

# outreach

## *The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK*

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Matthew 28:19-20

representing



## **Independence – curse or cure?**

Many Christians are outside the organized bodies of the Church of God. They may be observing Sabbath alone in their home. Or perhaps with a few like-minded friends. Are such any less part of the Body of Christ?

It's important that every Christian be in close association with the Body of Christ, His Church. There in face-to-face interaction we learn to relate to other Christians. There we are, hopefully, instructed by competent teachers. There we can share with our brethren our life in Christ with all its highs and its lows. There comfort and encourage one another, build up one another, care for one another. There have our doctrinal wrinkles ironed out.

Such interaction is most attainable and effective, in face-to-face contact with brethren in a local assembly.

### **Good Reasons**

Circumstances, however, hinder the ideal, and many brethren are unable to fellowship with others. The reasons for their choice are many:

- they may live too far away to make a regular Sabbath journey
- illness may be a factor
- so, too, may finances
- accessible local churches may be seriously defective in their teachings
- perhaps the local minister is heavy-handed, overbearing (a church fellowship should be uplifting, encouraging)
- or a local group fails to recognize and effectively use the brethren's spiritual gifts

Blanket condemnation of a 'living room Christian' is clearly unaccept-

able. They may have good reason.

However, there remains to be considered the *attitude* of the individual independent. Is he or she independent for one of the above, or similar, acceptable reasons? Or is inertia a factor? Or perhaps an independent spirit, an unwillingness to 'work as a team' with other brethren? Perhaps a frustrated desire to be 'in charge'? (Some - perhaps because having held a 'high' church office - simply refuse to work 'under' or with another equally-qualified Christians.)

Other independents may have mounted a doctrinal 'hobby-horse'. They have developed a doctrine contrary to their church's stated teachings but are unwilling to 'keep it under wraps'. or they may find the leadership unwilling even to discuss the matter. So off they go into pastures new - or isolated in the 'living room church'.

### **A Lesson from History**

Another consideration is the *independent group*. Some such may be independent for totally wrong reasons. But many have formed an independent assembly because they perceive it to be the Biblical norm.

The early church speedily spread around the world - *Acts* chapter two exemplifies some of the nations to which the church of God reached. Sometimes a group of new believers would return from Jerusalem to their distant homeland. Sometimes just a single individual would do so - *eg Acts* 8.26-39.

They would evangelize, and form a local assembly of believers and disciples. They were a part of the Body - even though they may never have had further contact with *cont'd p.4*

## Iraq - the end of the West?

Was the Bush-Blair axis warmongering by its invasion of Iraq? Was it a genuine belief that Saddam Hussein and his cohorts were a threat to Western democracies? Was 'black gold' the true motivation?

It's unlikely you will extort a straight answer from any politician. And 'the man in the pub' has his own – sometimes confused—inside knowledge. Bible thumpers, too, spout their penny-worth. Could there be another explanation?

While the following is merely a suggestion it may— at least for Bible-believing Christians—be worth consideration. (Unbelievers may scoff!) Given the invisibility of the 'weapons of mass destruction', the apparent use of obfuscation to justify the war and the current near civil war in Iraq, could *God* have had a hand in it? Could He have exercised His eternal right - so often used - to govern the world?

Not, if such is the case, that such a scenario implies the Creator is pleased with the United States of America or with the United Kingdom. As in the past, He may well simply be using these nations as a 'big stick' to quell the excesses of a brutal tyrant. The cry of the people of Iraq may have come to His ears.

### Consider:

- God is Creator—and sovereign
- He intervenes to prevent our world tipping into anarchy because of our awesome *sin*
- He raises up and overthrows nations and empires
- In the past He has used both Israel and Assyria to fulfil His will in such matters
- the LORD has, too, inspired kings to carry out His sovereign will - *eg* Cyrus, Nebuchadnezzar

### Blessings Past

God could have used Iran to quell the excesses of Sadaam and his little helpers. (They have long been at each other's throat.) Instead He (may have) stirred up the United States and Britain. Close attention to the Scriptures gives us a clue. These two nations have, above all, inherited earth's bounty. In Bible terms they are 'blessed'. But blessed by God for historical reasons:

- these two nations, especially, have inherited promises made by God to Abraham and his descendants
- more than any other they have applied the divine Law in governing the nation
- that Law is the optimum form of governance for any nation, and its

application bears good fruit

So, if Britain and America are God's 'big stick' - does that mean He approves of how they have abused His munificence? For no longer do our rulers apply the divine Law. Instead they have substituted laws dreamed up from the depths of human depravity.

Whatever the motives, we are embroiled in the occupation (call it what you will) of a foreign sovereign nation. If President Bush is indeed - perhaps unknowingly - forwarding God's will, then why the many deaths of both civilians and military? Why do Islamic terrorists kill and maim the innocent? Why has not the war already ended cleanly and successfully?

Consider some of the reasons that God's blessing is slipping from us:

- the elderly are ignored, abused, neglected
- violence is inadequately prevented or punished
- adultery is considered normal, rape is rarely punished, stable marriage is deemed of no importance, millions are slaughtered in the womb
- we steal, cheat on tax, invade homes for gain, amass money by illegal means
- our justice system is corrupt, perjury common
- the inordinate desire for 'stuff' drags millions into unpayable debt and homelessness

How did we come to step on this slippery path? Because we have abandoned the God of the Christian Scriptures. Because the Word of the Sovereign God is no longer respected. Not even in the 'Bible Belt'. Because we bow down to our own gods of gold and silver. Because we have substituted the worship of other gods - which, says Paul, are 'no gods' - for the true worship: God's festivals and His Sabbaths.

We must consider that our failures in Iraq, the expenditure there of billions of our taxes, the deaths of our soldiers, the rising unrest at home - these may be part of 'the plan'. Despite our military might, our moral weakness has made the 'stick' weak. It may well be that it will snap, that our great national heritage will disappear, that God has given us our last chance. That He has engineered there our defeat to bring about our national repentance.

Christians can pray that God, that Jesus Christ, will turn aside their anger at how we have trodden underfoot God's bounty. But Scripture provides no surety that our leaders, our people, will turn from our path of rebellion to the Creator. Perhaps all we can pray for is '*Your Kingdom come*'. Ω

*Request the free literature:*  
**The Law of Life**  
**Two Nations of Israel**

**NEW HORIZONS/  
OUTREACH**  
**July/August 2005**

**There was a problem with the mailing of these issues. If you didn't receive your copies, please contact us.**

*Our apologies for any inconvenience*

## CGOM Update

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries can report that we have this year received an increased number of literature requests:

- *E-mail* requests have already topped all of 2004 by +6% as of the end of September
- These next three months will just increase that percentage above all of 2004
- *1-800 calls* have also already topped all of 2004 by almost 7% as of the end of September. These next three months will also just increase that percentage above all of 2004
- *Regular mail* was up over 72% for the month of September compared to September of 2004. It was up by over 32% for the 3rd quarter compared to 3rd quarter 2004
- And it is up by over 9% for the year compared to this same time in 2004
- We have added 177 *NEW names* to the international mailing lists this year
- We have added 382 *NEW names* to the USA mailing list this year
- Our mailing list totals are now up to 4,334 *active subscribers* of a mailing list of 4,982 for the USA
- 658 *active subscribers* of a mailing list of 1,010 for the International list

*Richard Gawith*

*You can perhaps imagine that increased activity of this nature puts a strain on our shoe-string budget! We would ask our readers to prayerfully consider how they can support our work. We appreciate the help offered in many forms: advertising our materials in your area, financial support, readiness to distribute New Horizons to a wider readership.*

*Our sincere thanks for your continued interest.*

The Outreach Ministries publish a bi-monthly Bible-based magazine *New Horizons*. It is free on request. To subscribe simply contact us at any of our addresses - by e-mail, or by phone or letter.

Over one hundred booklets and articles are available on request. They address a range of themes from Bible exposition to practical day-to-day living.

All our publications may be viewed on-line at [www.cgom.org](http://www.cgom.org)

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## GOOD NEWS!

'There's a new world coming in the morning' goes the song. It's the purpose of the Outreach Ministries to help spread abroad that very message - the best news you will ever hear.

If you are a Christian you will constantly hold fast the vision of that world to come, and if you stay faithful to that vision you will be an integral part of this divine Plan. The culmination of that Plan seems to be imminent, and many are preparing to take part.

The 'new world' contrasts vividly with this one, though world conditions have in general improved during the last hundred years. Average life expectancy, for example, has increased from 30 years to 68 years. Poverty, says the UN, has improved more in the last half century than in the previous five centuries. 80% of the developing world now have clean drinking water - 30% in 1970. But only the deluded or unthinking can be 100% comfortable here and now! As Christians we are 'strangers and pilgrims' - just passing through, but looking forward excitedly to that new world.

### Advance Plans

To further God's plan for mankind, Jesus Christ - the Messiah - will return to Planet Earth to put right all that has gone wrong while under human administration. The Father is now calling out individuals and giving them opportunity to align themselves with Jesus in that task. This selection process has continued since human beginnings.

Men and women long dead will at Christ's return come out of their graves, together with those Christians still alive at his coming. Not in their frail physical bodies but transformed by divine power into beings able to live tirelessly forever. Imbued with divine wisdom they will for a thousand years govern those who survive the coming time of worldwide destruction - together with their offspring.

The *good news* is that 'the end of the world' won't happen! For before mankind self-destructs Jesus Christ will step in to save the planet. He will, together with those who are resurrected, apply the laws of life which he devised prior to man's creation. The kind of world we dream about will become reality: peace and harmony among nations, health of body and mind, a clean environment, universal justice and an end to corruption in politics and commerce, a world void of religious strife. Isn't that what you desire?

Such a mammoth task needs careful preparation. So part of our mission, in co-operation with others of like-mind, is to herald the terms on which men and women may actively be part of the Plan. But it demands personal change. God provides the opportunity - but we must each embrace His terms. True Christianity is not for the faint-hearted!

Contact us to learn how you can be part of this awesome plan 

Request the free articles:

**Should You Be Baptized?  
What Do You Mean - 'Repent'?  
God's Grand Design**

## Who's In Charge?

The idea of a single - and only - 'one true church organization' still grips some church groups. The Roman Catholic Church is a prime example, but there are others. Each stakes a claim to be the direct twenty-first century heir to the apostolic church. There will be one Head, presumably appointed by Jesus from his heavenly throne. The Pope, of course, is the obvious example.

It is inevitable that, given human nature, no such organization can remain intact forever. The Roman Church copes by permitting various 'Orders' each with its own doctrinal flavour - the Benedictines, for example, or the Jesuits. - and these remain part of that 'one true church'. But the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches, and the Anglican have in past centuries split from 'the Mother Church'. None of them, however, would accept that they are cut off from Christ.

### Apostolic Succession?

For other churches it's not so simple. For a start, they cannot, as do the Popes, lay claim to an unbroken 'apostolic succession' from one of the Twelve or Paul. Likely, though, they trace their descent from a man of charisma who is reputed to be an apostle. But if B splits from A and then there's spawned a whole 'alphabet soup' of church organizations - who's in charge? Who is the one and only divinely appointed leader, the 'apostle'?

On the basis of 'one true church' organization - rather than *organism* - there must surely be just one representative of Jesus Christ on earth. So who lays claim to that awesome position? And if a brother or sister chooses to be separate from that esteemed group of local churches are they thus no longer part of the Body of Christ? Condemned to 'outer darkness' or to eternal death?

If your idea of church polity is that there must be a single organization guiding - and often controlling - a number of local assemblies then surely a claim must be staked for apostolic authority. Indeed some do! Yet the act of 'ordination' (itself much misunderstood) spawns a host of men - and some women - who have had hands laid upon them, and who may then claim direct descent from the original apostles. Who can dispute a claim from any one of them to be 'God's chosen'?

### Faith Once Delivered

In essence, Christ appointed but thirteen apostles - the Twelve and Paul. He taught them both before and after his resurrection. They had witnessed Jesus from the start of his ministry. (Paul was an exception.) He endowed them with miracle-working power. He inspired them to record all that's necessary for our use as he builds his church. And all theology must conform to what *they* taught: '*...the faith once for all delivered to the saints*'. Their apostleship is unique.

Charismatic leaders arise from time to time claiming apostleship and some successfully promote Christ's teachings. They are not, however, infallible and too often lead away from 'truth'. By virtue of their personality they can attract a devout following. Without care these disciples can become stuck in a doctrinal time-warp. Further understanding of the Word is stymied. *cont'd next column*

## Independence...cont'd from p.1

Jerusalem or even with an apostle. They learned from the Scriptures, and were guided and taught by Jesus through His Spirit. Whole associations of churches of God developed - as, for example, the early Coptic Church.

Of course, when they heard authentic apostolic teaching independent groups would learn and grow spiritually. They were not, though - until, as the decades passed, some fell into error - separate from the church of God but an integral part.

It is clearly a fallacy to assume that organizational unity will prevent error. Indeed it may preserve and promote it - as, for example, the Roman Catholic organization. Nor has it been unknown in the past couple of decades of church history! The example of the 'Seven Churches of Revelation' demonstrates that Jesus himself carefully oversees each local assembly of His brethren. Sometimes they respond to correction, sometimes not.

A positive example of this oversight is that of the local assemblies around first-century Ephesus. Paul had warned them to be resistant to false teachers and their heresies [Acts 20:27-30]. Thirty years or so later Jesus, through the apostle John [Revelation 2:2], commended them for putting to the test 'false apostles' implying they had not even then fallen into doctrinal error. This was confirmed by Ignatius (also end of the first century). In a letter to them he wrote: "*Onesimus praises exceedingly your good discipline that no heresy dwells among you*"; and, "*You did not permit those having evil doctrine to sow their seed among you, but closed your ears.*" [Epistle to the Ephesians: §§6, 9]

Independence, then, is either a help or a hindrance to our life in Christ. We grow spiritually as we integrate face-to-face with brethren. We can, if not careful, wither on the vine if we unnecessarily choose to avoid such fellowship and instruction. Ω

## Who...? cont'd from previous column

The Scriptures, however, are an inexhaustible store of wisdom and truth, and none of us will exhaust this treasure house no matter how long we live! Men may claim authority, but in reality the one 'in charge' of the church of God is Jesus the Lord and the Messiah. Ω

## WATCH OUT...

We will shortly send you an e-mail summary of reports from various 2005 *Festival of Tabernacles* sites. If any CGOM elders have not yet sent a brief update please do so asap  
Many thanks.

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