



'Here comes the Judge'

There is a growing hostility to the Gospel, and the Gospel messenger

In February the president of a national Christian fund-raising organization was convicted, along with two assistants, of *conspiring* to steal money from a widow.

The jury, swayed by a smooth-talking lawyer, granted more than \$200,000 damages to the plaintiff, plus demanding repayment of the money she had lost.

The fund-raising organization was obviously wrong for taking money it could not repay. But even the plaintiff was surprised at the fierce way the judge and jury acted toward men who had made mistakes, but were not, by any stretch of the imagination, guilty of conspiracy.

We are living in a world which is becoming more and more hostile to the Gospel message—and the Gospel messenger. Even the smallest mistakes are being blown out of proportion by the enemies of the kingdom. Every means possible is being used to discredit those who preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This nation has always been sympathetic to the Gospel. However, many are predicting that by the end of the century America will no longer be a haven for Christians or Christianity.

In many areas of the nation committed Christians are already being counted as enemies of society—much as those early Christians in Rome and the middle east. Within a few years it will not only be acceptable to openly persecute Christians—it will be popular.

Cultural Christians will always be acceptable in this world. That is because they are like chameleons, able to adapt to the color of the foliage.

But the friendly environment of the past is rapidly changing. The wise Christian understands this—and watches his step. One false move will mean exposure to the lions.

As a result of such cases, ministers, churches, and even lay workers in churches are having to purchase malpractice insurance.

It's a sad commentary on the shape of the world.

Just as medical doctors have grown weary of dealing with accident victims who might in turn bite the hand which heals

them; so Christian leaders are being reminded that what looks like a wounded sheep may be a snapping wolf instead.

This is especially true with churches who deal with people who come off the street. Some people, it seems, are deliberately baiting ministers to force them to make a mistake, so they can sue.

The immunity which was once afforded Christians, the winking way the world used to handle "ministerial exaggerations," is no longer available. One mistake, and the world is ready to take the Christian to court.

And feed him to the lions if possible.

For example, Dr. Thomas Harris, author of the widely read book on transactional analysis, *I'm Okay — You're Okay*, is suing Bible teacher Larry Tomczak for \$19.5 million.

Tomczak, speaking at a Jesus rally in Chico, California, almost two years ago, repeated a wide-spread rumor that the aging California psychiatrist had committed suicide. His remarks were taped and later played over radio KFIA near Sacramento — where Harris lives.

Harris, who allegedly admits his bookings and royalties had dropped off, hired a Los Angeles public relations firm, called a press conference, posed for pictures for *People* magazine, and announced he was suing Larry for slander.

His new book, it seems, was almost ready for publication.

But what many thought was just a publicity gag to get his name before a national audience, has turned into a nightmare for Tomczak — and several others.

Although Harris' suicide has been rumored for years in secular circles, the suit seems directed expressly at Christians. Also named were Bible teachers Jimmy Moore and Bob Mumford, from whom Tomczak allegedly heard his version of the rumor. He is also suing the radio station, as well as the little tape ministry which duplicated the tapes.

What's to be learned? For one, despite what Shakespeare wrote, the world is not a stage — it is a battleground.

Christians must begin to brace themselves against the heaviest onslaught in history as this age draws to a close.

Second, our mistakes will rise up to haunt us. Thus Paul's strong word to walk "circumspectly," or without blame before the world, is especially apropos.

While "they" won't put us in jail (at least not yet) for preaching the Gospel, rest assured they will nail us to the tree for just one mistake.

Finally, if there ever was a time to pray for the gift of discernment of spirits, it is now. Too much of what seems harmless has been booby-trapped by Satan. The wise Christian must be careful what he picks up.

A lot of things are exploding these days.

Only in this case, the lion is setting traps.

In January *Time* magazine carried a major story on churches and pastors who are having to purchase malpractice insurance.

Take the case of DeWitt Hill, for instance. Hill pastors a small pentecostal church in Little Rock, Arkansas. As such he preaches a lifestyle which calls for abstinence from drinking and gambling.

A woman in his church was married to a man who, says Hill, liked to go "night-clubbing and go to the dog races."

When the man's wife divorced him, he said Hill was to blame for putting ideas in her head. He sued the minister for "alienation of affections through teaching of the Bible."

The jury decided in favor of the preacher, but the husband is appealing. So far it has cost the pastor of the little pentecostal church \$2,500 out of his own pocket—and untold hours of anxiety.

Even more serious is the case against John MacArthur and his staff at Grace Community Church of the Valley in Los Angeles. MacArthur is pastor of the largest church in Los Angeles County (20,000 members). In 1979 a young man under his counsel committed suicide. The boy's parents blamed the minister and his staff. They charge the clergy "discouraged and prevented" their son from seeking professional psychological counseling.

MacArthur tried to get the suit dismissed, but the court rejected his argument. Now the case will be tried as a precedent-setting malpractice suit. ↵

