

Servants' NEWS

Vol. 8, No. 1 A newsletter for servants of the Almighty Eternal Creator, wherever they may be Jan/Feb 2002

Feast 2002 in Hastings, Michigan: Preparation for Righteous Rulership

by Norman Edwards

The Feast of Tabernacles is a vital time to learn important lessons about the way God deals with man. The Scriptures give a lot of important points to the meaning of this Feast that we should keep in mind:

You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always (Deut 14:22-23).

Notice that the stated purposes of the Feast of Tabernacles are to “eat before the Lord your God” and to “learn to fear the Lord your God always”. We will see a lot more about that in scriptures that will follow. But we might ask the question, “When does one learn to trust God more, when one has little and needs God or when one has lots of money to spend?” The Bible mentions the term “tithe” (10%) many times, giving several different uses for it—but never mentions the terms “first tithe, second tithe or third tithe”. It is the understanding of this writer that the Israelites were not commanded to consume an entire 10% of their increase of animals and crops during the Feast

days—as they would have to gorge themselves—but that they were to use their tithe for a variety of purposes. They certainly were to plan to have enough to enjoy the feast and to take care of any others who might not be so fortunate.

“But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able

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Dominating Faith

Underestimating the work God wrought in Christ is a sin of ignorance.

Most of us are guilty of it. For some, Paul’s teaching has never become a part of our spiritual education. Some may touch on it, but for the most part very few actually grasp the meat of what God has revealed through Paul’s experience and teachings. For this reason we underestimate the work He did for us in the “New Creation”.

We also underestimate what He can do through us today, in our mortal flesh.

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Why More on Hierarchical Leader Letter?

We received a number of letters, calls and e-mails about our Hierarchical Leader Letter articles of the past two issues. Some were asking us why we were wasting time on an issue where many people have already made up their minds. Most thanked us for continuing to try to bring understanding to what they consider to be a major problem among the Church of God groups.

In some ways, this issue can be likened to a family argument. Sometimes, one will say, “Why do you keep bringing up our problems, we should be doing positive things, rather than talking about our problems all the time.” And indeed, imagined problems will go away if everyone stops bringing them up. But real problems need to be discussed and solved, otherwise they will continually surface and cause trouble. It is a **real problem** when most CoG groups claim to be the “main” one that God is using, refusing to work with each other, yet have similar teachings. This problem often surfaces whenever a new believer attends or a member wants to go to a service or Feast with a friend who is in another group.

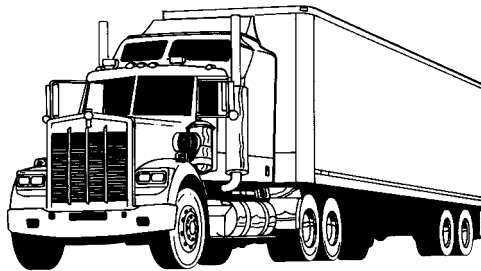
This issue is largely dedicated to this subject and will hopefully conclude it. I learned from the writing, and I hope that you will learn from it, too. — NSE

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Truckers Bible Study

Oak Grove, Mo.
#91-95



The Trucker's Bible Study is conducted weekly at the Texaco truck stop on I-70, Oak Grove, Missouri, by Arlo Gieselman, often assisted by Lenny Cacchio, the writer of this series

December 9, 2001

Lessons were reinforced today.

I began with one guest today and ultimately ended up with five. The first man was troubled. He not only had drifted away from his faith, he was also shaken by 9/11. My job would have been to encourage him, but that would not have been enough in this case.

We were joined shortly after by another gentleman, who was going to get in his truck, hit the road, and try to find a "real" church along the way. But it came into his mind to join us instead. He was the perfect man for God to send to us. He was well-versed and well-grounded, but also understood exactly where the first guest was coming from and had the wisdom on how to deal with it. He was also of the same race and could deal with the tougher issues in a way that a white man such as myself could not have. These would be issues such as: "Why did you quit your job?" "People should work instead of expect hand-outs." "Do you have family?" "Have you called them to help?"

All this being done from a sound biblical perspective, with evident compassion, but with conviction that God expects us to take responsibility. It would not have been as effective coming from me.

Lesson #1: God provides the help of the right people at the right time.

Lesson #2: Give people meat in due season. James talked about the person who says "be warm and filled", but who does not provide what is needful for the soul. I could have covered my planned study today, or insisted on talking about whether there are two or three resurrections, or which day is the Sabbath, but if we had not worked from the perspective of providing sound counsel and comfort from the word, we would have failed miserably.

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Servants' NEWS

Vol. 8, No. 1

Jan/Feb 2002

The purpose of Church Bible Teaching Ministry is to continue the work of the Church that was started by Jesus Christ (Yeshua the Messiah) and His Apostles in the first century. This work involves expounding the truth of the Bible by means of preaching, teaching, writing and music as well as taking positive action to help and serve other believers and all people of the world. CBTM and those people who work within it are just a few of many parts of the Church, which is the body of Christ. *Servants' News* is a publication of CBTM.

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Editor: Norman S. Edwards

Production Editor & Website Design: David King

Servants' News Staff: Bill Buckman, Marleen Edwards, Missi Lara, David Meidinger, Jon D. Pike, Christine Yoos

Website Hosting: Gary Lesperance, garyl@mcsauto.com

Contributors: Many! Thanks to everyone!

Notice: *The people listed above do not necessarily endorse every item in this newsletter.*

New articles and corrections to previous articles will be considered for printing. We do not return writings sent to us, so please make copies of anything you need to keep. Send to:

Servants' News

P.O. Box 107, Perry, Michigan 48872-0107

Phone: 517-625-7480 Fax: 517-625-7481

E-Mail: Info@ServantsNews.com

Internet: www.ServantsNews.com

Magazine and literature requests may be sent to the following addresses. Money received at these locations will be used for duplicating and mailing. Please make checks out to the name shown with the address:

Australia: Dale Heslin, 9 Alice Jackson Crescent, Gilmore, ACT 2905. e-mail: dale@pcug.org.au

Canada: Cherie Zimmerman, 268 Pennswood Way SE, Calgary, AB T2A 4T3. e-mail: usczim2@aol.com

Philippines: Cesar Lumbuan, 2298 Florida St. Balagtas, Pandacan, Manila. e-mail: maxzen@skyinet.net

U.K.: Jenny Whiteman, 2 Warren Road, Narborough, Leicester, LE9 5DR.
e-mail: 100623.734@compuserve.com

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Most Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version

Circulation mailed from the USA: **1792**;
Internationally reprinted: **113**; e-mail: **203**

Servants' News is published bimonthly (six times per year). Issues are regularly sent free to people who request the publication and are genuinely interested in it. *Servants' News* is published by Church Bible Teaching Ministry (3690 Bath Rd, Perry, Michigan—this is not a mailing address). CBTM reserves the right to refuse service to anyone for any reason. Periodical postage paid at Perry, Michigan (USPS 016-995, ISSN 1522-0621). Postmaster: send address changes to *Servants' News*, PO Box 107, Perry, Michigan 48872-0107.

Still More Answers to Hierarchical Leader Letter

Eric Snow, a member of United Church of God, *an International Association*

Mr. Snow has been a member of the UCG-IA since 1995. He is a frequent and prolific writer. Some of his papers are distributed by Church Bible Teaching Ministry. However, he disagrees with many of our writings on church government. — NSE

LETTER:

Eric V. Snow
snoweric913@cs.com
31120 Wildwood Apt 5103
Wixom, MI 48393-2624

January 5, 2002

Dear Norm,

I've decided to take up your challenge to readers for answers to your letter to leaders "in a Hierarchical Church Organization" in the "May/June 2001" issue.

Although I'm a laymember (yes, I accept the evil "Nicolaitan" clergy/laity distinction!) of the UCG-IA, I can't be considered any kind of official "spokesperson" for it. Nevertheless, here's how I would reply if I were a high-ranking minister who received it, although I'm only speaking for myself below:

Let's begin by answering the third question first about whether God intended to end the evangelistic work begun by Herbert W. Armstrong. The Church of God has been commanded by God to preach the Gospel to the world as per the Great Commission of Matt. 28:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Likewise, the church has a commission to issue a warning (cf. the principle of the watchman in Ezk. 33:2-9) as a witness to the world before the end comes, as per Matt. 24:14: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations and then the end shall come." This text shows that money spent on public media evangelism (print, radio, TV) isn't to be judged as a pure "waste" if none or few choose to convert as a result since the job of the church when evangelizing isn't only to get new members.

RESPONSE: I agree with you here. Even

Servants' News, PO Box 107, Perry, Michigan, 48872-0107, USA
April 25, 2000

Dear Leader in a Hierarchical Church Organization,

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I am sending this letter to Church of God leaders who are attempting to continue the work of Herbert Armstrong. If you have answers to the following questions, I will gladly publish your entire response in *Servants' News* (up to 3,000 words)—even if you send a previously written article that answers these questions. After Pentecost, I intend to publish lists of groups that *did* and *did not* respond to this letter—both in *Servants' News* and in *The Journal*.

1. Do not the members in your own church organization prove that the Eternal does not always govern from the top down? For the past 20 years of his life, Herbert Armstrong taught that any problems "at the top" of the church government would be cleaned up by God Himself. Yet, Herbert Armstrong appointed Joseph Tkach, who appointed his son, who reversed much of the truth that Herbert Armstrong taught. Herbert Armstrong's appointees never told former WCG ministers or members which was the "right group" to join. No group has any "signs" that make it obviously "the one": no miracles like the early apostles, no annual new-convert growth over 10%, no media outreach anything like the WCG. Your group may claim to be the only *one* following Herbert Armstrong correctly, but it was your ministers and members who were able to think for themselves, study the Scriptures and *decide to join*. They were not commanded from the "top down", but they disobeyed the man appointed by Herbert Armstrong.

2. There are members who left the WCG, joined another WCG split-off group, then joined your group. Are not these members proof that these other split-off groups are part of the Church of God and therefore brethren? Does your group automatically rebaptize or discipline former WCG members who attended another split-off group before joining yours? Or do you welcome them with open arms? I think it is wonderful to welcome them. But if you consider people in other groups as *brethren*, then why don't you encourage your members to fellowship with *these brethren*, share joint activities and services, etc.? Why do you continue the sectarianism that Paul spoke against? (1Cor 1:10-17; 3:1-10.) How do you explain this to the new converts that come to your group? If your group is truly and obviously doing the most significant work of God now, would not the intermixing of brethren cause more of them to see your group and begin to attend it? Or are you afraid that your members will continue to check your teaching against Scripture as they did when they left the WCG—and might see problems with your group?

3. Is it possible that Christ intended to end Herbert Armstrong's work? Nearly every group that tries to continue his work is splitting and shrinking. HWA has been dead for 14 years—almost no teenagers remember seeing him alive; the world leaders he visited are out of office. In another 14 years, most former-WCG ministers will be retired or deceased, and most of the adults who heard HWA prophesy "these things will happen in your lifetime" during the 40's, 50's and 60's will be deceased.

Eternal judgment is one of the six basic doctrines (Heb 6:1-2). Paul told believers: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2Cor 5:10). He also said: "For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged" (1Cor 11:31). I am not your judge; you do not have to answer these questions to me. **But if you cannot answer these questions to your own members and the members of other groups, how will you answer Christ?** It is easy for a person to think he is right when he is surrounded by people who agree with him. I know; I worked for the WCG for 18 years. It is much more difficult when one must answer questions from others who disagree. The New Testament shows Christ and His Apostles spent much time answering difficult questions from Pharisees, heretics and sometimes brethren. What will you do?

Sincerely,

Norman S. Edwards

the preaching of Christ produced relatively few followers in His lifetime, but His words were repeated by the apostles and later written in the Bible and have warned a great many people for centuries. However, we must ask the question about our own radio, TV and print media: "Is anyone listening now or will it be preserved in any way for future generations?" Teaching that does not bring about conversions may still have value, but teaching which is being ignored does not. By the way, I feel that the UCG-IA's *Good News* magazine is very helpful to believers of varying backgrounds, but magazines are useful only as long as they are produced—even libraries cease keeping magazines when they are no longer published.

LETTER: The death of Herbert W. Armstrong in January of 1986 did not rip out of the Bible these texts. True Christians today, which at least include those who learned as a package doctrines that had been neglected for nearly two millennia through Mr. Armstrong and the men he taught, still have a duty to preach the Gospel to the world. Hence, I would not say so much that we're continuing the "work of Herbert Armstrong" as simply continuing to obey God's commission to preach the Gospel to the world of which the efforts of Herbert W. Armstrong were the greatest by a non-Trinitarian Sabbatarian since the first-century A.D. We honor him as the one whom God used to restore foundational truths of Scripture that the world's Christianity rejected, neglected, or didn't have altogether in one denomination as a package. Christians should not believe, as a number in the Church of God today believe (such as Robert Elliott of God's Church Worldwide), that the evangelistic work of God was completed by Mr. Armstrong, so it's only our duty just to prepare the bride of Christ (i.e., spiritually improve ourselves as Christians) until Jesus returns. Again, the two texts from Matthew cited above were not deleted from the Bible the day Herbert W. Armstrong died. (His opinion, stated just before he died, that he had completed the evangelistic work of God in this age, and that his successor was (mainly) to prepare the church for Christ's return, was mistaken). It's our duty to preach the Gospel, even if people don't believe (re: the first class found in the Parable of the Sower), so fewer people

can claim at the beginning of the millennium, "I couldn't have known better!" It may be true that the Two Witnesses will do more evangelism in a few years than the church has done in the prior approximately two millennia combined, but it's our duty to aim to do what we can in the time that's left.

RESPONSE: The Scriptures show that we should be doing Christ's work when he returns. However, I feel it is a mistake for any present day work to openly tie themselves to the work of Herbert Armstrong. He had enough failed prophetic interpretations, false claims, false doctrines, and lack of practicing what he preached, so that anyone who tries to find background information on him in libraries or on the Internet will come up with too many serious questions for which there are not good answers. The days when an organization can control what information is disseminated about itself are over. While Herbert Armstrong taught a lot of truth, many other groups have taught similar truth, sometimes without some of his errors.

LETTER: A key spiritual advantage of making preaching the Gospel one of the two major focuses of the church operationally (the other being personal spiritual preparation, "preparing the Bride of Christ," etc.) is its outward focus. By now we Sabbatarians in the tradition of the old Worldwide Church of God of Herbert W. Armstrong have spent some seven years since clear revelation of the great apostasy of 1994–95 thrashing out internal issues among ourselves. As the pages of *Servants' News* and *The Journal* for years have shown, we make each other the main enemy it appears, not the world or Satan. How much more time do we need to spend obsessively bashing others over matters such as church government and the Jewish calendar? Can it be balanced for (say) Dave Havir to have published in every issue of the *Journal* for months on end a column that each time denounces some aspect of hierarchical church government? It would nearly seem, from the amount of time and print space independents in the COG spend on these issues, that 1Cor. 13:13 must read, "Now abide church government, faith, hope, love, these four, but the greatest of these is church government." How much longer

are we going to rehearse the emotional wounds we received in the WCG or some other corporate COG? It's time to get over it, and move on! Isn't seven years, a tenth of a standard human lifetime, enough already? If the independents spent as much time and zeal in (say) attacking evolution or decaying family life as they do corporate church government, a mighty work might result!

RESPONSE: I realize that the major corporate churches would like to stop talking about government and hope that the issue would go away—and that everyone would join their group. But the very point of the letter you answered is that the issue will not go away by trying to ignore it. As long as believers in corporate churches are being persecuted for attending the Feast with their friends or relatives in a different group, the issue will not go away. As long as there are new believers coming to one CoG group, only to be shocked that they have no dealings with other CoG groups in the same town, the issue will not go away.

There will be a need for non-aligned believers to teach these new people that they can worship and serve God without hierarchies in a variety of congregations. A person who regularly attends an independent fellowship is free to visit other groups as much as he likes. A person who regularly attends a corporate group will often have trouble if they try to visit another group.

LETTER: At least when Gerald Flurry of the PCG overemphasizes prophecy, he has two good arguments for his position intrinsically: 1. Some 28% or so of Scripture is prophecy, so a priority giving one sermon a month on prophecy would not be unbalanced. 2. Since we believe we're in the time of the end and the final generation before Christ returns, which developments on the world's scene (especially in the EU) in recent decades would indicate is a solidly based belief, we're the ones who need to know prophecy more than any other prior generation. We're the ones who need to be the experts on (say) Daniel and Revelation since we're likely going to live through more fulfillments of prophetically predicted events than any prior generation of Christians. By contrast, does the percentage of verses that EXPLICITLY deal with church government matters reach 1%?

RESPONSE: I take great exception to Mr. Flurry's arguments. While we are commanded to study and live by "every word of God" and while Bible prophecy is certainly true, there are numerous Scriptures that tell us what we will be responsible for when we are judged, and virtually nothing is said about understanding prophetic interpretation. (Ask for our paper, *What Does the Bible Say About Eternal Judgment?*) Indeed the Bible says: "...whether there are prophecies, they will fail..." (1Cor 13:8). There is simply no Bible command or example to try to assemble most prophecies into a prophetic framework and preach it to the world. Yet this has been done by religious groups for hundreds of years, with the primary result being the building and later break-up of religious groups.

The New Testament example of prophetic use is to seek inspiration of God to understand what prophecies apply to our situation, now (notice the Joel 2:28–32 quote in Acts 2:17–21). Paul said, "Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues" (1Cor 14:39). If 28% of the Bible is prophecy, but if only 2% of the Bible is prophecy that applies to us today, then should we have only one message per year on it? We must realize that many prophecies are addressed to specific nations, not our own, though most are addressed to Israel. For decades, the WCG claimed that most prophecy was "to be fulfilled in your lifetime". But a great many people who heard that message are now dead—and that message proved false. Should we link ourselves to that false message? Should we repeat it without direct revelation from God? If the PCG or the UCG-IA "is sure" that we are in the "last days", to whom has God revealed it and how? Or is this just another guess based upon current events and uncertain prophetic interpretation?

LETTER: During the English Civil war and the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell (1642–60), the various Protestant groups involved (Anglican, Presbyterian, Separatist / Congregationalist, etc.) argued nearly endlessly over matters of church government and administration. Indeed, nothing is new under the sun! How much more time are we going to row the boat with only one oar (i.e., in circles)? How many more times do

the same arguments need to be reiterated? It's time to deal with the world instead, as the likes of Gerald Flurry determined some months ago (see the dramatic difference in the *Trumpet* now compared to four years ago!).

RESPONSE: Eric, I am surprised at you. I think you know your history well enough to know that the 1500s and 1600s were the ages in history when Papal control of the Church and the Bible, as well as monarchical control of the state were largely defeated. Those arguments you mention were an important part of the foundation of freedom of religion that we have today. If you think the world would be better off without them, please go join the Catholic Church, or the State Church of some other country. Those arguments were also influential in producing the republican form of government of the United States of America—which produced the most prosperous nation ever. I have always wondered why none of the Church of God groups ever suggested moving their headquarters to Cuba or some other country with a dictatorship so they can be under what they teach is the "biblical form of government".

LETTER: Now, let's take up specifically the other two questions your letter raised: #1. The unique circumstances of the apostasy of 1994–95 made null and void the spiritual authority of Joseph Tkach Sr. and any others who followed his slide into Evangelical Protestantism. God has placed human authority in the church (Heb. 13:7, 17; Titus 2:15; 1Tim. 2:12; 5:17), but it isn't allowed to cancel out the clear commands of Scripture when they conflict (cf. the principle of Acts 5:29; 4:19). Just as the existence of abusive husbands doesn't invalidate the spiritual principle of Eph.5:22 about wives obeying their husbands, the existence of abusive ministers doesn't prove that no ministers at any time have any authority over others in whatever church organization they have joined of their own free will. (Likewise, since Romans 13:1–7 shows the gentiles who lord it over us are to be obeyed even when many of the laws in question are (arguably) stupid, Matt. 20:25–28 doesn't condemn hierarchy per se, but merely an **abusive** hierarchy). It's correct to observe that the "bottom" (i.e., laymembers) or even the "middle" (i.e.,

field ministers) may be more right than the "top" on some doctrinal point(s), but that doesn't prove the last have never had any authority at any time. It's an invalid argument to reason that because God sometimes doesn't govern from the top down, therefore, he never does, which is (presumably) the independents' position. Otherwise, they're faced with the problem: If God does sometimes ("not always") govern from the top, when are the times they (the independents) should obey it? "Sometimes" isn't the same as "never" or "always"!

RESPONSE: I think most independent believers would say the basis for our decisions is John 16:13: "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth..." There are numerous commands to brethren in the New Testament to evaluate leaders and follow the good ones and shun the bad ones (Rom 16:17–18; 2Cor 11:13–15; Gal 1:6–8; 2Thes 3:6, 14; 1Jn 2:21–22; 4:1–3; 2Jn 1:10–11; Rev 2:2, 14–15, 20). All believers should be responsible for cooperating with those leaders who appear to be bearing Godly fruit—and for opposing false leaders and teaching. It appears that you agree with that principle in that you believe brethren had the right to leave the WCG hierarchy, and ask God to show them which other hierarchy they should join (UCG-IA, LCG, etc.).

LETTER: #2. As shown by merger discussions (call them what they really were) that eventually bore fruit with the Remnant Church of God in Ghana and the COG, a Christian Fellowship, the UCG-IA itself happily allows people from other COG groups to become members, even ministers as per the credentialing process. The former group involved people who had never been members of the old WCG, and they weren't required to be rebaptized, etc. We freely acknowledge that true Christians attend other corporate and non-corporate organizations.

But certain problems can come up with indiscriminate intermixing between different COG groups that aren't acknowledged here, hence some caution is in order. Those who bounce around from one group to another can have divisive doctrinal or personal agendas. I know of one congregation in a corporate organization (the idea didn't originate from the pastor in

official charge) that had members who asked for a particular independent not to come anymore because his attitude was so often so negative and critical. If a person attends a group, and then spends much of his or her time before and after services bashing its form of church government and what various leaders or members in it are doing or have done, they have a misplaced emphasis that can spread divisiveness. If people come in peace, they're welcome as per our open door policy, but not if they've come to merely complain and criticize, they can be asked to leave and not come back until their attitude improves: "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them" (Rom. 16:17; cf. 1Tim. 6:3-5, 1:3-7).

RESPONSE: I agree with the approach of asking people not to come who are always stirring up difficulty. In corporate groups, visitors only talk to others before or after services; but in groups that follow 1 Corinthians 14:26, visitors often have opportunity to address the whole congregation, so the problem can be worse. Some independent groups have had people show up who want to teach Sunday-keeping every week. They have had to use Matthew 18:15-17 and Titus 3:10 to make clear to them that their repeat discussion of this idea will not be accepted. On the other hand, if an independent person attending a corporate church is not permitted to talk about church government even when asked, then I think it is a problem. It has been my experience that the problems independents create for corporate groups are **not** continual badgering and disruption, but bringing up ideas and questions, even just once, that local pastors cannot answer.

Does any corporate church have a booklet showing how their practice of "ordaining" deacons and elders can be clearly found in the original Greek Scriptures and how it has nothing to do with unbiblical Catholic and Protestant practices? If such a booklet could be written, it would largely end these controversies. But for all the "trouble" that independents have supposedly caused the corporate groups, I still have a very difficult time even getting them to write about the issue, much less openly debate

it. (For an in depth study, as for *How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans?* see contact information on page 2.)

LETTER: The problem often isn't doctrine, although it can be, but the attitude with which it's expressed, whether it be in conversations or on sermon tapes. Furthermore, there can be certain doctrinal issues at times that have potential legal ramifications: It isn't a good policy for the UCG-IA to allow Ron Dart to speak to its congregations if the U.S. government, down the road, reinstates the draft, and says to the UCG-IA: "Since your organization has allowed minister(s) to speak in it who don't object to Christians waging war, young men in your congregations who have been called up for service are going have more trouble receiving conscientious objector status."

RESPONSE: I am sure that you do not have an example of a legal case where any such decision was ever made. I applied for and received conscientious objector status in the 1970s and the Service's criteria was whether or not an **individual's** beliefs were "deeply held". I had to explain my beliefs myself—a letter from my church was not enough. Unfortunately, this is one area where the average educated American may be more prepared to rule with Christ than the average Church of God member. Civic, religious and educational institutions frequently invite speakers who will express points of view with which they do not agree, just so their members can be educated and understand other views. Church of God groups typically tell their members what is right, and also tell their members what the "wrong guys" teach. The CoG groups seem to place little value on letting their people hear both sides of an issue and then judge what is right. I continually meet people who say something like, "But my ministry told me that you teach... (some doctrine that I have never taught)". Often, that minister has never read what I wrote, but heard it from another minister. All of this misrepresentation does not please God. To restate the point, allowing a speaker with differing doctrines will have no affect on someone's application for conscientious objection to military service.

LETTER: To outsiders, unacquainted

with our (often) petty feuds, we are going to look pretty much alike (cf. Acts 18:13-15; 25:18-20), so it isn't wise to always get lumped together.

RESPONSE: These and other scriptures show the opposite point: Paul spoke to all kinds of groups, was sometimes "lumped in" with others, but never let it get in the way of his speaking. We are "lumped together" because of our common names and common history. Whether or not we welcomed other speakers would make little difference. If a methodist and congregationalist minister "trade pulpits" occasionally (as some do), nobody assumes that the groups have merged.

LETTER: I agree that the COG divisions caused by the ministry's own divisiveness in various organizations that have caused friends and family to be divided (Meredith vs. Salyer, Hulme vs. the rest of the COE, GTA vs. other ministers in the CGI, etc.) are bad.

RESPONSE: While I think there was a certain amount of self-seeking in all these cases, some of them involved men who were honestly trying to remove leaders who were exceeding the authority granted them, or who were behaving in manners unfit for the ministry. The Bible teaches us to take care of these kinds of problems. Refusing to work with "believers" who are openly sinful is biblical; refusing to work with them because "they are not part of our group" is not biblical.

LETTER: But divisiveness also can come from the bottom up, from spiritual fingers who jump from congregation to congregation constantly criticizing what's happening in that organization or what had happened to them in the past. People who have constantly bad attitudes who can't keep them to themselves shouldn't be free to just come and go as they please. Trying to prevent such problems may cause divisiveness in turn, especially if certain people get unfairly tagged, etc., but doing nothing (i.e. having no controls) can lead to divisiveness as well.

RESPONSE: Even the New Testament records "fingers" who caused trouble and did not help that much. We have them today in both corporate and inde-

pendent churches. In corporate groups the minister gives the “shape up or ship out orders”, in independent groups, all of the mature believers see it as their “responsibility”. Several times, I have witnessed someone teach an unbiblical idea in an independent service, and then watched half a dozen people stand up one at a time to lovingly, but firmly refute it from the Scriptures.

LETTER: Here some kind of balance between the two extremes is necessary. Our tendency as humans is to swing from one extreme to the other, like a pendulum, just as independents want to reject all hierarchy in church organizations because of the one-man rule dictatorship they experienced in the WCG, when a merely tamed, reformed, flattened (no ranks such as apostles, evangelists, etc.) hierarchy will solve most of the problems, such as exists in the UCG-IA presently.

RESPONSE: Eric, I agree with you on the one ditch to the other ditch concept. Many independent congregations do not even want to appoint their own elders or “servants” (ministers/deacons) as the Scriptures instruct. Many do not even want to look to see if they have any kind of spiritual gift of leadership among their members. I also agree that the UCG-IA is an improvement over the WCG. The UCG-IA ministry elect their own council which elects their corporate officers. This is a bottom-up biblical approach. However, their local congregations have no choice in who becomes their local ministers or elders—they must accept whoever their headquarters sends them. How can they apply 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 if they are sent someone whom they do not even know? I agree that a balance needs to be achieved in governance, and neither the UCG-IA nor most independent congregations are there yet.

LETTER: Now consider: If a person spends most of his or her time condemning and criticizing others, whether they be the local or other ministers, various corporate church organizations, administrative procedures of corporate church organizations, Herbert W. Armstrong, Garner Ted Armstrong, Ambassador College, the old WCG, tithing as exploitive, etc., is that the spiritual emphasis Christ would want us to have? (See Matt. 7:1–5; Phil. 4:8 if anyone has doubts).

RESPONSE: Most of the writings of the letters of the New Testament are the pointing out of error and a pleading to change. Since I was at one time involved in promoting some of the errors of the WCG, I feel an obligation to confess that error and help undo the effects of it. But I think I have avoided saying that people who disagreed with me are not converted or are going into the lake of fire. Whereas the GCG told others (not me directly) that I could lose my salvation for leaving them.

LETTER: Now Isn't it judgmental to say “Today, many Christians are afraid to place their church congregation directly under Christ and trust His protection, even when there is no immediate persecution for doing so. They prefer a state-granted incorporation because the state promises them liability protection and other benefits” (SN, May/June 2001, p. 7)? How does this differ in form from the old WCG teaching that going to doctors shows a lack of faith? (Alluded to on p. 21, the same issue).

RESPONSE: Yes, my statement is judgmental in that most Christians today probably have never studied into this subject or given it much thought. They have not knowingly traded God's protection for the state's protection, but have simply thought that incorporation was the only way to organize a church group. That was my view 10 years ago. I also do not like it when people treat me like I do not trust God when the problem is that I have never studied the issue for which they are criticizing me. **Your correction is well-taken, Eric.**

However, I believe “going to doctors” and “incorporating a church” are greatly different issues for two reasons. First, trusting God and going to doctors are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to do everything in James 5:14–16, call the elders, be anointed, be “prayed over” and confess sins, and still use a doctor—as long as doctors are viewed as skilled human beings who **might** be able to figure out what is causing our problem and help fix it. We should always evaluate a doctor's proposed treatment and attempt to determine if it has been successful for others. If a treatment is not helping us, we should not be afraid to disagree with the doctor and stop it. Going to doctors only becomes a sin when one does not

also look to God, but just says, “here I am, doc, do whatever you think best to fix me up.” Incorporating a church, on the other hand, is a long-term deliberate agreement to submit the assets and officers of the church **to the state**—even if the state's rules conflict with the Bible. The standard incorporation papers for a tax exempt church promise to obey all IRS regulations, both present and future, which already restrict the church from teaching on some subjects—and the list seems to be growing.

Secondly, choosing a doctor primarily affects families and is a *family issue*, whereas church incorporation is a *church leadership issue*. The WCG's instruction for members not to go to doctors was particularly hypocritical because some WCG leaders were going to doctors themselves while teaching it! Even if the Bible said: “only the weak go to doctors”, church leaders *should have* taught the brethren what the Bible says, and then let them learn from their experience by letting them make decisions that primarily affect themselves. By comparison, choosing whether or not to incorporate is a decision largely made by church leadership and that primarily affects church leadership. Anyone who signs the papers forming a corporation should at least read what they are agreeing to. Paul chastises the Corinthian church members for going to court one against another. Can anyone imagine Paul telling believers to go to the Romans, the Pharisees, “the lawyers” or some other governing entity to organize their congregation? Even though almost no churches were incorporated in the USA 100 years ago, we are now quite used to this form of state control.

LETTER: Now If people don't agree with the SN's legal advice on not incorporating churches, especially when no lawyers are writing for it, are they automatically spiritually benighted Laodiceans?

RESPONSE: We do not give “legal advice”. Page 2 of every issue says: “This publication is produced as a right of freedoms of religion, speech, and the press as protected by the first amendment. It is not legal or professional advice or recommendations.” *Servants' News* provides information which we hope people will use along with their own research of other sources so they

can make their own decision. Whereas in most legal situations it is considered legally sufficient for an individual to *rely* on the *advice* of a single attorney.

Most Americans are unaware of the trouble caused by the monopoly called the American Bar Association. While it certainly does some good work in setting needed standards and disciplining obviously bad attorneys, it is a one-party system and sometimes sets standards for its own benefit—not for the American people. Attorneys who dissent are often disbarred, then they are not attorneys any more. In my research, I could not find any attorneys who would help a church group organize as a “church”, the way it was historically done in the USA. They favor corporate organization. (And by the way, corporations must, by law, be represented by licensed attorneys.)

Church groups that incorporate are not automatically Laodiceans, but the apostle Paul sounded a little excited when he said: “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?” (1Cor 6:1). So today we might say, “Dare any of you, planning to rule with Christ when He returns, go to the state to rule your church group?”

LETTER: Or, are there legal drawbacks or trade-offs to free, non-incorporated churches that have to be admitted, as they are at least in part in “Starting a Local Congregation”? There can be legal, not just merely medical, quackery, although it appears that free churches have a better track record (so far as the SN reveals) than (say) iridology, naturopathy, etc. A second opinion is called for, I’d say. Do research on your own, independent of the obvious “pro-free church” sources. At least, it’s time for some tolerance of differences of opinion on this matter among Christians and others of goodwill.

RESPONSE: Let me encourage everyone to get the facts wherever they can. But since there are hundreds of thousands of attorneys who will recommend incorporation of churches, it seems like there is a much greater need to study and distribute information about free churches. But, yes, I think all of us need more goodwill—so I will try to have some.

LETTER: So in conclusion: 1) Since the New Testament commands hierarchy

in many fundamentals in society at large....

RESPONSE: Hierarchy means an ascending series of ranks where each person is thoroughly under the control of their superior. The following verses do not say “hierarchy”, but point out positions of limited leadership where God wants us to cooperate within His law (Acts 5:29).

LETTER: ...such as between citizens and their government (Titus 3:1; 1Pet 2:13–15)...

RESPONSE: In the USA, the highest authority is “We The People” (*The Constitution*).

LETTER: ...children and their parents (Eph 6:1; Col. 3:20)...

RESPONSE: This is a temporary relationship that ends when the child is mature (Gen 2:24). Similarly, some “church authority” ends when a believer matures.

LETTER: ...slaves and their masters (Col 3:22–23; Eph 6:5–6; 1Pet 2:18–19)...

RESPONSE: If a slave’s treatment was so bad that he ran away, God told people not to make him go back to his master (Deut 23:15–16).

LETTER: ...wives and their husbands (Col 3:18; 1Pet 3:1, 5–6)...

RESPONSE: If a wife is offended by her husband, she goes to him, with witnesses and the church, and if the church agrees with her, she may regard him as a heathen (Matt 18:15–17). If he leaves her, she is no longer under bondage to him (1Cor 7:15).

LETTER: ...and even between Christ and the Father (Heb 5:8; 1Cor 11:3; 15:27–28)...

RESPONSE: This is a non-human relationship that works perfectly and not a valid comparison to fallible human government.

LETTER: ...it shouldn’t be surprising that God can rule from the top down through ministers on earth within church organizations.

RESPONSE: We should look at the scriptures that tell us how God rules in His church to know how He rules in his Church.

LETTER: The fact abuses occur does not refute the principle of hierarchy, otherwise, wife-beating would abolish the principle found in Eph 5:22, child abuse would nullify Eph 6:1, and communism would obliterate Rom 13:1–7. Proving that the ministry (or leading ministers) can be wrong sometimes doesn’t prove they never have had any authority at any time over anyone.

RESPONSE: Agreed. But the fact that God clearly allows people to disregard corrupt human government means that the various church organizations must lead brethren by doing the right things, not by simply telling the brethren that “God placed you under us and you have to do whatever we say, right or wrong.”

LETTER: 2) A lack of controls can cause division to spread as well as having too many controls on brethren meeting together. Certain people who wander from place to place, constantly condemning and criticizing, divisively bringing up pet doctrinal ideas or even outright deadly ones (the Conder controversy, for example), should be told not to come back if they refuse to repent. 3) Since Matt 24:14 and Matt 28:19–20 weren’t torn from the Bible the moment HWA died, there are good reasons for Christians to engage in preaching the Gospel by large-scale media evangelistic efforts. Personal evangelism has its place also, but it can’t easily do everything. It can’t easily cover the same territory, especially by Christians tied down to one location by commitments to their jobs and/or families who aren’t going to want to “rough it” in poor Third World countries. Both approaches have their place, and both should be encouraged.

Sincerely,

— Eric V. Snow

RESPONSE: I have already agreed with you on the need to deal with traveling troublemakers and to continue evangelism. Some of the most successful foreign evangelism projects I have seen are by local congregations that send one of their own people or families to another country and support them there. They

know the people—they know that the money is not being wasted. There are few things more satisfying in life than “roughing it” when you know you are effectively working for God.

But I also appreciate your comment that there is a need for more than one kind of group—local independents, and then larger groups for big evangelism projects like the *Good News* magazine. I am not at all opposed to large groups of believers working together. I am also happy to hear that the UCG-IA clearly recognizes that there are believers in other organizations. But I think they need to think more about their excuses for not working together with them. When new people come, they need to see that we treat the brethren in other groups like brethren, not like enemies. (Once there was a back-room debate at a UCG-IA service as to whether my family should be escorted out that day—not because I was passing out literature or disturbing people, but simply because what I had written in *Servants' News*.)

We can disagree on what the Scriptures say and exactly how to do God's work, but still encourage each other, realizing that God has worked many different ways with different people in the past. If multiple Sabbatarian groups have respect for each other, new people can come, see the love among them, and work with whomever God leads them to work with.

—Norman Edwards 

Comment on Diane Rhodes' Answer to Hierarchical Leader Letter, p.15 Sept/Oct 2001

Two things in particular struck me about Mrs. Rhodes' letter.

First was her statement “*People have a right to decide for themselves*”—and then she writes she is not even going to let her husband see your questionnaire! In other words, she was not going to let the person the letter was addressed to decide for himself. Isn't there a contradiction here? Didn't she just admit to not letting someone decide for themselves—the very thing she accused you of doing?

The second thing that struck me was the matter of you **getting a job**. Here are two comments on her advice.

First, *you have a job*. You have one of the *hardest* possible jobs. Why say that? Because your income every *single day* depends on providing your readers with something they *voluntarily* pay for.

Furthermore, you are not able to threaten your donors with Mal 3:8, something the organization that pays Mr. Rhodes has done.

Secondly, you have lots of competition for *your* services. Let's face it, there are now many places in the

persons better able to judge it than Mrs. Rhodes might be. Your success is measured by your readers and voluntary donors. To say you should abandon them and **get a job** seems somewhat out of place.

Could there have been an arrogance detected in parts of Mrs. Rhodes' letter? If so, it is the same arrogance I seem to be noticing more and more from hierarchical leaders who have never had a real world job, but instead have lived all their working lives off the earnings of their tithe payers.

Since Mrs. Rhodes has raised the excellent subject of “**get a job**”, may I ask a question that has been puzzling me for some time?

It might be helpful to first mention my qualifications to ask the question. Baptized by the WCG in 1964, and having been a conscientious member and supporter of the Churches of God since then, I ask the following:

What are the ministers of Mr. Rhodes' hierarchical organization doing with their time these days?

Why ask? Look at the data. In the sixties, the WCG United States paid ministry was about 600 and feast attendance was 140,000 to 150,000. Even using the lower figure means each minister served about **233 members**.

In contrast, about 13,080 U.S. members attend the Holy Days with Mr. Rhodes hierarchical organization. It has a full time ministry of over 98 ministers. Thus it seems each minister now serves an average, not of 233, but of **134 members**.

There is more. In 1964, and for many years after that, WCG ministers carried out the following duties: conducted weekly Spokesman Club meetings, often *two* clubs per week. Many ministers also conducted Women's Clubs.

Much of the ministers' time, however, was spent on the many, many Prospective Member visits. These visits lasted for *hours* with eager “prospectives” asking a multitude of questions. Visits quite often lasted until 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning.

COG community where people can send voluntary offerings.

Moreover you started out, in faith, very small and with very little income. But you stuck with it and it has grown from that small beginning. It seems Mrs. Rhodes was pointing out that your work pays a fraction of what her husband is paid. But she only knows that because you *openly disclose* the figures of your income.

That open disclosure, it seems to this writer, should be *commended*, and the low income it reveals not *ridiculed*. It seems the average minister in her husband's hierarchical organization *does* enjoy salaries, benefits, and perks that cost \$81,159 per year.

(This figure was obtained not because salaries and perks were openly disclosed as you do yours, but only after lengthy analysis—see the July/Aug 2001 *Servants' News*. It should be further noted that Mr. Rhodes' organization was given the opportunity to dispute the \$81,159 figure with exact disclosures of their own, but failed to do so. Nevertheless, this letter-writer enjoys Mr. Rhodes' articles and learns much from them.)

And yes, Norm, you make only a fraction of \$81,159. But should income be used as a measure of spiritual success?

As a loyal reader of *Servants' News* for several years, I think what you are doing is very important and you should not look for a job. I have learned more from *Servants' News* than I have from dozens of sermons given by highly paid ministers of the Rhodes' organization. Actually you are measured every day by

Therefore, since Mrs. Rhodes has put in play the “get a job” subject, here again is the question:

Now serving about 1) half the number of members, 2) with most areas no longer having Spokesman and Women’s Clubs, and 3) with prospective visits down to almost none:

What are the ministers of Mr. Rhodes’ hierarchical organization doing with their time these days?

Pondering the above data, could “get a job” possibly be applied in the opposite direction? Might telling you to get a job, be a case of “doth she protest too much”? Could one even go a step further and compare the fruits of the one-

man-ministry of Ronald Dart with that of the 98 plus ministers of Mr. Rhodes’ organization and conclude one side is falling down on the job?

Norm, you are very articulate and well able to defend yourself, but I thought it might be good to add other perspectives to the subjects raised by Mrs. Rhodes.

— “One-third Century In-CoG’s”

[Thank you for doing this comparison. I think it is much more fair when voluntarily done by a third party, rather than by me. I did not refute some things Mrs Rhodes wrote because I wanted people to understand her heart-felt writing without turning it into a big dispute. — NSE]

Robert Thiel Explains How the Living Church of God Is Different from All Other Groups...

Dear Norman Edwards:

You have asked me to briefly explain in what way the Living Church of God differs from all the other Church of God groups that had origins in the Worldwide Church of God. Basically it has to do with Church eras.

In his 12/17/83 sermon titled Mission of the Philadelphia Church Era, Herbert Armstrong individually listed those truths that the Ephesus era (the apostolic era) once had that were restored to Philadelphia era of the Church. He also stated that the Philadelphia era would place proclaiming the true Gospel to the world as its highest priority. In his book, *The Mystery of the Ages*, Herbert Armstrong confirmed this by writing that God had used him to **restore at least 18 truths to the Philadelphia era** of the Church of God [p.251, hardback 1985 edition] and that the Philadelphia era would place its top **priority on proclaiming the Gospel** of the Kingdom to the world as a witness [pp.265, 289–290, hardback 1985 ed].

The Living Church of God teaches those truths that were restored to the Philadelphia era and places its top priority on proclaiming the Gospel to the world as a witness.

As long as we successfully combine these criteria, we believe that the Living

Church of God is the major remnant of the Philadelphia era of that Church. This is not to say that all of our members are Philadelphian or that simply being a member of the Living Church of God makes one a Philadelphian, but that the Living Church of God upholds the standard of the Philadelphia era of the Church of God.

I am aware of no other Church of God that meets both those criteria.

With all the confusion and misreporting that has existed the past decade or so, there is no doubt that there are some who are Philadelphian in God’s sight who have not become part of the Living Church of God. It is our hope and prayer that those Philadelphians outside of the Living Church of God will examine our teachings and practices and support us in our efforts to warn this world.

In your response to my letter published in the Nov-Dec 2001 edition of *Servants’ News* you raised some questions about the United Church of God, An International Association (UCG), which I found peculiar since UCG was not the subject of my letter. Thus I would like to briefly mention UCG here.

The UCG is the largest group to form after Herbert Armstrong’s death. Its teachings allow for the belief in Church eras, but this subject is considered a matter of interpretation by the UCG. Unlike the

Living Church of God (LCG), the UCG does not teach that it is the Philadelphia era of the Church, but rather that it is a continuation of the Church of God.

The UCG has specifically repudiated one of the 18 truths (governance), says that part of one is no longer necessary (third tithe), and will not clearly teach at least two others (upon conversion one is begotten by the Holy Spirit and born-again at the resurrection) as the elders on its Council do not agree on some of these points.

The UCG does not place its top financial priority on proclaiming the Gospel and every year since it formed has spent more money on its form of governance than on ‘public proclamation’. All of this is documented with citations from UCG literature in an article at my website on the differences between the Living Church of God and the United Church of God:

<http://members.aol.com/cogwriter/home.htm>

While we do consider UCG members to be brethren, we do not appreciate it when UCG leaders or members suggest that UCG teaches the same doctrines, etc. as LCG does.

Regards,

— Robert J. Thiel
Host, Living Church of God,
Arroyo Grande, CA

...and Norman Edwards Responds:

Mr. Thiel’s approach is that there are true believers in multiple groups, but that the LCG is clearly the main group with which God is working. I think that it is good that he gives two reasons why: accepting Herbert

Armstrong’s 18 truths restored to the Philadelphia era, and preaching the Gospel as the WCG did. These may sound good to the WCG member, but how would they sound to a Bible student seeking the “true church”?

The words “Philadelphia era” are not found in the Bible, but are based on Mr. Armstrong’s specific interpretation of Revelation 3:7–13. Similarly, Mr. Armstrong’s big media method of preaching the Gospel gathered many

people in the 1950s through the 80s when there was more trust in television. But face-to-face teaching has certainly been the primary means of teaching the Bible from the time of the Apostles to our day. The Bible does not say that a major media effort is **the sign** of the Church of God.

If someone said that the sign of the church is preaching “the third angel’s message” (Rev 14:9) or having the “spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10), most Church of God brethren would say, “What?”. However, these points were

so emphasized by Ellen G. White, that most of the 20,000,000+ people in Seventh Day Adventist splinter-groups will claim their support of those doctrines as proof that they are a “true church”. But to a new Bible student, it seems that both the COGs and SDAs are reading much more into these scriptures than is actually there. Both groups take the approach of “accept us because we have everything right, or go away.”


I agree that the UCG-IA has rejected some of the 18 truths, and I think they have made improvements on them.

Now, they need the courage to tell their members that. But what does the Bible say about finding true believers?

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35)

So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:33).

...Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother (1John 3:10).

Are there any groups that claim to do these things better than the others? 

Comments on the Living Church of God’s Treatment of Other Believers by Darwin and Laura Lee

Dear Norman,

In regard to “More Answers to Hierarchical Leader Letter”, *Servants’ News*, Nov/Dec 2001, page 8: we carefully went over the letter Robert J. Thiel wrote to you and your responses, and we have the following comments:

We attended the Living Church of God in Bismarck, North Dakota for about 9 months as visitors, in the year 2000. We attended as visitors, perhaps once a month. We attended and gave money also on some Holy Days. When we attended the Living Church of God, on Feast of Trumpets 2000 a public announcement was made that before people could visit their congregation we would have to call their new minister in Minnesota. We ignored that first announcement and attended again on Day of Atonement, at which time the announcement was made much sterner.

We at that point did not feel at all welcome to attend services of any kind at the Living Church of God, let alone ever become members of such a group, where one must first call long distance a minister they have not yet met to get permission **to attend and fellowship with people that we knew for 30 years**. Darwin knew both Fred Ternes and Dave Fischer for 30 years or so. I only met any of them in 1999, but was appalled at such a loveless act to keep people from fellowshiping and/or getting to know each other. I am not sure how such behavior on the part of the “Living Church of God” is going to

bring more people into their congregations. In Bismarck, there are few places to meet and fellowship with other Sabbath Keepers. The Living Church of God had in 2000 only six attending in Bismarck, Randy and Rachelle Lien and their 2 children, Fred Ternes, and Dave Fischer. There were five others of us who used to visit them off and on in 2000. To my knowledge none of those five visitors have gone back to visit the Living Church of God since that announcement was made back in 2000.

Because we saw a need for people to have a place to fellowship with others in this area, Darwin and I opened our doors to the general public to attend and/or fellowship with us on the Sabbath. We have had people visit us from both United and Living, Church of God 7th day, Seventh Day Adventists, ex-Worldwide who attend no place now and even people who never attended any Sabbath group. We have fun getting to know new people and building relationships with them.

Some even ask us about other groups in town. What do you think we tell them? We tell them United AIA is here and so is the Living Church of God, however good luck getting in. You have to first call their ministers before you can visit and then if you are allowed to come, you have to make sure that you get there on time or you are locked out. When people are told of their policies they require of visitors before they can go, most are no longer

interested. To my knowledge I don’t believe either group has had contact with those who inquire here about these groups, although we freely give contact information when asked.

So what are the fruits of hierarchical government? One of the fruits is dis-fellowshipment. One of their disfellowshipped members attends with us regularly and we love her dearly and to this day, I have not seen or heard of even one of their members who has ever tried to come and gather her back into their fold as one of the lost sheep. Another of the fruits is that they don’t make visitors feel welcome to attend services—putting stumbling blocks before them so they go elsewhere for fellowship. Their emphasis on “the work” is of little value if visitors are not reasonably allowed to attend.

Following, you will find the letters which Darwin and I received from all the members of the Living Church of God in 2000 and 2001. The first one is from Randy & Rachelle Lien, and the second one is from Dave Fischer. Laura answered the first two letters. The third letter was from Fred Ternes, who even traveled to the Feast with Darwin in years past, so Darwin answered that letter. **[Only one letter and none of the answers are printed in Servants’ News to save space.]**

To this day, none of these members of the Living Church of God have answered any of our replies, nor have they ever (since their unfriendly announcement to us on Feast of

Trumpets 2000 and Day of Atonement 2000) attempted to invite us back for any kind of fellowship or activities of any kind with their congregation. We are hoping that perhaps someone reading all of this information in the Living Church of God, may be able to look at this information and these letters and see that there is a definite problem with the way that your group treats those who want to visit your congregations.

All we sent to these people is an invitation which is open to all members of the Living Church of God and the general public. This invitation was not to join anything, for we have nothing to join. There were four activities listed, a Friday night potluck and Bible study, a Saturday service, a Saturday meal, and a Sunday picnic at the park. We left it up to the individual to pick and choose which things they are interested in attending. Surely if a church organization is reaching out to the household of God and wants to be friendly, it would not bar its members from fellowship with us. And, they should reach out to us who feel unwelcome in their congregations and invite us to fellowship and to any activities you may have. Why would these acts of love towards others be so hard for any of us?

With Much Love

— Darwin & Laura Lee

November 26, 2000

Dear Darwin & Laura,

Please take us off of your church mailing list. We are members of Living Church of God and have no desire to

receive church literature or invitations from any other church group.

As we did in 1979 with Worldwide Church of God, we have proven that, at this time, Living Church of God under the direction of Roderick C. Meredith is the one and only true Church of God.

The one true God is not the author of confusion and therefore would not have a bunch of groups out there doing whatever they think is right. The Bible is very clear on that. What counts is what God thinks. The Bible is very clear on that too.

We urge you to go back to the roots of your first calling and again prove all things. We would further urge you to contact the local Living Church of God minister and to counsel with him as to any questions you may have.

Please do not tarry as time is short, humble yourselves and seek God, repent of any rebellion. Do not let rebellion overtake you. Don't let your lamps run empty. Christ is at our very door.

With Brotherly Love,

— The Liens (Randy & Rachelle)
Lincoln, North Dakota

[I, Norman Edwards, cannot help but comment on this letter. I believe I wrote a letter similar to it 15 or 20 years ago when somebody who had left the WCG invited me to some kind of activity. I felt strong standing up and telling them that "I had proved I was in the true church, and they were not." I am sure that the Liens also believe they are doing the right thing.

But now I cannot help but notice how I, back then, and this sincere family, now, were not able to go to the

Scriptures and discuss the issue and patiently show their point from the Bible. This letter is largely a repeating of church sayings and slogans. Yes, the LCG literature and Robert Thiel's writings state that there are believers (even "Philadelphians") in other church organizations. But these brethren in the local congregation have not heard that message. They believe that they are in the "one and only true Church of God". This is a sad deception, and I would hope that the leaders in the LCG would attempt to clear it up.

For years the WCG taught its members that they are training to rule with Christ. They taught that learning to follow human church leaders—no matter what—is how God is training them. (In reality, there have been millions of people through the ages who have meticulously obeyed hierarchical leaders to the death. If blind obedience is all God wants, then all He needs to do is raise these followers from the dead, show His great power, and say, "I'm in charge now.")

After the WCG changed doctrines, the other COG hierarchies had to teach that every so often God lets the leadership of a church organization go bad, and that all the members need to study to find the new group with the most truth, so they can begin to obey that one unquestioningly. What the brethren really need is ongoing interaction with a variety of people so that they can learn to study the Scriptures, use the Spirit of God and make important life decisions based upon them.
— NSE.]

Letter Exchange Between Robert Thiel and Darwin & Laura Lee (The Lees sent a letter similar to the above to Robert Thiel, including all of the GCG member's letters and their responses)

Dear Darwin and Laura:

If I understood your letters correctly, you never wished to be part of LCG, intentionally went against direction from LCG, are in principle against 'corporate churches', sent literature to LCG members that they did not want, and were disfellowshipped by both UCG and LCG.

None of that changes anything that I wrote.

I do understand about being isolated as

our video group is quite small and rarely visited. Still, we do what we think God would have us do and support the major work that we believe represents the bulk of the remnant of the Philadelphia era of the Church—the Living Church of God.

Sorry you feel otherwise. And no, I do not want to receive any more of your group's literature.

Regards,
Bob Thiel

Dear Robert Thiel,

The very first time we visited LCG, we let them know that we had no intentions of becoming members of the LCG or any other group, so everyone there knew that right up front. Our reason for going there was for the purpose of attending Sabbath services and for fellowship with other brethren. We visited the LCG on an irregular basis over a 9-month period. We had no intention

of making any long distance phone calls to a minister we never met to ask if we could visit when we had already occasionally been visiting LCG services for 9 months.

We did not send "literature" to the brethren, but sent them an **invitation** for fellowship with us and to participate in pot luck meals with us.

We were disfellowshipped from United AIA, and everyone including Paul Shumway in the LCG Bismarck congregation knew that, yet had no problem letting us visit the LCG Bismarck congregation for 9 months. We were never members of the LCG, and were never disfellowshipped from LCG.

After reading our writing you say, "None of that changes anything that I wrote." Yet, you seem to hope that others will join your group. We are only trying to point out to you that when you treat your visitors as you did us here in Bismarck, North Dakota, I clearly don't see your membership rolls going up in numbers. As we see it, you can ignore what we say, as you seem to be doing with this letter, or you can hear what we have said and take steps within your various congregations to make your visitors feel more welcome, which in turn would eventually create an atmosphere where more people might want to join your membership roles. Are there any scriptures in your Bible where God tells you to mistreat or abuse people who want to attend your LCG services and fellowship with your members? If so, please tell me what those scriptures are so we might study them.

Are there any scriptures which say that you can forbid people to attend your Sabbath services when they want to attend? If so, I would like to know what those scriptures are also. John 13:34-35 says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

I see nothing in this clear commandment given by Christ that says this only applies to LCG and their members. This commandment given by Christ applies to all people everywhere and is a command. Philadelphia means "brotherly love" and when I

look that up in Revelation, I see no place where my Bible says that LCG represents the bulk of the remnant of the Philadelphia era of the Church, in fact please tell me what scriptures in all of the Bible even mention a Philadelphia era, because I can't find it anywhere in there.

Just because people do not see every single thing exactly the same way, does not mean they cannot attend the same Sabbath service or fellowship with each other. I feel you and your group do yourselves a great disservice by locking so many brethren out of your fellowship and not wanting to fellowship with those who invite you to a picnic or the like as we did.

Regarding "not sending literature", I think you might have a problem with word definitions—I sent you no literature at all. I sent you several letters in regard to the letter you wrote and had printed in *Servants' News*.

With Much Love,

— Darwin & Laura Lee

Dear Darwin & Laura,

First of all, if you were ever treated improperly, that is wrong. I am not your judge, was not there, have not talked to the others involved, etc., so I really do not know if you were. I attended UCG before GCG and since. I have had no problems when I did so from either group. Sorry you seemed to have had problems with both.

As Jesus said, the book of Revelation is prophetic (Rev 1). The events of history show that certain eras of the Church of God predominated at different times. If you do not believe in Church eras, then there is no point in this discussion going further. If you believe that God used HWA to raise up the Philadelphia era of the Church of God, there is an article about that at the COGwriter website. It, and probably two other articles, better explain about LCG being the remnant of that Church era.

You can certainly disagree (which the tone and specifics in your response suggest). But if you do, we have nothing to say to each other at this time. I am not an LCG minister, just a member.

Regards,
Bob Thiel

Dear Robert Thiel,

You are absolutely correct, in that I don't believe in church eras as a doc-

trine. History may very well appear to show eras, especially when someone explains it in a believable way. History also shows people keeping Christmas and Easter so should we also make those doctrines as well as eras? Christmas and Easter as well as eras are not in the Bible, so why would we teach them as if they were in the Bible? By your own words, you seem to be telling me that if I don't believe in eras as you do, then you don't want to speak to me anymore. Which brings me to the way that your group definitely does abuse others.

Your fruits seem to be that everything should be done as you say and all should believe exactly the same things including those who only come to visit you. We just had a member of your group stop in to visit us recently, and this person seemed quite concerned that due to the lack of fellowship with visitors in this person's own group, having only contact with a couple of people week after week, this person in your group feels they are stagnating. This person expressed the need for wanting to grow.

You also state that you are not a minister, only a member. It doesn't matter whether you are a minister or a member. You still have a responsibility to proclaim the good news of God's soon coming kingdom here on earth. You also still have a responsibility to love and show love towards everyone including your enemies and especially towards the household of God. You also have a responsibility to make sure that what you are teaching other people is in the Bible. Now this is not to say that a person might sometimes teach some things in error, simply because they do not fully understand them, but hopefully when they see their error they will admit the error and change their teaching on it. Clearly by your own words, you are saying that church eras are not in the Bible, so why would you teach it in the same manner as a doctrine from the Bible and go even further in saying that if I don't see this point as you do, then I and you no longer have anything to talk about. Do you see the fruits of such statements are wrong, and if you did this with all the different things you believe, you would soon find yourself alone, because the bottom line

is, there are no two people who believe everything exactly the same.

We associate with many people whom we don't fully agree with on all issues, and it seems to work out just fine, and even though we don't all believe exactly the same we still help each other in a variety of ways, and we are all able to learn many things from each other. Working together keeps God's Spirit flowing, rather than isolating God's Spirit so it stagnates. So if you feel my disbelief in eras is sufficient for you to cut me off from a relationship with you whom I hardly even know, then that is your choice. I however will not participate with you in such behaviors.

With Much Love,

— Darwin & Laura Lee

[I don't agree that "church eras" are similar to Christmas and Easter; the latter are clearly from paganism but church eras are a prophetic interpretation. But those who teach church eras have a far-from-perfect track record in prophetic interpretation. I remember the WCG teaching that the "Philadelphia era" would be led away to a place of safety and the "Laodicean era" would be left behind to go through the tribulation. They said nothing about the "Philadelphia era" being scattered into many groups and being mixed up with the "Laodiceans". They clearly had no divine inspiration in this. The idea that one believer will not talk to another believer because they will not accept this questionable prophetic

interpretation is clearly unbiblical (2Pet 1:20; 1Cor 13:8). It is good to talk about these issues, but may God grant us the understanding of how to work with each other in peace.

I would like to contrast this letter exchange with one that I (Norman Edwards) and Laura Lee had on the subject of Passover. Without printing the pages of discussion, we managed to communicate our views to each other, work out some misunderstandings, and come to see that we each simply put a different priority on different scriptures. Some scriptures had a clear meaning to me, and I explained the other "difficult" ones according to that clear meaning. Other scriptures were clear to her and she explained the scriptures that were "difficult" to her based on those. It is very clear that we both intend to obey the Scriptures. There is still a vast majority of Bible teaching that we agree on, and we can work together there.

How can we read the same Bible and believe different things? After all, it does say: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1Cor 1:10). This is a wonderful goal, and we should work toward it, just like we should be "becoming perfect" (Matt 5:48). But Paul explains the reality later in the same book: "For there must also be factions among

you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you" (1Cor 11:19). God is more interested in recognizing what we do with what we have, than He is in conveying perfect teaching to everyone. Not all of Christ's teaching was recorded in the Bible, and we suffer from mis-copying, mis-translation, erroneous history and erroneous teaching. So will we refuse to fellowship with everyone we disagree with, or we will support the vast amount of truth that we understand and share?

A kind of unity can be achieved through a hierarchy. The organization simply takes any controversial area in Scripture, declares one opinion to be the truth, and suppresses all ideas to the contrary. There will be unity in such a group, but virtually no fellowship with people in other groups that "don't have all the truth". Indeed, those who study anything contrary to the official doctrine run the risk of disfellowshipment. The only ones free to study in a hierarchy are those at the very top—and they are usually too busy "administrating" to study. That was the reason that I left the GCG.

But when believers realize that there will be honest differences as they seek God, that encourages study and conversation among them. The likelihood of finding the truth is much greater.

May God bless us all with knowledge of His truth and love for each other.

— Norman Edwards]

F. Paul Haney—Independent Minister

E-mail: CFMinistries@att.net
Telephone: 860-274-1896
PO Box 370; Watertown, CT 06795
December 4, 2001

Dear Norman,

Greetings. In the May/June 2001 issue of the *Servants' News*, p.25, you asked some questions of your readership. To my knowledge, I never received your original letter but would like to respond just the same. I may paraphrase your queries.

1. "Do not the members of our organization prove that God does not always govern from the top down?" Yes. The

strictly hierarchical notion that HWA/WCG supported and encouraged was in error. The singular Yahweh God works the way He wants to. Who are we to suggest that He can only do it our way? The idea of top-down governance—that is, only the top dog gets to call the shots and his word cannot be questioned, is cultic in nature and flawed.

2. "Members leaving WCG, joined others, and then came here are part of the Church and therefore brethren?" Absolutely they are brethren. In fact, I would not limit "brethrenship" to merely members of old WCG who cycle through

various groups, but to any persons whom **God** thinks are brethren and therefore has put that person's name in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, long before the law was in place. Who are these people? Nobody knows them all. Are they all Sabbath-keepers? Probably not. Who are our brothers and sisters? They are those who do the will of God, whether we like it or not.

3. "Is it possible the Eternal intended to end HWA's work?" Not only possible but probable. Why would God allow a corrupt-

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to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household” (Deut 14:24–46).

Notice that the only reason to turn an agricultural tithe into money was when the place was “too far from you”. When they arrived at the Feast, they were to turn their money back into food. Hopefully, there would be enough people at the Feast with extra food, who would be willing to sell the food to them. Those coming to the Feast with money should be an exception case, not the majority.

The Bible mentions many different trades: clothiers, blacksmiths, builders, innkeepers, etc. What should they do if the way is **not** “too far from” them? Should they take their money to the Feast and buy food there? Or should they take their money and buy food in advance and take the food to the Feast? While the Bible does not spell this out in detail, the reason it gives for taking money to the Feast is if the journey is too long or the way is too far. If everyone is to keep the Feast, including shopkeepers and the poor, it seems unlikely that there would be merchants working to serve huge numbers of people coming to the Feast with money and no food.

But lest anyone becomes too worried, the purpose of this article was not to convince you that the only way to keep the Feast of Tabernacles is to pack a trailer full of live animals, grains and vegetables, and drive off to the Feast prepared to butcher, bake and boil. Nor is the message that one must pack 24 sack lunches and suffer through it. The point is that the feasting, both physical and spiritual is the central focus of the Feast. Spending a

lot of money and having others serve you is not a lesson or command about the Feast.

Deuteronomy 14 continues on with instruction on how to help others with the tithe:

You shall not forsake the Levite who is **within your gates**, for he has no part nor inheritance with you. At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and **store it up within your gates**. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are **within your gates**, may come and

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eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do. At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts” (Deut 14:27–15:1).

It is not clear to this writer whether this is talking about observing the Feast of tabernacles “within your gates” in the “third year” or if it is talking about storing up food that the poor can eat when they are in need. Since the very next chapter is about releasing the debts of the poor in the seventh year, is the “third year” tithe a benefit to those who are in debt and still four years away from being released from those debts? On the other hand, there is some logic to observe the Feast locally for those who could not otherwise travel. The expression “within your gates” refers to the gates of a city. The following verses show the need to help the poor of our own localities, but indicate that they are to go to the “place which the Lord chooses.”

“And you shall remember that **you were a slave in Egypt**, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, **your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates.**

Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God **in the place which the LORD chooses**, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice (Deut 16:12–15).

The only place that God mentions choosing for the Feast in the Bible is “Jerusalem” and “Shiloh”. Yet there is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that He will not choose, by His Spirit, other places today—which could be either regional or local sites. The above verses again emphasizes the need for **everyone** to rejoice at the Feast. There is to be no “servant class” or “working class” of people who must “slave away” during the Feast so that others may enjoy it. God

shows that they were all slaves in Egypt once, and that they are to come out of that. The use of “tabernacles” (“tents”, “huts”, “sheds”) at the feast is to remind us of God protecting the children of Israel in the desert after they left Egypt.

Purpose of the Feast: God’s Protection After Leaving Egypt

“You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, **that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God**” (Lev 23:41–43).

The above scriptures shows that the purpose of the Feast that is to be taught throughout generations is how God made Israel dwell in shelters—how He sheltered them—when coming out of Egypt. Nearly every Christian has heard the story of the “rebellious Israelites”, how they failed to obey God and how they were made to wander for 40 years and only their children were allowed to go into the “promised land”. God Himself denounced them for their lack of faith and obedience:

Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of the men who

saw My glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but **who disobeyed Me and tested Me ten times**—not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated Me with contempt will ever see it. But because My servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows Me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it (Num 14:21–24).

Other verses show that Joshua (son of Nun) was also faithful and was allowed to go into the promised land. Most Christians generally assume that through the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit, they have the faith that the Israelites lacked back in the wilderness. We somehow know that if we were there, we would trust God and not do what those Israelites did. So let us think about observing the Feast of Tabernacles, and review those ten instances when Israel disappointed God and see how we would do. The scriptures will be summarized rather than quoted, but you are encouraged to read the whole thing.

As you read these points, please realize that there is a difference between faith and foolishness. For example, a person who disobeys a human law to obey a clear law of God might expect God to deliver him or to be with him while he pays the penalty. But a person who breaks a law simply for his own convenience and then boasts that “God will protect me” may find that God does not. Also, a person who lives by an obscure doctrine which he has read into the Bible may find that God does not protect him from the consequences of his own doing.

For the ancient Israelites, God and Moses were there telling them exactly what to do and God’s will was not in question. But today, if someone shows you by putting 69 obscure scriptures together that Christ is coming in two months and that you need to sell all of your possessions and give it to their work so they can announce His coming, you may wisely choose to wait and see. Having faith in God’s Word, and having faith in a man’s compilation of 69 obscure scriptures are two very different things.

Ten Trials in the Wilderness

1. Threat of attacking military force (Ex 14:5–12). After the Israelites left Egypt, the Pharaoh changed his mind and sent 600 chariots after the Israelites. We might think of this as the superior military force of that time, and then think of military forces today.

If we believed that God wanted us to go to the Feast, but we had to pass a hostile military force with machine guns and tanks, would we go the Feast anyway, or would we stay home in fear? Does even the relatively low chance of plane hijackings or danger on our freeways keep some of us away from the Feast?

2. Going without a water source for three days (Ex 15:22–25). The Israelites had no fresh water for three days so the people complained. As in most crowds, some people probably were carrying enough water, and others probably had been out for a couple days and were getting very uncomfortably thirsty. Some probably shared their water with those in greatest need (pregnant and nursing moms), others may have fought over the remaining water. But rather than trust God, ask God or ask Moses for water, they complained.

It does not make sense to plan a Feast site today with no water. But if the water at a Feast site was cut off for some reason for a few days, would we complain about an awful Feast, or would we trust God to take care of us as needed?

3. Having a lack of food (Ex 16:1–4). After being out of Egypt for one month the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron and wished they could go back to Egypt where they had food regularly. The Bible does not record any instance of anyone dying of hunger or thirst, but the people complained.

Does anyone ever skip going to the Feast because he or she thinks we will not have enough to eat there? And if they do go in faith, are they content with how God might take care of them—maybe sharing a tent and a bowl of cooked grains every morning?

4. Disobeying clear instructions from God (Ex 16:19–20). God told the Israelites not to try to keep manna

overnight on the first five days. Nevertheless, some of them did and it stank. Are there clear instructions about the Feast that God has given that we could follow but do not?

5. Not learning from a previous disobedience (Ex 16:22–28). The Israelites were told to gather twice as much manna on the sixth day and keep it till the seventh. Even after the previous failure from disobeying God, some of them went out to gather it on the seventh day, anyway. This is like the child who knows not to throw rocks at his siblings, has to be chastised for throwing rocks at his brother, and then has to be chastised again the next day for throwing rocks at his *sister*.

Do we ever fail to follow God’s instructions, reap the consequences of it, then do a very similar thing right afterward?

6. Complaining about the same problem, even worse than before (Ex 17:1–13). There was no water at the camp, so the people complained even more strongly against Moses than they did before (see item 2). They again demanded to go back to Egypt and even questioned if God was among them at all. Have you ever had a difficulty at the Feast (not caused by your own sin), but God delivered you out of it, and then you said, “I’ll never let that happen again!”

We need to realize that sometimes, even though we pass a test one time, God tests us in the same way again, and we must trust in God again.

7. Looking to a human leader rather than God (Ex 32). When Moses was gone up to Mt. Sinai for a long time, some of the people began to think he was dead and wanted Aaron to make a golden calf. They apparently attributed all of God’s works to Moses and when Moses was gone, they were willing to forget about God and asked Aaron to lead them back to the religion and land of Egypt.

Have we ever greatly changed our religious practices because a religious leader died or because we left his group? Did we make our changes based upon our understanding of the Scriptures, or did we simply do whatever seemed easiest to us?

8. Complaining about other stuff (Num 11:1–3). The Bible does not say what the people complained about

when they were encamped at Taberah, but God caused a fire to come and kill some of them. The previous chapter is about frequent moving and setting up camp, so maybe it was the moving—maybe it was even their housing that they complained about.

This writer has heard many stories of people who survived great disasters traveling to or at the Feast—including floods, tornadoes, robberies, collisions, etc. Some have thanked God for deliverance and are ready to go again, others are angry at God and fearful it might happen again.

9. Complaining about the menu (Num 11:4–34). While they were encamped at Kibroth Hattaavah, some of the people complained about always eating manna—remembering the variety of food that they had in Egypt. Moses became so upset with them that he asked God to kill him rather than have to continue to work with them.

“So the Lord said to Moses: ‘Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.’” (Num 11:16–17).

While these 70 leaders helped Moses rule, it should be important to note that God has never again worked powerfully through a man like Moses, the only exception being Jesus. When we go to the Feast, what do we hear more about, what God is doing there, or complaints about the food?

10. Rejecting the way God has made as too difficult. (Num 13:25–14:20). When the twelve spies returned with their report on the land of Canaan, which Israel was preparing to enter, only two out of 10 (Joshua and Caleb) had confidence that God was able to help them defeat the superior military forces of that land and give it to them. The people grumbled and wanted to go back to Egypt again. God was so angry at the people that He considered wiping them out and making a new nation from Moses, but Moses persuaded Him to change His mind.

We Need to Come Out of Our Own Egypt

If we keep reading past the end of point 10, above (Num 13:25–14:20), we come right back to Numbers 14:21–23, which is what launched us on the study of the ten times that Israel disappointed and disobeyed God. **It was just so easy for them to see the human, physical reality of Egypt, rather than the reality of God—even though they received miracles and blessings at His hand.**

I would have to be honest and say that this has affected me. Even though God has supplied every significant need at the Feasts we have sponsored, I have still seriously considered not sponsoring a Feast some years. Let me acknowledge some of what God has done:

- My first year working independently, 1995, I had neither money to go to the Feast, nor confidence to organize one. An independent site in Florida was cancelled a couple of days before due to a hurricane, so I offered the use of our services building in Springdale, Arkansas—about half of the people came. God put me into Feast planning before I had time to think about it.
- God caused someone to give me some sound equipment that I did not know I needed until later—but have used it extensively.
- Every year, someone has come to the Feast who was able to run the sound system.
- During the last two years, God sent people to help purchase and prepare the Feast meals.
- In the year 2000, Danny Smith told me he was coming to the Feast site more than two days early. I told him that I would not be able to be there that early and wondered what he would do. As it turned out, Danny was busy doing important things the whole time.
- I have always had enough money to make the needed deposits and cover the needed expenses at the Feast. One year I paid for two families' motel

rooms so they could come and did not receive enough money to cover it. But a man who did not even come to that Feast found out about it and paid for it.

- God has also sent speakers, children's teachers, musicians and others needed to make a better Feast of Tabernacles.

These and other points that show that God has taken care of our needs at the Feast do not mean that we should not plan or that we can plan carelessly. But they do show that if we try to serve God and do the best that we can, that He will take care of us. **We do not have to be ashamed that we live by the grace of God, rather than by man's brilliance, man's strength and man's money.**

It is important that all of us think about the degree to which we live “in Egypt”. Egypt provided the Israelites with homes and a stable supply of food. However, they were not free to worship God as they wanted. The wealth produced by their hard work went to advance the cause of Egyptian religion and government. The people had little control over their own destiny or that of their children.

Today, in most western nations, everyone has a place to live and something to eat. However, most people are not free to openly worship God or use biblical principles in their work, in their schools or in government. Over 50% of the wealth produced is consumed by the secular state to further its secular-humanist agenda. People's concept of “right and wrong” tends to be formed by what the state does or does not punish—not what God says. False ideas enter children's minds through schools and mass-media, whether parents want it to or not. Some Christian parents are afraid to physically punish their children as the Bible instructs, lest the state take them away.

While most people reading this article probably have more freedoms than the Israelites did in Egypt, slavery-like conditions are encroaching upon us. Human-promised physical security just seems to reach out and tempt us, and say “it is smarter to trust me than it is to trust God”. Certainly, the “sins of Egypt” are all around us.

Feast of Tabernacles observance

should be an oasis in this “wilderness of sin”. It should be a shining light of what God’s people can do using His principles to enjoy feasting together, praising Him, talking together, entertaining each other, and looking out for the needs of everyone there. In summary, it should be an example of righteous, enjoyable life among the people of God.

Prepare for the Promised Land

Since the purpose of the Feast of Tabernacles was to remind us of how the Israelites lived in “tabernacles” after they left Egypt (Ex 23:42), we must realize that God was hoping to train the Israelites for an important purpose—just as He is hoping to train us for an important purpose when we keep the Feast, now.

We previously quoted God’s instruction on keeping the Feast from Deuteronomy 16:12–15. Additional Feast instruction follows:

“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you” (Deut 16:16–17).

God wants people to learn to thank Him for their blessings, and to share them. This message has been preached extensively by many groups, so we will not dwell on it here, except to say that the Hebrew *does* mean “three times a year” (not “three seasons a year” or “seven times a year”, as some groups teach in order to collect more offerings).

The next instructions are very much a part of the lesson of the Feasts:

“You shall appoint judges and officers **in all your gates**, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you” (Deut 16:18–20).

This is a clear command to all of the people to set up righteous local governments. “In all your gates” is a reference to all the cities that God gave them “according to your tribes”. There is no extensive government plan or group of laws here, but the principle is very clear: the officials were to do what is right, as opposed to what is best for their own economic gain. Today, most government officials seem to believe that they can do whatever they want to benefit themselves as long as they do not get prosecuted for violating any of the hundreds of thousands of “laws” on our books. If they can avoid prosecution due to a “legal technicality”, then it is “all right” in the eyes of most people. Yet God clearly shows that righteous judgment is necessary “that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”

God was doing a wonderful thing for the Israelites. He was defying the typical human systems where the strong, wealthy and educated oppressed the weak. God fairly divided the land among the people (Deut 33:54). He set up a system whereby debts would be forgiven, slaves would be freed, and lands would go back to their original owners, even if somebody misused their property (Lev 25, Deut 15). He told them to use silver for money (the Hebrew word for money is “silver”). He commanded them to not even own the instruments for unjust business (Deut 25:13–16). It would have been very difficult for people to rise up and oppress others. God did not give them a human king, rather they demanded one later and God warned them that a king would oppress them (1Sam 8).

The last two verses of Deuteronomy 16 give one more vital instruction needed to prepare a people for righteous rule: they were not to follow the religious practices of other people.

Do not set up any wooden Asherah pole beside the altar you build to the LORD your God, and do not erect a sacred stone, for these the LORD your God hates (Deut 16:21–22).

God hoped to give the Israelites a year in the wilderness so they could just be with Him, away from the distractions and sins of other nations. He wanted them to learn to trust Him, and

to get along with each other. When all but two men failed to trust in God, He gave them another 40 years in the wilderness to learn to trust Him. Only Joshua and Caleb from the original group of adults, and the younger generation went into the promised land.

Similarly, today, Christ is working with many believers, but only a small number of them will be ready to rule with Him (Matt 22:14; 25:1–13; Luke 12:42–48; Heb 11:35; Rev 3:21; 20:5–6). **The Feast of Tabernacles offers a time when we can draw away from the world to be sheltered in tabernacles by God—to learn His lessons, and then to be ready to help people into His Kingdom—to rule in righteousness and to avoid false religion.** Most of us do not have a year to be in the wilderness with God. But if we live 46 years as an adult (age 20 to 66), they will spend a total of 367 days at the Feast of Tabernacles, which is roughly one year. If you like numbers, it took 46 years to build the temple at the time of Christ (John 2:20), and so our bodies are spiritual temples (1Cor 6:19) which may also take 46 years to build.

This article cannot cover all of the important details that we need to learn from the Bible to be ready to rule with Christ for 1,000 years (Rev 20:6). In many ways, the job will be the same. The Bible makes it clear that the land of Israel will again be fairly distributed among the people (Ezk 47:13–48:35). The Israelites were sent in to destroy some evil people (Deut 7:1–5), but they were primarily intended to be a living, wonderful example of God’s way to the other nations around them (Deut 4:1–7). Similarly, the Kingdom of God will include the defeat of evil forces, and an example of righteous living to others.

While there are additional spiritual lessons to be learned that are not covered in the instructions to the ancient Israelites, there is much that we as believers need to learn from what God has written in the Old Testament. Let us learn some of it at this Feast of Tabernacles.

The Hastings, Michigan Feast Site Daily Themes

This year, we will sponsor a Feast site at Winding Creek Camp, Just

outside of Hastings, Michigan. We cannot promise to teach everything mentioned in the first part of this article, but we will try to make a good start at it. Everyone is invited to participate and help in any way they would like. Winding Creek Camp is a cheerful-looking place with a very good, heated air-conditioned meeting/dining hall. It also has outdoor and indoor recreation facilities for basketball and volleyball, plus an outdoor pool, field sports and more. There are many "tabernacles" to dwell in on the grounds—it would easily accommodate 200 Feast-goers. Food and accommodations are covered at the end of this article.

The dates of the Feast will be according to the commonly used Jewish Calendar, beginning Friday evening, Sept 20, through Saturday evening, Sept 28. The first night (Friday) we will have snacks available from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. and a brief service from 8:00 to 8:45 p.m. The rest of the week will include morning services, and various afternoon and evening activities—the exact schedule to be set later. But most importantly, here is the theme for each day and what we hope to learn:

1. **Purpose of the Feast of Tabernacles.** Read the scriptures about the Feast of Tabernacles—hear a message about them.
2. **Meet the brethren.** We expect a diversity of people at this Feast, many of whom have not met together before. Be prepared to talk for about three minutes on how you came to know God and how He has changed your life.
3. **How has God blessed you?** We will hear and sing a lot of praise music on this day. Be prepared to talk about blessings you have received. We plan to write down these things that we are thankful for, weave them into a song, and let everyone who wants to participate in recording it (singing, playing, clapping or otherwise). This may take some time during the other days of the Feast, but the plan is for everyone to be able to go home with a CD of this song and possibly other original music that brethren may bring. Hopefully a "result" of this Feast will be a recording praising God, rather than complaining like the Israelites.

4. **How has God protected you in difficult times?** Just as the ancient Israelites easily forgot the miracles that God did for them, so we easily forget the miracles God has done for us. Be prepared to talk about the miracles that God has done for you or your friends—things for which there is no known physical explanation. We plan to record some of them for printing in a *Servants' News* article and may record them on a CD, as a permanent record of what God has done for us in this age.
5. **How can we prove God to the outside world?** While people who have known God all their life have little reason to doubt His existence, there are many today who are confused on the issue. "...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have..." (1Pet 3:15, NIV). Everyone will have a chance to answer this, and we will present some interesting proofs of God through creation (Rom 1:20).
6. **What does God expect His people to learn and do today?** We will read Scriptures from New and Old Testaments emphasizing what God expects us to do today. While our personal lives are important, emphasis will be placed on how we are commanded to interact with others.
7. **What will we help Christ do in the Millennium?** What does the Bible say about this? Will the world be divided into countries, states, counties and cities? Will everyone be a farmer? Will we have money? Cars or horses? Tithes or taxes? Can you do whatever you want on your own land? If your neighbor wants to use his property for a junk-yard or a skunk farm, can you do anything about it? What should happen if the road between your town and the next one is too narrow, but the people along the road do not want to sell the land needed to widen it? The simple, and the complex issues need to be discussed by those who hope to rule with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 20:6).
8. **The Eighth Day, a new beginning.** We will read and study the Scriptures about this day, and rejoice in what God has done this Feast. There will be messages and discus-

sion on each of these subjects each day—both in morning sessions and evening studies. We also intend to have a variety of recreational and social activities. A **Karaoke night and Feast Variety Show** will certainly be part of the activities, so be working on your song, skit or story that everyone will enjoy.

Feast Food Plan

Last year, at Chadron State Park, we prepared all of our own meals in the kitchen we rented. The meals were good and nearly everyone enjoyed preparing them. (I did overwork one person, who never complained, but her family let me know later—I think we can avoid that this year.) We plan to prepare the meals ourselves this year. The kitchen facilities at Winding Creek Camp are excellent. At some point in the future, maybe we can all bring food to the Feast and all work together, but for this year, we will purchase the food centrally and ask those attending to pay for the cost of it and help in the preparation of it.

Planning and record keeping are too difficult if we try to let every person purchase every meal individually (God's meal plan with manna was a whole lot simpler than ours!) So please decide if you would like to purchase all 8 breakfasts for \$25, all 8 lunches for \$30, and all 8 dinners for \$30. Prices for children 3 to 12 years old are \$15, \$20 and \$20 respectively. The price for all meals is \$85 per adult and \$55 per child. They are inexpensive enough that if you miss a few of the meals, you still have a "good deal". There will be no Friday evening meal, and the Final Saturday meal will consist of good quality leftovers. (If anyone can only attend part of the Feast, but would like to participate in the meal plan, please make special arrangements.)

Breakfast will consist of a variety of eggs, pancakes, sausage, toast, cereal, fruit and beverages. Lunch will offer diverse sandwiches, soups, salads and hot dishes—some will be outdoor picnics if the weather is warm. The dinners will consist of a variety of good food (last year we had sloppy Joes, pot roast, spaghetti, baked chicken, jambalaya and steak). We will try to let those helping to organize the

meals that they are best able to do. Each main dish will be accompanied by appropriate vegetables, salad, bread, beverages and dessert.

If, for whatever reason, one chooses not to participate in this meal plan, nearby Hastings has numerous fast food restaurants, an Applebees', Big Boy and Ponderosa Steak House. Anyone is welcome to bring their own food and eat with the rest of us. If anyone has special dietary needs, please contact us (see end of article) to see if we can help you.

Lodging and Transportation

Winding Creek Camp has numerous "tabernacles" in which Feast-goers might stay—from cabins with one double bed, to larger cabins, to two-story lodges with many rooms. These facilities have electricity and are nice-looking, inside and out, but they do not have central heating or plumbing. There are nice bath houses about 20 to 50 yards away. We are welcome to bring electric heaters or electric blankets—some rooms will support a 1,500-watt heater (the most powerful typically available for a normal outlet), while others share a circuit between two rooms, so a 1,000-watt heater (the "medium" or "low" setting on many heaters) is all that will work continuously. We can do what is practical to prepare for colder weather, and then we can ask God for nice weather, and accept whatever He gives us.

Most rooms have one double bed, but there are some single beds. Some cabins have doubles and singles, ideal for families. We will let you know the exact number and sizes of beds you will have when you make your reservation. You will need to bring your own bedding (or sleeping bags if that is your style). Families are certainly welcome to use either larger cabins, or multiple rooms in the lodge. Rooms have closets and dressers, most floors are carpeted.

The camp is charging us \$8.65 per person per day for everyone age 3 and up, plus an additional amount for electricity—not completely certain yet. This charge is the same no matter where a person stays. In order to keep the math simple and help families a little, we are asking for \$10.00 per person per day, \$8.00 per day for children 3–12. We will have other expenses,

including main building heating/air conditioning that we will pay from offerings given.

Recreational vehicles are welcome and water and electric hookups are available. There is a dump station, but no sewer hookups. The same per-person rate applies to RV Feast-keepers as to those staying in the lodges and cabins.

For those who would like to stay at motels: **Brookside Motor Inn**, (616-945-4182) is less than a mile away on the south edge of Hastings on M-37. Rooms sleep 2 to 4 costing \$40 to \$50 per night or \$160 to \$200 per week. Some have a kitchen. This motel is very close to the highway and not particularly fancy, but would work for someone spending most of their time at the Feast site. **Adrounie House** (800-927-8505) is a very beautiful 6-unit bed and breakfast in downtown Hastings. Ask for their discount "corporate rate" from \$60 to \$90 per night. You can see the rooms at www.adrounie.com. Full breakfasts are included. **Parkview Motel** (616-852-9489) is 6 minutes away on M-43 on the north side of Hastings. Per night costs are \$47 (single), \$54 (double), \$59 (room with two beds) with \$5 extra per person. **Lamar Cottages** (517-852-9489) are 12 minutes east on M-79. They have kitchens and everything but linen for \$300 to \$345 per week, sleeping 4-6. **Gun Lake Motel** (616-792-2028) is about 15 minutes away with rooms ranging from \$50–\$60, but a nice weekly rate of \$175–\$200. Rollaways are \$5 per night, extra people in sleeping bags are permitted. **Chicago Point Resort—North** (616-795-7216 or 517-321-4562) is about 20 minutes away right on the shore of Gun Lake with 5 nice condominiums. Weekly rates range from \$480 (2 bedrooms) to \$700 (4 bedrooms); \$80 to \$120 extra if multiple families are sharing the same unit.

Winding Creek Camp requests that those who do not stay there, but use the facilities during the day pay **\$2.00 per person per day as a usage fee** (children 0–2 excluded).

Winding Creek Camp is located about a mile south of Hastings. Take M-37 south out of town. Look for a road that angles off to the right—a small sign says "Campground Road". In about half a mile, you will see lots

of cabins and buildings on your left.

For those interested in **flying** to the Feast, there are three *airports all about 45 minutes away*: Grand Rapids, Lansing and Kalamazoo. Car rental is available, but we will also try to arrange to transport you if necessary. A person should be able to observe the Feast in Hastings without the need for their own vehicle.

How to Make Your Reservation

Please make reservations as soon as possible, even if you may have to change them later. Below is a summary of the rates **for all 8 days**. Fill in those that apply:

___ adult breakfast × \$25 = _____
 ___ child breakfast × \$15 = _____
 ___ adult lunch × \$30 = _____
 ___ child lunch × \$20 = _____
 ___ adult dinner × \$30 = _____
 ___ child dinner × \$20 = _____
 ___ adult lodging × \$80 = _____
 ___ child lodging × \$64 = _____
 ___ use fee for each person
 staying in a motel × \$16 = _____
 extra \$10 (adult) or \$8
 (child) staying the 9th night _____

Total cost: _____

If you cannot stay for the entire Feast, or have other unusual circumstances, please adjust the above form accordingly. Please send a 10% deposit when you make your reservation. A check, money-order or the Paypal online service (www.paypal.com) may be used. Facilities will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis—desirable accommodations may be given to others if no deposit is paid. Please send the entire balance by September 1 so we can buy the food and pay the campground managers.

More information will be printed in *Servants' News* as it becomes available. If you need more information now, use the contact information below. If you are planning to stay at a motel, make your reservation directly with them, **but also contact us**.

If you would like to stay at Winding Creek camp, **do not contact them directly, but contact Church Bible Teaching Ministry, PO Box 107, Perry, Michigan 48872-0107; info@servantsnews.com; 517-625-7480.** 



We print a representative sampling of our mail—both positive and negative. We do not include names unless we are fairly sure that the writer would not object.

To avoid any difficulty, writers should specify how much of their name and address they would like us to print.

If Apostolic Succession Is True, Is My Baptism Valid?

LETTER:

May 19, 2001

Hello Norm,

Hope things are going well for you and your family this year. As an old song goes, "How time slips away" it seems I'm always behind anymore, so I'm finally getting around to sending in this questionnaire and renew *Servants' News* and also write you a letter I have been procrastinating on writing about Herbert Armstrong.

First of all let me say your article in *The Journal* (February issue) was excellent. It dealt with many of the problems of copyrighting material and incorporating Churches. But you also stepped into territory that most of the ministry wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole, and that is exposing the sins and errors of Herbert W. Armstrong.

You probably don't remember me writing to you on this subject a few years ago. I was then in the process of investigating these allegations for myself to prove them right or false. It has taken me quite some time to read all the material on HWA that's out there. I still don't have it all read but of what I've read it seems he was guilty of child incest and statutory rape when he was supposedly starting what is known as the Philadelphia era of God's church. I know most of the material out there is circumstantial and you can't convict someone with hearsay. But there are credible witnesses who know it's true, but won't say yea or nay in writing because they think Herbert was an Apostle or if they did, it would blow their own house of cards apart.

RESPONSE: David Robinson published accusations that HWA committed incest and other sins: 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 indicate that church leaders should be "one who rules his own house well" and have "a good testimony among those who are outside". If these accusations are true and if Mr. Armstrong never openly acknowledged and confessed this sin, then he should not be regarded as a church leader. I have made some effort to try to find wit-

nesses who themselves heard either a confirmation or a denial directly from the Armstrong family. Most declined to answer. Others claimed that they "knew" that the allegations are true, but could not give the specifics of how they obtained their opinion. I have never heard a claim (even by second- or third-hand story) that Mr. Armstrong even denied the accusation. I do know of two people close to Mr. Armstrong who wanted to find out about the matter and were advised to ask Dorothy and Beverly directly—but they never did.

Aaron Dean said he never heard anyone ask Mr. Armstrong about it, nor did he ever ask him himself. Aaron Dean said: "I did hear an argument between he [HWA] and Dorothy (the alleged victim) where she was asking him for money. Although the conversation got quite loud and demanding, there was never a 'you know what I know' or any type of statements that would indicate this sin. Neither one knew I was there in the house when this took place, so there was no reason not to say anything that came to mind. He did not give her what she was asking for. None of this proves anything, except perhaps that it either didn't happen or he respected me enough not to say anything. In the 12 years I worked for him, I never saw him do anything immoral, and as most people know, he was quite open. It does not fit the character of the man I worked with—however many biblical characters prove there can be lapses of character."

Aaron Dean went on to say that one ought to believe what they can find in their Bible, not simply because Mr. Armstrong said something. "Even so, while I have my personal beliefs where I feel he was right on some areas that are more speculative, I do not demand those 'speculative' beliefs of others." I think this is a key that all church of God brethren need to recognize. **Whether Mr Armstrong was a "great saint or a great sinner", we ought to teach only what we can clearly teach from the Bible, and not expect anyone**

to believe a teaching because "Mr. Armstrong taught it".

Unfortunately, many people still seem to be stuck on trying to determine whether he was "an apostle", "the Elijah" or some other special biblical figure. If anyone has clear first-person testimony about this issue, I think it would help some people to print it.

LETTER: I read your articles in past *Servants' News* and thought you gave HWA a fair and honest evaluation. I know if you have read as much as myself, you could have shredded him to pieces as some have done without any mercy, so your evaluation was proper. It exposed the bad as well the good that he had done.

What really got me started into this messy ordeal some years ago was not initially the incest allegation, but his plagiarism of other people's writing, a problem you confronted with Jim Rector. Plagiarism, as you pointed out, is stealing and hypocrisy, which Jesus Christ condemned very emphatically. I challenge anyone with an open mind to compare HWA's "US and BC in Prophecy" with J. H. Allen's "Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright" and say HWA didn't plagiarize his book. But this is not the only plagiarism he did, as he liberally used the writings of G.G. Rupert for his booklets as Richard Nickels of Giving and Sharing has material available to show this is true. (Write *Servants' News* for the Giving and Sharing Order Form). And I'm sure you are aware HWA was not the first in 1,900 years to teach the Holy Days, the British and Israel theory, clean and unclean meats, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, etc., etc. He got most of these from Rupert's books and his magazine "Remnant of Israel" still available at the New York Library.

As one minister told me when I confronted him about HWA plagiarizing Allen's book, "What difference does it make where it came from, if it's true?" If I used his reasoning about plagiarizing with today's technology of computers, scanners, copiers, etc. I could be the greatest author of all time, change the title, insert my name as author, change a word here and there, print a manuscript and off to

the publisher. I don't know how long I would last before I was sued, but I could really put out the manuscripts for awhile.

Anyway, after I proved he plagiarized other writings, it led me into the charges of immoral behavior. I had never read the Ambassador Reports until I started this investigation. I, like many others, thought it was trash like the Esquire magazine and other gossip tabloids. This is what we were told by the ministry: it was trash, untrue, some were even put out of the church for reading it. But when it came on line, I read all of them and in retrospect, I found the majority of the material to be true. No wonder the ministry wanted no one to read them. It's ironic that many of the ministers themselves who did the ARs, left the church after finding out about the cover-ups, extravagant lifestyles, whoredoms, incest, false prophecies, extravagant salaries of the higher echelon of the church.

RESPONSE: Many people have told me a similar story. There are a few false facts in Ambassador Report and some speculation that turned out to be wrong. But all too much is true. The unfortunate thing is that the WCG leaders never once acknowledged their sin and thanked the Ambassador Report for bringing it to their attention. They pretended like none of it ever happened. This is completely opposite from the type of repentance I see in the Scriptures.

LETTER: A word on John Trechak: although I don't agree with some of his philosophies, I think he was a man of character in that he published mostly from newspaper articles and first hand knowledge and not rumors, although some slipped through and were later retracted. It is interesting that Rader and Co. could never find a just cause for a lawsuit to shut him down, although they did try.

This was not the case for former WCG minister David Robinson whose book "Herbert Armstrong's Tangled Web" caused an uproar in WCG. Sherwin McMichael and Rader associate Henry Cornwall's lawsuit delayed the publishing for a while and bankrupted Robinson. I personally didn't know David Robinson, but his son Mark was an associate pastor in our area for a while. From what I can ascertain from others, he was a man of morals, although authoritative as was the manner of many ministers. It's interesting to note the lawsuit was not about the contents of the book as untruths, but a breach of ministerial confidence. The WCG lawyers were really grabbing at straws in that suit.

RESPONSE: I remember hearing about that suit when I was in the church—and hearing strange explanations why Sherwin McMichael and Henry Cornwall had to sue, rather than the WCG. I remember them saying that they had to use the courts to stop the "enemies of God" from telling evil lies about them. Yet, it is amazing to see how they used the courts in the same manner as other corrupt people—just to cause delays and expense for someone else, not to see that a case is settled justly.

LETTER: Now for the crux of this letter, as you know the WCG and Herbert W taught apostolic ascension, the Primacy of Peter, and The One True Church doctrines: that is, if you were not in WCG, all you could hope for was the second resurrection. **With that in mind, all members had to be baptized and hands laid on directly or indirectly by HWA to be in the true church and hence in the first resurrection.** If all the allegations about HWA's incest with his daughter for ten years are true, then from what I read in 1Tim 3:1–7, he did not meet those requirements when he was supposedly ordained an Elder.

As an aside by what I've read, he was baptized by a Baptist minister and hands laid on him later by the small congregation in Oregon and according to Alan Ruth, no Elder was present. So, one would wonder how valid was his baptism according to what he taught.

RESPONSE: This is a very interesting issue. Mr. Armstrong's own baptism and ordination certainly were different from what the WCG required for most of its existence. I have had this discussion with many others, some of whom have said, "HWA was the start of a new era, so God had to start it up from nothing." But how do we know that some other ministry today which appears to be defying "established church authority" is not the start of "a new era" that God is "starting up from nothing"? The reality is that God does not need our permission to operate as He wants. If He wants to reveal Himself to one man and have that man teach a million people, He can. If He wants to teach a million people Himself, He can.

The Bible simply does not teach a succession of ordination, or that a believer must be baptized by an ordained person. The Bible gives us genealogies of many people—even telling us the mother's name of nearly all the kings of Israel, but makes little effort to tell us who laid hands upon each servant

of God or who baptised who. We have a clear admission from the Apostle Paul that he did not remember if he baptized anyone else beside the household of Stephanas (1Cor 1:16). Paul was baptized by Annanias (Acts 9:10–18), but who baptized Annanias? There is no record of any apostle "appointing a successor"—and only a very few Old Testament prophets who did. **If a prophet or apostle by virtue of his calling has the right to appoint a "successor", then all it takes is one who is (possibly secretly) not following God and the entire rest of the chain is not of God.** But if we realize that we must look for personal fruits in any servant of God, we are on much better ground than someone who is only asking, "Who baptized or ordained that leader?"

LETTER: I know some argue that was when he was a babe in Christ and he later repented and God used him to do a mighty work. They also use the David defense, and say David was a man after God's heart. They also point to his works or fruit and how many lives were changed by his preaching. But looking back, you can see many lives were wrecked by his doctrines (teachings on divorce and remarriage, teachings on avoiding family members who left the WCG) and many left the Church because of the behavior of him and Garner Ted. If Lev 20 laws were in effect today, both of them would have been put to death, not only for sexual crimes, but being false prophets as well. The question I am and others are asking, if he did not meet the requirements of Timothy and Titus, where does that put all under him? Do we have a valid baptism, if one believes in apostolic ascension, if he did not qualify?

RESPONSE: If one believes in apostolic succession, yes, one is in big trouble. The only sensible thing would be to stay in the WCG and follow whoever is in charge there until God "cleans it up".

LETTER: As I wrote earlier, very few will even address this because they don't like being backed into a corner. They know very well where that leaves them if their idol falls. They all need Herbert's legacy to prop up the numerous off-shoots. So HWA must stay as the foundation while some of the things he taught may be rejected.

RESPONSE: I agree. Many groups speak glowingly of Herbert Armstrong even though they may have changed many of his

teachings. Other denominations do this. If we were to point out Martin Luther's disagreements with the Bible to a Lutheran, they might ask for tolerance and try to show how much good he did. But most CoG members would see that as a clear reason to completely reject Luther and all the good he did fighting corrupt practices in the Catholic Church in his day. But if a Lutheran were to point out HWA's doctrines that did not match the Bible, many CoG brethren would expect the Lutherans to ignore that and to see only the good things that he taught.

LETTER: Another problem with using his apostolic ascension theory: If HWA had no authority to ordain, then neither did the men who ordained the ones who preach today—so on it goes until **none** of them has any authority to be a minister! Without HWA, none of these offshoot ministers can claim any authority—all authority came from the initial ordinations by HWA. This is the old dominoes theory, if you pull out HWA, they all fall. If he did not meet the requirements of deacon and elder, how could he possibly be an apostle? As for the requirement of apostle-ship, how about Acts 1:21–25?

RESPONSE: I agree that this “opens up a can of worms” for all of the CoG groups. Do their ministers claim to be ministers because of their chain of ordination, or do they claim to be ministers because they are indeed ministering? If it is the latter, might it be a good idea for the brethren to give some input as to who is ministering to them and who is not? A lot of them really are ministering—serving. But some may not be.

In regard to apostleship, I agree that Mr. Armstrong did not have the direct training from Christ that the 12 Apostles and Paul had. He claimed to have been trained from a six-month study of the same Bible and books in a library that are available to almost everyone today. Nor did he have the “signs and wonders and mighty deeds” that Paul mentions as the “signs of an Apostle” (2Cor 12:12).

LETTER: In 1Tim 5:19–20, it says, “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.” In the case of HWA, there were more than two or three witnesses who knew about his past sins of cover-up, extravagance, plagiarism, and in 1979 the early incest. Those who did dare rebuke him or

Garner Ted, whether minister or laymember, were quickly branded heretics, marked and excommunicated from the church. The rest cowered in fear. What happened shows the frailties of hierarchical government.

RESPONSE: Some of the sins of extravagance and plagiarism are documented by undisputed records available to anyone (people simply dispute whether they are actually sins). But if there are multiple witnesses to the incest accusation, I do not know who they are.

LETTER: As for those in the ministry who will now openly address this issue, you and Dave Havar are the only two I know who have rational views on this subject. There are others with more radical views pro and con. Most people in the various groups still refuse to hear or read anything about HWA's past. They simply refuse to believe HWA could do such heinous acts; maybe they are better off than the ones who find out differently.

RESPONSE: The Bible never teaches “ignorance is bliss”. God promises to lead us into truth (John 16:13) and that truth would make us free (John 8:32). God knows the truth about everything, and as we grow to be like Christ, we need to be able to handle the truth, too.

LETTER: There are leaders of a few of these organizations who consider it anathema from Christ to say or write anything in opposition to HWA's teachings and if you say he committed incest and many other sins, they consider you a complete heretic.

Those people who prove to themselves this actually happened, fall into, it seems to me, four categories: 1. They are deeply hurt by it, but still attend church somewhere because they still believe the basic doctrines. 2. They are hurt by it and quietly fall away. 3. They are hurt by it and get angry and vent their feelings; the majority fall away, a few stay. 4. They are hurt and get angry and seek revenge, nearly all fall away and become agnostics.

RESPONSE: I have certainly met people who seem to fit in all of those categories and others as well. But I also know quite a few like myself who realize that the Bible and history are full of leaders who pretended to be good, but who were not. Figuring out who was good and who was bad is an activity for Christ in the judgment. Right now, we need to be more focused on how God wants to work in our lives and how to let Him do

it. **It should not take much prayer or study to realize that we need to both live and teach both the Bible and salvation in the name of Jesus, rather than doctrinal booklets in the name of Herbert Armstrong.**

LETTER: I would say I fall into the first category although I believe the truth should be told especially about the plagiarism as it affects people building on a false foundation. People should be building on the foundation of Christ and not HWA. The incest is something that falls into the category of, “work out your own salvation”, you either believe he was an apostle or you don't.

I know that everyone of us has sinned and come short of the glory of God (Christ) and if we're expected to be perfect as mortal men to enter into the kingdom, there would be no one able to enter. (Eph. 2:8 “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”).

As one minister told me, “HWA's fate is sealed, he will rise in the first resurrection or he won't. Only God is his judge and we should not judge him”. That's good advice but I also want to know where I stand on the validity of my own baptism.

I would like your input on this subject of the legitimacy of HWA's qualifications as a minister based on Titus and Timothy either in an article or private mail as this is a thorn in the side for several people.

Warm regards,

— Phil, Ohio

RESPONSE: The problem with Mr. Armstrong was concentrating all power in a hierarchical government so that members could not use 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 to evaluate either him or their local ministry. Baptism is an act carried out on behalf of God. As Solomon built the temple, but then left God, so someone can baptize us and then leave God. The heart of the person and what God does is all that matters at baptism. People have been baptized by ministers who later admitted they were atheists with an easy job. God's promises are sure. Only a wrong attitude on our part can invalidate our baptism. The spiritual status of Herbert Armstrong or anyone else does not matter. The Bible does not say “find the right baptizer”, but: “...Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

— NSE 


“F. Paul Haney” from page 14

ed work to continue? The WCG caused much pain and suffering along with the good. Those who insist on HWA or the highway will fail in their endeavors. The old HWA “work” was relatively great but if size is a factor of greatness, look at orthodoxy and the Catholic Church. If quality is a better indicator of greatness, HWA / WCG does not fare that well. Today, the various churches of God are perpetuating many of the same old myths and lies, plus much of the truth. But a mixture of error and truth devolves to a corrupted message that has to be cleaned up. Yet, many of the groups, even the more forward-reaching ones, are not terribly willing to really clean up the old message—they are not visibly, at least, seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. They are willing to maintain the cult status. And that saddens me. HWA was a false prophet—let’s admit the truth of the matter. That doesn’t make all he said wrong but it

should tell us to beware his teachings and not be afraid to closely examine his “exalted word”. And we must indeed judge ourselves harshly, lest a stronger judge take us in hand. In **Christ Fellowship Ministries**, I do answer the difficult questions. Because I am openly willing to confront issues, my own WCG past, and let the chips fall where they may, I have lost “friends”. Consequently, I have grown and have discovered things hidden from others—things they are unwilling or unable to see. Thank you.

— F. Paul Haney

[I did not send the original copy of this letter to Paul Haney because I never considered him a “hierarchical leader”. I agree with his answer. Our understanding of what the Bible says about government and our opinion of what God is doing with the WCG is very similar—but we did not learn it from each other. He did his own study and so did I. We receive each other’s

newsletters, but we do not always have time to read them all. Paul Haney teaches a Seventh-Day Baptist congregation, has two on-going prison ministries and works with other groups. Everyone is welcome to attend in the groups where he teaches—whether they get literature from 100 church of God groups or from none. He does not try to stop people from visiting other groups. Mr. Haney has no trouble defining what the Church is: “persons whom God thinks are brethren.” He realized the futility of trying to write some document defining that, because we simply cannot now know everything that God knows. If someone who attends with him appears to offend or lead astray other brethren, it is dealt with on a case by case basis using the appropriate scriptures (Matt 18:15–17; Rom 14; Gal 6:1–2; Tit 3:10, 1Jn 4:1). May more and more groups have the faith to work this way. — NSEJ 

“Dominating Faith” from page 1

The secret of dominating faith—complete dependence on God—lies in getting a true conception of what Jesus actually did for us, and what we are in Him as a result of it, and what the Word promises we can do as a result of His finished work in us.

Some people may have good intellectual and scholarly knowledge of Paul’s teachings, however, unless this knowledge is acted upon, it is of no significant value.

Understanding the distinction between faith and belief, and their close relationship, is important here. Faith is understanding and trusting; believing is acting upon your faith. And when we know what Jesus did for us in His Substitution, then we dare to act on that knowledge; this is the *highest order of faith*—Dominating Faith.

Simply to admire it, to say that you believe it, but to refuse to act upon it, robs you of faith in the time of need.

When we come to know what He is and what He did for us, what actually belongs to us now, and what we may enjoy in our daily life, then this makes us victors.

When we know that Ephesians 1:3 is real, and that “...He (God The Father)

has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus,” and we know how to assimilate that, how to enjoy it, how to enter into the riches of it, then we will appreciate our Master. And we can then truly say, “I am getting to know Him.”

Another point here that may help us understand dominating faith is on “hope”. Hope is the most beautiful child of the senses. The very word is filled with fragrance. However, the unthinking have often mistaken it for faith. Faith is always NOW. Hope is always future.

Even Abraham had to change hope into faith (Rom 4:18). There is always a battle in the spiritual realm to do this.

Hope is so vigorous; it is so full of vibrant enthusiasm. We should thank our Father for it, but it can never be associated with faith, or sit in the seat of faith, or hold dominion over faith.

Faith is a creative element of God. Hope paints the clouds at the setting of the sun and makes the dying day beautiful.

Faith is a rugged thing, a creative force, a dominating force. Hope cannot create, and its dominion is often dangerous.

Faith is a builder.

“Sense knowledge” faith has given us all our great financial structures. It

has been the strength of the man of the senses. It has made him a victor in the war of civilization. (Consider the settling of America, or any other new frontier.)

But Spiritual faith grows out of the **Word**, out of the recreated spirit. Faith has given us all that is beautiful and real, all that is holy, all that is actually worthwhile in Life.

It has brought us into personal contact with the Creator of the universe. It has confessed Jesus as Lord.

It has challenged the love heart of the Father resulting in Eternal Life for us, and it has brought man into union with the God Family.

To know this, to believe this and then to act upon this knowledge, this is Dominating Faith.

Why can we talk about trust in Christian leaders, trust in Christian organizations, trust in doctrinal statements; trust in governments and trust in ourselves and most people accept it? But if we talk about having the same kind of trust—yes, faith—in the Bible, in the Word of God, why do we often find opposition?

People’s knowledge—some call it “sense knowledge”—does not produce dominating faith. It will never give the Word first place. It admires the Word,


but does not do it all. Jesus set the example for us to learn of complete dependence on His Father.

Many religious books are written to show that the Bible agrees with the latest dictum of science. They may be helpful to encourage a skeptic to consider that God exists. But the mature

believer should be far away from the approach that "God exists because men have concluded that His existence is logical". We should know He exists because He exists in us!

If our focus is only on the preconceived ideas from "sense knowledge" faith, it is very difficult to give it sec-

ond place, and give the Word of God its real place.

In the fight of faith, there is but one weapon—the Sword of the Spirit. "Fight the good fight of Faith..." (1Tim 6:12). 

— Morris. C Kerry, Jr.,
edited by Norman Edwards

"Truckers Study" from page 2

Lesson #3: Don't feel you need to be the center of attention. Let the Holy Spirit move wherever it will—and whomever it will. Keep your mouth shut and let others be an instrument of God. Instead, make sure the meeting stays focused on the message at hand and does not drift aimlessly.

It never hurts to reflect and remember what these experiences have taught me.

December 23, 2001

Two drivers came today, both going through divorces that they don't want. We reviewed 1 Corinthians 7 regarding unbelieving mates. If the unbelieving mate is pleased to dwell with the believer, then don't divorce her. However, if she insists on a divorce, then the believing mate is not under bondage in such cases.

Having said that, they should do what they can to save their marriages, especially when children are involved.

Last week I met with a truck driver who was most likely going to give up driving, one reason being his desire to get back together with his ex-wife and do it right this time. Truck drivers have a very hard time of it in regard to family life, some being on the road for months at a time. I often turn to Ephesians 5:17, telling them not to be unwise, but to understand what the will of the Lord is. The rest of that chapter tells us much of what God's will is. We will not find in the Bible any instruction that says that Joe Truck Driver should give up truck driving, but if it interferes with God's will regarding marriage and family (5:22–6:9), then maybe they should find another line of work.

Almost the entire study today was spent discussing the issues at hand. Sometimes it's best to just give these men a venue to talk.

January 6, 2002

I began today by discussing Saul and Samuel and their sparring in 1 Samuel 13. It seemed to me that Saul was an accomplished liar and refused to take responsibility for his actions. One of the drivers had another take: that Samuel had set him up. The Scriptures say that as soon as Saul finished the illegal sacrifice, lo and behold, Samuel showed up (v10). He theorizes that Samuel entrapped Saul because he wanted to get rid of him. We countered by pointing out that Samuel mourned for Saul (15:35–16:1). The truck driver had an answer for this, that the Scriptures don't always tell the whole story and can be wrong, whereupon we pointed out that Scriptures are either inspired or not. He said that he certainly believes in the inspiration of Scripture, but that the Old Testament is often wrong.

So what could we do with a comment like that?

[I have occasionally spoken with people who claim to be Christians, but believe that the Bible has major errors, as this man did. If I have time, I usually try to sit down with them and get them to describe how one could know which parts of the Bible are the thoughts of God and which are not. Some have already worked out a clear definition of what parts they believe are true. Then I ask them if they are perfectly following all of the commands that they agree are true (as Christ asked of the man with one talent in Matt 25:14–30). Most agree that they are not, so I encourage them to do the parts they know to be right, and ask God to show them about the rest.

Others clearly have never thought about exactly how much of the Bible they believe and how much they do not. If they claim to believe the New Testament, but not the Old, I show them that NT authors believed the

whole OT (Matt 5:17–18, Luke 16:17; 24:44; Acts 24:14; 2Ti 3:16). If they claim that the Scriptures have been changed since that time, I start asking them how much they know about the Bible manuscripts, and how few significant differences there are, and usually find that they know little about these things. Also, I try to show them that the Bible can never be any kind of spiritual guide for their life if their approach is "anything I disagree with in the Bible is probably wrong"—they might as well say they don't believe it. I do agree that there are some relatively minor errors in today's Bibles, due to manuscript and translation problems. However, Since the Bible claims to be God's revelation to man, and since I know of no other book that comes close to fulfilling that role, I think we should obey everything in it, unless we can use manuscript and translation tools to demonstrate an error. God can judge us very well from seeing how well we follow what we understand to be right (Matt 11:23; Rom 2:1–16).

Finally, I ask people if they have mistrust for the Bible because they have met people in church organizations who were deceitful and tried to "get rid of" their political enemies (as your visitor accused Samuel). I assure them that God and the righteous people in the Scriptures are not like the corrupt people who run corrupt church groups today. — NSE]

Another topic of discussion related to various covenants in the Bible. It seems to me that the Old Covenant was between God and a nation (Israel), and that this covenant by itself did not offer salvation. The New Covenant is between God and individuals (not any one nation) and is all about salvation.

Other covenants relate to God's agreement with Abraham and his descendants, a covenant with Jonah, and so forth.

January 13, 2002

With the five truck drivers today we covered a number of different topics, although the intent was to cover Genesis 2 and 3. A discussion of those two chapters can logically lead in dozens of different directions, including Sabbath, family relations, evolution, humanism, New Age philosophy, discussion of covenants, the sacrifice of Christ, Satan's devices, self-justification, the presence of evil in the world, the spirit of God vs. the spirit of man, the introduction of animal sacrifices, etc., etc. The door can be opened to any of these issues and more, depending on God's leading. So that's what we did today.

One of the drivers was perhaps too articulate (he tended to dominate the meeting) and spoke at great length about the man's responsibility in leading his family, and thus ultimately, Eve's deception was Adam's fault. His wife (who is also his driving partner) pointed out that the command given to Adam to not eat of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was given before Eve's creation (which to my surprise appears to be true), and therefore it shows that Adam didn't sufficiently teach his wife.

So where did God get the animal skins with which to clothe Adam and Eve? Obviously from an animal, which had to be killed so that they could be covered, which was a precursor of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. An innocent animal had to give its life to cover the shame of our first parents in the same way that an innocent lamb had to be slain at the Passover in Exodus 12 so that the angel of death would have no power over the children of Israel.

God breathed into man the breath of life. An interesting characteristic of both Hebrew and Greek is their words for spirit. In Hebrew, "breath" and "spirit" are translated from the same word *ruach*. The Greek *pneuma* can be rendered both "wind" and "spirit". So whenever we see the word "spirit", it is not necessarily talking about the Holy

Spirit. One of the men had a theory that he asked for some help with—that the Holy Spirit is given at the moment of conception. How else could we have a sense of the divine and feel God's presence even as young children? So we reviewed Acts 8 and Acts 2, showing that the Holy Spirit was given to people at specific points in time. But I believe his confusion came from a misunderstanding of 1 Corinthians 2, where the relationship among the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, and the spirit of the world is discussed. And Jesus also mentioned, when speaking to His disciples on the night He was betrayed, that the Holy Spirit was WITH them, but later would be IN them.

Of the five truckers today, three admitted to jail time. It was gratifying to see them openly admit past mistakes in life and how much their faith meant to them in overcoming destructive lifestyles. In fact, had you walked into the study today, you might have wondered what type of motley crew was meeting there. One fellow had a totally shaved head except for a long braid going halfway down his back. Another was dressed in all black leather with shoulder-length black, curly hair and was built like a stereotypical biker (which he was), and a third one was a stern-faced native American with scraggly hair well passed his shoulders. I relate this because these people were evidently sincere in their desire to learn from the Word of God and were there today because they wanted to be. I also want to ask this question: if any one of these men were to walk into your congregation, would you welcome him as a brother or treat him like an infidel? Think about it.

[Christ seemed to find the most honesty among the poor, tax collectors, prostitutes and other "less desirable" people of his day (Matt 21:31). He had the most criticism for the religious leaders of his day (Matt 23). I have occasionally observed people from "difficult" backgrounds come to Sabbatarian groups—both corporate

and independent. Unfortunately, they were usually not well received and most stopped coming fairly soon. We have a lot of room to grow. — NSE]

February 3, 2002

Six truck drivers joined me today, including a gentleman who had met with me several weeks ago. It was obvious that all the men knew their Bibles, as they had no problem finding the scriptures that we referred to. But two men in particular were articulate, one of whom claimed to have been in his Bible for only a year. Yet his understanding was amazing. I asked him if the Bible made sense to him before that, and he said that it did not. I mentioned that sometimes it's like God flipping a switch in your mind, and what at one time was indecipherable will become clear when God decides to open our minds. I asked him if he could explain that. Another trucker told him to turn to John 14:26:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

We covered a lot of ground today, including a discussion on the Apostle Paul, law, grace, end times, Lucifer and his origins, etc. My hope going into the meeting was to focus on Genesis 2–4 and how most of the Ten Commandments can be found there, including the fourth one. But for whatever reason I just couldn't get it there. One way to defeat the argument that the law is done away is to show that the law was not really instituted at Sinai but was there right from creation. It's a wonderful way to show that the Sabbath was not a Mosaic institution, but part of the creation covenant. Maybe we can get to that next time, as I would bet that we'll have some of these men back again.

L_cacchio@yahoo.com
705 NE Bryant Drive
Lee's Summit
MO 64086 ☐

Servants' News, PO Box 107, Perry, Michigan 48872-0107, USA

Tel: 517-625-7480, Fax: 517-625-7481, E-mail: Info@ServantsNews.com

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