson, Bible Readings and Sermon Outlines (Knoxville: Press of Ogden Brothers and Co., 1900), p. 3.

²A. S. Johnson, The Life of Trust (Knoxville: Ogden Brothers and Co., 1897), p. 44.

Wisdom for this great work? All through His earthly life He manifested His power and the power of prayer.¹

Throughout his entire life, Dr. Johnson considered prayer the voice of dependency and helplessness. He always ended his prayers, "in the name of Christ," not because it was a magical formula but because it was the expression of dependence upon Jesus Christ, man's advocate in heaven.

Dr. Johnson was able to instill these strong convictions into the life of the school. He was the author of the following statements:

We work as if everything depends upon work;
 We trust as if everything depends upon trust;
 We believe as if everything depends upon faith;
 We pray as if everything depends upon prayer;
 We wait as if everything depends upon waiting.²

Every student who has attended Johnson Bible College learns the importance of prayer. The "upper room" which is a prayer room on the fourth floor of the main building, and, also, in the steeple of the new chapel, is a unique feature in the atmosphere of the school. Dr. Johnson felt a man might possess an excellent vocabulary, some knowledge, and a real ability to preach a sermon; but if he had not learned the value of prayer and was not sufficiently convinced to order his life accordingly, he was an unprofitable servant of Christ.

Also, one remembers the "prayer meeting" held each evening in chapel. The thrill of singing gospel hymns as well as the great hymns of the church as a student body is an experience long remembered. It was

¹Johnson, op. cit., p. 47.

²Brown, op. cit., p. 39.

not uncommon to hear thirty or forty sentence prayers from the students or receive letters of answered prayers from friends who had written requests in behalf of loved ones. Professor Robert Black has well observed:

There has been consistently about the institution an atmosphere of prayer and reliance on God. An attitude or atmosphere may be quite intangible to the senses and historically may be difficult to establish; however, the results accompanying the efforts of those who received their training in the halls and on the hills of Johnson Bible College cannot be disputed. The "upper room" and the "prayer meeting" remain the two poles around which the students' practice of prayer centers.¹

Dr. Johnson endeavored to create a spiritual atmosphere wherein young ministers could be transformed by the Holy Spirit and grow into full manhood in Christ. To him, the Holy Spirit was the key to this renewal. He explained it in this way:

What relation does the Holy Spirit bear to Christian growth? He is back of the whole remedial scheme; in every detail of it; He therefore furnishes both the seed of it and the object of it in Christ the Lord... The deep things of God, made known, or revealed, by the Holy Spirit to the human understanding, constitute the inspiration of his life.²

Without a doubt, these guiding principles produced results in the school. Some of our finest church leaders got their start in this "preacher training atmosphere." Also, Dr. Johnson's proposition that "faith in Christ - always including obedience to His will - is God's measure by which He blesses His children,"³ brought forth innumerable answers to prayer.

¹Robert E. Black, The Story of Johnson Bible College (Kimberlin Heights: Tennessee Valley Printing Co., August, 1951), p. 47.

²A. S. Johnson, The Holy Spirit and the Human Mind (Knoxville: Ogden Brothers & Co., 1899), p. 240.

³A. S. Johnson, Bible Readings and Sermon Outlines on the Christian Plea (Knoxville: Ogden Brothers & Co., 1900), p. 244.

Reflecting on this, he recalled how God answered the school's prayers in the early days. The greatest trial they faced then was the failure of the publishing house where their books were printed. This precipitated on the school bank notes and open accounts to the amount of three thousand dollars. He did not have a dollar with which to pay! There was nothing else for them to do but believe and pray!

The notes gradually began to disappear. Then the East Tennessee National Bank, which was holding one of the notes amounting to one thousand dollars, sent a notice in the mail that the note was due. In the same mail he received a notice from the Circuit Court Clerk, Fountain City, Indiana, that one thousand dollars from the estate of Mrs. Eliza Perkins was subject to his order. This is only one example of hundreds of testimonies of God's hand made manifest in this school having such high and noble objectives.

Dr. Johnson gave thirty-two years of his life as President of Johnson Bible College and nearly a half a century to the work of Christ. During his years as president he was persistently handicapped by poor health. Severe headaches, probably migraine, hampered his busy life. In later years he suffered constant pain from an abrasion of his shoulder which he received from X-ray treatments. When surgery was planned as the last hope of relief, it was postponed while he was on the operating table because of his dangerously high blood pressure. During his last days he travelled to Baltimore to search for relief from the gnawing shoulder ailment. On a Sunday morning he developed a cerebral hemorrhage. By the following Tuesday he became critical and then slipped silently into a coma and death.

He had an unswerving faith in the promise of the resurrection life. He never expressed it more confidently and colorfully than in one of his sermons:

There has been many a weary mile, many a weary day - foot-sore, anxious, worried, oppressed with burdens without and within, we have travelled together, touching elbow to elbow, hand to hand, and heart to heart. The weary watch will soon be over; the night of trial will soon be passed and we shall stand - Oh glorious thought! Oh grand and glorious consummation! - We shall stand in the presence of the King, transformed, glorified, made like unto Him....

....May God give us mansions close to one another in that city and may we gather up the boys that have been and those that are and those to come and our children and our children's children in the gospel unto the remotest age, and may we all take part ourselves and, while others join in the chorus, sing one grand, sweet song of triumph to Jesus who hath loved the sons of men and washed them in His blood and may live together and talk over the times when we had hardships here below, and may we see the smiling face of Him whom we believe and honor and may we as His children from every land, sit together in the sight of His throne and may the rest that is denied us here, sweet, deep, eternal, on Jesus' breast be ours there, ages on ages, infinite, eternal, unending - and so shall we be forever with the Lord!¹

From the beginning, Mrs. Johnson had worked side by side with her husband; her service was given quite as freely as his. And for ten years, she, due to President Johnson's afflictions, was virtually the head of the institution. If there is anything in preparation, she was certainly trained for the task.

For the next two and one-half years she gave vigorous and efficient leadership as President of Johnson Bible College. In 1926, however, there was a recurrence of cancer that had first appeared in 1923. Early on Decoration Day, May 30, 1927, her friends rallied to her as the doctor warned

¹A. S. Johnson, Johnson's Sermons on the Two Covenants (Hollywood: Old Paths Book Club, 1949), p. 240.

the end was near. She conversed with close friends and the next morning she slipped quietly into the silent halls of death.

Early in their marriage, Dr. and Mrs. Johnson lost their only child. In a real sense the boys at Johnson Bible College became their sons. But in the Fall of 1922, a freshman enrolled in the college who was destined to become not only a son to them but also their chosen heir to the presidency of Johnson Bible College. Since he had been a commercial student in high school, Alva Ross Brown became the "right arm" of Dr. and Mrs. Johnson in the office and a joy to their hearts the last years of their lives.

Alva Ross Brown was born September 7, 1905, in Fairfield, Pennsylvania.

He was named Alva Ross Brown for two friends of the family, J. Alva Hopkins, a preacher whom the Browns admired, and Dr. Ross McKinzie, the attending physician at the child's birth. Alva, as he was always called in his childhood, named after a preacher and destined to be a preacher, was the joy of his parents.¹

Mr. Brown's parents were of English, Irish, and German extraction. His father, Edward Brown, was somewhat unstable in the early years. He vacillated between farming and operating a store near Marion and Fairfield, Pennsylvania. In 1916 they moved to historic Gettysburg and settled down into a wholesome home environment.

From the beginning, Alva was a good student and conscientious about his studies. He was well liked by his school friends and showed avid interest in sports as a participant and a spectator. He entered

¹Delno Wayne Brown, "Biography of Alva Ross Brown" (unpublished B. D. dissertation, Dept. of Church History, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1945), p. 8.

High School at Gettysburg at the age of 13, and graduated when he was only sixteen. Nicknamed "Brownie," the following lines were written by his picture in the school annual:

Alva is the brilliant lad who astonishes us in his use of big words, especially so in history class, causing many of his classmates to consult their dictionaries. We are indeed proud to have so bright a star shining among us, but "Brownie" is destined for greater things than merely twinkling in G. H. S. He tells us he is going to be President some day. This, only time can answer.....¹

Alva's father and grandfather, Philip Brown, had become a member of the Christian Church in Maryland. Evidently they were quite faithful to the tenets of the Christian Church. When they moved to Fairfield, they were the only residents who were members of the Christian Church and, consequently, there was no place for them to worship. With the help of their minister friend, J. Alva Hopkins, they conducted an evangelistic meeting and started a church. When Alva's family moved to Gettysburg, they continued to attend in Fairfield despite the distance.

This devoted loyalty made lasting impressions in the soul of young Alva Brown. Although the church finally died out, several young people from that church devoted their lives to full time Christian service.

Earlier, while Alva was in high school, an evangelist named Henry F. Lutz came to Fairfield to hold a meeting. After hearing his dynamic messages night after night, Alva confessed Christ as his Savior and was later baptized into Him.

Another influence that helped mould Alva's religious career was the influence of his mother. "She had always possessed the urgent

¹Ibid., p. 10.

desire to be a preacher herself."¹ Since that dream for herself never reached fruition, she hoped one of her sons would be called by God. Before Alva was born, she promised God if he was a boy she would do every thing in her power to lead him in that direction. She fulfilled her part of that promise because, by his own admission, she was the strong predominant influence in his life for the ministry. He dedicated his book Our Lord's Most Sublime Words to her memory.

But of one thing we are certain -- she did not live in vain. Her life was not easy; many things was she denied and she was dealt her share of pain; much did she suffer because her heart was tender and touched by the woes of others. But she became acquainted with Christ, and that is all that is worthwhile. She feasted her soul upon the words of life. She lived for others -- one of the most kindly, most patient, most generous souls we ever expect to know. So thoughtless of self was she that we have no satisfactory portrait of her mature years -- our choicest likeness is but an enlargement from a snapshot -- no good picture save precious memory which will be our inspiration until we see her again. And we will meet her? Oh, that question remains for us to answer, for we are convinced that with her all is well.²

Alva's decision to enter the ministry seemed a foregone conclusion. He chose Johnson Bible College and enrolled in the fall of 1922, following his graduation from high school. From the beginning, he was of great help to the Johnsons. He assisted Dr. Johnson with the registration and the new students thought he was one of the faculty members. He typed letters for Dr. Johnson and slowly became a respected confidant. All this special attention aroused a great deal of jealousy among the student body.

¹Ibid., p. 14.

²Alva Ross Brown, Our Lord's Most Sublime Words (Kingsport: Southern Publishers, Inc., 1930), pp. 183, 184.

In his biography of Alva Ross Brown, Delno Wayne Brown suggests this intimate relationship seems to have developed as early as the Spring of 1924:

During April of that year, Johnson was staying at the Palmer House in Chicago for a time, and he sent letters to Brown with the greeting, "Dear Son Alva." He also sent an installment of a book which he hoped to publish, stating, "I would rather give it to you than anyone else on the planet."¹

During his years as a student at Johnson, Alva made a commendable scholastic record. He became firmly grounded in Scriptural teaching and learned the great importance of prayer. He was committed to the plea for Christian unity through the restoration of the New Testament Church. He knew, too, that some day he would be called upon to promulgate these convictions as president of Johnson Bible College. For, some time before Dr. Johnson's death, he and Mrs. Johnson disclosed they had chosen him to be their successor.

In the Fall of 1926, Alva left Kimberlin Heights to begin his graduate study at the University of Michigan. It was with deep regret that he left Mrs. Johnson to carry on the school by herself since Dr. Johnson had passed on to his reward.

During the last days of Dr. Johnson's life he set things in order. Near the end of his life he made one real appeal in behalf of the President's Trust Fund, which he was building up in order to assure the president of his salary.

On October 7, 1922, the Johnsons made their final deed. This legal document stated that the Johnson farm and the college buildings would be

¹Brown, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

turned over to the trustees on certain conditions. The conditions of the will are as follows:

(1) That Emma E. Johnson should become the president if Ashley S. Johnson died first, (2) that the two together, or the survivor, were to have the power to appoint the next president, who must be a graduate of the college and whose tenure of office should extend for life, (3) that there should be a Board of Trustees of the college, appointed by the president, nine in number, including the president, two-thirds of whom must be graduates of the school, and (4) that the president who succeeded the Johnsons should have the power to appoint his successor in office, a graduate of the school, with the approval of the Board of Trustees.¹

During her last year, Mrs. Johnson was quite ill. She called a meeting of the Board of Trustees on May 23, 1927, and revealed to them that Alva Ross Brown was her choice to become her successor as president. One week later she passed away at the White House. Word of her death reached Alva while he was in the midst of final examinations at the University of Michigan. Because of this, he could not return to the Johnson Campus until several days after Mrs. Johnson's funeral.

Alva Ross Brown had the rare distinction of being the youngest college president in the United States. He was just twenty-one years old. But like his successor, R. M. Bell, his ascendancy to the presidency was met with hostile forces.

President Brown was marked at the beginning for trouble. Everyone despised his youth. Some of the students at the college were older and, thus, began movements against him. Also, the old jealousy concerning his intimate relationship with the Johnsons reared its ugly head. The trustees

¹Ibid., pp. 39-40.

tried various suggestions to by-pass the will. Some thought they should name a chancellor and a field man to serve as a buffer for the time, but not interfering with the functions of the president. Others suggested the Board of Trustees appoint an acting president or regent. Many insisted on a voluntary retirement of Dr. Brown with the understanding that, after a space of five or six years, he would be re-instated. Nevertheless, President Brown refused to compromise and held firm to the conditions of the will.

His early years were fraught with the loss of students and suspicious faculty members. The students who did return adopted a belligerent attitude.¹ The situation was compounded when President Brown finally dismissed Dean W. H. Sperry. They could not agree on administrative policies. The Knoxville News-Sentinel added fuel to the fire by printing boldly, "Tiny Knox County Kingdom Threatened by Revolution" and "Young Man, Who Inherited Throne of Johnson Bible College Through Will of Founder, Dismisses Dean and Stands Stern in His Rights Despite Student Protest."²

Alumni of the school were inflamed by the newspaper publicity. Surreptitious scheming took place among the alumni along with the students at the school, and a thorough inquiry into the financial matters of the school was demanded. In addition, they demanded that Dean Sperry be re-instated and President Brown replaced by an older man. President Brown stood his ground firmly but in a Christian spirit and the revolt died of its own accord.

¹Ibid., p. 48.

²Ibid., pp. 48-49.

Alva Ross Brown soon began to head the school with vigorous leadership. He made plans for a new building on the Johnson Campus in 1929. His bookkeeping training enabled him to improve the financial system of the school. He maintained the historic doctrinal tenets of the school established by Dr. and Mrs. Johnson. A new lighting system was added in order to receive power from Knoxville through the Tennessee Valley Authority lines. A summer kitchen was built near the boy's dormitory, two new houses for professors were constructed, furnaces for the professors' homes were installed, new machinery for the college well was put into use, new roofs were added to the college buildings, a barge for crossing the French-Broad River was secured, and the library was built up impressively.¹

President Brown did not wish the original purpose of training preachers to be changed in any way. He made this clear in an editorial in the school paper:

The program in all points focuses in training men to preach the Word of God, and it is the sincere aim that each course may contribute to that objective. The college desires to heed the exhortation of the greatest of all heralds of the Christian Gospel who wrote under divine guidance, "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the Word of Truth."²

He made some additions to the course of study to strengthen it and hired older faculty members rather than using college seniors as previously practiced by Dr. Johnson. Also, he laid less stress on the Academy than Dr. Johnson. Under Dr. Johnson there were more students in the high school Academy than were enrolled in the college.

¹Ibid., p. 78.

²Alva Ross Brown, Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: February 1, 1935), p. 3.

However, fate dealt President Brown's tenure of office a deadly blow when the depression came. His long range plans for building were scuttled, especially his prized plans for a new building. The debts of the school began to mount rapidly. Much of the college property fell into disrepair. Some of the faculty members were dismissed, and those who remained were not paid their full salaries.

At the trustee's meeting in May of 1933, Brown reported the college owed \$30,000 to various creditors and that \$2,500 was needed to liquidate the estate of a woman in Washington. Since the President's Trust Fund and the Teacher's Fund contained \$22,000, President Brown recommended this amount be borrowed from the college funds to pay the debts. The trustees approved the recommendation but cautioned President Brown against piling up any further indebtedness.¹ By 1941, the closing year of Brown's life, the school's indebtedness had risen to \$50,000.

The financial burden and frustration of his plans by the depression took a heavy toll on President Brown. Earlier, while taking an insurance examination, it was discovered he had leakage of the heart. The stormy years had left their mark. Even though he had followed the doctor's advice explicitly, his pressing duties brought great stress and depression. He worried a great deal, and his nights were filled with fitful sleep. He complained of being tired and discouraged. On Saturday, February 23, he took cold and developed influenza. His condition worsened, and the doctor hospitalized him. Although the prognosis was encouraging, a sudden heart attack took his life March 2, 1941.

¹Brown, op. cit., p. 70.

President Brown's funeral was conducted in the chapel of Johnson Bible College. The minister delivered the funeral sermon and stated in part:

And when he (Ashley S. Johnson) died, a great many people said, "The heart of Johnson Bible College is dead." And of course when the heart is dead, the rest of the body is dead. Alva Ross Brown, a mere boy who many of us thought knew nothing much but books, was asked to make that heart beat again. And he did. And not only that, he raised the educational standard. He hasn't increased the size of the college, but I think he has improved its quality. I didn't think he could do it, and I didn't know anybody else who thought he could do it, but when I read his first book, Standing on the Promises, which in reality was a history of the school and primarily of Dr. Johnson, I felt much better, because I saw that he had caught the spirit of Ashley Johnson. And then when I read his next book, Our Lord's Most Sublime Words, then I was satisfied because I saw that he had caught the spirit of the Galilean who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. From that time on, I felt that the college was in safe hands. And I was happy over the outlook because he was still in the prime of his life, and he was living for the college. He had no selfish interest, and his wife and children were so fine, and fit into the picture so beautifully. I was happy and you were happy.¹

Little did that minister realize that in a few short months he was to be named the successor to the man he had just buried.

¹R. M. Bell, "Alva Ross Brown Funeral Sermon," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: March 14, 1941), p. 4.

CHAPTER II

AN HISTORICAL PICTURE OF R. M. BELL

It is difficult to assess to what degree we are children of our time. The interplay of heredity and environment and the compelling reaction of personalities on their surroundings are indispensable in understanding people. For it is in the light of the circumstances which produced them that they can be understood.

As we begin an investigation into the life and contribution of Robert Monroe Bell, perhaps a statement by John Dewey will give the necessary guidelines for this work:

When we see a book called The Life of Lincoln we do not expect to find within its covers a treatise in physiology. We look for an account of social antecedents; a description of early surroundings; of the conditions and occupation of the family; of the chief episodes in the development of character; of signal struggles and achievements; of the individual hopes, tastes, joys and sufferings. In precisely similar fashion we speak of the life of a savage tribe, of the Athenian people, of the American nation. "Life" covers customs, institutions,¹ beliefs, victories, and defeats, recreations and occupations.

Robert Monroe Bell was seventy-five years old on June 15, 1964. A doctor recently announced that he was living in a body biologically ten years younger. He was born June 15, 1889, near Metcalf, south of Thomasville, in Thomas County, Georgia.²

¹John Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), p. 2

²Interview with R. M. Bell, President Johnson Bible College, February 3-7, 1964.

His life began in the midst of tragedy. His mother, Gertrude Bell, was the daughter of Elizabeth Stringer Mims and Larkin Mims of Thomas County, Georgia. Before her marriage to Dr. Bell's father, she was married to a man named Tom Applewhite. They had a daughter, Jessie, who is still living. Mr. Applewhite was a sheriff, and while attempting to arrest a Negro, they both shot and killed each other.

Gertrude Applewhite met William Bell in Thomas County, Georgia, and married him. Their only child was Robert Monroe Bell. His mother died when he was eight days old.

William Bell, of Scotch-English ancestry, was one of four sons: Bob, Ed, Scott and William. William's father was one of seven or nine sons born in Virginia and scattered all over the country.

There is little information about Dr. Bell's three uncles. Uncle Bob ran a livery stable in High Springs, Florida. When the automobile began to displace the horse and buggy, he converted his livery stable into a garage. For some reason he left at the home of Bob's grandparents a trunk containing some books which fascinated the boy. They were the only books to which he had access during his childhood. When he learned to read, the first book he read all the way through was Paradise Lost which came from that trunk. Later Uncle Bob sent for his trunk, and it was burned in a fire which destroyed his home. The family Bible containing the Bell family records was destroyed.

He never saw his Uncle Ed, who lived in Alabama. Dr. Bell described him as a "queer duck." He was headstrong and labeled the black sheep of the family. Once Dr. Bell received a picture of his uncle with a rattlesnake draped around his neck. A patent-medicine salesman came to town

with a large rattlesnake which he used to attract the crowds. A local citizen bet the salesman \$15.00 that Ed Bell would put the snake around his neck. The salesman took the bet and lost. Ed put the snake around his neck, went to a nearby studio and had his picture made. He sent the picture to Bob, and in a letter he said, "I have handled over four hundred rattlesnakes but have never been bitten. They won't bite or strike unless they are molested and then not without warning."¹

Uncle Scott lived in Texas and visited Dr. Bell only once when he was a child. His only impression of that visit was that his uncle was neat and tidy almost to the point of femininity.

William Bell was very fond of his little step-daughter, Jessie Applewhite. When his son was born he was greatly disappointed because he was not a girl. Gertrude died when the baby was eight days old, leaving William with an eight-day-old masculine disappointment and a very beautiful three-year-old step-daughter of whom he was very fond. William wanted to keep the girl and let the maternal grandmother keep the boy. Grandmother Mims insisted upon keeping the girl and was willing to keep the boy. Evidently a bitter family quarrel ensued. When the baby was six months old, the father left both children with their grandmother Mims, and never returned. Thirty-eight years later, Bob, then a professor in the University of Tennessee, together with his wife Myrtle and son Bobby, visited his father in Alachua, Florida.

Jessie was taken by her uncle Jesse Applewhite, and he assumed the financial support for her. She stayed at his home part of the time

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

and the rest of the time with her Grandmother Mims.

Dr. Bell recalls seeing his father only one time in his life. After he was married and had a family of his own, they took a trip to Florida to see him. Again the hostility between him and Mrs. Mims appeared. He charged that she was a "despot."¹

Dr. Bell's early childhood with his grandparents was a happy one. His Aunt Mary and Uncle Wesley lived at home, too. Both Jessie and Dr. Bell called Grandmother Mims "Mama."

Mrs. Mims was an extremely strong woman. Her father was a plantation owner and a man of considerable means. When she married Larkin Mims, her father gave her two hundred and sixty acres of land. They established a fine home and had ten children. (Gertrude, Dr. Bell's mother, was the fourth child). But this bliss was soon marred by the Civil War. Larkin fought as a Confederate soldier. Like many men, he was never the same again. He contracted a respiratory disease, probably tuberculosis, and was weak and sickly the remainder of his life.

Larkin Mims was interested in growing fruit and nuts. He grew many varieties of peaches, pears, pomegranates, figs, plums, and grapes. He had the only orange tree in that section, but Dr. Bell recalls, "It was bitter."²

Dr. Bell says that his grandfather had the oldest pecan tree in that section of the country. Today the prolific pecan section of Georgia is in that same area.

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

²Ibid., (February 3-7, 1964).

Since Grandfather Mims died when Dr. Bell was young, he has only two recollections of him. They owned what was called a "double-pen log house." The east end of the house consisted of a large living room, kitchen and dining room. The west end consisted of three bedrooms. The two sections were separated by a wide hallway open at both ends and a porch extending across three-fourths of the front. This long porch and hallway made an excellent place for small boys to romp and play.

One day Dr. Bell was swinging around the supporting posts of the porch and catching water in his cupped, upturned palms. His grandfather spoke sternly, "If you continue to do that, I'll spank you."¹ He remembers to this day the threat and the fact that he quit, even though he was only three years old.

The other experience took place at his grandfather's death. His body lay in state on a couch in the living room. Later the child attended the funeral and went to the graveside in a buggy. As they were returning, Dr. Bell said, "There's nobody home but Grandpa." They tried to reason with him that "We left Grandpa back there." But he could not comprehend leaving him in the ground.²

Life was not easy after Mr. Mims passed away. Dr. Bell recalls their diet of biscuits, cane syrup, and butter, three meals a day. There was fish on rare occasions, when periodically, a fish peddler made his way in from the Gulf. As far as meat was concerned, they had pork but no beef. They often ate supper by a torch when the oil ran out.

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

²Ibid., (February 3-7, 1964).

He knew every facet of plantation life. He enjoyed particularly the thrill of playing with neighbors who lived several miles away. Once, when he was very young, a little girl came to play with him. There was a large cotton basket on the front porch, and he was hiding in it. It tipped over in the shuffle of play, throwing him off the porch, and he landed on his back across a large root. He was lame and sore for a while, and years later he developed back trouble. An X-ray revealed that he had broken his back from that fall. He still suffers from arthritis of the back.

There was a shortage of manpower on the farm, and Dr. Bell soon learned the rigorous side of the plantation life. Upon her husband's death, Mrs. Mims sold half of the farm (one hundred and thirty acres). Aunt Mary and Mrs. Mims kept the house going while Uncle Wesley, Dr. Bell and an ex-slave named Prince Footman worked the remaining one hundred and thirty acres. During the busy season she hired Negro day laborers, and Wesley ran the farm.

Those days made a deep impression upon the growing boy. He claims that Mrs. Mims was the most fair-minded woman he ever knew. The principles she taught became the chief source of inner resources for him. She had the qualities of a judge in that she was fair to everyone concerned. She enjoyed the reputation of honesty among the Negroes. With one accord they said, "Whatever Miss Betsy says is right."¹

She drilled two things into young Robert Bell's mind: "Stay out of debt and stay out of jail."² She was extremely scrupulous about paying

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

²Ibid., (February 3-7, 1964).

debts. Every spring she borrowed money from the bank to pay the laborers, but she never spent anything on herself until the bank debt was paid.

The concepts of truth and honesty were so integral a part of her life that Dr. Bell never thought white people stole or white women had illegitimate children until he was in his teens. The knowledge that such things did happen came as somewhat of a shock.

The influence of these strong principles plus hard work provided a fine mold for character. But circumstances added another strand. When Dr. Bell was twelve years old, Uncle Wesley fell in love and married. Naturally he wanted to have his own place, so he moved. At this tender age Dr. Bell learned the meaning of shouldering responsibility. With his uncle's departure he ran the farm. At thirteen he laid by his first farm crop.

Mrs. Mims did not settle for just homespun philosophy to rear her parentless child. She also planted strong religious roots within his soul. There were two Methodist churches in the area, one in the country and the other in the village, where preaching was held once a month. She was a member of the Methodist Church but never said too much about it. She attended regularly but never participated in public demonstration of her religion. She knelt by her bed for prayers each night, but young Robert never heard what she prayed. At the church when an altar call was given, she seemed to avoid any public display. Today Dr. Bell feels this influenced his own penchant against public demonstration in religion.

Most of us can point to strong personalities who helped shape our destinies. By now it is evident that Mrs. Elizabeth Mims was a dominant

influence for good in the life of R. M. Bell. Not only did she provide a home, but she filled a vacuum where indolence and irreligion might have spawned. Without being pedantic, she was able to demonstrate through living the basic fundamentals of life.

In retrospect, Dr. Bell is able to pinpoint an experience that provided a turning point for later decisions. One day at home, a former slave came to do the washing. As usual, she ate lunch with them and enjoyed the after-dinner conversation. While sitting on the porch he overheard the woman say to Mrs. Mims, "When that little child's mother died, I never thought we would ever see him playing in the yard." Mrs. Mims replied, "The Lord must have something for him to do or he wouldn't be here with us."¹ This affected his whole life. Later in his ministry he purposely made friends with children, stopping them at the door of the church to love and squeeze them. He was convinced that little children, in spite of their wiggling, hear more in church than most adults. Dr. Bell feels more importance lies in what the minister does out of the pulpit than what he says in the pulpit.

The community where Dr. Bell was reared had its share of upstanding men. They all shared the common lot of grubbing out a living in the fields of Georgia. One such man was Tom Sparks, a blacksmith in Metcalf, Georgia. Tom was known by all the youngsters for his jumpy Texas pony. Every Sunday he hitched the pony to an open buggy and picked up children around the countryside to be in his Sunday School class. Actually, he brought most of the class with him.

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

When the annual revival meeting was held, Tom Sparks' entire class joined the church. Dr. Bell was between six and seven years old. The Sunday they had arranged for baptism he was sick; as a result, he had to wait another month for the next preaching service. The Sunday arrived, and he wore a new outfit with a large sailor collar. As the preacher poured water on him, he poured too much, and his collar got wet. He still remembers the irritation.

Looking back he remembers going to the altar several times but nothing emotional ever happened. In all honesty he presented himself for membership in the church because the rest of the class did.

Nevertheless, the sincere loyalty of Tom Sparks made an imprint on the soul of R. M. Bell. He, no doubt, could not remember much of what Tom Sparks said, but his humble witness added another link in the chain of events issuing forth in a call from God.

Two years after Uncle Wesley married and left the farm, Mrs. Mims decided to sell the farm at Metcalf. Bob was fifteen at this time, and his grandmother no doubt felt the need for older and wiser support. Also, there were only a few years left before Robert would follow the same path as Wesley.

Therefore, she bought a piece of land in the northern part of the county, in proximity to a farm owned by one of her sons. Little did they realize how significant a role this move would play in the future of R. M. Bell.

A small church named the Spring Hill Christian Church had been built on part of their property. It was now the closest church to them. Some of the basic religious convictions Dr. Bell has held through the

years were born here. Writing about his home church, Dr. Bell said:

The first time I visited the Spring Hill Church, I did so out of pure curiosity. I wanted to see how the Campbellites acted. I was disappointed at their perfectly normal and sane conduct. For various reasons, I returned again and again until I became a new creature in Christ.¹

In this place the idea was forged that Jesus did not establish a denomination but the church. Such men as R. I. Hinely, Uncle Mose Brumbley, Alex Waters, Whit Goolsby and Hartwell Brinson taught him the difference between the church and a denomination. This concept remains with him today. Recently he wrote:

Before the undenominational church can be united with the denomination, one of two things must happen: the denomination must give up the denominationalism, or the church must take on the character of a denomination. Our brethren who are impatient with the progress of the Restoration Movement apparently have concluded that the denominations will never give up their denominationalism; therefore, they are seeking to "reconstruct the brotherhood." This means, of course, that they will give it the character of a denomination, so that it may amalgamate with other denominations; provided, of course, that the other denominations will accept it.²

Dr. Bell had two cousins who were members of the Spring Hill Church, but his curiosity was intensified by a young girl who caught his fancy.

Although the worship was much the same, they didn't have an altar, and communion was served every Sunday. In the Methodist Church he had only seen this quarterly, when the presiding elder came.

The Spring Hill minister came up on a train once a month from Lake Park, Georgia. After a short time, Dr. Bell noticed a vast difference between

¹R. M. Bell, "To My Home Church," Blue and White (Knoxville: January-February, 1964), p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 1.

the preaching of the Methodist and Christian ministers. The Methodist ministers were excellent story-tellers, but the Christian preacher used the Bible more and expounded it. Having an insatiable hunger for knowledge, Dr. Bell always learned something each time he heard one of the Christian ministers.

Everything was going fine for the young Methodist at Spring Hill until a preacher preached a sermon on baptism. At this point he was highly incensed and offended. The following week Alex Waters, an elder, came over to visit him. He asked casually, "How did you like last Sunday's sermon?"

Dr. Bell replied, "I didn't like it. He said sprinkling wasn't baptism."

"Well, is it?" replied the elder.

"Sure it is," answered Dr. Bell.

"How do you know?" queried Mr. Waters.

"The Bible says so," he replied.

"Where?" asked Mr. Waters. "Show me in the Bible."¹

Dr. Bell recalled how he fervently wanted to show what the Bible said, but he didn't know the Bible. During the following week the Methodist minister was in town, so he appealed to him for help. The minister's only counsel was "Stay away from that church! They will only upset you." He gave Dr. Bell a pamphlet that seemed convincing to his mind, so he took it to Alex Waters.

After he read it, he asked, "Who wrote this? Was it one of the

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

Apostles?" He then turned to the New Testament and read what Peter and Paul had said. Wryly he quipped, "Now that's what the New Testament says about baptism. What you brought me is what some Methodist minister thinks about it."¹ At this point Alex Waters thought he was on the threshold of victory. After all, hadn't he conclusively presented the evidence? Actually, he had driven Dr. Bell further away. Although he could not refute the evidence, in the back of his mind he knew eight million Methodists, plus all their big colleges, churches and scholarly teachers couldn't be wrong.

He continued to attend the church, but the relationship was strained because of the emphasis placed upon baptism. Yet, in all candor, he admits that he asked for the baptism lectures. Everywhere he went he always seemed able to start an argument about it.

A new breakthrough in the cold war was shaping up when an evangelist came to conduct an evangelistic meeting at the Spring Hill Church. E. R. Clarkson was a young man who had been trained as a lawyer. When he arrived, they purposely placed him in Mrs. Mims' home. They had banked on Dr. Bell's starting an argument on baptism, and he didn't disappoint them.

The argumentative lad began warming up to the subject by making rather pointed remarks. Clarkson quickly made it clear that he had no intention of arguing the subject with him. Dr. Bell persisted by asking, "Will water wash away sins?" And again, "Is a whole river of water more effective than a cup of water?"

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

Finally Clarkson replied, "What you want me to say is not what I think. However, what you think is just as important as what I think. But that which transcends what we both think is what the Bible teaches. If you have an honest question, I'll try to answer it, but I refuse to argue with you."¹

This was the first time a "Campbellite" had valued what he thought. When Clarkson told him to get his Bible, he knew then the walls were ready to come tumbling down.

E. R. Clarkson began in the New Testament with Biblical references which he made Dr. Bell read for himself. This was difficult for him to do. Even though he was seventeen years old, he had only a fourth grade education. When his Uncle Wesley married, he dropped out of school to run the farm. Nevertheless, Clarkson patiently worked with him, making him read it three or four times until he understood the sense of the sentence. He concluded by saying, "Well, that's it. That's what Jesus, Philip, Paul, Peter, Ananias, and the Holy Spirit say about it. If you want to argue about it, in reality you must argue with them."²

Dr. Bell saw for the first time that he was wrong and so was the Methodist Church. Some day he would be immersed, but for now, he sincerely believed that the "Campbellites" were an ignorant sect.

The emotional build-up leading to a call from God was nearing its climax. One more personality was needed to provide the catalyst. R. I. Hinely was the next minister of the Spring Hill Church. He excelled as a Bible teacher. He had the masterful capacity for explaining

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

²Ibid., (February 3-7, 1964).

difficult Scriptural truths. Under his preaching Dr. Bell received his first clear idea about the nature of the church. He saw more clearly the Christian Church plea that the church was not a denomination. The analogy of all churches likened to different roads leading to the same place was not true. Denominationalism was not the original part of the church but another name for division. The Spring Hill Church was a part of a movement that preached a message whereby all denominations could unite on Scriptural grounds.

Dr. Bell began to experience frequent compelling inner drives to preach this kind of message. Mrs. Mims had named his Uncle Wesley after John Wesley, hoping he would become a minister. Maybe he could fulfill his dream for both his grandmother and himself. In 1908, at the age of nineteen, R. M. Bell was baptized into Christ by R. I. Hinely. But it was more than an obedience to a command of Christ. It was a response to a call to preach the Gospel.

The Evangelist, E. R. Clarkson, was a graduate of Transylvania College. Because of his influence upon Robert, he wrote to Transylvania for information. He soon found he had neither the money nor the education to begin college work. In the summer of 1910 a young Johnson Bible College student named Guy Orahood came to hold a revival meeting under the auspices of the State Society of Georgia. State Secretary John Woods had employed several Johnson Bible College students to work throughout the state during the summer. He told Bell about Johnson Bible College and its unique program of education and work opportunity. He shared this dream with Grandmother Mims, the pillar of his early youth, and made plans to enroll at Johnson Bible College. He was now twenty-one years old, and

after the crop was harvested, he took one bale of cotton (seventy-one dollars) which was his year's wages. He bought a ticket, a trunk and some clothes. He joined Carl Bayless and Guy Orahood and journeyed by train to Atlanta where Carl, Guy and the other young preachers received pay for their summer evangelistic work from State Secretary Woods. In September of 1910 he enrolled at Johnson Bible College.

When Dr. Bell was nineteen years old, he had only finished the fourth grade. This handicap was caused by the crisis at home when his Uncle Wesley married. Dr. Bell assumed the responsibilities of the farm and worked it out of debt. Seeing the need for education, he decided to attend the Spring Hill Grade School. He hired a man to plow, and in six months he finished grades four through eight. Before starting back to school, he procured an elementary arithmetic book and started with the first problem. He spent most of his spare time at noon and in the evenings solving problems until he completed the book.

When he enrolled in Johnson Bible College, he finished the eighth grade grammar and arithmetic at night plus the high school course in three years. In addition to this, he worked twenty-five and one-half hours a week.

Each student at Johnson Bible College has ample opportunities to preach. There has, for some reason, been a shortage of preaching points close by, thus creating a traveling problem for most students who want to preach.

Dr. Bell does not remember the exact year he preached his first sermon, but it took place at the Christian Church in Tasso, Tennessee. Hoping to guard his speaking time, he placed his watch on the pulpit.

Soon he was caught up with his message and lost all concept of time. After the service a farmer took him home for dinner. Following the meal the farmer moved out in the yard and while seated under a tree pointedly asked him, "Are you going to preach as long tonight as you did this morning?"

"I don't know," he replied. "How long did I preach this morning?"

With a solemn face, his host answered, "One hour and forty minutes."¹

Needless to say, he was never asked to return.

Dr. Bell was never afraid of work. The summer before World War I began, he sold religious books and Bibles for the Southwest Book Company in Nashville, Tennessee. A best seller was a book of sermons by a popular Baptist minister named Lofton. He made seven hundred dollars that summer.

As summer was approaching again, he planned to sell books in nearby Sevierville. However, as the school year drew to a close, Dr. Johnson approached him about spending the summer in Lannett, Alabama as supply minister. He was only a Sophomore and naturally felt very inadequate. But even more important, he didn't have any sermons. Dr. Johnson insisted that he ought to have absorbed enough by osmosis to get by. He asked if he could defer his answer until morning. That night he prayed more diligently than he had ever prayed before. Still he didn't know what the Lord wanted him to do. The only thing Dr. Johnson had told him about the church was that he thought they had a nice building. With much trepidation, he consented to go.

There were five men in town who had been members of the Christian Church elsewhere. Dr. Jack Weldon, who had three children, Tom McGuidon,

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

who had three children, Jack Wheat, who had two children, Mr. Clements and Mr. Willoughby, who had larger families. Dr. Weldon, a funeral director had become acquainted with the other men and learned that they were interested in establishing a Christian Church in Lannett. Naturally, they needed a preacher. One of them wrote to President Johnson and asked him to send one. All the young men who were prepared to preach had already made their plans for the summer, so he sent Bob Bell, a Sophomore, with no experience, no plans, and only three hastily prepared sermons.

When the fledgling preacher arrived, he was stunned to learn that there was no congregation, no building, no lot, no plans, no program. He had three sermons, but no place to preach and no one to preach to. He began by holding cottage prayer meetings in homes that were sympathetic. In these prayer meetings he used the prayer meeting topics that were published weekly in The Christian Standard.

On Sunday, young Bell would attend either the Methodist or Baptist churches. He found both congregations and both ministers to be very friendly. On one occasion, the Methodist minister, a middle-aged man, attended the cottage prayer meeting (held on Thursday nights, to avoid conflict with other Wednesday night prayer meetings). On this particular night, the subject for discussion happened to be baptism.

After the devotional period, consisting of songs and prayers, young preacher Bell addressed the audience somewhat as follows:

"We are delighted to have Brother Bonner with us this evening. He is much older than I am, and has been studying the Bible much longer. For that reason, I am going to ask him to lead this discussion on the subject of Christian baptism."

The older minister arose and said in substance:

"You could not have chosen a subject about which I know less.

I do not consider baptism to be a matter of great importance. Therefore, I have never studied the subject." After a few more rambling remarks, he sat down.

Bob Bell had studied the subject. In his long fight with the "Campbellites" over baptism, he had studied every scripture remotely connected with baptism and had tried desperately, but unsuccessfully, to maintain the Methodist position. Within the next few minutes he laid the foundation for a successful summer in Lannett. He told the audience exactly what the New Testament says about baptism: what Jesus said, what the Holy Spirit said, what Peter said, what Philip said, what Ananias said and what Paul said. From that night he had a following. The people who attended that prayer meeting went away believing that there was a young preacher in town who knew his Bible.

Fortunately, no one was offended. The Methodist minister expressed his appreciation and some time later gave the young preacher and his developing congregation another boost. The Methodists had torn down their old church building and were building a new one. For their Sunday services they had rented the fraternal hall, a building used jointly by several fraternal orders. The Methodist minister graciously offered the little band of Christians (yet unorganized) the use of the hall on Sunday afternoons. The offer was gladly accepted. But the Christian preacher continued to attend the Sunday morning and evening services of the Methodist and Baptist churches. Consequently, his Sunday afternoon audiences were made up largely of Methodists and Baptists. Frequently, both preachers would be in the audience.

When the Baptist Church held its revival, Bell not only attended all the services, but sang in the choir. The people invited him to all the meals along with the minister and the evangelist. One night young Bell overheard the evangelist warning the minister, "If you're not careful, that young minister will take some of your members."¹

Dr. Bell obtained permission from the school board to pitch a tent in the school yard and laid plans to conduct his own revival meeting. Percy Cross was engaged as evangelist for the meeting. It was a splendid success. A church was organized at the close of the meeting. By the end of the summer they had a congregation of one hundred and fourteen members; a lot on the town square had been donated to them; and three thousand dollars had been subscribed toward a new building.

As the new school term was fast approaching, Dr. Weldon, an influential member, called a meeting with Dr. Bell and eight other men of the church. They said, "Bob, you can't go back to school this year. If you do, the work you have begun here will die." Admittedly, this pleased his vanity. They added more swelling to his bolstered ego by saying, "We'll give you one thousand dollars plus board and room if you will stay one more year with us. Then you can go back to school."

In frantic desperation, he wrote Dr. Johnson for advice, saying he would do whatever he recommended. They all prayed together and agreed to consider Dr. Johnson's advice God's answer. Johnson replied by telegram saying: "Come back even if they offer you five thousand."²

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

²Ibid., (February 3-7, 1964).

Dr. Bell returned to college with mixed emotions. He made tentative plans to return the following summer, if they needed him. The church hired a minister, but he didn't stay very long. As the summer approached, he discussed with them the possibility of helping them out again. About the same time, Dr. Johnson received word from Canada requesting three boys to help out in summer work. Dr. Bell waited for word from Alabama, but it didn't come. When he didn't hear, he committed himself to go to Canada. The next day the call came from Alabama, but it was too late.

The summer in Canada was very exciting. The Provincial Missionary Society was starting new churches in three places. Dr. Bell was assigned to work in St. James, a suburb of Winnipeg, Canada; Glen Carter served at Portage La Prairie; and Jim Ulmer at Riding Mountain.

The Lord blessed Dr. Bell with a repeat experience of Alabama. At the end of the summer they begged him to stay on with them. He liked it extremely well, and since the University of Manitoba was accessible, he decided to stay. He had been intrigued with the economics course at Johnson, so he enrolled in economics and history that year at the University of Manitoba.

After this year of schooling, Dr. Bell decided he should return to Johnson Bible College and his senior year. He returned for the fall semester in 1917 and graduated with the class of 1918.

When the war began in Europe in August 1914, Dr. Bell thought he was a pacifist. During the time he served in Canada, that nation was in the war, and Dr. Bell's lack of sympathy was the source of strained relations on numerous occasions. Gradually, the world situation worsened, and

our ships were being fired on and sunk in the Atlantic by German U-Boats. President Woodrow Wilson wrote letters of protest. Finally, President Wilson sent Colonel E. M. House to confer with Lloyd George and other Allied leaders. Someone, presumably Lloyd George, sold Colonel House on the idea that this was the "war to save the world for democracy." In turn, Colonel House sold President Wilson on the same idea. Soon the propaganda machines began to turn. Dr. Bell began to change his ideas about war, so he decided to volunteer for the Marines. He was thirty-five pounds underweight and was advised he couldn't pass the examination.

Upon graduation from Johnson, he applied for duty in the Navy Chaplaincy. In the meantime, he followed through with earlier plans to work for the Christian Women's Board of Missions in Canada. He no sooner arrived back in Canada when he received word to report for officers' training at Camp Taylor, Louisville, Kentucky. There were over two hundred men in his class, but fewer than one hundred graduated. On November 11, 1918, the war ended; consequently, his military career lasted less than three months.

In 1918, Dr. Bell was discharged from the Chaplaincy, and he returned to Canada as a missionary under the Christian Women's Board of Missions. He lived in Winnipeg with Dr. Charles and Mary Cornelius. It was here that he learned to drive his first car, an electric Brougham, owned by Dr. Cornelius. One day a man driving a new Ford ran in front of him, and he hit the Ford, breaking all the spokes in the left front wheel. Luckily, two policemen saw the accident, and he was not held responsible. Reflecting on this, Dr. Bell remarked that he had owned fifteen cars in his lifetime and had driven over half a million miles. In that time he

had never put a scratch on another man's car until January, 1964, when the driver of a freight truck forced him to sideswipe an improperly parked car, doing minor damage to the bumper of the parked car.¹

Dr. Bell spent two years this time in Canada, as pastor of a church. These years were very successful, and the church prospered.

It was during this ministry that he met a man who was engaged in federating Men's Brotherhoods. He was a part of the Canadian Brotherhood Federation that raised money for Belgian and Serbian war relief. The man liked Dr. Bell's preaching and offered him a job federating men's groups of all churches. This appealed to him because of his avid interest in unity. He resigned his church and became Provincial Secretary of the Canadian Brotherhood Federation. His salary was two thousand dollars a year plus expenses and an additional four hundred dollars if he married.

He was pleased with the opportunity to set up speaking engagements for his superior in that it gave him an opportunity to promote unity. The first month he stayed at an expensive hotel in Calgary, Alberta, where his room rent was ninety dollars per month. Even though he was on an expense account, his frugal nature forced him to rent a cheaper room.

Time proved this experience disappointing. His job required him to speak in as many churches as possible and take up an offering for war sufferers. He usually spoke in two churches on Sunday and occasionally in one or more during the week. The Toronto office furnished plenty of promotional material designed to stimulate compassion and increase the offerings. At the close of each speech an offering would be taken for

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

the European sufferers. The audiences were usually small. Consequently, the offerings were small. Gradually it dawned upon Bell that he was being used, not to preach the Gospel of Christian Unity, but to raise money for an organization that needed a lot of oil for the machinery. The offerings he collected averaged between thirty-five and seventy-five dollars each service. Out of that came his expenses and salary. Up the line there were secretaries and general secretaries in both Canada and Europe. Like Paul, he started out sincerely, but a deep conviction grew upon him that this wasn't right. He seriously doubted if twenty or twenty-five percent of the offerings ever reached the war stricken people.

He sat down and wrote to Dr. Johnson explaining his dissatisfaction and asked Dr. Johnson to help him find a church. He told him of his forthcoming marriage and urged him to send his reply to his fiancée's home in Jacksonville, Florida.

When Grandmother Mims decided to sell her farm and move closer to her son at Ochlocknee, Georgia, she bought the Langley farm. The Langleys moved to Florida and one of the boys left behind a sweetheart, Ethel Castleberry, to whom he was engaged. Dr. Bell found her attractive and responsive to his slightest attention. Soon they were dating, and she returned the Langley boy's ring. In a short time they were engaged.

They contemplated marriage, but the Spring Hill Church experience altered Dr. Bell's plans. He determined to get an education and he doubted that he could go to college and support a wife at the same time. The Ph. T. degree had not been invented. The custom of "putting hubby through" had not yet evolved.

He talked it over with Ethel and found her in no mood to wait seven or eight years for marriage. Their affection cooled. He enrolled in Johnson and some time later she married the brother of the Langley boy to whom she had been engaged earlier.

Several years later Dr. Bell was home from school and he had a chance meeting with Ethel at a picnic. She had come up from Florida for a visit. He was puzzled to know why they had fallen in love in the first place and was very thankful that they had not married in their teens, before their ideals and tastes had matured. He tells this story to teenage college students who are contemplating marriage, hoping to induce them to wait until they have matured. Each couple, however, thinks that they are more mature than the average and that their case will be different.

As a young man on the farm Robert Bell was a vigorous coon hunter. When he was seventeen years old he was on an all night hunt on horseback. On the way home the hunters stopped off at the schoolhouse to get a drink from the well. The schoolteacher allowed the children to leave class and look at the coons. It was then that he saw for the first time a young girl in pigtails named Myrtle Dekle.

As she grew up, her friendship with Dr. Bell grew. Community activities brought them together, and they began dating regularly before he left for school. When he left for Johnson, they agreed to correspond with each other but also to date whomever they wished. He used to tell her, "If you marry me, you are stuck for life."¹ Their relationship was kept alive, and it deepened. Finally, in 1920, on his thirty-first birthday, they were united in marriage in Jacksonville, Florida, at the home of Arthur Dekle, by J. T. Boone.

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

Soon after their marriage, a letter arrived in Jacksonville, Florida, from Dr. Johnson. It was a reply from the letter he wrote from Canada. Much to his surprise, Dr. Johnson offered him a teaching position at Johnson Bible College. He had not prepared himself to teach, and, besides, he was not sure he could support a wife on one thousand dollars a year. He had been making two thousand dollars with a promise of an additional four hundred dollars as the Provincial Secretary of the Canadian Brotherhood Federation. Then, too, Mrs. Bell had been used to living well, especially since she was the youngest and her older brothers and sisters showered her with love.

They left on their honeymoon, still undecided. One night at Bainbridge, Georgia, he was awake about midnight, struggling with a decision to reply to Dr. Johnson's offer. Mrs. Bell awoke and said, "Let's go to Kimberlin Heights, Tennessee."

Dr. Bell said, "Do you think we can live on that salary?" And she replied, "Of course we can."¹

Prices were sky-high following the war. When they arrived at Johnson Bible College in August of 1920; sugar was thirty-three cents a pound, eggs sixty cents a dozen, and coal fourteen dollars a ton. As a new professor he was given those subjects to teach that were unwanted by his fellow professors. Void of any previous experience, his first year he taught rhetoric, Freshman English, American and English Literature, economics, sociology, and Roman, French and English History. Nine subjects in three fields for a total of twenty or more hours a week. Many of the

¹ Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

courses were four and five hour subjects. The second year he added sociology, English Literature, Roman and French History, which alternated with economics, American Literature and English History.

In the summer of 1924, Dr. Bell enrolled at the University of Tennessee for additional work in English and economics. At that time his economics professor was having inter-faculty problems. This, no doubt, affected his teaching effectiveness. On one particular day he was laboring over an economic concept with the class, and he called on Dr. Bell to explain. He was greatly impressed by his lucid explanation. The inter-faculty problem caused the professor to finally resign. Soon after, the head of the Economics Department called Dr. Bell into his office and offered him an attractive teaching position. Dr. Bell felt sure the former professor had recommended him for the position.

Dr. Johnson was in Chicago at this time having a physical check-up. Professor Bell informed Dr. Johnson of the offer and of his desire to accept it. Dr. Bell received a letter from him with the following caption: "Oh, my son Absalom!"¹ Always before, Dr. Johnson had been elated when any of his students received an advancement. However, this time he was greatly disturbed and hurt. He felt as if Dr. Bell were forsaking him. He was friendly after that, but the warm close relationship they had enjoyed was never completely restored.

In 1918, Dr. Johnson had talked to Bob, then a senior, about becoming his successor. He said, "I'll give you my razors and make you president of Johnson Bible College if you will marry my niece, Helen Woodland."² The senior was flabbergasted. The offer came without any preliminary build-up

¹ Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

² Ibid., (February 3-7, 1964).

and caught the young man by complete surprise. Here was the offer of a wife, a college presidency for life, and a razor thrown in for good measure. What made the offer exceedingly attractive was not the presidency nor the razor but Helen. Dr. Bell remembers her as being very beautiful and very talented. "Her voice was ever soft, gentle and low, an excellent thing in a woman." She was the kind of a girl for whom any man could fall without effort. But there were problems.

In the first place, Bob had never seen anything in Helen's demeanor to indicate that she had the slightest interest in such a proposition. In the second place, he was not ready for marriage. Though he was a senior, he felt that his education was only begun. In the third place, he saw no prospect of ever being able to maintain a wife in the financial and social strata to which Helen was accustomed. Therefore, he did not know what to say. Nor does he now remember what he said. He thinks that whatever it was, it was probably inappropriate, because he never heard anything more about the matter.

In the fall of 1924 he began teaching at the University of Tennessee and rented a professor's house at Johnson Bible College. He taught economics and worked on a Master's Degree in economics and history. He finished the class in a year and transferred all his credits from the other institutions he had attended.

When Herbert Hoover became President of the United States, he was greatly interested in statistical reports on broad aspects of American life. He appointed the Wickersham Commission to find out what crime was costing the American people. Also, he wanted to determine if Prohibition was a failure or a success. Later this committee was labeled the Prohibition Commission.

To determine the cost of crime, all cities of twenty-five thousand population or more were surveyed. The University of Tennessee was asked to appoint someone to make this survey in Memphis and Knoxville.

Dr. Bell had not finished his Master's thesis, so he took the job of the commission as a thesis assignment. In three weeks he surveyed Memphis and Knoxville and completed his material in about two weeks. Not one item was changed in his report, and his professor was amazed.

Dr. Bell's teaching experience was not limited to the University. He loved economics, and he enjoyed teaching in every facet of the field. His interest began at Johnson Bible College when he took his first class. Later a Scottish professor at the University of Manitoba influenced him greatly. He taught this subject eighteen years at the University of Tennessee.

He had been teaching at the University for five years when they asked him to place a new course in Railway Transportation and Traffic Management. The second semester of that course was to be in Traffic Management. Because this was a new field and there were no satisfactory textbooks, he developed his own course through a correspondence school. Later on a specialist was hired in that field, and he took over the courses. One day Dr. Bell was asked to substitute for him, and, to his surprise, he found the specialist was teaching the course as he had originally outlined it.

His teaching career was further amplified when the American Institute of Banking formed night classes in Knoxville. The classes were held in the directors' rooms in various banks. Dr. Bell was engaged to teach courses in Money and Banking, Standard Banking Economics, and Analysis of Financial Statements.

Later, he was asked to teach classes for the Retail Credit Association and the Wholesale Credit Association of Knoxville. The chain stores were beginning to emerge and make their imprint in the grocery field. This caused great alarm to the independent grocers. The secretary of the Independent Merchants Association asked him to prepare a course to help them with the competition of the chain stores. Dr. Bell developed a sixteen weeks' course two hours a night. Having no previous grocery experience, he felt foolish teaching grocerymen and told them so. The Association supplied pamphlets and various materials available through their national organization. He built the course on streamlining their operation, pricing, and making the store more attractive through better methods of displaying merchandise. The class began with forty-five students and ended with ninety.

Once a minister experiences a call to preach, he is restless without it. Dr. Bell was no different in this respect. An opportunity opened for him at a football game, while seated on the fifty-yard line. Edgar Broom, whom he had succeeded as teacher at Johnson Bible College, was sitting in front of him. During the course of the game, Edgar told Dr. Bell of his plans to leave the Harriman, Tennessee, church. He asked him to fill in for them until they could hire a new minister. Mr. Howard Matheny, an elder of the Harriman church contacted him about preaching for them a few weeks later. He commuted by train to Harriman and spent the first night at the Matheny home. That night he slept with a fourteen-year-old son, Howard, who later entered the ministry.

His first Sunday in Harriman he noticed there were one hundred and twenty-eight in Sunday School, but only thirty-three stayed for church.

He ate dinner in the home of Tom Tarwater. After they had visited in several homes that afternoon, he asked Tom why so many people left after Sunday School. He soon found out the church was split three ways. One group was unhappy over a man who wanted to be an elder, but was opposed because he remarried after divorcing his first wife; another over the missionary society division, and a third over the circumstances under which the former minister had left.

The church interviewed several ministers, but after a few weeks they called Dr. Bell back and asked him to become the minister. For five years he worked diligently to overcome the dissension in the church. On his fifth year he was presented with a sterling silver loving cup. One man gave this tribute at the presentation: "When our minister came we were divided, knifing each other. We still have differences, but we can't imagine our preacher taking sides."¹

Dr. Bell served the Harriman church twenty years. He then announced it was time for them to hire a minister who could work with them full time. He said, "I'll give you one more year before I resign," and he did.²

During his ministry, Dr. Bell has served as pastor or interim pastor at the churches in Lannett, Alabama; Lonsdale, Tennessee; Thorngrove and Copperhill near Knoxville, Tennessee; Newport, Tennessee; Jellico, Tennessee; Mobile, Alabama; and in Winnipeg, Canada.

Another area of business in which Dr. Bell gained experience was real estate. He soon had to move from the house at Johnson Bible College

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

²Ibid., (February 3-7, 1964).

when he accepted the teaching position at the University of Tennessee. At first he rented a five-room upstairs apartment on Yale Avenue in Knoxville. It was the first time he had paid rent, and he didn't like it. He sought out the owner of the property and arranged the purchase. He borrowed the money from a bank, and then let the tenants in the rest of the house pay him the rent.

Before long he saw the possibilities of lucrative profit in buying old houses in Knoxville, the type that used to employ servants. Subsequently, he bought and remodeled them, dividing them up into apartments. The rent from the apartments paid for the investment he made in a short time. During his tenure at the University he was able to gain valuable experience as well as accrue profits from sound investments for himself.

When the offer came for him to become the president of Johnson Bible College, Dr. Bell ceased any real estate activity on his own behalf. From that time on he used this valuable insight in buying and selling real estate for the Lord in the name of Johnson Bible College.

CHAPTER III

THE ASCENSION OF R. M. BELL TO THE PRESIDENCY OF JOHNSON BIBLE COLLEGE

Dr. and Mrs. Bell were blessed with two exceptionally bright and beautiful children during their marriage. Bobby, the son, was the elder; the younger, a daughter, Betty. Yet, tragedy was to strike a blow that left an indelible mark in the midst of the joy of close family life. This experience of sorrow was the last major turning point in the career of R. M. Bell.

In 1940, at the age of nineteen, Bobby was a sophomore at the University of Tennessee. There was a week-end football game, and the students were honoring the football team with a dance at the gymnasium. One of his fraternity brothers suggested they go down to the White Dot Restaurant for a sandwich. Bobby drove the car to the restaurant, and after they had eaten, they left and picked up more of their fraternity brothers. As they were rounding a turn, the wheel locked, and the car smashed into a light pole. Bobby was thrown from the driver's seat, striking his head on a tree. Dr. and Mrs. Bell were called to the hospital, but Bobby was dead on arrival. Later, one of the boys admitted driving the car the day before the accident. He noticed trouble in the steering mechanism, but had forgotten to mention it.

Many thoughts dashed through the mind of Dr. Bell at that time. How often he had preached at funerals, "All things work together for

good..." but at this point he doubted how this could be working good for anyone.

Reflecting on this experience to the writer, Dr. Bell said this event, "tore me to pieces."¹ Yet, in retrospect, he was positive he would never have accepted the presidency of Johnson Bible College without going through this "vale of tears." While his theology did not permit him to say God caused this tragedy, yet he is convinced God brought good out of it.² He could not help but take some consolation in the fact that many of Bobby's classmates were killed in the war. Maybe his instant death spared him suffering had he lived. Dr. Bell also spoke of the possibility that he might have become so interested in making money that the "riches and cares of this world" would have choked out the coming call of God. In the midst of it all he felt a new kinship with Ashley S. Johnson. Dr. Johnson told Dr. Bell, "When my baby died, Johnson Bible College was born. I was soon to have more sons than I could have ever had myself."³

As we approach the threshold of Dr. Bell's ascendancy to the presidency of Johnson Bible College, it is important to pause and get a brief picture of Johnson Bible College at that time. From its inception, Dr. Ashley S. Johnson was intent upon doing at Johnson Bible College what Alexander Campbell had done at Bethany College; that is, giving students a thorough knowledge of the Bible and equipping them to preach its truths. He wrote an article in the 1913-14 school catalogue entitled "The Kind of a School This Is" in which he plainly stated his objective:

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

²Ibid., (February 3-7, 1964).

³Ibid., (February 3-7, 1964).

First of all, I emphasize the fact that it is an institution, offering an open dining room, class room and constant opportunity for any young man who has bodily strength and mental capacity and the purpose to preach the Gospel of the Son of God.

....We have been working for twenty years to establish the kind of a college "that will train and send forth young men with courage, zeal and backbone, honesty of purpose and truthful tongue, and who will be true to the faith "once for all delivered to the saints."

....In other words, we are training men to do in this generation what Alexander Campbell trained men to do in his best days in Bethany College. This place is saturated with the idea of preaching and the idea of the gospel, and with the idea that the gospel prevails over every other thing; that the disciples have a plea which will, in somebody's hands, take the world some sweet day, and we believe that we are the people to contribute something, how much God only knows, to that end.¹

During their years of leadership, both Dr. and Mrs. Johnson maintained this objective. Intentionally, the school was designed to be a Bible College with an emphasis upon providing an opportunity for "poor young men to preach the Gospel."

Alva Ross Brown, during his tenure as President, followed with scrupulous care the same program launched by the Johnsons. He was unusually qualified because of his close association with the Johnsons.

For five years Brother Brown was associated with them in the management of the school, enjoying their complete confidence. They prayed, planned and worked together, and Alva Ross Brown was their choice for head of the institution. He has been deliberately chosen, it being the belief of Mrs. Johnson, the survivor of the two to whom the right of choice was reserved by deed, that he, better than any other, understood and appreciated the purpose and ideals of her husband and herself. It would seem that Brother Brown has not failed to measure up. His unqualified purpose to carry forward the Christlike ministry of the work is the strongest guarantee of its consistent perpetuity.²

¹Robert E. Black, The Story of Johnson Bible College (Kimberlin Heights: Tennessee Valley Printing Co., 1951), pp. 37-38.

²Ibid., p. 97.

Perhaps the one single factor that preserved the purity of the historical position of Johnson Bible College was the will of Dr. Johnson. He stipulated that any teacher at the school must present and file a written affidavit which has been notarized "setting forth that he or she does solemnly swear or affirm under the pains and penalties of the law, the following:"

- I. That he has since the twentieth of the previous month been employed in teaching in Johnson Bible College, thirty days, and has sought in every way to promote its interests as they have been maintained from the day of its founding in the year 1893.
- II. That he does solemnly believe in the one true God of the Old and New Testaments.
- III. That he believes in the inspiration of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and that if he believes and obeys Jesus Christ, such faith and obedience will bring him the remission of sins and eternal redemption hereafter.
- IV. That he believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary without interposition of man, and that He is in the all inclusive and all exclusive sense our Saviour, Prophet, Priest and King.
- V. That he believes that Jesus died on the cross for the whole human race and for all ages, and that His blood cleanses from all sin.
- VI. That he believes that Jesus was buried in the grave, and that He came from the grave alive in the body in which He was buried, triumphant over death, hell and the grave.
- VII. That he believes that Jesus gave the great commission to the Apostles (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-16; Luke 23:45-47; Acts 1:8) to embrace all nations and all ages.
- IX. That he believes that faith, repentance, and confession of Jesus and baptism and prayer are for the remission of past sins, and that faith, repentance, and confession of sins and prayer are for the remission of the erring Christian's sins.

- X. That he believes in the Restoration Plea handed down to us by the fathers, and that its basis and the basis of the union of Christendom are founded in the New Testament.
- XI. That he believes that Jesus Christ will come at the end of the world and judge all men and all ages according to that which is written in the sacred Scriptures.
- XII. That he has done his best to teach these great fundamentals at every opportunity he has had to reach the students of Johnson Bible College.¹

By midyear of 1941, the net assets of Johnson Bible College amounted to \$354,062.42. The school, by and large, operated financially from the unified support of many churches and individuals who gave generously of their means. Johnson literally depended upon its friends for support. The school had no endowment. There was a small Trust Fund, composed of memorial gifts, designated to assure the salaries of the president and faculty. However, the depression years took their toll on Johnson Bible College. Dr. Bell wrote:

The late President Brown estimated that it cost approximately \$36,500 per year to operate Johnson Bible College....During the past ten years the deficit has averaged \$5,000 a year.²

Since the College was in serious financial difficulty, "President Brown had cut salaries to the bone and then scraped the bone."³ Most of the college facilities were in drastic need of repair. President Bell appraised the situation in the following way:

Roofs are leaking, termites are eating up foundations, the water tank and heating plant are in bad condition, and much of the farm machinery is worn out. To make these repairs will require a minimum of \$4,500. This does not include repairs for the frame dormitory....⁴

¹Ibid., pp. 104-105.

²R. M. Bell, "Who Is Willing To Help Out On Operating Expenses?" Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: December, 1941), p. 1. (The period Dr. Bell alluded to was from 1931-1941).

³Ibid., p. 1.

⁴R. M. Bell, "Statement of Aims for J.B.C.," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: June 20, 1942), p. 1.

This briefly describes the general situation at Johnson Bible College at the time of Alva Ross Brown's death.

There are those who believe that Ashley Sidney Johnson was called of God to be the founder of Johnson Bible College, and that Robert Monroe Bell was called to be its rejuvenator. Bell's call certainly was not according to his plan or according to the plan of the Trustees, but rather in spite of the plans of both. At the time of Bell's election, he was teaching at the University of Tennessee, was preaching for the First Christian Church in Harriman, Tennessee, was conducting some private classes in business, and dabbling in real estate. He had a good home in a desirable community, he had a lovely family, and a cultured circle of friends. He had what most men covet--including economic security. He had no plans for a change. Prior to this time, Dr. H. A. Morgan, the President of the University, had asked him to go to a branch of the University located at Martin, Tennessee, and take charge of the Department of Economics. He offered him an increase in rank and an increase of a thousand dollars per year in salary if he would do so. Bell turned it down, saying that he preferred to stay where he was. He had taken roots and did not wish to move. Among his extra-curricular activities was the Trusteeship of Johnson Bible College. For several years he had been a member of the Board of Trustees of the College.

When President Brown died, the Trustees met at Kimberlin Heights for the purpose of choosing a president. Brown's death came unexpectedly and caught the Trustees unprepared for such a task. It seems that S. S. Lappin, the oldest trustee, a retired minister and former Editor of the Christian Standard, was a man well and favorably known throughout the

brotherhood. He believed and taught the doctrines for which Johnson Bible College has always stood. He was the only trustee who had been appointed to the position by Ashley Johnson. Although he was past the age of retirement, he was still vigorous and in good health. Apparently, he discussed the situation with all of the trustees except Bell. It was planned that when the trustees should meet for the purpose of electing a president, Lappin would nominate Bell, who would naturally refuse the job, and then someone would nominate Lappin, the motion would be seconded, and Lappin would be elected. On the day of the meeting everything went according to plan up to a certain point. Bell was nominated and refused the job. Then, Lappin was nominated. The nomination was seconded and Dr. Lappin left the room to give the trustees an opportunity to discuss the matter. Bell, who had been elected Chairman of the Board, pointed out that, according to Ashley Johnson's will, only a graduate of the school could become president. Lappin was not a graduate. Consequently, when he was called back into the room, he was shocked to discover that he was not the President of Johnson Bible College and that, according to the will of Ashley Johnson, he could not become the president. Naturally, he blamed Bell for blocking his election.

The trustees proceeded to consider other possibilities. Bell suggested the name of Harold Hanlin, pointing out that Dr. Hanlin was a graduate of Johnson Bible College, that he had taught there for four years, that he had a lovely family, his wife being a good musician, that he had been teaching at the School of Religion at Butler at Indianapolis, and that he had just completed his work for his Doctor's Degree at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, and that he had other qualities

that seemed to recommend him for a college president. No one knew, of course, whether or not he was available. It was decided that Bell should call him by phone and offer him the job. Hanlin was contacted immediately, but said that he would have to talk to his wife and to some of his friends at Columbus, Indiana, and to the officials at the School of Religion before he could give an answer. He did not know how long it would be before he could say yes or no. The Board elected W. O. Lappin, who was then the Dean, as Acting President, and adjourned until further notice.

After several days, Hanlin called Bell and said that he had decided to accept the position and that he would like to come down the following day and look the situation over. Bell, who lived in Knoxville, drove out to the College and called at the home of the Acting President to tell him that Dr. Hanlin would be down the next day to look things over. Bell received a very frigid reception. When he knocked on the door, he was admitted, but he was not asked to have a seat. Without any preliminaries, he simply stated his mission, saying that he had come to tell the Acting President that Harold Hanlin would be down the next day to look things over, to which Lappin responded, "What have you got against my brother?"

Bell: "I have nothing against your brother. Why do you ask?"

Lappin: "Then why did you block his election?"

Bell: "I did not block his election. Ashley Johnson's will blocked his election."

Lappin: "So far as I am concerned, you can get out of my house and stay out."

This request caught Bell completely by surprise. The wrong word or the wrong move at this critical moment could be the starting of a feud which would wreck the college. No one remembers exactly what was said, but Bell did not walk out. He did attempt to explain in a conciliatory manner that he had nothing against Sam Lappin and that he held him in high esteem, but that, according to Johnson's will, he could not legally be president of Johnson Bible College. Before the conversation ended, Lappin apologized for his rash statement and promised to give Hanlin whatever information was available.

The next morning Hanlin arrived in Knoxville by train, was met by Bell, and taken to the Bell home for breakfast. Fred Bayless, the Office Manager and Superintendent of the farm, drove in to Knoxville and took Hanlin to the college. When Hanlin left Knoxville for the college, he was in high spirits and seemed to be thrilled at the thought of becoming the President of Johnson Bible College. When he returned about eight hours later, he was a completely changed man. He declared that under no circumstances could he accept the job. He never gave his reasons, but said that he was convinced that he was not the man for the place. No amount of argument could change his mind.

The next man to be considered was Thomas H. Johnson, President of Manhattan Bible College, who had been a student in Johnson Academy and Johnson Bible College for five years, but he was not a graduate of the college. That fact eliminated him.

Weeks passed and matters seemed to be going along rather smoothly under the guidance of the Acting President. He had put on a campaign to raise money to try to reduce the debts of the school. Progress seemed to

be satisfactory. The trustees, therefore, were in no particular rush to find a president. But when they heard that the Lappin brothers were consulting an attorney in Johnson City to find out how the Johnson will could be broken, they became somewhat alarmed and put pressure on R. M. Bell to accept the position. He was elected at a called meeting of the trustees which was held in the Sinton Hotel in Cincinnati. He assumed office July 1st, 1941.

Needless to say, he was not greeted with open arms. The faculty could be classified into three groups -- friendly, neutral, and hostile. The largest group was hostile. The first major decision which the new president had to make was whether or not to dismiss the hostile members of the faculty and try to secure new faculty members or whether to try to win the friendship of those who were hostile. He decided upon the latter course, but he found the way steep and difficult. Because the school was deeply in debt and the creditors pressing for their money, certain economies had to be introduced, and other changes had to be made. Everything that the new president did was criticized. Nothing which he did was praised. On one occasion when he was away at a convention, one of the teachers tried to start a rebellion among the students. The plan was to get all of the students to write to their preachers and to the trustees and tell them what a terrible president Johnson Bible College had. The scheme failed because the other teachers would not cooperate in the plan. Even those who had previously been hostile refused to cooperate. The opposition gradually subsided, and at the end of five years, it was practically gone, with a single exception: All of those teachers who had opposed the president became his loyal friends. Even Sam Lappin became a

loyal supporter, and three years before he died, he wrote to President Bell saying, "When the time comes for someone to say the last words over my remains, I hope that you will do it." On December 29, 1960, in the Christian Church in Fairfield, Illinois, President Bell said those final words at the funeral service of S. S. Lappin, described by the speaker as "one of God's noblemen and my friend."

One of the first things that demanded the immediate attention of Dr. Bell when he took office was the matter of finances. Earlier we referred to the fact that the school had been operating at about a five thousand dollar deficit per year for the past ten years. Dr. Bell's big problem centered around securing funds to eliminate an indebtedness of fifty-two thousand dollars. There was a forty-one thousand dollar legal debt and an eleven thousand dollar moral debt. When Bell was a trustee, the creditors were pressing hard for payment of overdue bills. He suggested to President Brown that they contact their creditors and inform them of the school's dilemma. Next, they offered to pay sixty-six and two-thirds cents on the dollar. The creditors agreed so the school borrowed twenty-two thousand dollars from its own scholarship fund, and the remaining amount was carried in a "floating debt." Each year thereafter the debt rose and at Alva Ross Brown's death the school owed fifty thousand dollars. W. O. Lappin, while acting as President through trustee appointment, sent out an appeal to the churches. There was a generous response.

Hence, Dr. Bell faced a legal debt of forty-one thousand dollars, but he considered the eleven thousand dollars he helped compromise while a trustee, a moral debt.

The first step Dr. Bell took was to send a mailing to all the supporters of Johnson Bible College explaining the hard facts of the financial situation and to solicit their support. The response from the people was splendid. In glowing terms Dr. Bell wrote:

Jesus said to His disciples, "Ask and it shall be given you." Matthew 7:7; and again, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son," John 14:13.

Some people may read these promises with a big question mark in their mind. But Johnson Bible College is a living testimony that they are true. I have heard Dr. Ashley Johnson quote them over and over and declare that on them Johnson Bible College must stand or fall. For forty-eight years it has stood and still stands. Time after time during those years, those promises have been put to the test, and each time their truth has been reaffirmed.

For a recent example: In December we asked for three thousand dollars to finish paying off a humiliating floating debt. The money came before January 1st. In February we asked for three hundred dollars to buy or build some poultry equipment so that we could raise more food. We received the amount we needed, which was considerably more than we asked for. In March we asked for fifteen hundred dollars to buy our next winter's coal supply. Within one week from the day we mailed the appeal we had the money in hand...¹

Encouraged by the fine response, Dr. Bell began working for a debt-free school. He wrote to all the creditors who had compromised their bills during the depression years. He asked them to send a statement, and said that Johnson Bible College would make good this moral debt. In reply, some said they no longer had the records; others were no longer in existence or were satisfied with the arrangement they had agreed to earlier; and a few sent their statements. Being cognizant of the psychological advantage of good timing, Dr. Bell set his debt-free goal for May 12, 1943--the fiftieth anniversary of Johnson Bible College. On that day, God heard the prayers of the school and the past debts were wiped clean.

¹R. M. Bell, "Another Vindication of His Word," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: April, 1942), p. 1.

Dr. Bell was blessed with a tremendous business capacity. Earlier mention was made of his pledge to "go into business for the Lord" rather than himself when he decided to come to Johnson Bible College. The financial success of the school did not materialize solely from the response of the people. God used the prowess of this man mightily.

One good example is found in an offer that came concerning baby chicks. In February of 1942, Mr. N. A. Atz, who operated a hatchery at Milltown, Indiana, offered to give to the school all the baby chicks they could raise. Dr. Bell took advantage of this offer and appealed for money to build brooder houses. A year later he reported in the Blue and White:

...We sold enough chickens to pay for all food not raised on the farm. Thus, for the food raised on the farm and our labor, we have had more than two thousand pounds of fried chicken served in the college dining hall. We have lost count of the total number of eggs. But in April alone we served to the students a mere four hundred sixty-five dozen, which at thirty-five cents per dozen would have cost us one hundred sixty-two dollars and seventy-five cents. Egg income for two months amounts to more than the initial investment.¹

As the college celebrated the achievement of solvency, we should note that this marked the first objective of a four-fold plan Dr. Bell had proposed to the school and its supporters. Soon after he assumed leadership, he wrote:

When I accepted the presidency of Johnson Bible College, I did so with the definite understanding that the college belongs to the Church and is a servant of the Church. With these facts in mind, I set about my new duties in the hope of accomplishing definite objectives.

1. To pay off, as quickly as possible, the floating debt and to put the College on a cash basis...
2. Our second objective is to put the buildings and equipment in a good state of repair...

¹R. M. Bell, "An Investment That Has Paid More Than 100%," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: June, 1943), p. 2.

3. The third objective is to develop the strongest Faculty that can be assembled with what we have to offer...
4. The fourth objective is to employ a good evangelist as a regular member of our Faculty...¹

The next problem Dr. Bell undertook was setting the buildings in good order and initiating a program of general repair. Farm machinery was in serious need of repair and replacement. New boilers and tractors had to be purchased if the farm was to be operated properly. As they pursued this course, they found the buildings far worse than they had originally estimated. Dr. Bell wrote concerning this:

Last fall we purchased paint with which to paint the frame dormitory known as Industrial Hall, intending, at the same time, to make some minor repairs. But when we began the repairs, we found the building in such a dilapidated state that we doubted the wisdom of spending money on it. We did only what was absolutely necessary, and began to pray that the Lord would show us what to do next. Because the foundation is eaten up by termites, the building cannot be used much longer as it is now. Moreover, the whole structure is obsolete, and even if we should spend several thousand dollars on it, we would still have a make shift.²

The response to this article brought suggestions to build rather than repair. Money was received to start a building fund. Because of the scarcity of building materials and high prices brought on by World War II, it was decided that any building should be postponed until after the War. However, it was considered a good time to raise money. All the money that was raised was invested in Defense Bonds to be used later for construction of a new dormitory.

¹R. M. Bell, "Statement of Aims for J. B. C.," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: June 20, 1942), p. 1.

²R. M. Bell, "Is This The Leading of The Lord?," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: March, 1942), p. 1.

Dr. Bell has enjoyed a high measure of popularity and success as president of Johnson Bible College. He has maintained high esteem and respect in that office throughout the years. However, he has constantly met pressures to pinpoint his beliefs or force him to embrace a particular position.

After his first year he experienced this kind of process which led him to write:

Some, who have never heard me preach, have wondered if I am a "liberal," a "conservative," or a "middle of the roader." I emphatically reject all such meaningless labels. What is a "liberal?" and what is a "conservative?" No one knows except the one who uses the terms, and in many cases even the user does not know. Therefore, unless I know precisely what you mean by the terms, I cannot tell you which one fits me...¹

He then embraced the tenets of the statement of faith every faculty member must subscribe to as designed by Dr. Johnson. This statement of beliefs seemed to settle the problem for a while. Yet, as the problems of internal unity grew larger in the Brotherhood, the frustration and restlessness among the ministers and their churches were ventilated through questionnaires to Dr. Bell. Following are some typical examples:

I was told by several that if I would write a letter to you asking some questions and asking for a definite answer, that you would hedge. I don't know what pretext you will use this time, but it will be interesting to find out....

Will you please answer the following questions:

1. Do you teach the students at Johnson that the U.C.M.S. is trying with all the power at their command to make a denomination out of the Free Churches of Christ?
2. Do you teach your students that the U.C.M.S. favors open membership?
3. Do you encourage your students to try and free local churches from the clutches of the U.C.M.S.: And to discontinue all support to the U.C.M.S. and Unified Promotion?²

¹R. M. Bell, "What I Believe," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: September, 1942), p. 1.

²R. M. Bell, "Another Questionnaire," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: April-May, 1946), pp. 1-2.

Dear President Bell:

You know that for several years there has been much confusion in our Brotherhood over the teaching of certain colleges and missionary societies, which are asking for financial support from our churches....

We will appreciate it if you will cooperate with us by giving us the following information about yourself and the school:

1. Do you believe in the Virgin Birth...
2. Do you believe in all the miracles of the Scriptures?
3. Do you believe in the Divine authorship of Scriptures?
4. Do you believe that immersion of the believer is essential unto salvation?
5. When was J. B. C. established?
6. How many students were in preparation for full time religious service in J. B. C. at the beginning of the war?
7. How many students in preparation for full time religious service enrolled in 1945?
8. Would J. B. C. employ a teacher who did not believe in all of the following? The Virgin Birth of Christ, all the miracles of the Scriptures, the Divine authorship of the Scriptures, that immersion is essential unto salvation?¹

Dr. Bell always answered the questionnaires as honestly as he knew how, always stressing the importance of truthfulness. If anything irritated him it was false conclusions gathered from untruths and rumors. He pointed out repeatedly, "We do not spend a great deal of time discussing the U.C.M.S. with our students..."

He held up the example of Jesus giving His graduates a commission to "preach the Gospel," "make disciples," and "baptize and teach them." "Nothing is said about fighting any of the wicked institutions or false religions of the hour, of which there were plenty."²

In 1946, Dr. Bell published a letter he had received regarding the many questionnaires he had been receiving. He printed the letter but prefaced it by saying it did not necessarily mean that he and the writer claimed the

¹R. M. Bell, "Another Questionnaire," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: December, 1945), pp. 1, 4.
²Ibid., April-May, 1946, p. 2.

same position. He went on to say, however, that he thought it was good advice.

Dear Brother Bell:

I have just been reading your article entitled "Another Questionnaire" appearing in the April-May issue of The Blue and White...

It would seem to me that this generation of young preachers would learn some lessons from the past. They have been fighting the U.C.M.S. and modernists, with all their might and main for many years and the U.C.M.S. and modernists benefiting by a lot of free publicity from so-called loyal pulpits, have gone right on gaining in power and in wealth. It is high time that we, preachers of the Gospel, should be true to our calling, stop beating the air and clubbing the opposition and get down to business and preach the Word of God...¹

To demonstrate that letters of censure and reproof come from both "cooperative" and "independent" churches, the following is presented:

Dear Sirs:

I've tried in the past to send your school \$25.00 yearly. One or two years our church helped to send a student to school, thinking all the time that we were helping to educate ministers for our church--Disciples of Christ Christian. I now hear that you have changed your thinking that we are not the best church for the world....²

Dear Sir:

I have long been interested in Johnson Bible College and have been a contributor through the years, as has been my church. Our present pastor is a graduate of J.B.C.

I understand you are turning out "independent" ministers. Please advise me what percentage of your graduates comprise this group. Our local congregation has been split in two because of the recent pastorates of two of these "independents" and I personally, as well as my church, have withdrawn our financial support as of this date. We have always had a place in our budget for J.B.C., but have discontinued this in favor of other colleges.

I shall be glad to hear from you regarding this matter.

Sincerely,
L. B.

¹Ibid., November, 1946, p. 3.

²Ibid., September-October, 1956, p. 2.

In his reply, Dr. Bell wrote:

Dear L. B.

Please pardon my delay in acknowledging your letter of November 6th. In that letter you said, "I understand that you are turning out 'independent' ministers.....I personally, as well as my church, have withdrawn our financial support as of this date. We have always had a place in our budget for J.B.C. but have discontinued this in favor of other colleges."

I assumed that I had been accused, tried, condemned, and sentenced, without a hearing. There was nothing for me to say. Therefore, I said nothing. In your recent letter, you say, "I am withholding my gifts until I learn what your position is." I am now writing to say that my position is the same that it has been since I was baptized in 1908. The position of Johnson Bible College is the same that it has been since the founding in 1893. It is the same that it was when your present minister was in school here. If you and your church have withdrawn support from Johnson Bible College, it is not because Johnson Bible College has changed its policy, but because you have changed yours. When your minister was in school in Johnson, no one attempted to tell him which congregation he should serve. That matter was left entirely to him and to the congregation. It still is....

I have in my files letters from two prospective students. One is from a "cooperative" church. The other is from an "independent" congregation, and expects to serve an "independent" church. Give me a single sound reason for closing the door against either of these young men, and I'll do it...

Sincerely and prayerfully yours,
R. M. Bell¹

Because of this continued and relentless pressure through the years, Dr. Bell said to the writer, "If I had not been determined to remain non-sectarian, I could have been driven into either camp by the persistent propaganda." He stated further that the "cooperative" group "never misrepresented me or my position, or supplied undue pressure or hurt me." There were some, he went on to say, "in the other crowd that did. One wanted the legacy left in a will, and the only way they could get it would be to prove

¹Ibid., Summer, 1962, p. 4.

Johnson had become a liberal school." Dr. Bell admitted that lines were drawn between the two groups, but he did not believe it was tantamount to division, nor was it inevitable. If they do split, Dr. Bell seemed determined to remain at his same position--non-sectarian.¹

In the final section of this chapter some of the major accomplishments of Dr. Bell during his tenure of office at Johnson Bible College will be enumerated. Let it be said at the outset how difficult it is to measure the impact of twenty-three years of service. This is especially true since the word "accomplishments" is nebulous and relative, at best.

There would be no argument to the statement that under Dr. Bell's leadership, Johnson Bible College has enjoyed phenomenal financial success.

The figure we carry on our books is an estimate. We own some stocks in corporations. Some of the certificates have a par value; some of them have no par value. But there is no relation between the true value and the par value. The true value varies, not only from day to day, but from hour to hour, as the market changes. Now we carry these stocks in our balance sheet at a certain value, but that value may be too high and it may be too low. It may be too high one month, and too low the next month. On June 30, 1941, the net worth of Johnson Bible College was listed at \$432,337.82. On June 30, 1963, the book value of the assets of Johnson Bible College amounted to \$3,707,491.63. The obligations of Johnson Bible College amounted to \$994,370.74, leaving net assets of \$2,713,120.89. **But some of the assets consisted of notes which, when they become due, may not be collectible.** Some of them consisted of stocks which may fall sharply in value. In fact, some of them may turn out to be worthless. You see, therefore, what I mean by the impropriety of trying to be too specific in this matter of assets. Any figure which we give will be erroneous. That being the case, we prefer to err toward the conservative side.²

What sparked such a magnificent growth? The ready answer must be that God blessed the school through the leadership of his servant, R. M. Bell. Let us examine some of the ways God has used the innate creative business

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

²Letter from R. M. Bell, President, Johnson Bible College, Kimberlin Heights, Tennessee, September 15, 1964.

genius of R. M. Bell. To begin with, Dr. Bell is a tireless worker. He never takes a vacation because he loves his work. He is convinced that fatigue is more emotional and mental than physical. Jesus spoke a great truth when he said, "As a man thinketh...so is he." A person gets tired mostly because he thinks he is tired. He recalled how he loved to plow as a boy until he was twelve years old. Then he was taken out of school to run the farm, and the chore became irksome. If a man enjoys his work and has a "why" for doing it, his fatigue will soon diminish.

When Dr. Bell came to Johnson Bible College, he could have retired financially. Hence, he came not to "work for a living, but for the Lord." He jokingly remarked to the writer, "If the preachers at my funeral say I worked myself to death, I'll rise up and deny it."¹ No one knows how much of his personal income has been invested in the school. A clue might be taken from this. In 1962, the trustees over his protest raised his salary from four hundred dollars a month to six hundred dollars. Dr. Bell has invested the additional two hundred dollars a month in a special Health Fund for the faculty.

In September, 1952, Dr. Bell explained in The Blue and White how Johnson Bible College is financed:

1. Outright gifts monthly, quarterly, or annually to Johnson Bible College.
2. Investment in Johnson Bible College Annuity Bonds.
3. Wills.
4. The establishment of Student Loan Funds.
5. Investment notes. Johnson Bible College issues an investment note which pays the purchaser three and one-half percent interest per annum, the interest being paid semi-annually. The college in turn invests the money in first mortgages on conservatively appraised real estate, yielding five and one-half to six percent interest.

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

The income at Johnson is classified in two groupings:

1. Gifts, and 2. Earnings. Gifts come from individuals, churches, and similar groups. This forms an important source of income for the school, constituting more than half the total income at one time. (Dr. Bell estimated that more money in this category came from "independent" churches than from "cooperative" churches). Earnings come from such sources as payments by students for room and board, sales from the farm and dairy, subscriptions for The Blue and White, earnings from the Tennessee Valley Printing Company, sales of books and pamphlets, interest, rent, and miscellaneous.¹

It is most interesting to see how the school was able to receive interest and rent mentioned above as sources of earnings. At this present time, Johnson Bible College has a line of credit for one-half million dollars at a bank in Knoxville. With this, Dr. Bell has operated a Building and Loan Association at the school. It is extremely profitable, first of all, because it can be done without any overhead. This has been a one-man operation. The administration of the school has been expedited through Dr. Bell and his extremely efficient secretary, Mrs. Larry Kostick. Secondly, Dr. Bell has employed the tax advantage which Johnson Bible College, as a religious institution enjoys, that no loan company could possibly compete with.

The school borrows money at a low rate of interest and then loans the money to build homes, churches and parsonages. In recent years, Dr. Bell has been working through various home building companies. He buys the notes at a discount. Monthly mortgage payments are handled through the school office from hundreds of satisfied customers in Tennessee and adjoining states. President Bell financed several other enterprises such as a furniture store, a metal processing company, a construction company and a mirror factory.

¹R. M. Bell, "How Johnson Bible College Is Financed," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: September, 1952), p. 4.

We have already alluded to the real estate investments Dr. Bell engaged in from time to time. His ability in this area was developed during this period he was at the University of Tennessee when he was in this business for himself.

Dr. Bell is an amazing example of what God can do through the dedicated genius of one man who has based his entire life on one premise:

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God..."

When the writer interviewed Dr. Bell for this paper, he had just closed the final deal which put the college out of two of these businesses, the construction business and the mirror factory. When questioned about this move, he gave this reply. First of all, he had been laboring under a health problem. Major surgery was performed in 1963. Secondly, he gave his age as a deciding factor. At seventy-five, the gigantic burden of these businesses and the mounting pressures of being President was beginning to leave its mark. Thirdly, he mentioned that he felt he was "spending too much time making money and too little time at things more important." Since many have recognized his gift for writing, they have encouraged him to do more in this field. Lastly, there had been some unhappy experiences in the businesses that confirmed his desire to quit. One of his associates in the businesses had a mental breakdown, and another turned out to be dishonest. It is difficult to operate a business when the men involved don't play by the same rules.¹

Because the school profited from the business ventures led by Dr. Bell and also enjoyed some support from the churches and individuals, the facilities at Johnson Bible College have undergone major changes and improvements.

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

Following is a list of improvements accomplished under Dr. Bell's administration:

1. Duplex	1948
2. Barracks	1949
3. Gymnasium	1951
4. Girl's dormitory	1951
5. Library reading room	1952
6. Oak Ridge House	1953
7. Home of farm manager	1955
9. Married couples' dormitory	1955
10. Renovation of boy's dormitory	1957
11. Fireproof office vault	1957
12. Additional office (long room)	1958
13. White House glassed-in porch	1958
14. Greenhouse	1958
15. Shop	1960
16. Addition to barn	1961
17. Chapel	1962
18. Professor's home	1963
19. Library - administration building	1964

These and other improvements cost between seven and eight hundred thousand dollars.

It is important to observe that Dr. Bell supervised the major portion of the buildings listed above. In most of the constructions an architect was not employed nor any drawings made. Dr. Bell told them step by step what to build next. An architect's service was used in recent years with the more elaborate buildings.

From the beginning, Dr. Bell stated that it was not his objective to make Johnson Bible College a large school. He was interested in quality rather than quantity. To achieve this, President Bell has built an unusually strong faculty for an undergraduate school. He has followed the policy of choosing outstanding young men who have certain qualifications which he requires in a teacher.

1) One of the qualifications which he demands is conviction. He has no patience with those teachers who can "teach it either way" or have

one theology for the classroom and another for the pulpit. He is a strong believer in academic freedom, but he is also a strong believer in academic honesty. For example, if a teacher is employed to teach certain truths, but he fails to do so and teaches something else instead, President Bell feels that he is academically dishonest and should be unceremoniously dismissed.

2) The second qualification is preparation. President Bell feels that the teacher should know his subject; otherwise, we have an example of the blind leading the blind. He does not equate academic degrees with knowledge of the subject. He is aware that a degree simply means that a man has spent so many hours in the classroom and has passed his examination with a satisfactory grade, or that he has written a thesis that was approved by a committee. These facts are helpful within limits, but they are not conclusive proof that a teacher knows his subject.

3) Another qualification is what President Bell calls teach-ability. That is, he means that a teacher should have the ability to teach what he knows. Many teachers have an adequate storehouse of knowledge, but they have difficulty in communicating it to others. According to Dr. Bell, a teacher should be a good communicator.

4) Added to these other qualities or abilities, a teacher should be able to inspire his students. Naturally, a student needs information, but, even more, he needs inspiration. According to President Bell, knowledge is like gasoline. It is nothing more than a cleaning fluid until it is ignited. Then it becomes power. Inspiration is the spark that puts knowledge to work. A faculty member at Johnson Bible College receives fifteen dollars per teaching hour, plus a rent-free house, fuel, lights, and

all the milk his family can use. To promote thrift among them, Dr. Bell started a program recently wherein the school will match from five dollars up to fifteen dollars of what they save each month. He has built up the special Trust Fund started by Dr. Johnson so that the faculty will not have to worry about their salaries as they did during the depression. Listed below is the present faculty and the faculty during Dr. Bell's first year. The degrees are listed for comparison.

1. R. M. Bell, President, A.B., M.A., LLD.
2. Floyd E. Clark, Academic Dean, A.B., B.D.
3. Robert E. Black, A.B., B.D., M.A.
4. William Blevins, A.B., B.D.
5. David L. Eubanks, A.B., M.Th.
6. Mrs. Ruth Rowland, A.B., B.S.M. M.S.M.
7. Clark Rowland, A.B., B.S.M. M.S.M.
8. Mrs. Lovella Richardson, A.B. Draughton School of Business, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
9. Lee Richardson, A.B., B.D.
10. James Pierson, A.B., M.A.

The oldest faculty members today, other than Dr. Bell, are in their forties. In the faculty of 1941, the average age was considerably higher. None of the faculty held a Doctor's Degree.

1. R. M. Bell, President, A.B., M.A.
2. W. O. Lappin, Dean, A.B., M.A.
3. J. Fred Bayless, A.B.
4. Miss Helen Stokes, A.B., M.A.
5. Henry R. Garrett, A.B., M.A.
6. Harry Wagner, A.B.
7. Arthur Hyde, A.B., B.D.
8. Mrs. Alma Childress Brown
9. Cecil K. Thomas, A.B., B.D., M.A.
10. Dean Jacoby, B.Sc., M.A.

Presently, three of the faculty members are working on their Doctorate in the field of education at the University of Tennessee.

Dr. Bell has never taught on a regular basis since he has been President. As one can see, his vast responsibilities left little time to devote to this part of the school's life. However, both President Johnson

and President Brown carried teaching assignments during their tenure. When confronted with this, Dr. Bell stated the reason he had not complied with this precedent. When Bell was a student, Dr. Johnson taught his class in the Book of Hebrews. To this day, he knows less about Hebrews than any other book. Not that Dr. Johnson wasn't a good teacher. On the contrary, this was one of his great strengths. But the pressures of his office caused him to miss too many classes or unexpected emergencies cut them short. Often he sent word to have the class meet at this office, only to be harassed by constant interruptions. Dr. Bell chose not to repeat this experience.¹

Since the foundation of the school, one question that has never ceased to perplex its supporters is that of accreditation. This question can only be resolved by understanding the founder's design and purpose for the institution.

Dr. Johnson's dream was to create an institution to train ministers. His concepts were not always compatible with accrediting associations. He felt that other vocational and professional institutions, such as colleges of law and medicine, made no attempt to provide general education for its own sake. Rather, they specialized in work definitely related to their field. In his book "The Story of Johnson Bible College," Professor Robert E. Black lists four reasons why Dr. Johnson did not wish to standardize the institution:

- 1) More intense application to essential preparation for preaching can be secured without the limitations enforced by standardization.
- 2) Less diversity in equipment is necessary.
- 3) A less numerous faculty is required.

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

- 4) Money contributed by many friends to train men to preach is used to train men to preach and is not expended on some side issue merely to satisfy a standardization requirement.¹

The school has maintained this historic identity of emphasis on "pre-professional" emphasis because of the deliberate efforts of Mrs. Ashley Johnson, Alva Ross Brown, and R. M. Bell.

This approach in philosophy has always been in conflict with that of the American Association of Theological Schools. In the judgment of the Association, the "appropriate foundations for a minister's later professional studies lie in broad and comprehensive college education." They stress a "liberal arts" program rather than a "pre-professional" program.²

In 1952, Dr. Bell made the first application to an accrediting association. He moved the college in this direction for two particular reasons. The Federal Government, through the G. I. Bills, was entering more and more into education. They felt that more and more non-accredited schools were springing up to get payments from the government and from veterans. Hence, the government was looking more and more with disfavor on these schools. Secondly, the competition between schools for students was becoming increasingly keen. A stigma was being attached to those schools that were not accredited. To meet these situations, Dr. Bell reported:

....We applied in 1951 to the Accrediting Association of Bible Institutions and Bible Colleges for accreditation. The Association, after having us fill out a lengthy questionnaire, sent a committee to make a thorough examination of the buildings, equipment, records, curriculum, methods, and quality of class work. On the basis of the committee's finding, the

¹Robert E. Black, The Story of Johnson Bible College (Kimberlin Heights: Tennessee Valley Printing Co., August, 1951), p. 71.

²Ibid., pp. 71-72.

Accrediting Association in session in Chicago, October 16th, voted to extend full and unconditional accreditation to Johnson Bible College.¹

Three years after the school was accepted into the Accrediting Association, it dropped out. The Secretary of the Association stipulated they must change the will of Dr. Johnson to get professional business men on the Board of Trustees. One section in Dr. Johnson's will stipulates seven trustees and another document, nine trustees. In both cases it suggests a majority of the trustees must be graduates of Johnson Bible College and all of them members in good standing of the Christian Church.

Also, the Association did not like the trustee-president arrangement. They maintained the president had too much power. The president should be elected by the trustees, but the president should not have the power to appoint his own trustees. Recently, President Bell created the "Council of Seventy," which will provide more alumni participation in the policies of the school. This group will also elect the trustees.

Other recommendations were made by the Association which the school is presently working through. An application has been filed with the Association for re-instatement.

When Dr. Bell was asked about moving the school toward becoming a liberal arts college, he said this could be done by amending the school's charter. But with an understanding of the original intention of the founder's purpose and philosophy of ministerial education, any such move is very unlikely.

Dr. Bell has had a broad participation in brotherhood activities. Some have maintained that he has spoken on more convention programs than any other college president in our brotherhood. The first major convention he addressed was the North American Christian Convention that met in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1942. Since that time he has spoken at several subsequent

North American Christian Conventions, the last one being in St. Louis in 1964. In 1944 he addressed the International Convention in Columbus, Ohio. In 1950 he spoke at the National Evangelistic Association in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He has appeared on the program of the Southern Christian Convention on three occasions and numerous state and district conventions and rallies. For several years he served on the Committee for Restudy of the Disciples of Christ. Since his first speech in 1942, he has been a frequent member of the Continuation Committee of the North American Christian Convention. For three years he was a member of the Executive Committee of the North American Convention.

CHAPTER IV

THE THEOLOGICAL POSITION OF R. M. BELL

Soon after Bell became the President of Johnson Bible College, articles began to appear in the Blue and White entitled "Krazy Kuntry." The articles were usually terse, often satirical comments on social inconsistencies. Dr. Bell wrote the fable of the "Lion and the Mouse" as a backdrop for the series which appeared with the first article:

Long, long ago there was a land called Krazy Kuntry. Once upon a time Krazy Kuntry was invaded by a lion and a mouse. When the terrible news was noised abroad all the announcers rushed to the microphones and sounded the alarm. Thereupon, a great army of ten-cent soldiers was organized--to slay the mouse. But one Krazy Kuntryman said, "Why not slay the lion?" "Oh," said the announcers, "the mouse is a ferocious beast. He may bite baby's toes and cripple baby's feet. The toll he takes is terrible. He bites one child in fourteen thousand." "Be it ever so true," said the Krazy Kuntryman. "What about the lion? He not only cripples children's feet, but eats up their homes and destroys their mothers' and fathers' bodies and souls." "Perhaps so," said the announcer, "but the lion has owners, and the owners pay the government to let him go free. Moreover, they pay us to tell the children and their parents that he is harmless--to tell many beautiful lies about him so that they will expose themselves to his power. The more men and women and boys and girls the lion destroys the more money the government gets. So--forget the lion and get the mouse." and everybody shouted, "Get the mouse!" That is why it was called Krazy Kuntry.¹

Using this parable as a backdrop, Dr. Bell then cited a recent broadcast in which strong appeals were made for dimes and dollars to fight infantile paralysis. Even though this is a commendable work, he was alarmed at the repeated announcements following the appeals. A strong appeal was

¹R. M. Bell, "Krazy Kuntry," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: February, 1942), p. 3.

issued to consume a particular brand of alcoholic beverage. "Such cross purpose propaganda provides a good illustration of James' charge that 'out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.'" (James 3:10)¹

The inconsistency that constantly alarmed him was how a civilized nation will fight one disease because it endangers the health and happiness of little children and at the same time give legal protection to help to spread another that is ten times as destructive. He reasoned,

The alcoholic scourge is much the greater evil, not only because it hurts more people, but because its damage is more devastating. Infantile paralysis cripples only the body, but alcohol cripples body, mind, morals, and soul.²

Another aspect of the alcohol problem that never ceased to amaze him was the way in which people are taken in by propaganda. In 1944, during the war years, he appealed to his readers not to be caught again by a propaganda trick. He recalled in the late twenties and early thirties that every trick known was used to discredit prohibition. "Every evil from the kidnapping of Lindbergh's baby to the dust storms in the Southwest was blamed on prohibition." The liquor association promised the following blessings if the prohibition amendment was repealed: decreased taxes, reduction in drinking, cessation of crime, and the end of the depression. Bell then reminded them of the evidence:

To make sure that there is more and more drinking, the brewers, distillers and wine makers are said to be spending twenty-five million dollars annually for advertising. Every motion picture since the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment carried at least one drinking scene that served as good advertising for beverage alcohol. From April, 1933, to August, 1941, nearly fourteen billion gallons of alcoholic beverages were consumed in the United States.

¹Ibid., p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 3.

The sale of beer has increased approximately five hundred thousand barrels a month since January, 1942. Arrests for drunkenness increased one hundred six percent from 1932 to 1941.¹

Because of this trend, Bell felt prohibition sentiment was rising. His fear was that it would be established in war-time and therefore it could not last.

Prohibition established in war-time cannot last. It will serve only to retard the cause of temperance. Following this war, we will have a terrible backwash of vice and crime. We had such a backwash following World War I. It will be even worse after World War II. If prohibition is re-established now, prohibition will bear the blame. This would be a tragedy almost as great as the war itself. This time let's place the crime baby in the lap of its own parents--war and liquor.²

Three years later, in 1946, Bell again reminded his readers of the "crocodile tears that were shed back in prohibition days by some weeping wets when it was reported that some high school students had purchased liquor from a bootlegger."³ The liquor industry promised that youthful drinking would be absolutely stopped if liquor should be legalized. Bell cited a recent report from Washington, D. C. of a four hundred sixty-six percent increase in the arrest of children for drunkenness, showing the effect of the high pressure advertising of the liquor industry.

In 1950, Bell brought to light his convictions that much of the failure of the prohibition amendment rested with crooked law enforcement. Proponents for the repeal of the amendment preached, "Rackets began with the Eighteenth Amendment." To show the blatant lie of such a statement, he quoted from a press dispatch of New York City, dated September 29, 1950,

¹R. M. Bell, "Will The Drys Get Caught Again?" Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: February-March, 1944), p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 3.

³R. M. Bell, "Another Wet Lie Exploded," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: February-March, 1946), p. 2.

which revealed that rackets were flourishing to an even greater degree than they did in prohibition days.

New York City's new police commissioner shook up his graft-torn department today, ordering all of the city's three hundred thirty-six plain-clothes policemen back into uniform.... The police scandal exploded into the open last week when Brooklyn District Attorney Miles F. McDonald and a racket-probing grand jury disclosed evidence that a vast book-making ring was paying cops some one million dollars a year for protection. To be perfectly logical the wet press should set up a clamor for the repeal of all gambling laws. Every argument that was used for the repeal of the liquor laws can be used for the repeal of the gambling laws.... Nevertheless, there will be no concerted effort by the press to repeal gambling laws. Why not? Simply because gambling sells itself and does not require a continuous, high-pressure advertising in order to get customers. The hope of winning sells it. The drinker never wins. Not one in a million can claim any gains as a result of his drinking. To produce a new crop of drinkers requires enormous sums to be spent in advertising. If we can get legislation to prohibit the advertising of beverage alcohol, we will accomplish two things: namely, the reduction in consumption of alcohol, and an increase in support of dry legislation on the part of newspapers and magazines. Therefore, those who are interested in temperance and sobriety should work first for legislation to prohibit liquor advertising.¹

Probably the most comprehensive article Bell wrote on the subject of alcohol was provoked by an article he read in the letters to the editor of The Christian Evangelist. A young preacher wrote that, "we had learned by experience that prohibition is not the way to stop drinking." In the same paragraph he went on to quote that The Methodist Board of Temperance had recently reported a twelve-fold increase (twelve hundred percent increase) in drinking since the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment.

Quick to see the contradiction between these two statements, Bell wrote this lucid article on exactly what we did learn by experience:

1. We learned that in less than one generation prohibition reduced the sale of alcoholic beverages approximately eighty per-

¹R. M. Bell, "Rum, Rackets, and Ruin," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: October, 1950), p. 2.

cent. This remarkable achievement was made in spite of the fact that the Federal Government, whose job it was to enforce prohibition, made no serious attempt to do so. At no time did the number of Federal enforcement officers, scattered through the United States, number more than three thousand five hundred. That was less than the number of policemen in a single large city....In spite of this meager effort at enforcement, the sale of alcoholic liquors was reduced, according to conservative estimates, at least eighty percent, alcoholism practically disappeared. The numerous institutions which specialized in the treatment of alcoholics closed up for lack of patients. Following repeal of the prohibition laws, alcoholism began to increase--slowly at first, and then more rapidly. By the end of 1950 alcoholics had risen to four million, almost four percent of the adult population.

2. The second thing we "learned by experience" was that the liquor business is a parasite which lives at the expense of other types of business. I know, of course, the exaggerated claims which the liquor people make concerning the industrial benefits of the liquor business. But every economist knows that those claims, like many other claims made in liquor advertisement, are utterly false or grossly exaggerated. The vast majority of people do not have enough income to maintain a desirable standard of living. Every dollar they spend for alcohol must be diverted from the purchase of other and more beneficial goods. Thus other industries suffer. Following the passage of the national prohibition laws, there was an unprecedented boom in business and an unprecedented rise in the standard of living of the masses. No well informed person would attribute the prosperity of the Twenties to any single cause. But, no well informed, unprejudiced person will deny that prohibition, by diverting vast sums of consumer dollars from liquor trade into channels of legitimate industry, contributed much to that long sustained period of prosperity. These are not the things we learned from wet propaganda or from good people who were influenced by such propaganda. These are the things which "we learned by experience."¹

In the Fall of 1963, the Surgeon General of the United States reported that medical science now confirms that cigarette smoking is a definite cause of cancer. This report supported a stand long held by Johnson Bible College. As a preacher training institution, its founder, Ashley S. Johnson, established a no smoking rule from the beginning.

¹R. M. Bell, "What We Learned By Experience," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: May, 1954), p. 2.

When R. M. Bell became president, he continued this policy in the school and wrote frequent articles appealing to the readers to give up cigarettes. One of his first cogent articles was written in November, 1942. An article in The Reader's Digest written by Lt. Commander Gene Tunney, U.S.N.R., provided the motivation.

Bell related in his article, "The Deadly Cigarette," the pungent facts Tunney reported in The Reader's Digest.

With every puff, heavy smokers shorten their own lives. Dr. R. Pearl, of John Hopkins found that among one hundred thousand heavy (over ten a day) smokers, fifty-three thousand seven hundred forty-four die before the age of sixty. Among the same number of non smokers only forty-three thousand four hundred thirty-six die before sixty. Even if you smoke moderately, you have much less chance of reaching sixty than if you don't smoke at all. It's a slow count, but it gets you finally.¹

Interestingly, Bell never pleaded his case on the ground that smoking was a sin. He spoke repeatedly concerning the health hazard and sought to supply factual, authoritative proof. Under the title, "Johnson Bible College Vindicated By Cancer Society Report," he wrote,

We know of course that tobacco is habit forming. Moreover, the habit is an expensive, troublesome, time-killing, filthy habit....In addition to these facts which we know about tobacco, we have believed that the use of tobacco created a health hazard and that heavy users, especially of cigarettes, were slowly committing suicide, but we could not prove it. On June 21, Drs. Cuyler Hammond and Daniel El Horn, investigators for the American Cancer Society, presented the proof to the American Medical Association.²

In 1959 he reminded his readers that thousands of people were burned to death each year due to fires resulting from smoking. Seventeen times as many people had died the year before from smoking as died of polio. Yet

¹R. M. Bell, "The Deadly Cigarette," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: November, 1942), p. 1.

²R. M. Bell, "Johnson Bible College Vindicated By Cancer Society Report," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: June-July, 1954), p. 2.

no one was organizing a campaign to end smoking rather than to concentrate solely on polio. He resorted to satire by stating that smoking relieved an "artificial tension" or craving like scratching relieved the itching from a chigger bite. He observed that it would be cheaper to seek "relief" satisfaction by scratching rather than smoking. He further pointed out that farmers could be given chigger raising allotments rather than tobacco allotments. The soil could be put in the soil bank and instead of spending time in the tobacco patch, he could sit back in his easy chair and watch his chiggers multiply while the taxpayer toiled to pay him soil bank checks. An ingenious advertising campaign could be launched to increase the demand for bugs, or the surplus could be put in cold storage. Bell suggested a T.V. commercial could run something like this:

First Stranger: Sir, what are you doing?
 Second Stranger: I am scratching. Can't you see?
 First Stranger: Sure, but why are you scratching so furiously?
 Second Stranger: I itch furiously.
 First Stranger: Sir, what kind of chiggers are you scratching?
 Second Stranger: Golden Brown Skin Divers. They match my complexion perfectly. They give more satisfaction per scratch than any chigger on the market.
 First Stranger: Do you think all scratchers should use Golden Brown Skin Divers?
 Second Stranger: I think every man should choose the chigger which gives him the greatest amount of satisfaction per bug. He can't go wrong with Golden Brown Skin Divers.
 First Stranger: Thank you sir. You are a very smart man. You talk like a Democrat and scratch like a Republican. Some day you may be a great golf player.¹

Since Johnson Bible College took a strong stand against smoking, many have suggested it was slightly incompatible to then raise tobacco on the college farm as a money crop. In reply to this charge, Dr. Bell pointed out:

¹R. M. Bell, "Call the Fire Department America Is Burning Down," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: November-December, 1959), p. 2.

The college has never grown a crop of tobacco. But tenants who rent land from the college grow it on college land. If refusing to permit tenants to grow tobacco on college land would reduce the amount of tobacco grown, we would refuse it. I have so written our Senator. But if we refuse to allow anyone to use our allotment, it will be distributed to other growers in the district. I am willing to suffer loss if my loss will help eliminate an evil. But if my loss will in no way reduce the evil, my sacrifice is pointless. It would be throwing two hundred dollars in the fire to prove my conviction that money is the root of all kinds of evil.¹

"Dangers Ahead," is the title of an article Bell wrote in May, 1947 about the "grave dangers which lie in the pathway of the ship of state." Although the war had ended, the American people were beginning to realize Russia's threat to peace. During the year of 1947, "the Russians will build more airplanes than the United States built during its years of peak production."² Bell asked, "On whom do they intend to use these planes, and for what purpose?" Do they really think they will be needed for protection? "They ought to know that Americans do not intend to attack anybody."

With this introduction, Bell developed the premise that the Russians could not derive from the speeches of President Harry Truman any assurance that we wanted peace. Moreover, the press and American congressmen made repeated irresponsible statements.

Consequently, Bell felt the Russians had grounds for assuming a belligerent attitude towards us through resentment and fear.

We do not like their atheistic communism and have been very frank in our announcements of the fact. Of course they resent it. If they have said all the nasty things about us and our capitalism that we have said about them and their communism, I, too, would resent it.³

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

²R. M. Bell, "Dangers Ahead," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: May, 1947), p. 1.

³Ibid.

Added to this resentment is fear of American might. We do not use honeyed words. Rather, we talk glibly, even arrogantly, about getting tough with Russia. Bell thus observed, "When we use such language, the Russians must draw one of two conclusions; namely, that we are bluffing or that we mean to fight. After seeing what we did to Germany and Japan, they are not likely to conclude that we are bluffing, but rather that we mean to fight."¹

Bell reasoned we would react in the same way if Russia talked and acted the way we had been talking and acting. Convinced that war was never a solution since it depleted natural resources, left a debt that staggers the imagination, and wounded and killed thousands, he felt there must be a better way. He maintained that our country had demonstrated the ability of states to live together in peace. The two most potent factors in this demonstration have been our form of government and our Christian ideals.

The United Nations is a step in the right direction. But without Christian idealism, the United Nations will fail, just as the United States would have failed without the support of Christianity which breaks down the barriers between races and classes, and gives dignity and worth to the individual. Christianity is the spiritual foundation for democracy....Therefore, if we will spend more time and money promoting the United Nations and spreading the Gospel of Christ, less time and money preaching the inevitability of war, we may make the third world war unnecessary.²

Two years later Bell referred to the dangers of socialism as a forerunner of communism. He received a letter from the Secretary of the Tennessee State Medical Association asking his help to fight socialized medicine. Bell remarked that the doctors had waited too long. The fires of socialism had been burning too long, but they weren't concerned until their own quarters were threatened.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

He asked where the doctors were when the government forced the railroads to operate at a loss or when the government entered the power business. The doctors had not opened their mouths because they profited by lower rates. When the government put the squeeze on the owners of rental property, the doctors did not so much as raise an eyebrow. They profited, they thought, by "frozen" rents. They seemed blissfully ignorant that the contagion which was striking other people down would, sooner or later, afflict them. Bell concluded his remarks to the "scared doctors" by saying:

We all want something for nothing and are foolish enough to believe that we can get it. This characteristic is the seed-bed for the growth of communism, the essence of which is confiscation. We are all perfectly willing for the government to confiscate the other fellow's wealth and income for our benefit. We forget that someone else wants what we have just as badly as we want what others have; and that, when the confiscation program gets under way, it takes all.¹

Although Bell may have been naive in his early appraisal of the international conspiracy and world domination goal of communism, his background in economics certainly gave him splendid insight into communism as an economic system. He prepared an article for The Blue and White entitled, "How Communism Came to Campus X," in which he gives a lucid analysis of the inherent weaknesses of communism.

His article is a story of several boys enrolled in a boarding school at a time when money was scarce. Whereas, most of the boys spent their money on non-essentials, Walter was different. He saved enough money on the side until he could purchase a bicycle. Since the school was ten miles from the city and there was no other means of transportation, Walter began a transpor-

¹R. M. Bell, "The Doctors Are Scared," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: April-May, 1949), p. 2.

tation rental system with a thirty dollar bicycle. He charged five cents per hour, or thirty cents per day. He allocated funds for repairs and also a replacement fund. Business went so well he had to borrow money from the bank to increase his battery of bicycles. Everyone respected Walter for his service of transportation as well as his initiative.

Then Gene came to the campus. He was the son of a Communist who called himself a Socialist. He soon labeled Walter a "Transportation Monopolist," the "economic tyrant," whose "parasitic practices" were reducing the "toiling masses" to "economic slavery." According to Gene, all the woes of society flowed from the "insatiable greed" of the "capitalistic exploiters," of whom Walter was a sample.

The students on the campus had not yet learned to sift fiction from fact and error from truth. They were impressed by Gene and did not realize the evils described by Gene were those developed in Europe along with the Industrial Revolution and had been wiped out long ago. Moreover, Gene failed to mention:

That it was capitalism that made freedom for the working man possible....; that capitalism destroyed the foundations on which slavery rested. He failed to mention the fact that capitalism, by affording effective incentives and by multiplying the production capacity of labor, had raised the standard of living to such a high level that, today, the average working man enjoys more of the comforts and luxuries of life than royalty enjoyed before the advent of capitalism.¹

Nevertheless, Gene organized the boys; and by ridicule, boycott, abuse, and threats, they induced Walter to turn his business over to the

"people," at a price which amounted to virtual confiscation.

¹R. M. Bell, "How Communism Came To Campus X," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: January-February, 1961), p. 2.

Matters went well for awhile until they faced a managerial decision. Who was going to run the business? In the capitalistic system, energy, initiative, and capacity are rewarded and management stands out--easily chosen. However, in the socialistic system managers are chosen through political selection. The best talker gets it. Since Gene was a good talker, he was given the manager's job. He had promised better rides at lower prices. As manager, Gene felt he should get a salary since he estimated that half the money which Walter took in was profit. In time, a service problem arose. Whereas, Walter had done his own repairing, patching, and oiling, he kept expenses down. Now, under the "people's management," these repairs had to be paid out of the rental income which Gene had already reduced.

Soon, problem after problem arose. Some "people" will simply not take care of the "people's property." What belongs to everybody belongs to nobody. Walter had charged extra for careless use of his bicycles and refused service to those who were incorrigible. Gene's high salary, plus high repair bills, plus reduced income brought an empty treasury. The bicycles were wearing out and no money to replace them.

A crash meeting was held to deal with the crisis. The business was insolvent, so two plans were proposed: 1) To borrow money with which to purchase new bicycles, or 2) To assess each member of the party according to his ability to pay.

Gene rejected the first plan as blatant capitalism, and the boys felt the injustice of the second plan which would tax one boy to pay for the rides of another. The conference ended in a stalemate.

Jake went home for the week-end and asked his father, a corporation lawyer, for advice. He returned with his son to the campus and suggested

the formation of a corporation as a solution to their problem. The boys should apply to the state for a charter, elect a Board of Directors, sell shares of stock and raise new capital for business. In answer to various questions Jake's father defined a corporation.

A corporation is a kind of legal person which is created by the state. It is a creature of "the people." The charter gives it a right to live and function. The "people" can kill it at any time, simply by revoking the charter. Thus, the corporation lives by grace of the people. In short, it is capitalism of the people, by the people, and for the people.

The shares of stock represent ownership. Suppose, for example, that there are one hundred boys in school, and the corporation divides the ownership into one hundred shares worth one dollar each. If each boy would buy one share, the corporation would have one hundred dollars with which to purchase three new bicycles at thirty dollars each and would have ten dollars for spare parts, and each boy could own one percent of the business.¹

Jake's father went on to explain that a corporation is managed by a Board of Directors elected by the stockholders. The directors appoint managers on the basis of managerial ability. Thus control remains in the hands of the people--this is people's capitalism.

He went on to show that by definition "Capitalism is not a form of government, but a method of production." It is the most efficient method of production that has yet been devised. Totalitarian capitalism under the feudal system is gone. But the communists still ridicule it, not recognizing the corporation and people's capitalism.

Bell ended the story with the terse comment that these boys should have known about "people's capitalism," but how can we expect a new generation to know unless we teach them.

Of all the social issues that perplex us, the problem of race is currently the most critical. When queried about his views, Dr. Bell replied:

¹Ibid., p. 3.

I am one hundred percent for civil rights, but I am lukewarm, or even cool, toward integration. It is unfortunate that the two issues have become so mixed in people's minds that you can't fight for one without fighting for the other, nor can you oppose one without opposing the other. The Bible is on the side of civil rights, but it is also on the side of segregation. God Himself is a segregationist. Abraham was a segregationist. Moses was a segregationist. Christ Himself was a segregationist. The church He founded was a segregated institution. The word "church" means segregation. When our Lord comes back to earth, it will be to complete the process of segregation. People, animals, birds, insects, fish, -- everything that has life -- tends toward segregation. The only way to enforce integration will be to deprive people of their liberty and thus restrict their freedom of choice, or, to change human nature. Congress and the Supreme Court can do the former, but only God can do the latter.¹

A study of Bell's theological position on various doctrinal issues is the next consideration. As editor of The Blue and White, he wrote extensively about several doctrinal subjects under discussion in our brotherhood.

One subject dear to his heart is the "Kingdom of God." To Bell the terms "Church," "Kingdom of God," and "Kingdom of Heaven" are synonymous. He wrote,.....

It seems clear that the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven and the Church are three names for the same institution. It is not unusual for one thing or person to be called by several different names or titles. Jesus Himself was called by many different names, each one expressing a particular quality, characteristic, office, or function. Likewise, the institution which He came to set up is called by various names.²

For Bell any concept of the church must begin in the Old Testament. The first promise concerning a Kingdom is found in Exodus 19:6. It is a conditional promise. Through Moses, God said to the Israelites:

¹Letter from R. M. Bell, President, Johnson Bible College, Kimberlin Heights, September 15, 1964.
²R. M. Bell, "What is the Kingdom of God," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: January-February, 1950), p. 4.

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.

From this passage he traces God's eternal plan which he revealed through the ages. For awhile Israel was happy having God as their King. However, they repudiated God's plan "in approximately eleven hundred B.C." and set up a kingdom with an earthly king similar to other nations. Their system lasted about five hundred years in one form or another.

About one hundred and fifty years before their kingdom fell Isaiah made an important prediction recorded in Isaiah 2:2-3:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it, and many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths, for out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Bell maintained that Isaiah simply meant that the time is coming (in the last days) when the Kingdom of God will be set up in the midst of the Kingdom of this earth. He suggests five important points of information from this prophecy:

- 1) It was to be established in the last days. (For an indication of the beginning of the last days, see Acts 2:16-17).
- 2) It was to be highly exalted. In comparison with other kingdoms, it would be as far above them as a mountain is above the hills.
- 3) It would be world-wide in scope--all nations shall flow into it!
- 4) It would be ruled by ideas rather than by force. "He will teach us His ways and we will walk in His paths."
- 5) It would begin in Jerusalem. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."¹

¹Ibid. p. 4.

The next important passage which continues Isaiah's prophetic pronouncement, according to Bell, is Daniel 2:34-35. The Jewish Kingdom had fallen and the people were in Babylonian exile. Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed a disturbing dream. Daniel was given an opportunity to interpret the dream after the wise men and magicians failed.

In his dream, the King had seen a great image with a head of gold, arms and chest of silver, trunk and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet of iron and clay. Then he saw a stone "cut out without hands, which smote the image....Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver and the gold broken to pieces together, and became like chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away that no place was found for them; and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain (Kingdom) and filled the whole earth." (Daniel 2:34-35).

From Daniel's explanation, the King learned that he was the head of gold. After him there would be a kingdom inferior to him and a third kingdom of brass. A fourth kingdom of iron that is strong shall come. It will break in pieces and bruise; and as the toes of the feet were part of iron and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle.

Bell suggests that Daniel is foretelling the same institution Isaiah spoke of one hundred and fifty years earlier. Like Isaiah, Daniel gave five important facts concerning it:

- 1) The time. "In the days of these Kings," meaning the days of the Kings of the Fourth World Empire from Nebuchadnezzar's; namely, the Roman empire. The Babylonian empire was succeeded by the Medo-Persian, the Medo-Persian by the Grecian, and the Grecian by the Roman.
- 2) How? Not by invading armies, as other kingdoms had been established but "without hands"...by "the God of Heaven."
- 3) It would have a small beginning, but would grow until it covered the earth. A single "stone cut out without hands"....

- became a great mountain and filled the earth." Nearly seven hundred years later Jesus said, "The Kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed....but when it is grown, it is the greatest among the herbs." (Matthew 13:31-32).
- 4) It was to be a kingdom of great power. "It shall break in pieces and consume all these Kingdoms."
 - 5) It was to be a permanent Kingdom....The Kingdom which "the God of heaven" was to set up would not have a successor. The God of heaven shall "set up a Kingdom which shall not be destroyed and....shall not be left to another people....and it shall stand forever."¹

Six centuries went by and the Jewish prophets kept this hope alive. Finally, John, the baptizer, came preaching in the wilderness of Judea saying, "Repent ye: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2).

Shortly after this, Jesus began to confirm what John had said. "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, 'Repent: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matthew 4:17).

As time progressed, Jesus chose twelve to preach to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." These were not enough so he added seventy and sent them out two by two. They, like the twelve, preached...."The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." (Luke 10:1-9).

Bell says that Jesus meant by the "Kingdom of heaven is at hand," that it was to be established in the lifetime of those who were preaching it. He said, "There be some of them that stand here who shall not taste death till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power." (Mark 9:1). Also, it was evident in the promise He made to Peter (Matthew 16:13-19), that the Kingdom would be set up during his lifetime. Else there would be no point in giving to Peter the keys of a kingdom which was to be established two or three thousand years after his death.

¹Ibid., p. 2.

The focal point when the kingdom became a reality rather than nearly was at Pentecost. During the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension Jesus spent much of His time with the apostles "Speaking of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." (Acts 1:3). On Pentecost, when the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter, speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit, gave the explanation recorded in Acts 2:16-21:

This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days saith God, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh....and it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

From Pentecost, the Kingdom was treated as an established fact. The early preachers preached as though the Kingdom were an existing fact. Paul"went into the synagogues and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God." (Acts 19:8). John regarded himself as being already in the Kingdom of Christ: "I, John, who am also your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the Kingdom, and patience, of Jesus Christ." (Revelations 1:9).

In summary, let us review briefly the prophecy and its fulfillment. Isaiah prophesied that: (1) In the last days (2) the mountain (Kingdom) of the Lord's house would be established, (3) it would be exalted above the hills (other Kingdoms), (4) it would be established in Jerusalem, and (5) all nations would flow into it.

Daniel prophesied that: (1) The God of heaven would set up a Kingdom (2) in the day of the Roman Kings, (3) it would have a small beginning but would grow till it filled the earth, (4) it would destroy all other Kingdoms, but (5) it would never be destroyed. John, Jesus, the twelve, and the seventy said "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Bell says that these prophecies were unquestionably fulfilled on

Pentecost:

Isaiah said the Kingdom of the Lord's house would be established in Jerusalem. "Out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." The Church was established in Jerusalem. Isaiah said it would occur in "the last days." On the day of Pentecost Peter, referring to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit said, This is what the prophet Joel said would happen in the last days....

Isaiah said "all nations" shall flow into it. In describing that Pentecostal audience, Luke says "There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven."

Daniel added that it would be the work of the God of heaven. Jesus commanded the Apostles to go to Jerusalem and "wait for the promise of the Father." On the day of Pentecost, Peter said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh"...Daniel said it would be in the days of the Roman Kings. Roman power ruled the civilized world when the church was established. Daniel said that it would have a small beginning. There were one hundred and twenty before the descent of the Holy Spirit. About three thousand were added following Peter's sermon - a mere handful in comparison to the population of the Roman Empire. Daniel said it would break in pieces other kingdoms. Largely as a result of the teachings of Christ, there is not a kingdom in the world today that existed when the Church began. Daniel said that it would never be destroyed. Kingdoms rise and fall, but thus far the Church has survived. Jesus said of it, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."¹

As we said at the outset, the terms "Church" and "Kingdom" are synonymous for Bell. It is a church in that it is composed of "called out ones," Christians called out from a life of sin to a life of righteousness. It is a kingdom in that it has a King at its head. Politically speaking, the church is a monarchy rather than a democracy. Where He has spoken His word is law. In matters wherein He has not spoken, Christians are free to use the democratic process.

¹Ibid., p. 4.

Any discussion of unity is a sensitive subject with Dr. Bell. His convictions run deep because they are vitally related to his own spiritual experience. Bell was reared in the Methodist Church and the journey he traveled to the Christian Church was painful. Reflecting on his home church, he wrote:

----under the preaching of such men as R. I. Hinely, and under the teaching of such elders as Uncle Mose Brumley, Alex Waters, Whit Goolsby, and Hartwell Brinson, that I learned the difference between the Church and a denomination.

It was there that I learned how to read and understand the Bible and was taught the meaning of the Gospel and the terms of salvation. It was there that I learned what it means to be a Christian only. It was there that I learned that Christ established only one church and that He meant it to be united, that denominationalism is not of Christ but of the devil. With great reluctance I gave up not only my denomination, but my denominationalism.¹

According to Bell, the best that any denomination can claim for itself is that it is part of the body of Christ. But, "Being a denomination, it is of necessity, an amputated part--amputated because of disease."²

Most ecumenical leaders would agree that the basic cause of our division is sin. They would probably concur with Bell's description of the growth of denominations:

....A denomination is like a river, which generally speaking, is not a river at the spot where it begins. Usually it is a tiny stream, perhaps without a name. But as it goes, it grows. Other streams join it and it finally becomes a river. So it is with a denomination. At first it was not a denomination; just rivalry between two leaders or groups of leaders. The introduction of an innovation, good or bad, to which someone objected; a disagreement over the interpretation of a passage of Scripture; a dispute over methods of organization; a challenge of authority; or an attempt to pull out the tares and the wheat....Then, a leader or group of leaders, raises a flag, announces a battle

¹R. M. Bell, "To My Home Church," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: January-February, 1964), p. 2.

cry, and calls upon the partisans to "come out from among them and be ye separate." Gradually the members take sides, separate meeting places are established, separate organizations are formed, and a new denomination crystallizes, piously believing that it has saved the cause of Christ.¹

However, Bell is in disagreement with most ecumenical leaders as well as the "cooperative" wing of our Brotherhood in his method of healing our denominationalism. Bell feels that there are many in our Brotherhood who are determined to merge with somebody for the sake of merger. He does not agree that this step will fulfill the purpose of the restoration movement.

Also, he interprets the restructure program as a step towards merger. "Because things which are alike merge more readily than things which are unlike, the first step is to 'restructure' the church into a denomination and then merge it with another denomination."² The reason this is being done is because the denominations have refused to give up their denominationalism; therefore, we are putting it on.

Bell does not agree that unity should be thought of in terms of cooperation among denominations. The body of Christ is not, and never will be, a confederation of denominations.

He feels that a move toward a merger of denominations would repudiate everything for which the restoration movement has stood, and "it would leave the religious world without a voice to proclaim the apostolic conception of unity."³

Quoting from the Restoration fathers, he cites their interest was in the abolition of denominationalism, not in their merger.

¹R. M. Bell, "Which Denomination," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: March-April, 1956), p. 2.

²Ibid., p. 1.

³Ibid., p. 1.

In the Last Will and Testament, Barton W. Stone and his colleagues "repudiated denominationalism and all creeds that divide Christians. They urged all followers of the Bible to unite in a new order based solely on the Scriptures." Thomas Campbell, in The Declaration and Address, "called for the unity of all Christians in independent, local congregations. This would throw off all man-made religious notions and go back to the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice."¹

Bell's idea of a universal or ecumenical church, then, is based first upon having restoration. In an article entitled, "The Shortest Road to Ecumenicity," he listed seven things which, if restored, would lead to the unity of the church. This article was prompted by a letter from one who was "no longer interested in restoration," and asked Dr. Bell if he shouldn't be willing to "give up something" in order to become a part of the ecumenical church. Bell replied that he had already given up something as his first step toward ecumenicity. He then lists what he gave up and reveals the essentials for a united church.

1. My false conception of the church.I was a bit stunned when I learned that Christ did not establish my denomination--or any other denomination; that denominationalism as such, is contrary to the teachings Christ and, therefore, is sin.
2. Denominational doctrines and practices.Not only did I give up my denominational conception of the church but I gave up the doctrines and practices that made me a denominationalist.
3. My denominational baptism.Several baptisms are mentioned in the Bible: The baptism unto Moses, John's baptism, the baptism of fire, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But Paul was not writing about any of these. He was writing about Christian baptism. Perhaps he was thinking about ecumenicity when he wrote to the Ephesians urging them to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." There is certainly no better formula for ecumenicity. Lest someone be in doubt about what he meant by "unity," he spelled it

¹Ibid., p. 1.

out in detail, setting forth categorically the matters on which the Ephesian Christians were to be united. Said he, "There is

One Body (The Church)
One Spirit
One Hope
One Lord
One Faith
One Baptism
One God"

....There is "one baptism." Nobody talks about three forms of the Lord, or three forms of the faith. Then why quibble over three forms of baptism? Paul defines it in the 6th Chapter of Romans. It is the "one baptism" that is universally accepted though not universally practiced. No reputable scholar, Protestant or Catholic, will deny that immersion of a penitent believer in water, in obedience to The Command of Christ, is valid baptism.

....Other "forms" of baptism are denominational. I gave up mine.

4. My denominational name.
....A careful study of the New Testament convinced my that the wearing of sectarian names dishonored God, caused and perpetuated division among believers, weakened the influence of the church and created a barrier against ecumenicity. Therefore, I gave up my denominational name. I am not a hyphenated Christian, but a Christian only.
5. My denominational communion.
....Denominational leaders have recognized that weekly communion is certainly in accord with apostolic teaching and practice. John Calvin said, "and truly this custom which enjoins communion once a year is a most wicked contrivance of the devil....Every week at least the table of the Lord should have been spread for Christian assemblies, and the promises declared by which in partaking of it, we might be spiritually fed." There is no more reason for giving up the weekly communion than there is for giving up the weekly sermon, the weekly offering, or the weekly prayers. The church which spreads the Lord's table each Lord's Day is on apostolic and ecumenical grounds. I have given up my denominational communion.
6. My denominational plan of salvation.
....A study of the cases of conversion recorded in Acts, reveals that every sinner who heard the Gospel, believed the Gospel, and obeyed the Gospel, was saved.To those who, upon believing the facts of the Gospel as set forth by Peter on the day of Pentecost, inquired, "What shall we do?" Peter gave the commands, "Repent ye and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus

Christ unto the remission of your sins." Then he added the promise: "And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38).

...."They they that received his word were baptised, and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41).

....This is still God's simple plan of salvation, and those who preach it are on undenominational, ecumenical ground.

7. My denominational church government.
The New Testament Church under the guidance of the apostles, adopted congregational government. Each congregation elected its own officers who exercised authority only within the congregation wherein they were elected. The church was God's school of democracy in a world that was enslaved by tyrannical, totalitarian governments.
As time passed, the church grew, Christianity became popular, and ambitious politicians bought or fought their way into the leadership of the church. Little by little the church lost its congregational form of government, and became an empire with a potentate sitting upon a throne, calling himself the Vicar of Christ upon the earth, assuming dictatorial powers over the whole church. Then came the Protestant revolution and the multiplicity of denominations. Each new denomination adopted that form of government which appealed to its founders. Seemingly, it never occurred to any of them to go back to the original pattern presented in the New Testament. This we must do before we can have ecumenicity.¹

Hence, to Bell there is only one way to an ecumenical church. If all the Christians who now wear denominational names, practice denominational ordinances, teach denominational doctrines, affirm denominational creeds, and maintain denominational types of government, will give them up, then we can have an ecumenical church.

President Bell evidenced in his writings a high regard for the Sacraments of the church. Truly Protestant at this point, he lifts up two Sacraments acknowledged by the New Testament Church--Communion and Baptism.

¹R. M. Bell, "The Shortest Road to Ecumenicity," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: March-April, 1960), p. 1, 4.

He considered Communion "The World's Greatest Memorial." In Isaiah it was promised that God would give his people a "memorial and a name." "Even unto them will I give within my house and within my walls a memorial and a name." (Isaiah 56:5). This was promised not because they were without a memorial and a name but because they would be inadequate to describe the new relationship between God and His people.

Man has always needed memorials because they are reminders to stimulate the "good forgetter" mechanism endowed by the Creator. Since God Himself introduced their use by setting a "bow in the clouds," man has invented a limitless variety. The white flower on the lapel, the granite grave marker, and the ringing of the Liberty Bell are examples.

However, the roots of the Communion memorial lie deeply in the holy history of Israel. When the Israelites went to Egypt in search of economic security, they lost both their security and their freedom. In their slavery they cried out for deliverance and God sent them Moses. By repeated demonstrations of power, God forced Pharaoh to free Israel.

To make sure Israel did not forget, He gave them a memorial--a reminder--which He called the Sabbath Day:

Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou, and remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord thy God commandeth thee to keep the Sabbath Day. (Deuteronomy 5:13-15).

Bell observes that the import of this passage does not center around "requiring six days of labor, nor to compel one day of rest, but to keep alive the memory of the most important event in the life of the Israelite--

his deliverance from the bondage of Egypt."¹

It is impossible for a Gentile to keep this commandment in that he cannot possibly remember that he or his ancestors were slaves in Egypt or that he was delivered from such enslavement. Moreover, the Gentiles were never commanded to keep the Sabbath Day.

However, the Christian does have a memorial to keep which is far more meaningful. It is called The Lord's Supper.

As the Israelite was in bondage to Pharaoh, so all men were in bondage to sin. As the Israelitish slaves were driven by the cruel whip of the Egyptians, so all sinners are lashed by their wicked habits and evil desires. As the Israelite was helpless in his enslavement, so sinful man is unable to throw off his sinful nature. But as God looked mercifully upon the Israelite and sent Moses to deliver them, so He looked on the whole world and sent His Son to redeem it.

Commenting on this act of love, Bell wrote:

The crowning act of Christ's redemptive work was His death on the cross. This fact we must never forget. Forget His lowly birth; forget His labors in the carpenter shop; forget His life of poverty; forget that He fed the hungry and healed the sick; forget, if you want to, that He raised the dead. But, for your sake, and for God's sake, don't forget that He died for your sins. Don't forget that He died to deliver you from the bondage of sin. Don't forget that He died that you might live.²

God in His divine wisdom provided a reminder for Christians to make sure this overwhelming act of love is never forgotten.

....The Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, Take eat; this is my body which is broken for you: This do in

¹R. M. Bell, "The World's Greatest Memorial," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: May 1950), p. 2.

²Ibid., p. 2.

remembrance of me. After the same manner also He took the cup when he had supped, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood: This do ye, as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me. (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

Admittedly, most Christians give too little thought to what Christ has done for them. But, if the Israelite was required by law to give one day in seven as a memorial, "certainly the Christian can give one hour in seven days."

Throughout this study of Bell's beliefs on various doctrinal subjects, one thing is quite clear. He has a deep passion for truth and an unswerving conviction that the Bible is the word of God. In a letter written to Dr. Bob Jones of Bob Jones University, he confirmed Bob Jones' stand that the Bible, "Is the Word of God" rather than, "Contains the Word of God."¹

The doctrine of Baptism illustrates his immovable conviction to remain loyal to the truth as God leads one to see it. Baptism has been the source of controversy and debate since the days of Stone and Campbell. In many ways the issue is much more critical presently than at any other time. Within this context Bell has held to the traditional views of our Brotherhood. He has maintained that he has not given any more emphasis to baptism than the Bible gives. First of all he points to the fact that Jesus himself stressed baptism.

For some reason not fully understood by us, Jesus attached great importance to Baptism. John, His "advance man," stressed it vigorously. "John did baptize in the wilderness and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." (Mark 1:4-5).

¹ Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

² R. M. Bell, "Why Preach Baptism," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: July-August, 1955), p. 2.

There is no indication in the New Testament that He rebuked John for being too zealous or giving too much preeminence to baptism. Not only did Jesus condone the preaching and practicing of baptism, but he also submitted to the act Himself. When He ascended into Heaven, the last command He gave to the apostles included a stress upon baptism.

A second reason Bell gives for preaching baptism is based upon the importance given to it by the Holy Spirit. In His last conversation with His apostles subsequent to His death, Jesus promised the guidance of the Holy Spirit saying, "When he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth....He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine and show it unto you." (John 14:13-14). "It is not strange, therefore, that when the Holy Spirit came, the first command which He gave included baptism."¹

This reference to the Spirit's command pertains to Pentecost as the "Spirit gave them utterance" and Peter was directed in his preaching. As the crowd was convicted and cried out for instruction for salvation, Peter exclaimed, "Repent and be baptized, everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38).

A third reason for preaching baptism is suggested because "Every apostolic preacher emphasized baptism." When Philip preached in Samaria concerning Christ and the Kingdom of God, those that believed, "were baptized, both men and women." (Acts 8:12b). Ananias, a lay preacher sent to blind Saul of Tarsus, preached baptism. After Paul had encountered the living Christ on the road to Damascus and was asked, "Why persecutest thou me?,"

¹ Ibid., p. 1.

he was sent to Damascus to await further instruction. Three days later the Lord sent Ananias, who restored his sight. Then he said, "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16).

Commenting upon Ananias' sermon, Bell said:

It is interesting to note that Ananias was sent by the Lord Himself to tell Saul what to do. And, although his sermon was brief--consisting of only sixty-nine words--it included baptism. Although Saul had been a believer for three days, had repented, confessed, and had been praying and fasting for three days, he was, according to Ananias still in his sins. The only command which Christ sent to Saul by Ananias, was "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."¹

Peter, in one of his epistles stressed baptism to the point that he said it "saves us." He refers to the Ark, wherein "eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth now save us." (I Peter 3:20-21).

In all the witness to baptism given by the apostolic preachers, it was left for Paul to give the only Scriptural definition of baptism. In Romans 6:3-6 he writes, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore, we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."

Hence, according to Paul, Christian baptism is the burial of a penitent sinner with Christ, and the resurrection of the new creature to walk in "newness of life." If as John says, "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son,

¹Ibid., p. 2.

cleanses us from all sins," then in Christian baptism the sinner contacts that blood as he is united with his crucified Lord.

In any discussion of baptism the question, "Is baptism essential to salvation?" is bound to appear. Commenting on this, Bell says:

That depends upon your definition of the word "essential." If it means that God cannot, under any circumstances, save an unbaptized person, then it is not essential. We cannot limit God's power to save whomever He chooses or under any circumstances He chooses. If by "essential" you mean that one cannot be obedient to Christ without being baptized, then baptism is essential. In fact, those who persistently refuse to be baptized are living in a state of disobedience. "He is the author of eternal salvation unto all them who obey Him." (Hebrews 5:9). We cannot obey Him and at the same time refuse to be baptized.¹

In all the areas in which Dr. Bell has written, he was never more lucid and trenchant than when he probed into the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Periodically, he received letters from "Faith only" adherents instructing him in "God's Simple Plan of Salvation." His reply placed him within the historical lineage of Walter Scott and his five finger exercise.

Bell placed a great deal of stress on the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion. However, his ideas on exactly how the Spirit works are different. Speaking on this subject at the National Evangelistic Association at Oklahoma City, he said, "The Holy Spirit had a variety of tasks to perform, but they all led to one goal: the glorification of Christ."² He claimed our generation might understand it better if we spoke of His primary objective as "selling Christ to an unbelieving world." In his opinion, there has never been a single valid conversion in which the Holy Spirit did not play a part.

¹Ibid., p. 3.

²R. M. Bell, "The Work of The Holy Spirit In Conversion," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: November-December, 1950), p. 1.

However, after searching the cases of conversion in the book of Acts, he finds that the Holy Spirit operated "through the word, through the preacher, or through circumstances; but never upon the sinner himself."¹ The Spirit spoke to Philip rather than to the Eunuch--to Peter, but not to Cornelius. He guided the missionaries to Lydia rather than Lydia to the Missionaries. The only reason that can be given for this is that the world cannot receive the Spirit. Jesus said to His apostles, "I will pray the Father and He will give you another comforter, that He may abide with you forever--even the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not neither knoweth Him." (John 14:16-17).

The Spirit, therefore, is promised only to baptised believers. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said to the three thousand who believed, "Repent and be baptized and (then) you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38).

Bell feels that these same truths are valid today and the Holy Spirit is still working through the same channels: the word, the preacher or witness, and circumstances.

Bell's ideas about salvation received the most attention when he printed in The Blue and White a letter he had written to Billy Graham. He was disturbed by the answer Graham had given to a young girl seeking help in conversion in that his answer presented about one half or one third of the Gospel. He wrote, "Your most oft-repeated phrase is, 'The Bible says.' Why, then, did you not tell the girl what the Bible says?"²

¹ Ibid., p. 2.

² R. M. Bell, "A Letter To Billy Graham," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: March-April, 1958), p. 1.

The question of salvation, or "What Must I Do To Be Saved?" appears in the New Testament, in one form or another, six times. Each time the answer that is given is different. On the surface this seems confusing and contradictory, but a closer analysis reveals unity and clarity. For the purpose of this paper we shall omit the thief on the cross and defer any comment until the summary.

There are two important things to remember before looking closer at the questions. The first is to remember that the first three who asked this question lived under the Law of Moses. The other three lived under the dispensation of Grace or The Gospel. Secondly, you must keep in mind that God always deals with a sinner where he is in the process of conversion and then leads him on to the next steps in the process.

The first time the question was asked pertaining to salvation was by a lawyer. He lived under the law and was a student of the law. He asked Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus replied, "What is written in the law? How readest thou?"

When the lawyer replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart....soul....and strength and mind," Jesus told him that he had answered correctly.

"This do and thou shalt live. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Luke 10:25-28; Matthew 22:40).

Jesus pointed the lawyer to the law; for people under the law were saved by complying with the terms laid down in the law.

The second time the question was asked it involved a rich young ruler who was also living under the law. When he inquired, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied, "Thou knowest the commandments,"

and named five of them. The young man declared that he had kept those from his "youth up." But there was at least one which he had not kept--the one forbidding covetousness. When Jesus suggested that he sell all that he had and distribute it to the poor, "he was very sorrowful; for he was very rich." (Luke 18:18-22).

Again, Jesus referred him to the conditions of the dispensation that was in force--the law. It is important to remember that the terms are different under the law. The new dispensation began with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the Gospel on the first Pentecost after the resurrection. If the terms had been the same for both dispensations, there would have been no need for the coming of Christ. "Salvation before Pentecost was salvation by Law. Salvation since Pentecost is salvation by grace, through Faith."¹ Paul says:

If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed. Wherefore, the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under the schoolmaster. For we are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:21-27).

At another time the question was asked, the inquirer was a jailor. He was guarding prisoners where Paul and Silas had been imprisoned. In the night an earthquake shook the foundations, giving the prisoners an opportunity to escape. When Paul assured him they were all present, he came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, "Sirs, what may I do to be saved?"

¹R. M. Bell, "Six Answers To The Question - 'What Must I Do To Be Saved?'" Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: January-February, 1956), p. 2.

Paul replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house." (Acts 16:31). This is not all he told him, but this was the first step and still is under the terms of the Gospel.

The day of Pentecost provided another occasion. The promise of the Holy Spirit by Jesus to His apostles was fulfilled in a miraculous way. His coming was both visible and audible and created a stir in all of Jerusalem. When a crowd gathered Peter acted as the spokesman and interpreted the event of that day. He reached the climax of his sermon with these words: "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:36).

With one accord they cried out to Peter under conviction, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

You will note that Peter's answer was different from Paul's answer to the jailor. He did not say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," because they had passed that point. They were convinced of the Lordship of Christ through Peter's sermon or they would not have cried out, "What shall we do?" Rather, he led them past this by saying, "...repent and be baptized, everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38).

The last incident to be mentioned took place with Paul. On his way to Damascus to persecute Christians he was stricken blind, heard the voice of Jesus, and was told to go on to Damascus where he would be told what to do. He went to Damascus as directed and prayed and fasted for three days, after which, one Ananias, a messenger of the Lord, came to tell him what to do. After a few preliminaries, Ananias said, "And now why tarriest thou?

Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). Ananias did not tell Paul to believe for the same reason Peter did not tell the Pentecostians. Paul had passed that point; he was a believer after confronting the Lord on the Damascus road. In like manner, Paul could give no greater evidence of having passed the stage of repentance than having spent three days in blindness, fasting and praying in Damascus.

Bell raises the question of why in each of these three cases each was told a different thing to do in response to his question for salvation. In answer to this question, he looks at each case in detail.

The jailor had never heard of this new religion Paul and Silas were preaching. They had been thrown in his jail as trouble makers, and he had beaten them and locked them up for the night. Because an earthquake shook the doors open, he was about to commit suicide in the fear he had lost all the prisoners. When Paul stopped him, he came pleading for salvation. It was then that Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." (Acts 16:28-31). Contrary to the ideas of some, the story does not stop there. "And they spake unto him the words of the Lord, and to all that were in his house."

Bell asks, "What did the 'word of the Lord' include?" He replied: The inspired writer does not tell us, but we know that it included repentance, because the jailor repented. He would not have known to repent if these spirit-guided preachers had not told him to repent. How do we know that he repented? We know it by his conduct, which is the best proof in the world. He bore the fruits of repentance. He was sorry for his sins, and began immediately to mend his ways and to relieve the suffering which he had helped to cause. The same hour of the night he took those preachers....and "washed their stripes." What better proof do we need that he repented.¹

¹Ibid., p. 3.

In addition to this, Bell maintains, "The Word of The Lord" also included baptism. Immediately following Paul's sermon the jailor and his family were baptized. "He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway, and when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." (Acts 16:33-34).

Those at Pentecost believed Peter's sermon when he told them they had crucified the messiah, God's son. Having already believed then, Peter told them to repent and be baptized.

Paul, in his blindness was convinced that this Jesus whom he was crucifying was, after all, God's Christ. During his fasting and prayer he certainly repented. Hence, when Ananias came, he completed the process by baptizing him:

Each inquirer was told to begin where he was and complete the process. The Pentecostians had believed, so they were told to repent and be baptized. Paul had believed and repented. He was told to be baptized. The jailor had not even taken the first step. Therefore, he was told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he was told to repent and be baptized. Which he gladly did.¹

Thus there are no conflicts, no contradictions, and no confusion when the Scriptures are taken as a whole.

In conclusion, we should mention the thief on the cross since he is used as an example of salvation without baptism. Bell asserts that the thief, if he were saved, had to comply to the terms of the law as did the lawyer and the rich young ruler. Of course, we have no proof that he was or was not saved because no one really knows what the Lord meant by His reply, "Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." It is true that Jesus had the

¹Ibid., p. 3.

power to forgive sins, even before the terms of salvation were proclaimed. But as to his fate, all we can do is assume or conjecture. At best, it is a tenuous example on which to build a "faith only" defense.

It would seem that this interpretation of the Gospel Plan of Salvation will stand the test of the keenest scrutiny. If one subscribes to this testimony, then he has the promise of becoming a "new creature" in Christ.

In all of Bell's writings, no other subject received as much attention as the controversy over the use of instrumental music in worship. His first article appeared in The Blue and White, January-February, 1955. There was no explanation given as to the reason for the article. Nevertheless, the return mail avalanched with favorable response to the article. Some time later, after The Blue and White had carried several full-length articles, he explained why he had devoted so much time and space to the subject:

Frankly, I had little hope of converting those who from childhood, have been steeped in the doctrine of "damnation by music." Certainly I had no hope of converting those preachers who have used this pernicious doctrine as a powerful proselyting device. To ask them to give it up would be like asking the Russians to give up falsehood as a method of spreading communism. I did, however, hope to stabilize some of our own people who are being misled by this man-made doctrine. I hoped also to make it more difficult for the purveyors of this un-Scriptural doctrine to divide churches. I have some evidence that these objectives have been accomplished, at least in a small measure. Only time will tell whether they have been accomplished in a significant measure.

The initial writing that aroused so much interest came from an offer of one thousand dollars to "anyone who could produce Scripture which says, or implies, that the use of instrumental music in worship is sin." Many

¹R. M. Bell, "Thank You For Your Patience," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: Summer, 1959), p. 1.

people from all over the country who had been harrassed by the anti-music people sent scores of letters requesting reprints to use for ammunition.

A young housewife wrote a typical letter that was received:

Dear Mr. Bell: I have been an active, faithful member of the Church of Christ for about five years. I and my family attend Mt. P. Church of Christ about six miles from home. We have always been very well satisfied that we were right in doing so and that the way the worship there is conducted, is the way our Lord would want it to be.

But, in the last few weeks our basis for believing has been challenged. A new minister from Virginia has come...and is in the process of establishing a new church there, which will be much closer to our home. He has visited in our home several times inviting us to attend his church and condemning us for going to worship at Mt. P. He says that Mt. P. is wrong because we use a piano and an organ in our worship services!...

I am a housewife, 29 years old, and I read my Bible regularly. However, I have never been to Bible College or received any formal Bible training. So now I need to know what basis I can use for my conviction that music is all right. I don't know how to prove what I believe in the Scriptures, you see. My minister said that you could give me sincere, Scriptural assurance that my belief is right. What I need now is a deeper conviction that I am right and that God approves of the way we worship--and lead our child to worship....

Bell's strategy in dealing with this issue is to put the anti-music people on the defensive. For the past seventy-five years the argument about instrumental music centered around the word "psalmos." Although the word has a dozen different meanings, only the meaning to defend their particular position was cited by proponents on both sides of the question.

In the past, the pro-instrumentalist was put on the defensive by being chided to prove that instrumental music is authorized for use in worship. Now, Bell challenged them to prove its use is sinful. This approach

¹R. M. Bell, "Letter To The Editor," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: January-February, 1962), p. 3.

lifted the argument out of the old debate over the meaning of words, which is useless.

Each time Bell advanced this position, those who wished to debate him tried to put it back on the same old defensive plane. Typical is a letter from L. W. Mayo, Evangelist, Gainesville, Texas:

Dear Mr. Bell:If you are ready to affirm that "mechanical instrumental music in the worship is clearly taught in the New Testament Scriptures" or if you are ready to affirm that "The use of mechanical instrument music in the worship is parallel to the obtaining of pitch from a tuning fork" we should be able to have a very interesting debate.¹

Bell's reply was much the same each time:

Dear Mr. Mayo: I am writing to say the use of instrumental music in worship is taught in the New Testament Scriptures just as clearly as is the use of the tuning fork or the church house or aspirin or surgery. I am not willing to affirm that either one of them is "clearly taught in New Testament Scriptures." Are you willing to affirm that either one of them is sin? If so, I shall be glad to publish your proof in The Blue and White.... If the use of instrumental music in connection with worship is sin, I want to know it, and I will be very grateful to you to point out the Scriptures which so teach. I have no yearning for a "very interesting debate." I do yearn for the truth.²

The people who wrote in to claim the thousand dollar reward usually quoted the same hackneyed arguments and used the same Scripture passages for proof texting.

Mrs. Addo Frost wrote:

....Proof that Instrumental Music in Christian Worship is Sinful. Colossians 3:17 - "Do all in the name of Christ." Can you worship with the instrument in the name or by the authority of Christ? Romans 14:23. "Whatever is not of faith is sin." "Faith comes by hearing the word of God." Romans 10:9-17. Since the word of God does not authorize the use of instrumental music in the worship of Christians, and faith comes by hearing the word of God, it follows that the use of instrumental music in Christian worship cannot

¹R. M. Bell, "Shall We Debate the Music Question?," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: May-June, 1963), p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 1.

be "of faith," and since that which is not of faith is sin, its use is sinful.

....The command is to sing: Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16.¹

This reasoning is a ruthless example of quotations made out of context or half quotes. Bell's gift in exegesis is superb. He always took the "Scriptural proofs" and forced the opponent to look at the entire passage.

The entire context of Colossians 3:17-23 says, "and whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."

Bell rightly observed that Paul is here urging Christians to live a dedicated life--to do everything, every word and every deed--in the name of Christ. Wives should submit to their husbands in the name of Christ. Husbands should love their wives in the name of Christ. Children should obey their parents in the name of Christ. Servants should obey their masters in the name of Christ. In other words, "Whatsoever you do, do heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men." If there is any condemnation of instrumental music here, then Paul surely missed the point.

¹R. M. Bell, "Who Nailed the Old Testament To the Cross?," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: November, 1957), p. 2.

Another passage quoted was Ephesians 5:19. In the context of Ephesians 5:18-21, Paul says, "and be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

Bell reminds his readers that this passage, "is a single sentence with six separate and distinct commands."¹ The anti-music brethren single out a single phrase, "singing and making melody in your heart," and give it the force of a command. Taking their logic and saying the passage to "sing and make melody" in their hearts is an unequivocal command rather than a recommended spiritual exercise, we are caught in a dilemma. It must apply to everybody. What, then, will be the fate of the people who cannot sing? What of the deaf mute? He can do what Paul exhorted. He can have a song in his heart. He can go through life doing this, but he cannot do what the anti-music people ask--sing!

Thus our non-instrument brethren have done an incredible thing. They have taken a single exhortatory sentence from Paul's letter to the Ephesians--a sentence in which Paul was exhorting them to live a completely dedicated life; and from the middle part of that sentence, which has absolutely nothing to do with public worship, they have taken a single phrase, about one-sixth of the sentence, and have given it the force of an unequivocal commandment. By their own rules of interpretation, they have accomplished a gigantic distortion of Scripture by making this phrase apply only to public worship. This, of course, is nonsense. Then, by failing to observe the grammatical construction of the phrase, they have changed the meaning of the phrase so as to make Paul say "sing with your mouth but make melody in your heart." Whereas he said to do both in your heart or "with your heart."²

¹Ibid., p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 3.

Another passage cited by Mrs. Frost and used by others defending her position is Romans 14:23. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." To do anything in God's service which is not authorized in the New Testament is rebellion and is, therefore, sinful. Their reasoning continues, "The Lord specified the use of the human voice to praise Him; therefore, the use of mechanical instruments to praise Him is an addition by men and is sinful."

Bell refutes this line of logic by showing how the Lord specified that oil and prayer of the elders shall be used in the treatment of sick Christians. Therefore, the use of drugs and surgery in the treatment of sick Christians is an addition by men and is sinful.

In summary, Bell maintains that there is no scripture taken in its context in the Old or New Testaments that says, or implies, that instrumental music in the church or out, is sin. No man can say, on Biblical authority, that the use of instrumental music is sin. "If it is sin, Jehovah, Moses, all the prophets, all the apostles, and every other Bible writer forgot to say so in terms which can be understood by people of average intelligence."

Bell felt the division caused by those who preach the doctrine of "damnation by music" have sabotaged the Restoration Movement. In his mind this is the greatest tragedy of modern times -- "A greater tragedy than two world wars combined."¹

Closely related to the subject of baptism is the problem of open membership. Earlier we mentioned that baptism had been a source of controversy since the days of the Restoration fathers. But to be more specific, the issue of open membership, according to Bell, can be the source of "The Decade of Division."

¹R. M. Bell, "Anti-Music Position Has No Scriptural Support," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: May-June, 1957), p. 4.

Bell questions if the decision to divide has not already been made. He asks, "....has that decision already been made by the 'leaders,' and all that remains to be done is that the division be 'sold' to that part of the Brotherhood which is willing to buy."¹ He urges those who advocate a substitute for Scriptural baptism to accept the blame rather than use the scapegoats of a "corporation," "methods of missionary work," "Independent" and "Cooperative" smear words, or "Agencies."

But let us back up and define our terms. What is meant by open membership? How did it get started? How is it causing a wedge of discontent bordering division in our Brotherhood?

Bell defines open membership as, "....The practice of receiving into membership of Christian congregations persons who have not been baptized into Christ."² He traces the origin of this practice to the inclusion of Sprinkling into the life of the Church. Although the date of its beginning is not clear, Bell cites The Edinburgh Encyclopedia which suggests the dates of A.D. 753 and 1311. Pope Stephen II was approached by the monks of Cressy in Brittany, and asked if pouring water on infants could be substituted in cases of necessity. It was granted. In 1311 at the Council held at Ravenna the Catholic Church declared "immersion or sprinkling to be indifferent."

Because of the misunderstanding of the meaning and purpose of baptism, because of the convenience of administering it, and because the Catholic Church finally adopted it in practice, most Protestant bodies followed the lead of the Catholics and gave first place to the substitutes.

¹R. M. Bell, "Open Membership and The Decade of Division," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: May-June, 1962), p. 4.

²Ibid., p. 1.

When the Campbells were forced to restudy their own position on baptism, they concluded that immersion was the only Scriptural form and restored it to the life of the church. Bell is not certain when or where the open membership idea was infused into the practice of our Brotherhood. But he writes, "according to Dr. Joseph Dampier, one speaker on the program of the Centennial Convention (Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, 1909) dared to make favorable reference to the idea of open membership."¹ Nevertheless, Bell maintains it was practiced surreptitiously for a time, but now it is practiced openly by some churches and advocated by some of the "leaders" of the Brotherhood.

Bell feels that this is a divisive issue in our Brotherhood today because many are confused about such terms as "church membership - open and closed," "giving candidates a choice for baptism," and "open communion logically implies open membership."

Bell declares it is a false assumption that there are two types of church membership - open and closed. It is erroneous to urge people to "join" the church. In the New Testament church membership is "open" to everyone who has faith enough to comply with the terms of admission. Peter made those terms very specific at Pentecost (Acts 2:38). As a result, the Lord adds "to the church daily those who are being saved." (Acts 2:47). Membership is, hence, closed to those whose lack of faith causes them to reject the terms.

Some proponents of open membership advocate a choice be given to his baptism among three baptisms--immersion, pouring, or sprinkling. Others give candidates for membership full membership if they are satisfied with their previous mode of baptism.

¹Ibid., p. 4.

To this Bell exclaims: "You erroneously assume that there is more than one baptism. Paul is unmistakably clear on this point: Says he, there is 'one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all...'"¹ (Ephesians 4:6). If the New Testament restricts your belief to "one God," it restricts your practice to "one baptism." If it restricts your confession to "one Lord," it restricts your submission to "one baptism." If the "one God" is the same for all people, the "one baptism" is likewise the same baptism for all.

Regarding the question of open communion in the church, advocates of open membership usually say, "It is inconceivable that a church could practice open communion and at the same time closed membership." To this Bell asserts there is nothing in the New Testament concerning "open" and "closed" communion. The purpose of the communion is not to have fellowship with other people, or to show who is Christian and who is not, but to "proclaim the Lord's death till He come." (I Corinthians 11:26). The responsibility for determining eligibility was placed upon the individual communicant himself. Paul said, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh condemnation to himself, if he discern not the body." (I Corinthians 11:28-29). "It is inconceivable," says Bell, "that a Christian minister cannot see the difference between permitting a 'sprinkled believer' to take communion, and admitting him to full membership of the church."²

In taking communion the individual assumes the full responsibility for his eligibility. The church passes no judgment, compromises no principle,

¹R. M. Bell, "Open Membership In The Open," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: November-December, 1960), p. 2.

²Ibid., p. 2.

or approves no error. Nevertheless, if someone should come with "strange emblems and strange ritual" void of symbolism of the broken body or shed blood of our Lord, we should be reluctant to accept his substitute.

In like manner this, in substance, is what the sprinkled believer asks us to do when he comes for membership on the basis of his baptism. In open communion the "communicant accepts our Scriptural communion. In open membership the applicant for membership asks us to accept his unscriptural baptism. Because a man accepts my genuine article is no reason why I should accept his counterfeit."¹

Since Bell has been the President of Johnson Bible College, there has been a steady pressure upon him to "take a stand." This pressure is applied from both the "Independent" and "Cooperative" segments of our Brotherhood.

A good example of this can be seen in one of the comments he has made while answering a charge accusing Johnson of being an "Independent" school.

A minister in Virginia has heard that "Johnson is on the bandwagon of the U.C.M.S. and has dropped us from his budget." One down in Georgia has heard that "we are 'poisoning the minds' of the students against all organized work." One in Ohio writes that "J.B.C. has gone modern." One in Missouri charges that we are "destroying the faith of the students." A student, who left school without saying goodbye, reported that a cyclone had wiped out the school. The devil is a hard worker.²

On the outset, let us frankly say that it is not hard to understand why Johnson Bible College is constantly confronted with this kind of pressure. Ministers serving in churches may claim to hold a "middle of the road"

¹Ibid., p. 3

²R. M. Bell, "Where Does Johnson Stand?" Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: Summer, 1956), p. 1.

position, but in all reality they are serving in one segment of our Brotherhood life or another. They may support agencies or causes that cross over the lines, but in the final analysis they are in one camp or another. This is not to say that it is right, but a realistic outlook of the times demands it.

Now the situation of a college can be different. Although the same pressures exist, a college that is determined to do so can refuse to be "sectarian." It is possible to teach the Gospel in all its ramifications without aligning yourself with any particular group. But one should not be surprised if complaints come from the churches. Ministers who have been forced to make a decision cry out in their frustration for some group, or persons, or school, with whom they can identify.

Dr. Bell chose to lead Johnson Bible College down a course that would enable the school to serve the whole Brotherhood. A clarification of terms might help to understand his reasoning.

First of all it is imperative to understand his definition of "brotherhood" and "agency of the brotherhood."

Brotherhood is a relationship. A brotherhood is made up not of organizations, but of individuals who are in fact or in figure bound together by fraternal ties....

Our brotherhood is made up of individuals who have both a common faith and a common task. Our faith is in Christ. He is our creed. Our task is to make Him and His gospel known to the uttermost parts of the earth and to persuade as many people as possible to accept His way of life.¹

An agency of the brotherhood has many meanings. But to Bell it simply means an instrumentality.

¹R. M. Bell, "What Is The Brotherhood?," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: November-December, 1955), p. 1.

An agency is merely an instrument or a tool which is used as an aid in performing our task....The tools themselves are unimportant. They are but a means to an end....When the workers stop to fight over the tools, they are failing to do the Master's work....Johnson Bible College is merely a tool--an agency. It has served the brotherhood--the whole brotherhood--for sixty-two years.¹

Bell goes on to point out that there are many churches within the brotherhood that have never supported Johnson Bible College. Nevertheless, he would be wrong to write off these churches because they did not support his "pet agency." Moreover, any agency which demands support of the churches and tries to read out of the brotherhood any church which does not comply with its demands, is a dangerous agency and "should be allowed to die for lack of support."

Another term that should be more clearly defined is "denomination." Bell has a strong aversion to this word. To him it connotes sectarianism. Once he was invited to be a representative from his "denomination" to an Interdenominational Conference. He refused because he did not consider himself a member of a denomination. In his reply to the invitation, he wrote:

In my early life, I could not think of the church except in terms of a denomination. I was taught that denominations were branches of the church.

....After a long and difficult struggle, and after much study of the New Testament, I too, came to see the difference between the church and a denomination. One is of God. The other is not. When I became convinced of this fact, I chose to "suffer affliction with the people of God" rather than to enjoy the prestige of my denomination for a season.²

This whole aspect is distressing to Bell. For a century and a half our preachers and writers have been pointing out the sinfulness of denominationalism. Now that the denominational world is recognizing this fact,

¹Ibid., p. 2.

²Ibid., p. 2.

many in our brotherhood want to lead us into this bondage of "sectarianism and ecclesiasticism."

Hence, Bell feels that a denomination is a sect, a "body of dissenters from an established church," a split-off from the church. Jesus did not establish a sect but a church.

It would be a repudiation of all for which he has stood for Bell to lead Johnson Bible College into either the "Independent" camp or the "Cooperative" camp. This would be flagrant sectarianism. Likewise, he cannot remain silent when he sees "agencies" that were created for instrumentality usurp that position and assume the role of the church or the brotherhood. His criticism of such, whether it be leveled at the "Independents" or the "Cooperatives," places him or the school in the vulnerable position of being labeled one or the other.

In the judgment of the writer any charge saying that Johnson Bible College has changed would be false. It is not the author's place here to question whether this is an asset or liability. In Bell's words:

We know the Gospel; we believe the Gospel; we preach the Gospel. We teach our young preachers that the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation. And we warn them, as Paul warned the Galatians, that if any man--college professor, state secretary, or even an angel--preach any other Gospel, let him be anathema.¹

The school is still, "pleading for the unity of all disciples upon faith in Christ and obedience to Him rather than upon the support of a particular agency."²

Since the lines of division within our brotherhood are being sharply drawn, it would be the opinion of the writer that it would be closer to the truth to charge that the churches involved in this entrenchment and pending

¹Ibid., p. 2.

²R. M. Bell, "Who Has Changed?," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: September-October, 1956), p. 2.

separation have changed--not Johnson Bible College.

In this section we shall consider Dr. Bell's attitude toward the United Christian Missionary Society. This is necessary in order to get an accurate picture of Johnson Bible College and its position in the Brotherhood. The latter will be handled on a broader basis later in this study.

Dr. Bell has not been vocally critical of the United Christian Missionary Society during his years as president of Johnson Bible College. However, it would seem fair to say it was suspect in his thinking. More recently he has published statements in The Blue and White which have been derogatory in nature.

In one article he traced the history of the Society. He recalled how the opponents of organization in 1849 predicted that organization of a society would bring discord and division. However, in retrospect, when the reports came in from the work of the "American Missionary Society" (1849), the "Christian Women's Board of Missions" (1874), and the "Foreign Missionary Society" (1875), "they were positively thrilling." "No contributor was dissatisfied with the results of his missionary dollar."¹ Still, the dire results predicted by the opponents of missionary societies did materialize. In 1906, the break came when several hundred congregations withdrew and asked to be listed in the United States Census as a separate religious body under the name of Church of Christ. In addition to the missionary societies, the use of musical instruments in worship led to the schism.

As time progressed, competition among the Societies was rather keen.

¹R. M. Bell, "To Merge Or Not To Merge," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: November-December, 1961), p. 2.

Some felt that "competition is a powerful stimulant." Others said that a merger should take place because "in union there is strength."

In tracing the history, Bell did not know who first advocated the union of the three societies; but the proponents prevailed and in 1920 the merger became effective and The United Christian Missionary Society was born. The purposes of the Society were set forth in The Code of Regulations:

1. That the world may more fully come to know Christ, the Son of God;
2. That all men everywhere may increasingly appropriate for themselves His way of life;
3. That the world of Christian brotherhood may be realized, and that the unity of God's people may be achieved, this society is established.¹

Commenting on the progress made toward the fulfillment of these goals, Bell said:

An unbiased appraiser would have to say that the Society has failed to achieve its expressed goals. I presume that the Society has made a contribution, small though it be, toward numbers 1 and 2. On number 3, however, it has failed lamentably.²

When the Society was incorporated in 1920, it was not enthusiastically welcomed by the entire brotherhood. Those who disapproved adopted a wait-and-see attitude. By 1926 a large segment of the brotherhood was convinced that the leadership of the Society was falling into the hands of the liberals. "The boil came to a head and ruptured at the Memphis Convention in 1926. Instead of applying a healing poultice, those in command applied salt."³

¹Ibid., p. 2.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

From this point on a battle was waged. During the stormy years, 1926 to 1946, nine hundred and sixteen Disciple Churches closed their doors, according to the Yearbooks. Even though most of these were weak churches, "nine hundred and sixteen is a frightful price to pay for a missionary society whose purpose is to build churches."¹

President Bell had one personal experience that he recounted to the writer that seemed to have a great impression on his thinking regarding the Society. He was asked to serve on The Commission for Re-study of The Disciples of Christ that convened in Indianapolis, Indiana. Others serving on the committee with him were Raphael Miller, Winfred Garrison, Dean Walker, and P. H. Welshimer, to mention only a few. It seemed to Bell that the committee would never get down to denying or doing anything about the open membership problem. They either avoided it or pretended it was not important.

During one session C. C. Morrison presented a paper on a critical discussion of The Gospels. A question was raised about the authorship of The Gospels. Bell said the real question was not who wrote the Gospels, but, rather, did the writers tell the truth. Miller replied, "I believe they did when they wrote it, but since that time certain 'inconsequential irrelevancies' crept in."

After a period of clarification Bell asked, "Do you think the story of the resurrection is an 'inconsequential irrelevancy'?"

After a period of silence, Dr. Morrison replied, "Yes, I do."²

¹Ibid.

²Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

This experience stayed with Bell and doubtless helped to confirm in his own mind the charges that the liberals had taken over the leadership of The Society.

In a letter written to Dr. Robert Burns, President of The 1946 International Convention, Bell commented on the speech Burns gave at the Convention in which he bemoaned the loss of members through the lack of evangelistic zeal. He wrote:

The thirty years' war that has raged between the defenders of the Society and its critics almost extinguished the fires of evangelism.... To one group the chief of sinners was the person who supported the U.S.M.S. To the other group the chief of sinners was the person who refused to support it. The test of fellowship was no longer a matter of faith in Christ and obedience to His commands, but support or non-support of the U.C.M.S. Instead of holding up Christ to a dying world, both groups held up the U.C.M.S. to a confused brotherhood.¹

Commenting further on the sad evangelistic witness of the brotherhood, Bell suggested three causes: "The persistent pressure to centralize authority," "opposition to the United Christian Missionary Society," and "failure to preach the Gospel with conviction and enthusiasm."

¹R. M. Bell, "The President's Challenge To The International Convention," Blue and White (Kimberlin Heights: November-December, 1964), p. 3.

CHAPTER V

EVALUATION

Robert Monroe Bell is one of those rare men who could have been successful in almost any field of endeavor he desired. His unusual ability as an economist, teacher, writer, preacher, and administrator have been alluded to. Another illustration will further amplify the conviction of the writer that Dr. Bell has the rare gift of "strong natural powers of the mind."

The Chamber of Commerce at Asheville, North Carolina, invited Dr. Bell to speak to them while he was on the faculty at the University of Tennessee. His assigned speech was "Industrialization in Agricultural Areas." The manuscript, incidentally, was forgotten when he left home; and in spite of Special Delivery mail attempts, he had to deliver the speech from memory. The speech was so well received that a few months later he was invited to give it before the Chamber of Commerce in Columbia, Mississippi; as a result, a movement toward the construction of a hosiery mill was begun. Later, when Hugh White became the Governor of Mississippi, he used the principles of Dr. Bell's speech in his promotion of industrialization of Mississippi.¹ Whatever Dr. Bell has attempted to do, it has always been of such exceptional quality that others have used and built upon it.

Moreover, even though Dr. Bell has been unusually endowed, he has remained humble, giving the credit to God. If a single virtue could be

¹Bell, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

pin-pointed as being foremost, it would be honesty. During the stormy years when he first became president, this sterling quality was never compromised. Those who made vitriolic and unfounded attacks upon him found him truthful in return. Those who, through their castigating remarks invited stern reprisals, found only a sincere attempt to restore.

Through the years he had stood firm in this virtue taught to him by his Grandmother Mims. Pressures, constantly mounting, have been applied to President Bell to align Johnson Bible College with one or the other segments of our Brotherhood life. Many may disagree with his position, but none can question his integrity or honesty.

The writer asked Robert E. Black, a professor at Johnson Bible College, to write some of his impressions of Dr. Bell formulated through his years of association with him. Following is his letter written in response to that request:

Dear Claire:

Re: Dr. Robert M. Bell - -

I have known Dr. Bell since 1941. His first year as College President was my Senior year in College. I came back to teach in the fall of 1949 and have worked closely with him since that time. President Bell is a business man and very efficient in all of his duties. He is always concerned first of all with the Lord's business. I am in his office often. He always exchanges greetings and inquires about the progress of my work, though his work is usually piled very high. He is a man of deep faith. I see this aspect of his life best in the chapel services in which he leads and in his administrative work with the faculty. I place extremely high value on his abilities as a preacher and writer. I know no man among us who understands more clearly the Biblical doctrines of the Church, Faith, Immersion, Fellowship, Worship and related themes. I also know no man who can write more forcefully and am sure that this is one of his most significant abilities. He has a real love for children. I have seen boys and girls often in his office or home or on the campus and have seen him take time to speak kindly to them. He is deeply appreciative of even small favors which he may receive. He has

no patience with a liar and no sympathy for one who will not work. He is respected as the President of Johnson Bible College by those who work with him here. He is also respected by the men in the Men's Fellowship of the Area Christian Churches. When he speaks, they listen; but he never takes unfair advantage of this position. He is indeed a man among men. To put my thoughts in one sentence, I would say, I have deep respect and admiration for Dr. Bell as a Christian leader.

Sincerely yours,

(s) Robert E. Black¹

Another professor having the longest association with Dr. Bell of any of the faculty, is Floyd Clark, Dean of Johnson Bible College. During an interview with Professor Clark, he related to the writer several memorable experiences. Professor Clark has never ceased to be amazed at Dr. Bell's patience and forbearance in tolerating criticism. It was always difficult to convince him of bad qualities in people. If the faculty members ever agreed to discharge a student, it was usually done over the protest of Dr. Bell.²

Earlier we mentioned his deep belief in honesty. Again, Professor Clark confirmed this by pointing out how Dr. Bell expected others to live by the same policy. There was only one kind of person that sincerely upset him and that was a liar. A student who lied about his work report was subject to dismissal quicker than any other offender.³

With tender pathos, Professor Clark recounted his deepest admiration for the masterful way Dr. Bell controlled his emotions. During their entire association he could recall only three times when he lost control of his emotions.

¹Letter from Robert E. Black, Professor, Johnson Bible College, Kimberlin Heights, Tennessee, February 23, 1964.

²Interview with Floyd E. Clark, Professor, Johnson Bible College, February 7, 1964.

³Clark, Interview, (February 7, 1964).

On one occasion in the old chapel, the students were all participating in the conversational prayers of the evening. In simple but touching words, a student prayed for President Bell. With tears in his eyes, Dr. Bell exclaimed, "That's the first time anyone has prayed for me here in seven years."¹

Another time, a surprise party was held by the students to honor Mrs. Bell and her contribution to the life of the school. At the conclusion the leader of the program called on Dr. Bell to pronounce the benediction. Choked with emotion, he turned to Professor Clark and whispered in muffled tones, "Will you dismiss them for me? I can't pray."²

The third occasion referred to by Professor Clark was a special appreciation program for Dr. and Mrs. Bell sponsored by the trustees of the College. At this event the new married couples' dormitory was named Bell Hall. Then a citation was read and the new girl's dormitory was named Myrtle Hall in honor of Mrs. Bell. Sensing the genuine sincerity of the audience, Dr. Bell wept in joy and gratitude.³

In search of qualified opinions regarding Dr. Bell's business ability, the writer contacted two officials in two different banks in Knoxville. Both officials had been former students of Dr. Bell at the University of Tennessee.

Mr. J. W. Friar, Vice-President, Park National Bank, spoke fondly of his experience as a student under Dr. Bell. He reminisced briefly about the accident that killed Dr. Bell's son Bobby. The boy who owned the car was going to be prosecuted, but Dr. Bell refused to press charges.

¹Clark, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

²Clark, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

³Clark, Interview (February 3-7, 1964).

He commented on Dr. Bell's ability to foresee the future growth of Knoxville and invest wisely in real estate for the College. Although Dr. Bell refused to take any credit, Mr. Friar was convinced that Johnson Bible College would be out of existence if he had not assumed the leadership of the school.

Praising Dr. Bell's humility, Mr. Friar said, "He is big enough to be little enough to be big."¹

Mr. E. C. Newton, President, East Tennessee National Bank, said, "Dr. Bell proved his business leadership by taking leadership of a school that was run-down and in depressed conditions. His supervision led to the greatest possible success story. His mortgage loan investments indicated his superior knowledge in real estate."²

The highest plaudits men can give was climaxed by Milligan College, Johnson City, Tennessee. In honor of the splendid work performed by Dr. Bell as president of Johnson Bible College and his contribution to the Restoration Movement, he was awarded the LL.D. degree.

In evaluating Dr. Bell's life and contribution, it would seem natural to say a further word about his leadership at the college. Enough evidence has been recorded to justify the claims we have made to Dr. Bell's phenomenal financial success in behalf of the school. But more important, he has been faithful in maintaining the historical position of the school. Both his predecessors, President Johnson and President Brown, held this as one of their chief aims. All three men complied to this succinct statement concerning the college:

¹Interview with J. W. Friar, Park National Bank, February 6, 1964.

²Interview with E. C. Newton, East Tennessee National Bank, February 6, 1964.

The institution is undenominational and unsectarian in the New Testament sense. We are content to call ourselves Christians, claim allegiance to the New Testament Church, and recognize authority only from the Christ and His inspired revealers. The college has never been aligned with secular organizations of any kind, but has steadily looked to the infallible Word of God as its guide in matters of faith and doctrine.¹

His commitment to this principle of remaining non-sectarian is the reason he has refused to lead Johnson Bible College into either camp of the Brotherhood. Even though this position invites the label "Middle-of-the Road," Dr. Bell has been faithful to the trust placed in him by the school and, also, to his own personal convictions.

This desire to preserve the historic continuity is also manifested in maintaining the image of a Bible College. There are many who contend that the academic pressures in the future will force Johnson to pursue a Liberal Arts status. It is reasoned that it is unfair to students to spend four years in college work and then receive an unstandardized degree. If this could be accomplished in conjunction with the University of Tennessee, it might prove useful. However, it is questionable how sound such a move would be if the price for Liberal Arts accreditation would be the loss of a spiritual "preacher-training atmosphere." Certainly this question cannot be resolved without first making a judgment on the philosophy of approach best suited for the training of ministers. Thus far Johnson Bible College has proved itself worthy in its approach. The Liberal Arts approach has certainly received the consensus of the educational leaders in the religious world. But in the opinion of the writer, which is admittedly prejudiced,

¹Robert E. Black, The Story of Johnson Bible College (Kimberlin Heights: Tennessee Valley Printing Co., 1951), p. 43.

Johnson should continue to pursue the "pre-professional" approach. There are several reasons for this opinion.

First of all, Johnson Bible College is not equipped financially nor in facilities to become a Liberal Arts College. The tremendous financial burden necessitating endowment funds that Liberal Arts courses demand is astronomical. Also, Johnson does not have the facilities to expand into a large school. They purposely have stressed quality of students rather than quantity. It was never the intention of the founder to make Johnson Bible College competitive with Liberal Arts Colleges in either curriculum or size. In addition to this, the argument that our seminaries will be forced by pressure from their own Accrediting Associations to refuse students from Johnson Bible College is not quite accurate. It is true that a limitation has been placed on the number of students from non-accredited schools, but the small number of students seeking seminary degrees from bible colleges is limited. The future does not show any sign of increasing the number of students, especially if the present movement toward unity by the Disciples is accomplished. Johnson Bible College is the only bible college left that makes any attempt to serve the whole Brotherhood. Most of them are offspring of the Independent group. There are already growing signs of the Independent segment providing their own seminaries. Therefore, the number of bible college graduates seeking entrance into Disciple Seminaries will be reduced.

Another reason for Johnson to continue the course led by Dr. Bell is founded upon the belief that the Brotherhood needs the witness of its point of view. It will help keep in perspective who we are as we chart the hazardous course of where we are going and who we want to become.

The future of Johnson Bible College depends on many things. It is certain that the years of leadership under Dr. Bell are numbered. It is doubtful that the next president will follow in the same historical role carved out by the former presidents. I say this at the risk of being inconsistent. In recent editorials Dr. Bell has moved closer to the Independent group in reaction to Disciple policy. If, in his words, they continue to structure the church like a denomination in order to unite with a denomination, this breach will widen. If the Disciples consummate the present proposal in unity, then the division will be finalized. In the opinion of the writer, Dr. Bell has been articulate concerning this situation in hopes of providing leadership through The Blue and White to those churches who feel the present summons to unity is an uncertain call.

In any event, the writer feels there are many men of Independent persuasion who could be enlisted to lead Johnson Bible College, but few who could honestly pursue the non-sectarian course of Dr. Bell. And yet, we should be cautioned even here by the words of President Alva Ross Brown:

To suggest that an institution, dedicated and consecrated to God's work, built upon His everlasting promises, cannot continue is to disparage the spreading of the Gospel on earth. It is to question the very heart of the teaching of Jesus. It is to discourage the aspirations of men to build for time and eternity. It is to belittle the influence and zeal of the faithful hearts who remain with the work. It is to declare that God's work is destroyed because of the home-going of His loved ones.¹

In conclusion, it is my earnest desire to couch Dr. Bell's contribution in the proper spiritual perspective. He was successful in the accumulation of material gains for Johnson Bible College, but this was because of

¹Delno Wayne Brown, "Biography of Alva Ross Brown" (Unpublished B.D. Dissertation, Department of Church History, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1945), p. 46.

a previous spiritual commitment of his life. He was no less a man of prayer or faith because of his material accomplishments. On the contrary, he constantly gave credit to the goodness of God for all the achievements at Johnson Bible College.

Let me speak as forcefully and sincerely as I know how! R. M. Bell is the ablest Christian I have had the privilege of knowing. It was a deep appreciation for his life that prompted this study in the beginning. The research conducted has only deepened it. If history has made prayer the descriptive heritage of Ashley S. Johnson, then "Seek ye first the Kingdom" will be the legacy of R. M. Bell.

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