

new Horizons

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by his apostles in terms clear to those who have 'ears to hear' - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond.

Who We Are

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals.

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: "...going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we "...Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep".

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature—eg our bi-monthly Newsletter **OUTREACH, NEW HORIZONS** magazine, the **BIBLE BASICS** on-line home study course, and a 32-lesson **STUDY COURSE**.

The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of Independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - and individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* is available from any of our addresses or from our web site **www.cgom.org**. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications.

New Horizons is published by the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*, an association of independent churches, to make known the good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God

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If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* or a *Publications List* please request it from any of the addresses listed or go to our website: **www.cgom.org**

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The Global Plan

Mankind longs for utopia. Hesiod, Plato to today's man-in-the-street - all dream of a golden age of peace and prosperity. It will come, for the Creator God has ordained it. But not yet

That, however, doesn't stop us trying to implement it! Notice this UK Government statement: '*We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment*'.

They are sentiments that all of us, surely, will applaud and they will, when Jesus reigns, be the 'new normal' when God re-sets priorities. They are in fact a summary of the United Nation *Sustainable Development* plan—also known as *Agenda21*, now updated to *Agenda30* (the projected date for completion).

One World

This plan, formulated with papal support, envisions a world without national borders but can be realized only under the umbrella of a single overarching authority—a 'world government' no less. It is the new 'faith' of *globalism*—a utopian world in which all of us accept the diktats of an elite ruling class, while submitting to whatever indignities they inflict.

Agenda30 has three elements—

social equity, economy, environment and assumes willing compliance by all. *Unlikely*, given human nature! Few will willingly relinquish their ancestral faith (part of the 'equity' element). Nor will they relish the redistribution of wealth (economy) nor the appropriation of all private assets. (environment).

"A global plan called the Great Reset is underway. Its architect is a global élite that wants to subdue all of humanity, imposing coercive measures with which to drastically limit individual freedoms and those of entire populations. In several nations this plan has already been approved and financed; in others it is still in an early stage. Behind the world leaders who are the accomplices and executors of this infernal project, there are unscrupulous characters who finance the World Economic Forum and Event 201, promoting their agenda."
(RC) Archbishop Vigano

Inherent in this long-cherished plan, therefore, is the need for coercive enforcement and the elimination of all opposition. This destructive global kingdom will be short-lived. and will be speedily replaced by the universal Kingdom of God. All the expressed aspirations of those behind man's global plan *will* become reality—but only under the benign rule of Jesus Christ.

The prime mover of this one-world movement is the papacy, which seeks to restore its medieval authoritarian rule—but now on a global scale. Under the present pope the plan has been accelerated. It has the ardent support of most world leaders—political,

financial, business, religious—and appears to be approaching maturity. [*see side-bar*]

Alert!

Bible-believing Christians need to pay close attention. However practical, however desirable and however harmless such worldwide unity might appear, therein lie the seeds of mankind's destruction. The present gentle and supportive garb donned by the modern papacy shrouds a dark and devilish agenda—echoes of its past. The unity they seek to impose is coercive, a many-headed hydra that seeks to enthrone Satan as 'king of the world'.

'Climate change', 'global warming' and 'economic stability' are a cover for engineered world depopulation and appropriation of all private resources by 2030.

'World peace', given mankind's unregenerate nature, is possible only by abject submission to draconian authority enforced by the military power of a pliable union of nations.

The 'god' of this re-set world is Satan, who knows his time is short, and infests a willing and plausible but prominent anti-Christian leader ensconced in the 'temple of God', the church of God, Christendom. Deploying his worldwide popularity and influence he, under the guise of enforced universal Sunday worship (supposedly to reduce spurious climate change), will tear off the 'Christian' mask and reveal his true identity—Satan himself. Ω

The Church Triumphant

Despite persecution, despite division, despite heresy the church of God survives

Some belief systems survive for millennia. Think of Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism *etc.* Nations embrace one or other and it is often the 'glue' that binds and stabilizes the nation.

None, of course, is monolithic—every faith diversifies into varied sub-groups yet largely flying the same banner. *Christianity* is no exception, and is notorious for the vast array of sects and subjects varying in size from the immensity of the Roman Catholic church (with its many divisions) to minute isolated independent bodies convinced of their unique doctrinal purity.

Such diversity—despite the plea of Jesus for harmony—is no surprise, for our human nature won't let us think we could be wrong!

The apostle Peter highlights to the church one cause for the disunity: '*... False prophets appeared in the past among the people, and in the same way false teachers will appear among you. They will bring in destructive, untrue doctrines*' (II Peter 2:1). Paul, to the Ephesian leadership: '*...after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among you yourselves men will arise, speaking [perversions of the truth] in order to draw away the disciples after them*' (Acts 20:29-30).

The apostles' assessment was spot on, for even before their deaths the church was riven by heresy after heresy, and within a few centuries became corrupt. As predicted Peter: '*...denying the Master who bought them, thus bringing on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their licentious ways, because of whom the way of truth will be reviled. And in greediness they will exploit you with false words*' (vv.1-3). A perfect reflection of the dastardly deeds perpetrated by the mediaeval church. So what happened?

Before the end of that first Christian

century the church, the 'Israel of

God', Jesus founded had all but gone underground. It has been remarked that within fifty years Christianity was barely recognizable. Here and there was a resistance movement, notably in Asia Minor. Polycarp (bishop of Smyrna) maintained the apostolic teachings in face of the heresies taking root in Rome.

The true faith was becoming submerged in a torrent of pagan worship practices as the prevailing false religions infiltrated the historic faith of Jesus. Over ensuing centuries, for example, the Biblical pattern of worship was replaced by the pre-Christian festivals now known as Sunday, Easter, Christmas *etc.*

Worse, the pure moral teachings of Christianity gave way almost universally in the established church to debauchery, greed and criminality on an industrial scale. 'Heretics'—in reality many of them true believers—were tortured and many murdered.

An Enduring Church

The church as founded by Jesus, however, persisted on the fringes of society. As Jesus said: '*...the gates of hell [ie death] shall not overpower it*' (Matthew 16:18). The church of God would never be extinguished! Faithful men and women maintained and propagated their faith in face of intense persecution by the established 'universal' church.

Unfinished Revolution

The sixteenth century saw the centuries-long 'famine of the Word' begin to abate under what became known as the Reformation. But that was 'the unfinished revolution', for many key elements of Jesus's teachings remained unaddressed by the Reformers—many of whom were martyred, and to whom we owe the subsequent freedom to freely explore the Christian Scriptures.

During the following century, and as knowledge increased, the structure, the form, of the true faith was unveiled as increasing numbers of

Christians rediscovered the Biblical seventh-day Sabbath—an observance that had never died out. Millions around the globe from east to west, north to south now observe the weekly and annual holy days.

Diversity or Division?

Today there exists a host of Sabbatarian groups united by their desire to honour the seventh day. Many also observe the seven *holy days* God has appointed (Leviticus 23 lists them). The latter provide a guide to the divine purpose for His creation, an outline of His plan for us.

There is a continuing unfolding of the treasures stored in the Scriptures, and which the various groups seek to explore and learn from. Not all agree! Given our varied backgrounds and diverse traditions there inevitably is some *disagreement*. This has led some to separate from the larger Sabbatarian denominations which are seen as being self-obsessive and obstructive to personal growth and development.

Inevitably, given our human nature there also have arisen charismatic individuals who, as predicted, lead the brethren along false paths, some puffed up with self-importance and focused on building private empires. Jesus himself warned us: '*...Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inside are ravenous wolves*' (Matthew 7:16).

The church of God will triumph. The Father has selected those whom He draws to Jesus Christ. He gives each the opportunity to join His spirit Family as joint heirs with Jesus. He cares for them, nourishes them in the embrace of His church. He gently corrects their failures.

As evidenced by John's record of the seven independent churches of Asia (Revelation 2-3) Jesus intimately oversees each local church, defining their deficiencies, patiently awaiting it to repent, to change its ways.

The church of God, for all its perceived faults, through all its trials, will remain faithful to the end **Ω**

One God, One Faith

The Christian's life must become a reflection of the will of God

The diversity of belief within Christendom and among all world religions depicts a misunderstanding of the nature of the one God, our Creator.

For some He is a God who demands strict adherence to a set of prescribed rituals. Or, you worship the god that predominates in your locality with his (or her) defined practices. For others, you make up your own rules for worship, or simply follow tradition. *Confusion!*

The one and only true God, however, is not divided. From the beginning He presides over a form of worship that reflects His nature and encapsulates His plan for mankind. Indeed it is written in the celestial bodies of the sun and moon which are linked to His guidance for our worship.

The heavenly bodies are for the service of mankind and by them we set our temporal activities—and also the times for celebrating our Creator through His designated festivals (Heb. *mo'ed*).

When Adam sinned he cut off our direct familial relationship with the Creator. We could now have contact with God only through an intermediary and through the practices appointed by Him—animal sacrifice how, when and where directed by Him, and ritual offerings of produce from the land, as exemplified by Cain and Abel (Genesis 4).

Choosing to worship contrary to the guidance from JHVH and committing to the '*way of Cain*' (Jude v.11), the true worship was largely abandoned for fifteen hundred years as mankind became increasingly opposed to

the way of God (Genesis 6). But a godly line remained, being observed, in the end, solely by Noah's family (I Peter 3:20).

That same faith exhibited in Abel also infused the heart of Noah: '*...By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith*' (Hebrews 11:7).

Post-Flood Rebellion

The seeds of corruption inherited from Adam remained even in Noah's family, and before long his descendants turned the servants of mankind—the heavenly bodies—into crass objects of worship.

It was a progression for, some three hundred years after Noah in the time of Abraham (born c.2000BC), the Canaanite clans retained a semblance of the true worship. Abraham had lied concerning his relationship with the beautiful Sara and she had attracted the eye of the local war-lord, Abimelech. Horrified on discovering this (*via* a dream from God) he said, '*...will you slay also a righteous nation?*' (Genesis 20:4).

During the following four centuries they sank into the gross idolatry prevalent at the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt. But they retained worship by perverse sacrifices, festivals, prophets and a priesthood succumbing to worship of the heavenly bodies, notably Ba'al - sun worship.

Retrace our steps to Abraham, however, and we find him totally committed to the God of creation. The record shows that he '*...obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my command-*

ments, my statutes, and my laws' (Genesis 26:5). Not out of fear but '*...by faith*'. He is recorded as on one occasion providing his guests with 'unleavened bread' (*ch* 19:3).

Roll down the years to the time of Moses (c.1500BC) and we find Israel still observing the Sabbath (Exodus 5:4-5) and a festival (v.1) under the despotic Pharaoh,

To instill His age-old form of worship in His new nation (Israel), and as an example for all nations, God established a pattern of rituals—observed with varying commitment over the succeeding centuries—followed nationally at times with much joy (*eg* Ezra 6:22).

The idolatrous neglect of the weekly and annual Sabbaths coupled with false worship, however, led to the exile of the northern Israelite clans, and later of Judah—a lesson the latter learned, and we thus find them again observing them in the time of Jesus.

As witnessed by the New Testament and early church histories the first Christians continued to keep the seventh-day Sabbath and these holy days but with a deeper understanding of their true meaning. Fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus the associated sacrifices and rituals are, of course, no longer observed. The Bible festivals—'*...my feasts*' (Leviticus 23:2)—are a template for prophetic events and serve as annual reminders of the divine plan.

The one and only God has been worshipped as He prescribed by the people of God from the beginning. **Ω**

'...God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs [Heb. 'oth], and for seasons [Heb. mo'ed], and for days, and years: And let them be for lights' (Genesis 1:14-15)

The 'sacrifice of the Passover' (Exodus 12:27) is replaced by the *Lord's Supper* as instituted by Jesus. The *Days of Unleavened Bread* continue (I Corinthians 5:7-8). (*see* Acts 20: 6.16)

God is meticulous in His timing of events, He foresaw the decline of the Canaanites (Genesis 15:16) Jesus was born on time (Galatians 4:4). He died '*in due time*' (Romans 5:6). His festivals are on specified dates (Leviticus 23, Deuteronomy 31:10)

Spring Holy Days 2021
Lord's Supper March 26 Fri evg
Unleavened Bread March 28-April 3
Pentecost May 16

Restored to Life

To God each human life is precious. He has a plan to restore to a relationship with Him all who are willing

Jesus restored life on several occasions, when the departed 'spirit of life' returned, as with a Jewish leader's young daughter: '*her spirit came again, and she arose straightway*' (Luke 8:55, also 7:15). After Jesus's death many rose from their graves and '*...appeared to many*' (Matthew 27: 52-53). Lazarus, too, was recalled to life (John ch 11) and will again rise from the grave in the resurrection.

Jesus himself, having given up his human spirit (Luke 23:46), was restored to life, not just as a spirit but with '*flesh and bones*' (ch 24:39). During this interim period then end-time two witnesses (Revelation ch 11) may be revived spirits. [Enoch and Elijah, though now dead (Hebrews 11:13), may fulfil this role (their deaths are not specifically recorded in the Scriptures).]

King Saul sought the illegal services of a necromancer—a practice defined as abominable by God (Deuteronomy 18:11). They expressed surprise when God raised Samuel from his grave with a message for the King: '*.... Samuel said to Saul, Why have you disturbed me, to bring me up?*' (I Samuel 28:15).

Christians usually stay clear of anything that is ascribed to 'the occult'. It is mysterious and widely recognized as condemned in the Scriptures, a 'work of the devil'. The spirit world is, however, a powerful reality, though sometimes fraudulent. It is widely associated with idolatry (see Deuteronomy

18:9-12) and condemned throughout the Scriptures.

When We Die

The default position of all the major faith, is that at death the 'soul' leaves the physical body and immediately reaps its reward—heaven, hell, purgatory (or *nirvana*). The Christian Scriptures, however, depict a time of 'hibernation' for this immaterial but real substance—the '*spirit in man*' (Job 32:8). It is the period between death and a spiritual or a physical resurrection for judgment (John 5:28-29).

During this interim period '*...the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten*' (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Indeed '*...The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence*' (Psalm 115:17).

But the human spirit is a template for all that is significant about each of us. It is retained in God's care until He calls us from the grave (Gk. *hades*). King Solomon adds this insight: '*... the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God*

CALLING ALL INTERNET USERS!

The Outreach Ministries website lists over a hundred Bible-based articles which address issues frequently on the minds of Christians. You may download any, or request print copies. There is, too, a section of on-line audio sermons, links to associated groups, back issues of *New Horizons* and an on-line magazine for our younger readers.

Be sure to take a look at
www.cgom.org

Beyond the Senses

Some people—often derided—claim to perceive events before they occur. As noted in *Psychology Today*: 'The *sixth sense* and similar terms, like *second sight* and *extrasensory perception* (ESP), refer to perceptual experiences that transcend the usual boundaries of space and time.' It is, in other words, a real experience. The phenomenon is no stranger to the Scriptures. Paul, for example, acknowledged its reality in his encounter with the 'spirit of Python' (Acts 16:16)

Although such can be assigned to inspiration—often from dubious sources—it is possible that some, eg Elisha, Paul (II Kings 5:26, II Corinthians 12:2)—may have had this sensitivity. Although a universal but usually dormant human characteristic, it may—like sight or hearing—be more acute in some. Perhaps it is listed in the gifts of the spirit as '*discerning of spirits*' (I Corinthians 12:10). It is usually, for now, beyond the range of human perception but will be universal in 'the children of the resurrection'.

who gave it' (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

We die once—that's normal: '*... it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*' (Hebrews 9:27), and our human spirit is preserved till the resurrection. But as noted earlier, the sovereign God may in this era restore someone to life to fulfil His purpose.

God wants all of mankind, everyone since Adam, to be saved and their spirits are now in His care: '*...[the Lord] is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*' (II Peter 3:9). In due time all will take on a body—some a spirit body (at the first resurrection) and the majority in a general resurrection after the millennium.

His plan will be complete. Ω

Prophetic Insight

When we set out to explain prophecy the keynote must be to acknowledge *'I'm probably wrong'*. Down the centuries Bible pundits *have* been wrong—wrong more often than right, often embarrassed by the passing of an unfulfilled predicted date.

Time and again it's the date for the return of Jesus Christ that is wrongly predicted. So we wait. That will be a pivotal date for all of mankind, for it signals the overturn of our present civilisation; and it is an inevitable and momentous event, an awesome event. But its timing is locked in the counsel of the Father.

Inevitable—so at some point in our trajectory through time Jesus *will* return. The divine plan will advance into a new phase. But that golden era is predicted to be preceded by a time of turbulence. The 'wolf' *will* come and will seek to devour what's left of our civilisation.

The Outcome

In regard to the final outcome, the real significance of prophecy, we can be certain that the final outcome will be exactly what God wants—and probably the process to achieve it will surprise us!

Given that the likelihood of worldwide repentance and a return to the true God by all mankind is an unlikely outcome we turn to the apostle Paul: *'...that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God'*

One aspect of this in dispute among Bible students is the

'falling away'. For some it began in the first century (eg Acts 20:29, I John) as the church departed from the true teachings and absorbed pagan concepts. For others it is an end-time event—within the true remnant. Church of God.

Also in dispute is what the apostle means by the 'temple'. Many understand it as referring to a yet-to-be-built—and perhaps imminent—physical Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, with a secular leader supported by the papacy (the 'little horn' of Daniel 9) seen as the fulfilment of antichrist who enforces his authority by ten European military powers.

Others refer the 'temple' to the church, to *Christendom*, or limited to the 'true church'. In this scenario the papacy (also the little horn', the then Pope) supported by Protestantism unveils himself as antichrist and wields the military power of the UN's ten regions.

Preparedness

However the process may unfold, as true believers we should 'sit light in the saddle'. The kaleidoscope of world events changes daily and can be confusing. Yes—we must be 'preppers', always prepared—but a continuing *spiritual* preparedness.

It would be naïve to think that the ground-plans for such a coup have not been laid over many years, even centuries. Since earliest times despots and the 'elite' have sought to control their fellows, to build a world empire:

Quotations from the Bible in New Horizons are from translations which clearly express the meaning in modern terms

Babylon, Alexander, Rome, Charlemagne, Napoleon, Hitler to name a few. Our own era witnesses the rise of so-called *globalism*—proposed as the solution to all our challenges.

Mankind, however, doesn't willingly trot into slavery. We must be seduced to comply—slowly, quietly, clandestinely, but ultimately by a manufactured fear that induces submission to those claiming to have the answer to lethal threats from man or from nature (or the 'gods').

Under human jurisdiction such schemes begin benignly but inevitably end in despotism, in draconian control of all resources (including human resources) to advantage a global elite motivated by dark spiritual forces. Such are still 'out there' and—however long delayed—we must each be constantly aware: *'...Be on the alert therefore, for you do not know the day on which your Lord is coming'* (Matthew 24:42). Ω

Taking Control

The implementation of long-laid plans to 'save' mankind by means of a world government have in recent years been accelerated. How is this possible in a 'free' world?

What our masters envisage, however, won't be achieved by democratic acceptance but only by coercion. So look out for

- All banks nationalised
the government owns your assets
- Re-direction of labour
work where you are sent
- Seizure of all private property
no longer your own domain
- Media censorship
truth perishes
- Universal welfare dependence
everyone gets the same wage
- Suppression of religion
Don't work on Sunday, or else

The Church of God—a Brief History

Few would deny that the church is in trouble—big trouble. The ‘face’ of the church presents in a thousand ways, to the extent that some are barely recognizable. Yet all claim to represent Jesus Christ. Can we make sense?

In some Christian circles the default position is that there is ‘one true church’. You must, to be ‘saved’, belong to it. Each sports its own criteria for belonging.

Prominent among such churches is the Roman Catholic faith with its 1.3 billion adherents. Indeed, it claims all other churches—no matter how deviant—are her ‘daughters’, and she works tirelessly to return them to her fold. (The post-Reformation *Order of Jesus* was founded for this purpose and remains active.)

The claim to ‘own’ the true faith is also claimed by others—Jehovah’s Witnesses, Adventists for example—despite the thousands who prior to them died for their Christian faith. Other groups believe they have it right but perhaps not exclusively. Often the differences are paper thin! With such diversity can we all claim to be part of the one body?

A Bit of History

Jesus built his church to last: *...death itself will not have any power over it* (Matthew 16:18 CEV). It was built on the foundation of God’s revelation as recorded over the centuries in the Scriptures and empowered by the indwelling holy Spirit. That church therefore *will* persist until the return of Christ.

The teaching mantle was passed by Jesus to the apostles and prophets and the whole Gospel message is encompassed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments: *‘...it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints’* (Jude 3). That is, all teaching must be within this apostolic boundary.

The initial unity of belief (Acts) crumbled as the leadership tested that boundary, and even in the lifetime of the apostles gross distortions of the Message emerged. At the end of the first century Jesus’s revelation to the apostle John highlights the variation between local assemblies (Revelation chs 2-3).

In *Ephesus*, Gnosticism (the Nicolaitanes) was creeping in, and they were preoccupied with doctrine to the exclusion of the fire of their first love. In *Smyrna* they, while claiming to be of the faithful, yet some secretly worshipped Satan. The church in *Pergamon* was succumbing to licentious practices in accord with the widespread Satanism in their city. In *Thyatira* a prophetess was influencing the brethren to take part in pagan rituals. The *Sardis* church was superficially dynamic and ‘evangelic’ but inwardly dead. *Philadelphia* alone is a shining example of a church remaining faithful in face of the wider church sinking into idolatry.

A Word of Warning

Take note of this key fact: all of these individual assemblies were overseen personally by Jesus. He urged them to listen to him and to make the necessary changes to their present trajectory, to correct the error.

But what of *Laodicea*? Serving an affluent area they had become complacent and rich in material resources, gold lavished on their church premises. But they were blind spiritually. They had become deaf to Jesus who was excluded from their plans—yet he still requested to be allowed back in. That’s a cameo of

the church of God as the first century drew to a close.

Over the next few centuries such departures from the primitive faith coalesced into the universal church, and in vision John saw it evolve into ‘Babylon the Great’—depicted as a church-state partnership—and still on the world stage when Jesus returns in judgment.

Diversity

The apostles urged the brethren to embrace the foundation truths of the faith, to co-exist in harmony. But, as with the seven churches, there was inevitable diversity. Yet Jesus still walked in their midst (Revelation 1:12-13).

When John recorded his visions each local church acted as a unit— independent, but co-operating with other assemblies, and Jesus had oversight of each individually. When it ceased to fulfil its proper role he closed it down as an effective witness.

From earliest years and throughout the centuries there sprang up ‘sister churches’, each with its own unique take on the original teachings of Jesus and the apostles—but still a part of the wider ‘church of God’; *ie* Christendom.

As worldly—and often heathen—pressures encroached, many of the foundation teachings of Jesus and the apostles were cast aside while the ‘Christian’ label was retained. Some teachings were lost and over the centuries others recovered, God on occasion jump-starting a key teaching—as, for example, in the Reformation or the late eighteenth century ‘Great Awakening’. But, overwhelmingly, ancient pre-Christian teachings too often all but smothered the true faith and the way to life was lost in a fog of false teachings.

Courageous believers down the centuries have grasped key truths of Christ’s message—often to the point of martyrdom at the behest of the established church—both Catholic and Protestant. (*cp* Revelation 20:4).

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is for many a
‘Book of Mystery’

unsigned articles are by the Editor

And didn't Jesus warn us to expect this: '*...you yourselves be careful, for they [the religious authorities] will deliver you up to sanhedrins and to synagogues [ecclesiastical authorities]. You will be beaten, and you will be led before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them*' (Mark 13:9). The true 'Israel of God' experienced such, with thousands martyred.

The Master's Voice

Jesus Christ deeply loves his church. He is '*...not willing that any should perish but that all should come*

God 'forsook' His nation, Israel (Jeremiah 12:7). But He never forgot them, for: '*...I will return, and have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage*' (v.15).

to repentance' (II Peter 3:9). He oversees it, nourishes it, corrects it. To the Ephesian church Jesus says: '*...Think about where you have fallen from, and then turn back and do as you did at first. If you don't turn back, I will come and take away your lampstand assembly*' (Revelation 2:5 CEV). It will no longer give the light of the Gospel truth to the world in which it exists and for which he placed it. Countless assemblies large and small have disappeared when their assigned work is complete or when they have ceased to shine.

Case Study

Christ's patience has long been tested in regard to the monolith that is the Roman church. In its beginnings it had the benefit of the presence of the apostle Paul who nourished it, taught it. Bolstered by its pivotal position at the heart of Empire, Rome arrogated to itself authority over all other assemblies—and still does. It embraced Greek philosophy and absorbed the heathen practices that were endemic to the empire.

Thus spread through Christendom such pagan practices as Christmas and Easter and the Mithraic homage to the sun, the Mass, the soul's immortality, veneration of 'saints', celibacy and homosexuality, distorted eschatology etc.

'My Church'

It may be hard to swallow, but even Rome—shades of the 'seven churches'—remains under Christ's watchful eye, ever hopeful that he will be readmitted to his rightful place at its head, and himself guiding each local assembly. Until after the turn of the first millennium Rome exercised a positive influence on morals and largely kept the peace among combative tribes. It then—as in Acts 20:29-30—was infiltrated with a succession of false teachings.

But during the last half century many voices from within it—claimed to be through visions and apparitions etc—have called for repentance. The *Marian Movement of Priests*, founded in 1972, is prominent with this call for change.

The hierarchy—largely 'sold to Satan'—continues to use her as a vehicle to attain world economic and political domination, while the billion or so adherents for the most part continue in blind ignorance of the

That churches should co-operate in joint projects is surely a given. We all represent Jesus Christ, we all bear his name, we all profess to follow him. There is, however, a misconception—that we should belong to a structured organization, all subject to a (usually hierarchical) leadership'.

Rather, the 'structure' of the early church was one of independent local assemblies each answerable directly to the Head, Jesus, as they were attuned to his leading.

Especially now, as we are losing various freedoms, each assembly must develop the internal structure that will enable it to function in support of the brethren even though its 'mother church' (Home Office) may have been shut down.

Recommended:

[http://www.cgom.org/
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true Gospel. Yet, as with many in Christendom, they sincerely if falsely believe they serve Christ. The entire world—and much of the church—is still in the malign grip of Satan, the '*...god of this world*'!

Vision

We mortals cannot envisage the magnitude of the divine plan for His vast and indeed limitless creation. Its extent is incomprehensible, though we are given brief glimpses in the Scriptures.

Mankind was created in the divine image (Genesis 1:27) for the purpose of each preparing to become part of the Family of God through our union with Christ. And in vision the apostle John saw the ultimate harvest: '*...After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands*' - Revelation 7:9. These are identified (v.14) as '*... they which came out of great tribulation [Gk. thlipsis; throughout the ages], and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*'.

This cosmic event accompanies the return of Christ to reign for a thousand years. Such a vast multitude cannot be reckoned to be derived from one exclusive Christian denomination. It represents the true people of God harvested from the 'church of God' — of all hues, from all ages, with varied imperfections: '*...the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity*' (Matthew 13:41, 24:31).

The church during this present era is inclusive of 'tares' (weeds) - a matter addressed by Jesus: '*...Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn*' (Matthew 13:30).

The years just prior to the return of Messiah will be difficult for all true believers. *Who* to serve will be a stark choice as a despotic world ruler, directed if not possessed by the Devil, imposes his mark of authority on mankind—no less than ceding mankind to the domination and rule of Satan: ‘...the one opposing and exalting himself over everything being called God, or object of worship, so as for him “to sit in the temple of God [ie the church]” as God, setting forth himself, that he is God (II Thessalonians 2:4). He assumes the spurious authority of the former Roman emperors.

The End of the Line

Mankind’s destructive rule is drawing to a close. Tumultuous events lie ahead for Christ’s church, but God’s word *will* be fulfilled and in the Father’s good time. Jesus has not lost control of his church—every part of it. He is aware of its every foible, every wrong turn, every success every failure.

As with the ‘seven churches’, Jesus calls on all to allow him full control: ‘...I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me’

‘...I call Heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore, choose life, that you may live, you and your seed’ Ω

Before conversion I knew only Methodist theology (Sunday School etc). Other aspects of the Bible came slowly leading to baptism and then a slow growth in a deeper understanding—growth without end! My church companions were all law-abiding believers, though not too interested in theology, in ‘going deeper’.

We were, I suppose, like the many in ancient Israel who were ‘prepared’ by the preaching of John the Baptist. Many from Christendom have ‘come to the light’. Who can judge? As said Jesus: ‘...the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5:22).

The Growth Factor

The brother of Jesus, Jude, urges the church to ‘...earnestly contend for the faith which was once [for all] delivered unto the saints’ (v.3). It is, surely, sound teaching! What—or who—could improve on what Jesus taught personally and has had recorded through his chosen apostles and prophets.

Identify and follow his teachings and we would all be one big happy church family. As Paul wrote: ‘...I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you’ (I Corinthians 1:10). *I wish!*

That didn’t happen, for human ambition and pride assumed they knew better—at least, better than they had been taught. The foundation faith was embellished, gradually emerging as the patch-work of denominational diversity that graces the modern church scene.

The Dawning

During the ‘dark age’ of Christianity the crystal clear teachings of Jesus became lost in a fog of ancient idolatrous fable. The candle of truth flickered dimly, often brutally suppressed by church-inspired pogroms. It’s legacy is the sanitized version of the faith of modern Christendom.

The darkness slowly became illuminated by pin-points of light as God—who is sovereign—influenced individuals to see elements of truth previously submerged. Not ‘all’ the truth, but glimpses suitable to their situation—just as in the conquest of Canaan by Israel the ‘inhabitants of the land’ were driven out slowly: ‘...

the LORD your God will put out those nations before you by little and little’ (Deuteronomy 7:22). And as told to Daniel: ‘...shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased’ (ch 12:4). We can only take so much at a time! Or, as the apostle Peter wrote: ‘...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (II Peter 3:18).

Growth That Transforms

In other words, true knowledge is unveiled little by little—we grow into it, both individually and corporately. When we first covenant with Christ our knowledge may be quite incomplete. We learn. We grow.

The apostle Peter’s words to us in his final letter are solemn. He warned (II Peter 2) of false teachers with ulterior motives who ‘...cunningly introduce fatal divisions’. He ends his letter: ‘...beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (ch 3:17-18).

When we become convicted of our alienation from God there is but one way to reconciliation with Him—through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. As with any major investment we must each be aware of the terms, and Jesus likewise tells us to be clear about the commitment we are making with him: ‘...Which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not sit down first and calculate the cost, asking if he has the means to finish it?’ (Luke 14:28).

Having chosen to follow him wherever he takes you, you become a ‘babe in Christ’—with lots of growing ahead of you: growth in a deeper understanding of who Jesus is, of the awesome depths of his perfect character, of the lifestyle he wants you to follow as you emulate him.

The measure of our growth—both as a local assembly and as a new creature in Christ—is the depth that the love, the *agape*, has grown in us. Ω

Key Lessons

- Not all Christendom is ‘bad’
- Jesus still knocks locked doors
- All church groups include tares
- All churches are deficient
- Sabbath observance does not equate to a changed heart
- Jesus alone is our Judge
- Relationship with God is personal

MiniStudy

A Place Prepared

‘...In my Father's house [Gk oikia] are many mansions [residences]: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also’ (John 14:2-3)

‘...to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father (Matthew 20:23).

All true believers are assured of a secure resting place when they finally, in the resurrection, reap their reward. Whatever our circumstances in life may be, we are each capable of achieving the highest reward as we purge our lower nature and step by step put on the image of Christ

- Having through faith committed ourselves to the Kingdom of the Father we become His children—His true ‘sons and daughters’: ‘...Wherefore come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty (II Corinthians 6:17-18)
- At our baptism we pledge ourselves to His service and to align ourselves with His will as revealed in the Scriptures; in return He resides in each of us through His indwelling Spirit. We thus become an integral part of the ‘Father’s house’, His household, His Family: ‘...you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God’ (Ephesians 2:19). Indeed we are joint-heirs with Jesus of that heritage (Romans 8:17)
- God, for now, dwells in His temple in (on?) heaven, but also inhabits His earthly temples, His people: ‘...you [Christians] are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’ (II Corinthians 6:16). As such we ‘...as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood’ (I Peter 2:5). In Christ we become—and now are—God’s sons. As notes the apostle John, ‘...Beloved, now are we the sons of God’ (I John 3:2). Imperfect as we are, yet the Father sees us as clothed with the white garment of Christ’s perfection—with the expectation that we will actively grow towards his perfect character, and that by his sacrifice our every transgression of his perfect law is covered: ‘...If we confess [acknowledge] our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (I John 1:9)
- Our works, note carefully, refer to character—they do not somehow ‘earn salvation’. We may be diligent, as were the Jews, in observance of God’s Sabbaths and other aspects of God’s way of life—but that doesn’t save. Only by the shed life blood of our Saviour do we restore our relationship with the Godhead. The Father has embraced us and ‘...he which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ’ (Philippians 1:6). We are each unique in the personal challenges we face, and it is for how we overcome them that we are rewarded at the return of Christ: ‘...I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be’ (Revelation 22:12). Jesus is our example: ‘...we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin’ (Hebrews 4:15, 5:7). We must daily monitor ourselves asking, how do we reflect that ‘perfect law of liberty’? (James 1:22-27).
- If we remain faithful we *will* inherit our place in the Kingdom. Jesus is preparing our role in his administration of the earthly Kingdom—commensurate with how we manage our nature during our earthly tenure, how we are using our innate and spiritual gifts in his service. The degree of responsibility assigned to each reflects their productivity (‘how much every man had gained by trading, v. 15), as illustrated by Jesus’s parable of the ten servants (Luke 19:11-27)
- The apostle John after a lifetime of faithful service urges the brethren: ‘...Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward (II John 1:8} **Ω**

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