

Servants' NEWS

Vol. 1, No. 6 A newsletter for servants of the Almighty Eternal Creator, wherever they may be Sept-Oct 1995

Church Government—It doesn't have to divide us!

Two of the larger Sabbath keeping groups, The United Church of God (UCG) and the Global Church of God (GCG) are currently struggling with the issue of government. While some of our readers have studied this subject and understand it well, there are still unanswered questions in the minds of thousands. We have devoted most of this issue to "government" in the hope that individuals and organizations can better understand it and get on with the job of teaching the Bible to others! Here we quote the majority of three recent government articles from three organizations with our own analysis—showing what the scriptures do say and what they do not say.

United Church of God (UCG)

Quotations from *New Beginnings*, September 11, 1995, p 1, *Denver Conference Covers Much Ground* by David Hulme.

The *United Church of God, an International Association* completed five days of meetings (Aug 27-31, 1995) regarding the issues of governance and organization. This meeting was in preparation for the UCG general conference scheduled for this December 3-5 in Cincinnati, Ohio. The 300+ UCG elders are invited to attend, at the expense of UCG. The purposes are to ratify the new UCG constitutions and bylaws, decide on a home office location, ratify its general operating plan and budget, and select a new Board of Directors to be effective January 1, 1996.

It appears that this meeting will be more of a ratification process—the approach to governance having already been established at the Denver meeting. The UCG article begins:

Dear Brethren,

The Denver Conference achieved some significant milestones for the United Church of God. The board of directors confirmed its confidence in the Indianapolis process. What began there was the basis for our preliminary statement on governance. you may

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Church of God International (CGI)

Quotations from *In Transition*, Aug 25, 1995, p 11, *What is the New Testament form of church government?* by Ronald Dart.

We found very little in Ronald Dart's article that we could challenge from the scriptures. He brings up some excellent points. There are a few things we would like to add.

The CGI article begins:

The most surprising thing about church government in the New Testament is how little anyone had to say on the subject. Jesus never said, "You will organize my church this way." He never told the disciples that there would be clerical offices, much less offices arranged in a vertical hierarchy. He never explained how they might fill any such offices. There are no instructions to vote or not to vote.

Indeed, the disciples were given very

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GLOBAL CHURCH OF GOD (GCG)

Quotations from *In Transition*, Aug 25, 1995, p 11, *What is the biblical form of church government?* by Roderick C. Meredith.

Roderick Meredith's article takes a view similar to the WCG approach used for many years. It begins with the idea that there has been one form of "government of God" used on earth since the creation of man. Scriptures or parts of scriptures compatible with that view are quoted, but the scriptures that unquestionably show that the Eternal has used a diversity of governments are ignored.

The GCG article begins:

The religions of this world are confused about almost every major doctrine in the Bible. It should be no surprise that they are also confused about the biblical form of church government.

In my widely read booklet *When Should You Follow Church Government?*, I was addressing the issue of NOT following false leaders who may come among God's people from time to time and can *misuse* almost any form of church government. In that booklet (pages 33-40), I did briefly describe the right approach to church government. Now, in this article, I wish to discuss more fully what kind of church government the Bible clearly describes—and *how* it should function.

In today's society, most people immediately think of a *democratic* government in most of

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Joseph Tkach, Jr. Assumes Father's Office

WCG Press Release:

On Saturday, September 23, 1995, Joseph W. Tkach, Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God, died in Pasadena, California, Headquarters of the Worldwide Church of God., In May of this year, Mr. Tkach underwent gall bladder surgery at which time it was discovered that he had cancer.

After a four-month fight with his illness, Mr. Tkach died quietly at Huntington Memorial Hospital at 2:20 p.m. (PST). [He had gone into a coma on Friday. —SN Editor]

Joseph Tkach succeeded the late Herbert W. Armstrong in January 1986 as Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God. On September 5 Mr. Tkach appointed Joseph W. Tkach, Jr. as Deputy Pastor General in the event of his death. This was done in presence and before witnesses of the Advisory Counsel of Elders and confirmed with the laying on of hands.

Funeral Services for Mr. Tkach will be held at Mountain View Cemetery in Altadena on Tuesday, September 26, at 10:00 a.m. (PST).

Public E-mail from Monttana:

I have just returned from the funeral

service for Joseph W. Tkach and I wanted to put down some of my thoughts while they were fresh in my mind.

The coffin arrived while the bagpipes played Amazing Grace. The day is overcast and temperature 70 degrees. The coffin appeared to be rosewood or mahogany and was very beautiful. It was covered by an American flag made of flowers. There were also several flower wreaths including one from the ministers and members of the United Church of God. If you see the video you can see it directly behind the podium.

The choir sang Amazing Grace and then Mike Feazell gave the opening prayer. We then sang "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken." Dr. Hoes then gave the eulogy. The choir sang another hymn followed by a spiritual lesson again from Dr. Hoeh. [Dr. Hoeh concluded his lesson by asking everyone to get behind Mr. Tkach, Jr. to do the work, and then gave him a big bear-hug. —another eyewitness] Then we sang "God Bless America" and Greg Albrecht gave the internment prayer. Finally a Naval representative presented the flag to Mrs. Tkach.

The attendance appeared to be in

excess of two thousand people. I was glad to see many old friends including David Hulme, Raymond McNair, Stan Rader and many others. I am sure Mr. Tkach would like nothing more than to find when he is resurrected that we all decided to put our differences behind us and serve Jesus Christ together with love, tolerance and understanding.

The Tkach family has asked that, instead of flowers, donations be sent to the Ambassador University Joseph W. Tkach chair in theology.

Chronology of Joe Tkach, Jr.

1951, Dec. 25: born in Chicago, IL.

1966: moved to Pasadena and entered Imperial Schools as a sophomore.

1969: graduated from Imperial Schools and enrolled in Ambassador College.

1973, June: graduated from Ambassador College and married Jill Hockwald.

1973, June-Oct.: ministerial trainee in Fort Wayne and Elkhart, IN.

1973, Oct. - 1974, June: ministerial trainee in Detroit, MI.

1974, June - 1975, Feb: Ministerial trainee in Santa Barbara & San Luis Obispo, CA.

1975, Feb. - 1976, fall: ministerial trainee in Phoenix, AZ.

1976, Pentecost: "ordained" a local elder.

1976, fall: terminated along with 34 other ministerial trainees in a budget cut.

1978, May: divorced from first wife, Jill.

1978, July: ceased assisting minister in Phoenix, AZ.

Specific years of employment are not available, but the Nov 5, 1990

Worldwide News states "he held positions as a child-care worker..., a state government social service worker... and as a community social worker."

He later worked as a customer service supervisor for Intel Corp.

1980, June: married Tamara Hall.

1984: received an MBA degree from Western International University


1986, Jan.: **father** becomes Pastor General
1986, Aug.: named Assistant Director of Church Administration.

1987, April: "ordained" a pastor.

1990, Sept.: "ordained" an evangelist

1995, Sept.: made deputy Pastor General

1995, Sept.: became Pastor General

For a man that has never been a full-time pastor of a local congregation, Joe Tkach, Jr. has a great responsibility as a leader of thousands. May he stay humble and seek the Eternal's will always. 

Servants' NEWS

Vol. 1, No. 6 A newsletter for servants of the Almighty Eternal Creator, wherever they may be Sept-Oct 1995

Servants News is published monthly by *Friends of the Brethren*. Subscriptions are free to individuals interested in obeying their Creator as described in the Bible. We believe His law is the basis for living a life that is pleasing to Him in harmony with our neighbors. We believe the holy spirit gives us the power to live such a life as long as we continually repent of our sins and accept the salvation provided through our Messiah and Savior. We believe in living "by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Deut 8:3).

We believe the gospel should be given freely: you may copy any or all of this publication and give it to others. *Friends of the Brethren* is financed by donations and has no ties with any of the other organizations listed in this publication.

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Servants' News accepts articles for publication. Include a self-address stamped envelope for items that you want returned. We do not publish materials that attack individuals or organizations, nor do we publish materials that claim there is only one human organization through which the Eternal works. We are happy to print corrections for any significant errors. Address articles and letters to:

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“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always”—Matt 28:19-20

“But when they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of man comes.” —Matt 10:23



“...At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.... Therefore, those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Gospel” (Acts 8:1,4).

Have you ever felt like the people of the Eternal are being scattered? Does it seem that some leaders of the larger organizations are more interested in “stabilizing” the money flow than in teaching new people? Have you felt that you have not been able to use the power of the holy spirit in you?

When the first century brethren had to flee Jerusalem, it seemed like a big disaster. But when they traveled everywhere preaching the Gospel, they were carrying out a mission in a way that, perhaps, could not be done otherwise.

Years ago, radio and television had much more respect. Networks made a greater effort to convey the truth. Most people had some confidence in news and advertising. Now, after years of scandals and broken promises, most people are suspicious of anything they see in the mass media. This suspicion extends to religion. Big-name televangelists have been caught committing the very sins that they powerfully preached against. They showered themselves with luxuries rather than help teach and feed the poor.

Many people with a variety of religious backgrounds are “turned off” by organized religion. They want to learn what the Bible has to say about our lives and they want to worship their Creator, but they do not want to become a part of a social club or a human hierarchy.

These are often the people that our Father can call and work with. Today, most are not looking to religious empires where the credibility of the leaders is difficult or impossible to verify. They may simply look to their own Bibles and to themselves, or to a local group which they can put to the test. Where would you look if you were looking for a local group? Several sources come to mind:

- 1) The religion pages of a local newspaper
- 2) The yellow pages under “churches”
- 3) Community bulletin boards at public libraries, etc.
- 4) Radio talk shows where the general public can call
- 5) Recommendation from friends

When the Messiah and his apostles were teaching on earth, they did not raise their voices in the streets (Matt 12:19) and try to get followers, but they spoke in the temple, in synagogues and in other public meeting places (John 5:1-9, 18:20, Acts 17:17, 19:9). Today, we do not have those public meeting places, but we have the five points listed above. Should not those who are spiritually mature make ourselves available in these areas?

The first step is prayer and fasting—asking our Father to work

through us and to bless our efforts. Anyone planning to teach must be ready to teach. Does that mean that you could answer every question? No! Being ready to teach means that you have some sound Bible knowledge, the desire to share it with others, the ability to present it in an organized way and **the humility to be honest when you do not know or are not sure about something.** If you

realize that you are not yet ready, now is the time to begin studying to be ready! (If you feel that only “ordained” people can teach, please write for our free article *How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans?*)

If you do decide to place an advertisement in a paper, a phone book or on a community bulletin board, what should it say? Many

\$400 Preach the Gospel
in Your City for only
\$400 per year. **\$400**

Servants’ News readers attend services sponsored by organizations with which they are not in complete agreement. Should you advertise that organization? Probably not. The yellow pages and newspaper religion pages are full of ads for organizations that have everything all worked out for you: services, Bible study, youth activities, fellowship meals, baby-sitting, doctrine, etc. Its all available at a certain time every week—all anyone needs to do is to simply show up, watch and listen. There is nothing wrong with these activities, but the emphasis on any ad you place should be on studying and seeking truth.

“Study the Bible with Other Families in Homes” is a possible one-line advertisement. The emphasis should be on learning truth independently of organizational dogma. Most other churches tout the facilities available and the timing and type of programs available. If you would like a longer ad, consider including a short scripture. This approach will make a clear distinction between your ad and the many others that talk almost exclusively about their own organization.

What name and phone number should be used in the advertisement? That depends greatly on your situation. If you attend with an organization where a new person’s differences will not be condemned, where they can ask questions, where they can learn and grow, then use the name of the organization. You should obtain permission from a representative of that organization first. It is amazing how some congregations of the big organizations are changing their format of services to really help people grow.

Servants’ News has heard from hundreds of people who attend with organizations because they want to fellowship with God’s people, but they realize a new person could not learn in a congregation that primarily views videos intended for 20-year WCG veterans. Your ad should probably contain your own name or a simple geographical name such as “Springdale Bible Fellowship” or “Springdale Bible Study.” If you utilize the “free” one-line listing in the yellow pages, you may want to use the name “Family In-home Bible Studies” as that conveys your purpose without the need

Continued from previous page for additional advertising. While the Bible certainly refers to local congregations as the "Church in Ephesus" or with other city names, today's practice of calling organizations "churches" has confused many people into thinking that their own organization is the "Body of Christ." We feel it is better not to call a group a "church."

For legal purposes, however, your group should be considered a church. The Constitution of the USA has largely prevented the Federal and state governments from passing laws requiring churches to register, incorporate, or pay any kind of license fee. The IRS actually allows deductions of donations to any church (even unincorporated ones), though they may later challenge the legitimacy of a church they have not officially recognized. If a group grows large, then there may be some monetary advantages to incorporation and/or obtaining "tax-exempt" status. However, the essential tasks of worship and Bible study can be accomplished without any formal organization. The important thing is to do the work, not to create an organization.

What phone number should the ad contain? If cost is a big factor, use an existing home telephone number. The telephone should be in the house of someone that is home most of the time and also has an answering machine. This does not have to be the same person that will do most of the teaching, but they need to be able to answer basic questions and take competent messages. There is no doubt that some people will be "scared off" by this "lack of professionalism" **but we must remember that it is our Father who does the calling.**

If you can afford to get a second phone line, then the phone can be answered with your group name, in the business-like manner that most people expect. A second residential phone line will cost between \$100 and \$200 per year plus about \$100 for the initial hookup and a phone with an answering machine. A business line will cost about \$100 per year more, but it usually comes with a free entry in your telephone company's yellow-pages. Local telephone companies often will not let you list in their yellow pages unless you have a business line.

Independent companies also produce yellow pages. If they have distributed attractive, useful yellow pages to your door, consider advertising in them. The independent companies will automatically include all of the one-line business listings from the telephone company and some of them will give you a free one-liner if your phone is resi-

dential. They do not copy large ads from the telephone company book, but they will sell you a small display ad for about \$100 to \$300—even if your line is residential.

You will have to choose the category of your ad. Churches—Bible, Churches—Independent, Churches—Non-denominational or Churches—Sabbatarian are all possibilities. A listing under Sabbatarian will appeal to people that have already learned this truth, but may be a "stumbling block" to those that do not.

The cost of advertisements in yellow pages or newspapers vary greatly depending on the size of the city in which you live. An ad in the New York Times will cost many hundreds. You would be paying for a service you do not need since many of the readers of the paper would be too far away to fellowship regularly. Instead, look for a paper oriented to a suburb or section of town near you.

You can place your newspaper ad for just one time or for every week. One-time ads are available for as little as \$10 in a smaller paper. An ad that appears every week of the year may cost \$150 to \$1000.

Ads on community bulletin boards (in public libraries, etc.) are nearly free, but the response is smaller. Someone with a computer can probably help you make a nice-looking ad. It should be small and to-the-point. People do not tend to read long bulletin board items and owners more often remove items that take up too much space. If you can obtain some tear-apart business-card stock for your friend's computer, you can use a label-printing program to inexpensively produce some nice business cards. People are more likely to respond if they can take something away with them.

Teaching others via talk radio is a subject that we will leave for another article. Now, however, is the time to think about placing ads in yellow pages. Many of them have ad deadlines in October so they can be printed in November and distributed in December. Newspaper and bulletin-board ads can be placed any time.

What do you do when someone calls? Find out their background and interests. It is almost impossible to teach anyone unless you know and understand their background (1Cor 9:19-23). Some callers may have their own political, social or religious causes they are trying to push—you may not be able to study together.

You should emphasize your belief that individuals need to do what the Scriptures say. If they ask for your qualifications, mention the holy spirit, the number

of years you have spent studying the Bible, your access to Bible study materials and publications, and Matt 28:19-20.

Invite the caller to come to one meeting. Be flexible. If you normally meet in your home, you may have to alter the messages and format. (Do not burden a visitor with WCG stories.) If you normally attend with other organizations, you may quickly have to plan a home meeting. The visitors will be more comfortable if you invite other Sabbath-keepers with similar interests or with children of similar ages as your visitor's. Tell your guests how you will dress. If they cannot meet on the Sabbath, plan it for another day. It takes some effort to bear some fruit. A Sunday Bible study is not a sin, but do not pretend it is your normal day of worship.

Depending on the number of people you have, your study can be held informally in a living room or around a table, or the speaker can stand. Allow questions and comments from others. Have a definite plan. If there is a certain area of scripture in which your guest has an interest, study it. If not, study a portion of scripture or doctrine which someone can explain well. If necessary, you can use a piece of literature that covers an important Bible topic. But don't just read the literature, stop and read the scriptures. **Let everyone participate in scripture readings.** Always keep a concordance handy. If questions arise and your study takes an unexpected direction, that is fine, as long as it is beneficial.

If the visitors appreciate and learn from a few such studies, you can later study what the Bible says about worship services (see our article, *Assembling on the Sabbath*). At some point, it should be clear that either the Eternal is working with them and they will be ready to attend regular Sabbath services, or they will probably go their own way.

There is much more to be said about teaching those who are being called. We will have future articles on the subject. Even if one new family per year begins to keep the Sabbath because of your efforts, you are bearing as much fruit as organizations of thousands that spend millions on television, but only add hundreds of new people per year from their efforts.

Preaching the gospel this way will require commitment and sacrifice, but that is what we are called to do. By spending time on your knees, time with some people and \$400 for a telephone line, answering machine and some ads, you can make a big difference in some people's lives. That is also what we are called to do.

—Norman S. Edwards

Local Congregations



United Church of God—An Alabama Non-Profit Corporation

Formal Statement Regarding Fellowship and Affiliation

September 16, 1995

The United Church of God—Birmingham is an Alabama Non-Profit Corporation. The *United Church of God* is the legal corporate name for the Birmingham, Alabama corporation which supports the Birmingham ministry which serves the local congregation.

It is a religious organization which was established in February, 1995 and now serves a *spiritual* ministry. That ministry serves a spiritual Church of God, which is called the Body of Christ (*ICor. 12:12,20*). This Body is composed of members who have repented and been baptized and received God's Holy Spirit and includes those who are in transition regarding their ultimate affiliation with an organized Body of believers. Fellowship and involvement with this ministry is and always has been *voluntary*. Donations have not been solicited. Everyone has the freedom to contribute locally, to Home Office or other organizations or not to contribute at all. This responsibility is between each individual and God.

Every effort has been made to disclose the financial and administrative affairs of the United Church of God, Birmingham, *and* to also distinguish the *physical* corporation from the *spiritual* Church. This distinction between the physical and the spiritual was vital in our recent separation from another religious organization which had for many, many years failed to

make this distinction.

Services began in March, 1995 and have continued to be conducted every Sabbath since then. In May of 1995 the *United Church of God—Birmingham* agreed to become *affiliated* with the United Church of God, *An International Association* during the transition period from May, 1995 to December, 1995. Our support of this affiliation is a matter of public record.

It is important to note that the *United Church of God—Birmingham* is a separate corporate entity established to *serve* a spiritual ministry. It is not now under the governance of any other corporate entity, nor does it plan to be so governed in the future.

The ultimate form of The United Church of God, *An International Association* will be determined in December at the general conference of elders.

It is our desire at this time to remain affiliated with the United Church of God, *An International Association* after the December conference. But the ministry supported by the *United Church of God—Birmingham* supports the concept of an International

Association which *SERVES* locally administrated congregations but does not *govern* them. This was the *spirit* of what was ratified in May, 1995 by the general conference of elders in Indianapolis, Indiana. The concept of a *service* association was ratified in May by the elders in a spirit of humility and service. It is the feeling of the ministry supported by the United Church of God in Birmingham that the concept of a *service association* is the only kind of religious organization with which it will remain affiliated. If we had planned to come under the governance of a hierarchical type of religious organization, we would have simply associated

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This document was produced by the United Church of God—Birmingham in reaction to efforts by the Arcadia UCG headquarters to control the activities of the Birmingham congregation. Ray Wooten, the Birmingham pastor, was one of the founders and original members of the board of the United Church of God, an International Association (Arcadia headquarters). *Servants' News* has received other stories of local congregations desiring to support the literature and media operations of a central organization but preferring the organization not govern the local congregation's affairs. As space permits, we will publish some of these stories.

Letter from Alan Ruth to the United Church of God Board with Response from Jim Franks

Dear UCG Board Member:

My name is Alan Ruth and I am a former member of the Worldwide Church of God. Since leaving the WCG in 1986, I have had the opportunity to fellowship with and read literature from many WCG split-off groups. I have researched the organization and doctrines of more than fifty WCG splits and have compiled my findings in a paper, which I hope will help to promote understanding among brethren in the various splits. Since the founding of the United Church of God (UCG), with headquarters first in Birmingham, Alabama, and then in Arcadia, California, I have read whatever literature the leadership has put out regarding its structure and beliefs, and I have fellowshiped with local United congregations. I have also read comments about UCG that others have made on the America Online computer bulletin board system, and I have listened to both inside and outside sources talk about conditions in the church. It is my knowledge of current trends in UCG, based on both personal experience and information from others, that has led me to write this letter.

The purpose of this letter is to express my concern about the direction UCG is taking in regard to the issues of church government and the nature of the Godhead. These are critical issues which need to be resolved as soon as possible.

When the United Church of God began to organize a few months ago, I was impressed by the statements of the leadership regarding the proposed structure of the church and the relationship between its ministers and members. Below are some of the statements that impressed me the most (emphasis mine throughout):

“There will be checks and balances implemented (in UCG) so that the power and wealth of the church of God will not ever again be used against the members” (posting on America Online by UCG, 3/17/1995).

“There are Christians in WCG, Global, Philadelphia, Church of God International and Church of God (Seventh Day) to name a few” (Ibid.).

The UCG has stated that it sees other Church of God groups as brethren in different branches (of the church of God). UCG has also stated that there is agreement on many doctrinal issues with some of these groups, but disagreement in areas such as hierarchical form of church government. (statements made at UCG conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, May 1, 1995).

“Local church autonomy can work, if converted individuals have the right spirit and attitude and set their minds to agree” (posting on America Online by UCG, 3/17/95).

“What makes UCG different from Global, Philadelphia, International, etc.? Governmental structure is the primary difference” (Ibid.).

“Basically, the two choices for governmental structure can be characterized as local autonomy (freedom) versus central control (control). The central hierarchical structure has failed the modern era of the church of God” (UCG paper on discussion of local church autonomy vs. central control, 4/7/95).

“I believe that God’s people have proven that they have good attitudes and will obey. By forcing individuals to make decisions (to exercise and develop good judgment) it forces on each of us a much higher standard of involvement and responsibility. A central hierarchical structure will defeat this. It will be pray and pay and take orders all over again, versus a **shared** ministry with member ownership and involvement at a local level. To heal the COG, in its present state, will take an open, honest, warm and loving approach, not more central controls” (Ibid.).

“The central hierarchical structure has been an instrument of **abuse** toward both the field ministry and the members. Central bureaucracies do not innovate, they destroy people and their lives” (Ibid.).

“If, after reading this [the local autonomy vs. central control paper], the senior ministers of the COG still believe in central control, then for the sake of the members, why not just go with the Global

Church of God?” (Ibid.)

“In this age of rapid technological change, corporate and business decentralization—and of empowerment—the church simply **MUST** understand the importance of a **shared** ministry with **ownership** at a local level” (letter to the ministry of the Church of God, written early 1995 by Ray Wooten).

These are some of the positive statements made by the United leadership in recent months. When I wrote to UCG’s Alabama address for some literature last April, I was pleasantly surprised to receive an enlarged copy of Herbert Armstrong’s excellent 1939 Good News article on church government! It was this type of response that led me to establish contact with a local United church and attend services.

Since that time, my positive regard for UCG has been tempered by what I have personally experienced in United over the past few months and by other indications that UCG ministers are beginning to use a heavy-handed approach toward members in their congregations. My concern is the perpetuation by the UCG ministry and its local churches of the “top down” hierarchical set of rules of church government which many of us with WCG backgrounds experienced and which many WCG splits still maintain. There are ministers in UCG who are “ruling” their congregations, consolidating their power and “authority” in the local church, and making pronouncements supporting the same command and control structure that they practiced in the Worldwide Church of God.

In the brief period since UCG began to form in the spring of 1995, I have received the following information:

* Brian Orchard, responding for Mr. Hulme in a letter dated 7/18/95, stated, “The United Church is committed to the traditions and heritage of the Church of God under Herbert W. Armstrong’s leadership. . . . Christ is still Head of the Church and there must be unity and peace in local congregations and to this end there must be structure and organi-

zation from the top down.”

- * An inside source has confirmed to me that UCG will eventually phase in the same type of hierarchical “top down” church government rules that the WCG has always practiced. These changes will come in slowly over the next year or two as UCG organizes more congregations and begins to consolidate power. This means that local church autonomy will be watered down, with members having less and less input in local church operations. The UCG ministers and leaders will dictate what happens in the local churches. The “open door” policy of allowing visitors from other WCG splits to attend UCG services will be curtailed. There will be other changes which will mimic the policies, doctrines and practices of the WCG.
- * UCG is seriously considering adopting a new form of the Trinity doctrine for its official explanation of the Godhead. This view, which Herman Hoeh in the WCG promotes, is actually a combination of Trinitarianism, Unitarianism, and Modalism. According to this view, God is a single divine Being who manifests Himself in three permanent modes or hypostases (e.g. Father, Son, Holy Spirit). In other words, if we could see God’s heavenly throne today, we would see **only one** Being on the throne. This teaching denies the Scriptural truth that there are two distinct, personal Beings in the Godhead (God the Father and Jesus Christ) and misleads us into worshipping one Being who has different aspects or manifestations.
- * A UCG minister expressed to me that although the leadership in United left the WCG, they have not really changed their views (in reference to the way UCG will be run). He said the only difference between UCG and the WCG is the name. He also stated that he believes in “top-down” church government and that truth primarily comes through the ministry to the brethren. He implied that if people do not like the way UCG is run (e.g. hierarchically, like the WCG), they should go somewhere else.
- * The same UCG minister who made the above statements also said that United is **not** a place for “different ideas” (in reference to the beliefs of other WCG split-off groups such as CGI, GCG, PCG, etc.). He said that all literature given to those in his congregation must be approved by him and that **NO** non-United literature (no matter how Biblically sound it may be)

was permitted to be handed out before or after services. In fact, this minister said that **no one in the congregation is allowed to send literature or information from other churches of God to anyone else in the group at any time during the week!** He did not like the idea of Herbert Armstrong’s 1939 article on church government being given out and stated that “ideas” or beliefs from other organizations were not healthy for local UCG churches. He firmly stated that he will be a “block wall” (his term) against non-United literature (and other issues yet to be named).

- * This same UCG minister said that local autonomy has to do primarily with money and “other things” but implied that it has nothing to do with how the local church is run, what literature should be allowed in the church, or other important decisions.
- * Some UCG ministers have reportedly stated that local boards should be made up of ordained brethren only, that the sole purpose of the local boards is to manage finances, and that these local boards should have no input relative to spiritual matters in the local churches. The attitude that is expressed in these statements leads to a valid concern that some UCG ministers may intend to retain power by setting up “dummy” local boards or by disbanding boards and replacing them with members who share the ministerial point of view on running the local church.

The above statements, made by some of United’s own ministers, are disturbing evidence of serious problems which, if allowed to continue, will eventually affect the entire UCG membership. Because UCG has not established any definitive policy in regard to church hierarchy and local church autonomy, former WCG ministers are “taking control” and ruling the local churches **exactly as they did in Worldwide**. Why haven’t the UCG brethren objected to this behavior? Most members are either unaware or unconcerned about what the minister does or how the church operates. Many members are “shell shocked” from coming out of the WCG. They are glad to be out of the WCG, but do not yet have the spiritual backbone to stand up against the tyranny of oppressive church government. Many brethren still feel that they are rebelling against God if they disagree with a local minister or challenge his doctrinal views. There are also brethren who still feel comfortable with a hierarchy in the church and are not concerned about what the local leader says or does, as long as

they have a minister “in charge.”

Many statements that have been published by the UCG leadership indicate that United’s aim is toward more use of the members’ gifts of service in the local churches and more participation by members in spreading the gospel, leading to a truly cooperative and complementary effort by members and ministers alike in preaching the gospel to the world. What can the United leadership and the local churches do to promote a firm foundation on which to grow? What action can be taken to strengthen the position UCG took early this year in regard to church government and to resolve other doctrinal issues? United can :

1) Call on those ministers who are mistreating the brethren to **repent** of their WCG attitudes, to admit that their way of treating the brethren is not right and that they are misusing the responsibility God has given them to lovingly nurture His church. Ministers who still want to “lord it over” their brethren need to humble themselves before God, asking Him to help them serve in a spirit of mercy and love toward **everyone** in the church. Those who bear the responsibility of leadership need to be encouraged to do some soul searching and self-examination in order to serve God’s people (not theirs) in humility and the love of God.

2) Hold open discussions on the nature of the Godhead and other important doctrines, allowing all ministers **and members** in UCG to participate. Be willing to examine the research and study papers of those in other churches of God who have labored over these issues. The United leadership should not follow a “closed door” policy but should be open and aboveboard in its doctrinal decisions.

3) Adopt a firm position **against** hierarchical, “top down” rules of church government both at headquarters and **in the local churches**. Make it clear that the UCG leadership does not condone the heavy-handed rulership, coercion, and other ungodly ways in which many brethren were treated in the WCG.

4) Require **all** ministers to support UCG’s stated position that it is **not** the “one true church” or the only church of God that God is actively working with. Insist that all UCG ministers acknowledge that there are truly converted brethren in other WCG split-off groups, and ensure that the United membership is allowed to take advantage of the excellent research and Biblically sound materials that other churches of God produce.

"Alan Ruth", from previous page

5) Encourage all UCG members to actively participate in doctrinal discussions and decisions. The brethren in United need to be included in these discussions in order for them to know that what is being promoted is Biblically correct. The book of Acts shows that the brethren in the Jerusalem church were active participants in the "conference" in New Testament times (Acts 15:2, 4, 22-23), and UCG should follow this Scriptural example. Members who are not ordained and yet are wise and Spirit led should also serve on the UCG board. This would provide a check and balance because some board members would not be employed by or receive money from United, yet would promote the spiritual growth of the brethren by adding a broader point of view to the board.

6) Encourage members in the local churches to take an active part in their local church operations. Instead of ministers making unilateral decisions, as they did in Worldwide, local members should be included in the major decisions which concern the local church, including disfellowshipment, the allocation of monies, and the discharge of ministers for preaching heresy or for abusing their responsibility as shepherds of God's people. The first-century New Testament church practiced this form of local self-government, operating in a manner whereby all brethren were involved in the maintaining, administering and building up of their local fellowship. The New Testament firmly supports the administration of the church at the local level by the members themselves (the local church autonomy concept). This concept was initially supported by UCG and needs to be actively implemented.

7) Utilize the God-given wisdom, understanding and gifts of the UCG membership by encouraging them to actively serve in the local churches. **Each** member should be given the opportunity to use his or her God-given gifts of service to build up the church and to help spread the gospel to the world. The work of God is large, and we Christians are too few on this earth to neglect any of the gifts God has given us for edifying our brethren and witnessing to the world. It is imperative for every member of the Body of Christ—the true spiritual organism known as the Church of God—to fully participate in God's work.

These are positive steps that United

can take to build a foundation for true spiritual growth and to aid in the healing of the brethren. Taking this action would provide an excellent springboard for preaching the gospel to the world. If United does not implement this action, and if the unbiblical philosophies of hierarchical government, the Trinity, and other such doctrines are brought into the church, then UCG will have ever increasing problems, just as the WCG is experiencing. The unbiblical doctrines and hierarchical government rules of the WCG should not be brought into the United churches. No good can result from doctrinal positions that lead to ministerial abuse of the brethren and the suppression of God's Spirit working in **all** his people. These policies have long been practiced in other churches of God, and their history bears testimony to the consequences of their errors.

If the United leadership follows in their footsteps, UCG will suffer the loss of many brethren who do not agree with these doctrines and who will flee from the hierarchical rules set up, just as they have left Global, Philadelphia, CGI (with its lesser form of hierarchy) and a host of other WCG splits that have adopted these policies. United could have members splitting off much sooner and in greater numbers than did these other church groups. The political maneuvering and power struggles which have been a major problem in the hierarchically run WCG and in some splits will also become a big problem in United. More and more UCG ministers will map out their territories and begin to wield authority in the same dictatorial way that WCG leaders have done in the past. The spiritual growth of the membership will be stifled, and the number of members will begin to plateau.

Brethren who submit to the hierarchical "overlordship" will be expected to follow the minister's point of view on doctrine rather than personally studying and proving each doctrine for themselves. Following a "pray, pay, stay and obey" policy will lead to Christians who are spiritual hothouse flowers, unable to prove sound doctrine, and who become ripe for deception. How can brethren help spread the gospel to the world if they themselves are not grounded in the Word of God? How can local autonomy exist if leaders act more like kings than servants? Can any part of God's true church prosper and grow spiritually if its primary focus is on building an organization rather than on

building up the brethren? The brethren in UCG will have difficulty growing spiritually unless their leaders truly work **with** them as God's heritage, not **over** them as "dumb sheep", denying them any opportunity to exercise discernment in spiritual matters of the church.

We as Christians are commanded not to copy the hierarchical government rules of the gentiles (Mark 10:42-45, Luke 22:23-27), which began in Babylon and which will end with Satan's personal dictatorship/hierarchy on the earth (Rev. 13). Knowing that this world's system of government will be destroyed by Jesus Himself at His second coming, we should purge ourselves from the influences of corporate America and the rulership philosophies of the churches of this world (e.g., the Catholic church) and stop allowing them to be practiced in the churches of God. The oppressive manner in which Babylon and her daughters (Rev. 17) rule their followers is not to be imitated by the followers of Jesus Christ.

I am fully persuaded that the days have ended when God will wink at our ignorance of His form of church government and our unwillingness to encourage **ALL** members of the Body of Christ to fully participate in the spiritual service of the church. The lessons of Worldwide are before our eyes. I am convinced that there will never be another large church organization with tens of thousands of brethren and millions of dollars which promotes hierarchical rules in the Body of Christ, as Worldwide did.

It is my hope and prayer that the churches of God will learn from the mistakes of the WCG and that brethren in all the churches of God will become a more powerful part of God's work. Nothing would please me more than to see the United Church of God, as well as brethren in other WCG splits, prosper and grow spiritually and be fully equipped to shout forth a message of warning and hope to this world. The churches of God must learn to recognize the spiritual gifts of **all** the members and encourage them to utilize their gifts to serve each other and to witness to the world. The churches of God cannot effectively fulfill their commission to the world if they neglect to use the resources that God has furnished to every member of the Body of Christ.

As a board member of the United Church of God, you have a personal responsibility to set the course for the entire membership. I urge you to act with-

out delay to resolve the issues of church government and other major issues that are discussed in this letter. I have enclosed a copy of my research paper on the WCG splits entitled *The Worldwide Church of God Splits: Their Triumphs and Troubles*, to remind you of the common faith that we in the churches of God share and the areas of weakness that we need to work on within our individual fellowship groups. I have also enclosed two excellent research papers on the Godhead by Carl Franklin entitled *Defining the Oneness of God* and *The Two Jehovahs of the Psalms*. These works will help clarify the Scriptural truth about the nature of the Godhead. Please write me, either by mail or by E-mail, if you wish to discuss my research paper or this letter. I look forward to your response. May God bless you in your service to His people, and may God's mercy, love and grace be poured out upon all His people, so that we may fully participate in the work before us.

In Christian service,
 Alan Ruth, July 31, 1995
 PO Box 4373, Troy, MI 48099 USA
 E-mail: ARUTH88521@AOL.COM

Response from Jim Franks

September 4, 1995

Dear Mr. Ruth,

I received your letter some time back, and I must apologize for not responding sooner. The date of your letter is July 31, 1995. I do want to thank you for the material which you sent me. I found it quite interesting. It truly amazes me to see all the groups that have formed out of the Worldwide/Radio Church of God.

I was pleased to read that you have been attending the United Church of God in your area and I hope that my letter can lay to rest some of the concerns which you expressed. First of all, there are some misconceptions on your part regarding the United Church of God, *An International Association*. Many of your quotes attributed to the Church were dated in March and April of this year. The United Church of God, *An International Association* did not come into existence until the first week of May. Most of your quotes were from the United Church of God in Birmingham, Alabama. When we went to Indianapolis it wasn't to become members of the United Church of God. We began an

organization that did not exist up until that time. Since our conference in Indianapolis, the United Church of God in Birmingham has chosen to be a part of our association. The only headquarters (or home office) that has existed for the current organization has been Arcadia, California. There was never a time when we looked upon Birmingham as our headquarters. So the quotes which you list in your letter prior to the Indianapolis Conference could only represent the ideas of the group there in Birmingham. That is not to say we are in disagreement with those ideas, but simply to say that they are not the official statements of the UCG, *An International Association*. [This approach allows Jim Franks to avoid answering the tough questions—*SN Editor*]

Let me address each of the issues that you listed as areas of concern in an effort to help you understand the approach in the UCG:

- You referred to a quote in a letter from Brian Orchard. Brian evidently made a reference to government from the top down. Our view is that government must begin with Jesus Christ as the head of the Church. This is indeed from the top down. This doesn't mean that we accept the hierarchical structure that we all left in the WCG. Mr. Hulme has explained it as a flattening of the pyramid under Christ.
- You referred to an inside source who has confirmed to you what UCG will eventually phase in the same type of government that we left. You referred to a curtailment of the open door policy and a rejection of input from the local members. I am not sure who your inside source may be, but I have seen nothing to make me believe that this is going to happen. We have a clear open door policy. We also instruct the ministry to listen to the members either through a board set-up or some sort of committee set-up. None of this has changed. The ministry has clear responsibilities as defined in the scriptures.
- You stated "UCG is seriously considering adopting a new form of the Trinity doctrine for its official explanation of the Godhead." I have no idea where this comes from. In virtually every issue of the *New Beginnings* newsletter, you will find statements that completely contradict this idea. Our latest issue has an article by one of our ministers condemning the idea of the trinity that had crept into the WCG. [Crept into the WCG? It was

enforced from the "top-down!" —*SN Editor*] We have a statement of doctrine before the Board which will be presented to the General Conference in December which clearly denies any of the trinitarian ideas. [It is comforting to see this. —*SN Editor*]

- You expressed several ideas that came from UCG ministers. I am not sure who these ministers are, but they don't seem to reflect the views of the majority in UCG. But, of course, the fact that we do allow people to express themselves would give these men a right to have certain opinions. Our form of government is spiritual consensus. There is no effort to stop any form of literature from being read by our members. There are some Church areas where the boards are made up of ordained individuals, but there are other areas where they are not. There is no official model from the UCG. Each area is given the responsibility of working out local issues locally. In some areas, we may need to look at the most efficient method of handling things. Whatever we decide will need to be presented before the General Conference of Elders in December for their consideration.

There are many other things brought up in your letter. I believe that you made some excellent suggestions toward the end of your letter. Primarily, your concerns seem to center around a potential return to authoritarianism and heavy-handed conduct on the part of those in leadership. As long as there are human beings, there will always be a potential for abuse. In the UCG we are establishing safeguards through a board set-up to deal with these issues if they arise. Our desire is to serve the people of God and launch a work of preaching the gospel. It will be up to God as to how successful we will be.

Thank you for taking the time to write. I hope this has been helpful.

Sincerely,
 Jim Franks
 Committee Member

[We are happy to see UCG respond, though it seems a little non-committal. It appears the UCG has yet to come to grips with the big question: Does the Eternal manage and guide his people through a variety of human leaders, or does he only work through **one** man or organization? The latter idea is tempting to leaders because it keeps "their" members coming to them. May the Eternal help all of us to see. —*SN Editor*]

“UCG—Hulme”, continued from page 1
have heard it from your minister as he reported to you the main accomplishments at the conference. I want to reprint it here for your thoughtful evaluation.

While there was confidence in the overall idea of the formation of UCG, Mr. Hulme does not mention the biggest point of debate of both the Indianapolis and Denver conferences: will local congregations be directly responsible to our Saviour and Head of the Body or will they be responsible to a central human government? Nevertheless, we appreciate Mr Hulme sharing this joint statement and encouraging our “thoughtful evaluation.”

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF GOVERNANCE—from the board of directors of the United Church of God, *an International Association*.

“We affirm that Jesus Christ is the living head of the Church, and that He sets apart some for the service of the ministry. The ministry, organized as a conference of elders to serve the needs of the local membership, being led by the Holy Spirit, chooses from amongst its numbers a governing board of directors whom God has demonstrated have the fruits consistent with senior leadership positions.”

This statement sounds good and fair, but exactly what does it mean? Did God set apart all of the men in the WCG to be ministers? If so, why are about half of them now teaching doctrines opposite of what they were originally taught to teach? If we admit that these ministers were appointed by men and that God may not have blessed every appointment, how do we know that only the “good ones” are with UCG? What are the “fruits consistent with senior leadership?” Does that mean that we simply select men that have been senior leaders before? **Is the “accidental” acceptance and teaching of the trinity doctrine a fruit consistent with senior leadership?** How many “little ones” (Mark 9:42) were disfellowshipped or completely gave up on the truth because of these ministers’ false teachings? Did the original apostles get confused and teach some doctrines of Simon Magus for a while? While we should warmly welcome back anyone that has made doctrinal mistakes and wants to change, should not we desire leadership of men that could see the error as it came—and men that had the courage to not accept it in spite of the cost to their personal lives?

“The general conference of elders recognizes the board of directors under the leadership of Jesus Christ to provide direction and oversight in the affairs of the Church according to its established bylaws, including but not limited to the areas of doctrines, ministerial duties and responsibilities, the preaching of the gospel, and financial management.”

This is the most important sentence in the article. It places the board of directors **under** Jesus Christ as they should be—as everyone should be. It also places the board of directors **over** (that is what “provide direction and oversight” means) the ministry and finances. This language obviously gives the board authority to hire, fire and transfer ministers at their discretion. It also gives the board authority to determine what is acceptable doctrine and to decide what action to take when ministers do not comply. While this statement is not saying that this government will turn out like the last WCG government, the board certainly has all of the power of the WCG pastor general.

The governing board in turn elects a chairman and appoints a president. Each is accountable to the board. The chairman nominates officers of the board, subject to the approval of the board. The president nominates operation managers, subject to the approval of the board, for the functioning of a home office. The home office is responsible for the administration of the policies and procedures established by the board for the day-to-day management and care of the Church.

It is not clear whether one person can hold both the office of president and chairman. If so, this structure could easily become a one-man rule. Day-to-day operations are left to the “home office” which is run by operations managers appointed by the president. There are no duties outlined that require a vote of the board except the selection of the president and chairman. Since the chairman nominates the officers, he can easily arrange to place his supporters on the board over a period of time.

“We recognize that each local congregation is guided and shepherded by a pastor, assisted by elders, deacons and others constituting advisory committees and/or board governed by published rules of association. The local congregations work in conjunction with the board of directors and the home office carrying out the policies and procedures that have been established by the board. Local congregations work together with the ministry in serving and caring to the needs of the Church and its membership and

being an example in the community.”

This paragraph speaks often of “working together” and that is a very good thing. However, we find that each congregation is **under** (“guided and shepherded by”) its pastor (who is responsible to the headquarters board). Local boards and advisory committees “assist” the pastor. There is no accountability to or authority from these groups.

It is sometimes difficult to believe that statements of this kind take hours to compose. The above is a carefully crafted statement intended to include, as much as possible, a consensus position on this important aspect of the United Church of God.

Hopefully, this statement is not too “carefully crafted.” If it is an effort to disguise a top-down government as a locally autonomous government, then it is a deception and it is wrong. If the board of directors of UCG believe the Bible supports a top-down government, then they should be honest (like the PCG and GCG) and clearly state it.

On the other hand, if this is a sincere effort to create a government under the Eternal, we would like to see some positive principles of law stated rather than just discussions of who is going to control what. It would be good to include basic statements about the qualifications of those that serve the brethren—will the procedure of initial selection by the congregation (Acts 6) be used? How will poor servants be dealt with? How can people be disfellowshipped—will the principle of bringing matters “to the church” in Matt 18:15-18 be used? The Bible contains far more information about how to live than about which human is in charge. We should follow that example.

With this statement before you, you can now see that the United Church of God has a form of governance which is based on biblical principles. Do you find evidence in scripture for this description of how the Church will find order and stability through its leadership? Those present in Denver included board members, regional pastors, wives and some home-office staff. All felt confident that the governance statement represents a significant clarification of the issue of how the Church will be taken care of from an administrative point of view.

We see Biblical principles followed in some cases and other cases we do not. However, we would be very interested in any writing showing the

"UCG, Hulme", from previous page

Biblical basis for this type of government. We realize that this kind of writing takes much time and effort, but if the founding principles of an organization are not based on the Bible in a way that the membership can understand, what fruit can we expect from that organization?

An initial draft of the Bylaws is now complete. These Bylaws cover governance of the Church in detail. They also contain a statement on basic doctrine that is much more complete than the statement we were able to issue in Indianapolis. The next project in the legal area will be the formation of Rules of Association, based of course on the agreed Bylaws.

While this paragraph may sound like so much legal terminology, these documents can be very important. These documents can set limits on the powers of boards, presidents, chairmen and "ministers" or they can leave loopholes enabling almost unlimited power to a single individual. (For example, if the chairman is responsible for calling a meeting to elect a new president, and the president is responsible for calling a meeting to elect a new chairman, and one person can have both offices, once in power, the president/chairman can forever avoid calling an election to replace himself.) While these legal documents are often difficult to follow, they do state the fundamental principles whereby an organization will operate. The conditions required to change the bylaws are important. Sometimes they cannot be changed at all. Other times only a majority vote of the board is required.

The rest of David Hulme's article went on to describe a new magazine being produced by UCG, *Good News* (the name is in the public domain, several organizations use it). This magazine is intended to be 40-48 pages in length and contain a number of challenging Bible-based articles. The *Servants' News* would like to congratulate UCG on this effort to give spiritual meat to many that have been missing out on it for so long.

It is our prayer that the UCG will focus on the task for teaching truth and serving the brethren and realize that if they are doing our Father's Work, He will supply their needs (Phil 4:9).

—Norman S. Edwards

"UCG—Birmingham", from page 5

with an existing one. There would have been no reason for the formation of another such organization. Anyone who wants to affiliate with that kind of organization should simply join one of those already existing fellowships. We believe that any such man made religious organization, set up to *govern* the very Body of Christ, is not biblical nor is it in the best interests of the disciples of Jesus Christ. And we categorically reject, as a matter of principle and faith, the governmental structure of such organizations. It is a matter of *conviction* and *conscience* (Rom. 14:23) and is not a judgment or stand *against* those who feel or do otherwise. We operate by faith that Christ is the Head of His Body and has never delegated His position to a man or any group of men (Eph. 4:14-16).

However, this does not preclude the probability that there are many of our brethren who fellowship with these organizations and we will continue to peacefully fellowship with them, if they so desire.

We have recently come to see that a few are under the impression that we are now or soon will be under the governance of the United Church of God, *An International Association*. This is not so.

We also realize that there are some who demand that we conduct our affairs here locally to suit their belief in a hierarchical system of governance which places ministers in ranks or position over other ministers and lay members. They feel that we should yield to their demands regarding our affiliation even to the point of spreading misrepresentations for the purpose of destroying our new found freedom in Jesus Christ and what is being done in the *United Church of God—Birmingham*. We make no demands on anyone's fellowship with us and we do not feel obligated to yield to any demands made upon the leadership of the local congregation and corporation.

We also understand that some have even resorted to the role of "keeping an eye on things" for Home Office and feel that it is their duty to report any-

thing done here locally which the Home Office may not approve. There is no reason for any such clandestine reporting or negative attitudes toward the local leadership whom they think are trying to hide something from the Home Office. Our position is well known to the Home Office and we make no pretense about the matter.

We feel it is important to those that have any such attitude regarding this local administration to understand that these efforts only tend to disrupt the harmony and hinder the free flow of God's Holy Spirit. We, as brothers and sisters in Christ, simply wish to fellowship in peace among brethren of like mind. We worship God in Spirit and truth and in *freedom*. Christ told His disciples that we shall know His truth and it shall make us *free* (John 8:32).

Those who don't wish to worship in this way or oppose this kind of worship should be reminded that everyone is here voluntarily. No one is coerced into this fellowship. If one does not agree with this form of worship, then the best thing for that person would simply be to leave.

If anyone continues to display open disagreement and hostility, or if one continues to secretly try to convince others against this form of worship, then that person will be asked to leave.

The purpose of this communiqué should not be received as our desire for anyone to leave our fellowship. We are only asking those who will not repent of this negative activity to leave. Our sincere hope is that everyone who has been involved in these activities repent and remain in our fellowship even if they don't *totally* agree with us. Everyone who will peacefully remain in our fellowship is welcomed and encouraged to do so.

May God bless you and give you the courage to make the right decision.

May His grace and peace be with you.

In Jesus' Name,
United Church of God—Birmingham,
Alabama, tel: 205-822-8524
fax: 205-822-8529

“CGI—Dart”, continued from page 1
 little instruction in the New Testament about government. We also find that the ten commandments and many of the other essential laws of the Old Testament were not repeated in the New. Why? Because those things were being successfully taught to the people every Sabbath (Acts 15:21). Perhaps we do not find much government instruction because the Synagogue government with which they were familiar was fairly close to what the Eternal had given Moses. The Synagogue system allowed the Messiah and his followers to travel around and teach new truth from the scriptures. (Try traveling to the congregations of a hierarchical organization to teach a new truth!) Synagogues were controlled locally and their leaders were selected locally. If they became corrupt or taught heresy, they could be put on trial by the Jerusalem leaders, but they were not administratively controlled from “headquarters.” Two of the leaders of synagogues, Crispus and Sosthenes, became members (Acts 18:8,17, 1Cor 1:1).

As important as church government is to us, one would think the New Testament would lay it out clearly. It does not. If it did, you would not be reading this. We could just publish “Paul’s instructions to the Romans on how to govern their church,” or better yet, “Jesus’ instruction to the apostles on how to rule the church.” But Jesus never told them any such thing. In fact, He never told the disciples who would be in charge—probably because he intended to remain in charge Himself.

The Messiah may have talked to them about organization, but none of the gospel writers were inspired to put it down. He did say he would stay in charge! (Col 1:18.)

There is very little direct instruction from Jesus on church government, but it would be wrong to say there is none. There are at least two very important statements. The first turns out to be a caution of what we *should not do* rather than what we should do.

It seems the disciples had one set of expectations about authority and Jesus had another. They were thinking of an immediate kingdom with Christ ruling on a throne. They had no idea of the circumstances that would prevail for the church during the remainder of their lives. At that moment, they did not even have a clear idea of what the church would be like. Jesus did.

What Jesus Christ said about authority

What Jesus told them about authority among themselves deserves careful consid-

eration. He called them together, and He said this: “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them” (Matt 20:25). A vertically structured system of governance with people exercising authority downward, Jesus said, is a Gentile system.

While this scripture does not say anything about “vertically structured systems,” it does show that we should **not** strive to “exercise authority” over others—to tell them “you must do whatever I say.” The system of judging that the Eternal gave his people was designed for the people to look “upward,” to come to the judges when they had a conflict (Ex 18:16, 22:9, Deut 1:16, 16:18, 19:17, 25:1).

Having said this, Jesus went on to give them His definitive statement about governance: “But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” The apostles were to look, not downward in dominion, but outward in service.

Now I know that many think that a pyramid style of government is Biblical and God ordained. The truth is that it was first recommended by Jethro, Moses father-in-law, as a solution to a problem (Ex 18:13 ff.). God seems to have neither condemned nor endorsed Jethro’s solution. But God’s solution to the same sort of problem was seventy elders of equal status, empowered by the spirit (Num 11:11 ff.). Perhaps the most significant difference between the two structures is that, in the one, power is focused vertically to the top, while in the other power is diffused horizontally.

Seventy elders were the basis of the Israel national government for many years—we know it as the Sanhedrin. These men were not each “over” a separate area of the country, but worked together to guide the nation. They made many decisions by voting. While this is the governing body that condemned the Messiah to death, it is important to realize that the Sanhedrin at that time consisted largely of men chosen by Herod the Great for their loyalty to him, not for their righteousness or knowledge of the Scriptures.

In addition to this national council, the Eternal gave the people local judges and officers to handle problems among neighbors. “You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates [cities had

gates], which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment” (Deut 16:18). Who was responsible for appointing these judges and officers? Certainly the same people referred to two verses previously—the people instructed to give offerings “three times a year.”

When using this as an example for church government, it is a critical mistake to identify the human leader of a church with Moses. Moses is a type of Christ, not of any human leader of the church. To attempt the role of Moses in the church is to usurp the authority of Christ. He is the only head of the Church.

When we understand this, we have grasped the first principle of New Testament church government. Jesus retained the real power to himself (Matt 28:18), and diffused power among the men who led the church.

By the time anyone wrote anything that is now “New Testament,” what there was of church government was already in existence. The New Testament writers took it for granted, and went on to more important subjects. The result is that we are left to gather what we know about church government from fragments and inferences. One of the first things we learn is that ministerial offices evolved. In the beginning there were apostles. With the growth of the Jerusalem churches, the needs grew faster than the ministry. They were meeting the needs on an ad hoc basis, with all the attendant inefficiency, inequity and frustration (Acts 6:1ff).

No divine revelation regarding government

What is important here is what did not happen. There was no dream, no vision, and no instructions from Jesus about how to plan, appoint deacons, organize the church or distribute aid. His instructions were simple enough: “Feed my sheep.” I suppose he thought the twelve were smart enough to figure out a few things for themselves. They were, but only when the need forced them to think about it.

I do not mean to belittle the role of the Holy Spirit in leading the apostles, but the Spirit did not anticipate the problem for them. When the problem surfaced, they called the multitude of disciples together and made their case, not from divine revelation, but from reason. They instructed the “multitude of disciples” to select seven men whom they might appoint over “this business.” What process they used we are not told, but it had to involve the exchange of information and recommendations, and some sort of decision making process. Did they vote? They may not have called it that, but by head nodding, hand raising, winking, or ayes and nays, the people chose seven men. And when the people

decide something, it is (are you ready for this?) a democracy of some sort.

Democracy is probably a poor term because of one major difference: democracy does not recognize a perfect, divine King. In democracy, the people determine what is good and what is bad, and elect leaders to implement those ideas. The Bible teaches that the Eternal is our King and He determines what is good and bad. When he gives us areas to make decisions, he expects us to do the best we can with what he has given us (Luke 12:47-48).

We do find other cases in the New Testament where decisions were made by a group (Acts 15:22, 15:40; 16:1-2, 16:4, 18:27, 2Cor 8:9, Phlp 1:14, etc.). While we do not have an undisputed report of how these group decisions were made, the Greek verb *cheirotoneo*, which literally means "stretching forth the hand" is used in two places (Acts 14:23 and 2Cor 8:19). Most Greek dictionaries agree that this word meant "to vote by raising hands" a few hundred years B.C., but some will claim its meaning changed to "appoint" when the New Testament was written—this is the meaning that most translators use. Nevertheless, it seems inconceivable that the writer of Acts would use a word that literally means "stretching forth the hand" if voting were considered a sin. For more information on this, write for our article *How Does the Eternal Govern through Humans?*

But there were some decisions the people could not make. Much of the work to be done depended on the gifts of the Spirit, and God decided how those would be distributed.

The apostles made the first division of labor in appointing deacons. They designated a ministry of the word and a ministry of service. The other divisions God made as he gave this gift to one man, and that gift to another woman. The "offices" of 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 were created and grew out of the distribution of spiritual gifts. Consequently, Paul can say "And God has set some in the church..."

Mr. Dart is quite correct in noting that spiritual gifts are from Heaven, not from the "church government." If we study to get past some of the mistakes of the King James Bible translators, the truth of the Greek scriptures is much less compartmentalized than most of us thought. Does the original Greek support offices of deacons and ministers? Absolutely not! There are not separate words for them!

The King James translators selectively translated one Greek word, *diakonos*, as "servant" in some places (its real meaning), as "minister" in other places and as "deacon" in other places.

The concept of "ordination" is largely created by the translators. What is the Greek word for "ordain"? There isn't one! There are 13 words that are usually translated something else, but the KJV translators wrote "ordain" in a few carefully chosen places. While the scriptures certainly do support the "laying on of hands" when someone is chosen for a special purpose, you cannot find a scripture that calls this an ordination or requires laying on of hands for one to become a "servant" or "minister." These ideas have been brought to us through traditional Catholic and Protestant theology. This history is explained in detail in *How Does the Eternal Govern through Humans?*

It is important to note that prophets are listed second in both lists of spiritual gifts or "offices." Can a congregation vote to decide which of them will be a prophet? Can an authority figure in the church decide which of us will see the future? Can a board of ministers meet and appoint one of their number as the resident prophet? Or is a man or woman made a prophet when the spirit of God moves upon them?

The lists of spiritual gifts are indeed ranked, perhaps in order of importance, perhaps in the order the gifts were bestowed upon individuals. What they do not represent is a hierarchy of authority. If this is the divinely ordained structure of church government, I can tell you what it is not. It is not a structure of Apostle, Evangelist, Pastor, Preaching Elder, Local Elder, and Local Church Elder. It is not a structure of authority where each person on the ladder owes deference to everyone above him on the ladder. To whatever extent it is a structure, it is a structure of service.

In the Catholic church, the Pope is the Vicar of Christ which means he is to function "in the place of Christ when He should be gone." By definition, a vicar is one authorized to perform the functions of another. The error is in the presumption that Christ would be gone.

Another statement from Jesus Christ

When Jesus gave "the Great Commission" to his disciples, he made His second great statement on church government (Mat 28:18-20). It is in three parts. First He proclaims, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Whatever authority there is in the church rests in Jesus Christ

and there is no authority but His.

Second, He gave them their "mission statement," their corporate goals and objectives. This is what they were to be doing with all their resources: Making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them.

Third, He made it clear that He needed no vicars: "And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Christ would remain in charge of the church, and not necessarily through the twelve. He called and commissioned Saul of Tarsus without consulting any of them.

Yes, He used Ananias to instruct Paul and did not even so much as tell the Apostles that He was appointing another apostle—they were all afraid of Paul when he came to Jerusalem (Acts. 9:10-19). While Paul had "preached Jesus" in the synagogue for a few times right after his conversion, there is nothing mentioned about any fruit being born by him at this time. Today, most hierarchical groups will not recognize teachers that they did not "ordain" unless those teachers show great "fruit" immediately. Should Peter have said, "God only works through me," and not let any members listen to Paul?

The idea that God works "through" this church leader or that apostle should be viewed with suspicion. If God can work "through" Balaam's donkey, then I suppose He can work through one of us. But when that one becomes an exclusive channel of God's government, God's grace, access to God, or any such, we have created a new vicar of Christ. We have put an ordinary man in the place of Christ. It is idolatry.

Church government is not a major concern in the New Testament. What is important is the sovereignty of Jesus in the life of each of us. Jesus Christ is your Lord; the ministry is your servant.

A well-stated conclusion. There are those who have said the most important command of the Bible is "obey the government." When our Savior asked about it He said "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31). While there is much liberty in these commandments, there is also much individual responsibility.

—Norman S. Edwards

Peaceful Cooperation among the Ekklesia

It appears that our "leaders" are very interested in setting up human legal organizations (meaning well in so doing) in order to do "a work." The problem with most of these physical organizations is that they tend to focus on how to organize, rule over, call it what you will, God's ecclesia. And these physical organizations tend to (even if it is on the subconscious level) compete for members and contributions and they tend to measure growth in physical (quantitative) terms. God, however, is probably more interested in qualitative growth (personal character development) in each individual comprising his ecclesia. God, the ultimate in free will, wants each of the individuals in his church to come to the point where we freely choose to do the right thing because it is right.

When many people speak of government, they do not even know what government is. It is, very simply, organized force. The primary purpose of the government of a nation is to protect life, liberty, and private property. In carrying out these functions the government of a nation is responsible for national defense, civil defense (police), and the administration of courts of "justice." The Church of God has no administrative requirements to provide national defense, or civil defense, and has only minimal requirements to mediate disputes among the brethren. So, how much organized force should be needed for the Church of God to accomplish the great commission outlined by Christ in Matthew 28? Not much. Not very much at all.

Be that as it may, it is apparent that many members of the ministry are determined to find a way to rule over what God never intended to be ruled over. Most of these men do not mean harm. They just do not know any better, having been primarily trained in a system that confused the physical administration of a human nation with the shepherding of a dynamic, 2,000 year old, spiritual organism. There is minimal need for organized force in the ecclesia because the true members of the ecclesia are always striving (not perfectly) to learn what the right thing is and to do it. All that is necessary is to GUIDE (not govern) the ecclesia to help them see what the right thing is.

Once we understand what the right thing is, we will want to do it, because it is right. Will we agree perfectly? No we won't, because each of us has been affected by the world we have been raised in and none of us has even remotely come close to really coming out of the world, even though we have tried.

What can the members of the ecclesia do now, to facilitate looking through physical human organizations, in order to work together to do good? I would be interested in receiving feedback on the below thoughts, which have occurred to me lately:

1. We should agree that the Bible is our code of ethics. Human statements cannot improve on God's word. If we want to narrow it down further, the Ten Commandments as clarified by Christ's life and words. If we want to narrow it down further, love.

2. Doctrines can also be called teachings. The teachings of the ecclesia are already well defined in a single book. It is called the Bible.

3. Members of the ecclesia should look for opportunities to peacefully cooperate with each other, irrespective of where they each physically attend Sabbath services. We must retrain our minds to look through physical human organizations and to obey God rather than men, no matter who the men are (even if they are ministers).

4. We must respect each other and pray for each other.

5. With modern technology, by working together, each of us doing a part of it, we can recreate or assemble a body of literature, from a Church of God perspective, that can serve as a comprehensive Bible Study help. This will take some time and effort, but I believe that within two years, we can assemble writings covering the different books of the Bible and also the major teaching of the Bible.

I had already achieved a technical college degree before I enrolled in Ambassador College (AC). I was called a few months prior to graduating and was fortunate in being able to immediately attend AC. Since I already had a technical degree and since I was a new member of the ecclesia, I was primarily interested

in taking the different Bible classes available there. This proved immensely valuable to me. What I did was to select courses, as much as possible, that covered major portions of the Bible. Below were some of the courses that were available to be taken (the exact titles of classes may not be correct, as it has been almost 20 years since I attended AC):

Life and Teachings of Jesus: This class concentrated on the four gospels and utilized a harmony of the gospels as the main guide to learning.

Acts and New Testament Survey: This class taught the book of Acts extensively and then surveyed the rest of the New Testament.

Old Testament Survey: This two semester class surveyed the entire Old Testament, with the entire instructor pointing out particularly relevant and interesting passages. A part of the class assignment was to actually read the entire Old Testament.

Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes: This class covered the books of the Bible with the same name.

Minor Prophets: This class covered the books of the Bible like Hosea, Joel, Amos, etc. that comprised the minor prophets.

Major Prophets: This class covered the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

General Epistles: This class covered the books of James, I and II Peter, I and II and III John, and Jude.

Epistles of Paul: This two semester class covered the 14 New Testament epistles that were written by the Apostle Paul.

History of Ancient Israel: This two semester class went through the history of Israel from Abraham to the time of Christ. It was one of the best classes at AC.

Other classes: Some other classes included classes on the doctrines (major teachings) of the church, prophecy, etc.

With the above in mind, it makes sense for the ecclesia to recreate a body of literature, from the Church of God perspective, that helps those who wish a greater understanding of the Bible to be able to utilize this literature as a tool in order to gain this greater understanding. Each reader of the literature can use or

not use whatever portions of what is available that they wish. Each reader of the literature will have to read and prove the material from their own Bible. In other words, each member of the ecclesia must read at their own risk.

Below are some proposed guidelines for participating in this project:

A. Do not take cheap shots at other people who attend Sabbath services in a different physical human organization. It is all right to vigorously discuss and to even attack ideas, but not people. It would be appreciated if a heavy handed manner of editorial writing would be avoided. In other words, try to refrain from, "If you do not accept this teaching, you may end up in the lake of fire." Sometimes, depending on the topic, it is necessary to say just that, but usually it is not. Teach the truth as you understand it, without resorting to intimidation tactics.

B. Since the primary means of initially publishing this information will be through the Sabbatarian library section in the Religion Forum on CompuServe, i.e. on-line, the author needs to identify himself, (unless their personal situation requires anonymity), and to identify how readers can ask follow up questions directly to the author.

C. The author of an article needs to be willing to update and correct their article based on feedback they receive. In other words, if you wish to write an article, please try and keep it current. The author of an article may want to amend the article to include a Question and Answers section following the article so that frequently asked questions can be answered right in the article. This is an important service to the ecclesia and will save the author a lot of time as well, as they will not have to respond individually to each and every question.

D. Hopefully some authors will choose to address particularly important teachings, e.g. the nature of God, the proof of the Bible, God's plan of salvation, the two trees, Hebrews 6 doctrines, Acts 2:38, etc. In other words, the recreated body of literature will hopefully have articles covering not only the different parts of the Bible, but also, the more important topics of the Bible. Topical sermon summaries are welcome. They should be categorized under the major topic covered.

E. The literature submitted will not be edited, unless we develop a network

of people who can serve in that capacity. It will be the responsibility of the author to make sure their article is as accurate, professional, and readable as possible.

F. It will also be the responsibility of the author to notify the person who provides the Table of Contents to this informal ad hoc Bible Study Course as to the title, subject, and a brief description of the contents of the article. It would be good if the article could be submitted in Microsoft Word, or some other major word processing software format that is readily available for the readers to be able to utilize once it is downloaded. The person who will serve as the chronicler of the articles has yet to be identified. For now it can be me, although I hope that someone who has the time to do this project justice will step forward and volunteer. See the end of the article for contact information. The index will be updated and uploaded to the Sabbatarian section of CompuServe's Religion Forum from time to time.

G. Eventually, we can hopefully publish these (not previously published) articles in something more than an on-line manner. The main thing is to get started. An article does not have to be new in order to be posted. And, if an author wishes to tackle a large topic, e.g. the book of Isaiah, they may need to post their articles in installments. This is all right and to be expected. This is a work of donated service which takes time and effort.

H. Already existing publications from various Church of God groups are welcome to be posted. By many people each doing part of the Bible, we can recreate a body of literature fairly quickly.

I. In order to get started, and to make this valuable to the ecclesia, I would appreciate it if you could gather up at least 5 - 10 articles, suitable for publishing, and let me know about them so I can include them in an initial Table of Contents. If four or five of us each gather up at least five articles, we can start with a Table of Contents that has maybe 20 articles. This would make quite a good start.

J. Each article should be uploaded starting with the abbreviation: COGBA: Title of Article. COG stands for Church of God. BA stands for Bible Article. If an author wishes to participate and has already uploaded an article into the Sabbatarian section, it would be

immensely helpful if they would upload it again with the COGBA heading. This will make it a lot easier for the ecclesia to locate and find which articles to download, as we are not the only people who will utilize this section of CompuServe's Religion Forum.

K. I fully realize that there will be occasions where two different writers may submit articles that have different conclusions. That is why I mentioned earlier that the reader must read at their own risk and prove things to their own satisfaction from their own Bible.

Please let me know if you will be willing to help in launching this service to God's people.

Thank you.

—Dale Stogner

tel:714-730-3561, fax:714-544-6725

email: 75361.2454@compuserve.com.

Reply from Servants' News:

Your idea is excellent! We would love to do this project, too, but we already have more than we can do. We certainly will help. We are going to have a conference about this subject at the Feast in Destin, FL. Richard Nickels with Giving and Sharing and other organizations have expressed an interest in cooperating.

One major question is: should this database be on compuserve or on the **internet** where everyone with a computer and modem can get to it. We could certainly do both, but it would require moving files back and forth.

We like using MS-Word as a standard language. Much time is required to move documents between word processor formats and fix the little problems.

We think it is better to use the "here-a-little, there-a-little" approach to scripture and start with basic booklets on the doctrines that most people are concerned about, but your approach is very important also. We already have some complete papers on Galatians and other books to help your initial start.

Many people do not have access to the internet, so we would be quite willing to make the articles available on 3-ring paper as long as the funds hold out to print them. We can print a 2-sided page for about \$.025 in quantities of 500. We know there are many others that would like to contribute articles to this project.

Keep us posted!

—Norman S. Edwards

Letters
& Responses

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. We include our response to each letter in this type-style. We have selected a title for each letter for easy reference. If writers supply their own title, we will be happy to use it.

Live Talk Radio Keeps Working

LETTER: Sept 15, 1995
Dear Mr. Edwards,

Could you add me to your mailing list for your newsletter and tapes if you have them.

I heard you on the Lee Clark Show [See April 1995 issue of Servant's News] several months ago and I was quite impressed—you were speaking about the criminal justice system.

Thanks,

—D. D., North Las Vegas, NV

RESPONSE: Thank you for your kind letter. We will gladly send you our newsletter, *Servants' News*, free of charge. It is intended for people that already have a long-time Sabbath-keeping, Bible-studying background. Many of our readers are members of congregations that are struggling with the issue of how they should be organized and governed.

Eventually, we will get away from this subject and teach many other Bible topics. If you have interests or questions not covered by our publications, please let us know and we will try to help you find what you are seeking.

—Norman S. Edwards

A Drink of Cold Water

LETTER: Aug 5, 1995
Dear Mr. Edwards

Let me begin by thanking you for the work you are doing. The Servant's News has been a drink of cold water for a thirsty man. I appreciate the diversity of teachings and teachers. You can count on my support, although you haven't asked for it. I thank God as well, for opening my eyes and my mind to the scattered brethren of God's Church, the true Body of Christ. May

you have much help in the battle against spiritual ignorance and intolerance.

I am asking that you send me the paper "How does the Eternal Govern Through Humans?", also "A Call To Arms". If it is more convenient feel free to E-Mail these papers.

Your Brother,

—Richard Fox, Madison, TN

RESPONSE: Thank you for the encouragement. We do not yet have all of our items ready to E-mail, but we are working on it.

—Norman S. Edwards

Article on Government

LETTER: Sept 9, 1995
Hi Norman,

I hope you are doing well. I have just read a copy of your article, "How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans?". The article was given to me by a member of the UCG last week in Seattle (he must have handed out a dozen copies of it that day).

I must tell you that it was just wonderful to read this article! You have done a marvelous work in this, and are to be commended. The Spirit of the Eternal has been leading me to understand many of the same points you made in your paper, so it was extremely validating to see them confirmed with such thorough research and sound reasoning. I am thankful that you were willing to share your gift of spiritual understanding on this subject with me, and the others will yet benefit.

I would like to know if you can e-mail me with an electronic version of your paper, say, in Word or WP format; or even just plain ASCII if nothing else? I know many, many people who would benefit from reading it, and I would love nothing more than to turn my personal laser printer into a small printing press for a time. This would be much cheaper than photocopying and mailing, or faxing the copy I now have.

Anyway, thanks again for the service you have provided in this valuable labor of love. I suspect it will accomplish much good for and among the people of the Eternal in the years to come. May He reward you accordingly.

Regards,

—Danny, Seattle, WA

RESPONSE: Thank you for the help. You may make as many copies as you like. That article is available in MS-WORD 6.0 format. Please do not give the paper to people who do not want it.

—Norman S. Edwards

Man's Government, not God's

LETTER: Sept 18, 1995

Dear Friends,

Thank you for sending us a copy of your publication. Please put us on your mailing list.

The article *Questions and Comments on Church Governance* was quite good. I left the WCG back in 1981, after being a member since 1963. Church government was one of the reasons I left. Another reason was the fact that HWA was an unrepentant false prophet.

HWA ruled the church as if he was its king; and his chosen "ministers," who were paid to carry out his will, ruled as princes and dukes and earls. The government of the WCG was basically totalitarian. It was a man's government, not the government of God. It was HWA's government! But as John Acton said: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely."

The WCG, like all things in this world, was a mixture of good and evil. But the WCG originally did more good than evil: HWA did preach the Gospel, even though he polluted it with his false prophecies and his personal prejudices and his self-exalting dogma. He did preach the Gospel, and through his work many people turned from sin and accepted the New Covenant and became Saints of God. But the authoritarian government of the WCG, along with HWA's character, were seeds of destruction. There was an obsession with **GOVERNMENT, AUTHORITY, and RULE** in the hierarchy of that institution. Eventually HWA declared himself Pope—"spiritual Father" of God's one and only "true Church," and successor to "Peter" as vicar of Christ on earth. He assumed a type of papal infallibility and had Gerald Waterhouse, one of his chief "ministers," tell the church that "God still backs Herbert Armstrong" even "if he's 99% wrong on a point." Waterhouse also told the church, "criticism of HWA...is criticism of Jesus Christ." Any church member who had the courage to speak the truth about HWA's errors was thrown out of the church by HWA's "ministers" and "marked." Some of these same "ministers" who supported HWA when he was obviously wrong are now with the UCG and GCG. Gerald Waterhouse, who supported HWA's assumption to the papal throne, is now one of the leaders of the UCG. Those so-called ministers who accepted their pay and went along with the abuses of power and the injustices and non-Biblical dogma in the old WCG should repent of their past behavior before they even think of forming another

church government to rule over the "Church of God." How can one remove a "speck" from his brother's eye when there is a "log" in his own eye? He can't!

HWA placed himself as an idol before God when he made himself Pope. It appears as if when he did that he finally went too far, and the Light of God went out in the WCG. All that was left was the fading afterglow of the light that once was. Those who think the light went out after Joseph Tkach took power are greatly mistaken. Maybe the afterglow died and gross darkness descended in 1994 or 1995. But the Light went out much earlier. As I recall, the last year there was light in the WCG was 1978.

Some thoughts on the subject of church government: There was a book I was given by J. L. F. Buchner titled *Paul's Idea of Community* by Robert Banks. This book should be required reading for everyone interested in the subject of church government. Something else that should be required reading is *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. I, Chapter VI, to understand how the early Christian churches which were originally autonomous became the Roman Catholic Church. Two other books that should be read to understand how the concentration of power in human hands always produces great evil are *1984* by George Orwell and *Crisis of Conscience* by Raymond Franz. Raymond Franz was the nephew for Fred Franz who was president of the Watch Tower Society. The leaders of the UCG would do well if they took time to read those works before they decide to establish a "hierarchical" or totalitarian form of government for their group. They would also do well if they took time to prayerfully study Matthew 20:25-28; 23:8-12; Luke 22:24-27; and John 13:34-35 to understand how Jesus intends His churches to be governed.

The UCG, when they hold their "General Conference" in December, should invite David Antion and Richard Nickels and others, who took a stand for truth when HWA was still alive, as guest speakers on the subject of church government.

Jesus never intended that there be a concentration of ecclesiastical power in the hands of men in His Church. That is why He remains head of the Church, and why He never established the church office of vicar of Christ or Pope. It is possible that one of the reasons Jesus allowed Paul to be imprisoned, aside from the fact that Paul was chosen to bear witness for Christ at Rome, was to keep Paul in his place, to keep him from exercising too much power over the churches (see Acts 9:26-31; 2Cor 12:6-10).

Paul knew the corrupting nature of ecclesiastical power. He authorized the ordaining of bishops to act as overseers over churches; but bishops were only ordained over churches they were long-time members of, and their authority did not extend beyond their own churches. Despite the fact that the bishops' authority was limited, Paul knew that church bishops or pastors would be leaders of the prophesied apostasy (Acts 20:28-30). And history proves that it was the bishops or pastors who transformed churches that were originally churches of God into the Roman Catholic Church! The concentration of power in human hands always results in evil.

There is no Biblical record of church bishops before about 60 A.D. The Letter of James and the early letters of Paul were written to a church, an *ekklesia*, and not to a bishop. There is no mention of bishops or pastors in those early apostolic letters to churches. The earliest letter that makes mention of church bishops is Paul's letter to the Philippians which was written about 64 A.D.

The church "minister" of today is not a true minister in the Biblical sense. A minister or deacon (the words "minister" and "deacon" were originally synonymous) was not a ruler over churches. The New Testament minister or deacon (*diakonos* in Greek) was a menial servant: a waiter of tables, an errand boy. And both men and women could be ministers: Phebe, who Paul mentions in Romans 16 was a minister or servant of the Cenchrea church. The modern day local minister in most churches is in fact not a minister but what the Bible would call a bishop. And those "ministers" whose authority extend beyond a local church are in fact archbishops or cardinals or popes. And there is no Biblical justification for a group of churches being ruled over by an archbishop or cardinal or pope. Dale Stogner asked this question in his article: "if ministers are really servants, why are so many lay members afraid...?" They are afraid because these so-called ministers are not servants but defacto bishops or archbishops or maybe even would-be popes!

Sincerely,

—William Washington, Cleveland, OH

RESPONSE: We agree that the WCG was a mixture of good and evil. We do not know how to establish a date when the "light went out"—even now there are a few good men teaching truth in a few areas and a few people are being called. The percentage of good versus evil in the leaders and ministers is something that we cannot judge. How much of their sin was with knowledge

and how much in ignorance we cannot know either. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to minimize the hurt of thousands of people who sold their possessions before 1972, received disastrous marriage counseling or were "marked" and lost all their friends.

For many years while in the WCG, I believed that everyone who was "disfellowshipped" was somehow bad and that I should not even listen to their story because it was a lie. After many of us have now been "disfellowshipped" for simply believing what we had believed for the last 10 years, it is easier to see that unjust disfellowshipments have been going on for a long time. We are commanded to have a special love for the brethren (Gal 6:10). There is no scripture that tells us to let another man decide who is a brother and who is not. The scriptures give us the criteria, and we decide.

We agree with most of your technical information about government. The Greek *episkope*, usually translated "bishop" in the KJV, should be "overseer." "Bishop" is a term borrowed from the Catholic church. Today's "ministers" are more authoritarian than the overseers found in the Bible or behave like archbishops or popes—offices not found in the Bible!

—Norman S. Edwards

Hoping for a Good Government

LETTER:

Sept 13, 1995

Dear Friends,

I was given a copy of an issue of *Servants' News* and a copy of *How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans?* I attend with United Church of God in Cottonwood, AZ. We were hearing from the Home Office about a new kind of open and participatory type of governance but because our local elders were controlling we were not experiencing those blessings here. Because of the education we were receiving from your two pieces of literature and from other materials, we knew that this was not correct. We finally have a minister who visits our area now twice a month. With his prodding they now have a local board going though it was installed not elected. I hope in December we will be allowed to elect a board and that individuals will not have to be ordained in order to be eligible.

Please place me on your mailing list. I will share this information with the Congregation and perhaps an educated membership will be a less apathetic membership. Thank you for the food.

—P.M., Cottonwood, AZ

RESPONSE: You're welcome.

—Norman S. Edwards

"GCG—Meredith", from page 1

the Western world. But will democracy be the inspired form of government *after* Christ's return? Remember that Jesus Christ "is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8). What form of government did He *always* lead His true servants to follow—in both Old and New Testaments? And what *kind* of government will be followed in the soon-coming *World Ahead*?

Jesus stated, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God'" (Luke 4:4). Are we willing to open our minds and hearts and see what is the *biblical* approach to church government? God says in Isaiah 66:2, "'For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist,' says the LORD. 'But on this one will I look: On Him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.'" Will you fear and tremble before God's Word and determine to be absolutely sure that *your church* is following the *biblical* form of government?

The Bible says: "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..." (Heb 1:1). While God and his righteousness are the same, he works with humans differently at different times. An unrepentant Cain was not killed for murdering Abel (Gen 4:9-15), but the death penalty for murder was later commanded (Ex 21:12). The entire system of civil government prescribed by Moses was not practiced by Abraham, and the "church" today does not administer these punishments, etc. Our Father also works through civil governments of men and specifically allows evil men to gain control (Dan 4:17). The Eternal wanted to be the King of Israel, but the people demanded a human king and he gave it to them (1Sam 8); "I gave you a king in My anger, And took him away in My wrath" (Hos 13:11). For more information about the diversity of governments found in the scriptures, write for our free article *How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans?*

The Gospel and our future calling

The true Gospel is clearly described in Mark 1:14-15: "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'" Most of God's people realize that Jesus was talking about a *literal* kingdom—or government—that would be set up on earth when He returned. We remember that, after Jesus' resurrection, His disciples asked Him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' Here Jesus had a marvelous opportunity to disabuse them of the idea of a literal government if God's form of

government was *not* a kingdom.

But what was Jesus' answer? "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7).

Throughout the New Testament, the Bible tells us that during the Millennium the true "saints" will help Christ in administering the literal Government of God over this earth (Rev 2:25;5:9-10). And the Apostle Paul was inspired to state, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, and you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" (1Cor 6:2-3).

The Messiah will certainly be King in a literal Millennial government, assisted by perfect spirit beings. Today, we are not in the Kingdom of God and no men have been made kings. When matters are brought to us, we should be involved in judging much as the judges did in ancient Israel, though we do not administer the death penalty. The "ultimate" punishment is simply to not "keep company" with people judged unacceptable (1Cor 5:11-13). It is interesting to note that 1 Corinthians is written to the entire congregation—it does not say that the "ministry" or the hierarchy is to do the judging, but the same people that are told to repent, grow, and live righteously are also told to judge.

Remember, brethren, that the occasion of these statements was the fact that some of the brethren in Corinth were *going to law with other brethren!* So Paul is reminding them that we are now "in training" to *judge the world* and so ought to be learning to practice that kind of judgment here in God's Church today! Paul exclaims, "If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, (why) do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so that there's not a wise man among you, not even one, who is able to judge between his brethren?" (verses 4-5). So God's people need training in administering God's kind of government. We need to "see" and to put in practice the very kind of government we will be responsible for carry out during the millennium.

If there were "hierarchical men in charge," Paul would certainly have told them to do the judging. But who were the hierarchical leaders "over" all of the various congregations to which Paul wrote? We don't know, do we? Paul greets many people by name but never once mentions a name followed by "your pastor" or "the man in charge of you." Can anyone who has been in the WCG for years imagine a headquarters leader writing to the entire local congregation and asking them to

find a wise man to judge a case? No! He would write to "the minister in charge" telling him to "take care of the problem." Judgment was an important part of the congregations, but it was not the top-down kingly authority given **only to perfect beings**.

Yet in making this judgment about the incestuous young man, Paul wrote, "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged as though I were present concerning him who has so done this deed" (1Cor 5:3). Although he certainly must have had much information and probably also COUNSEL from the other leaders of the Church, the Apostle Paul had authority to make the decision to disfellowship this blatant sinner. Obviously, he was not seeking permission from any committees or "boards" of men to carry out his action!

Again, as future kings and priests, God's people should be learning to practice and administer the very form of government which they will be administering over the cities and the nations of this earth in a few years!

If we read the next two verses we find something vital: "... **when you are gathered together**, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Paul did not simply declare the man "disfellowshipped" by letter. He did not tell the "minister" to do it. He told the people to do it when they were "gathered together." He was telling them to follow the instructions given by the Messiah in Matthew 18:15-17: "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' **And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church [Greek *ekklesia*, meaning "assembly" not "ministry"]**. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."

These verses show the great difference between human government and the Father's government. He does what He wills (Psalm 115:3); He needs no witnesses or assemblies to confirm his decisions—neither will his spirit rulers in the Millennium. When the Eternal gives authority to men, he always limits that authority as in the verses above. Every member must learn to make righteous

judgments, but nowhere does the Bible say we are practicing the Millennial government now! How many people would have been put out of the WCG for not accepting the trinity if the WCG had followed these scriptures and taken the matter to "the church?" Would not most congregations have said "No! If we put out anyone, it should be the trinitarians!"

Paul could make this judgment at a distance because the facts of the case were not in dispute: the man had taken his mother for a wife. The problem was, the Corinthians were not taking correct action. Nevertheless, Paul did not write a letter putting the man out, but told the Corinthians to do the job the way our Savior commanded it.

Even when Diotrophes was casting true brethren "out of the church," John did not declare him disfellowshipped by letter, but said "If I come, **I will call to mind his deeds**" (3Jn 9-10) He would present the man's error to the assembly, counter his tricky arguments, and the *ekklesia* (congregation) would put him out.

God's government in the Old Testament

The nation of Israel was also called "the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). How did God inspire this church/state to be governed?

Listen to the inspired instruction which originated from the One who became Jesus Christ, "Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such over them* to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be *that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you*" (Ex 18:21-22).

Moses recorded thousands of words given directly from the Eternal, but the words Mr. Meredith quotes above were given by Jethro, a priest of Midian (Ex 18:1, 17). The Eternal later told them to set up judges along tribal lines (Deut 16:18, 17:9, 19:17). It is important to note that these were not kings, going to other men telling them what to believe and do, but were consulted only when people had a difficulty to settle (Ex 18:16).

So Moses was led by God to *appoint* dedicated men to these responsibilities. Certainly, much counsel, thought and fervent prayer must have been involved. But there was no "politicking" and *no voting!*

In Deuteronomy 1:9-17 we find additional information about this story: **Moses**

told the people to choose the leaders from among their tribes! (verse 13.) Since Exodus states that Moses "chose" also, the selection must have been a joint effort. Since there were about 600,000 Israelite men (Ex 12:37), the people probably chose the 60,000 "leaders of 10" and Moses likely those the 600 "leaders of 1000".

Later, king David of Israel—the "man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22)—was led by God to use the *same form of government* (2 Sam 18:1). Remember that in the soon-coming resurrection David will be back in *his same job* as king of all Israel (Jer 30:9). And then—understanding more fully the SPIRIT of the law—King David will again govern the people using God's LAWS. "David My servant *shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them*" (Ezk 37:24).

David will certainly be a king in the Millennium, but it is unlikely he will use this organization. Why? All of the other references to captains of 1000's, 100's, and 50's in the Bible refer to military organization where strict control is essential (Num 31:14-54, 1Sam 8:12, 22:7, 29:2, 2Kngs 1:14, 11:4-19, 1Chr 1:2, 13:1, 23:1-21, 26:26, 27:1, 28:1, 29:6, 2Chr 25:5). Of all the things David did well, the Eternal did not praise him for his wars: "But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for My name, because you *have been* a man of war and have shed blood'" (2Chr 28:3).

It is clear that God's government throughout the Old Testament—AND in the soon-coming *World Ahead*—was a hierarchical government with direction from God through human leaders directing His people. There is no recorded exception to this which received God's blessing.

While prophecy indicates the Millennial government will be unified under the Messiah, **the Old Testament governments were rarely a single hierarchy** and the Eternal usually worked outside of the big governments to accomplish His will! Judges 21:25 tells us "In those days *there was* no king in Israel: everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes." These people were **misusing the freedoms** in their Biblical government, but it is clear they were not being controlled by a hierarchy. When Eli was the high priest, did the Eternal always work through him? No, He spoke through an unnamed prophet and then through a boy (1Sam 2:22-3:21). When Israel rejected

the Eternal as their king, He gave them human kings which were separate in authority from the priests. Many of the prophets that were sent were neither kings or priests.

David had to live apart from Saul for many years with a band of 600 men following him (1Sam 27:2). Were these men "in rebellion" against Saul or was the whole nation of Israel "in rebellion" against David? After Solomon's reign, the Eternal split the kingdom of Israel in two (1Kngs 11:26-40) and it stayed that way for the past three thousand years. While the phrase "God only works through one man" sounds nice, it is not what He does.

Those seeking to serve the Eternal did not always have a single leader either. Elijah was a great spiritual leader, but he was completely unaware of 7000 others that were faithful (1Kings 19:10,18.). Daniel and Ezekiel and other sets of prophets prophesied at the same time, but one did not "report" to the other.

In Revelation 2 and 3 we find seven congregations within a few of days journey of each other, but with different teachings and problems. Were the hierarchical rulers over these congregations blind to all of the different doctrines there? It appears there were no such rulers. Each congregation was responsible directly to the Eternal but, as in the time of Judges, most were abusing their freedom and needed to repent.

Remember that the Spirit Personality who emptied Himself to become our Savior was definitely the "God of the Old Testament." "And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1Cor 10:4). The author of Hebrews tells us: "Jesus Christ is the *same yesterday, today, and forever*" (Heb 13:8). So it should be obvious that Christ does not keep "switching" His form of government in directing His people through the ages.

Reading the context of Hebrews 13:8 shows it is about doctrinal truth, not how God works with man. **If our Saviour works only through a hierarchical government, he would have begun his ministry with the high priest and other Jewish rulers**, proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom, and commanded them to teach it to the people or be terminated. But he began teaching the common people—whoever would hear—in Galilee, away from the established "headquarters" of the day (Matt 4:17-23).

Continued on next page

Church government in the New Testament

Throughout the New Testament, we find the Living Christ directing His servants to follow the *same pattern* of government which He had inspired over the previous 1,500 years. Jesus Himself set the example. "Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and *from them He CHOSE twelve whom He also named apostles.*" (Luke 6:12-13).

We never question the decisions of beings that are perfect. When fallible humans claim their decisions must be right because they are in the "government of God," we find no scriptural support. If we can learn anything from the doctrinal reversal of the WCG in the last 10 years, we should learn that **the Eternal does NOT always correct errors—even BIG errors—made in hierarchical governments.**

Here Jesus gives us a powerful example. A true servant of God must *pray fervently* and seek God's will—not *his own!* And yet, in the end, such a leader should make the decisions involved in directing the affairs of God's Church. There were NEVER any "board" or committees directing Jesus, Peter, James, John or Paul, or telling them what to do. So after much thought and then *fervent prayer* throughout the night to the Father, Jesus then "CHOSE" the 12 apostles.

In the book of Acts, we find that Paul selected Timothy to assist him in the ministry. So, "He took him and circumcised him" and began to train him. Later, we find Timothy was an "evangelist" (2Tim 4:5).

Please, let us read the scriptures. They do not say Paul "selected and trained Timothy," but "...a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren* who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him..." (Acts 16:1-3). The **people** initiated this action—they suggested Timothy because he was already bearing fruit and Paul accepted him! Paul did **not** select a man because he would be "loyal to his boss," had money, "could really sway people", or dressed well (all of which have been done in hierarchical organizations).

Also, the scripture does not say Timothy "was an evangelist," but it says "do the work of an evangelist [gospel preacher], fulfill your ministry [service]." The Greek for evangelist is *euaggelistes*, the Greek for gospel is *euaggelion*.

Obviously, these are two forms of the same basic word. There is nothing in the language that indicates it is a title. An evangelist is one that preaches the gospel. It is not a rank.

Along the way, Paul gave Timothy the *qualifications* he should consider before ordaining anyone (1 Tim 3:1-13).

Again, let us read the scripture: "This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop [overseer], he desires a good work." Members of hierarchical organizations might try calling their "headquarters" and express their desire to help oversee the affairs of their congregation. Will they be told they are desiring a "good work" or will they be told that is for the "hierarchy to decide" or will they be disfellowshipped? Also, note that this scripture says absolutely nothing about "ordination" or laying on of hands.

And in 1 Timothy 5:22, he warned Timothy, "Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure." Implicit in this warning and *in all these examples* is the obvious fact that Timothy did not have to get the approval of any "board" or committee. For Timothy—especially due to geographical circumstances—was primarily responsible to the Living Jesus Christ—although certainly subject to Paul's direction.

Timothy was certainly responsible to the Head of the Body (Col 1:18). While he respected the righteous wisdom and instruction of the apostle Paul, there is no scripture that says he reported to him like a boss. Should we base major doctrines on "implicit" assumptions? Rod Meredith is quite right when he says Timothy did not get approval from a board or a committee. But if he had recommendations from the people about which men would serve best, he could make a well-counseled decision without a board.

The pattern of church government in the early inspired church is very clear in Titus 1:5-9, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city *as I commanded you*; if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

The letter to Titus begins, "Paul, servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ." Putting this together with verse 5, three basic points

become clear:

1. Christ was the head and Paul, His Apostle.

2. Under the leadership of the Living Jesus Christ, Paul had authority to direct the activities of Titus, an evangelist, and also give him instructions on how to carry out his responsibilities.

As most of these New Testament leaders had the holy spirit, they agreed and worked together on most things. However, we find cases such as Barnabas who disagreed with Paul about taking Mark on a journey (Acts 15:36-41) and Apollos who rejected Paul's command (1Cor 16:12)—neither was disfellowshipped and both continued to serve. Determining the qualifications Paul gave in Titus 1 required knowledge of how people lived their daily lives. You cannot find out if someone is quick-tempered, given to wine, not greedy for money, self-controlled, etc. from seeing them a few times in Sabbath services. The Greek word for "appoint" here is *kathistemi*, the exact same word used in Acts 6:3, "Therefore, **brethren, seek out from among you** seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may **appoint** over this business."

3. Titus, responsible to Christ overall and to Paul especially in administrative matters, had authority to "appoint elders" within the guidelines set by *Paul*—NOT by any board of men.

It is important to note that Titus was not appointing people to the "office of elder," but was appointing elders (older men) to the job of overseer [bishop] (Tit 1:7). **The Bible never gives qualifications of an elder or states that a person becomes an elder by the laying on of hands.** Eldership was something that people grew into—although historical records show that a wise man might be considered an elder at an earlier age than a foolish man.

This clear pattern of government is evident throughout the entire New Testament. The overall Headship of Christ is stressed again and again. But it is also made clear that Christ Himself has established important offices in the Church of God for the sake of unity, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:11-13).

The scripture does not say "Christ

established offices” but “He Himself gave some [people] to be apostles, some prophets...” The “He Himself” phrase emphasizes that these people were given these tasks directly by the Messiah, not by a hierarchy of men. This is obvious when you see that “prophet” is listed here. A hierarchal leader or a board cannot make a person a prophet. **People are prophets only when the Eternal speaks through them.** Paul explains these and other spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and encourages the brethren to “earnestly desire the best gifts.”

It should also be very clear that the Living Christ has *always* directed major areas of His Work primarily through one man at a time. Moses and Aaron directed different phases of God’s Work within the Israel of their day. Later Joshua came along, then Samuel, etc. In the book of Galatians, God indicates that He used primarily Peter to direct the Work to the Jews and Paul to direct the Work to the Gentile world: “But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (For He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised” (Galatians 2:7-9)

We must read the Bible here: “James, Cephas, and John **who seemed to be pillars**”! Could you imagine the Worldwide News saying in 1980: “Armstrong, Meredith and Hoeh who seemed to be pillars”? The protocols of hierarchy demand that they be referred to as the “Apostle Armstrong” and the “evangelists.” But Paul did not refer to anyone as the “chief apostle” or “headquarters apostle,” etc. Paul’s purpose here is to show that the Jerusalem leadership accepted him. If these three apostles had a hierarchical title, this was the place to use it.

As we have already noted instances where the Eternal worked through many, we can note some more: After Joshua died, an unspecified number of elders ruled Israel (Josh 24:31). In Acts 8:1,4 we find “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” No rank or position in a hierarchy is given to these

many people who preached “everywhere.”

Although Barnabas was also an apostle, yet Paul was the clear leader of the Work to the Gentiles as the above scripture shows. And although scripture shows that James and John were “pillars”—certainly *leading* apostles—yet the Gospel to the circumcision had been “committed to Peter’s overall direction. This division of responsibilities between Peter and Paul was necessary—at that time—because of the truly HUGE difference and antagonisms between the Gentile and the Jewish peoples of that day, and also because of geographical considerations and the fact that there was no instant communication as we have in our time now.

Today, such a division is NOT necessary since we now have almost instant communication around the world with telephones, computers, fax machines, etc. These modern means of communication enabled the vast majority of God’s people to be “one” under the inspired leadership of God’s servant, Herbert W. Armstrong. Christ did guide and bless His Work in that way for over 50 years! To deny that is to deny reality.

Herbert Armstrong’s work was certainly a blessing to tens of thousands of people for many years—many learned Bible truth through him, many experienced a great sense of oneness in the congregations, and many leaders received much respect and much compensation. However, there were also members that were commanded to leave a happy marriage—to be told many years later that it was a minor mistake. Some went bankrupt paying three tithes—to be told later that poor people should not be paying third tithe. Some did not use sound medical help and suffered death or permanent disability at the urging of their “minister” to demonstrate their faith in God—only to find the minister used medical treatments for much less serious problems. Some gave their life savings in a “financial crisis”—to later find out that a similar amount of money was spent for a single evening meal for a few church executives in the most expensive restaurant in Los Angeles. **In all, about 30 percent of all the people that were baptized by the WCG before 1992 either left or were disfellowshipped.** Certainly many of these people departed because of their own difficulties. But thousands of them continued to work and fellowship among the hundreds of other Sabbath-keeping groups.

Every man’s work will be tried by fire (1Cor 3:13). When the fiery trial of false doctrine came upon Herbert Armstrong’s

work during the last ten years, much of it caught fire and burned. Nearly half of the congregation and “ministers” have either accepted teachings opposite to those Herbert Armstrong taught or **feel trapped in a corporation** because they have been so conditioned to blindly follow a hierarchical government even if it teaches doctrines they do not believe. While some gold, silver, and precious stones have shown forth, many of the leaders that emerged from the WCG fire are still teaching “God works primarily through me” and “He will remove me if I go astray.” If He didn’t do it in the WCG, can we be assured He will do it in a much smaller group?

Common misunderstandings

There are several examples that misguided people sometimes seize on to try to contradict the clear pattern of government God reveals in His Word. One of these is the idea that in Acts 1:20-26, Matthias was chosen to replace Judas by a form of *voting*!

The above idea is clearly unscriptural and may be held partly through ignorance of the Old Testament practice of appealing to God for a decision through the Urim and Thummim. Notice the context of this matter: after finding two dedicated men who met the *qualifications* of having been with Christ from the beginning of His ministry all the way to His resurrection, the apostles then appealed to GOD to make the decision between these two, “And they prayed and said, ‘You O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.’ And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:24-26).

Notice the comment on this matter in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*: “And they cast lots.’ Deliberate selection and prayer played their parts in this appointment as well as the lot. The lot was a sacred institution in ancient Israel and was a well-established means for ascertaining the divine will (cf. Prov 16:33), being in fact the principle of decision by Urim and Thummim. This is the first and last occasion of the employment of the lot by [during] the period between the ascension and Pentecost; Jesus had gone, and the Holy Spirit had not yet come.”

Besides showing that the “casting of lots” is an appeal to God’s will on this matter, the comment on this being the *last time* this practice was used is significant. Because once the Holy Spirit came, then the Living Christ—through God’s Spirit—would guide His faithful ministers in all major decisions.

Acts 1 does not directly describe voting, but it does describe the casting of

Continued on next page

lots, a practice found numerous times in the Bible—not just by the Urim and Thummim. Please see pages 20-21 of our article *How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans* for a full explanation. The Greek word for lot used here is *kleros*—a small piece of stone or wood upon which the name of an item to be chosen was placed, then mixed up and dropped out of a jar. It can also refer to something obtained by casting lots, but it always implies this process. If we look up *kleros* in a Greek concordance, we find it is used several other places in the New Testament, **but is obscured by most translators.** When Simon Magus attempted to buy his way into a position, Peter told him “Thou has neither part nor lot in this matter” (Acts 8:21 KJV). Why would Peter use this terminology if he knew they would never cast lots again for leadership? If all leaders were selected through a hierarchy, Peter could have said “I am giving orders that you will never be allowed in!” Also, in a discussion of the duties and qualities of the saints, Paul says that we “share the lot of those who are living in the light” (Col 1:12, Phillips). While this scripture may be speaking in a figurative sense (the Eternal has chosen us as if by lot), it does speak positively of choosing by lot and may refer to the literal choosing of congregational responsibilities by lot.

In Joshua’s day, the land of inheritance was divided by lot (Num 26:52-56, Josh 14-23) and **it will be divided by lot again in the millennium** (Ezk 45:1, 47:21-22, 48:29). Our Father has not given up on this process! “The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposing thereof is of the Lord” (Prov 16:33). Can anyone really believe the “Acts 1” example—the very method used to pick one of the rulers in the Millennium (Matt 19:28) was not put in the Bible as an example of how to choose a leader when the issue is not clear to us?

If seems fallacious to argue that the Apostles could not make the decision because they did not have the holy spirit. The Eternal certainly guided the process whereby they narrowed the choice down to two men. The biggest problem with choosing leaders is not lack of guidance from the Eternal; the problem is human beings let their own prejudices and desires get in the way of His guidance. Even though he had a great measure of the holy spirit, Herbert Armstrong readily

admitted (and the fruits proved it) that he had great trouble in choosing the right man for a job. Perhaps he could have learned from Acts 1.

Some also read into the appointment of deacons in Acts 6, the practice of politics and voting. Again, one need only look carefully at the scriptural context to see the error of this assumption. Verse 3 give the key information: “Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”

So the brethren were to sincerely “seek out” a number of individuals meeting certain qualifications. They may have found at least 15-25 men whose “fruits” showed wisdom and the Holy Spirit. But then, did the brethren as a whole “vote on which of these men would become deacons?”

Of course not. That has NEVER been God’s way at any time in human history or in the history of the true Church!

No, the brethren did not vote. But the apostles—no doubt after much counsel and prayer—did “appoint” Steven and the other deacons to be ordained.

Does anyone remember an example where a hierarchical church tried to follow this example? Did they ask a congregation to put forth a number of people for possible “ordination” and then “ordain” a few people from that congregation’s list? It seems most people remember surprise services where the members and the person(s) being “ordained” did not know it was going to happen until it did. If Acts 6 is inspired, why don’t we trust the Eternal that it will work?

There are other common misconceptions associated with Acts 6: The words “deacon” or “office” are never mentioned in the text—they might be in the heading of your Bible, but not in the text. These men that were chosen to take care of the “daily distribution”, not to receive a title or an office. Nor were they limited to that job; in the very next chapter we find one of the seven, Stephen, powerfully preaching to the leaders of the nation.

How did the congregation “seek out” these men? The Bible doesn’t say; yet neither does it say voting is a sin. On the contrary, the Greek word *cheirotoneo*, which literally means “stretching forth the hand,” is used two places in the New Testament. A few hundred years B.C., **there was no question that it meant “to vote.”** Some dictionaries claim its meaning changed to “appoint” by the time the New Testament was written, but others disagree. The Weymouth Bible and

Young’s literal translation render *cheirotoneo* as “selected by show of hands” or “vote.” “And when they had ordained [*cheirotoneo*—selected by show of hands] them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23). Greek has many words with various shades of meaning of “appoint” (*tasso, diatasso, protasso, sun-tasso, diatithemai, kathistemi, anadeiknumi*). If voting is a sin, why did Luke use a word that meant (certainly in historical books of his day) “selected by show of hands”?

“And not only that, but who was chosen [*cheirotoneo*—selected by show of hands] of the churches to travel with us with this grace” (2 Cor 8:19). This was a man chosen to accompany Paul with money for the poor. How could one man be chosen by “churches” (Greek *ekklesia*—assembly) unless they voted? If the “ministers” of the congregation appointed him, why didn’t Paul say that?

Also, some have misunderstood the account of the Jerusalem Conference as given in Acts 15. As I explained in my booklet, *When Should You Follow Church Government?*, there certainly was an open and brotherly atmosphere in that landmark conference. There was obviously a good deal of hearty and perhaps even heated discussion among the “apostles and elders” (verse 6).

But, “And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us’ (verses 7-8). Then Peter proceeded to explain God’s decision to give the Gentiles the Holy Spirit without having them first become circumcised.

Afterward, Paul and Barnabas also showed how God had backed up this principle by “miracles and wonders” (verse 12). James—the presiding apostle at Jerusalem—referred to Peter’s declaration, enlarged on it, and said, “Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God” (verse 19). So James stated the consensus “judgment” or decision of the leadership.

Commenting on this entire procedure, The New Bible Commentary: Revised states: “It seems from v. 12 (‘all the assembly’) that other members of the Jerusalem church were present, although deliberation and decision rested with the leaders.” So again, it is obvious that there was no “voting” as such, but much hearty counsel from many of the apostles and elders.

The apostolic "pillars" such as Peter and Paul made the major speeches and then James stated the final Decision to which these dedicated men were led by the Holy Spirit.

While the speeches of Peter, Paul, and James are recorded, there was "much dispute" (Acts 15:7). "It pleased the apostles and elders, **with the whole church**, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. Either Luke just made this statement up as a piece of propaganda, or they had some way to know that it "pleased" "the whole church." Acts 16:4 flatly states the decrees "were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem." (A study of the Greek *presbuteros* "elder" shows that these are older men, not "ordained ministers.")

If the New Testament government was hierarchical, the writer of Acts missed his big chance to state that the decision had been given by God to the chief apostle and then handed down to the elders and members. While Roderick Meredith claims voting was impossible, I would like to know how they could claim the "apostles and elders" made the decision without some kind of voting. It may be that as each man spoke, a scribe made notes of their understanding and the notes were later tallied. Or, they may have simply asked those in agreement with the leader's statement to raise their hands or say something. **The Scripture does not say what process they used to decide, but it does say a group decided, not "one man".**

Much input and counsel must be sought

In all the above examples a number of people gave input *and/or* counsel before the leaders made the decision. God clearly tells us, "The way of a fools is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise" (Prov 12:15). Again, God's Word states, "Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established" (Prov 15:22).

For this reason, the Global Church of God has established a Council of Elders "to assess and guide the overall direction of the Work and all major projects of the Church" and "to have final authority over all major doctrinal issues." The Council of Elders meet officially at least three times annually, as well as being *on call* for their input relative to any major decision of the Church.

The Global Church of God bylaws state "a consensus of at least 90 percent of the members of the full Council [which is established by the Board of Directors] would be required to change any major

doctrine." (See *In Transition*, May 26, 1995, p 12.) What happened to the claims that "God usually works through one man" and that the Bible does not support "boards" or "voting?" Does anyone know a way to determine if there is a 90 percent consensus of the GCG Council without voting? What would happen if the Eternal gave Roderick Meredith a vision like he gave Peter in Acts 10, revealing a new truth to him? Could one person on the GCG Counsel vote against the new teaching and prevent the organization from teaching the new truth?

So a dedicated servant of the Living God will *always* try to seek the "counsel" of at least several qualified individuals before making any major decision. Also, a true servant of God will spend *much time* in thoughtful, fervent prayer to God—asking for HIS WILL to be made clear—before making an important decision. We have already noted that Jesus *prayed all night* before choosing the 12 apostles (Luke 6:12). We remember how Paul "fasted" and prayed for three days in seeking God's will after being struck down on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:9-11).

Notice also this fervent seeking of God's will in the appointment of elders, "So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:23). This humble, sensitive seeking of God's will should be the hallmark of all true ministers of God. And as long as this attitude is maintained then Jesus Christ will be there and guide His Church as its Living Head (Colossians 1:18).

The scriptures agree with Roderick Meredith's emphasis on the importance of humbly seeking the Eternal's will for major decisions (2Chr 33:12-15, Mic 6:7-8, Luke 12:47-48, Col 1:9, Heb 13:21). However, we cannot find scriptures stating that God works only through the humble seeking of individuals **but not groups**. Acts 4:23-31 is an example of the holy spirit coming in power as the result of a group prayer. Matthew 12:31 and 2Chr 12:5-7 quoted other examples. In Acts 14:23 quoted above, the Greek for "appointed" is *cheirotoneo*, meaning "selected by show of hands" as was previously discussed. The fasting and prayer was important. Just as our Father allows hierarchal leaders that drift from Him to make bad decisions, he also allows groups to drift away.

Servant Leadership

A key distinguishing attitude of God's true servants is that they *do* regard themselves as just that, "servants." Finding the disciples arguing among themselves about "who is the great-

est," gave Jesus an opportunity to explain a very important principle, "But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many'" (Matt 20:25-28).

All in authority in God's Church should *have*, and should *act on*, this attitude of service. We all know that in the past some ministers would appoint themselves as "dictators" in their areas—trying to run the lives of the brethren even in purely personal matters. This was **WRONG** and completely unjustified by scripture! For each leader in God's true church should humbly try to *serve* the brethren in a way that helps each of them increase their *own* wisdom and develop their *own* human potential.

These statements are soundly backed by scripture. For those elders that are found setting themselves up as dictators instead of servants, congregations should employ 1 Timothy 5:19-20: "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.**" This scripture has rarely been followed in the congregations. Most hierarchies want to "cover up" a leader's sins so his congregations will not lose respect for him. In reality, refusal to follow this scripture makes it look like the person "got away with the sin" and people lose respect for the entire organization.

Each of us should try to understand those we serve and should endeavor to strengthen, encourage and inspire them to be like Jesus Christ in every aspect of their lives. Only in this way can we truly "love our neighbor AS OURSELVES."

The Apostle Peter, who had been impetuous and "pushy" in his younger ministry, was finally inspired to write, "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1Pet 5:1-4).

God's approach to government is clearly shown from the very beginning when *He* organized the family unit and set the husband in

Continued on next page

charge (Gen 3:16). Yet even here it is the Living Christ to whom we should look as the ultimate Head under God the Father, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1Cor 11:3)

This is the Biblical "organization chart." No other single scripture so simply shows that there is no hierarchy between the Savior and the believer.

And although there is *no voting* and the husband is the undisputed *head* of the family unit in God's sight (Ephesians 5:23), yet he is admonished also to practice "servant leadership" and to *SERVE* his wife in the way he leads the family (verse 25). So *all* true Christians—and especially those in the ministry—should try to "lay down our lives" for the brethren. We all need to heed the Apostle John's inspired instruction, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1Jn 3:16).

The principles are great, though we do not understand the condemnation of voting. When a father promises to play a game with his children or to take them to a restaurant, is it wrong to let them vote on the game they will play or on the restaurant they will go to? Is not that a good way to teach them to think for themselves and to cooperate with others even though their preference is not chosen? Obviously, since fathers are the permanent head of families, families are not democracies. But when there are matters of preference to decide, why not let everyone learn to make decisions?

Faith in the living Christ

If we have genuine FAITH in the living Jesus Christ as active Head of the Church, we will quickly see and submit to His form of government in the Church. For we will look *beyond* men—and beyond the human foibles that we all have. We will see that Christ shows that He has anointed certain men with His Spirit—and that they are preaching His full Truth and really *doing His Work*—then *Christ* will be there to guide and inspire these ministers in leading His Church (Matt 28:20).

Which scripture states that the result of faith is the recognition of the right form of government? The fruits of the spirit are defined in Gal 5:22-23, but there is nothing about government there. There are many scriptures that warn us to develop personal righteousness and fruit, but which ones tell us to make sure we submit to the "right" group of men?

Jesus said, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by the fruits you will know them" (Matt 7:19-20).

So in determining *where* Christ is working

and *whom* He is leading to walk more fully in His ways, one needs to look at the "fruits"—the *results*. Is the *biblical* form of government being followed? Is the message of the Kingdom of God being preached powerfully to the world? Is the prophetic WARNING or the coming great tribulation being urgently proclaimed to modern Israel—the Jewish people and the descendants of the so-called "Lost Ten Tribes?" Is the full *Truth* of God's laws and ways being taught these people? And are the people being taught to GROW in grace and knowledge "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"?

When the above "fruits" are present in any church organization, then one can have confidence that Christ is there and will direct its leadership. And if the leadership should turn aside, "water down" the Truth significantly, or fail to really preach the true Gospel and do the Work—then the brethren are clearly instructed in the Bible to cease to follow such an organization and its leadership. As the Apostle Paul said, "follow me AS I follow Christ (1Cor 11:1, KJV)!

Remember when the apostles were threatened and pressured to stop preaching the Gospel? Notice their inspired answer, "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Why does Roderick Meredith insist that "form of government" is so important to identify the right church organization? If someone believes government is top-down and God works through one man, **should he leave the Global Church of God because its bylaws require a vote of its Council to accept any new doctrines?**

On the other hand, if someone believes that a congregation should follow the many Biblical examples of choosing leaders recommended by the membership, should he immediately leave that organization just because the leaders have this error but many other things right?

While we should all strive for as much truth as possible, we realize that most organizations have some error. Should we automatically cut ourselves off from people with the holy spirit just because they don't have all knowledge?. One easily provable but common error that most congregations have is maintaining the "offices" of "deacon" and "minister." What is the Greek word for deacon? *diakonos* (*dee ak' on os*). What is the most common Greek word for minister? *diakonos!* These separate offices existed in the Church of England—inherited from the Catholic Church. When the King James Bible was translated, the transla-

tors were instructed to put these "offices" into the Bible. Most translators since then have followed their lead—not interested in offending the churches that buy their Bibles. But could you imagine a man in a Greek congregation being "raised in rank" from a *diakonos* to a *diakonos*?

It is obviously not possible to have two different jobs with the same name. In the minds of the people that wrote the scriptures, there is no distinction drawn between people that serve spiritually or physically. You can verify this truth yourself by using a Strong's or Young's exhaustive concordance. You will find that every occurrence of "deacon" or "deaconess" is translated from word numbers 1247 (verb) and 1249 (noun) and that most occurrences of "minister" are translated from the same. Also, these words are often translated "serve" or "servant," their natural meaning.

We should not make it our goal to cause division—tell people to stay away from other members or groups—just because they have a little provable error. Romans 14 shows we can work together without perfect understanding on every point.

So, once the "fruits" are evident, it is to the Living Christ we should look to lead and inspire His faithful ministers to direct the affairs of His Church in the right way. Truly dedicated Christians will have FAITH in this. Not faith in men, but in the LIVING Jesus Christ.

Even if "fruits" are evident, as they were in the WCG for many years, no scripture requires us to have faith that Christ will work through a certain group of men. Can anyone tell me the exact date that Christ stopped working through the WCG? Did He tell everyone so they could start looking elsewhere? During a time of doctrinal confusion the apostle John said "Look to **yourselves** that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward (2Jn 8).

Some may say, "But mistakes were made in the past and people were hurt by church government!"

This reasoning is exactly the kind of reasoning used by the people in Samuel's day (1Sam 8:1-7). They have been "hurt" by Samuel's sons misusing their offices. So what did they do? Did they cry out to God in prayer and fasting to either chasten or remove those offending persons?

We do not know if these people prayed and fasted or not. We do know that many thousands of people prayed and fasted many days beseeching their Father

to clean up the WCG leadership and He did not do it. This chapter contains the reason why! We will cover it in the next column.

No. They came to Samuel en masse—like a “march on Washington”—and they *demand*ed, “Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a KING to judge us like all the nations” (1Sam 8:5).

These self-willed men were demanding not merely a redress of the current misuse of office. They demanded that the ENTIRE FORM OF GOVERNMENT be changed! They felt they couldn’t “trust” GOD to direct Samuel and his sons, so *they wanted a form of government more like the carnal nations around them*. This would be analogous to people wanting democracy simply because that is the way of the world around them today! So Israel has been CUT OFF from God’ direct form of government ever since! And partly because of this, we are soon headed to our DOOM as modern nations in the Great Tribulation! To use a modern example, suppose a president or prime minister abuses his *office* (e.g. commits *adultery, perjury, larceny, etc.*), do you immediately do away with the office of the *presidency*, or the prime ministership?

No. It NEVER pays to “throw the baby out with the bath water!” Human mistakes of church leaders *never* justify changing God’s *entire approach to church government*, or His laws, or anything else. Yet when human beings find that they have been in one “ditch,” they often leap out, *run across* the middle of the road, and jump into the other “ditch”! The *answer* is not in going to either extreme, but in *trusting* Christ to guide His Church, following the pattern of church government as *He clearly reveals it throughout the Bible*.

This lesson of the book of Samuel explains what has happened in WCG today, but we must read a little more to understand the parallel. In the government given to Moses, the Eternal was king and men went to the judges only when they had a disagreement with others. The Eternal promised to fight for them. There was no human king or bureaucracy ordering people around. In the New Testament, “the head of every man is Christ” (1Cor 11:3). There was no power structure imposed between man and his Savior. Herbert Armstrong started his work with this kind of government—write for a reprint of his 1939 article *Did Christ Reorganize the Church?*

But why did the people ask Samuel for a king? It was true that they wanted to be like the nations around them and it was true that Samuel’s sons were corrupt. But the Eternal knew that the problems with Samuel’s sons were not the real reason: “And the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Heed the

voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, **but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them**” (1Sam 7:8).

Corruption occurs in monarchies more often than in Judges-style governments. These people simply did not want the Eternal as their king.

Throughout history, congregations of true believers have gone back and forth from allowing the Messiah to be king to looking at what other big churches of the world do—set up a hierarchy. Indeed, when there is no central hierarchy, some individuals or congregations wander away from thruth. There will be a diversity of Bible understanding at any congregation. Some people want to label this “confusion” and set a human leader over all the congregations so they can be unified—so they can feel they are part of the one true group that is going to the place of safety and into the Kingdom. However, there is no guarantee that a king can deliver on these promises and there are certainly many problems with physical kings—and the “kings” that we set up over church organizations.

“Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall **solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king** who will reign over them” (verse 9). Many of the warnings in this chapter apply to us today.

“He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots” (verse 11). How many parents felt completely obligated to send their children to youth activities, summer camp, or Ambassador College? Some young people benefitted from being one of the “kings horsemen.” But others left home to work for the king, rarely ever seeing their parents again. Others came home feeling they were better than their parents, because they were “trained at headquarters.” And some came home with stories of abuse that nobody would-believe because it was “the Church.”

“He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots” (verse 12). **He will set up a hierarchical, military-style government and forced work**. Beside doing their own jobs and paying tithes, offerings, and taxes, people worked on local

service projects, cut the “minister’s” lawn, repaired the local hall, and a host of other things that the “king” or his hierarchy demanded.

“He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. And **you will cry out in that day** because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and **the Lord will not hear you in that day**” (verses 17-18). Indeed, many people during the past few years have fasted and cried out to the Eternal when their lives, their local congregations, or their church organization was apparently being destroyed by an errant leader that got control in a hierarchy. In only a few cases throughout history has the Eternal removed a “bad” person from a hierarchy to keep an organization intact. Usually, the organization just goes its way, sometimes to demise and sometimes the errors just stay entrenched.

“Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel: and they said, ‘No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles’” (verses 19-20). The people did not like the clever ways that the Eternal defeated their enemies for them. They wanted a big army with a king that physically looked impressive and they could trust in. Today, it is very difficult for people to say “**I am a member of His Body and I trust Him to give me the spiritual gifts to do His work, and I will fellowship with his people wherever I can, whether part of an organization or not!**” Today, people want to say, “I am a member of this organization, and this man is our king (leader), and we have this many people attending and unless you have one man in charge nothing will get done!”

Even back in Old Testament times, the faithful men and women knew that GOD was responsible to guide His servants. Faithful King Jehoshaphat set judges in the land and said to them, “Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment” (2Chr 19:6). How much MORE will the resurrected Jesus Christ be with and guide His New Testament ministers who *are*, in fact, preaching His Truth and *doing* His Work?

There are no scriptures guaranteeing that men will be guided by the Messiah just because they are leaders. Many scriptures show that church leaders go astray (2 Tim 4:10, 2Cor 11:13-15, Acts 20:29-31, 2Pet 2, 1Jn4:1-6, 2Jn, 3Jn, Rev 2:2,

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"GCG", continued from page 21 etc.) **Men are guided by the Eternal as they submit to Him** (Deut 4:29, Isa 55:6-7, Rev 3:20). If a leader wants to go on teaching that the Bible supports separate "offices" of "deacon" and "minister," the Eternal will let him teach that, even though it is not possible that the men who wrote the Greek scriptures taught or believed that.

Again, check *very carefully* the "fruits" of any church leaders or organizations claiming to be of God. If good fruits are clearly there, then one can have faith that the Savior who died for us and who is now resurrected and sitting at God's right hand will lead and guide His Church if it follows His way of church organization and government, preaches His Truth and does His Work.

Again, if there is anything we can learn from the doctrinal reversal of the WCG over the last ten years (or the books of Kings and Chronicles), it is that the Eternal often lets human leaders do what

they want.

While this article does disagree with much of the GCG approach to government, the authors would like to commend the GCG, for their publications and media efforts to warn the world and teach the truth. People could do a better job of "very carefully" checking the fruits of the GCG if they would provide detailed statistics about the exact number of contacts with new people (no former Sabbath-keeping background), new people attending services, new people being baptized, media responses, literature being sent, etc.

While we cannot find Scriptural support for a hierarchical church government, the scriptures do not support a democracy either. As a church hierarchist cannot create truth by pontificating it from his office, so a group of people cannot vote to determine truth. In the true government, the Eternal is the king and He promises to direct his people. If we

have disagreements or trouble with our brothers, we use the principles in Romans 14 and Matthew 18. If we want to know how to conduct Sabbath services, we use the principles, in 1 Corinthians 14 and elsewhere. If we want to know how to select leaders, we use many of the scriptures quoted in this article. If we need to settle issues on which we do not agree or we need to make collective plans, we use the principles in Acts 15. We can always take comfort in the truth that the Messiah is the Head of the Body.

"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Heb 13:20-21).

—Norman S. Edwards

Literature List

Friends of the Brethren still intends to make a wide range of literature available from a variety of sources. We have now received many hundreds of items from dozens of groups. We have had to reorganize our methods just to store and classify them! Some appear excellent, others claim their particular doctrines make their tiny group the "only true church." Of the items we have printed and offered, we still send about 400 per month. The *Servants' News* circulation is now over 600.

We have had offers to help in various capacities, but there is some difficulty coordinating matters over long distances. Thank you for your patience in these matters.

The Apple of God's Eye by Jim Rector, 13 pages. God's love for us is far greater than we imagine and we often take it for granted.

Assembling on the Sabbath by Norman S. Edwards, 16 pages. An exposition of the scriptures regarding our need to fellowship on the Sabbath and how to do it.

A Call to Arms by Jim Rector, 16 pages. Lessons for today from Revelation 2-3 including the oppressive doctrine of the Nicolaitans and the doctrine of Balaam.

Does the New Covenant Do Away with the Letter of the Law? by Eric V. Snow. 32 pages. A "must read" for those

who feel it does.

Did Christ Reorganize the Church? by Herbert W. Armstrong in 1939, 8 pages. Very different than his later approach: Christ never set up a hierarchical government.

Friends of the Brethren Statement of Income and Expenses, 2 pages. (Automatically sent to contributors)

God's Purpose for Your Life by Fred McGovarin, 40 pages, half-size booklet. A "first booklet" for people just becoming interested in the Truth. It introduces Hebrew names (Yahweh and Yashua) for God and Jesus.

The Heart of the Matter by Jim Rector, 31 pages. Our calling is to spiritual growth, not just attendance, socializing, politeness or legalism.

How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans? by Norman S. Edwards, 34 pages. How the KJV translators altered Scriptures about government to please King James and an analysis of what the Bible says about how we should govern in today's congregations.

Just What Does the New Covenant Do? by Joseph Chunko, 18 pages. Explanation of the difference between the law, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

The Worldwide Church of God Splits: Their Triumphs and Troubles by Alan Ruth, 56 pages. Facts and analysis of the last 20 years of church history.

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