

CHAPTER X

THE FAILURE OF LIBERALISM

The previous chapter makes reference to the St. Louis Globe Democrat, and an article which became the focal point of a lawsuit. That article was written in 1885, and alleged, among other things:

"Now, at the end of five years, and at a time when one should be able to determine pretty accurately the value of such an experiment, the great religious daily sends a missionary into Barton County to ascertain how grows a town under a liberal influence and the best of natural advantages. The missionary remains in Liberal for a day and a half; mixes thoroughly with the people, and, after a due consideration of everything heard and observed, is compelled to say that the experiment is a failure; that the town, instead of keeping pace with other towns of the same age, has fallen far behind them, and instead of being the happy, prosperous, community it promised to be, is shriveled, contracted, torn into by dissensions, and is in a condition where only prompt actions in behalf of its friends toward a complete reorganization will save it from disintegrations . . . nearly one third of the inhabitants of Liberal have moved off of Walser's land and established a town of their own, called Denison . . ."

The St. Louis Post Dispatch of May 2, 1885 concurred:

"Nine tenths of those now in town would leave if they could sell their property. More property has been lost by locating in the town than has been made in it. Public schools and infidel meetings have been held in rented buildings, except what were held in the Universal Mental Liberty Hall, the stupendous title of a building about the size of a smoke house, which it clearly resembles. The 'lively paper' is a four column sheet, printed one page at a time on a ram shackling old job press that looks old enough to be contemporaneous with the discovery of printing. The type had been condemned for the foundry when Walser purchased it years ago. The paper is about as legible as if it had been printed on a curry-comb. The matter is

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cheap, low flung abuse of Christianity. The paper is a fair specimen of the public spirit, liberality, intellectual and educational condition of the place. The town is as badly collapsed as the printing office. Property cannot be sold for near its cost. There are many vacant lots from which buildings have been moved, fifteen having been moved at one time . . . "

Clark Braden added:

"The bonds of the town and its warrants are offered at fifteen cents on the dollar and without purchasers. The marshal, in November 1886, sued the town for the eighty-five cents he lost on each dollar of its warrants issued to pay him. The coal mines, of which so much was said in the paper of Liberal, have not averaged a car of coal a day during the time they worked. The miners were idle three fourths of the time, and Walser is preparing to close them. The paper has suspended and the office material is for sale. The public school has no building to meet in, the partly finished school house is locked up, and loaded with debt, business men are moving their goods, people are leaving, and those that are left, look like mourners awaiting a funeral, of criminals awaiting the penalty. So stands Liberal, December 1886 . . . "

There can be little doubt that things were not going well for Walser. In addition to his business and financial problems, his twenty-seven year marriage to his wife, Harriet, ended in divorce on October 20, 1884. Though Mr. Walser was the plaintiff, the court required that he pay Harriet seven thousand two hundred and fifty dollars. Apparently, he did not have the total amount in cash. He therefore agreed to pay twelve hundred and fifty dollars cash, the rest in various notes at 10% interest. He was also required to pay for the care and support of his daughter, Lena.

Someone has said that we do not see the light until we feel the heat. Walser was feeling plenty of heat, and the light was beginning to shine through. This famous Freethinker, was in the process of becoming a believer.

Symbolic of this change, was the sale of the Freethinkers, U.M.L. Hall, to a church. As we have mentioned before, the last meeting of the "Freethinkers" in this hall, was the Sunday evening before the Presidential election of 1888. This was the meeting where Walser was silenced by a ten minute limitation. The building was sold to the Methodist Church on September 16, 1889 for four hundred and eighty-eight dollars. Then, other

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churches came. In due time there was a Christian Church, Baptist Church, Church of Christ, Church of God Holiness, etc. Soon, Liberal was just like every other small town in S.W. Missouri.

The Globe Democrat predicted that the town would disintegrate unless there was a complete reorganization. The town did not disintegrate, and this was apparently due to considerable reorganization.

From our present vantage point in history we have seen other failures of liberalism. Take, for example, the recent collapse of the U.S.S.R. They didn't believe in God either. They even put into practice some of the same erroneous theories that Walser tried. The cynic said it best: "One thing we learn from history, is that people do not learn from history."

Again, it is comforting to remember that Walser changed. When he realized that his liberal theories were not working, he had the courage to abandon them. Biblically speaking, there is something good and wholesome about the confession of sin. **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9.)**

The citizens of Liberal should therefore not feel badly that the original inhabitants of their town were sinners. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. No one can be saved without the grace of God!

John Newton wrote the beautiful hymn, "Amazing Grace." Newton was a much more famous sinner than Walser. He was born in 1725, the son of a sea captain. His mother died when he was only six. After two years of formal education, he joined his father's ship at the age of eleven. The early years of his life were spent in immorality, debauchery, and failure. He even sold his fellow human beings into slavery and spent time in jail.

Newton was converted to Christ during a violent storm, and at the age of thirty-nine, became a minister of the Gospel. He spent the rest of his life in Christian service. The grace of God truly is amazing! This is why he wrote his famous song:

"Amazing grace how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I'm found,

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was blind, but now I see."

Newton died in 1807, the year before Walser's mother was born. These words are written on his tombstone in Olney, England:

"John Newton, Clerk; once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy."

The life of George H. Walser, is another reminder of God's amazing grace.

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