Church Government

. and· Church Unity

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Church Governnlent

and Church Unity

*Is It Rebelling Against the*

*'''Government of God" to*

*Consider· Worshipping* . *with a*

*Different Group* . *of Sabbath*

*Keepers Whom You Sincerely*

*. Feel Believe and Teach More of*

*the Truth'of God's Word?*

by Roderick C .. Meredith

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SCENE ONE: At the Nuremburg War

Crimes Trials after the defeat of Nazi Germany. in

World War II:

• Nazi SS Officers are shown to have been guilty

of the torture and murder of tens . of thousands of

/ civilians.

• Their reply: "We were just following orders."

• Analysis: In certain militaristic, dictatorial

organizations, people are *expected* to "blindly"

follow orders and do and believe *whatever* they are

told. *Right* or *wrong,* they are just to follow the

current "government." But in God's word we are

told: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by

every word of God" (Luke 4:4). "Prove All things,

and hold fast that which is good" (I Thessalonians

5:21) .. And the apostle Paul instructed: "Follow

me *as* 1 follow Christ" (I Corinthians 11: 1; New

King James Version throughout unless otherwise

noted).

SCENE TWO: At God's Throne In

Heaven, millions of years ago:

• Lucifer, the Archangel, has been put in charge

of the "Government of God" on earth. But word

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comes in that he is *misusing* and *perverting* his post

in "government." Will those angels under him

blindly follow this brilliant Lucifer in his rebellion?

Or will they see through what is happening and

have the faith and courage to obey GOD in spite of

what this clever Lucifer says?

• Result: About one third of all the angels were

deceived by Lucifer and joined with him· in his

rebellion against GOD, their very Creator!

• Analysis: Those angels were just "following

govertmlent. ". But they should have known that one

must *not* follow "government," *any* government, if

it is contradictory to the ways and laws of GOD.

Since they should have known better but followed

. Lucifer anyway • God. has. them "reserved in

everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment

of the great day" (Jude 6).

**A Misunderstood Subject.**

One of the greatest and most serious misunderstandings

that has developed in the Church in recent years concerns

Church Government and Church Unity. It is not really a .

complicated subject, but somehow we have had our

collective minds "set" on a certain approach to this topic.

WHY?

Herbert W. Armstrong often said and wrote that among

men in general, many of our ideas are "carelessly assumed

and taken for granted." In this world, for instance, people

somehow just "know" that good people will go to heaven

when they die. They carelessly *assume* this because they are

told so, and because the Bible talks about the kingdom "of'

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heaven. So people just suppose it must mean the kingdom

is "in" he.aven and that Christians go there at death.

So it is with Church Government •

. In his. *Autobiography* (Vol. I,· pp. 557-558); Mr.

Armstrong wrote of his . experiences with the "Sardis "

Church in 1933: "In those days one Biblical subjectJ was

completely befogged on was the matter· of· church

organization and government. I *knew* the "Stanberry"

pattern of a General Conference was not scriptural. I *knew*

that voting by human preference was unscriptural. I saw

plainly that Christ *chose* His Apostles-that they and the

evangelists, in tUrn, chose and ordained elders in local

churches. Consequently in the church now meeting at Jeans

. schoolhouse, since I was the evangelist God used in raising

up this church, I chose and appointed Mr. Elmer E .. Fisher

as deacon, remaining as Pastor myself.

But just what truly was the Biblical form of organization

I did not at that time see clearly .. I was really confused on

th·e ques tI'o"n. ... .

Our Early Discussions .

Even after several years of guiding the college, Mr.

Armstrong still did not understand much about Church

Government, and said so openly a number of times.

Consequently, in the early mid-1950's, Herman L. Hoeh and

I each were inspired to write articles along this line. As

hundreds of our older brethren remember, I· wrote the

article, "Judging and Discipline in God's Church" and,later,

"Whose Opinion Counts?" and one· or two other similar

articles.

. Herman Hoeh. wrote articles dealing with the pyramid

structure of government-from Christ down through apostles,

evangelists, etc.-· revealed in the Bible. He also wrote other

articles along this line.

Mr .. Armstrong accepted these articles and immediately

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published them in the GOODNEWS. The three of us and

others discussed this topic and realized that, although there

is no one *exact* way of organizing a church revealed in the

New Testament, the *principles* of government from the top

down, of office by "appointment" based on the "fruits" of

a man or woman's life, and of *order* rather than confusion

were all revealed in the Bible. We realized that church

"politicking" and voting were *not* God's way and that

VOTING, as such, was NEVER employed in the Bible!

Mr. Armstrong always stressed that we should follow

him only *as* he followed Christ. He always urged us to

*study* our Bibles. He reminded us that we would be

"judged" by what·the Bible said, *not* by following him or

any other man. But. he hoped we would always follow him

*as long* as he truly followed Christ and did His Work.

To this we all agreed.

**Mr. Armstrong Respected the Other·**

**Seventh Day Churches of God**

Many. many times over the years and even into the last

few years of his life, Mr. Armstrong acknowledged that the

Churches of God, Seventh Day-headquartered in Stanberry.

Missouri and in Salem,West Virginia, WERE part of God's

Church-though perhaps of the "Sardis" era-as we came to

understand it. He just· felt that he had to LEAVE these

people because they refused to grow into the full truth God

was revealing.

But since we had no churches nearby, Mr. Armstrong

suggested more than once that some of the college students

working up in Oregon in the summer during the early 1950's

worship with the Sardis churches meeting at Jefferson,

Oregon, and elsewhere. College students Owen Smith,

Kenneth Herrmann and I did attend the Jefferson church

during the summer of 1950. We were cordially received,

and found sincere fellow Sabbath keepers there.

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In talking to some of the college graduates in those years

and later, I learned that-although the Sardis people did have

a lot of "politicking" and divisions among them,' they did

treat with respect and understanding anyone who' left

Stanberry to join the Salem, West Virginia group, etc.

People were virtually *never* disfellowshipped when they left

to join another group of fellow Sabbath keepers!

They perhaps "fussed" at them a little bit about leaving,

or were even temporarily.upset that they had "gone off to

follow Dugger." (Andrew. Dugger was the one. who left

Stanberry and founded the Salem, West Virginia, group.)

.BUT, my friends told me they merely regarded them as

"departed brothers," but *sdU* "brethren" and fellow Sabbath

keepers and fellow worshippers of the true God of Creation.

Virtually *no one* felt that those people were. "rebelling

against GOD" by shifting from one Sabbath;..keeping group

to another.'

Mr. Herbert Armstrong felt that way' also,though he

always, exhorted us that we should stay together "in order to

do a really BIG WORK"-which he felt they were unable to

do. Yethe always acknowledged that if this or any other

church were somehow taken over by leaders unwilling to

preach the truth, we should ALL leave!

, **Herbert Armstrong's Own EXAMPLE**

The fact of the matter is that Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong

themselves "'shifted" from one Sabbath-keeping church to

j another on two different occasions. First, they ,left the

Stanberry group to worship with the Salem, West Virginia,

Church. Later, they severed all ties with that group and the

"Radio Church of God" developed. into a full-fledged,

completely separate, church.

In Mr. Armstrong's *Autobiography* (pp. 556, 561), he

writes of his decision to leave the Stanberry organization:

At the biannual General Conference meeting of the

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Church at Stanberry, Missouri, which probably was held

in August, 1933, Elder Andrew N. Dugger had lost his

previous iron control of the church by one vote.

Thereupon Mr. Dugger promptly bolted the Conference

and organized a competing "Church of God" under what

he termed "the Bible form of organization. "

He managed to induce half or more of the ministers

in the church to join him in this new "Organization," on

the argument that they were now re-establishing the Bible

form of organization. . . . Thus we of the Church of God

meeting at the Jeans school-house, along with our brethren

of the Oregon Conference, decided to go along with it in

co-operation, but we of the new local church near Eugene

did not "join" in the sense of becoming an integral part of

it.

I then began to send in regular minister's reports.

We co-operated fully, as brethren in Christ. But I did not

accept salary or expense money from them. None in our

local church put himself under their authority. We kept

ourselves free to obey God as set forth in the Scriptures,

should any differences come up. And they did later come

up!

After the experience of being ordered to baptize

contrary to the Scriptures and the renouncing of the $3

weekly "salary", we were firm never again to be placed

in a position where we might have to obey men rather

than God.

Notice how Herbert W. Armstrong kept himself "free"

to obey God as set forth in the Scriptures! If you knew Mr.

Armstrong intimately as I knew him for the last 36 years of

his life, you would deeply understand that he would NEVER

agree to being under a so-called "Government of God"

which prevented him from preaching the full truth of the

Bible! If you doubt this, please read the section of his

*Autobiography* contained in pages 505-563. Then you will

never doubt again!

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**The MISUSE of Church Government**

As the Church developed, however, all of us leading

ministers began to emphasize the need for UNITY. We

realized that, unlike the Sardis "splits," we needed to stay

together to do the Work. And that was certainly vital *as*

*long as* a dedicated man of God (like Herbert W.

Armstrong) was guiding the Church and that the full truth

could be taught and preached.

But, however unwittingly, we began to compare Mr.

Armstrong with Moses-a special prophet with whom God

talked face to face and gave *direct commands* which often

became part of the Scriptures! We began to confuse the

"position" of Mr. Armstrong with Moses-through whom

God *spoke directly* and who was the supernaturally-appointed

leader of the ONE physical, carnal nation on earth God was

directly dealing with in this way, ancient Israel.

Many of our ministers began to use the example of

"Korah's rebellion" and similar examples to imply that-if

anyone ever left this Church even in hurt or confusion-they

were REBELLING against the "Goverrunent of God" just as

surely as Korah and his followers. Everything seemed to

become "the Goverrunent of God."

Older students or graduates leading baptizing tours would

admonish their assistants that they were violating "the

Goverrunent of God" if they turned up the car radio without

thinking to ask permission! Wives were violating the

"Goverrunent of God" if they did not have their husband's

suits pressed on time!

Unwittingly, we in the ministry seemed to forget that

Mr. Armstrong "rebelled" -if you take that approach-in

leaving the Stanberry Church, and again "rebelled" in not

submitting to the "Goverrunent of God" through A.N.

Dugger of the Salem, West Virginia, Church of God.

WHY did Mr. And Mrs. Armstrong leave these two

churches?

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From carefully reading his *Autobiography,* and from

hearing Mr. Armstrong describe it personally many times, it

became clear to me that he left these two churches:

1. To be able to teach the *full truth* of God's Word

without hindrance.

2. To be able to do a really BIG WORK of preaching

the gospel of the kingdom of God to the world; and

to preach powerfully the Ezekiel Warning Message

especially to the United States and British

Commonwealth peoples.

If Mr. Armstrong had allowed himself to remain trapped

in the small towns of central Oregon, and had preached only

what was "acceptable" to the governing boards of those

churches, most of us in the Church would probably have

remained BLINDED in the Protestant or Catholic churches

we grew up in!

**Very SELDOM a Central Government**

**In God's Church**

Mr. Armstrong *knew* and many of us who have studied

church history *know,* that in fact VERY SELDOM in its

2000 year history has God's Church *ever* had *one*

administration, with *one man* in charge. All who have

studied the history of God's scattered people-the Paulicians

in Armenia, the Bogomils of Bulgaria, the Petrobrusians of

Provencal, the Henricians, Abigenses and Waldenses of

southern France, Switzerland and northern Italy-all of us

know that these people usually had NO IDEA that there were

the Bogomils, for instance, over in Bulgaria who were *also*

keeping God's Sabbath, keeping the true Passover, sincerely

trying to live by every word of God and often calling

themselves the "Church of God."

There was NEVER one man in charge of all these

scattered groups, NEVER any central government-though

some of those groups were contemporaneous. Rather, these

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What About the Many Groups that

Split Off in the Past?

Are They Right in God's Sight?

While no man has authority to determine who

is right before God, the principles (I Corinthians

3:9-16, Matthew 7: 15-20) used by Herbert

Armstrong and other church leaders apply

equally to them. Did they leave to preach the

truth or for a selfish reason? History seems to

show Herbert Armstrong's departure from the

Church of God, Seventh Day was very sincere.

What fruit has been borne by the many other

Church of God splinter-groups?

Each must be judged individually. Some that

left were actually ahead of the main body in

understanding (not breaking up certain marriages,

Pentecost on Monday, etc.) Others claimed

special prophetic understanding. Some knew of

major, continuing sins of high Church officials.

What happened when the doctrinal difference

was resolved, the special prophecy failed, or the

"sinner" departed? Did these splinter groups

return? Or was their leader primarily interested

in "running his own show?"

How many new people *(not* formerly Sabbath

keepers) have these groups contacted, taught,

and baptized? Who have they warned about the

judgment to come upon the world? Each

member must humbly answer these questions

before God - his eternal destiny depends on the

answer (James 3:1).

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people did have "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"

(Ephesians 4:3). Though separated geographically and

certainly holding slightly different doctrinal positions on

minor points, they were nevertheless led by God's Spirit to

obey God's Laws and keep at least some of His Holy Days,

and to look forward to the coming of the King of kings.

Most of our older brethren will remember how Mr.

Armstrong always said that God's true Church is *not* a

human organization, but a "spiritual organism." He often

acknowledged that among the Sardis groups and scattered

Sabbath-keepers all over the world there were probably many

true Christians.

**What Kind of Church Government**

**in the New Testament?**

If we look into the New Testament with an open mind,

we find a totally different approach to government than what

has developed in the Church. This different approach

affected the way the early brethren and ministers interacted

with each other, and the way they handled disagreements.

Perhaps before plunging into scriptural examples, I

should first set the stage. Frankly there was NEVER-in the

New Testament Church-any example of a "Moses figure"

or a "Pope Peter" who towered over the other apostles and

elders, gave them orders, threatened to "fire" them, etc. I

cannot refer you to any scripture on this, because it IS NOT

THERE!

You *do* find that Peter took the lead among the original

twelve apostles and was acknowledged-although this is

never directly stated-as the main speaker and leader. For

Christ used Peter to preach the main sermon on Pentecost

(Acts 2), heal the crippled man outside the Temple (Acts 3),

open the "door of faith" to the Gentiles (Acts 10), etc. But

you do *not* find him giving orders to the other apostles,

sending them out on missions, or in *any* way "lording it

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over" them.

Rather, as you read Acts 6 carefully, notice that "the

twelve" summoned the multitude of the disciples for counsel

on who to appoint to wait tables. "They" wanted advice,

they said, about whom "we," they said, "may *appoint* over

this business."

So the decision was clearly through "multitude of

counsel" (Proverbs 24:6), and then by "appointment"-not

voting. Yet ALL the apostles got this counsel so that, they

said, "we" may decide whom to appoint. Peter was *not* the

Pope! He NEVER unilaterally decided ANY of those basic

matters in the New Testament Church!

Think about it!

Now notice Acts 8: 12-25. Here we find the inspired

record of how the apostles "sent" Peter and John to Samaria.

No "Pope Peter" here, either!

Having the dominant personality, Peter did take the lead

over John in dealing with Simon, but "they" returned to

Jerusalem and evidently BOTH of them preached the gospel

along the way.

I would encourage all who read this to really STUDY

Acts 15 with the above thoughts in mind. It is the inspired

record of what was undoubtedly the MAJOR Ministerial

Conference-if we may call it that-of the apostolic age. If

there were ever a time when Peter would sit in the chief

seat, give orders to the other apostles, and totally dominate,

this would be it!

**The Jerusalem Conference**

Notice Acts 15:1: "Certain men came down from

Judea." Did Paul and Barnabas blindly yield to

them-thinking they came from "Headquarters" or from

Peter or James!

No way!

And that is the point, brethren. The entire approach of

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the original apostles AND ELDERS was NOT: "Who's in

Charge here? I'd better go along or they may fire me!"

Rather, the approach was-as Peter himself later wrote,

"All of you be submissive to *one another,* and be clothed

with humility" (I Peter 5:5).

When these men from Judea came, Paul and Barnabas

"had no small dissension and dispute with them." Paul, as

you know, always fought for the TRUTH even when he

"rattled the teacups" in doing so!

Notice what happened then. "They" -evidently the local

church leadership-determined that Paul and Barnabas, with

others, "should go up to Jerusalem." Note that Paul did *not*

unilaterally make this decision! It was obviously made-in

a "collegial" manner-in concert with the other ministers and

leaders of the local church. And so Paul and others were to

go up to the apostles (plural) and ELDERS (plural) about this

question.

No hint that they were to go and present themselves

before "Pope Peter" and get HIS decision. For, again, there

WAS NO MOSES in the New Testament Church! God

guided *many* apostles and elders to work in a brotherly, nonthreatening,

collegial atmosphere, and no single one of the

apostles towered over the others at that conference!

**Many "Elders" Had Input**

In fact, the account several times indicates that the

"elders" had a vital part and significant impact in this

conference. Because of the open, brotherly atmosphere

inspired by the Holy Spirit in this conference, the elders

were *not* intimidated by the apostles and obviously were

listened to with respect.

"So, being SENT on their way by the church *(not* Paul's

*own* decision) .... And when they had come to Jerusalem, they

were received by the church *(not* "Pope Peter") and the

apostles and the ELDERS" (verses 3-4).

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When some of the Pharisees rose up to demand that even

Gentile Christians be circumcised and keep the rituals of the

Mosaic law, "the apostles and ELDERS came together to

consider the matter" (verse 6). And when there had been

much dispute, Peter rose up and reminded them of how God,

through him, had acknowledged the Gentile converts and

given them the Holy Spirit without them keeping all these

rituals.

But notice that Peter did *not* issue some decree, or make

the final decision. He merely expounded what God had done

and appealed to them to consider this. Then, Paul and

Barnabas spoke up and backed up what Peter had said by

reminding them of the "miracles and wonders" God had used

to show that He was calling the Gentiles directly-not *after*

they had been circumcised and become Jewish Proselytes.

Finally, the presiding apostle and pastor of the Jerusalem

Church of God, James, spoke up. It was fitting that he

should summarize and state what was obviously the decision

of this conference, because it was from "certain men" at

Jerusalem that the whole matter started. Thus, it was James,

*(not* Peter) who said: "Therefore, I judge that we should not

trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to

God .... " (verse 19). And James proceeded to explain the

four idolatrous practices they warned the Gentiles to avoid.

"Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the

WHOLE CHURCH, to send chosen men of their own

company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas .... " (verse 22).

Notice, the elders and the "whole church" were involved in

this! How utterly *different* is the "flavor" of this meeting as

compared with modern times!

"They *(not* just Peter or James) wrote this letter by

them: The apostles and ELDERS and the brethren, to the

brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and

Cilicia: Greetings ... .It seemed good to US, being assembled

with one accord to send chosen men to you with our beloved

Barnabas and Paul.. .. " (verses 20 and 25).

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Remember, this was the humble, brotherly

approach-obviously inspired by the Holy Spirit-in what

was the MAJOR Ministerial Conference of the Apostolic

Age. There is *no hint* of any authoritarianism,

highhandedness or threatening behavior on the part of ANY

of the apostles. The inspired account notes that Peter, Paul,

Barnabas and James all gave what may have been major

addresses. All were apparently listened to and received with

the same respect. And it was James, *not* Peter or Paul, who

issued the summary conclusion of the matter.

When Barnabas "Rebelled"

Some time after they returned to Antioch, Paul suggested

to Barnabas that they re-visit the churches in Asia Minor

(Acts 15:36). It is obvious that Paul was the leader and

"chief" apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7). He "insisted"

that Barnabas did *not* take his young nephew, John Mark,

with them on this trip. But, even so, Barnabas was

"determined" to take him along (verses 37-38).

"Then the *contention* became so sharp that they parted

from one another" (verse 39).

But did Paul ever threaten to "fire" Barnabas over this?

Not even a hint of such a thought! For we find in Acts

15 and in many other passages the obvious fact that these

ministers were truly CONQUERED by God. They were

humble and *not* trying to "pull rank" on anyone. They

respected the direct calling and spiritual "fruits" that Christ

produced through their fellow-ministers . And no one ever

threatened to "fire" or "disfellowsbip" their fellow

ministers except in the cases of plain heresy or moral

turpitude.

Notice the dramatic incident recorded in Galatians 2: 11-

21. Here Peter perhaps feared some "political"

repercussions from eating with the Gentiles, and Paul openly

REBUKED him to his face!

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Did "Pope Peter" pull rank, threaten to "fire" Paul or

any such thing? Never! The obvious conclusion is that

Peter humbly took the rebuke, learned from it and forgave

Paul *if* there was any unnecessary harshness. For in his final

letter before his martyrdom, Peter refers to "our beloved

brother Paul" and clearly indicates that Paul's epistles were

now regarded as "Scriptures" (II Peter 3:14-16).

The "Government of GOD"?

Unwittingly, we have been rather careless in using the

term "Government of God." This term *never* appears as

such in the Bible, and certainly not in connection with New

Testament church organization or government. Yet, in the

Church, most of the ministers and brethren seem to think

that the awesome title "Government of God" is wielded by

*whoever* happens to "get in charge" of any local church

congregation, or the Church at large.

Obviously, to a degree, *any* high office should be

respected-including that of Adolph Hitler or the Pope. We

are to pray that God guides ALL men in authority, "that we

may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and

reverence" (II Timothy 2:2).

On the other hand, Paul also warned: "For I know this,

that after my departure savage wolves will come in among

you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves

men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away

the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29-30). And we

have warned for decades that sinful men might try to take

over God's Church someday, pervert the doctrines, "water

~ down" the truths we have learned and the gospel we have

preached.

Should we, then, follow these kinds of leaders?

Obviously NOT!

The KEY is that our first loyalty is to GOD and the

inspired Word of God which we all need to be studying

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much more zealously! Though they were sitting in "Moses

seat," Peter and the inspired apostles told the Jewish leaders

of their day: "We ought to obey GOD rather than man"

(Acts 5:29).

And when the leaders of the Sanhedrin had told the

apostles *not* to preach the full truth God had revealed to

them, here was the answer: "But Peter and John answered

and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to

listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot

but speak things which we have seen and heard'" (Acts 4:19-

20).

Herbert W. Armstrong told us over and over: "Blow the

dust off and prove these things in your own Bible." And he

always said: "Follow me *as* I follow Christ!"

Remember, I have already pointed out that Mr. and Mrs.

Armstrong *refused* to take orders from the "Government of

God" in two different branches of the Sardis church when

they found they would be UNABLE to fully obey God and

preach the full truth of the Bible if they submitted! So they,

too, said in effect, "We must obey GOD rather than men!"

You see, God does *not* back up ANY human beings in

government-even in His Church-if they desert the truths

of the Bible or forbid that they be preached. If it were

otherwise, God would have severely PUNISHED Mr. and

Mrs. Armstrong and their Work would have come to

NOTHING.

So let us understand, then, that dedicated men in God's

Church may build an organization and direct it according to

Biblical principles. If so, they will have God's overall

guidance and blessings. But God "governs" only through

the inspired laws and principles of His Word. And any

church government that preaches contrary to those principles

is *not* the "government of God," but the government of *men.*

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**Is God's Church A "Mother"?**

At this point, I would like to. cover an idea that often

confuses people. For we have sometimes taught that the

Church is the "Mother of us all:"

On the surface, this is a nice sounding idea. But, in

reality, the Bible does *not* say any such thing! If it did, then

your "Mother," the Church, would have led you into the

"doctrine of the Nicolaitans" if you had lived back in the

Pergamos Era (Revelation 2: 15). If you had lived in the era

of Thyatira, you would have had church leaders who "allow

that woman J ezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach

and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to

eat things sacrificed to idols" (verse 20).

The key passage some people use (though many scholars

do *not)* to prove that the Church is a "Mother" is found in

Galatians 4:26: " ... but Jerusalem above is free, which is the

mother of us all ."

Note that it is "Jerusalem *above"* who is "mother" of us

all, *not* the human Church here on earth. Then read

carefully verse 27: "For it is written: 'Rejoice, 0 barren,

You who did not bear! Break forth and shout, You who do

not travail! For the desolate has many more children than

she who has a husband.'"

It is clear that the Jerusalem above is barren-no children

m. For she is *not* yet married until Christ's return

(Revelation 19:7). The "Jerusalem above" certainly refers

to our Father, God, to Jesus Christ, our High Priest and

Living Head, and to "the spirits of just men made perfect"

(Hebrews 12:22-23). Our "citizenship" is "in heaven"

(Philippians 3:20) where the spirits of just men, from

righteous Abel clear up to the present time, await the

resurrection from the dead. Then, the "Jerusalem above"

will have thousands of children!

But the Church here below is *not* "Jerusalem above," is

not yet married to Christ, and so does not yet have children.

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So the human Church-sometimes misguided and subject to

false teachers-is definitely *not* our "mother" according to

the Bible.

An Inspired WARNING

Even in His own Church, God *allows* leading men to

turn aside, pervert doctrines, water down scripture and

mistreat fellow Christians. In Rev. 2:2, Jesus told the

Ephesian Era: "I know your works, your labor, your

patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And

you have tested those who say they are apostles and are

not, and have found them liars."

Notice that then people "tested" those who claimed to be

"apostles." And they found some of those so-called apostles

to be LIARS!

"Nevertheless," Christ tells these Ephesians, "I have this

against you, that you have left your first love. Remember

therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the

first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove

your lampstand from its place-unless you repent" (verses 4-

5).

Christ is exhorting this church era to recapture their

ZEAL, and, as Mr. Armstrong would say, "to get back on

the track!"

Every single church era, except Philadelphia, is

described as having various *sins* and *weaknesses.* So it is

very clear that Christ did not plan to "govern" His church in

a way so as to prevent heresy and sin-even at the very top!

') That is WHY Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong had to LEAVE the

Sardis organizations!

Now notice an inspired warning in the third letter of the

apostle John- the "apostle of love." "I wrote to the church,

but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among

them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call

to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with

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malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does

not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to,

putting them out of the church" (III John 9-10).

Let us analyze these passages carefully.

Clearly, Diotrephes was one of the main leaders of the

developing church at that time-if not the main leader. I say

"developing" because at that time they were slowly but

surely deserting the foundation of true Christianity. They

were "growing," but in the wrong direction! History is clear

on this, and this very passage corroborates that fact.

Diotrephes *refused* to see and hear the last remaining

apostle of that generation! He used "malicious

words"-perhaps implying that John and the earlier apostles

were not "up-to-date," had made mistakes, or were lacking

in other ways.

And this Diotrephes would not even receive honorably

the "old-timers" -the brethren still loyal to John and to the

original TRUTH they had been taught. Using his position in

the "government of God," Diotrephes disfellowshipped these

faithful "old-timers!"

Would YOU follow Diotrephes if he were in charge

today?

Think about it.

**WHAT Church History Reveals**

As we have already briefly noted, the annals of church

history make clear the fact that VERY SELDOM, *if ever,*

have all of God's people in the New Testament Church been

led by one church government under one man.

Early church history is replete with examples of groups

like the "Ebionites" -the early Jewish Christians who

remained faithful to the truth of God. In Jesse Lyman

Hurlbut's *Story of the Christian Church,* they are described

as follows: "A small section of Jewish Christians endured

for two centuries, but with ever-decreasing numbers, the

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Ebionites, a people by themselves, scarcely recognized by

the general church and despised as apostates by their own

race" (p. 43).

Notice that these zealous Christians who basically

retained the teachings of Jesus were "scarcely recognized by

the general church." In other words, the majority, the main

body of people, regarded the Ebionites as "outcasts" who

refused to "grow" into the developing *Pagan teachings* and

customs that slowly and subtly began to take over the

"Christian" church. Often, these faithful followers of Christ

were "disfellowshipped" or even persecuted by the "new

age" teachers of their time!

In his excellent book, The Incredible History of God's

True Church, (p. 119), Ivor Fletcher also describes this

situation: "Clement of Rome, writing at about the same

time-A.D. 95-96-expressed deep concern over a similar

situation which was developing at Corinth. The Corinthian

church, less than thirty years after the apostle Paul's death,

was *ejecting from the ministry men who had been ordained*

*by the apostles. "*

Again, on page 129, Fletcher writes: "By the closing

years of that century, Christians who faithfully continued in

the teachings handed down to them by the immediate

followers of Christ were rapidly finding themselves ,to be in

a minority position.

"Mosheim, in his church history, relates that: 'Christian

churches had scarcely been organized when men rose up,

who, not being contented with the simplicity and purity of

that religion which the Apostles taught, attempted

innovations, and fashioned religion according to their own

liking. '"

So where was the "government of God" in all of this?

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**HOW Christ Leads His Church**

In the past, we (and I include myself in this!) have

mistakenly assumed that Christ directly guides His Church

so that no serious errors will ever be made and no serious

doctrinal deviations will ever occur. This misunderstanding

arose partly because in the 1950's and 1960's everything

seemed to be going so well and God was obviously

BLESSING His Church in nearly every way.

But, of course, this was also obviously in the

"Philadelphia Era" of God's Church-the ONLY one of the

seven eras about which Christ gives no criticism whatever!

Of ALL the other eras, however, Christ prophesied in

advance that errors-even SERIOUS ERRORS-would be

made and at times obviously permeate the leadership and the

brethren alike (Revelation 2 and 3).

Christ, the Living Head of the Church, specifically

prophesied that the Ephesians would *leave* their "first love"

(Revelation 2:4). Later, He said that there would be those

in the Pergamos Era who would "hold the doctrine of

Balaam" (verse 14). Then, He said, "You also have them

who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I

HATE" (verse 15).

Christ hates these false doctrines, yet He obviously

*allows* them to come into His own true Church. Is it partly

to "test" His people, to see where they *really* stand before

He gives them great GLORY for all eternity?

The Thyatira leadership allowed "that woman Jezebel"

to seduce their fellow servants. At this time, there was

tremendous pressure to conform to the great false church

(Revelation 17), for the Waldensian Sabbath-keepers and

similar groups to attend mass and to have their children

baptized by the priests.

Through fear and weakness, the leadership and the

majority of these people often "went along" with the worldly

religious practices.

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But many times there was a small minority who insisted

on obeying Jude's exhortation "to contend earnestly for the

faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude

3).

As we have already seen from history, the faithful

brethren were often *disfellowshil!.Ped* by the worldly "church

government" of the time. But they were *faithful* to God and

His Word!

Where, then, is CHRIST in all of this?

Christ Does NOT

Micro-Manage the Church

Like His heavenly Father guides world events only in an

overall way, *not* trying to "micro-manage" world affairs

except in a very few specific cases, so Christ guides the

Church in an overall way. He makes sure that there always

*is* a Church of God on earth (Matthew 16: 18). He makes

sure that the Bible is preserved. And He directs His Church

to do a POWERFU~ Work during certain key ages-yet

prophesying in advance that in other ages the human

leadership and the church as a whole would be "dead"

(Revelation 3:1-2).

In Daniel 4: 17, we read, "This decision is by the decree

of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy

ones, In order that the living may know that the Most High

RULES in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He

will, and sets over it the lowest of men." So, although God

"rules," He also obviously "allows" weak and misguided

men to be in power much of the time so the world can write

the lesson in human suffering that Man's ways lead to death

(Proverbs 16:25).

In the true Church, Christ directs the overall pattern of

things *more directly* than God does in the world at large.

Yet, in Christ's own words in Revelation 2 and 3, it is

obvious that He "allows" His Church and its leadership a lot

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of "rope" to get entangled in and sometimes with which to

hang themselves! He allows the Church to be *influenced* by

the world around it. And this often heavily effects the

"approach" and "atmosphere" of each church era and its

leadership.

For instance, during and after World War II there was a

spirit of zeal, patriotism and respect for authority in much of

the Western world, particularly in America. The growing,

zealous "Philadelphia Era" of God's Church reflected this

approach.

But, now, after the rock music, dirty speech, "free sex"

and other movements and rebellions of the 1960's and

1970's, and the crass materialism and hedonism of the

1980's, the "me" generation of the United States and much

of Europe wants to "take it easy," to "water things down,"

to "do their own thing." And so the Laodicean Era-which

the Church as a whole is obviously in-reflects this very

much.

But does this "worldly" atmosphere give God's faithful

people any *real* EXCUSE to "water down" the doctrines and

the entire way of life revealed in the Holy Bible? Can they

just say that, "the government of God" (actually the ~

human government in the Church!) says it is okay, so it must

be "just fine?"

Of course not!

Follow Men Only *As*

They Follow Christ

For, again, as Herbert W. Armstrong said so many

times: "Follow me only *as* I follow Christ!" And, as Jesus

said: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but

by every word of God'" (Matthew 4:4). Yes, you and I

will be JUDGED by how zealously we have tried to live

by the words of the Bible! That is the *"key."*

We should honor all men in a high office, and especially

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in God's Church. We should, in the Church, follow them *as*

they follow Christ (I Corinthians 11: 1). We *should* always

be "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond

of peace" (Ephesians 4:4).

But the apostle Paul warned: "For 1 know this, that after

my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not

sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will

rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples

after themselves" (Acts 20:29-30).

About two years after the death of Herbert W.

Armstrong, things began to CHANGE, and change rapidly.

The deep respect for Christ as our HEALER has all but

disappeared in many church congregations. The fervent

preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God based on

God's law is slowly and subtly sinking beneath the sea. It is

being replaced with a kind of Protestant gospel about the

PERSON of *Christ-not* the gospel which He Himself

preached!

We are commanded to "preach the Word" (II Timothy

4:2). About one third of the Bible is prophecy. Yet the

ministry is commanded *not* to preach about any power bloc

or its fulfillment of prophecy. Do you remember the

"Personal" in the November 19, 1990 issue of *The*

*Worldwide News?* Notice these specific instructions to the

TV presenters and ministers:

Prophecy programs will not highlight which

individual, which nation or which group of nations

currently may be fulfilling specific end-time prophecies.

Prophecy programs will present a balanced, overall

perspective of the purpose and value of prophecy, instead

of attempting to interpret specific prophecies.

Prophecy programs will not lose sight of the gospel

message by trading the true gospel for a lO-nation/saveyour-

skin gospel (Galatians 1:6-10). This was never the

gospel. It was an interesting 'hook' to get people

interested in the true gospeL ...

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To preach that if you repent and obey God, you will not

be killed in a war, taken captive, go hungry or get a disease,

is to preach 'another gospel,' not the gospel of Jesus Christ

(II Timothy 3:12)."

Whoever wrote that "Personal" seems to have forgotten

Jesus' direct promise in Luke 21:36: "Watch, therefore, and

pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all

these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the

Son of Man."

**Mr. Armstrong's Legacy Destroyed**

One of the main booklets on prophecy-a booklet that

has inspired multiple thousands to see God's hand in human

affairs, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy,* has been

"shelved" for over two years now. Every indication is that

neither it nor anything like it will appear again at least under

the present administration.

The Eternal God built this present Work primarily

through Mr. and Mrs. Herbert W. Armstrong. Mr.

Armstrong was ordained in 1931 and served God faithfully

(though he certainly had personal faults) for about 55 years!

God had plenty of opportunities to get rid of Mr. Armstrong

during that 55 years-but He *did not.*

In fact, after some of the same "liberal" changes we see

today occurred in the mid-1970's while Mr. Armstrong was

away from Pasadena travelling a great deal, God used him to

*reverse* this wrong trend and "put the Church back on the

track!"

So *which* "government of God" would you choose to

follow? The one Christ used to build a vibrant, growing

Work that was BLESSED? Or one that is "watering down"

and virtually DESTROYING virtually everything special that

Christ brought into the Church through Herbert W.

Armstrong?

As I said before, one of the most VITAL truths that Mr.

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Armstrong introduced to the Church was the prophetic truth

of the identity of the so-called "lost Ten Tribes of Israel."

The booklet on this was a vital "key" to understanding

literally dozens and scores of prophecies directly affecting

the American and British Commonwealth peoples. These

prophecies from God's Word were POWERFUL warnings

from our Creator about what is going to happen to our

nations and our very lives!

Yet, these prophecies are being suppressed! "For the

wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness

and unrighteousness of men, who *suppress* the truth in

unrighteousness," (Romans 1: 18).

Also, God COMMANDS all His faithful servants to

*warn* our peoples of what soon lies ahead: "But if the

watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the

trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword

comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken

away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the

watchman's hand. So you, son of man: I have made you a

watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a

word from My mouth and warn them for Me" (Ezekiel 33 :6-

7).

Most of us older brethren and ministers realized we were

helping the "watchman" -holding up his hands. We were

part of the watchman's "staff."

And we knew God's warning included us if we failed to

do the job. "His blood will I require at the watchman's

hand." In plain language, the DEATH PENALTY is

required of those who know this vital truth and yet REFUSE

to preach the "Ezekiel Warning" to our people!

This is SERIOUS business!

How long can we "hide behind the skirts" of human

"church government" and refuse to warn the American and

British Commonwealth peoples of the prophesied coming

Great Tribulation!

How long?

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Let us read what now seem to be prophetic words from

page 528 of the *Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong:*

I know of evangelists who probably are sincere in

supposing they are serving God-and who would *like* to

be free to proclaim many truths they now hold back.

They reason something like this: .. If I go farther, and

preach those things, I'll lose all my support. I'd be cut

off from the ministry altogether. Then I could preach

NOTHING. Better to serve God by preaching as *much* of

the Biblical truth as possible, than to be prevented from

preaching anything."

They are relying on the financial support of MEN, or

of organizations of men. Anyone in that predicament is

the SERVANT OF MEN and NOT OF GOD, whether he

realizes it or not. "

Christ DOES Intervene

It may be that because we are in the Laodicean Era, and

because perhaps most of the Church members "like it that

way," Christ will simply leave this branch of the Church the

way it is: "For the time will come when they will not

endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires,

because they have itching ears, they will heap up for

themselves teachers; and they will tum their ears away from

the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (II Timothy 4:3-4).

So, although *not* cleaning up the human government of

the Church, Christ may intervene to SEPARATE the faithful

Philadelphians. He may give us a chance, once again, to

teach the full truth and do the Work of WARNING our

people Israel and of preaching the full message of the coming

Kingdom of God based on His Laws!

So all of you who are deeply converted, studying your

Bibles, and deeply sensitive to God's will-you will know if

that time has come. You will need to pray for the

COURAGE to stand up for the Truth! You will need to

say as the apostles did to the leaders of the Great Sanhedrin:

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"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more

than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things

which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

Yes, Christ *governs.* But He governs now primarily

through His inspired Word those yielded enough to OBEY.

He shows us that the apostles and evangelists were

supposed to organize churches, ordain elders and direct the

administrative offices of the Church. And all ministers were

to be "appointed" -there was NEVER any voting mentioned

in the New Testament.

Of course there are times when the ministry is

commanded to discipline wayward brethren for gross

immorality (I Corinthians 5) or for causing division (Romans

16: 17-18). Yet it is significant that in the latter case we are

warned to "note those who cause division and offenses

CONTRARY TO THE DOCTRINE WHICH YOU HAVE

LEARNED, and avoid them."

The current apostasy in the Church is absolutely based

on departing and going CONTRARY to virtually every

major doctrine which Jesus Christ inspired Herbert W.

Armstrong to *stress* during the 52 years he faithfully led

God's Church. WHY has the current Church leadership

departed from most of the "18 Truths" written about so

glowingly in the August 25 , 1986, *Worldwide News?*

Is not this administration leading us directly

"CONTRARY to the doctrine which you learned" under

Herbert W. Armstrong? Should not we then obey God and

AVOID these people even if that means leaving the

Laodecian branch of the Church and worshipping with those

who are trying to preserve and teach the TRUTH?

So do not let humanly devised theories of church

government keep you from fully obeying God's Word!

We have always known the above facts. We have also

known that God does not-anywhere in the Bible-set out an

exact procedure for the human government in His Church.

For the broad world conditions and the immediate Church

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situations may CHANGE from generation to generation.

**Right Approach to Church Government**

But what God *has* revealed is that the approach to

government should always be in brotherly LOVE and

outflowing concern. For Peter commanded the elders:

"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as

overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest

gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to

you, but being examples to the flock" (I Peter 5:2-3).

The right church government should be "collegial."

That is, it should include a broad representation of *all* the

elders and ministers of the Church as the account we read

from Acts 15 makes clear. And correct church government

should always be based on *multitude* of counsel (Proverbs

15:22).

Given that, the KEY FACTOR that we have been

pointing out in this booklet is that the human church

government must NEVER attempt to override or supersede

the DIRECT government of God through His written Word

and the inspired guidance of His Holy Spirit! Human church

government must *never* be allowed to "water down" or do

away with basic truths or any part of the basic

"commissions" given the Church in regard to preaching the

full gospel and the vital prophetic warnings that we in this

generation are COMMANDED to preach.

Anytime *any* human church government attempts to do

any of the above things, it should now be perfectly clear that

this is *not* the "government of God" and should *not* be

followed.

Rather, all of us whose minds and hearts God opens to

these things should courageously respond to Mr.

Armstrong's letter written to our brethren way back on

September 3, 1936: "Nero fiddled while Rome burned!

Many churches and religious broadcasts are today giving the

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Under What Conditions Should Church

Members Be Disfellowshipped?

Although the word "disfellowship" does not

appear in most Bible translations, the concept

appears in several passages. There are two

reasons why a member may be disfellowshipped:

Flagrant personal sins. People that openly

and carelessly sin, encourage others to sin: "A

little leaven leavens the whole lump." Removing

these people from the Church serves the dual

purpose of showing the sinner the consequences

of his sin and showing the public that the Church

does not condone sin. (I Corinthians 5: 1-5,

I Timothy 1: 19-20)

Serious doctrinal errors. The Church is to put

out people that practice or teach heretical

doctrines or refuse to obey the apostolic epistles.

This preserves truth and unity in the Church.

(Romans 16:17-18, I Corinthians 1:10-13,

I Thessalonians 3:6,14, Titus 3: 1 0-11, II John

10) No scripture says a member should be

disfellowshipped for hearing or reading the words

of another teacher. Indeed Mark 9:38-40 shows

the Church should not interfere with other

groups teaching in the name of Christ. If the

Church of God assumes their present doctrines

are correct, they have a Biblical reason to

disfellowship *ministers* for teaching different

doctrines, but an organization that disfellowships

*members* for trying to determine which teachers

are of God (I John 4:1, Matthew 7:15-20,

Revelation 2:2) must have something to hide!

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people *a sleeping potion* in the form of nice, soothing,

pleasing, comforting programs-lulling the people to

sleep-while the JUDGMENTS OF GOD ARE FAST

COMING UPON THEM! Why, in Jesus' name, do they not

wake up and fearlessly SHOUT THE WARNING? This is

no time for soft and smooth platitudes. It is time to

AWAKEN people! It is time to WARN THEM!"

*(Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong,* Vol. I, p. 616).

Brethren, even as I read these inspired words of Herbert

W. Armstrong, my heart "burns" within me to once again be

able to preach the full truth of God's Word and to warn the

400 million or so fellow Israelites of the coming Great

Tribulation. Most of us know of fine, upstanding, wellmeaning

relatives and friends in the world who NEED to be

warned! Time is short. Much work needs to be done.

**Need for FAITH and COURAGE**

Have our minds and hearts been blinded by a *wrong*

*concept* of church government so that we have been "afraid"

or unwilling to step out and get God's Work going again?

Some may fear that such an action would be like the

dissidents who left in the 1970's.

Do we realize that there is a HUGE difference this time?

For back then Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was still alive,

still faithful to God's Word, the *full truth* was being

preached and the Work was being done!

Now, however, the man through whom the living Christ

built this Work is being denigrated and virtually, though

subtly, ridiculed. The Work is going down. The income is

*down.* Church attendance is *down.* Baptisms are *down.*

The Pasadena college is *closed down.* The GOOD NEWS

magazine is *closed down.* Plain Truth circulation is only

about one third of what it was a few years ago. And we

only have about half as many TV stations! "By their f.ru~ ?

you know them. "

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He must indeed be a blind soul who cannot see that

something is *terribly wrong* with the Church at this time.

Of all the seven churches of Revelation, *only* Laodicea

is so insipid that Christ says: "I will spew you out of My

mouth" (Revelation 3: 16). The obvious indication here, and

in Jesus' statement that Laodiceans need to be "refined in the

fire," is that these smug, self-satisfied people will be cast

into the GREAT TRIBULATION soon to fall upon an

unsuspecting world!

If you stay among such people, if you begin to think like

they do and agree with them, you WILL receive their

reward! Is that what you want for your wives and children?

For yourself?

Think about it!

In closing, I say with urgency to all who read this,

please do not anymore allow a *false concept* of Church

Government to blind your eyes! Do not use it as a "copout"

or excuse for personally *proving* and DOING what the

Bible says.

Down through history, Christ has guided His Church so

that often-in fact most of the time-there were different

"branches" of the true Church co-existing at the same time.

Sometimes it was a geographical necessity. But often, as in

the Sardis Era, Christ allowed His people a certain freedom

of choice. Which Seventh Day Church of God would they

worship with? The branch administered from Stanberry,

Missouri? The one located in Caldwell, Idaho? Or the one

headquartered at Salem, West Virginia? Or one of the

others?

In talking with Dr. Herman Hoeh over the years, Mr.

Raymond McNair, and with Mr. Armstrong himself, I found

that we all agreed that *all* these groups were "branches" of

God's Church. And as Mr. Armstrong often said, among

them were *many* sincere people who will be in the Kingdom

of God.

Again, remember that Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong ended up

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in leaving *two* of these branches! If they had not, the Work

as we have known it might never have existed.

May God grant *all* of us the true understanding-and the

*faith* and *courage-that* He granted to them to get the Work

going again. Our desire should not be just for self-to have

"stability" or to be "comfortable."

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but

whoever loses his life for My sake will save it" (Luke 9:24).

A whole world is waiting out there. It is in dire need of

powerful, direct, inspired preaching of the *soon-coming*

Kingdom of God, the *true* name of Jesus Christ, and the

Ezekiel Warning Message. God grant us the privilege of

reaching these people with the full truth while there is still

time!

For those of you interested in "reviving *II* The

Work of God, please note that great numbers of

God's people have come out to form the Global

Church of God. We are faithfully preaching the

truths proclaimed by Herbert W. Armstrong. If

you are interested in learning more about us,

please write us:

Global Church of God

PO Box 5500

Glendora, CA 91740-5500

or call our toll-free number:

800-959-1641