

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE MAY 1976

STATEMENT ON BIRTHDAYS

The following statement of the Worldwide Church of God
supersedes all material heretofore published on this subject.

MINISTRE DE LA SANTÉ
MINISTERIO DE SALUD

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The Worldwide Church of God has no specific declaration of "doctrine" concerning the common 20th century custom of the celebration or the observance of birthdays.

It must be remembered that the Worldwide Church of God has never taken any official stand against the celebration or the observance of various and sundry "days" during the course of each calendar year, whether they be national, or personal. The majority of its members celebrate Thanksgiving Day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Memorial Day, Columbus Day, Washington's Birthday and the like. Other personal "days" have long been observed by Worldwide Church of God members, such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, and wedding anniversaries. These are commonly "noted" or "observed" either through the exchanging of gifts (as in Mother's and Father's Days), the celebration over a family meal (as in Thanksgiving), or merely abstaining from work or going on an outing (such as Labor Day, the Fourth of July, etc.).

Therefore, to "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel" in attempting to legislate strict avoidance of any "celebration" in connection with the noting of the annual anniversary of one's birth would be ridiculous.

The Bible itself keeps careful track of the ages of the patriarchs and of the kings of Israel and Judah (especially at the beginning of their reigns). Levites worked in the service of the tabernacle of the congregation from thirty to fifty years old (Num. 4:23)

Our society requires that we are continually listing the date of our birth in identification documents, official statements, passports, social security registration, drivers' licenses, and everything from job applications to census taking.

In the past, based almost entirely upon the two examples of pagan rulers who were celebrating their birthdays, and the martyrdom of an individual in each instance (Pharaoh's baker and John the Baptist), unnecessarily heavy weight was placed upon an argument from omission, meaning that since the only celebration of birthdays per se, spoken of in the Bible, revolved around "pagan" kings, (and which kings weren't pagan save a precious few over Judah or Israel--including the majority of the lineage of Israel's and Judah's own kings?) and also that since Jesus Christ's date of birth was carefully concealed, that birthdays ought not to be observed. Thus,

Genesis 40, Matthew 16, and a further example found in Job 1:5 formed the basis of rather widespread condemnation of the practice of the celebration of birthdays in the past, including the giving of parties, presence of a birthday cake, and the giving of gifts.

However, it must be remembered that an evil event occurring in connection with the celebration of an alleged "pagan" king on his birthday no more constitutes biblical proof that Christians should reject the celebration of such an event than would the argument that since Jesus Himself was martyred on the Passover, and that the Passover was later abused by New Testament Christians (I Cor. 11), the Passover should be avoided.

Many years ago, it was assumed that the statement found in Ecclesiastes 7:1 "The day of death is better than the day of one's birth" constituted biblical proof for the prohibition of birthday celebrations. However, only two verses later the Bible also says that sorrow is better than laughter. A sound and balanced view of that scripture in the light of what Jesus said about "life more abundantly," Paul's admonition that Christians should be making "hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" and to "rejoice" in tribulation, plus the fact that the second attribute of the Holy Spirit is "JOY," would prove to anyone that the statement in Ecclesiastes 7:3 should be taken contextually to mean that though sorrow is, in the context of a "good name" called "better" than laughter, the Bible is not necessarily inferring that laughter is evil or should be avoided!

If we were to follow false logic we would infer from verse 1 that Christians are commanded to spend the entirety of their lives in moribund anticipation of the day of their death, rather than the casual, normal and natural practice of noting the passing of another year (no matter how painful that may be as the years wear on).

In our society, there is not a one of us who does not MANY TIMES in the course of each single year, know that he "is" a certain age! It is one of the first questions we ask of others when we come to be acquainted. It is common knowledge kept in our minds concerning each other, acquaintances, friends, and people in the public view. Almost continually, in newspaper stories concerning any individuals, their ages are given. The Bible also follows this practice, including listing the ages of noteworthy men and women, and even goes so far as to infer a certain amount of pride and accomplishment in connection with reaching a point in life when an individual was said to be "old and full of years!"

Almighty God dwells in the "ages unto the ages" and is "from ancient time," and inhabits eternity! The living of human life is marked by the constant milestones of the passage of birthdays. This is not an argument for the celebration of birthdays by various allegedly "pagan" accoutrements such as a cake with a certain number of candles or the exchanging of gifts, but neither, on the other hand, can the Worldwide Church of God blindly condemn the practice as it is commonly followed in society today of the noting of the passage of one's day of birth as being inherently pagan and therefore to be avoided.

Simply stated, the Church has no doctrine on the subject one way or the other.

The Bible says, "One man esteemeth one day above another: Another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth a day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it" (Rom. 14:5, 6).

To some families, the passage of the birthday of a child at age 6 is quite an important occasion with congratulatory hugs and kisses, and sending of a proud little boy to his first day in grade school. Perhaps, in other families, the event is comparatively unimportant, and there is no special note taken of the passage of any particular year. In all of our memories, it is safe to say that some birthday observances or celebrations, or particular plateaus of life at which certain achievement or accomplishment may have been on the horizon, especially entering into teenage, reaching the age of legal responsibility (formerly 21), and certain plateaus of wisdom and knowledge along the way since, have been important to us.

It is the opinion of the leadership of the Worldwide Church of God that the condemnation of birthday celebration would be ludicrous in the extreme, would be a serious departure from the commission and calling of the Church of God for this age, is not the responsibility of Christ's ministers on this earth, and would be nothing more than another step in the direction of the condemnation of everything from paisley print to the Gothic arch.

From that point on, we could enter into exhaustive studies about what constitutes "God's type of music," "God's form of art," "God's approved architecture," and whether there is something Satanic in the shape of bridgework, wedding rings, or french bread.

Almighty God dwells in the "ages into the ages" and is
"from ancient times," and inhabits eternally. The living of
human life is marked by the constant mission of the passage
of birthday. There is an arrangement for the celebration of
birthdays in various ways, "some" "some" "some" as
a case with a certain number of candles or the expansion of
light, but neither, on the other hand, can the Worldwide Church
of God directly condemn the practice as it is commonly followed
in society today of the noting of the passage of one's day of
birth as being inherently pagan and therefore to be avoided.

Simply stated, the law of God is to observe the birthday
as set in the Bible.

The Bible says, "One man esteemeth one day above another;
another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully
persuaded in his own mind, he that regardeth a day, regardeth
it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the
Lord he hath not regard" (Rom. 14:5, 6).

In some families, the passage of the birthday of a child
at age 5 is quite an important occasion with congratulatory
pups and kisses, and sending of a good little boy to his first
day in grade school. Parents, in other families, do not take
unusually important, and there is no special note taken
of the passage of any particular year. In all of our families,
it is safe to say that some birthday observances or celebra-
tions or particular phases of life at which certain achieve-
ment or accomplishment may have been on the horizon, especially
entering into teenage, reaching the age of legal responsibility,
etc. (generally 21), and certain phases of wisdom and knowledge
along the way since, have been important to us.

Generally speaking, the observance of the Worldwide
Church of God that the observance of birthday celebration
and birthday observance would be a serious dan-
ger to the communion and calling of the Church of God for
this age, is not the responsibility of Christ's mission to
the world, and would be nothing more than another step in
the direction of the condemnation of everything from party
given to the Gothic style.

That that point on we could enter into extensive studies
about our constitution "God's type of man," "God's form of
life," "God's approved architecture," and various laws of
formation within in the shape of birthday, wedding rings,
or church bread.