

01 Being Cooperative in Church Unity (side 1)

It's been a number of years since I've been here.

I've been twice to Sun City since you left a previous building and came to this one.

I think I know more people there than I remember here, partly because the number I related to those who work in Pasadena.

Since Mr. Seifak reflected a bit on life, I would only have one apology to make to him.

I did not teach him diving.

I do say now that learning to swim, and therefore also the art of diving, where and when, is a very important matter because no small number of young people, children in particular, cease to live to the age that any of you are because they've made innocent mistakes.

They didn't know how to respond.

And one of the most important things that little children need to learn, and adults as well, is to remain calm and not get excited if they think they have a problem in the water.

That comes, of course, from familiarity with it.

But familiarity should also go hand in hand with the rest of the information that we should have as we grow up and realize, as any sailor does, that the beautiful ocean can also be a grave.

We're very pleased that Mr. Seifak has been able to accomplish what he has done all these years.

I don't certainly say he stayed on the straight and narrow.

It would be hard to get very far from that in his situation.

And we've been pleased, I think, the church that is knowing him and his wife and his family, his parents, been very grateful for what they have meant in terms of stability, which leads me to the introduction that I will present today to a topic, an introduction that is perhaps more important than the topic itself, if you listen carefully to what I'm saying.

We are here because the church was asked by Jesus Christ when he was addressing the father to be one.

And in being one, we realize there is a purpose in that.

Any group of people that divide and scatter cannot do the work they should.

If we roll back time, we will discover that in the last century, a large group of people in the 1830s, beginning in 1831, were being called out of various denominations in the Christian world to hear a message presented by a prosperous farmer who had become a minister, a person of Baptist background to my recollection.

And he was commenting on things in prophecy, aspects about the return of Jesus Christ that he had not perhaps dwelt on earlier, and it became very important to him, and this became known historically as the Second Advent Movement.

A large number of people were disappointed in 1844, which was the second date he thought events might occur on the basis of an unfortunate misunderstanding in reading Daniel 8, but that's beside the point today.

Out of those people who were called and were listening to the important message about the return of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God, there were those who became enamored of certain prophecies that a young lady, Ellen Harman, was receiving, certain messages, and there were those who were quite dubious about them.

Ellen Harman later married Mr. White, and is known as Ellen White, from which the Seventh Adventists take their movement, but among those who did not accept the influence that she had in that movement were groups of people scattered from New England to West Virginia, from Missouri to Michigan, that we know today as people who assembled together at the second year of the Civil War to establish the Churches of God, a name which while still in fellowship earlier with Adventist people who were enamored of the visions of Ellen White, were found to be in need of organization, and so they gathered together because the majority of the people who had been called out at that time had simply gone back to many of the traditions that they had had in terms of how often to observe the Lord's supper that give one illustration, and so customs that the Methodists had were absorbed into the Seventh Adventist movement.

But the interesting thing is that these people were called out but had no real organization until the Adventists, as such, organized under that name, not accepting the idea of the name Church of God, which is given in the Scripture, a name which was chosen by those people who concluded that the visions of Ellen White did not have the kind of validity essential for their lives.

I know some very wonderful people in various groups of the Christian world as well as non-Christian, so this is only a background of the story of organization that is important in why we assemble.

I will just make a footnote and then go on and say we have my wife and I, a Hindu family we have known for many years since 1973.

We've known a family of Muslims since 1972 that we correspond with nearly every year.

Our friends, the Bhuchalates, who work in archaeology and responsible for the excavations in Syria in which the Foundation has participated, are practicing Catholics, a man who was honored by Jews many times and other groups, Christians most certainly, who risk his life more than 900 times to rescue Jews and other people from the Germans and the Vichy French in World War II, who delivered these people personally across the border with Switzerland and helped to deliver others into Spain, is a Seventh-day Adventist elder whom I've known since 1956, a man of remarkable character who was honored earlier this year at the Holocaust Memorial Season.

I was there when in Arcadia he received that award and he is now in his eighties.

We have friends and God is intending to call all people, so what I am saying here is not managing the criticism in any way.

What I'm getting at is that the churches of God came together to work out their responsibility as individual and local congregations having had no real organization up to 1862 and 1863.

It was in this period of time, at the time of the Civil War, that perhaps we would say the crisis in the nation mirrored the crisis in the church and sometimes we don't realize how often this is the case.

The Civil War was tearing the country apart and the people whom God was calling out to be the foundation of the work that this work now is were being called out of various denominations by William Miller, 18th centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Those people coming from different backgrounds may have had the view of local congregational autonomy as Baptists do.

Presbyterian or congregational autonomy may have had Episcopal perspectives as in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

For whatever reason, they had numerous concepts in the background in terms of church government.

The whole Christian world has never clearly had a perspective on church government.

This is why we have the Catholic and Orthodox worlds as we do, why in the Orthodox movement there are national churches, why in the Protestant movement we actually have denominations named after kinds of government.

That's what a Presbyterian church is, that's what a congregational church is, that's what a Methodist Episcopal Church is, it is a church with a different perspective on government.

I don't know if you've really focused on that, it wasn't particularly doctrine.

It was a question of government, because the Protestant Reformation reflected in these groups had to face the question of government at the very time that the crisis between the different Christian perspectives in Europe was occurring, that is, was Mother Church the church, and what do you do if you protest and are indeed separated? Anyway, in the 1860s till the 1930s the church had no clear perspective on government.

The church began to do a publishing work.

In 1931 the churches of God, in fact, had the question of government paramount, and they split, one centering in Salem, West Virginia, the other in Standbury, Missouri.

What is important is that it was at this time that Mr. Armstrong in the Northwest of the United States in Oregon was ordained to the ministry by the Oregon Conference of the Church of God.

Now what is significant, of course, is that that became a very lively branch within the churches of God, and Mr. Armstrong was a participant and was asked to be, in a sense, a leader in the area in the Willameth Valley of the various people who had no resident minister at that time sent to them from Standbury, Missouri.

The bulk of the people in the Willameth Valley in Oregon, in fact, essentially worked with Standbury, Missouri, but many had family members who were following leadership in Salem, West Virginia.

Now when Jesus prayed that the church be won, he certainly meant to see that such as was happening among God's people in 1931 and thereafter should not have to occur.

That would tell you that there was something fundamentally wrong.

The church was asleep in reality and needed to be awakened to its responsibility and be what it ought to be.

I will not go through the history because that's not the purpose of my message today, but I want you to know why you are here and others are not and what you learn because of why you are here.

Crises did not stop in 1931 as they continued, and ultimately the people in the Willameth Valley who were called of Christ through the ministry of Herbert Armstrong as a minister in the Church of God Seventh Day to start with, and in general a minister who was understood to be in the ministry by both Salem, West Virginia and Standbury, so there's no misunderstanding about that.

Those people began to coalesce in the area of Eugene and support the opportunity to have a radio broadcast, and that broadcast became known as was a kind of religious service such as ours with singing, prayer, I take it, I don't recall ever hearing the earliest scripts.

It was called the Radio Church of God, that it was the Church of God, in other words, on radio as distinct from one meeting in San Bernardino.

The brethren were, however, meeting in Eugene, Oregon.

There was a center on a religious broadcast, then there was a magazine.

Now in those days, what is interesting, and for a long time since the 1860s, ministers would be involved in the off and on publishing of the Bible Advocate or some other name of the Church's publications.

Later on when radio came, it was not uncommon for the local congregation to support a local radio program.

There was no clear organization in the Churches to unify the efforts of the Church, and want you to get the perspective.

So the Eugene Church did support a radio program.

The bulletin that had been published by and essentially a lively publication because of Herbert Armstrong in those days came to be later the good news, but Mr. Armstrong and the Eugene Church continued the publication of the bulletin of the Oregon State Conference of the Churches of God Seventh Day.

Well there came a time when, indeed, despite the cooperation of the brethren with Salem West Virginia, which was the area that Mr. Armstrong felt had the leadership, and we must remember that the leader in the Church up to that time, A. N. Duggar, was the one who was centered in Salem West Virginia.

There were those who didn't like him and those who did, and that was an unfortunate state of affairs.

But nevertheless that is the way things were in the 1930s.

The 1930s were a state of what we would call spiritual turmoil in the world, just as we had spiritual and military and political turmoil in the world.

As we failed to realize to what extent the Church being made up of people called out of the world goes through similar situations, like the split among the people in the 1860s at the time of the Civil War in the U.S. and all the divisions and confusion at the time of the 1930s, when we had most certainly a world that was not in harmony and was clearly going in the wrong direction that led to World War II.

Anyway, the brethren in the Willamette Valley heard the program and supported it, and there were people who were called in Oregon and Washington, and so the efforts of the Eugene Church came to have significant results in the area, and the magazine was established a month later in support of the program.

It was never intended to be in competition to the Bible Advocate of the Churches of God's seventh day, nor was it ever raised as an issue at the time.

What is important to realize, of course, is that even in those days Mr. Armstrong had not truly understood and said so the question of Church government.

That was still a question everywhere among the brethren that are known as the Churches of God, no matter where headquarters were then.

We will not go into the crisis that developed in 1937 and 1938 when, in fact, the Salem West Virginia branch decided to make a decision and terminate the relationship between themselves and the brethren in Mr. Armstrong in the Willamette Valley in Oregon, centered in Eugene, of course.

The Church did not walk away, that is, the Church in Eugene, from the others.

The situation was that they could no longer cooperate, and Salem West Virginia made certain decisions that simply were impossible to fulfill, centered around the question of baptism and what was required of people before you could be baptized, which was simply inappropriate and irresponsible if any minister would have followed such a matter.

There is no statement, no series of things that have to be done before baptism when people have repented and believed Christ's message.

However, what is significant is that this branch of the Church began to do a lively work and the others were simply scattered.

We have groups in now, Idaho, there have been in Israel, West Virginia, the relationship between Standbury and Denver, Colorado, it was simply an administrative one, they worked together because they moved headquarters west, but the churches of God's seventh day were shattered as a result of not having an understanding of the government of God.

What happened, of course, is that Mr. Armstrong came slowly but surely to realize the importance of the rule of Christ over the Church, and how he does it and through whom.

This is not a sermon on Church government, but let me tell you the story of the seventh day Adventist elder who rescued the many Jews and others from Vichy France in last war.

He was at our home one day, one evening, he and his wife, and he asked, who is the head of the Church? His answer was, in his mind, the answer I was to give him, either some group of people or a single individual.

Well, I said, Jesus Christ is the head of our Church.

No, no, he said, I don't mean that, I mean, who is the head of the Church? Well I said, Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, and I explained how Jesus Christ works.

And suddenly his eyes and sense opened, and he said, oh, what you mean is that government in your Church is based on faith.

You actually believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church.

Now of course, if you don't, then you really don't believe what is fundamental to this Church.

Now if Christ, and he is, is the head of the Church, then Christ makes certain decisions.

Now in a family, we do learn that the husband is the head of the wife, or certainly the single parent, mother or father, is the head of a family if there is a loss of one member due to one reason or another.

And the head of the wife is the husband, and the head of every husband is Christ, and the head of Christ is God the Father.

That's clearly stated in the teaching of the New Testament.

Now so we don't misunderstand my premise here, I would like to know of you wives how many of you have been living with a husband who has been perfect while Christ is his head.

Now my wife is not here to raise her hand, so I would like to see, I'd like to meet that man.

All right, you get a point, don't you? We are not perfect, or as a minister, Mr. Norman Myers told me, about a man who wanted to join a perfect Church, he said, well there's no use joining this one, because if you did it wouldn't then continue to be perfect.

Body is in this life, that's the goal, be perfect, said Jesus as your Father in heaven is.

That's the state we should be in, but we wrestle with human nature, in mind and body, thought.

So what is significant in all this is a recognition that even if Christ is which he is, the head of the husband in a family, this does not mean that every husband seeks to please Christ as well as his wife.

Sometimes he seeks to please his wife when he shouldn't, sometimes and very often he seeks to please himself or his boss.

So also we discover that even in the Church we have to face the fact that everyone who has any responsibility in the Church is still a human being, and the government of God must be seen in such a context so that no one person, even an apostle, as in the case of the book of Galatians with respect to Peter and Paul, and remember Peter was the one who was ultimately the responsible person in the group of the twelve.

He was not above them in some other office, but when you have a group such as twelve there has to be a decision maker when there is, let's say, the question of six minds thinking in one direction and six minds thinking in another.

That's just the reality.

The Church is a group of people called out by God the Father and under the jurisdiction and leadership of Jesus Christ, who is the savior of the Church and ultimately of humanity at large.

Our function in the Church is to be submissive to the guidance of Christ.

Christ has the responsibility, and if you please the problem, to get his ideas into the minds of those he is calling.

That's every one of us, and that's also those in the ministry or even for terms of other responsibility in the Church, in the Deaconship, men and women.

One of the ways that Christ has, and that which is fundamental to my topic here, is that we should gather together, and in gathering together every week or for that matter at other occasions as in a Bible study, we gather together to learn as a group.

What a Church service is is a learning experience that is not an academic learning experience.

It is a learning experience that involves spiritual and eternal matters, and it occurs on the day that God sent aside that we should rest from our other labors and ideas and focus on what is most important in life.

So we are together here as one group, as in every city or community throughout the world, where God's people are gathered together.

And we are here to learn.

Those who are not here, apart from the question of health, that is, those who have chosen not to have fellowship and be one, are simply not here to learn.

And this is as important as what you may be learning.

It is more important, in fact, because the unity of the Church is more important than any one teaching or doctrine.

Jesus prayed that the Church may be one.

Paul wrote that we should have as a goal that we come to the unity of understanding in the faith that represents what Christ wants the Church to be and to know.

The emphasis, therefore, is that we grow toward understanding as we abide in and remain loyally a part of the Church, and as we grow together toward the unity of the faith, because you know we all start from different backgrounds with different things we learn.

Some things we never learned, we must learn, other things we must unlearn.

But what is not in question is that we should be one working together under the leadership of Christ to fulfill the function of the Church, both to announce the message and to be trained for our responsibilities when Jesus Christ establishes the kingdom of God over the nations, which in itself is a training for further responsibilities after the thousand years when we deal with all the people who will be resurrected who have lived and died without truly understanding what we now are privileged to know.

Mr. Armstrong knew correctly, even if he didn't understand some things about Church government, that ultimately what holds the brethren together is that we have the love of God which leads to the fulfilling of his law, as distinct from sin that has afflicted the world.

Mr. Tkach recently pointed this up.

It should not be a question of do you believe this, do you believe that, or do you believe something else, and if you don't we have nothing to do with you.

Americans have a tendency, I don't say other people do not, but Americans have a tendency that represents perhaps one extreme.

You meet a stranger, and if you discover that you agree on the things you talk about, you can be friends.

But if you find that the stranger disagrees with you, most Americans simply discontinue any possibility of friendship.

Americans want to be friends with those with whom they can agree.

That is a trait of character.

Now there is a people in the world that is a kind of opposite, and I don't say they're the only ones, and then there are those in between.

They are the Greeks.

When the Greeks meet you, you're another Greek, let us say, and you agree, well, you're like friends that they have.

And if you disagree, then the two Greeks want to really be friends and discuss things.

Because to a Greek, an argument is very interesting and stimulating and important.

It does the opposite in American minds.

I'm saying this because this is one of the fundamental characteristics that's involved in the present matter being presented to the church.

Dr. Stavrinidis, who is Greek, presents it in terms of logic and argument, a discussion.

If you had a discussion with him for an hour and come to no conclusion, you might be like the Englishman who did and said, well, what have we accomplished? He was disillusioned that he came to no agreement.

Dr. Stavrinidis said it was a wonderful hour.

We were able to discuss every possibility.

And they're still both friends, but for the one, it was delightful.

Now this is an important thing to have us think about.

The church today has a responsibility to consider that whenever anything needs to be discussed and presented, we have a responsibility to be here and to examine the scriptures as those in Berea did when anything was presented.

This has been the teaching of the church for a long time.

Mr. Armstrong said, you know, not only to blow the dust off the Bibles you didn't use, he said, open your Bibles and look in it for yourself and see what it does say.

Don't assume, because he said on TV or on radio or wrote it in the magazine, that just because we said it, it was so.

He said, on the other hand, if you do discover that this is indeed a group of people or a broadcast or a publication that Christ is using to do a work, you do have a responsibility to pay attention and to give special heed and to most carefully examine what is being said.

Now when people come every Sabbath, they are able to hear what Christ is bringing to the attention of the church, whether the ministry clearly understands what Christ is seeking to do or not.

That's beside the point.

The point is that when you are here, you're in a position to listen.

If you decide this is not where you want to be, then you're not going to be here.

And you won't be in a position to listen, and you will have severed your relationship.

Therefore you see in the long run, it is especially important that we recognize in a time when there are individuals who, for varied reasons that may not be discussed here, have decided to walk away from their responsibility that they may have had in the church.

If a person or a minister concludes that Mr. Tkach doesn't understand something that the church had previously understood, he has a different perspective, and Mr. Tkach is apparently not going to change his mind on something, there are those few who have decided that therefore they should leave.

Because as one said in a publication, it became apparent that Christ was not going to change certain things in the church because the person responsible, or Mr. Tkach in this case in particular, doesn't understand it.

And if Christ is not going to change it, and if something that this person thought be an error is going to remain in the teaching of the church, then he decided that he would now have to leave the church and do what Christ was unable or unwilling to do in the church.

Now the logic of this, no, logic isn't the word, is it? The illogic is that anyone who thinks this way has to assume that the one whom Christ leads always has to be right, but what do you do when Mr. Armstrong examined Mr. Armstrong and found he was wrong on this point or that? Well, what does a husband do when he finds that a decision he made last year was not the best decision, he should make another one? Just because a man makes the wrong decision or a children's mother, if she's having to be responsible directly for the home, makes the wrong decision, you don't break up the family.

You work out in accordance with the family responsibility as we work things out spiritually in accordance with the church.

Now when we do, then we discover exactly what Paul is saying when he said, we are to grow toward the unity of the faith till we come to that state.

We can argue in the delightful Greek sense over Greek food, there are some people who argue and it comes to blows.

I don't know whether it's the Greek food that makes Greek arguments easier to take, but you get a sense that different people approach things quite differently.

And of course this has to do with personalities.

There was a man who was a former editor of the Plain Truth, now no longer with the work.

I don't think I agreed with him on anything I discussed for years.

Now that doesn't mean we didn't have areas of agreement.

But the most remarkable thing was we found our discussion was always pleasant, he was ultimately a British background.

We could agree to disagree and there was no problem whatsoever.

Yet I know of another person who was no longer with us, with whom I knew that I should not even enter into a discussion, because there would be no possibility of even tolerating the discussion further than knowing that we would not agree.

That is, there are personality differences and you will find that to be the case.

You can't discuss everything with everybody.

So we learned that there are some people who can take discussions much more widely than others.

The Jews are constantly discussing, you know the old proverb, two Jews, three opinions.

I was at Sinai with the former governor general who ruled the Sinai in the 1956 war with Egypt when the British and the French were involved, you remember, over the Suez Canal.

And we were visiting when the governor general after 1967 was there.

This was in 1971.

The first thing I learned, you had two governor generals and they both disagreed on where Mount Sinai was, even as they were at the foot of it.

Well, it illustrates a point.

Now they got along all right, it was a delightful discussion.

I think one of them was correct.

The former governor general major wrote him, in any case, we recognize the reality of things that no husband and wife make or come to decisions and views if there is any open discussion with which they will always concur.

Now there are some who just go along with either one or the other mate, that depends on the situation, but we're now talking about people who really don't exercise responsibility.

It is important to realize that, and I take the family as an illustration because sometimes we fail to realize that Christ is the head of the husband as Christ is the head of the church.

And don't assume that because he's the head of the church, the church is always perfect or reverse if he's the head of a family, that the family is always imperfect, that Christ can do one thing right and not the other.

The answer is we should grow to become like him till we all come to the same stature.

Stature not in terms of how many feet or inches tall you are, but stature in terms of responsibility.

There are people who do have stature before others.

No one can doubt that President Lincoln has had in his day and most certainly has achieved historically world stature, probably the most important single president we ever had.

There will be differences of opinion on that.

But if you were to read, for instance, his second inaugural address to the Congress in 1865, when Congress was being addressed, the election was 60 and then 64, so the inauguration was 65, you will find a distressingly tragic situation in the nation yet, but it was nearly over, was being addressed by a

mind that probably was closer to the mind of Christ and the mind of the Church of God than any other president has ever expressed.

President Lincoln was not a member of a church, the only president who was not a member of a religious denomination, and he was looking for it.

In fact, the Church came to become what it was in his day, but it was so small.

The Church was in fact, when he grew up, not really viable except for individual people.

It didn't become viable until 1862 to 63, and in the midst of war, their voice was hardly heard.

And that's why he never did find the Church in his day.

But leadership ultimately for men and women is a question of stature and character.

We have remarkable men and women in the world.

We have remarkable men and women in the world of the Bible.

The goal in any family should be to seek that relationship which leads to harmony and to the goals and success for which, if the right goals, the family is established.

That's true even in life itself.