

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

PO Box 2525
LINCOLN
LN5 7PF
England

e-mail: coguk@aol.com
web-site: www.cgom.org
Editor: James McBride

Regd Charity No 283358

**November/December
2010**

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Matthew 28:19-20*

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Winds of Change

Thirty years, plus! That's how long since the monolith that was the *Worldwide Church of God* began a major scattering. No longer does the Gospel clarion call of the Church of God movement ring out with a formidable voice. Dozens—hundreds!—of varieties of 'the work' have sprung up, a number indeed with the claim to be the true and only successor of that Church. While the 'original' has assumed the identity of almost any Sunday-observing denomination—though it still has its faithful adherents.

Divided We Fall

There are magazines galore, newsletters (like this one!), web-sites, annual festival sites—once speaking with one voice and one doctrine (however flawed) but now often with an uncertain sound. Yet with, in general, little of note between them in the basic teachings. Brethren are scattered as '*...sheep without a shepherd*', and have often become disillusioned and wandered to new pastures.

Many, however, have remained faithful to Bible teachings and to our Saviour despite the loss of friends and despite isolation and despite the passing of years and the decay of society.

Although all once were members of a single denomination ('WCG'), it has become clear that that 'unity' hid deep division—hence the speedy disintegration into so many off-shoots, each with its own per-

sonalized brand of 'armstrongism'. The structure was flawed. Attempts to restore the old structure failed—and inevitably led to more division.

Sadly, even after thirty years old wounds still fester. Some brethren cling to '*Worldwide*, whatever'—in the belief that it remains 'God's true church' no matter how it may have parted from the Scriptures.

Some focus on 'a doctrinal twig' believing it to be 'essential for salvation'. Or on a teaching that yet remains obscure in the Scriptures, claiming special—or exclusive—insight, a message from God. (None of us have perfect understanding of the Eternal.)

Others look for salvation in 'Old *Worldwide*' teachings of a particular era—yet there were many changes over its fifty years. And the many drift to other traditional faiths or non-faiths or simply to personal religion.

Inevitably, though, self-appointed teachers arise and gather personal followings. The result is a scattered flock whom the Father and Jesus still love intensely, and desire to return—to them.

Back to Basics

Much disputed is the form of governance. Experience suggests that to hold together a denomination with numerous congregations or a huge single congregation there must either be come easy, go easy doctrine, nominal faith—or some form of coercion. *over*

Change ...cont'd from p.1

In some fundamentalist churches and in the Church of Rome the underlying (but false) threat is of 'hell-fire'. Just as coercive is the claim to be the 'one and only true church outside of which is no salvation'. Again, false.

It is now my understanding that the early church was based around local congregations, each of which was independently organized but acted in co-operation with other congregations, and answerably directly to the Head, to Jesus, for behaviour and for their teachings. Romans 16 provides examples. It didn't stop disputes—for Christians retain human nature—but it provided some restraint to the wholesale spread of heretical teaching and division, as when total authority is ascribed to one revered, but fallible, leader who determines orthodoxy.

[An article [The Small Church](#) discusses this in more detail, and is available from our address or from the website.]

Restoring Health

So—what can we do to heal the wounds? Healing is intensely personal; there's no panacea. Many have found healing in taking a step back from the notion of 'doctrinal purity', that there is but one way (but that's a way which leads to a ghetto complex and to ostracizing all other non-conforming brethren). The *Letters to the Seven Churches* should scotch this idea. Though diverse they were all part of the church of God.

Some brethren are uncomfortable unless within the cocoon of a highly-structured group (though they need to nourish their mental and spiritual independence). Others prefer to 'follow a chosen leader' (but I Corinthians 3 should cause pause for thought). Then there are those whose comfort zone is their 'living room' (but who, where possible, should '*...not forsake assembling together*': Hebrews 10, for we all have much to give and to learn.).

Whatever our choice, all of us can unite in one activity: *viz*, we can develop our personal relationship with the Father and with Jesus. As joint-heirs we are all brethren, all children of the Father. (It is instructive to study—and to apply—the '*...one another*' texts in the Scriptures.)

Evangelism 101

Christian bookstores overflow with 'how to evangelize' texts, each with its own special take on how to spread the Gospel. Lots of good ideas—but why don't we make much headway? There are many more births than 'new births'.

Evangelism ought to be 'in the dna' of every Christian, for Jesus' parting instructions were a command to take his message worldwide. So each of us in our own way should be using our talents and skills to that purpose.

The apostles—Paul, notably—are examples of this inner drive, often to the point of great privation and even martyrdom. But no matter what the 'technique' may be, and no matter what external factors may be involved it's clear from the Scriptures that considerable effort is required.

Spirit Power

Just how, in New Testament times, did men and women come into the church of God? The message was widely heard—but repeatedly we're told of hearers who '*...believed not*'. Jews believed but most Jews didn't. Gentiles believed—but most didn't.

Paul reasoned, in Rome, with leading Jews with mixed success in presenting the case for Christ. These men were already proficient in the Scriptures and the Way prescribed by God. They observed the divinely appointed weekly and annual holy days—days which identify the one and only true God. They understood the requirements of the *Torah*—yet clearly they lacked spiritual insight regarding the divine plan in Jesus. That is a work of the Holy Spirit: to convince Jew and Gentile of the sin of rejecting Jesus as Saviour (John 16:9). Why does this fail?

Failure may not be because of a lack of evangelism, for billions are expended by churches to propagate the faith. Nor is it a failure of God's activity through His Spirit. It is, says Paul, that they had become callous to matters of the spirit: '*... this people's mind has grown callous, their hearing has become dull and their eyes they have closed to prevent* *cont'd p.3*

It is inappropriate, Biblically, to seek to return to 'the old days' of a false and imposed unity. What's required is for all of us (while holding firm to the basics) to set aside sincerely-held differences of style, of emphasis, and to work together in harmony and in brotherly love so we may visibly reach outward with the message of salvation in Jesus. Let's forget those attitudes which have for too long shamed the name of the church of God. Ω

Creation Insight

“...the laws of physics could never have actually built the universe. Some agency must have been involved.

“To use a simple analogy, Isaac Newton's laws of motion in themselves never sent a snooker ball racing across the green baize. That can only be done by people using a snooker cue and the actions of their own arms.

“[Stephen] Hawking's argument appears to me even more illogical when he says the existence of gravity means the creation of the universe was inevitable. But how did gravity exist in the first place? Who put it there? And what was the creative force behind its birth?

“Similarly, when Hawking argues, in support of his theory of spontaneous creation, that it was only necessary for 'the blue touch paper' to be lit to 'set the universe going', the question must be: where did this blue touch paper come from? And who lit it, if not God?”

John Lennox Professor of Mathematics, Oxford

Second Resurrection

Many Bible students understand that those who have died ‘without Christ’ will be resurrected in a material body after the Millennium for a period of judgment during which they may qualify for the Kingdom of God (*see Revelation 20:5, 11-15*). This includes those who may never have even heard the name of Jesus (*Acts 4:12*).

However, there is a strand of opinion that there are some who will be excluded from that ‘second resurrection’. They are the ‘incorrigibly wicked’ and may be referred to in Psalm 1:5, rendered (LXX, Vulgate) as ‘...*the ungodly shall not rise again [KJV: stand] in the judgment*’. They and their ‘seed’ may have been so corrupted as never being able to form a relationship with the Father (*cp Genesis 6:5*). (Amalek and others may fall into this category.) Ω

Evangelism...cont'd

their ever seeing with their eyes or hearing with their ears, or understanding with their minds and turning back so that I might heal them’. Why?

The rejection of divine revelation since man's early history spilled down the centuries (*Romans 1:17-32*). It's a process aided and abetted by demonic forces (*Ephesians 2:2, I Timothy 4:1*). The minds of unbelievers are blinded by the ‘...*god of this world*’, Satan (*II Corinthians 4:4*). Then there's *tradition*—we grow up accepting the ‘faith of our fathers’ with no incentive to put it to the test of Scripture (*Mark 7:8*). And the worldly wise, the well-born, the powerful see no need for faith.

By such powerful forces we become calloused to truth. God, however, looks to other characteristics—to those who don't have much going for them. These the Father invites to be His children. They hear this calling through exposure to the Word, the ‘sword of the Spirit’. It may be by preaching (*cp Paul*) or by reading

Purim ...cont'd from p.4

Mordecai reported a plot to overthrow the King and relayed the news to the King *via* Esther—a fact recorded in the Royal Chronicles.

Why Purim?

Haman used *Pur*—ie cast lots—to find the most auspicious day in which to attack the Jews throughout the Empire.

How he did this is not now known. It is a superstitious practice widely used in ancient times in varied forms. It is a ‘spirit of divination’ condemned in Scripture, and quite different from the lot cast by the High Priest in Israel.

God may have intervened to ensure a late date was selected, giving the Jews almost a year to prepare for the attack. *Esther 9:26*

He was resented for imagined ‘disrespect’ by Haman, a recently-appointed aide to the King. In short, Haman, having learned that Mordecai was a Jew, obtained an edict to kill every Jew throughout the Empire (127 Provinces from India to Ethiopia!).—the massacre to begin on Adar 13. Why such racism?

In fact, Haman belonged to the Amalekite Royal Family—an ‘...*Agagite., the enemy of all the Jews*’ (*Esther 9:24*), ‘... *the adversary and enemy*’ (*ch 7:6*). This was a continuation of a millennium of Amalek's animosity towards Israel.

The outcome? The King relented and gave permission to all Jews to defend themselves. (He could not go back on his word to Haman.). Haman himself was hanged for his treachery (*ch 7:10*).

Assisted by all regional officials (*ch 9:3*) the Jews avenged their enemies—‘...*those that hated them*’ (*ch 9:5*). That is, all those of Amalek throughout all the provinces—including Haman's ten sons whom the King hanged with their father.

Queen Esther issued a decree that in perpetuity all Jews and those who associate with them should observe Adar 14 and 15 as a day on which to rejoice and to celebrate this victory (*ch 9 21-32*). It is so observed in Judaism to this day. So ended a blood-drenched saga extending for over a thousand years. Ω

the Scriptures, or by a casual encounter with a believer, or *via* the media. If they respond, God's Spirit draws them to Jesus the one and only Saviour (*John 6:44*). The rest? They await resurrection from the grave to face a period of judgment .in the flesh.

A fundamental principle of evangelism, then, is that through the spiritual interaction of His Word the Father calls men and women to repentance and to salvation. The basic evangelistic responsibility of every Christian is to deploy our individual unique talents and skills as our contribution to Matthew 28: 19-20: ‘...*disciple all nations, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you*’. Ω

The Feast of Purim

In Judaism *Purim* is a celebratory festival held in late February/early March (Adar 14/15 on the Hebrew calendar). It isn't mentioned in the *Torah*, but is observed by most Jews, and celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from their enemies in fifth century BC Persia. The events are recorded in the Bible book of *Esther*—a book notorious for not having any mention of God. Yet *Esther* has a vital role in God's plans, and it records the culmination of a thousand years of history.

[As *Purim* is not a festival appointed by the Lord to highlight His plans, as in Leviticus 23, it is not incumbent on Christians to observe it.]

Corrupt Genealogy

It's clear that this is a world of inequalities. The Bible account has all created equal—but with varied skills and aptitudes. Very few people groups did not have adequate resources both material and intellectual—but many have failed to exploit them, or they squandered them.

All of us shared the original human gene pool, but individual choices and external factors corrupted some to the point of destruction. Indeed humanity as a whole at one point became so corrupt that they fractured the spiritual bond between man and nature—resulting in a universal all-destroying flood (*see* Genesis 6-9). Humanity survived solely because of the faithfulness of a single family (I Peter 3:20).

Some failed to learn the lessons of their history and repeated the pattern, again becoming corrupted. Among these, in the days of Abraham, were the Amorites, descendants of Cush (Genesis 15:16). God foresaw the continued depraved decline of this people. They would later be subdued by the incoming Israeli armies.

A Familial Feud

Another corrupted individual was *Amalek*, a grandson of Jacob's brother Esau by a concubine—reportedly (Jewish tradition) both Eliphaz's daughter and his sexual partner. Amalek has a history that ties him to the events recorded in *Esther*.

Amalek proved to be an implacable enemy to the descendants of Jacob. He would be well aware of the deceptive events that excluded his grandfather Esau

from the first-born blessing of Jacob.—and resented it. But God, well aware of potential character (*see* box), had chosen Jacob (Romans 9:13).

They first confronted Israel shortly after the Exodus from Egypt. Despicably, they attacked the 'feeble' from the rear of the advancing Israelites (Deuteronomy 25:17-18), thus incurring God's wrath: '*...you must wipe out Amalek so completely that no one will remember they ever lived*' (v.19). Allied to various tribes, the Amalakites attacked Israel time and again, notably defeated by Gideon (Judges 6 and 7). King Saul (I Samuel 14:48) led a large army against them, defeating them once again..

But the Lord didn't forget this ruthless people and their deeds. They attacked again, and God had had enough: '*...Thus says the LORD of hosts [to King*

Saul], I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass' (ch 15:1-3).

Genetic variation—*eg* by selective breeding of animals—is a major factor in behavioural and physical outcomes. As recorded in the Scriptures, marriage partners were carefully selected to retain and perpetuate specific characteristics—*eg* in the priesthood (Leviticus 21:15)..

Genes ('seed')—both good and corrupt—are transmitted to following generations. They may be corrupted by mutations, ill-matched cross-breeding.

Note: Even though bad behaviour may be genetically determined, God does not withhold appropriate punishment—even to death or 'ethnic cleansing'.

The King destroyed all before him though to his detriment he spared the royal line - the Agagites). It was a mistake that would sound down the centuries. Elsewhere other Amalekites remained, many slain by David (ch 27:8). At this time (eleventh century BC) Amalek. became part of a ten nation Middle East conspiracy against Israel, with the slogan '*...Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance*' (Psalm 83: 1-9). That has a familiar ring, being the call of Israel's enemies to this day. (The Psalm may have prophetic significance.)

Judgment Executed

Forward six centuries and the exiled Amalakites and their ilk remain a problem, this time concentrated on the Jews exiled in Persia. (the rest of Israel had long since dispersed westwards). The account is in the book of *Esther*.

The Persian King sought to replace his disgraced wife. An orphaned Jewish girl was presented as a candidate at the behest of her guardian Mordecai, also of Judah. She became Queen—*Esther*. *cont'd p.3*