

May 1996

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SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT 'CHURCH GOVERNMENT'

One of the topics that has been hotly debated for some time now is this question of "Church government". There are those who favour a strong headquarters-type central government, the way it was established under Mr. Armstrong. And there are those who favour a congregational-type government, where most or all authority is vested in the local congregation. And there are those who feel that there should not be such a thing as an "ordained ministry", claiming that since all the members in the congregation are given gifts by God, therefore all are in effect ministers (which means "servants").

Many have appealed to an article Mr. Armstrong wrote 57 years ago, back in February of 1939, entitled "Did Christ Reorganize the Church?".

So what is right?

I have read Mr. Armstrong's 1939 article. I have also read a few other articles, including a lengthy one by Norman Edwards. To me it seems that there are certain problems with the articles I have read. While they all make a case for their particular view in some regards, they also seem to make certain unwarranted assumptions in other areas. And they raise new questions of their own.

In this article I will try to point out some of the problems with some of the ideas that are currently being discussed, and then I will lay out how I understand this matter of "Church government".

THE CORRECT STARTING PREMISE

The first thing we need to establish is that we do NOT have a vested interest in the conclusion we reach! Frankly, there are those who DO have a vested interest in the outcome to this question. There are those whose motive is to prove that there should be "strong central government" in the Church of God; and there are those whose motive very clearly is to prove that there should be "congregational government". Both groups set out to prove their desired outcome to this matter, and so they present any number of biblical references in support of their views. And with equal zeal they try to explain away and discredit the reasons presented by those who oppose their views.

It has been A MAJOR FLAW amongst people in the Church of God over the past few decades to start out with an idea or an opinion, and THEN to seek biblical support for this idea or opinion!

Ministers have done it, when we have "a great idea for a sermon"; deacons have done it when they have "a great sermonette idea"; men in the speech clubs have done it in the speeches they have given. YOU have done it and I have done it, right?

We start out having this great idea. We ASSUME that it must obviously be right before God. We forget that God has admonished us that our thoughts are NOT the same as His thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). And so, without too much of an objective assessment, we then proceed to "look for" Scriptures that will support our "great idea". That's never been a great difficulty, to find some Scriptures to attach to what we would like to do or to believe. Even Satan can do that very effectively (see Matthew 4:6). And once we have attached a few Scriptures to our "good ideas", then quite a few other people will also accept our "good ideas" as being "biblically correct".

But did we ever, at any stage of the process, OBJECTIVELY consider if the alternative to our "good idea" might not even be "BETTER" in the sight of God?

Well, no! Usually we haven't been very concerned with an objective analysis of ideas contrary to our own ideas. After all, we don't want to prove our ideas WRONG! We want to prove our ideas to be right and correct.

So regarding this question of "Church government" ... ARE YOU BIASED? Is your mind already made up regarding the answer you want to see adopted? Do you feel that you couldn't possibly be wrong? Would you be unhappy if the Bible did indeed show that your ideas are WRONG? Or would you scramble to present more possible arguments, no matter how flimsy and how far-fetched, in order to hold fast to the answer you want for this question?

WHAT'S YOUR INTEGRITY BEFORE GOD REALLY LIKE?

Speaking for myself:

I have no strong preference in this matter. I don't really care whether the Church government is strong-central or congregational; I don't really care whether the ministry is a group of people God has appointed to leadership positions or whether there is no such thing as an "ordained ministry". Whatever the answers are to these questions, it does not change anything in my life. It doesn't make me richer or poorer; it doesn't give me more power or less power; it doesn't give me more prestige or less prestige. OTHER PEOPLE might perhaps feel obligated to think of me as more important if there is a recognized ordained ministry, than if there were no such group of people; but what other people think in this regard is not something that I have instilled in them. And what other people think doesn't really change my life for better or for worse.

The only thing I am concerned about with this question is: WHAT DOES GOD ACTUALLY WANT US TO DO IN THIS REGARD?

In the past I have taken the "strong central government" approach for granted, and I personally have no problems with it. On the other hand, while I in the past have never really considered it as a viable alternative, I have no objections at all to congregational leadership, IF God really wants His Church to have congregational leadership. If that is what God wants, then I have no argument with that. And if God wants His Church to have strong central government, then I have no arguments with that either.

I mention these things at the start because I am NOT setting out "to make a case" for the one option or the other! I have no ulterior motive and I have nothing to gain by the things I will present in this article. All I am interested in is fulfilling what the Apostle John explained in 1 John 3:22, that we should aim TO DO THOSE THINGS THAT ARE PLEASING IN GOD'S SIGHT! It is my intention to NOT impose "MY WILL" on the Word of God.

So I will try to examine everything from the perspective of: what does this tell me about the mind of God? WHAT does God want and WHY does He want that? What principles can I draw from these Scriptures?

One more thing:

Just because some people start out trying to prove their own ideas true, this does not mean that what they present is necessarily wrong. The answer they present could actually be right, even when they started out with a positive bias towards the right answer. So, while we should take note of the bias people may have in presenting their case, such bias does not automatically mean that their solution "MUST BE WRONG". If it is wrong, there should be valid reasons for why it is wrong.

MR. ARMSTRONG'S 1939 ARTICLE

1) As a matter of principle I feel that this appeal to something Mr. Armstrong wrote about 47 years before his own death is rather unfair!

While Mr. Armstrong had at that point been studying the Bible for about 12 years or so, he was comparatively still "a babe in the truth of God". Look, the man had no one available who could sit down with him and answer all of his questions. He had to search them out labouriously and in a very time-consuming manner. Further, in many cases it took a long time for Mr. Armstrong just to think of the right questions to ask.

By contrast: we who came into the Church and attended Ambassador College in the 50's, 60's, 70's or 80's had the opportunity to IMMEDIATELY study scores of booklets, spelling out all of the things Mr. Armstrong had learned over a long period of time. We had ready access to people who could answer the questions that came up in our minds. Oh certainly, perhaps not EVERY single one of our questions was answered in a satisfactory way; but by and large we quickly received answers to our questions. A very common comment back in the 60's went like this: "I had a lot of questions I wanted to ask you, but then the next issue of the PLAIN TRUTH arrived, and all my questions were answered."

If you came into the Church in the 50's or later, then there is no comparison between the amount of biblical knowledge and understanding that was available to you within your first ten years in the Church, and what Mr. Armstrong was able to learn in his first ten years in the Church. You had access to FAR more knowledge and understanding! As soon as Mr. Armstrong increased in understanding in some area, he would share this with the whole Church.

Look at it this way: Isaac Newton (born 1642, died 1727), the English mathematician and physicist, is considered to be one of the greatest scientists in history. He made important discoveries in many fields of science. Isaac Newton was one of the inventors of the branch of mathematics called calculus, and he also solved mysteries of light and optics, formulated three laws of motion, and derived from them the law of universal gravitation. He was a PHENOMENAL scientist by any standard, YET the things he discovered are TODAY BEING TAUGHT TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS! The fact that today high school students are being taught the things which Isaac Newton required his whole life to learn, does not in any way detract from his stature as a brilliant scientist. We just need to acknowledge that today high school and college students have access to so much more knowledge and information than Isaac Newton ever had access to.

So the point is this: to appeal to what Mr. Armstrong wrote in 1939 is like quoting a sermonette you gave during your fourth year at Ambassador College, while you were a Senior. Now, twenty or more years later, you don't really want people to quote what you said back then. Yes, you were sincere in what you had said, but you have learned so much more since then. Back then you had only been baptized for three or four years. You were still wet behind the ears back then, so to speak.

People who appeal to that sermonette in your Senior year at AC are not allowing for you to have GROWN in knowledge and in understanding since then. The same applies to Mr. Armstrong.

2) An appeal to "what Mr. Armstrong said or taught" is NEVER proof that something is right! Mr. Armstrong saying something or teaching something doesn't make it right! Something is correct BECAUSE it is correct, and not "because Mr. Armstrong said so".

As far as I am concerned, attaching Mr. Armstrong's name is NEVER proof that something is correct. You FIRST need to prove that something is correct, and THEN you can show that Mr. Armstrong taught the same thing which you have already proved as being correct.

3) The very people who are appealing to what Mr. Armstrong wrote in 1939 are also DISCREDITING what Mr. Armstrong wrote later in his life. So by rejecting what Mr. Armstrong wrote later, in the 70's and in the 80's, they are being very selective in which of Mr. Armstrong's teachings they go along with.

It should also be quite clear that at the time of his own death Mr. Armstrong himself would not have accepted his 1939 article as valid. The things he wrote in the early 80's make this quite clear.

4) It should be equally clear that Mr. Armstrong's own comments on this subject of Church government were biased and agenda-driven. And I mean BOTH, in 1939 and also from the 1950's to the 1980's before his death.

In 1939 Mr. Armstrong was basically running a "one-man-show". He was outside of the CoG 7th Day organization. He wrote his article with the bias that he was going to prove that what Andrew Dugger was doing in the CoG 7th Day was wrong. Mr. Armstrong was NOT writing the article from the point of view of "which form of organization is right"! In the whole article he actually does not propose any right form of organization! Rather, the whole 1939 article is written from the point of view of trying to prove that the "Bible government", as viewed by Dugger and Dodd was wrong.

The fact that his article is NOT POSITIVE (i.e. it does not at any stage present what IS the right option), but is ONLY NEGATIVE (i.e. it only makes a case for trying to prove that what was being done in another organization was wrong), reveals Mr. Armstrong's bias in writing the article. He was simply trying to prove someone else wrong, without presenting any alternative type of organization that would have been the right way to organize instead.

The whole article is clearly written from the perspective of a "one-man-show" which did not require any major form of organization. The 30% growth per year was not yet making a significant impact. And so the "one man" was in charge of everything; so why all this talk about "Bible government"?

From the 1950's onwards the picture changed very dramatically. By then the 30% growth per year was VERY noticeable. Ambassador College had been established in Pasadena and there were very many responses to the broadcast.

IT BECAME IMPERATIVE TO HAVE SOME FORM OF ORGANIZATION!

It should be clear that by the 1950's Mr. Armstrong's perspective had changed very dramatically from 1939. By then Mr. Armstrong had selected a location for his "headquarters" ... i.e. Pasadena. He also received many responses to his broadcast from all over the continental United States, not to mention from elsewhere. So there was simply no way that Mr. Armstrong could avoid facing the fact that SOME form of Church government was needed, if he was going to continue doing the work he was doing.

So again Mr. Armstrong approached this question with a bias. He had ALREADY DECIDED, back in 1947, that Pasadena was going to be his "headquarters". It should be CLEAR that when someone has already established, at great sacrifice(!), a headquarters site and THEN examines the question of which form of government to use, then OBVIOUSLY he is going to be biased towards a form that will REQUIRE a "headquarters".

So if we are going to examine this question openly and honestly, then we need to realize that with both options which Mr. Armstrong taught (i.e. the 1939 version, and the 1950's and later version) there was an element of bias and vested interest in the outcome involved. This fact does not of itself make either option wrong; but the bias needs to be faced and acknowledged. And we should also understand that the bias in BOTH cases COULD easily have resulted in an unbalanced presentation of the subject; you

know, looking for Scriptures to support an already-reached conclusion, while omitting or overlooking those things that are not compatible with the desired conclusion. After all, this is what happens in other religions all the time; they refuse to face the facts about the Sabbath and the Holy Days, etc..

Later I want to look at some of the things Mr. Armstrong presented in the 1939 article. But for now let's move on to another point.

A MATTER OF LOGIC

There are MANY things that are said in the Bible. In fact, the Bible says many THOUSANDS of things in the 31175 verses in the Bible.

But it is equally true to say that there are MULTIPLE MILLIONS of things which are NOT SAID IN THE BIBLE!

That is really self-evident, though you wouldn't say so when you see the endless arguments people present in trying to prove their own points, when they make a statement like:

"Well, the Bible NOWHERE says ..."!

Question: So exactly what does a statement like: "THE BIBLE NOWHERE SAYS ..." prove?

Answer: IT PROVES NOTHING AT ALL!

As far as biblical truth is concerned, you can NEVER really prove anything from omission! Just because something is not mentioned, that does not prove that it doesn't exist, or that it isn't true. Obviously, there are MILLIONS of things which are TRUE that the Bible does not mention; and there are also MILLIONS of things which are FALSE OR WRONG that are not mentioned in the Bible.

So yes, you can build what appears to be a strong case by referring to something that is OBVIOUSLY wrong and saying: "The Bible nowhere says that ... (this wrong thing is right)". You will already have proved in other ways that this "obvious wrong" is not right. So in this case your "the Bible nowhere says ..." argument can appear to be pretty strong and convincing.

But when you apply this "the Bible nowhere says ..." argument to a matter that is debatable, something that has not yet been proved at all, then you are doing nothing more than REVEALING YOUR OWN BIAS and presenting completely unsound reasoning!

Your reasoning implies the following jump:

SINCE THE BIBLE NOWHERE SAYS ... THEREFORE ... (THIS THING) MUST BE WRONG OR NOT TRUE!

Please understand that there is A VAST DIFFERENCE between something "not being said" on the one hand, and something "being wrong" on the other hand.

[Comment: The reverse is obviously equally true. Simply because "the Bible nowhere speaks against ..." does not mean that something is therefore right before God.]

Understand that it is always illogical to reason from omission ... to reason from something that ISN'T said!

And obviously, people have used this illogical reasoning both ways. People will say: "the Bible nowhere says that what you want is okay ... so therefore it must be wrong". At other times they will reason: "the Bible nowhere says that what I want to do is wrong ... so therefore it must be okay".

"THE BIBLE NOWHERE SAYS ..." IS ALWAYS A BIASED ARGUMENT! The deceptive part is that it appears to be "a factual statement"; after all, IT IS A FACT that the Bible nowhere says ... , isn't it? Yes, it is indeed a fact; but that fact is of no consequence at all, in view of the MILLIONS of other things that are also not said in the Bible.

Logic demands that we prove our beliefs and our practices from what IS said in the Bible, and not from what ISN'T said! However, I have already mentioned that there are also millions of things which are right and true, which are also not mentioned in the Bible.

So this brings us to the next point.

THE NEED FOR CORRECTLY DISCERNING RIGHT PRINCIPLES

It is quite clear that the Bible simply could not mention everything that is right or wrong. That is what human law books try to do; and they always fall short. The Apostle John concluded his gospel with this verse:

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.
Amen. (John 21:25)

Yet God's revelation to mankind for this present age is complete; there are 22 books in the Old Testament (the Jewish way of counting the O.T. books) and 27 books in the New Testament, 49 books in all. Those 49 books contain everything we need to know in order to live as God wants us to live.

So what about the things that are right and the things that are wrong, which are NOT mentioned in the Bible ... the things where people like to use the "the Bible nowhere says"-type of argument?

That's where correctly understanding and applying THE PRINCIPLES which God reveals in His Word enter the picture! Mr. Armstrong understood this quite well very early in his Christian life. Remember the matter of smoking? Mr. Armstrong realized that the Bible does not say: "You shall not smoke". So he didn't look for that statement. Instead, he looked at THE PRINCIPLES which the Bible reveals when dealing with other questions; and he correctly applied those same principles to the question of smoking.

Here is a simple guideline for discerning the difference between an honest and sincere desire to seek a correct understanding of the mind of God, and a biased, agenda-driven approach to biblical research.

"THE HONEST DESIRE TO SEEK THE MIND OF GOD" APPROACH: Let's see now, the Bible doesn't really make any specific, direct statements about this particular topic I am examining. How then can I know what God would LIKE me to do? Are there any passages which reveal THE PRINCIPLES that God would apply to this question?

"THE BIASED AGENDA-DRIVEN" APPROACH TO BIBLICAL RESEARCH: The subject I am interested in is not discussed in great detail in the Bible. And since "the Bible NOWHERE says" that I

cannot do what I want to do, therefore it is clear that God approves of what I want to do. Further, since "the Bible NOWHERE says" that what you want to do is right, therefore what you want to do must obviously be wrong.

The first approach genuinely seeks to understand the mind of God. The second approach is only interested in obtaining God's approval for a preconceived belief or desire, or else in rejecting what does not agree with one's own ideas and wishes.

To really understand God's will, we simply MUST look for sound principles to apply in the absence of clear and definitive statements. God expects us to understand and to apply right principles. That is part of our character development process. If we are not learning to wisely apply the right principles in our lives, then we are simply not developing godly character. God is not looking for a bunch of robots, which respond to nothing other than specific "DO" and "DON'T" statements. It is OUR MINDS which are supposed to be developed by our faithful obedience to God.

The "the Bible nowhere says ..." approach effectively eliminates the mind from any involvement in the decision-making process. It is one of the most effective approaches used in giving people permission to do the things they want to do, and to believe the things they want to believe. YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND THIS!

I hope you can understand that the "the Bible nowhere says ..." type of reasoning can NEVER prove a contentious or controversial issue. I have explained this at some length, because it is used fairly often in the debate about Church government. And yes, even Mr. Armstrong himself used this type of reasoning at times. Mr. Armstrong's use of this approach doesn't somehow make it more logical.

So be on your guard whenever you are confronted by this sort of argument. It is never acceptable as real proof for anything. Once something has ALREADY been proved ... THEN a supplementary statement with something like "furthermore the Bible nowhere says ..." is fine. But it is not "proof" by itself!

THE REAL ISSUE IN THIS DEBATE IS POWER!

The point we need to openly acknowledge is that this is a question about POWER! It is about WHO will have that power! The very word "GOVERNMENT" implies power. Somebody has to have the power to make decisions and to uphold standards, to "govern".

The different ideas about "church government" are simply different ideas about exactly WHERE OR WITH WHOM that power should reside. Most people agree that there must be SOME form of government. Without some form of government there will only be chaos and confusion, like in Israel at one time.

In those days [there was] no king in Israel: EVERY MAN DID [THAT WHICH WAS] RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES. (Judges 21:25)

Without government you have anarchy, everyone doing what they themselves decide is right. This is equally true for God's Church as it is for secular societies.

Now "government" by definition requires submission. Without submission government cannot function. Whether they attempt to obtain it by force (dictatorships, police states, etc.), by appealing to customs and traditions (monarchies, tribal chieftains, etc.) or by appeals to reason and popularity (democracies), one thing those who are in positions of power know: they MUST obtain submission! Without submission everything breaks down.

Those who desire a strong central government for the Church really want THE POWER concentrated in the hands of one leader, or perhaps in the hands of a very few leaders. Those who advocate congregational leadership want THE POWER to reside, at least NOMINALLY, in the hands of the entire membership.

We are going to examine this question HONESTLY, right? We are not going to put up facades, right?

So let's face the fact that you NEVER have a situation where THE POWER will remain with everybody! In a congregational-leadership situation the power always ends up in the hands of a few leaders.

Think about this statement:

If EVERYBODY is a leader, then in reality NOBODY is a leader!

The point is this: you can only be a leader if other people will submit to your leadership. This means that they are then THE FOLLOWERS and therefore they are not the leaders. You are the leader. There is a lesson in Judges 21:25; there EVERYBODY was a leader, and the result was chaos!

Don't be deceived!

People who have or are given the right to vote or to cast a ballot or a lot DO NOT HAVE ANY POWER! The power resides in the hands of those who are voted into office, and NOT in the hands of those who did the voting! Do you understand this? The person who is voted into office has the REAL power, not the person who did the voting. The person who voted or cast the ballot has NO POWER AT ALL! Making a cross or a tick on some piece of paper is not the same as having power! If you for one moment think that because you have the right to cast your vote once every year, or every four years or however frequently, that THEREFORE you have real power, then you are WOEFULLY DECEIVED!

There is only one "power" that voting or balloting bestows on you. Do you know what it is? It is "the power" to make the minutest fraction of 1% of the choice as to exactly whose leadership you will SUBMIT to for the next one or more years! The very concept of voting implies that YOU AGREE TO SUBMIT your power to the will of other people; it is only the majority vote that decides who will be in the positions of power. And even if you voted for the people who are then elected, all you did is agree to surrender your power to other people who will make many decisions that will influence your life. THEY have the power, and YOU have the knowledge that you either assisted them in getting into the positions of power or else your opposition to them was overruled by the votes of other people.

The above two paragraphs are meant to be an open and realistic assessment of what voting and balloting actually achieves ... which is a transfer of power to a selected few individuals. It is only intended to be a criticism of the whole voting system in as far as people are deceived into believing that voting gives them something which it doesn't really give them at all! Voting does NOT give you power; it only gives you the opportunity to formally submit to the power of other people, and to an extremely minute degree you can have some input into actually choosing those people to whom you will submit.

So we need to recognize that the power to rule is always exercised by a very few people. It is never that "EVERYBODY" rules. In a strong central government within the Church that power is exercised by a few people at headquarters over the whole Church; in the congregational-type of leadership that power is also exercised by only a few people, but in this case by a few people within each individual congregation. But you cannot get away from the fact that "government" involves the few ruling over the many. "Leadership" implies that others are "followers".

So let's acknowledge that POWER is the real issue in this discussion about Church government.

THE MISUSE OF POWER

Every form of governing involves the exercise of power. And when power is conferred upon people in order to enable them to govern wisely, then there is always THE POSSIBILITY that this power could be misused.

When God sent Satan to this earth to be in charge over one third of the angels, God gave them the commission to prepare this earth for human habitation. To do this job, God conferred a great deal of power upon Satan. Satan misused that power! And destruction was the result.

We understand that Satan is the "god" of this present age (2 Corinthians 4:4). And so it should not surprise us that Satan has seen to it that with EVERY form of government that has been tried out by human beings over the past nearly 6000 years, we can find examples of THE MISUSE OF POWER!

So understand this:

Just because we can find examples of the misuse of power in a form of government, that does not mean that that form of government should therefore be rejected as wrong.

Specifically:

Power can be misused when you have a strong central government. But that does not prove that therefore a strong central government structure is inherently wrong. Power can also be misused in a democracy, and there are many examples that illustrate this as well. But that does not mean that therefore the democratic form of government is inherently wrong. Monarchs have also at times misused their power. Even when "checks-and-balances" are built into a system of government, that still does not guarantee that power will not be misused. Power can be misused just as easily by leaders in a congregational-type of government as in a central government.

As long as a government, ANY TYPE OF GOVERNMENT, is still being administered by human beings, there is always THE POTENTIAL that power could be misused. To not misuse the powers we have access to is also part of the character-development process.

So the fact that power CAN be misused, and that power HAS BEEN misused by a particular form of government does not of itself mean that God would not want His Church to use that form of government.

While an analogy never proves anything, an analogy may at times be helpful to illustrate a point. With all of God's laws there exists THE POTENTIAL to break those laws. But in order to see that these laws are not broken God does not lock people up in small cells in solitary confinement, so they can never steal anything or tell any lies to anyone or break the Sabbath or commit adultery. God does not take away our ability to speak to ensure that we never take God's name in vain, etc.. Likewise, we don't solve the problem of the misuse of power by searching for a foolproof system which would make it utterly impossible for power to ever be misused. There is no such system in this present life.

THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD

This is where Mr. Armstrong had a major lack in his understanding. Again, I feel we need to just openly acknowledge this without beating around the bush.

As far as the Church of God is concerned, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong claimed very emphatically that the

Church of God is the only place on earth today where the "government of God" exists.

BUT MR. ARMSTRONG WAS WRONG!

The "government of God" was a major theme that Mr. Armstrong frequently focussed on and spoke about. The expression "government of God" is used 55 times in the body of Mr. Armstrong's last book "Mystery of the Ages". Here are a few quotes from that book, where the page number references refer to the hard cover edition.

God placed man here TO RESTORE THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD to the earth. (p.137)

This we know: God's purpose for them had a definite relation to preparing for the ultimate KINGDOM OF GOD--when THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD WOULD BE REESTABLISHED over all the earth, and spiritual salvation would be offered to all! (p.168)

Consider why God created mankind in the first place! God is reproducing himself through man! He is creating in man God's own perfect holy and righteous spiritual character! And that, in turn, is purposed TO RESTORE THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD over all the earth. And, further, to create billions of God beings to finish the creation of the vast unfinished universe! And, beyond that? (p.170)

The first Adam had the opportunity of taking of the tree of life, which meant God-life-- obeying God and thereby replacing Satan on the throne of the earth. Jesus came to do just that, to qualify to replace Satan on that throne and TO START THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD on the earth through those called out from Satan's world. (p.209)

What the world does not understand is that the Spirit of God was cut off from humanity as a whole UNTIL the second Adam actually removes Satan and RESTORES THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD on the earth. (p.214)

Now we remind the reader that the Holy Spirit was closed to humanity at the time of Adam's sin at the very foundation of the world. It was closed to humanity as a whole until Christ the second Adam should RESTORE THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD and unseat Satan from the throne of the earth. (p.228-229)

These quotations should suffice to show that Mr. Armstrong spoke a great deal about "the government of God".

BUT MR. ARMSTRONG WAS ONLY PARTLY CORRECT! AND HE WAS ALSO PARTLY WRONG IN HIS UNDERSTANDING!

WHAT MR. ARMSTRONG HAD RIGHT: Mr. Armstrong understood correctly that when Jesus Christ returns to this earth, He is going to establish the government of God; and all those in the first resurrection will be a part of that "government". That government will rule all of God's creation for all future eternity.

WHAT MR. ARMSTRONG HAD WRONG: Mr. Armstrong was incorrect in his claim that the government of God will be "RESTORED"! The facts are that up to this present time in history there has NEVER EVER been "a government of God" on this earth or anywhere else!

Is that a shocking statement?

THEN YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND THIS!

God will never "share" His government with anyone who is not also "God"! No angels and no mortal human beings will ever feature in the government of God. The government of God NEVER EVER makes mistakes, not even "little ones"! The government of God is a government BY GODS, not by angels and not by mortals! It is a PERFECT government!

Satan has NEVER at any time been a part of the government of God. Adam was not offered the opportunity to THEN, at that time, be a part of the government of God. Moses was not a part of the government of God, nor was Elijah or David or Peter or Paul or the Apostle John. Thus far no human being has ever been a part of the government of God!

We have misconstrued the word "government". The government in any organization does NOT include every single member of that organization; it only includes those that RULE within that organization. Those that only receive orders and do nothing but execute those orders are not a part of "the government"; they are not ruling!

For a start, the expression "the government of God" is never used in the Bible. The word "government" appears exactly 4 times in the KJV text of the Bible; in Isaiah 9:6; 9:7; 22:21 and 2 Peter 2:10.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the GOVERNMENT shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of [his] GOVERNMENT and peace [there shall be] no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

The Hebrew word in both these verses is "misrah", which comes from a primitive root meaning "TO HAVE POWER". The word "misrah" is not used anywhere else in the O.T.. These verses talk about THE POWER that will be vested in Jesus Christ! Keep in mind that when Isaiah recorded these two verses there was no such thing as a "government", in the way we today tend to view this word, anywhere ... not in Israel or in Egypt or in Babylon. Nations back then were ruled by a single individual. The point in this prophecy is that THE POWER TO RULE will rest "ON CHRIST'S SHOULDERS", as opposed to the power in worldly kingdoms resting on a human king's shoulders. The expression "upon his shoulder" makes clear that this is something referring to AN INDIVIDUAL, not to some kind of "governing body".

[Comment: The translation of these two verses is an example of the translators of the King James Version attempting to please King James himself, who had commissioned this translation. There are also a few other examples elsewhere which illustrate this tendency by the translators of the KJV.]

Similarly, Isaiah 9:7 tells us that "of the increase of Christ's POWER and of peace" there shall be no end. It is not in any way referring to some kind of "governing body" getting bigger and bigger and bigger ... for all eternity! That's absurd!

This Scripture is one example of people taking a biblical term and INTERPRETING it in terms of OUR OWN MODERN SOCIAL STRUCTURES! We know what WE mean when we use the word "government". But that is not what Isaiah meant when he used the word "misrah". The whole concept of "a government", as we think of it, was foreign to people in biblical times.

This example of reading OUR meaning of "government" into this word "misrah" is similar to reading the word "CONVERSATION" in the KJV and inferring that this is a reference to "SPEAKING", which is not true at all. In the KJV "conversation" refers to conduct and behaviour, and we today use the word to refer to a very specific and limited area of behaviour; speaking to other people. Similarly, the Hebrew word "misrah" is used twice to refer to THE POWER vested in the One who will rule, and we today are used to the concept of ruling being something that a constituted body (i.e. a government) does.

Now obviously, a ruler will delegate certain responsibilities to some of the people under him. Anciently, the closest rulers came to sharing their power was that they had "counsellors". But those counsellors and advisors didn't really form a government to rule with the king. Their positions were totally dependent on the king's favour.

God IS going to form a government, which will be inducted into office at the time of the first resurrection. It will be a perfect government and it will be in office for ever ... that is what is meant by all those in the first resurrection becoming ... "a PILLAR in the temple of my God" (Revelation 3:12). That perfect government will consist of God the Father and Jesus Christ and exactly 144000 resurrected individuals. And that government will rule over the rest of the Family of God, over the angels and over all of God's creation for ever. It will rule WITH Christ as "kings and priests".

But this government has not yet been set up! Currently God the Father and Jesus Christ rule without that government assisting them, because that government is still in the process of qualifying. The purpose of the first resurrection is to FORM the government of God. Currently God the Father and Jesus Christ GOVERN, but they do not have a government to assist them in this activity! They rule not unlike the kings of old, assisted by many counsellors and advisors (in God's case the 24 "elders" around His throne, the living creatures, Gabriel and the archangel Michael, etc.). At the first resurrection, however, a real governing body will be inducted into government positions, which Christ is currently still preparing (John 14:2). There will be exactly 144000 positions to fill in that government. Every member will have a portfolio which God the Father and Jesus Christ have decided upon.

Consider the meaning of the word "ISRAEL".

God gave this name "Israel" to Jacob because it has a very specific meaning, one that is sometimes overlooked.

And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: FOR AS A PRINCE HAST THOU POWER WITH GOD and with men, and hast prevailed. (Genesis 32:28)

God Himself defines this name here as meaning : "AS A RULER to have power with God"! Do we grasp this? WHO is going to have "power WITH God as a ruler"? Who has thus far in human history had "power with God as a ruler"? THUS FAR NOBODY!

The name "ISRAEL" refers to all those who will form the government of God with Jesus Christ. They are the ones who will have "power WITH God". Can we understand this? The definition God gave in Genesis 32:28 is a PERFECT description of all those in the first resurrection. They will form "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16), the ones to rule with Christ (Revelation 5:10). Those in the first resurrection are Abraham's seed, as far as God is concerned (Galatians 3:29). And it is, after all, GOD'S VIEW that counts in deciding who is "Israel" for all eternity, and not just for a short physical life-span.

[Comment: Many people in the Church do not realize that the vast majority of physical Israelites will not be Israelites at all for all future eternity! The only ones who will be REAL ISRAELITES (i.e. those who REALLY will have 'power with God') will be all those in the first resurrection. Can we see why that is "a

better resurrection"? God is not an eternal respecter of persons. Jacob's name was CHANGED to "Israel" because of his character! And those who will for all eternity be the twelve tribes of Israel, making up exactly 144,000, the firstborn of Almighty God, will likewise have their names CHANGED to "Israel" at the time of the first resurrection. Others will simply not be "Israel".]

So the government of God is set up when those who will have power with God "as rulers" are inducted into their offices. It will be a government that will have no end. God Himself has always ruled, but thus far never yet WITH a government! Jesus Christ will be the Head of that government as king OF kings and Lord OF Lords (under God the Father, of course). God the Father will have vested in Him the power to control that government, but that "government" itself will not be "upon his shoulder". Rather, those in that government will have inherited "ALL THINGS" WITH Christ (Revelation 21:7; Romans 8:17). What will be "upon Christ's shoulders" will be THE POWER of that government.

The government of God is one in which ONLY THOSE WHO ARE "GOD" make decisions. This is one more point why those who "have power with God" must also themselves be Gods! Any government in which individuals who are not God-beings make decisions is simply not "the government OF GOD". It is a government by those individuals.

THE CORRECT PICTURE OF "THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD"

The government of God will govern according to the law of God. Now the law of God is nothing more than an expression of the NATURE of God, the way God IS! To perfectly govern according to the law of God is only possible for those whose very nature is expressed by that law. Because the law of God is an expression of the very nature they have acquired in the resurrection, therefore it is guaranteed that those in the first resurrection will always govern according to that law.

Anyone who is not God cannot be a part of the GOVERNMENT of God. The angels are not the government of God, even though they do carry out the instructions of God. Similarly, human beings cannot be a part of the government of God, even when they do carry out God's instructions. For that matter, even the demons carry out God's instructions, and they certainly are not a part of the government of God. The government of God is not something an individual can be made a part of and then later be removed from! The government of God is PERMANENT! Once God has formed that government, it will NEVER be changed.

Exactly what is it that the "heirs of God" (Romans 8:17), who will "inherit all things" (Revelation 21:7), are going to inherit? It is not that they "get" the new universe, is it? Because the universe is not something anyone can "get". When people inherit something, they get CONTROL over that something, i.e. "power" over that something. So likewise, the heirs of God are going to receive CONTROL ... POWER ... AUTHORITY over all things; they will RULE over all things. And that is precisely what the government of God will do, control all things.

To inherit all things means to become a part of the government of God! But true Christians are only "heirs" and not yet inheritors. Therefore true Christians are also NOT YET a part of the government of God. We are only in training to become a part of that government. If we are faithful, then God will in the future MAKE us rulers, induct us into His government.

His lord said unto him, Well done, [thou] good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I WILL MAKE THEE RULER OVER MANY THINGS: ENTER THOU into the joy of thy lord. (Matthew 25:21)

Until we are "made rulers" we are not a part of the government of God!

MR. ARMSTRONG'S MISTAKEN REASONING

Briefly, Mr. Armstrong ASSUMED that when God sent Satan to this Earth with one third of the angels, that this was so that Satan would establish "the government of God" on this Earth. But that was not God's intention at all!

Mr. Armstrong's idea, without ever being stated in so many words, was based on the concept of a colonizing power. For example, the government of Great Britain was extended every time a new colony was annexed and a Governor-General was appointed. Likewise, Mr. Armstrong reasoned, the government of God was extended when "a colony of spirit beings under the leadership of Satan" was sent to this Earth.

But that analogy doesn't hold true. God's rule over all of His creation is not dependent on spirit beings being present on any given planet in this whole universe. God "governs" all things on His own at this point in time. He controls it all!

God was not establishing "a government" through Satan. Satan and the angels were sent to this Earth in order to be TRAINED and TESTED, to see if they could be used as "guardian angels" for the mortal human beings that God would create in His own image in the next phase of His plan. Specifically, their training consisted of preparing this Earth for human habitation.

God gave Satan and his angels specific instructions, as well as the abilities to carry out those instructions. But they were beings with free moral agency. They had free wills. And the law of God was not their nature. Therefore it was not guaranteed that they would always "govern" as God would govern.

Satan was supposed to carry out God's instructions as a servant, or "ministering spirit" (Hebrews 1:14). "Servants" are not a part of THE GOVERNMENT of God. Notice how Jesus Christ explained the difference between "servants" and "friends" ...

Henceforth I CALL YOU NOT SERVANTS; FOR THE SERVANT KNOWETH NOT WHAT HIS LORD DOETH: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. (John 15:15)

"Servants" don't have the same MIND as their master. Now Christ came to reveal the Father.

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and [HE] TO WHOMSOEVER THE SON WILL REVEAL [HIM]. (Matthew 11:27)

This was to enable us to understand the mind of the Father, at least to a small degree. That is the starting point. But before someone can become a part of the government of God another step is needed. That individual also has to receive the very nature of God, to become God.

Mr. Armstrong thought that with Satan's rebellion the government of God was removed from this Earth. That's not correct. God ALLOWED destruction to take place, but God was always in full control! Likewise, at present, Mr. Armstrong said, the government of God is not found anywhere on Earth except in the Church of God. That is also not correct. God is still in full control of everything on this Earth, down to the level of every living creature and even every single HAIR that falls to the ground!

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (Matthew 10:29-30)

In fact, God is in SUPREME control and absolutely NOTHING ever escapes His awareness and control. But the "government" that God is going to establish has not yet been formed. Currently God is ruling like a king without a government assisting Him. But the time for that government of God is not far off now.

OTHER VERSES WITH "GOVERNMENT"

Earlier I mentioned that the word "government" appears four times in the KJV. We've looked at only two of those places. Let's now see the other two verses.

And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit THY GOVERNMENT into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. (Isaiah 22:21)

The Hebrew word used here is "memshalah". It is used 17 times in the O.T. and only here is it translated "government". It is usually translated as "DOMINION", which is derived from the Latin word "dominus", meaning "lord". So "dominion" means "supreme authority", "sovereignty", etc.. And that is what "memshalah" means.

It should be clear that this verse is also not a reference to a "government" as such. It is speaking about someone whose "dominion" or "supreme rule" over an area is going to be transferred to someone else.

The fourth verse is in the New Testament.

But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise GOVERNMENT. Presumptuous [are they], selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. (2 Peter 2:10)

The Greek word used here is "kuriotes", which is a derivative of the Greek word "kurios", which means "lord". "Kuriotes" is used only four times in the N.T. and is translated in the other three verses as follows:

- in Ephesians 1:21 as "dominion"

- in Colossians 1:16 as "dominions"

- in Jude 1:8 as "dominion".

The Greek word "kuriotes" basically means the same as the Hebrew word "memshalah". "Kuriotes" also refers to "dominion" or "supreme rule". Peter tells us that these presumptuous people despise rulership. This is common in our present age, in which rulers are constantly criticized and ridiculed in magazines and in newspapers.

The plural "governments" also appears once in the Bible. It is in 1 Corinthians 12:28. There the Greek word is "kubernesis", from the verb "kubernao" which means "to guide". A similar noun, from the same root, "kubernetes", is used twice in the N.T. to refer to a pilot or helmsman of a ship (Acts 27:11; Revelation 18:17). Here is the verse with "kubernesis":

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after

that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, GOVERNMENTS, diversities of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:28)

Paul wasn't trying to make the statement here that ... "God has set GOVERNMENT in the Church". He was simply enumerating different functions that are being fulfilled. The word "kubernesis" is not translated as "governments" in any of the newer translations; the word would be better translated here as "advisors, counsel, guides", etc..

[Comment: This is another example of the KJV translators trying to present something that would be acceptable to King James himself. Later we'll come back to this verse.]

We have now looked at all four Scriptures where the word "government" is used in the KJV, as well as the one time where the plural "governments" appears. In none of these verses is it speaking about a "government" as we today think of it! Thus, not only is the expression "the government of God" never used in the Bible; but even the word "government" itself is never used. In all five places it is really a mistranslation, being more accurately rendered as "dominion" or "power" or "rule" or "guide".

While the WORD "government" is not directly used in the Bible, the government of God is certainly inherently implied in the word "Israel", and it is described to some degree in the book of Revelation.

However, Revelation makes very clear that "the government of God" is something that is still future. Currently God certainly "governs" His whole creation, but He has no "government" to assist in this task. But in the future He WILL have a "government" in place. And that government will be in office for ever! It will be made up of resurrected sons and daughters of God, under the leadership of Jesus Christ, who in turn will be in submission to the Father. All those in the first resurrection, and only those, will be in that government.

This subject of "the government of God" is explained in more detail in my other article entitled "Understanding The Government of God" and the companion article entitled "Understanding The Mind of God", both of which I wrote almost two years ago. So the material is to some extent dated. Please read those articles for a further discussion of this subject.

As far as our discussion of "Church government" is concerned, we should note the following:

Whichever form of Church government is adopted, it will have NOTHING to do with "the government of God"! "The government of God" doesn't really enter the picture one way or the other! It follows that it is not an appeal to "the government of God" that somehow makes the one form acceptable and the other form unacceptable. Church government is simply not the same as "the government of God" and it never has been!

It is incorrect and biblically indefensible to claim that any given decision by the human leadership of the Church is an expression of "the government of God". Rather, God sees to it that His purposes are achieved independent of whether human beings in leadership positions make right decisions or wrong ones; that's how great the power of God is! The most extreme example to illustrate this point is Satan's rebellion. Nobody would claim that Satan's rebellion against God was an expression of the government of God, but that rebellion is something God has USED (!) towards achieving His purposes. If God's plan can continue to be fulfilled in spite of the magnitude of Satan's rebellion, then God's plan can certainly also be fulfilled in spite of human beings making decisions CONTRARY TO how God Himself would "govern".

Now let's take a closer look at Mr. Armstrong's article, written in 1939 and entitled "Did Christ Reorganize

the Church?".

SOME COMMENTS ON THE 1939 ARTICLE

Anyone who has read several of my articles knows that I respect Mr. Armstrong. Yet I have not hesitated to express my disagreements with the things Mr. Armstrong taught in areas where I feel Mr. Armstrong was not correct. Such disagreements with a few of the things Mr. Armstrong taught have not diminished my respect for the man in any way.

Now we come to this article Mr. Armstrong wrote in 1939, 47 years before his death. From the things Mr. Armstrong wrote and taught in the 70's and in the 80's it is quite clear that he himself strongly disagreed with the things he had written in 1939! And so when I now point out the errors in the 1939 article, I am in effect criticizing things that Mr. Armstrong himself also rejected for the last 30 years or so of his life.

So let me state my point up front, and then I will explain:

THE 1939 ARTICLE IS SPIRITUALLY EXTREMELY SHALLOW, BIASED AND LACKING IN LOGIC!

As I mentioned earlier, this 1939 article is spiritually very much like a sermonette or a speech some of us might have given while we were still students at Ambassador College. It lacks discernment and depth of understanding. And it reveals a very clear bias, a hallmark for very many of the serious speeches that were given in Ambassador College during the 50's, 60's and 70's.

Here are a number of points to notice about that article:

- 1) The CoG 7th Day, under Dugger and Dodd, had introduced a form of organization for the Church which they claimed was "God's true Bible form of Church government". It was structured into "the 12, the 70, and the 7".
- 2) Mr. Armstrong's very plain and clear purpose in that article was to oppose this form of organization that Dugger and Dodd had brought about.
- 3) There is absolutely NOTHING positive about the article! Its sole purpose is to prove wrong what other people were doing. Apart from the brief, one-sentence statement that ... "All authority and power to rule is limited solely to each LOCAL congregation", Mr. Armstrong NOWHERE IN THE ARTICLE explains how that "authority and power" within each local congregation SHOULD be exercised!

However, Mr. Armstrong's reference to "authority and power" within a local congregation is an admission that THERE MUST BE GOVERNMENT!

- 4) It is easy to prove that Andrew Dugger's organization of "the 12, the 70, and the 7" is not at all a biblically enjoined form of government for the Church. So it was EASY for Mr. Armstrong to show such a system as being wrong.

However, proving Dugger's system wrong does NOT prove that therefore there should be no government in the Church! It only proves that there is no biblical support for Dugger's system.

- 5) Mr. Armstrong's attack in this article is clearly focussed on "BOARDS"! He repeatedly argues by omission ... stating that because there is no evidence of any "boards" in the New Testament, THEREFORE a system involving "boards" is wrong.

This displays a clear lack of logic! Simply because something is not mentioned in the Bible, that does not prove that the thing not mentioned is therefore wrong. There is a vast difference between "not being mentioned" and "being wrong".

6) Mr. Armstrong's bias against any form of Church government is evident right at the outset of the article. He asks the question:

Just what is the true BIBLE form of organisation and Church government?

And then answers this question with:

So let us SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES! Let us begin at the beginning. The Church, as we know, actually BEGAN at Mount Sinai, in the days of Moses (Acts 7:38).

The bias is evident because he then limits his search to LITERAL STATEMENTS! This is shown in statements like:

"Is there any Scripture giving plain instructions ...?", etc.

In other words, Mr. Armstrong was not really looking for PRINCIPLES that illustrate Church government; he limited himself to literal statements. Yet ten years earlier he had already understood that in order to decide about smoking, he had to look for principles. But here, on this issue, he limited himself to literal statements. That reveals his bias!

7) The reasoning Mr. Armstrong presents in this article then goes as follows:

A) Only God can institute organization and Church government.

B) At Sinai God "married" Israel.

C) "IT WAS THE MARRIAGE THAT FORMED GOD'S PEOPLE INTO AN ORGANIZATION HAVING CHURCH GOVERNMENT!"

D) "That being so -- and it IS so, and none can deny it -- then it naturally follows that THE ORGANIZATION and GOVERNMENT of God's people, at least as ordained and sanctioned by the Lord, EXISTED ONLY AS LONG AS THE MARRIAGE UNION WHICH ESTABLISHED IT!"

E) "If the marriage was done away, the ORGANIZATION and the CHURCH GOVERNMENT was at the time done away! For it was only this marriage relationship which established the organization -- the kingdom -- the government, both civil and ecclesiastical!"

COMMENTS: First of all, the marriage covenant God made at Mt. Sinai has NOTHING to do with "Church government"! NOTHING AT ALL! Understand that at Sinai God did NOT give Old Testament Israel ANY form of "Church government"!

Don't be confused! The Levitical priesthood which God established was NOT a form of Church "GOVERNMENT"! Responsibilities and duties were spelled out for the priesthood, but that was not some kind of Church GOVERNMENT! The priesthood did not in any way "govern"! The duties included teaching the true doctrines, officiating at Church services, officiating for the ritualistic observances,

providing an avenue for receiving instructions from God, and pronouncing people "clean" or "unclean".

Similarly, the New Testament ministry has certain duties. These include teaching the true doctrines, officiating at Church services, anointing the sick, officiating at weddings and at funerals, being available to counsel members and help members to understand the will of God more fully. But these ministerial duties do not in themselves constitute some form of "Church government". And likewise the Levitical priesthood was not some kind of Church government, simply because the priests had a range of duties to perform.

Furthermore, while God "married" Israel at Sinai, it was only almost a year later that the Levitical priesthood was established. So much for "Church government" being established at Sinai!

IT WAS TOTALLY ILLOGICAL FOR MR. ARMSTRONG TO LINK "CHURCH GOVERNMENT" TO THE OLD COVENANT!

Church government really has nothing to do with the Old Covenant one way or the other, and the Old Covenant has nothing to do with Church government!

But let's continue with Mr. Armstrong's reasoning.

8) Having linked Church government to the Old Covenant, Mr. Armstrong has set the scene for pronouncing that Church government was DONE AWAY WITH! He reasons that if the marriage is done away with, THEN Church government is also automatically done away.

AGAIN, THIS IS ILLOGICAL REASONING!

When God "divorced" Israel, that did NOT do away with Israel's civil government! Oh yes, Israel went into national captivities, and at times the national governments were in subjection to foreign conquerors. But national governments continued apart from these sporadic interruptions.

The statement "at least as ordained and sanctioned by the Lord" is rather misleading. The types of government Israel experienced changed a number of times, even before God "divorced" Israel. Before the captivity there were Judges and Kings; after the return from captivity (for Judah) there were governors. Before the expiry of the 2520 years (i.e. before 1800 A.D.) there were monarchies (Britain, France, etc.) and a democracy (United States). So what "God has sanctioned" has not been the criterion.

There were a number of servitudes to other nations already during the time of the Judges. Also, they were in subjection to the kings of Assyria and Babylon, even before they went into total captivity. As an example, Daniel already went into Babylonian captivity in the third year of King Jehoiakim (Daniel 1:1-2), almost 20 years before the destruction of Jerusalem, one of the dates from which the 2520 years are reckoned.

When the Jews returned from Babylon, they established a government. Nehemiah was for a time the top ruler of that government.

The descendants of the ten tribes (i.e. Britain, France, the Scandinavian countries, etc.) have all had their own governments throughout much of history, certainly before 1800 A.D., the time when, according to one way of reckoning, the 2520 years came to an end. The United States had a government before 1800 A.D..

It is simply incorrect to claim that God took both, civil and ecclesiastical government, away from Israel for a period of 2520 years. Mr. Armstrong's statement ...

"Surely that ought to settle the matter! Israel was DIVORCED! This cut off the GOVERNMENT, the ORGANIZATION, from among God's people, and TURNED IT OVER TO THE GENTILES FOR 2520 LONG YEARS -- until the very present generation! Still other Scriptures PROVE it!"

... is nothing more than biased and totally devoid of any factual support! It was ridiculous to claim that government was cut off from the people of Israel until the 1930's A.D. (when Mr. Armstrong wrote this). The people of Israel were not without "organization" until the 1930's, at which stage they supposedly had "government" restored to them.

That really "ought to settle the matter!" But let's continue to examine Mr. Armstrong's reasoning.

9) Continuing from #7 above, where we had reached point "E)".

F) Mr. Armstrong then referred to the image in Daniel 2:37.

Thou, O king, [art] a king of kings: for THE GOD OF HEAVEN HATH GIVEN THEE A KINGDOM, power, and strength, and glory. (Daniel 2:37)

From this verse Mr. Armstrong REASONED as follows:

"Since God could not have established or set up a kingdom in Babylon, among the Gentile Chaldeans, the only way God could have GIVEN Nebuchadnezzar a KINGDOM was to have given OVER to him the Kingdom he already had set up -- the one set up AT SINAI!"

THAT REASONING IS FALSE!

Daniel did NOT say that God gave Nebuchadnezzar HIS (i.e. God's!) kingdom. God gave Nebuchadnezzar "A kingdom", NOT "THE" kingdom! Furthermore, "at Sinai" God had NOT "set up a kingdom"; the KINGDOM was not set up till almost 400 years later in the days of King Saul.

The kingdom that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar was that he would be the head of A WORLD EMPIRE, something Israel had never been! The story of the image in Daniel chapter 2 is about WORLD RULE, culminating in the rule of Jesus Christ. Even in the days of David and Solomon, when the kingdom of Israel was at its height, God did not offer to make Israel a world empire.

In Exodus 19:5 God had said:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: FOR ALL THE EARTH [IS] MINE: (Exodus 19:5)

Since "ALL THE EARTH" is God's, it follows that God can "GIVE" any kingdom to anyone He chooses to give that kingdom to. There are obviously more kingdoms than one on earth. And God gave "A kingdom" to Nebuchadnezzar. The claim that God gave Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom which He had (supposedly) set up at Sinai is very contrived.

IN EXACTLY "WHAT WAY" DID GOD GIVE NEBUCHADNEZZAR "SOMETHING" THAT GOD HAD ALREADY SET UP AT SINAI?

Others had at various times ruled over Israel before then. Does this mean that God had ALSO given over TO THEM something He had set up at Sinai? No, it doesn't mean that at all, that every time a foreign nation gained control over Israel (or a part of Israel, as in Nebuchadnezzar's case) it amounted to that foreign nation being given something that God had set up at Sinai.

Think about the statement Mr. Armstrong made, and what it would have to look like in practical terms.

G) Mr. Armstrong next reasoned that this meant that Church government had also been turned over to Nebuchadnezzar.

Again, this reasoning is false!

What God gave to Nebuchadnezzar has NOTHING to do with Church government. And it has nothing to do with whether Church government should be of the strong central type or the congregational type.

H) Mr. Armstrong then reasoned that Christ did not establish "any government, ecclesiastical or civil".

So what?

Does that prove that therefore Christ does not want ANY KIND OF GOVERNMENT WITHIN HIS CHURCH? Of course not!

The conclusion that you could draw from Mr. Armstrong's statement is that therefore Christ encouraged ANARCHY, since Mr. Armstrong claimed Christ wasn't "for" any type of government, civil or ecclesiastical. But that isn't really true, is it ... that Christ encouraged anarchy?!

10) Here is an example of an extremely biased statement by Mr. Armstrong. He wrote:

"But when His people Israel would not continue governing themselves according to His laws, based on this great fundamental principle, God turned authority of government over to the Gentiles, and gave them 2520 years to DEMONSTRATE, by experience, the fruitage of the Gentile ways of lust."

Just look at that statement and think about it!

Mr. Armstrong, in effect, said: BECAUSE Israel disobeyed God's laws, THEREFORE God took government from them in order to prove (i.e. demonstrate) just how perverse the nations would be if THEY were given half a chance to govern.

For Israel it is that they would not continue to govern themselves according to God's laws. But for the Gentiles it was supposedly a foregone conclusion that they would govern by "the Gentile ways of lust". "LUST" is not something limited to "Gentiles"; it is not a Gentile attribute any more (or any less!) than it is an Israelite attribute. Recall Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. Mr. Armstrong's racial bias is pretty obvious in this statement! "Lust" is a HUMAN problem, not a "Gentile" problem.

Furthermore, it really doesn't make sense to claim that God, in effect, said: BECAUSE you, Israel, have disobeyed Me, THEREFORE I am going to give government (didn't the Gentile nations "HAVE" government before that time??) to the Gentiles, who I know will disobey Me even more ... to PROVE just

how perverse the Gentiles would be (i.e. their lustful ways!).

While acknowledging some fault with Israel, Mr. Armstrong is in the same breath and in the same sentence EXONERATING ISRAEL, by finding MUCH MORE FAULT WITH THE GENTILES ... and they hadn't even had a chance to do anything yet, one way or the other.

It was ISRAEL who had disobeyed God, but it is THE GENTILES who are made to look bad in Mr. Armstrong's statement! That reasoning was plain perverse!

It didn't seem to dawn on Mr. Armstrong that he was actually imputing A NEGATIVE MOTIVE TO GOD, as if God was DETERMINED to prove that the Gentiles wouldn't be any more obedient than the Israelites. Talk about prejudice and a bias!

Furthermore, at Sinai God gave Israel A GREAT DEAL OF INSTRUCTION. And God SPELLED OUT what He expected from Israel. And the whole nation witnessed those events. So IF God was (supposedly) giving over to Nebuchadnezzar something He had established with Israel back at Sinai, then God was really giving the Gentiles an extremely unfair deal ... they didn't get a fiftieth of the witness of the power of God that THE WHOLE NATION of Israel had witnessed, yet God was (supposedly) going to "demonstrate" the Gentile ways of lust. Talk about imputing wrong motives to God!

I'll tell you one thing: there were DOZENS of students at Ambassador College in the 60's who gave exactly the same kind of dumb speeches, with the same kind of dumb reasoning! So put the 1939 article down to nothing more, SPIRITUALLY speaking, than a speech assignment given by an undergraduate college student, who still had a great deal to learn!

Like I said earlier, I am going to tell it like it is. And no hidden agenda!

And yes, Mr. Armstrong DID learn a great deal more after 1939, didn't he? He himself didn't ever drag out his old 1939 article during the 70's and 80's, to try and make a point. No, by then Mr. Armstrong had THOROUGHLY rejected the things he had said in 1939.

You should be able to see WHY he had rejected the ideas in his 1939 article. They were biased and biblically unsound!

11) Let's look at another statement which is biblically incorrect. In speaking about the twelve apostles, Mr. Armstrong wrote:

"The only power and authority Jesus ever gave even His original twelve was to heal the sick, and cast out demons."

THAT STATEMENT IS ALSO NOT CORRECT!

The statement is made from the motivation of trying to prove that congregational government is the only kind which is endorsed by the New Testament. It does not represent an objective assessment.

So let's examine a few statements in the New Testament.

At the conclusion of the gospel of Matthew Christ said:

Go ye therefore, and teach ALL NATIONS, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Now consider this:

Here Jesus Christ was very clearly giving "His original twelve" the instruction to go and teach ALL NATIONS! Now IF they were to teach the truth of God to all nations, then OBVIOUSLY they needed to have authority to preach beyond the confines of the local Jerusalem congregation of the Church of God. Since THEIR COMMISSION went beyond the confines of one single congregation, therefore their authority also automatically had to go beyond the confines of that one congregation. It was inevitable that they would have authority over every single congregation which they would establish. Can we understand this?

Now let's notice what Christ had said earlier to the Apostle Peter:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and WHATSOEVER THOU SHALT BIND on earth shall be bound in heaven: and WHATSOEVER THOU SHALT LOOSE on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:18-19)

Later I will look at these verses more closely. But for now it should be obvious that here Jesus Christ was conferring the authority to make BINDING DECISIONS. It has nothing to do with "healing the sick" or with "casting out demons".

So once again one of Mr. Armstrong's claims is proved to be incorrect!

12) Let's look at another statement Mr. Armstrong made. He wrote:

"The AUTHORITY -- the GOVERNMENT -- the RULERSHIP -- was turned over to the Gentiles for 2520 years -- until Christ RESTORES the kingdom at his Second Coming!"

There are several things wrong with this statement. First of all, Mr. Armstrong lumps two incompatible things together! The 2520 years do NOT finish at the second coming of Christ! Already more than 2520 years have passed since Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem; in fact, even the destruction of Babylon itself occurred more than 2520 years ago.

So notice the flaws in Mr. Armstrong's biased reasoning:

A) He argues that government is turned over to the Gentiles for 2520 years.

B) He claims that this period started with Nebuchadnezzar.

C) He claims this period concludes with Christ's return.

But the fact is that the 2520 years have NOTHING to do with Christ's second coming; and there is no way to link Nebuchadnezzar and the second coming of Christ by 2520 years, even if in 1939 there theoretically existed such a possibility! Today, in 1996, that is no longer a possibility.

Next, EXACTLY WHAT DO YOU MEAN ... "government was turned over to the Gentiles for 2520

years"? Did they not govern themselves before? Did they rule over Israel for 2520 years? Were Britain and France and Switzerland and Belgium and the USA and the Scandinavian countries "GOVERNED" by Babylon for 2520 years ... and did they then attain independence from Babylon when those 2520 years expired? Exactly what is that statement "government was turned over to the Gentiles for 2520 years" supposed to mean? WHAT was supposedly "turned over" to the Gentiles? Or is this just some vague, nebulous, nondescript, generic expression for which we are not supposed to find a specific meaning?

THIS ALL BY ITSELF CLEARLY ILLUSTRATES MR. ARMSTRONG'S CONFUSED THINKING IN THIS 1939 ARTICLE!

In his own mind Mr. Armstrong wanted to believe that at the time of the Babylonian empire all authority and all government was taken away from Israel (at that time it was already only Judah, rather than 'all Israel!'). The only way he could justify that was to apply the 2520 years concept to this idea. But 2520 years after the fall of Jerusalem takes us to approximately 1935 A.D., or roughly the start of World War II. Put another way, Mr. Armstrong was writing that very article very close to 2520 years after the fall of Jerusalem. But he also wanted to believe that government, including Church government, would only be restored at the second coming of Christ. But Christ's return is certainly MORE than 2520 years after the fall of Jerusalem.

However you try to put it, Mr. Armstrong's reasoning required the indiscriminate linking of things that really are not connected.

13) Another wrong statement by Mr. Armstrong is in assessing the quotation from the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Mr. Armstrong wrote:

"Thus it was CONSTANTINE -- the "BEAST" -- who injected and introduced into the Church the idea of a BOARD to decide doctrine, and to rule."

Here Mr. Armstrong indiscriminately mixes up churches! What Constantine injected into the FALSE church really has nothing to do with the question of government in the true Church of God. Who cares how the false church is organized? Constantine did not inject this idea into the TRUE Church of God. The true Church of God did not, as a result of Constantine's actions, start to summon "church councils".

Mr. Armstrong's quote from the Britannica has nothing to do with government in God's true Church one way or the other. It is purely a matter of "stacking the deck" against central government. As I mentioned at the start, most people have a vested interest in the outcome to this question, and they will bring up every flimsy and far-fetched argument they can think of in order to support their ideas. That's what Mr. Armstrong was doing in this article. His reasoning was shallow and unbiblical!

14) Mr. Armstrong continued in the article to draw more and more biased and unfounded conclusions. For example, he next said:

"And thus the very PRINCIPLE of CHURCH GOVERNMENT becomes THE IMAGE TO THE BEAST! The whole thing is FALSE!"

That is simply not true! But it is "name calling" and implies "guilt by association"!

There is absolutely nothing wrong with "THE PRINCIPLE" of Church government! It was absurd for Mr.

Armstrong to attack "THE PRINCIPLE" of Church government! And later in his life Mr. Armstrong UNDERSTOOD that such a claim is absurd, and he didn't make a statement like that in the last 20 years of his life.

It's okay ... you and I (who attended AC) made the same kind of foolish statements in some of the speeches we gave in our speech clubs and in the public speaking classes, right? We were babes in the truth back then; but we have grown. Let's allow Mr. Armstrong the same kind of latitude we would like to receive for our opinions when we were "new in the faith".

The PRINCIPLE of government within the Church is certainly right and proper. If we are looking for A PRINCIPLE pertaining to the necessity for government in ANY organization, then we should look at Mark 3:24-25:

And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. (Mark 3:24-25)

These are statements of PRINCIPLES!

A lack of any cohesive government is one of the causes of divisions. The very concept of "UNITY" implies some form of government, to which all are willing to submit.

15) Some examples where Mr. Armstrong argued from omission, from something that was NOT said include the following statements:

"Jesus never set up an organization, nor did He establish any church GOVERNMENT. ... The OBJECT of the Church is not to build up an organization, or a movement."

Yes, those statements are correct. BUT SO WHAT?

The fact that Jesus Christ Himself did not "set up" any Church government doesn't prove anything at all! It only proves what He DIDN'T do; it does not prove WHAT HE WOULD LIKE DONE!

Similarly, what "THE OBJECT" or "THE PURPOSE" of the Church is also has nothing to do with whether some form of Church government will be needed or not! There is a difference between "the object of something" and "THE MEANS for achieving that object". A man may have THE OBJECT of making a lot of money; and THE MEANS he devises to achieve this object is to build up a large industrial corporation with a corporate government structure.

16) Let's look at another incorrect statement in the article. Mr. Armstrong wrote:

"What has split and divided up the saints in the Church of God? Nothing but ORGANIZATION -- which has led to politics, ministers lusting for rule and for power ..."

That sweeping statement is simply not correct!

"Organization" per se is not what is wrong. And again, Mr. Armstrong's statements here, taken at face value, could easily be viewed as encouraging anarchy, being against all forms of organization! Yes certainly, men can and have USED organizational structures to further their own aims and ambitions. But the problem is not with the principle of organization. After all, is God "organized" or is God

"disorganized"? Like many other things, people can put organization to a wrong use; but that does not make organization itself wrong.

Consider what Mr. Armstrong is actually doing with his "NOTHING BUT ORGANIZATION" statement? Is he not doing what the people of Israel did after Solomon's death ...?

And when all Israel [saw] that the king would not hearken unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? and [we have] none inheritance in the son of Jesse: EVERY MAN TO YOUR TENTS, O ISRAEL: [AND] NOW, DAVID, SEE TO THINE OWN HOUSE. So all Israel went to their tents. (2 Chronicles 10:16)

Isn't it just another way of saying: "to your tents O Israel"? Who needs "organization"? It only brings strife and lusting for power. We are better off without any "organization". Wasn't Mr. Armstrong, in effect, trying to drive people away from "the tents" of Dugger and Dodd?

So Mr. Armstrong's statement was again not correct.

17) Let's look at one more point from Mr. Armstrong's article. This one also reveals a lack of understanding by Mr. Armstrong. Notice what he wrote:

"Now TO WHOM will Christ be married, at the marriage of the Lamb? Notice it, IN YOUR OWN BIBLE -- Revelation 19:7 -- He shall marry HIS WIFE! Note it!!! Yes, his WIFE whom He divorced."

That is not quite correct!

Jesus Christ will NOT marry the same wife whom He divorced at an earlier time! Do you understand this? Mr. Armstrong sort of understood it, but he was also still somewhat confused in his way of looking at this. So a little later Mr. Armstrong wrote:

"It is the CHURCH which shall be married to the Lamb, establishing God's GOVERNMENT on earth -- restoring the KINGDOM to Israel!"

(NOTE: At this point Mr. Armstrong correctly stated that at the second coming of Christ God's government will be "ESTABLISHED" on earth; he did not use the word "RESTORED", as he did in later years. He had not yet thought about that concept.)

So while Mr. Armstrong understood that Christ will marry the Church, he nevertheless somehow equated this with Christ marrying the SAME wife He had earlier divorced. That is not so!

At Mount Sinai Christ had "married" the physical nation of Israel. This nation later broke up into two separate nations, both of which went into national captivities. When Christ gave His "wife" a bill of divorcement, He was putting away PHYSICAL Israel. But at the second coming He will "marry" SPIRITUAL Israel. While they will have the same name (i.e. both called "Israel" for reasons discussed earlier), they will not be the same wife at all!

The wife Christ "marries" at His second coming is NOT the one He had earlier "divorced", yet this new "wife" will receive all the rights, privileges, titles, names, etc. that had been conferred on the first wife, from which Christ "divorced". So at His return Christ will "marry" a group of people who will be totally

different from the group of people He "divorced" during Old Testament times. The vast majority of those who were a part of the first wife will not be a part of the wife Christ will "marry" at His second coming.

So it isn't really "the same wife whom He had divorced".

Anyway, so much for Mr. Armstrong's 1939 article. Can you now see the flaws in Mr. Armstrong's 1939 presentation?

Right, now let's look for the principles in the Bible that will indicate God's will on this matter of Church government. Should the Church have central government or should it be controlled on the local congregational level? Keep in mind that what I have done thus far is show that Mr. Armstrong's 1939 article is without any merit; it was biased and unbalanced. But that does not mean that I have shown the concept of local congregational government to be wrong; I have only shown that Mr. Armstrong's earlier reasoning is not valid. But the concept of local government still needs to be taken into consideration and evaluated on its own merit.

DID CHRIST ORDAIN A SPECIFIC FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT?

It is quite clear that during His ministry Jesus Christ did NOT establish a strict form for the government of His Church. That is what Mr. Armstrong tried to focus on in his 1939 article, this obvious ABSENCE of any instructions for a clearly defined form of Church government.

WHY DID CHRIST NOT SPELL OUT IN SIMPLE TERMS THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT HE WANTS HIS CHURCH TO HAVE?

Do you know the answer to this question?

Consider a number of other things that are also not very specifically spelled out in the New Testament. For example, the New Testament does NOT:

- command us to tithe;
- spell out who should receive our tithes;
- command us to keep the Sabbath;
- command us to keep the Holy days;
- command us to abstain from unclean meats;
- spell out a format for conducting Church services;
- instruct us how to establish a correct calendar;
- prohibit the smoking of tobacco;
- give instructions about voting for politicians;
- spell out a prohibition against gambling.

With which of these above ten things do you reach a decision by reasoning from OMISSION, by

reasoning based on what is NOT said? You know that is what WCG has now done, right? They have now said: BECAUSE it is not specifically commanded in the N.T., THEREFORE we are not required to do it. But that is not what we used to teach while Mr. Armstrong was alive.

YOU reject that form of reasoning when it is applied to the keeping of the Sabbath and the Holy Days, right? You probably also reject that line of reasoning for most of (hopefully ALL of) the other eight things in the above list. But do you ACCEPT that line of reasoning when the subject is "Church government"?

Do you understand that reasoning by omission is ALWAYS the expression of an ulterior motive, a hidden agenda, a desire to receive a specific answer? That ulterior motive is as follows:

"I already have my preferred answer to this question. Therefore UNLESS you can give me a specific Scripture that contradicts my preferred answer, I will continue to hold to my preferred answer. Yes, for those things where I do not have a preferred answer, I am quite willing to look at PRINCIPLES without requiring specific 'You shall ...' or 'You shall not ...' statements from the Bible. But on THIS subject I will only change if you show me clear Scriptures that state in plain terms that my preferred answer is wrong."

Would you ever dig in your heels and reason like that? If something you really want to have or to do is at issue, sure you would! If you can't see that tendency in yourself, then you don't really understand your own nature!

So why are all of these things I have mentioned above not clearly spelled out in the New Testament? Well, in some cases these things are already clearly spelled out in the Old Testament (Sabbath, Holy Days, tithing, unclean meats); in some cases the source of information was already established in Old Testament times; in some cases God expects us to apply clearly stated principles to reach the right conclusions ourselves (gambling, not using tobacco, the matter of voting); and in some cases God expects us to make the appropriate decisions when a need arises (format for Church services).

Some things are not mentioned because they were simply never an issue in biblical times (use of tobacco, voting for political leaders); and some things that were never an issue could have more than one possible "correct" way of dealing with them (format for Church services).

So back to our question: WHY did Christ not spell out the correct form of Church government, which He wants His Church to have?

BECAUSE AT DIFFERENT TIMES THERE WOULD BE DIFFERENT FORMS OF GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD BE "CORRECT" FOR THOSE SPECIFIC TIMES!

Understand that the form of government for the Church of God would ALWAYS be influenced in a major way by the specific circumstances in which the Church would find itself at various times. Government is NOT the most important thing at all! It is NOT an end in itself; rather it is only A MEANS TOWARDS AN END!

"The end" which God is concerned about is that the Church of God would grow and develop precisely as God has intended, so that at the point when Jesus Christ is about to return, it can be said that "His wife has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7). And government within the Church is nothing more than a means towards that goal.

WE have tended to think that the right form of government is somehow a high priority to God. But the

"high priority" to God is really that holy, righteous character is developed within each one of us. Towards that end God has left many things for both, leaders and members in the Church themselves to decide. Those decisions themselves, whether right or wrong, whether wise or foolish, provide opportunities for the development of godly character, both, for the ministry and for the lay members.

As far as what form of Church government is "right" at any time, the following factors would have a bearing on that decision:

1) **THE SIZE OF THE CHURCH!** In the course of the past 1950 years there have been vast differences in the size of the membership. Starting out with 3000 baptized members on Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, the membership first swelled to 5000 (Acts 4:4) and was then scattered (Acts 8:1). In subsequent centuries it may have dwindled down to perhaps just a few dozen at some stages, before a new surge again increased membership. Under Mr. Armstrong's leadership total attendance exceeded 100,000. The larger the Church membership, the more "government" will be needed.

Keep one thing in mind: whether the membership was large or small, it was always **ONLY ONE CHURCH!** Jesus Christ did not build three or four different churches. He built **ONE Church!**

2) **THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION!** Slower means of communication will automatically require a less centralized form of government. If it requires a whole year to get a reply from some other location (e.g. for someone in Jerusalem to get a reply from Rome), then of necessity each area must have greater autonomy than if you can get a reply from any other part of the world on the same day!

3) **THE MEANS OF TRAVEL!** Similarly, slower means of travel also automatically require a less centralized system of government. Even if you could communicate fairly quickly, yet if it takes a few months to actually TRAVEL to these areas you can communicate with, then your government will have to be less centralized.

In our context today you might think of it this way: supposing there was another congregation on the planet MARS. You might be able to send a radio message, which they could receive within a few hours; yet it would be exceedingly difficult to actually travel to visit that congregation on Mars. Therefore the style of government for that congregation on Mars would **AUTOMATICALLY** have to allow for them to have a great deal of autonomy.

While there are obviously no congregations in outer space, 1500 years ago travel to some distant area was almost as time-consuming as it would be today to consider travel to the moon or to some planet. And when long distance travel was so difficult, there was simply no way that any leader in a centralized location could possibly have run "a tight ship"! This is even apart from the question of whether or not it would be desirable to run "a tight ship".

4) **THE LOCATION OF CONGREGATIONS!** Whether the means of communication and of travel are very advanced or not, you have a different situation when all of those in the Church live together in fairly close proximity, than when they are scattered over vast areas. Being together in close proximity tends to require more centralized control.

Examples of everyone being together in close proximity would include:

- Israel during their 40 years of wandering;
- the 5000 initial members in the area of Jerusalem;
- all the members living together in one or two Alpine valleys;

- all the members living together in the Willamette Valley (?);
- all the members being together at the place of safety.

These are some of the factors that would influence which type of Church government is "right" at any specific time in history. Whatever the factors involved, even when there are geographic separations, it is always Christ's intention to have ONE Church, even as God the Father and Jesus Christ are "one" ... i.e. in total agreement with each other.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; THAT THEY MAY BE ONE, EVEN AS WE ARE ONE: (John 17:22)

This request, which Jesus Christ addressed to the Father in prayer, makes clear that it is never Christ's DESIRE to have divisions or separations amongst His people. It is Christ's desire to see the maximum amount of unity amongst His people. And closer unity requires more government than a loose, confederation-style association.

So it is not really a matter of having to search the Bible for any "divinely inspired government-plan"! That only leads to "reasoning from omission"! We need to understand that at different times and under different conditions different forms of governing the Church of God are the best ones to employ. And that really has nothing to do with any appeals to "the government of God"! Understand that people have simply "loaded the deck" at both ends of this debate in order to promote their specific ideas.

Let's now look at some principles that are revealed in the New Testament.

SOME BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER

Let's start off by looking at Matthew chapter 16.

And I say also unto thee, That THOU ART PETER, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. AND I WILL GIVE UNTO THEE THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: and WHATSOEVER THOU SHALT BIND on earth shall be bound in heaven: and WHATSOEVER THOU SHALT LOOSE on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
(Matthew 16:18-19)

We are agreed on the obvious things in these verses: that CHRIST HIMSELF is the "big Rock", and that this obviously did not confer licence to go contrary to any of God's laws.

But we also need to understand the following things about these verses.

1) There IS a reason why Jesus Christ renamed Peter as "Little Rock" (and that has nothing to do with Arkansas).

2) In the Greek the verbs Jesus Christ used are very specifically in the singular case. Christ said:

- I will give to YOU (singular!) THE KEYS ...;
- whatsoever YOU (singular!) shall bind ...;
- whatsoever YOU (singular!) shall loose

3) This is correctly expressed in the King James Version.

4) Webster's Dictionary makes quite clear what these pronouns as used in the KJV mean:

- "THEE" is the objective case of "THOU";

- "THOU" is the universal form of address TO ONE PERSON;

- "YE" was originally ONLY A PLURAL PRONOUN of the second person in the nominative case;

- "YOU" was used formerly ONLY AS A PLURAL PRONOUN of the second person in the dative or the accusative case as a direct or an indirect object of a verb.

So where the "thee" and "thou" in these two verses are rendered into "YOU" in more modern translations, you need to understand that it means "you SINGULAR"!

So in these verses Christ was speaking to Peter specifically, and He said that He was giving TO PETER certain "keys" and also certain "AUTHORITY"! The expression "whatsoever you shall bind or loose ..." very clearly confers some AUTHORITY!

5) Understand that naming Peter as "Little Rock" was not intended to be some kind of put-down for Peter (as has sometimes been implied by people who make fun of the comparison between 'Petros' and 'Petra')! It was intended to convey some form of ELEVATION for Peter, setting the stage for conferring to him (singular Greek verbs) authority to bind and to loose.

QUESTION: Would Jesus Christ have intended that authority to bind and to loose, which He conferred upon Peter, to be limited to applying to ONLY ONE LOCAL CONGREGATION (i.e. Jerusalem)? Or did Christ intend this authority He conferred on Peter to go beyond the bounds of the Jerusalem congregation?

Remember that we are looking for PRINCIPLES which will reveal the mind of God to us on this subject. This statement in Matthew chapter 16 clearly conferred some measure of authority to Peter, which went beyond the bounds of the one local Jerusalem congregation, which would be formed at a later date.

(Later I will look at a very similar statement two chapters later, in Matthew 18:18. In that case we need to examine the larger context.)

Now let's look at Christ's parting instructions to His apostles, as recorded in Mark chapter 16.

And he said unto them, GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD, and preach the gospel TO EVERY CREATURE. (Mark 16:15)

Now think about this verse. This seems to imply that each one of these apostles would raise up several different congregations in the course of his ministry, at least that seems to be the intent (James was killed rather early, while still in Jerusalem). Now if any of these men were instrumental in raising up more than one congregation, would they have retained some form of authority over those congregations? Or would the local leaders have been totally autonomous, independent of any kind of control from the man who had raised up that congregation?

What is the principle in this sort of situation?

Let's look at what the Apostle John wrote in his third letter.

Wherefore, IF I COME, I WILL REMEMBER HIS DEEDS which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth [them] out of the church. (3 John 1:10)

WHY would John have travelled to different congregations, unless he had some kind of authority to teach and instruct them? What does his statement "if I come, I will remember his deeds which he does" imply to you? Does it not imply some sort of ADMINISTRATIVE authority that John felt he had the right to exercise? So was the local congregation there really "totally autonomous" from John's control?

Let's look at what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians chapter 11.

Beside those things that are without, THAT WHICH COMETH UPON ME DAILY, THE CARE OF ALL THE CHURCHES. (2 Corinthians 11:28)

Does this indicate that Paul was intimately involved in the administration of "all the churches"? Or were they all just totally autonomous entities? How does Mr. Armstrong's 1939 statement of "ALL authority and power to rule is limited SOLELY to each LOCAL congregation" stack up with Paul's dealings?

Let's look at an instruction Paul gave to Titus.

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that THOU SHOULDEST SET IN ORDER THE THINGS THAT ARE WANTING, AND ORDAIN ELDERS IN EVERY CITY, AS I HAD APPOINTED THEE: (Titus 1:5)

Several things to note here. Paul had DELEGATED the authority to ordain elders to a minister under his authority. Question: do the words "as I had instructed you to do" imply a chain of authority or not? Was Paul in authority over Titus or not? Next, does the instruction "I want you to set things in order" imply any ADMINISTRATIVE authority or not. Notice that Paul had instructed Titus to do TWO things:

A) set things in order that needed to be corrected;

B) ordain elders in every city.

Does this not imply that Titus, who was under instructions from Paul, himself would have had authority over the congregations in all of these cities?

Let's look at something Luke recorded in the Book of Acts.

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. (Acts 20:17)

Here Paul asks the leaders of the Church in Ephesus, the elders, to come to him at some distance away. And they all came (Acts 20:18). Again, does this not imply that Paul was in a position of authority OVER these elders from Ephesus, who would have been ordained at his instruction in the first place? Do Paul's actions not imply that Paul was IN CHARGE over all those local elders from Ephesus?

Let's look at something Paul told Timothy.

Let THE ELDERS THAT RULE WELL be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. (1 Timothy 5:17)

First of all, this statement implies that Timothy was in authority OVER these "elders"; Timothy was the one who would implement this instruction. Secondly, this states that elders actually "RULE", implies some form of government within the Church. The Greek verb here translated as "rule" is "proistemi", which is used in the perfect tense. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament states that in the perfect tense this verb means: "TO BE OVER, TO SUPERINTEND, PRESIDE OVER, (so from Herodotus down)".

So here are elders (Greek "presbuteros") who are expected to preside over and to rule in the congregations. Again, some form of government seems to be clearly implied.

Think about the account in Acts chapter 5 about Ananias and Sapphira. They sold a property and then brought a portion of the money and "laid it AT THE APOSTLES' FEET" (Acts 5:2). What does laying something at somebody's "FEET" picture to you? Does it not indicate a recognition of authority or power on the part of the person at whose feet things are laid? We all know the account ... they both dropped dead. But notice how this episode is concluded:

And GREAT FEAR CAME UPON ALL THE CHURCH, and upon as many as heard these things. And BY THE HANDS OF THE APOSTLES were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. AND OF THE REST DURST NO MAN JOIN HIMSELF TO THEM: but the people magnified them. (Acts 5:11-13)

This tells us that:

- 1) The whole Church feared (respected) the power vested in the apostles.
- 2) The apostles also performed other signs and wonders, further demonstrating the power God had conferred upon them.
- 3) Of the rest of the membership of the Church no one dared to "join himself to the apostles", i.e. try to make himself equal to the apostles in the power that was vested in them.

This clearly implies that the apostles were over the rest of the Church in authority, and the membership acknowledged this authority.

Let's look at Acts chapter 15. Here some Jews (Pharisees who had come into the Church, see Acts 15:5) came down to Antioch and promptly started some doctrinal arguments, insisting that circumcision was a requirement for salvation (Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas opposed this wrong teaching. But notice how they were going to solve this doctrinal dispute.

When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, THEY DETERMINED that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, SHOULD GO UP TO JERUSALEM UNTO THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS ABOUT THIS QUESTION. (Acts 15:2)

Paul was the most highly educated minister in the Church at that time. Even Peter acknowledged that "WISDOM" had been given to Paul (see 2 Peter 3:15). So it is not a matter that Paul did not ALREADY

correctly understand this question. At the end of the Jerusalem Conference the decision reached agrees with what Paul and Barnabas had taught all along. Nothing new was decided, as far as Paul was concerned.

So WHY did they decide to go up to Jerusalem to sort out this doctrinal question? It seems clear that the Church in Antioch recognized that "the apostles and elders" at Jerusalem had doctrinal authority over them.

But notice what happened at that Jerusalem Conference.

And WHEN THERE HAD BEEN MUCH DISPUTING, PETER ROSE UP, AND SAID unto them, Men [and] brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that THE GENTILES BY MY MOUTH SHOULD HEAR THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL, and believe. (Acts 15:7)

The Greek word here translated as "disputing" (i.e. "suzetesis") refers to "mutual questioning, discussion". The only man in the whole discussion whose words are actually recorded was Peter. WHY are Peter's words recorded for us? And why had God used Peter to be the first one to preach to a non-Jew? And why was the whole question basically settled when Peter concluded his comments? Notice:

THEN ALL THE MULTITUDE KEPT SILENCE, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. (Acts 15:12)

Peter's presentation finished the argument. When Barnabas and Paul then spoke, they simply reinforced what Peter had already explained. They both agreed with what Peter had explained. And so then it says:

AND AFTER THEY HAD HELD THEIR PEACE, James answered, saying, Men [and] brethren, hearken unto me: (Acts 15:13)

So after Paul and Barnabas have expressed their total support for what Peter had said, then James also expresses support for exactly what Peter had said. James starts his comments off by referring to what Peter had said (Acts 15:14) and shows that this was in total agreement with the Old Testament (Acts 15:15-17).

So if we look upon this chapter as something like "the minutes for the meeting", a summary of what took place, then we have the following picture:

Peter explains what the correct answer to this question is. Then Paul and Barnabas and James all express support and agreement for this answer.

There is a mistranslation in verse 19, which has led to some confusion for some people. The KJV text reads:

WHEREFORE MY SENTENCE IS, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: (Acts 15:19)

In the Greek there is NO NOUN for "my sentence". The Greek text reads as follows: "dio ego krino ...".

The word "dio" is a conjunction and means "BECAUSE OF WHICH".

The word "ego" is the pronoun "I". Greek does not require this pronoun to be used, since it is always implied by the form of the verb which is used. So when the pronoun is used, it is always as a form of emphasis.

The word "krino" is the present active indicative of the first person and means "I judge".

So where the English text reads: "wherefore MY SENTENCE is ...", the Greek text actually reads: "because of which I JUDGE".

What James was doing is expressing his PERSONAL judgment of the matter, which judgment was based on what Peter had explained, and which was in harmony with the revealed Word of God. It is NOT really a matter that James had the last word in this discussion, because he was somehow "presiding at this conference", or because he was the apostle for the Jerusalem Church. At that time Peter was ALSO the apostle of the Jerusalem Church! In the Greek text NOTHING is stated about any "sentence" being passed! The Greek only uses a verb and not any noun in this context. Also, in the entire account there is not the slightest indication that James was somehow "IN CHARGE" at this conference. James is not mentioned until he voices his support for Peter's explanation; and that is the only time James is mentioned in this account.

After Paul and Barnabas and James had all expressed their support for what Peter had explained, the whole question was settled. THEN the understanding of this question was unanimous. This is shown in verse 22.

THEN PLEASED IT THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS, WITH THE WHOLE CHURCH, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; [namely], Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: (Acts 15:22)

This is not a description of "the whole Church" DECIDING to do something; rather this is a statement that "the whole Church" AGREED WITH the explanation that had been given. They also AGREED WITH the decision that Paul and Barnabas should go back with this message from the Jerusalem Church.

The whole account in Acts chapter 15 implies that the apostles at Jerusalem provided some leadership, and that they were in some way in authority over the other churches.

Let's look at what Paul said in Galatians.

But contrariwise, when they saw that THE GOSPEL OF THE UNCIRCUMCISION was committed UNTO ME, as [THE GOSPEL] OF THE CIRCUMCISION [was] UNTO PETER; (Galatians 2:7)

It is difficult to avoid reaching the conclusion that Peter was in authority over the preaching of the gospel to circumcised Jews. It is difficult to avoid reaching the conclusion that Paul was in authority over the preaching of the gospel to the non-Jews. What does this tell us about Church government? Was "all authority and power to rule limited solely to each local congregation", as Mr. Armstrong's 1939 article claimed? Hardly!

If we are really looking for principles that apply to Church government, then these Scriptures certainly

indicate that some leaders had authority over more than one congregation.

Let's look at what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:13.

But we will not boast of things without [our] measure, but according to THE MEASURE OF THE RULE WHICH GOD HATH DISTRIBUTED TO US, A MEASURE TO REACH EVEN UNTO YOU.
(2 Corinthians 10:13)

Again, this is a clear statement by Paul that his authority extended way beyond some local congregation. Read also the next three verses (2 Corinthians 10:14-16) in this regard. What principle can we draw from this verse, that of local autonomous rule for each Church congregation? Hardly! Paul said that God had given him a measure of ruling over congregations.

Let's look at Romans chapter 12.

For as we have many members IN ONE BODY, and all members have not the same office: So we, [being] many, ARE ONE BODY in Christ, and every one MEMBERS ONE OF ANOTHER.
(Romans 12:4-5)

This is speaking about the Church of God. It shows us how God views the Church. If someone else made this statement (i.e. Romans 12: 4-5) to you about their church without explaining in detail how their church is actually governed, what conclusion would you draw? Would you conclude that their church probably has an independent congregational-type of government, or would you conclude that they probably have a central government type of organization? If they tell you that all their congregations around the world are "members one of another", would you conclude they have local autonomy in each congregation? I wouldn't! The picture that would naturally come to my mind is one where there is a leadership which JOINS all of their congregations together, where the finger is joined to the hand, and the hand is joined to the arm, and the arm is joined to the shoulder, etc..

Similarly, Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:4:

[THERE IS] ONE BODY, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
(Ephesians 4:4)

It is difficult to reconcile the "ONE BODY" concept with independent and autonomous congregations around the world that are not linked by some form of government. It is difficult to picture UNITY without some form of central government uniting widely scattered congregations.

Now let's look at Matthew chapter 18.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 18

Let's examine the section in Matthew 18:15-20.

The section gives Jesus Christ's instructions for conflict resolution between members of the Church of God. The three successive steps Jesus enumerated seem to imply a hierarchy of sorts, like going one level higher each time.

Step 1: This is mentioned in Matthew 18:15.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. (Matthew 18:15)

(There is one manuscript which does not have the words "against you" (Greek "eis se"), and that is Manuscript Aleph B Sahidic. I think it is safe to retain these two words "against you" in this verse, as the overwhelming majority of MSS support this.)

So step one in conflict resolution is to try to sort the matter out privately with the individual concerned. This way the conflict is kept private and confidential. If it is resolved THIS WAY, the friendship is usually retained or restored without any adverse effects. But often the conflict will not be resolved.

Step 2: This is explained in Matthew 18:16.

But if he will not hear [thee, then] take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. (Matthew 18:16)

The next step is to take one or two mutually acceptable witnesses along, to act as impartial assessors and arbitrators in the conflict. It is still only on the level of lay members in the Church attempting to resolve a conflict, without any appeals to any form of authority. The presence of witnesses should ensure that any terms or agreements that are reached are later not denied or misrepresented. If the conflict is still not resolved, then we proceed to step three.

Step 3: Matthew 18:17 explains this.

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell [it] unto THE CHURCH: but if he neglect to hear THE CHURCH, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (Matthew 18:17)

THIS IS WHERE SOME PEOPLE SEEM TO MISUNDERSTAND!

Some people feel that this verse means that step three is to tell the entire congregation what the problem is. **OBVIOUSLY**, both parties would have to state their case.

THAT IS NOT THE CASE AT ALL!

The people who think this is an instruction to involve THE ENTIRE congregation in resolving the conflict, **TOTALLY IGNORE THE NEXT THREE VERSES WHICH APPLY SPECIFICALLY TO THIS INSTRUCTION!!**

So consider the following things:

1) The whole approach Christ used was to keep the problem confined to where the minimum number of people are dealing with it. In step 1 only two people know about it. In step 2 perhaps two or three more people become involved, but it is still limited to only about five people.

IT IS ABSURD TO THINK THAT THE NEXT STEP IS TO WASH THE DIRTY LINEN IN PUBLIC, LIKE SOME SCANDAL/GOSSIP PAPER, BEFORE AN ENTIRE CONGREGATION OF 300 PEOPLE!

Furthermore, it doesn't say anything about "a congregation" in these instructions. Therefore, IF the words "the Church" are interpreted to mean EVERYONE IN THE CHURCH, then the next step would involve telling the problem to every Christian worldwide! And that is ridiculous!

Think the whole situation through!

2) Understand that the larger the number of people involved in judging a matter, the less likely they are to reach a unanimous conclusion. Try having a jury composed of 200 people ... you'll almost never get a unanimous decision. The larger the jury, the less likely the guilty party will be punished.

3) Obviously BOTH SIDES of the story have to be presented. And, obviously, as they present their own version of the problem, each man will seem to be right.

4) It is simply not correct to interpret this verse as some kind of threat, as I have heard one man explain this verse, that the guilty party will be intimidated into agreement by the threat of being publicly embarrassed and humiliated by such a hearing.

5) It is a fact that if you involve "the entire Church", several HUNDRED people, you automatically include the relatives and friends of both the parties involved in the conflict. It will be inevitable that people will take sides; and impartial judgments are simply not reached by large masses.

6) What would happen in practice is that the majority in the congregation, who have no personal stake in the outcome that is reached, would be swayed by the arguments of the "sharp lawyer-types". The majority would simply not be rendering a genuinely thought-out answer; they would rubber-stamp what the bright leaders had presented.

7) Take a realistic example: at a conference for 300 delegates, exactly how much floor-time can you give to each delegate to speak his mind? If you give them only two minutes each, that is already 10 solid hours, without any coffee breaks! You can't really take that kind of time. So you would EXPECT the majority to just nod their agreement to the wise ones who eloquently analyse the whole situation. So what is the point in presenting the case to everyone (like some courtroom situation) in the first place, when it is a foregone conclusion that OBVIOUSLY everyone will simply not be given the time to have input for even ten minutes, let alone half an hour of input or more?

8) Look again at the discussion of the conference in Acts chapter 15. There we only have the words of TWO MEN ... Peter and James. The words of Paul and Barnabas are not even recorded. Also, in Acts 15 no counter-arguments are presented. It was THE LEADERSHIP of the Church that decided the whole matter, once Peter had spoken no one in the whole Jerusalem Church had any more input, apart from a few supportive comments by Paul, Barnabas and James. Peter had settled the matter.

9) Involving the whole Church leads to these year-long legal cases, where more and more and more evidence is dragged up and cleverer and cleverer arguments are put forward. The longer it drags out, the less guilty the guilty party would seem to be, and the more sympathy more and more people in the Church will express for the guilty party. Can we not learn from the prominent trials of recent times, which have dominated our news media?

10) So NO WAY did Jesus Christ mean:

If you and your brother can't agree about some conflict, even after involving two or three neutral observers, THEN TELL THE ENTIRE CHURCH ABOUT IT!

11) Let's look again at verse 17, and then examine the following verses.

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell [it] unto THE CHURCH: but IF HE NEGLECT TO HEAR THE CHURCH, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (Matthew 18:17)

What do you mean ... "hear the Church"? Do you really expect every single member in a 300-strong congregation to pronounce his judgment to the guilty party in this conflict? How many individuals will actually "SPEAK" to the guilty party, in pronouncing a judgment of sorts? ONE person will do the speaking, not 300 people!

12) Now notice the next verse:

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)

What do you mean ... "VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU"? Who is this addressed to? WHY does Christ say this? WHAT is He talking about? Do we understand?

WHAT DID CHRIST HAVE IN MIND THAT "THEY" COULD POSSIBLY WANT TO BIND OR LOOSE?

Do we understand that this "verily I say unto you" TIES VERSE 18 TO THE PREVIOUS STATEMENT?! THIS is what happens when a conflict is brought "to the Church" for arbitration!

The "binding" and "loosing" has nothing to do with making doctrinal decisions! It is not even talking about making decisions to run the Church! The "binding" and the "loosing" in this specific verse here has to do SPECIFICALLY with sorting out conflicts between two members of the Church of God. THAT is what Jesus Christ had been speaking about up to that point in time.

So what Jesus Christ said in plain words in this verse is as follows:

When a conflict between two members of the Church is brought to you (parallel to Israel bringing things to Moses for arbitration), then you are to judge totally impartially. And when you determine who the guilty party is and what the right way to resolve the situation is, who should pay or apologize and who should receive compensation or an apology, THEN "THE TERMS" you decide upon for resolving such a conflict will receive God's approval. If you decide someone should "pay", then God will require such payment to be made. If you decide that someone should be "loosed" from some kind of obligation, then God will also loose the individual from that obligation.

THIS IS WHAT VERSE 18 IS TALKING ABOUT!

It has nothing to do with (here in this context!) making binding decisions about doctrinal things or administrative things pertaining to the Church or even Church government issues. It is speaking specifically about God backing up the decisions "THE CHURCH" will make in conflict-resolution situations. That is precisely what the previous three verses speak about.

13) Now let's look at verse 19 to see exactly "WHO" Jesus Christ had in mind when speaking about

"THE CHURCH".

Again I say unto you, That IF TWO OF YOU SHALL AGREE on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 18:19)

First of all, who is meant by "YOU"? Who was Christ speaking to? Did Christ mean "THE WHOLE CHURCH" when He spoke to these men and used the pronoun "YOU"?

Next, WHY did Christ make this statement? Did He mean that "they" would have to make decisions about things that He was just not going to explain to them in person? Did Christ have certain things in mind that "they" could possibly be asking the Father about?

Next, WHY did Christ refer to "TWO of you"? What could "TWO" possibly be seeking help for from the Father? Why didn't He say something like: where a CONGREGATION of My people agree on anything on earth, it shall be done for them? WHY did Christ refer to two?

Next, WHAT did Christ expect the Father to be doing in response to such requests that "two" would agree on? Is it talking about answering requests for healings, or for open doors, or for more money for the Church, or for favourable business contacts, or more TV stations for the Church's program? What sort of requests would Christ have had in mind, that the Father would be responding to?

Do you understand that this is still the same subject that Christ had started to address in Matthew 18:15?

In this verse Jesus Christ was speaking to the twelve apostles. They were the "YOU" that Christ was addressing. This verse makes clear that by "THE CHURCH" in verse 17 Jesus Christ meant THE LEADERS HE HAD APPOINTED!

God was going to bind the decisions that were made by the leaders HE HAD CHOSEN, decisions that were made in a genuine attempt to resolve problems between members of the Church. It required at least TWO such leaders, because if there was only one, there was always the possibility that this one leader might naturally be closer to the one party in the conflict than to the other party. Two leaders, both selected and approved by God, would largely eliminate any potential bias to favour one party. Three such leaders would be even better.

The verse makes clear that both of these leaders would be asking God for wisdom, understanding and guidance in the matter that confronted them. So if they asked God to reveal His will in the matter to them, then God would help them to reach the right conclusion by giving them a consensus of opinion.

Notice the sharp contrast between someone who would like to make a public spectacle of a problem between two people in front of an entire congregation of maybe 300 people or more, and Jesus Christ saying that if "TWO" of them reached consensus about the matter, God would take care of it.

14) Now let's look at Matthew 18:20.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.
(Matthew 18:20)

The Greek word translated as "for" is "gar". Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon defines this conjunction

"gar" as follows:

"properly a particle of affirmation and conclusion, denoting: truly therefore, verily as the case stands."

The point is that verse 20 introduces an affirmation of, and conclusion to, what has been said in the previous verses.

The expression "where two or three are gathered together in my name" has NOTHING TO DO WITH CHURCH SERVICES! Nowhere in the gospels does Jesus Christ actually even talk about "Church SERVICES"!

The subject Jesus Christ has been speaking about is conflict resolution between two brothers in the Church. And for the express purpose of resolving such conflicts "two or three" will be gathered "IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST", i.e. they will be gathered ON THE AUTHORITY which is vested in "THE NAME" of Jesus Christ.

And it is these "two or three" that people are to take their conflicts to when they can't resolve them even with the help of neutral witnesses.

Do you now perhaps understand Matthew 18:15-20 more clearly?

But the subject of conflict resolution is not finished yet. This subject actually continues to the end of this chapter, to verse 35.

So notice:

In Matthew 18:16-17 Jesus Christ had assumed one specific type of situation, one where the guilty party in the conflict stubbornly refuses to do what is right and expected, or even what is required. In Matthew 18:18-20 Jesus Christ then assured the Church leadership, the ministry, that God would help them to resolve such difficult cases.

Then, in Matthew 18:21, Peter introduces another angle to the conflict situation. Peter presents the situation where the guilty party is readily identified and is very co-operative in wanting the problem resolved. So the guilty party is shown as admitting the faults, and expressing genuine repentance. The question then becomes this:

When the guilty party is obstinate and stubborn, then we put him out and treat him like an unbeliever. But what if the guilty party is repentant? What if the guilty party is simply not ABLE to make good the damage he has caused? How should the innocent party respond? What if the guilty party is weak in a certain way, and causes further problems? This would make it very hard for the party that is repeatedly wronged in some way. So how long should the innocent party be willing to put up with (i.e. co-exist with in the Church in a right spirit) such treatment?

In response to this question about conflict resolution, Jesus Christ told the parable about the two servants, one owing 10,000 talents to the king, and the other owing 100 pennies to the first servant (see Matthew 18:23-35). The point is this: admitting the problem, repentance and an appeal for mercy should really resolve all conflicts. In the process we may sometimes even lose what would rightfully be due to us, but the conflict should be resolved.

[Technically speaking there is a difference in the expressions "WHATSOEVER you shall bind/loose ..." in Matthew 16:19 and in Matthew 18:18. We have already noted that the "YOU" in Matthew 16:19 is singular, where the "YOU" in Matthew 18:18 is plural. But there is also a difference in the word "whatsoever". In Matthew 16:19 "whatsoever" represents only one Greek word, the conditional particle "ean", which is most of the time translated into English by the word "IF". But in Matthew 18:18 the word "whatsoever" actually represents the TWO Greek words "hosos ean". The word "hosos" is a relative adjective with a fairly wide range of meanings, including things like "as great as", "as much as", "so much the more", "whatsoever", etc.. Here in Matthew 18:18 this word is joined to the conditional particle "ean". Thus in Matthew 18:18 the Greek word for "whatsoever" (hosos) is tempered to some degree by the conditional aspect of the Greek word for "IF" (ean). But in Matthew 16:19 the term "whatsoever" is possibly even more limited than in Matthew 18:18, since there it represents only the word "if" without the extension of any word for "whatsoever".]

Well, that should suffice for Matthew chapter 18. As you read them, think about each of these verses. Think about the situation Jesus Christ is addressing. No way did Christ mean that we are to make a public spectacle before the entire Church, be it worldwide or be it just local before 200 or 300 people, out of every situation, where two brothers in the Church have not been able to resolve a conflict. And likewise, no way was Christ referring to "two or three" getting together for a Church service. The whole section deals with taking problems that members cannot resolve on their own to two or three ministers for a decision and a judgment.

The repeated use of "two" and "three" in Matthew 18:19-20 makes quite clear that Christ was talking about taking such difficult conflicts to "two or three" ministers. Christ did NOT mean that congregations of His Church would consist of only two or three individuals. Two or three individuals simply do not make up a congregation. If "two" are having a problem, and they have involved "three witnesses", then that is already five individuals. Then if they take the matter to "two or three" in the Church, then you already have eight people involved. But if there were only eight people in total in that congregation, then it would be inevitable that some of those eight would be biased in favour of one party or the other. So you obviously have to have MORE than eight people in that congregation to choose from, to ensure impartiality. So no way does the "two or three gathered in Christ's name" refer to a full congregation of God's Church getting together to reach a common judgment.

Thus, when it is correctly understood, Matthew 18 also supports the idea of authority being vested in the ministry.

But now let's look at this matter of an "ordained" ministry.

WHAT ABOUT "AN ORDAINED MINISTRY"?

There is a movement amongst some people who have left the Worldwide Church of God and who feel that "ALL MEMBERS ARE CALLED TO THE MINISTRY". Some are arranging "non-aligned" meetings. They don't feel that they need "a ministry" to officiate.

So let's see what the Bible tells us in this regard.

To justify such conduct, some are turning to some of the more modern translations of the Bible. Whether such translations are actually a faithful reflection of the original text is often not considered.

For example, let's look at Ephesians chapter 4.

Here is Ephesians 4:11 in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

THE GIFTS HE GAVE WERE THAT SOME would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, (Ephesians 4:11 NRSV)

And here is the KJV text for this verse.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (Ephesians 4:11)

Now in the Greek, the Majority Text and the Byzantine Text and the Alexandrian Minority text (on which the NIV and NRSV are based) all agree completely. This verse is identical in all these texts. Here is the transliterated Greek text for this verse.

kai autos edoken tous men apostolous tous de prophetas tous de evaggelistas tous de poimenas kai didaskalous (Ephesians 4:11)

Let's look at every word in this Greek text. It is actually a very straight-forward verse. The words are as follows:

- kai = a primary particle, a conjunction meaning "AND";
- autos = masculine 3rd person singular pronoun, meaning "HE";
- edoken = the verb "TO GIVE", aorist active indicative;
- tous = masculine accusative plural, definite article "THE";
- men = a primary particle, meaning "INDEED, VERILY, TRULY";
- de = a conjunction, meaning "AND, BUT, NOW, THEN", etc.;
- apostolous = APOSTLES;
- prophetas = PROPHETS;
- evaggelistas = EVANGELISTS;
- poimenas = SHEPHERDS;
- didaskalous = TEACHERS.

Since all the Greek MSS are agreed on this text, it really should read as follows in English:

"And He gave indeed the apostles and the prophets and the evangelists and the shepherds and teachers ..." (Ephesians 4:11, literal translation)

THAT IS WHAT THE TEXT SAYS!

First of all, there is no word for "gifts", as the NRSV implies. That is purely another INTERPRETATION by the NRSV. But secondly, there is also no word for "SOME", as almost all translations imply. What all

of these translations have done, starting with the King James Version, is to translate the definite article "THE" (Greek "tous") into English as "SOME". In so doing they have obviously diminished the force of the original Greek statement.

Notice that the end of verse 11 does not conclude the sentence (i.e. the thought Paul is presenting). If you carefully check the King James Version, you'll see that this one sentence spans SIX WHOLE VERSES. The sentence goes from the start of verse 11 to the end of verse 16. It is a very complex thought. In the KJV this sentence has 163 words (in the Greek it only has 125 words, as if that makes it easier). Today's communicators would have severely criticized Paul for using such a long sentence.

The point is: don't focus on just the first part of the sentence and ignore what the rest is speaking about. At the very least you should follow the thought-process to the end of verse 14; the word "but" in verse 15 introduces a contrast, which does not affect the meaning of the previous verses.

So Ephesians 4:11 states A FACT ... that God INDEED gave THE apostles and THE prophets and THE evangelists and THE shepherds and teachers.

Ephesians 4:12, the next part of the same sentence, then states THREE PURPOSES WHY God "gave" these men. These three purposes are:

- to help individual members grow in the truth;
- to do the work of the ministry;
- to build up the Church of God.

Notice:

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
(Ephesians 4:12)

Ephesians 4:13, still the same sentence, then spells out THE RESULTS that these three purposes should achieve. They are:

- till we all achieve UNITY of beliefs ("the faith");
- till we all achieve UNITY of knowledge;
- till we all focus on wanting to follow Christ's example.

Notice:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: (Ephesians 4:13)

Ephesians 4:14, still the same sentence, focuses on THE CONSEQUENCES of those results God wants to achieve. They are:

- that we then have DOCTRINAL SOUNDNESS;

- that people can't deceive us about doctrines;
- that we don't fall prey to false teachers.

Notice:

That we [henceforth] be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, [and] cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;
(Ephesians 4:14)

ALL OF THIS IS BASED ON THE STATEMENT IN VERSE 11!

When you compare the "who" in verse 11 with the "what" in verse 12, it becomes clear that the men in verse 11 are only A PART OF the whole Church, specifically chosen individuals. Verse 12 focuses on how THE WHOLE CHURCH is to benefit from the ones God selected and specifically "GAVE" to do certain things.

The word "gave" implies a specific calling from God. Ephesians chapter 4 supports the concept of a specifically "called" ministry. It does NOT support the idea that "all members are ministers".

Now let's look at another passage in Paul's writings.

1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 12

Let's notice verse 28 of this chapter.

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:28)

The Greek text reads as follows:

kai ous men etheto ho theos en te ekklesia proton apostolous deuteron prophetas triton didaskalous epeita dunameis eita charismata iamaton antilepseis kuberneseis gene glosson (1 Corinthians 12:28)

Here are what these words mean:

- ous = the relative pronoun "WHO, WHICH, WHAT", plural;
- etheto = verb, means "TO SET, PLACE, PUT";
- en = in;
- proton = first;
- deuteron = second;
- triton = third;

- epeita = THEN, AFTER THAT;
- eita = THEN;
- dunameis = POWER, MIGHTY WORKS;
- charismata = GIFTS;
- iamaton = HEALINGS;
- antilepseis = HELPS;
- kuberneseis = ADVISORS, COUNSELS, GUIDES;
- gene = KINDS, DIVERSITY;
- glosson = LANGUAGES.

So here is a literal translation of 1 Corinthians 12:28.

"And which the God has indeed placed in the Church FIRST apostles, SECOND prophets, THIRD teachers, AFTER THAT mighty works, then gifts of healings, helps, advisors, diversities of languages."

It is interesting to note that with the word "epeita" (i.e. "after that") Paul switches from the concrete to the abstract. The things he lists as "first ... second ... third" are specific concrete positions or offices (apostles, prophets, teachers). Someone either is or is not a prophet, teacher or apostle. But with "AFTER THAT" Paul switches to the abstract things (mighty works, gifts of healings, helps, advisors, kinds of languages). None of these abstract things are necessarily tied to any office or position; they are not necessarily limited to ministers.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians about two or three years before he wrote Ephesians. So here in 2 Corinthians Paul states quite clearly that God has set specific offices within the Church in a first, second, third order. Two or three years later Paul retained the same order in his letter to the Ephesians, but between "prophets" and "teachers" he inserted two new groups: evangelists and pastors. So the later sequence is: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. This indicates that the Church had developed further. More congregations had sprung up, and so the administration of the Church had been refined to also include evangelists and pastors (or shepherds). This is typical of "development"; as new circumstances come about, so the way of administering the Church is refined and modified.

The enumeration of first, second, third stops with "teachers"; the enumeration in Ephesians chapter 4 also stops with "teachers". Those are the only specific offices Paul listed as existing within the Church. The abstract things introduced by "AFTER THAT" do not represent specific offices; and that is why Paul did not repeat them in the later Ephesian letter.

So 1 Corinthians 12:28 would also indicate that a clear organizational structure existed within the Church. The fact that there was a development from 1 Corinthians 12:28 to the time of Ephesians 4:11 indicates a certain amount of flexibility in the system. Not all offices need to exist all the time. And new offices may need to be created as new needs become apparent.

Always keep in mind that God did not somehow put the structure of "Church government" up on some

kind of pedestal. Church government is simply a way for effectively meeting a need to achieve God's stated purposes. Church government is NOT an end in itself.

Let's look at one more statement.

PHILIPPIANS 1:1

Notice this verse.

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: (Philippians 1:1)

Paul first addresses the entire congregation as "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi". So every Christian in that congregation has been addressed. Paul then singles out two specific offices within the Church, bishops (overseers) and deacons.

It is correct that in the New Testament Church of God the office of "bishop" was NOT what it later came to be in the Catholic Church. So I am not really concerned about how important that office was, or how much power the bishop may have had.

The point is: Paul specifically singles out two offices, or positions, which existed within the Church. The very word "OVERSEER" implies some authority and responsibility to "OVERSEE" other people. It also implied that everyone else in the congregation was NOT an "overseer".

Paul's wording makes clear that only some in the congregation were "overseers and deacons". The wording implies some form of government. So if we are reading this verse for principles it may reveal, then there is no way we can conclude that everyone in the Church at Philippi was a minister or a bishop or an overseer or a deacon. Paul's opening statement in this letter implies some form of government. It implies offices which had been "set apart" from the rest of the congregation.

Let's look at something else.

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT versus STYLE OF GOVERNING

The type of government that may exist in the Church is one thing. But THE STYLE OF GOVERNING is an altogether different matter. The situation we have amongst those who have come out of WCG is this:

We can see many wrongs, flaws, weaknesses and mistakes in THE WAY ministers have in the past ADMINISTERED the government within the Church. That was "their style" of governing. We need to be careful that we don't conclude that simply because many ministers employed a wrong style of governing, THEREFORE the type of government within the Church must have been wrong.

What some are doing is looking for a TYPE of government, which will make it impossible for ministers to employ a wrong STYLE of governing. That doesn't work. Every type of government can potentially be misused. What others are doing is rejecting all forms of government within the Church, and the wrong style of governing in the past is their justification for doing so.

They are throwing out the baby with the bathwater!

It is a matter of record that many ministers have in the past three or four decades acted in very dictatorial ways! They have tried to run people's lives. They have tried to impose their ideas on the people in their congregations. At times they have used people to further their own ends. They have presented their own likes and dislikes as being God's ways. In many cases ministers have expected special treatment from the congregation. And in many cases ministers have dealt very harshly with members. Many ministers have expected members to make sacrifices, when it was doubtful whether the minister himself would be prepared to make that kind of sacrifice. It is no wonder that members have reasoned as follows:

"He told me to obey God and to be prepared to lose my job. But he himself was quite prepared to teach heresies rather than be fired. He was afraid to lose his job, but he told me to have faith when I faced the same sort of test. And now, that he has FINALLY taken a stand and left WCG, NOW he wants me to still accept him as my minister, as if he had been faithful and dedicated all through this period of the perversion of the true teachings."

It is no wonder that many members are rather sceptical about the doctrinal reliability of some of their ministers. It is no wonder that they are searching for a system of government which will prevent the mistakes of the past.

Now it is also correct that certainly not all ministers employed such a wrong, dictatorial style of governing. It may not even have been the majority of ministers. All through these past few decades there have been many examples of ministers who have truly served their congregations the right way. Their style of governing was right! Nonetheless, many of the indictments recorded in Ezekiel chapter 34 about "the shepherds of Israel" also apply to the way numerous ministers in the Worldwide Church of God have in the past tried to rule.

It is not a simple matter of saying: the wrong style of governing by some ministers in the past was due to the type of government WCG employed, a strong central government. It is interesting that "congregational involvement" in the government of the Church was proposed by one of the greatest religious dictators of all time ... John Calvin. John Calvin (1509 - 1564) for the last seven or eight years of his life ruled the city of Geneva like an absolute dictator! Even the worst offender in this regard in the WCG ministry would have seemed extremely tolerant and liberal compared to John Calvin.

So the people of God need to address two questions regarding this subject of Church government:

1) What TYPE of government would God want His Church to have? The smaller the Church, the less need there is for detailed and hierarchical government. The larger the Church, the more important it becomes to have some kind of central government. The principles revealed in the New Testament clearly imply some kind of central government. We recognize that the means of transport and the means of communication of that time automatically necessitated a certain measure of autonomy. But nonetheless it is clear that Peter and Paul had authority over many different congregations, and that with doctrinal questions they looked for input to the Jerusalem Church.

2) What STYLE of GOVERNING would God want His ministers to employ? This question is really independent of the type of government that may exist in the Church. Here we can find many instructions that apply, like:

- helpers of their joy
- patient and meek
- apt to teach

- considerate of people's needs
- not self-willed
- not selfishly motivated
- tolerant towards other people, but intolerant of false teachings
- courteous and kind and hospitable
- gladly willing to serve people
- balanced in his own life-style; etc..

These are the things that many of the people who are debating this matter of Church government are looking for. But these things are not legislated by a TYPE of Church government that is adopted. They are an expression of THE STYLE of governing that a minister may (really "SHOULD"!) employ.

However, it is also a fact that IT IS EASIER TO HIDE the wrong style of governing behind the front of "government from the top down", which expects "unquestioning" (i.e. it really shouldn't be, but sometimes ends up that way) submission. And it is a fact that this wrong style of governing will be much more transparent in a system of local autonomy, which takes away the excuse of "I am just doing it the way Headquarters has instructed".

So what type of "government" should the Church of God have today? For a start God's people are at this point in time scattered in various different organizations and many are currently not members of any specific group. The larger a group, the more important it probably is to have some kind of "central" government. For many of the smaller groups this may not really be an issue. IF God's people were to get together again in one larger organization, then central government would probably be the most desirable option. I suspect that at the place of safety central Church government will again be the only real option.

What we need right now is not so much an overhauling of the type of government that existed under Mr. Armstrong, as BASIC EDUCATION TOWARDS A RIGHT STYLE OF GOVERNING. This should serve to establish and strengthen mutual respect between the membership and the ministry.

Because we have been speaking about "Church government" I have used these terms thus far. But when I speak about "the right style of governing", that is just another way of referring to the right kind of LEADERSHIP. And that is what the whole question comes down to ... "does the ministry employ the right type of leadership?", rather than "do we have the right type of Church government?" When THE LEADERSHIP is godly, as revealed through the pages of the Bible, then the type of government is only secondary in importance.

Frank W. Nelte