

The Prophet's Column

This is a paid advertisement by J. M. Little

A born-again believer does not have a critical spirit. But a deceived heart always looks for something in the message to criticize. That's because the deceived heart cannot rejoice in Christ.

You can't rejoice in someone you don't know. And let me say with emphasis that you cannot be brought under Holy Spirit Conviction and then go about criticizing God's message or His servant. The outstanding mark of a deceived heart is that you do not understand Holy Spirit Conviction (John 16:7-11).

A preacher and his wife were here years ago at my house. And in conversation, I said to them: "you are leaving out Holy Spirit Conviction." They replied: "no, we are not leaving our Holy Spirit Conviction." Yet in every sentence from them they were

denying Holy Spirit Conviction, but they didn't know it. Their hearts are still deceived until this day. A deceived heart, being a total stranger to Holy Spirit Conviction has to rebel against these simple messages setting forth the Way of Grace. And I realize these simple gospel messages are giving some here unshirred hell. And I praise the Lord. It's been over 23 years since God saved me. And I can give my testimony that every soul that has fought me and other of the Lord's people have gone down.

You cannot win fighting the Lord. Just recently the obituary column carried the names of two souls who went the way of all flesh. One was 67 years of age and the other 83. Years ago both fought me at Satan's bidding. And then just recently I was on the road traveling

out there somewhere and thought I recognized a certain person up ahead in the other lane to my right. I said 'that looks like M...,' then I pulled up beside her vehicle to get a good look to be sure. And when I looked over in her face, she turned her head to keep from looking in my face. I want to tell you, friends, if the unsaved can't stand to be in the presence of my Lord now, how in the world are they going to stand in the presence of the Lord at the Great White Throne Judgement? (Revelation 20). Sometimes here it seems that an individual is coming down the way of grace and then something is said in the message that crosses your will and you rebel. If I could just keep you straight, but I can't. The reason you rebel is because you are not in Christ.

Sin and atonement

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Racial division and job discrimination are issues rooted in the hearts of man. And only Jesus Christ can change the heart. Jesus has not promised to change everyone's heart.

As dictated by Jesus, each Christian shall be a witness unto Jesus, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and in the uttermost part of the earth. Oh, my brothers and sisters, who has bewitched you? God knows we need jobs, education, and places to stay. It is written: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of

all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:31-33).

Be reconciled now

Back to atonement. An individual can be reconciled to God right now, wherever he or she is. It can begin with a statement from the heart: "Lord have mercy on me a sinner" or "Lord, I am getting what I deserve, Lord remem-

ber me" or "Woe is me, I am undone" or "Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief," or any other expression of repentance from a sin-sick heart. "Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, Today, after so long a time; as it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7). Here's wishing all a happy new year.

THE REV. CHESTER DEBNAM lives in Raleigh.



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Black church coming back to life

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BARDSTOWN, Ky.— At a time when other parishes were closing or clustering, the Louisville Archdiocese decided last fall that the mainly black St. Monica Catholic Church would once again operate independently.

With the new lease on life, the church will mark its 40th anniversary this year. Its members will celebrate their parents' and grandparents' decision to break away from the mostly white St. Joseph parish in 1942 and to formally establish a parish for the Bardstown area's black Catholics in 1956.

The archdiocese won't decide for several months whether St. Monica's 165 families — about three-quarters of them black — will get their own priest or operate under lay leadership, archdiocese spokeswoman Cecelia Price said.

For about two years, St. Monica has been informally grouped with St. Joseph because of a shortage of priests and a 1993 fire that damaged the St. Monica parish hall.

Even though St. Monica is now on the rebound, it still hasn't recovered some of the programs it lost in recent years.

"Right now we don't know

what's going to happen, but we are very fortunate we are going to stay open," said Marlee Crowe, who runs St. Monica's private credit union, which has made small loans to members since 1964. "And we are very grateful."

The demands of the growing St. Joseph parish and the "unique mission" of St. Monica led to the undoing of the informal cluster, said the Rev. Bill Medley, current pastor of the two parishes and a member of the committee that developed the reorganization plan for the whole archdiocese.

St. Joseph is the third-largest parish in the archdiocese, with more than 1,500 families, according to the Catholic Directory. St. Monica is one of only two rural black Catholic churches within it — the other being Holy Rosary in Springfield.

A few years ago, five priests tended to the parishioners at St. Joseph and St. Monica. Now, Medley has only the Rev. Mark Spalding assisting him.

Still, that's only part of the story. About eight years ago, St. Monica's congregation plunged into turmoil, and attendance at Sunday Masses plunged from more than 200 to 40 or less.

Some St. Monica members began commuting to

Louisville for Mass; others attended services at the local black Methodist and Baptist churches.

Among other things, the congregation was at odds over who really made the decisions in the church, the priest or the parish council, and whether to introduce a more Afro-centric style of worship or stay with traditional Catholic Mass.

A rapid turnover of priests didn't help matters. Some thought the final blow was the 1993 fire that burned the parish hall and damaged the sanctuary with smoke.

While the archdiocese weighed whether to rebuild or close the church, St. Joseph added a Mass that was designated as St. Monica's. But few from St. Monica came.

Some members said St. Joseph's size made them feel lost, but many more cited lingering memories of a painful history. Some St. Monica members said their ancestors were slaves owned in the 1800s by white St. Joseph families. Others recalled St. Joseph's making its black parishioners sit in the back, said Francis Lydian, a Bardstown City Council member and a Eucharistic minister at St. Monica.

Before making a final decision after the fire, the archdi-

ocese surveyed St. Monica parishioners, telling them "that the archdiocese would rebuild if the church could stand on its own. The archdiocese had to have a reason to dish out the money, or the people could now be members of St. Joe's," said Traci Porter-Johnson, a St. Monica member.

"I think people really thought, 'Boy, if we don't get it together, we're not going to have St. Monica's anymore.' So I think the fire was a blessing in disguise."

The church was rebuilt, and two years later the single 9 a.m. Sunday Mass, with its mix of traditional Catholic

and Afrocentric-style music, is filling the pews. St. Monica is supporting itself financially. And the number of children

taking religion classes has doubled, to 54, said Ada Logan, the parish's director of religious education.

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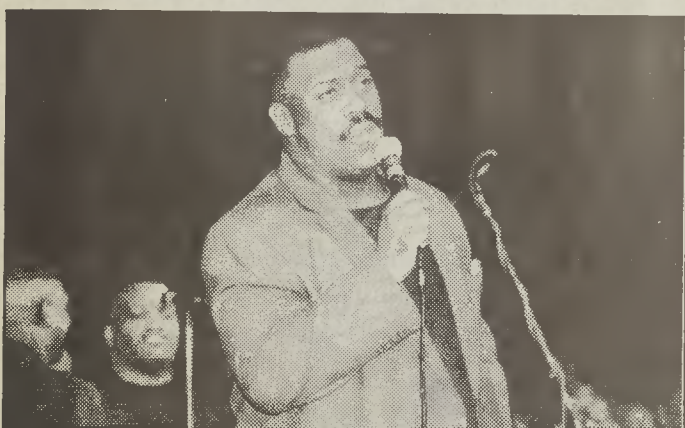
The Charlotte Post

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Martin Luther King, Jr.

John P. Kee's year is off to a rousing start.



The Charlotte-based gospel artist has been nominated for a Grammy for "Show Up," his album project with The New Life Community Choir. Kee, who records for Verity Records, was nominated for Best Gospel Album By A Choir or Chorus. He wrote, produced and composed all songs on the album.

"Show Up" has been a fixture on Billboard magazine's Top 10 gospel albums for 11 months, and has shown up on the Contemporary Christian chart, a rarity for an African American gospel act. An ex-member of the r&b band Cameo and former drug dealer and abuser, Kee's success transcends gospel and secular music. Kee has also five Stellar Awards, one of the most prestigious honors in gospel music.

Verity will release a new album by Kee and The VIP Mass Choir titled "Stand" on Feb. 27. "Stand" is a live recording from Kee's annual Victory in Praise Music and Arts Seminar last summer.

Herbert L. White

PHOTOS/PAUL WILLIAMS

Sunday school

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ment toward a significant goal. Reflecting on his situation, the Lord's servant began to feel that he had labored in vain. His confidence in God,

however, carried him through. He stated, "Surely the justice due to me is with Jehovah" (verse 4)

Christians often must do kingdom work without perceptible positive results. But "we walk by faith, not by sight"

(Corinthians 5:7). Jesus taught that a significant portion of gospel seeds scattered never produce fruit (Matthew 13:1-23). Yet we must keep believing that our "labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).