

# Church of God, The Eternal

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May 2003

Dear Brethren:

Greetings to all the faithful, from Mindanao, Philippines!!!

When we take a long look at the lives of God's most zealous servants, men like Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul, what is it that is so different about them? When we read in Hebrews 11:36–38 of those courageous and faithful men and women who have gone on before us, having endured the "trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, . . . destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy)," do we indeed grasp the very fact that these people were real? This record is so starkly true that it ought to shake and stir us to our very foundation and awaken every sleeping Christian!

What caused Moses, for instance, who timidly said to God, "But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice:" and, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent . . . but I am slow of speech" (Exodus 4:1, 10), to go from a timorous keeper of Jethro's flocks to the powerful leader of God's people, Israel, of whom it was said, "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses" (Deuteronomy 34:10)?

What was it that turned Simon Peter from a shrinking coward who forsook his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, in his greatest hour of need—who had the audacity to deny with cursing and swearing that he even knew Him—into the supercharged apostle of Acts 2, 3, and 4? And what happened to Saul of Tarsus that so transformed this strict, legalistic Jew—who caused God's own people to be scourged and imprisoned and even put to death—into an unstoppable zealot for Christ?

What did these men have that was so special, so different, and so unique? What was actually responsible for these remarkable changes? It was the very thing that, to a great extent, is often missing in our own lives. The great difference between Moses or Peter or

Paul and each of us today is that the vision of their calling was clearer to them, the purpose of their lives was more certain, their experience with God was more real!

Remember that Moses saw the burning bush! And he heard the voice of the Eternal! And he stood in the very presence of the Almighty! And when he descended from Sinai, "All the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone:" (Exodus 34:35). Now that is reality.

Peter walked and talked with Jesus Christ, ate meals with Him, heard His voice as He taught them, saying, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9); saw the tears in His eyes as He wept over Jerusalem or cried at Lazarus' tomb, watched in utter incredulity as He healed the sick, cast out demons, calmed the storm, or walked on water! Jesus Christ was as real to Peter as our own mother or father would be to us! Moreover, he saw Him crucified, buried, and resurrected. He gazed in amazement as the risen Christ walked through solid walls and closed doors, appeared and disappeared at will, and finally ascended bodily into heaven! Indeed, Peter's experience with Jesus Christ was about as real as it ever gets!

And Saul, when he was struck blind on the Damascus road, *heard* the voice of Christ Himself say, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4). He not only heard Christ, he saw Him as well. He plainly stated, "am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Corinthians 9:1). This kind of powerful reality changed forever the lives of these early servants of God. They remembered their encounters, they clung to the absolute certainty of their experiences, and subsequently they were willing to give their lives for what they had *seen* with their own eyes!

In the cases of Peter and Paul, they both preached the gospel of the Kingdom, constantly fired by these significant events. They sought to convey both the messages of Christ and their own personal experiences with Him as well. In fact, their firsthand contact provided much of the impetus to their ministries. And they were enormously successful at first. But as the first century wore on and the next generation arose, we find a definite waning of faith and power of the church.

We see both John and Peter, in their epistles, compelled to issue warnings to the brethren. But it was Jude, an apostle and brother of Christ, who gave the most solemn admonition of all. Seeing clearly the declining condition of the early church, he pleaded, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should *earnestly contend* for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) [emphasis mine].

The New Testament church, scattered, brutally persecuted, and with apostasy rampant, grew weaker and further removed from that original source of fire and zeal. We know that Christ had to severely admonish the church at Ephesus to return to their "first love," but the sternest warning was reserved for the Laodiceans to whom he said, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot . . . Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed . . . and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see . . . be zealous therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:15–19).

And nearly two thousand years later, is it truly any wonder that we now, more than ever before must, "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered"? It is absolutely imperative that we strive (contend), after having been chosen and given the privilege to understand His revelation of salvation through His servants. Those faithful servants are very grateful to God for our sake. "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

That is the important first step. Then the flame must be turned up. And that is a responsibility which God has given to each one of us.

That kind of powerful manifestation of God's reality is precisely what we all need to help stir us into action! We are all small and weak—naturally subject to carnal pulls, temptations, fears, superficiality, lack of faith, spiritual blindness, lethargy and sleep. The trials and sufferings, the enticement and distractions of this life, are so often almost hypnotic. Much of the time we are either consumed with struggling, surveying, coping, or foolishly following our own pursuits and desires, that we live in a virtual trance with only momentary lapses into reality—the reality of God, the reality of His purpose in our lives, the reality of our personal relationship with Him!

If we are to fully serve and please Almighty God, it is absolutely mandatory that we reach out and take hold of Him and tenaciously refuse to let go—that we seek from Him a powerful vision of His reality, a lifting of the veil as it were, that the fire of the Eternal might pour out and light our lives!

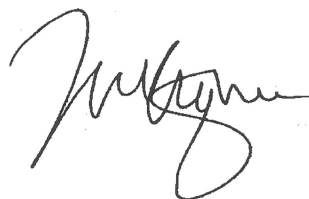
It is quite true that many of God's greatest servants had dramatic, tangible experiences that transformed their lives. But remember that Jesus told Thomas, who refused to believe until he had held the evidence in his hands, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, [in the flesh] and yet have believed" (John

20:29). We are indeed among those who "have not seen" Jesus Christ in the flesh, that rare privilege having been reserved for only a few. We should never be ones to seek after visible signs. But we must always be among those who have seen Jesus Christ with spiritual eyes.

As human beings we all long within our hearts to be able to see God. Who has not, in his own way, cried with Isaiah, "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at your presence" (Isaiah 64:1)? But never forget that Jesus Christ lives within each of His people today. And He is fully able to reveal Himself in and through our human lives. If we will determine now to commit ourselves without reservation into His hands; if we will ask, seek and knock in sincerity and humility, God will not deny us this vision we all so desperately need. Job said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eyes seeth you" (Job 42:5). And truly we have heard of God. But we must now be willing to put on that eyesalve that we might in our own minds come to really see Him. We all know that we should be zealous for the work of Christ. We surely must believe that the purpose of God upon this earth is meaningful enough to stir and move us. But if our vision is not clear, if our objective remains hazy, if our experience with God is simply not real to us, we will always tend to be lukewarm. We must fully realize that the importance of the goal overshadows all of the obstacles and is worth more than every other alternative! It is incumbent upon us to honestly and seriously assess what is paramount in our lives, and then—unafraid and unashamed—take it to God, confident that He will act. If we try our best to do our part to obey the will of God, God will never fail to do His part in doing the things that we cannot do.

Zealous service to Almighty God should cause every other form of human endeavor to shrink into insignificance. Let us then resolve to strive fervently in prayer, to seek diligently that clear, sharp vision of our calling, to knock ceaselessly before the throne of grace and mercy—that we might always be among those that call upon the name of the Eternal, who stir themselves up to take hold of our God!

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mario Y. Roque', with a stylized, flowing script.

Mario Y. Roque