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HOW MUCH DID THE MINISTRY IN THE 1950'S REALLY UNDERSTAND ABOUT 'THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD'?

In order to support the present Jewish calendar much has been made of “the teachings that have been handed down by Mr. Armstrong”. Often some of the early ministers under Mr. Armstrong are appealed to for authority, because they too accepted, supported and defended the present Jewish calendar, and still do so.

The reasoning is: Mr. Armstrong and all the leading ministers have always accepted the Jewish calendar as being the one God wants us to use. It becomes **a matter of church government**. And the fact that all the “leading” ministers accepted the Jewish calendar is supposedly proof enough that the Jewish calendar must therefore also have God’s approval.

A question that arises is: just how much understanding about “the government of God” did the men who became “the leading ministers” in this present age really have back then? Let’s examine the facts.

The Ages of the Men Involved

Kenneth Herrmann, who became the Church’s calendar expert, is now 76 years old and living with his son in East Texas. He is still associated with the Worldwide Church of God. He was a student at Ambassador College in 1950, at about age twenty-six years. He already had a BSc degree before going to Ambassador College, which made him “the scientist” in the Church at that time. This means that when he wrote his calendar article for the March 1953 GOOD NEWS magazine, he was about 29-30 years old.

By 1953 Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was 60 years old. Apart from Dr. C. Paul Meredith (the uncle of Roderick C. Meredith) and Harold Jackson, all of the men who were of any influence (i.e., Herman Hoeh, Roderick Meredith, Raymond McNair, Ted Armstrong, etc.) and who became leading men in the years to follow, were only in their early to mid 20’s, all a few years younger than Kenneth Herrmann. And they had a major influence in shaping the direction in which the Church developed from then onwards.

Let’s take a closer look at how things developed.

Forty years later, on January 20, 1993 Dr. Roderick C. Meredith wrote a letter to promote his booklet “*Church Government and Church Unity*”. By then he had founded “The Global Church of God”. On page two of that letter Dr. Meredith wrote:

“So please read this overview of Church Government with an open mind and heart. Yes, *many of us* have made terrible mistakes in this area, *including me*. We have in the past often been too strict, domineering and sometimes unfeeling in dealing with others”. (his emphasis)

Indeed! In the past, when they were all twenty-something year-old evangelists, they made some terrible mistakes! It was brave of Dr. Meredith to be willing to acknowledge this in a public letter addressed to “Dear Brethren and Friends”.

However, what these “terrible mistakes” should tell us is that **they were very clearly not being guided**

by God Almighty! In his own writings during those years when they made those “terrible mistakes” Dr. Meredith repeatedly appealed for authority to “the fruits” which the ministers were supposedly producing. Yet “the fruits” were “terrible mistakes”!

Let’s now look at the booklet Dr. Meredith was introducing with this letter. It is titled “*Church Government and Church Unity*” and has the copyright date of 1993. [I believe that he has since revised this booklet.]

On page 3 under the subtitle: “Our Early Discussions” Dr. Meredith wrote:

“Even after several years of guiding the college, **Mr. Armstrong still did not understand much about Church Government, and said so openly a number of times.** Consequently, in the early mid-1950’s, Herman L. Hoeh and I each were inspired to write articles along this line. As hundreds of our older brethren remember, I wrote the article, “*Judging and Discipline in God’s Church*” and, later, “*Whose Opinion Counts?*” and one or two other similar articles”. (my emphasis)

My Comments:

Can you see what Dr. Meredith is saying here? **Mr. Armstrong wasn’t really the one to formulate the ideas about “church government” at all!** It was precisely because Mr. Armstrong “did not understand much about church government” that this doctrine was developed by these young evangelists in their 20’s, a development for which Dr. Meredith claims “inspiration”. He then mentions two specific articles he wrote at that time.

We will examine those two articles. And we’ll see some examples of the “terrible mistakes” in those very articles, yet those articles were supposedly “inspired” by God. That doesn’t really make sense, does it? Would God inspire “terrible mistakes”?

Let’s look further into this booklet to see what Dr. Meredith was referring to.

On page 7 under the subtitle “The misuse of Church Government” he wrote:

“**Many of our ministers** began to use the example of ‘Korah’s rebellion’ and similar examples to imply that-- if anyone ever left this Church even in hurt or confusion -- they were rebelling against the ‘Government of God’ just as surely as Korah and his followers. Everything seemed to become ‘the Government of God.’” (my emphasis)

My Comments:

This was a major problem, turning everything into a “government of God” issue! This very thing caused unbelievable problems and trials and heartaches for a large number of people! The suffering many wives had to endure for decades because their simplistic husbands tried to put the “government of God” teaching of these immature evangelists into practice in their marriages is hard to total up. This very teaching was responsible for destroying many marriages! As Dr. Meredith mentioned in his letter, it resulted in conduct that all too often was “strict, domineering and unfeeling”.

Let’s look at the next paragraph in the booklet, which gives a few mild examples in Dr. Meredith’s own words:

“Older students or graduates leading baptizing tours would admonish their assistants that they were violating ‘the Government of God’ if they turned up the car radio without thinking to ask permission! Wives were violating the ‘Government of God’ if they did not have their husband’s suits pressed on time!”

My Comments:

Can anyone deny that it was absurd for anyone, let alone evangelists who were supposed to have a high degree of spiritual discernment, to equate changing the volume on the car radio with “the government of God”? Can anyone deny that it was absurd to equate having a suit pressed punctually with “the government of God”?

Realize that Dr. Meredith is here quoting some examples he has chosen. There are numerous other examples that are far more absurd and ridiculous than the two he chose to present. Can we not see that this “government of God” teaching did nothing more than turn a wife into a slave? Can we not see that this “government of God” teaching developed by these twenty-something year-old evangelists was nothing more than Matthew 20:25, “**exercising dominion over them** and exercising authority upon them”, something Jesus Christ explicitly told us not to do?!

And it was precisely, as Dr. Meredith wrote, because Mr. Armstrong “still did not understand much about Church Government” that these absurd ideas managed to find acceptance in the Church. These ideas did not come from Mr. Armstrong.

This “strict, domineering and unfeeling” attitude was the direct result of the ideas of these very young ministers. And in this booklet Dr. Meredith even claims the credit for this teaching. To say that the fruits of this teaching were bad is an understatement. That I will explain in more detail towards the end of this article.

Let’s now look at the first of the two articles Dr. Meredith draws our attention to in his booklet.

In the GOOD NEWS MAGAZINE, NOVEMBER 1953 edition appeared the article “*Judging and Discipline in God’s Church*” by Roderick C. Meredith , on pages 3, 4, 6, 7, 8. (This article was written 40 years earlier than the booklet quoted above.)

Page 7, column I:

“Learning to obey the government of God is the very basis of true Christianity. People must be **taught to respect and fear the authority** God wields **through His ministers**. If a person refuses to obey God’s government now, how can he be expected to obey it in the kingdom?” (my emphasis)

My Comments:

Here we have the foundation for “obey, respect and fear” the ministers! The minister stands in the place of God, and his (the minister’s) word is the law. Teach people to fear the minister! That was a huge problem!

Page 7, columns I-II:

“Do you see that Paul was calling attention to the fact that God grants authority and power to His true servants? Paul knew he had the authority to come “with a rod” -- to chasten or put out stubborn sinners from their midst. The power of Almighty God would back him up in this! **Any who resisted would be struck dead** as Ananias and Sapphira if necessary. God’s government is with divine power and it is

well for all of us to realize this!" (my emphasis)

My Comments:

Again the emphasis is on authority and on power and on striking dead those who dare to oppose the minister's authority. And, as Dr. Meredith acknowledged in his later booklet, everything was turned into "the Government of God". Everything became unbelievably oppressive.

Page 7, column II:

"But **strict discipline is necessary** to preserve the church". (my emphasis)

My Comments:

These young evangelists wanted everything to be "strict discipline". Many comparisons were made to the way the military is run, as if that has anything to do with how a family should function. People's feelings were never considered.

Page 8, column I:

"The scope of God's judgment includes physical as well as spiritual matters".

My Comments:

They weren't content with authority over spiritual matters. **They wanted control over the physical details of people's lives!** People couldn't change jobs or buy a new car or move to another area or sell a house, etc., without first checking with the minister! The minister was always the final authority on every facet of the people's lives, even though in most cases these twenty-something year-old ministers (back in 1953) were still nothing more than clueless kids, totally lacking in life's experiences!

By their fruits we are supposed to identify them, according to Dr. Meredith's own words.

Page 8, column III:

"In material disputes, **you are to go directly to God's ministers** instead of a worldly court. If you love God, this will always be to your best interests in the end. This is God's way -- God's command". (my emphasis)

My Comments:

The instruction was to look to the minister for everything. He was the fountain of all knowledge and wisdom, because he represented to you the government of God!

The above quoted statement in the article is followed up with the following sentence:

"In all cases, remember that **the final responsibility for all decisions rests with God's ministers** whom He has called". (my emphasis)

My Comments:

In other words, once you have taken something to the minister, then you are absolved of all responsibility! You have done everything that God requires of you! You yourself don't ever have to make

any decisions; the ministers will make those for you!

Let's look at the next statement from this article, also in **column III on page 8**:

“You may be tempted to criticize or disagree with some decision that God's ministers will bind. **Be very careful** lest you let this turn you against God. You may not understand all the facts. But God's called ministers probably do and they are responsible to Him — not some human — for their actions in directing His Church”. (my emphasis)

My Comments:

Don't you dare criticize the decisions this young minister presents you with! You may be a successful middle-aged business man or an executive, but “you may not understand all the facts”, whereas this minister in his early twenties who graduated from Ambassador College last year “probably does” understand all the facts. And this young minister certainly does not have to give account to you; he is only accountable to God!

It should be very obvious that this article amounted to using scare tactics to coerce submission to ministers who were overwhelmingly very young and very inexperienced in most things.

The things that were stated in this article certainly were “a terrible mistake”, as Dr. Meredith so freely acknowledged 40 years down the road, in his January 20, 1993 letter.

Let's now look at the other article Dr. Meredith mentioned in that booklet.

GOOD NEWS MAGAZINE OCTOBER 1957 article “*Whose Opinion Counts?*” by Roderick C. Meredith, on pages 3, 4, 12.

Page 3, column II

“But when God's true servants do make a decision based on His word, it is to be respected, for **it is bound in heaven**”. (my emphasis)

My Comments:

The article is, as the title indicates, about “**opinions**”! So you may be a sixty-year old Church member with experiences in many different areas of life, but don't you dare to disrespect the opinion of your young minister, who really hasn't yet learned very much about life at all! He is “a minister” and that ought to settle any argument. If you don't like that, then you are disrespecting an opinion that is “bound in heaven”!

Can we see the incredible pressure that was put on Church members by this wretched “government of God” attitude of this young ministry, while “Mr. Armstrong still did not understand much about Church Government and said so openly a number of times”? Some of the examples of this “ministerial rule” that I have heard over the past twenty-five years, by people who were in that way oppressed by their supposedly God-guided pastors, are not even appropriate to mention in an article like this.

But those examples are real!

And many of you who were in the Church back in the 60's and even before then know of many examples yourself! Dr. Meredith's statement that “many of us have made terrible mistakes in this area, including me” was not mere window-dressing. He knows full well the oppressive and ungodly approach many

ministers took in the way they ruled their respective congregations.

Let's continue.

Page 3 column II

"If you take **the decisions of God's ministers** lightly, you are disrespecting God Himself!" (my emphasis)

My Comments:

The threat in this statement is open and there for all to see.

Page 3 Column III

"Another way to examine their "fruit" is to see if they are willing to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 3:18). Some "Christians" — even some who profess to be in the Church of God — refuse to grow into more truth!"

My Comments:

This comment was directed at people other than "God's ministers". However, it should really be applied to all people, including the ministers in God's Church. It is ironic that Dr. Meredith's statement from 1957 applies today especially to the ministers! It is ironic that it is primarily the ministers who "refuse to grow into more truth" when it comes to the calendar! They are confronted with evidence which they cannot refute, yet they, in Dr. Meredith's words, "refuse to grow into more truth".

In looking back, it should be clear that it simply was inevitable that sooner or later the ministers would also have to be tested on whether we too are "willing to grow into more truth" or not. God is not mocked! When we confront ordinary people with this kind of challenge, then God will see to it that we too will one day have to face the same kind of challenge.

Let's move on.

Page 3 column III

"No man gains all of God's truth at once. We must all grow in knowledge. Some churches and some ministers have known a portion of God's truth. But when they became unwilling to grow into more truth through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they soon began to twist and pervert what little truth they had, and to spiritually rot away and die!"

My Comments:

All I can say here is: Dr. Meredith said it, I didn't! But if this was true for the 1950's, then it must surely still be true today?

Page 3 column III bottom to page 4 column I top

"When a matter of church government or policy comes up, realize that they (**the ministers**) **have the authority to decide the issue**". (my emphasis)

My Comments:

Again, we have here the threat that you, the average Church member, had better not rebel against “church government”. And, lest you have forgotten, we are talking about such serious transgressions of “the government of God” as turning up a car radio without explicit permission, not having a suit pressed on time, being late with having the evening meal ready, buying a new car without first seeking the minister’s sage advice, seeking a new job without first checking this with the pastor, not cheerfully coping with the minister’s offensive behavior, etc.

Yes, “terrible mistakes” were indeed made!

Page 4 column I

“**Their decisions**, then, **will also be God’s decisions**. They are binding on God’s Church. His true Church will be **obedient!** It is **government** by God, **through His servants**”. (my emphasis)

My Comments:

To say that this was extremely presumptuous is an understatement. Yet this is the burden these young ministers were “binding” on God’s people. And if you were the wife of an abusive husband, who felt he was exercising “the government of God” in his own marriage, then in some cases your life was no better than that of a slave; and the minister was only going to back up your husband.

I have over the years heard from many wives, whose lives were very difficult, but who forced themselves to tough it out because the church had taught them (thanks to articles like these by Dr. Meredith) that this is what God expects of them. And the tragic thing is that their husbands’ abusive behavior was the direct result of the men trying to “diligently put into practice the government of God as taught to them by the ministry”! Their husbands have in many cases “mellowed”, as Dr. Meredith put it in his 1993 letter. But the twenty or more years of difficult and extremely trying demands by husbands who were taught incorrectly by an inexperienced ministry have left their scars on many of these wives.

Page 4 column I

“It is God’s responsibility to chasten His Servants if they **abuse** their authority. You can’t read their hearts. But God can!” (my emphasis)

My Comments:

This is a very interesting statement. It is a tacit acknowledgment that ministers (and by extension husbands in the family context) were going to “abuse” their authority, and in the very same breath this abuse is justified by stating that “God can read their hearts”. So presumably this was to mean that abuse of authority is acceptable “as long as the heart is right”? At any rate, you as the average Church member are expected to patiently put up with any abuse of authority.

Page 4 column III bottom to page 12 column I

“They are responsible for teaching you the truth. When there is a doubt as to the meaning of a scripture, or when there is a church policy to be decided upon, God’s ministers are given the authority to make those decisions based on His revealed will”.

My Comments:

“When there is doubt as to the meaning of a Scripture”, then it is boldly asserted that whatever God’s ministers decide the Scripture is to mean is more important than textual proof that may actually

contradict the meaning the ministers attach to the Scripture!

Do you see the importance of this statement?

This statement is the foundation for simply assigning one's own meaning to "the oracles of God" in Romans 3:2. This statement is the foundation for rejecting the obvious deduction that the whole feast of ingathering "at the tekufah of the year" in Exodus 34:22 must fall into the autumn!

Somehow the ministers supposedly "are given the authority" to decide that "the oracles of God" means the Jewish calendar; and that Exodus 34:22 does not set any limitations on when the Feast of Tabernacles is to be observed.

God's ministers are responsible "for teaching the truth", and it is assumed that they will not make decisions that are contrary to "the truth". When such "authority to make decisions" is given to a young and immature ministry, then it is very easy indeed for "terrible mistakes" to be made, the consequences of which can be very serious, as I will show later.

Let's see the next quotation from the article.

Page 12 column I to column II

"And even then, if there is ever a case when you have a real conviction that one of God's ministers is teaching something contrary to His will, you ought to", obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)".

My Comments:

This statement very clearly states **our present predicament**. It is beyond question that we have "real conviction" that some of God's ministers are "teaching something contrary to his will", as far as using the present Jewish calendar is concerned! And we also believe that in this case we ought to "obey God rather than men". In this situation even Dr. Meredith himself advises us here to act on our "real conviction".

Page 12 column II

"Remember that you are not to rebuke an elder or minister, "but intreat him as a father" (I. Tim. 5:1)".

My Comments:

This was definitely **putting the minister on a pedestal**. It is hard to treat someone younger than your own son, perhaps even younger than your own grandson, as if he were "a father". So even if the minister was indeed wrong with his decision or his opinion, and you could see that he was wrong, yet it was not for you to point his errors out to him. This is in stark contrast to the way the young minister would (and in all too many cases did) treat you; he would correct you and humiliate you in public, all in the name of "the government of God".

Page 12 column II

"In all matters, then, it's God's opinion that really counts!"

My Comments:

This statement was intended **to equate "the minister's opinion" with "God's opinion"**, indeed "a

terrible mistake"! The abuse of Church members that followed these two and similar articles is etched into the memories of countless people who made up the congregations these young ministers "lorded it over".

Another Example from the 1960's

When I was at Ambassador College we had a class called "Family Relations" which was taught by an evangelist. I took this class in the 1969/1970 college year. One example will suffice to illustrate the devastating effect of the "government of God" teaching that the young ministers had introduced into the Church while "Mr. Armstrong still did not understand much about Church Government".

In the second half of the college year we were given the assignment to write an essay on the subject: "*SHOULD A HUSBAND EVER SPANK HIS WIFE?*"

Now our lecturer was very careful to not commit himself one way or the other. Neither did he ever commit himself after all our assignments had been handed in. But he did present the topic in such a way that for him it wasn't really an obvious, clear-cut, no other possible choices at all, type of question. He presented it as if there were merits for both possible answers, that it wasn't a clear-cut one-sided matter at all.

I was flabbergasted! I was a 25-year old single man at the time, but I had never heard anything so utterly *ABSURD*, that a married man would even *CONSIDER* "spanking his wife"! But then I had never attended any local congregation prior to going to Ambassador College; I had never even set eyes on a minister before setting foot on the campus and I'd never seen the GOOD NEWS articles that were published in the 1950's. It had never at any stage even occurred to me to look to other people for the decisions in my personal affairs. Towards the end of 1967 I simply drove my car onto the campus without ever having met anyone who was a part of "the government of God" and I became a student. The only contact that I had had with the Church prior to that point in time was the Plain Truth Magazine plus a score or two of booklets and articles.

But that question of "*Should a Husband Ever Spank His Wife?*" was one of the "*fruits*" of the "government of God" teaching expounded by Dr. Meredith and others from about 1953 onwards. That teaching had warped people's minds to even consider it to be a man's duty (or right or responsibility?) to apply "the government of God" in his own home by perhaps "spanking his wife"!

At no stage did our lecturer offer any guidance to the class regarding the answer to this question. Exactly what were the young and impressionable students, who took this class, supposed to take with them when they scattered around the globe a few months later?

So "how inspired" really were the articles Dr. Meredith, Dr. Hoeh and others wrote "in the early mid-1950's"? They were really nothing more than "terrible mistakes", totally cut-off from any guidance or inspiration by God. They produced pain and suffering for countless people.

[Comment: I have also examined the article titled "*Government in Our Church*" by Dr. Herman L. Hoeh, which appeared on pages 3, 4, 7, 8 of the August 1953 GOOD NEWS Magazine. The information Dr. Hoeh presented in that article is only of a general nature; it does not spell out instructions for Church members, as do the two articles by Dr. Meredith that we have looked at. So there is no need for specific comments on Dr. Hoeh's "Government" article.]

So why have I presented all this information from past GOOD NEWS articles? Am I trying to embarrass the authors who wrote those things?

Far from it!

The Point of All this Information

We have all made mistakes. We have all had a lack of understanding in many different areas of life. And we were all drawn to the Church of God because “we wanted to do it right”; we wanted to learn exactly what God expects of us, so that we could then practice “God’s way of life”. We were filled with a zeal for the truth of God, and for wanting to grow in that truth.

And while there were ministers who applied the things they learned from the ministers before them, or in authority over them, in ways that produced “terrible mistakes”, there were also many ministers who did not abuse their authority, who did not try to run the lives of people in their congregations, who did serve God’s people with meekness and humility, who gave their lives in service and dedication to God’s people.

It is not a matter of singling out a few “guilty” individuals. Dr. Meredith happens to be the one who brought up this subject of “the government of God”, and who wrote the two articles we have looked at, but the problem really went beyond being the ideas of just one person. Those ideas really typify an attitude that pervaded the entire leadership of the church to a greater or lesser degree. The young men who were taught these ideas at Ambassador College in many cases simply inculcated them into their minds because they sounded right to them, and they then took these ideas with them when they were then made ministers and tried to apply them in the congregations they were given to pastor.

The point is this:

It is constantly claimed that God blessed the work of the Church in those years, and this supposed “blessing” from God is presented as justification that therefore God was pleased with the way things were done and with the teachings the Church accepted.

Specifically:

One justification that is presented for retaining the present Jewish calendar for use by the Church is: look at how God blessed the church all those years we used the Jewish calendar! If that calendar is “wrong” or “sinful”, **why would God possibly have blessed the church so abundantly** while we were using this “sinful” Jewish calendar? And look at the unity we had while we all used this Jewish calendar?!

Because this justification is so blatantly wrong, therefore the reason for presenting the information mentioned in this article is to show that:

the claim of “blessings” is a total myth! It is nothing more than the emperor’s new “invisible clothes”! The claim is totally without substance! In the last thirty years or so the church hasn’t really been “blessed” at all by God! It has in fact been “cursed”, if only we have the eyes to see it!

Talk about “blessings” is nothing more than seeing things that aren’t really there, and not seeing the things that are there!

To establish whether or not the Church was “blessed” by God, exactly what do we look for? Do we look at the Church’s income? Is a lot of money really a proof that God “blessed” the Church? Or do we look at the number of people who received the Church’s literature and who came to attend services? Are A lot

of people really a proof that God “blessed” the Work?

Solomon wrote the following in Proverbs 10:22:

“The blessing of the LORD, it makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it!”

An increase in money and an increase in membership can certainly be an indication of God’s blessings. But by themselves these things don’t necessarily indicate a blessing at all! They are only an unquestionable blessing from God when the proviso Solomon spelled out is also fulfilled. In plain language: increases in income and in membership are only a blessing from God when:

There is no sorrow attached to these things!

In other words, I don’t believe at all that an increase in the Church’s income is an indication of a blessing from God when that income creates a great deal of sorrow! Likewise, I don’t believe at all that an increase in “Church membership” is an indication of a blessing from God when it becomes absolutely clear that well over 50% of that so-called “church membership” has never come to real repentance and has never at any stage been converted!

The only way to really establish whether or not God in fact “blessed” the Church (be it in the 50’s or the 60’s or be it from 69 onwards to the present) is as follows:

how were the lives of the people who came into contact with the church affected? Did contact with the church produce happiness and joy for these people? Or did contact with the church produce sorrow and pain and suffering and bitterness and resentment for these people?

Whether or not God “blessed” the Church must be evaluated by the fruits that the contact with the Church produced in the people’s lives! Blessings are not indicated by quantity or by amounts; blessings are indicated by quality! The key to blessings from God is always that **God “adds no sorrow with it”!**

There is a reason why today there are so many people who have become bitter and resentful. And the “government of God” teaching is a major component of the reason for this bitterness and this resentment.

I mention these things to set the record straight regarding what are blessings and what are not blessings. I very strongly question that the billionaires and multi-millionaires in American business and commerce have in most cases been “blessed by God”! A closer look at their personal lives will in many cases show very quickly that those individuals weren’t really blessed at all! You can probably think of half a dozen names right off the top of your head of some of these “super rich” people, whose lives were empty and even pathetic. Yet they had a lot of fame and a lot of money.

So let’s get back to the people in God’s Church.

I have on many occasions had to deal with Church people whose lives went from one disaster to another, from one problem to the next, and yet they kept trying to tell me how blessed they were! They might have been involved in a major accident that caused serious injuries and brought financial burdens upon them, but they claimed they were “blessed” because they didn’t get killed in the process. They might have suffered a large loss, but they said they were “blessed” because their loss wasn’t greater.

Their foolish conduct might have gotten them into serious trials, and their subsequent behavior showed that they hadn’t really learned the lesson, yet they stated they were “blessed” because the trials could

have been greater. Yes, certainly, we are to have a positive attitude when trials come upon us. But we should also recognize that many times we are “buffeted for our own faults” (see 1 Peter 2:20). And we should also understand the principle of Proverbs 10:22 as explained above. This proverb is something that we should really think about deeply!

“The blessing of the LORD, it makes rich, and He adds no sorrow with it!”

By this definition the Church has certainly not been “blessed” in the past thirty years!

Difficulties and hardships and trials and sicknesses and diseases and pain and suffering are not really what God means when He speaks about “blessing us”! Deuteronomy chapter 28 spells out what God means when He speaks about “blessings” and when He speaks about “curses”.

As stated above, I have on numerous occasions had to deal with people who were really “cursed”, but who themselves couldn’t see this; in their own minds they kept trying to convince themselves that they were really “blessed”. And I couldn’t really help them to open their eyes to the facts of what was happening to them; they invariably continued in their own delusions.

When we talk so glibly about “God blessing the Church during Mr. Armstrong’s time”, **we are in danger of ignoring the facts** of what really happened; we are in danger of closing our eyes to facts we may not want to see, even as Jesus Christ mentioned in Matthew 13:15:

”For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and **their eyes they have closed**; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Matthew 13:15).

So when we want to talk about “blessings during Mr. Armstrong’s time”, here are some facts we should also consider at the same time:

1) The 35 years of 30% per annum growth stopped in 1968! They went from 1934 to 1968 inclusive. This is established by Mr. Armstrong’s own writings. So even from a “money point of view” things went downhill after 1968!

2) Our incorrect understanding for many years concerning the matter of “divorce and remarriage” caused tremendous suffering to thousands of people. Many of them were completely discouraged from any further study into the Bible and into God’s way of life; they gave up trying to become a part of God’s Church because of the Church’s wrong understanding in this area.

3) Mr. Armstrong himself faced many severe trials right within his own family. Many people deceived him at various times for their own personal ends, and he failed to discern the selfish motives of these people. Mr. Armstrong died without being reconciled to his own family. For some time he was a virtual prisoner in his own home in Tucson, Arizona. And even while he was dying, he was being deceived by those who wanted to succeed him.

Proverbs 16:7 didn’t really apply to Mr. Armstrong’s life, did it?

“When a man’s ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Proverbs 16:7).

Mr. Armstrong's life was not one of "peace"; it really was one of struggle and hardships, and it wasn't all just a matter of "Satan persecuting a servant of God". I am not trying to pick on Mr. Armstrong, but we do need to objectively face the facts if we are going to talk about "Mr. Armstrong having been blessed". There were many things in Mr. Armstrong's life that were anything but "blessings"! It is also well known that Mr. Armstrong was susceptible to flattery, and that he was repeatedly taken advantage of by people who used flattery towards him.

4) The "government of God" teaching brought into the Church in the early 1950's by very young ministers, while "Mr. Armstrong still did not understand much about Church Government", something he admitted openly a number of times, caused much grief and pain and suffering to multiple thousands of people!

The number of sincere people who were insulted and humiliated by "ministers" who were still very young and inexperienced is absolutely staggering! And it was all done in the name of "the government of God"!

This human misery and suffering must also feature in the equation when we want to talk about "the blessings" that were showered upon the Church. In many instances grown men were subjected to a great deal of emotional stress by the way they were treated in the Church's "Spokesmen's Clubs" by their ministers.

5) Thousands of marriages, including the marriages of many ministers, suffered incredible stress because the Church taught husbands to be "strict, domineering and unfeeling"! Multiple thousands of wives had their lives turned into misery because of what the ministers taught their husbands about "the government of God" in the family. They endured years and even decades of very harsh and demanding treatment by husbands who didn't know any better than to do what some young, immature minister told them to do.

6) The fruit of this teaching in many thousands of cases was bitterness at the husband for the way he treated his wife, and bitterness at the Church for encouraging this pathetic behavior in the husband. Thousands of marriages have been permanently scarred by what the Church taught and expected.

7) So when we total it all together: was the misery and pain and suffering that probably more than 10,000 people have endured from the church during the past fifty years one of the "fruits" that God was really "blessing" the Church?

By the evidence we have seen from the two GOOD NEWS articles, isn't it obvious that the minister was king in the congregation, and members had better not dare to challenge his opinions and ideas?! Those very articles ("*Judging and Discipline in God's Church*" and "*Whose Opinion Counts?*") prove that **Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34 are addressed to the ministry of the worldwide church of God**, especially in the 50's and 60's and 70's!

Those two chapters in the Bible present a staggering indictment of "the pastors" of the congregations of God's people, congregations God refers to as "the sheep of My pasture". Can we not see how many thousands of people were "scattered" (see Jeremiah 23:1) by the harsh, "strict, domineering and unfeeling" treatment they received from these ministers?

These two chapters in the Word of God speak about the fruits our actions as ministers have produced! And there isn't even the slightest hint of "blessings from God" in these chapters. Yet they are addressed to the "Mr. Armstrong-trained" ministry of the Church!

I know that it isn't very popular, but these two chapters are **addressed to us, who are ministers today!**

The evidence that the ministry has “scattered God’s flock” and driven them away over the past fifty years (see Jeremiah 23:2) is there for all to see, except those who willingly close their own eyes!

Thus:

When we misunderstood the truth about “divorce and remarriage”, we bound heavy burdens on people, and in so doing we drove many people away.

When we treated God’s people in “strict, domineering and unfeeling” ways, we also drove many people away.

When we taught people to apply “the government of God” in their marriages, we drove many couples apart. And many were driven away from any desire to want to have any part in such a “government of God” structure or future.

When even an evangelist could give young students the assignment to comment on “*Should a Husband Ever Spank His Wife?*”, the Church was setting the stage for creating stress within future marriages, and driving more people away.

When we taught people to apply “the government of God” in their child-rearing, we were responsible for alienating many children from their parents, and in all too many cases we drove those children away from the Church.

When we offended and insulted the men in the Church at the “Spokesmen’s Clubs”, more people were driven away. The preparation for an upcoming speech assignment was often just as stressful for the wife as it was for her husband.

In this regard one simple example from my own experiences with one of these “government of God” ministers while I was at College will suffice. A visiting minister was asked to evaluate our “Ambassador Speech Club” during my senior year. Before walking into the Club that night he had never set eyes on me before. I didn’t know him and he didn’t know me. Now before going to Ambassador I had been a commissioned officer in the West German Army, and in the speech I gave that night I spoke about something in connection with my army experiences. Afterwards, in his overall evaluation this “government of God” type didn’t really comment about my speech. Instead what he said was: “An officer in the German Army? You’re effeminate, that’s what you are!” End of speech evaluation! Now the man had to be an arrogant, opinionated, total idiot to come up with that evaluation! I later found out that he himself had a certain military background, and that there was a certain amount of resentment towards “the German Army”. (He left the Church soon after this incident.)

While the man’s comments didn’t particularly phase me, they did provide me with a useful example, which I have used at various times. But the point I want to make here is that this type of insulting behavior was dished out multiple thousands of times at the Church’s Speech Clubs around the world by ministers who had been taught by the founders of the “government of God” doctrine. My experience here was far from being an isolated incident! Thousands of men received that kind of arrogant treatment from men who were in many cases young enough to be their sons. And in the many hundreds of speech clubs that I myself have “evaluated” since then, I too have at times made comments that lacked wisdom, discretion and discernment, and which hurt some of the men. I am not without fault in this regard. It is a matter of facing the facts, so that we can go forward, rather than justifying the past.

And of those who were willing to “tough it out” and stay in the Church no matter how they were treated by the ministers, many became hardened and bitter, and they lost the love and zeal and enthusiasm they had started out with. A great deal of the bitterness towards the Church that is today “out there” is a

direct consequence of this “government of God” approach in those early years.

Yes, the evidence that Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34 apply to the ministry of the Church in this age is there for all to see! And as already stated, I myself am not without some guilt in this regard! We need to face the facts.

8) The Church during Mr. Armstrong’s time always had an incredibly high “turn over” of members! That is assuredly not a sign of “blessings from God”. The Church also always attracted some people who were motivated by things other than a desire to unconditionally submit their lives to Almighty God; some people had selfish motives of one kind or another. Obviously, such people coming to the Church were not really proof of “a blessing from God” either.

9) What “fruits” are there really to show for the more than one billion dollars that people have contributed to the Church in the past fifty years? Where are the three “beautiful campuses” that the Church bought and developed? What fruits are there for the more than one billion pieces of literature that the Church has distributed in this age? How many converted people are there really? What have all the magazines and booklets and broadcasts and telecasts really achieved? What did Mr. Armstrong’s fifteen years of flying around the world to meet with various leaders really achieve? Are there really “any fruits” from those fifteen years of traveling the world? Where?

10) Even at its height the Church was at least 50% unconverted! That’s by Mr. Armstrong’s own assessment! He repeatedly spoke about his hope that “at least 51%” of us are converted, though he would in personal conversations admit his conviction that the percentage of truly converted people was in fact much lower. So how much “blessing from God” does that indicate?

11) Mr. Armstrong repeatedly indicated that the 30% per year growth came to an end in about 1968. So how blessed has the Church been in the 32 years that have passed since then? How blessed was the Church in the remaining 17 years of Mr. Armstrong’s life after 1968? How does the Church today even compare to where we were in 1968? If anything, the Church today is behind where we were in 1968!

Specifically, exactly what has the Church achieved since 1968? Whatever was built up after that date has today already been destroyed; whatever literature was produced after that date has today already been taken out of circulation; whichever “world leaders” Mr. Armstrong met after that date are today, with very few exceptions, either dead or out of office and unlikely to even remember the name “Herbert W. Armstrong”; whatever money was contributed to the Church has today already disappeared. So exactly what does the Church have to show for the last 30 years? What “blessings” can we list? And while there are indeed a number of people who have come to a real repentance during these past 30 years, at the same time a far greater number of people have turned their backs on the Church.

Speaking about “God blessed the work under Mr. Armstrong” can be a very vague and nebulous thing, which relies very heavily on biases and assumptions.

The facts are: a large number of people came into contact with the Church during Mr. Armstrong’s time. As I indicated above, that is not an indication of “a blessing from God” one way or the other. “A large number of people” have also come into contact with computer software produced by Microsoft, and that “large number” proves nothing at all, as far as blessings from God are concerned. The real key is:

how were the lives of that large number of people affected by this contact with the church?

When we consider the matter from this approach, then we find that:

- the majority of those who received the Church's literature or heard the Church's broadcasts never made any direct contact with the Church;
- of the minority who got so far as to actually meet a minister of the Church, the greater part by far never got as far as attending Church services;
- of the minority who actually became baptized members, the majority didn't stay in the Church for very long;
- of the minority who "toughed it out" past the first five or ten years, many eventually became bitter and many had their marriages affected in adverse ways by the Church's "government of God" teaching;
- of those who didn't become bitter, many nevertheless endured severe trials imposed on them by "strict, domineering and unfeeling" ministers;
- of those who were still left at the time of Mr. Armstrong's death, the majority has since either readily accepted false teachings, or gone back into the world's churches, or just become disillusioned and disappeared from the scene completely.

Of all the people who responded to Mr. Armstrong: how many (or maybe I should ask "how few") are still holding fast to God's way of life?

Jesus Christ Himself said at the end of His life on earth:

"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 17:12).

Likewise, in evaluating "the blessings from God", the criterion is not how large a number of people the Church has made contact with. The real criterion is:

Of all those that God had "given to the Church", how many has the church still got, and how many has the church lost?

Seen from this angle, it doesn't look like the Church was very blessed at all, and certainly not since 1968, when the 35 years of 30% growth p.a. came to an end!

So:

I don't believe there is any justification in holding onto the present Jewish calendar with its proven violations of clear biblical instructions by appealing to "look at how God blessed the Church during Mr. Armstrong's time". I get somewhat irritated by all these references to supposed "blessings" during Mr. Armstrong's time because they never ever look at the "terrible mistakes" Dr. Meredith acknowledged in his letter of January 20, 1993. They never look at the harsh treatment all too many of the early ministers dished out to the congregations they pastored; they never look at the incredibly large number of people who walked away from the Church because the Jeremiah chapter 23 conduct of the ministry discouraged them. All they ever look at is the "total number of people contacted", "total number of responses to a broadcast", "total number of people baptized", etc., but what actually happened in the lives of those "total numbers" after they had made contact with the Church is conveniently ignored.

But there is still more.

The Ultimate Proof of “Bad Fruits”

Earlier I used the expression “this wretched government of God attitude”. I have also mentioned that it was inevitable that “sooner or later the ministers would also have to be tested on whether we too are ‘willing to grow into more truth’ or not”.

One of the most pervading principles found throughout Mr. Armstrong’s writings and teachings is this:

“There has to be a cause for every effect!”

Below are **ten quotations** where Mr. Armstrong made this statement, with Mr. Armstrong’s own emphasis throughout.

1) *THE WONDERFUL WORLD TOMORROW — What It Will Be Like* by Herbert W. Armstrong , 1966, 1973, 1979 edition

“Does it make sense? Do we not realize that there is a cause for every effect? Why are people blind to the cause of all this degeneration? ... We repeat, there’s a cause for every effect”.

2) *WHY WERE YOU BORN?* by Herbert W. Armstrong , 1957, 1972 edition

“I repeat: There has to be a cause for every effect. If there is to be peace, happiness, abundant well-being, something must cause it! God could not be God without providing a cause for every desired good”.

3) *What Science Can’t Discover About the HUMAN MIND* by Herbert W. Armstrong , 1978 edition

“No wonder this world is filled with evils! There has to be a cause for every effect!”

4) *NEVER BEFORE UNDERSTOOD, Why Humanity Cannot Solve Its Evils* by Herbert W. Armstrong , 1981 edition Subtitle: “A Cause for Every Effect”

“There has to be a cause for every effect. What was the original cause for all the world’s seemingly insolvable troubles? This cause has been utterly overlooked by modern science”.

5) *MYSTERY OF THE AGES* by Herbert W. Armstrong , 1985 Hardbound Edition

“Why is mankind here on the earth? Did we simply happen? Or was there design and purpose? We say there is a cause for every effect. The effect, here, is man. Man is here”.

6) *THE MISSING DIMENSION IN SEX* by Herbert W. Armstrong, 1964, 1971, 1981 edition

“For every effect, there has to be a cause! There has to be a cause for all the world’s evils! There has to be a cause for the worsening moral problem!”

7) *DOES GOD EXIST?* by Herbert W. Armstrong, 1957, 1960, 1971, 1972 edition

“And some power or some one had of necessity to do the creating. There is a cause for every effect. And in accepting that inevitable fact, proved by the findings of science, of the existence of that great first cause, you have accepted the fact of the existence and preexistence of the Creator -- God!”

8) *MILITARY SERVICE AND WAR* by Herbert W. Armstrong , 1967, 1985 edition Subtitle: “Treating Effect -- Ignoring CAUSE!”

“It’s just as simple as this: There is a cause for every effect -- yet the whole society and way of life in the world today is based on treating the effect, IGNORING the cause! Our people do it in treating sickness and disease. They do it in dealing with crime. They do it in working for peace!”

9) *THE INCREDIBLE HUMAN POTENTIAL* by Herbert W. Armstrong , 1978 edition

“No wonder this world is filled with evils! There has to be a cause for every effect!”

10) *WORLDWIDE NEWS, SPECIAL EDITION* , March 6, 1981, Pages 6-7, “A VOICE CRIES OUT: WHAT’S WRONG WITH ORGANIZED LABOR?”

“Right now we’re all in the same boat, facing the No. 1 problem of human survival! There has to be a cause for every effect. What brought civilization to the chaotic state where for the first time it’s possible for man to erase mankind from the earth?”

The point of all the above quotations is this: Mr. Armstrong applied this principle to everything and to every subject! Nothing is exempt from this principle.

It really is a re-statement of what the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 6:7.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

Indeed, God is not mocked! So now consider the following very carefully.

One of the main causes for the introduction of doctrinal heresies into the Church during Mr. Tkach’s time is this government of God teaching introduced into the Church in the 1950’s by a group of very young ministers at a time when “Mr. Armstrong still did not understand much about church government”!

Can we grasp the significance and the consequences of this teaching?

Here is what has happened:

1) A group of young evangelists in their early 20’s introduced a doctrine into the Church that caused major problems and suffering for vast numbers of people! Remember that by then Mr. Armstrong had been in the Church for over 25 years, whereas these young evangelists had been around for a mere four or five or six years and were barely adults; yet they introduced a teaching about which Mr. Armstrong after 25 years in the Church still didn’t understand very much.

2) This teaching resulted in ministers running people's lives in autocratic, strict, domineering and unfeeling ways, causing much suffering and grief, and driving many of the people, who actually got so far as to contact the Church, away. These people were scattered and for the greatest part faded into obscurity. That's Jeremiah 23:1-3 and Ezekiel 34:2-10.

3) These young ministers demanded respect and unquestioning submission to their decisions, which they claimed were "bound in heaven", from people who were old enough to be their parents and their grandparents. This approach is typical for immature young people, who have not yet learned from years of experience the practical ways of working with people. The zeal and rashness of youth had not yet been tempered by the wisdom of experience.

4) but God was not in this "government of God" doctrine! And God was not mocked!

5) So God showed His displeasure with this immature teaching by letting "the bad fruits" roll in: broken marriages, unhappy homes, alienated children, a high turnover in Church membership, endless problems and struggles, a fearful and insecure membership which was constantly looking for "ministerial approval" for everything, a fear of being "visited" by the minister, etc. For every bad effect there has to be a cause, as Mr. Armstrong said.

6) These "bad fruits" should have rung some warning bells; they should have shown us that something in our teachings was not right. But we carried on, oblivious to these warning signals; we continued with this "government of God" teaching like a bull in a fine china shop, totally oblivious to the havoc we were creating.

7) Since we didn't respond to these warning signals, God allowed constantly more problems to come upon the Church, going so far as a major and resources-draining attack on the Church by the State of California in January of 1979.

8) Since these "young evangelists" had with their "government of God" doctrine demanded total and unconditional obedience from people who were mostly older than they were, it was inevitable that GOD would test them in the very thing which they had laid upon the shoulders of the Church membership. When they were about 25 years old, they expected people in their 50's and in their 60's and even older to respect and to accept their judgments, and to look upon these twenty-five year-old ministers as "fathers".

So God tested them as to whether they would be willing to do the same thing: when they were now in their 60's and 70's, would they submit unquestioningly to "youngsters" in their 20's and their 30's? So God allowed the Church to be "taken over" by a bunch of youngsters who, incidently, were all ten or more years older than the evangelists had been when they introduced this teaching into the Church in 1953. It became clear very quickly that these evangelists and other old-time leaders were not about to carry the same burden that they themselves had laid on the membership about 40 years earlier.

9) The intent was not so much that they should carry the same burden which they had laid upon people 40 years earlier; the intent was really to prove beyond any doubt that what they had introduced in the 1950's was wrong, that it should never have been introduced into the Church in the first place! By placing these ministers at the receiving end of what they themselves had dished out for many years, God was driving home the point that their teachings had not only been "uninspired"; they had been downright wrong.

10) The method by which the heresies were introduced into the Church after Mr. Armstrong's death depended for its success on this "government of God" doctrine. Without this doctrine it would have been almost impossible for these heresies to find such widespread acceptance amongst people who had been

in the Church for decades! It is the “government of God” doctrine that had conditioned the minds of far too many people to accept without question things presented by the ministry.

11) This “fruit” of the “government of God” teaching proves all by itself that this teaching was without inspiration or approval from God. It was a carnal and vain teaching, which elevated the minister high above his congregation. It violated Jesus Christ’s clear instructions.

12) The truth about “the government of God” is that no human being has ever been a part of that government of God!

There is no room for any mortal human being in “the government of God”. The government of God is government BY God and not by human beings! God has thus far not yet established any “government of God”. It is only at the first resurrection, when those in that resurrection will be made “kings and priests” that “the government of God” will actually be established!

Until then God continues to rule like a benevolent dictator, utilizing many servants and even advisors, but without “a government” in place. The angels are servants (Hebrews 1:14) of God, but they are not in a “government”. The 24 “elders” around the throne of God (Revelation 4:4) are advisors to God, but they are not “the government”. Human “ministers” today are exactly what the word really means: servants to God! But servants don’t form the government, they don’t rule with God.

It was extremely presumptuous for young ministers in their early 20's to claim that they were a part of the government of God!

Whichever way you want to slice it, God was not going to let that go unchallenged! It is no wonder that this teaching has had without doubt the worst consequences of any error that the Church has made in the past 60 years! It was inevitable that “the punishment” (or “the curse”) would come for this presumptuous teaching.

Solomon wrote:

“As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come”
(Proverbs 26:2).

But “the curse” did come upon the Church, and we need to recognize the cause. Dr. Meredith went so far as to acknowledge that terrible “mistakes” were made regarding the teaching about “the government of God”. If the young ministers had not persuaded Mr. Armstrong to sanction this “government of God” teaching back in the 1950's, then a vast number of problems would have been averted!

When we want to talk about “how blessed the Church was under Mr. Armstrong”, then we should look not only at the large number of people who came into the Church; we must also look at the large number of people that also walked out of the church again because the church made a negative impact on their lives and because they had never at any stage come to a real repentance! And we must look at the vast number of people who were offended and hurt by the treatment they received from the ministry.

So, in our efforts to justify clearly identifiable problems with the present Jewish calendar, let’s just quietly drop this “look at how blessed we were under Mr. Armstrong” argument.

Frank W. Nelte