

IS IT A QUESTION OF SURVIVAL OR SALVATION?

Is life on this planet at a crisis point? Has humanity fallen into a mire from which it cannot escape? There is plenty of anecdotal evidence which suggests that this is precisely the case.

Last year, scientists told us that the depletion of the ozone layer is much greater than previously thought. The ozone hole is getting bigger all the time, yet with all the talk about alternative solutions to the CFC gases the fact is that the process of destruction of the ozone layer has not even been stopped, let alone reversed.

The increase in the ultra-violet radiation has already triggered epidemics of skin cancer in humans and animals in countries closer to the poles from where the ozone hole is expanding. Tasmania, the southern most state of Australia, and parts of southern Argentina and Chile, are the first areas to be affected this way. Data from the Northern Hemisphere indicates that countries closer to the North Pole are beginning to experience the same effects. The hole over the North Pole, which was originally smaller than the one in the south, is now expanding as fast or faster than the one in the south.

In the last couple of years, there has been an unexplainable drop in rice yields in the countries of Asia. After the green revolution of the seventies and the eighties, when many countries in the region turned from importers to exporters of rice, this unexpected fall in harvests could be ominous.

Specialists in the field are at a loss to explain this phenomenon, but scientists have already told us that the thinning of the ozone layer affects the development of both animal and plant life. The plankton in the sea, upon which depend all marine life and ultimately land life as well and which maintains a balance in nature by recycling carbon dioxide emissions, a role more important than ever now after the destruction of the forests, is being damaged directly by ultraviolet radiation.

The fishing industries around the world provide one and a half billion meals every day. By the turn of the century this demand is expected to double. But fishermen are already having difficulties meeting the current demand let alone double that. A history of mismanagement and over-exploitation has led to a drastic reduction in the fishing stocks worldwide.

At a time when organic and mineral resources are declining, experts are telling us that the world population will double within a generation. More arable land will be taken out of production for human settlements, so that even less food will be produced. The apocalyptic images of starvation from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and elsewhere are but a reminder of what will be seen on a scale that defies imagination.

The discussion about world over-population has taken a bizarre twist lately. The producers of the Far Eastern Economic Review suggested recently that those who talk about impending doom are of a "racial cast." The idea of over-population, they say, is a white man's plot designed to rule the world through population control.

How did they come to this astonishing conclusion? No one worries about too many white people, only about too many yellow or brown people, and since most of the complainants are white it follows that this is a plot designed to put the white race above the others. A new form of colonialism in other words.

The article goes on to explain why no one needs to worry about overpopulation. It takes as example Hong Kong and Singapore, two prosperous countries with shortages of labor, and compares them with China, an impoverished country but with a huge population pool. China has a density of 125 people per square kilometer, while Hong Kong and Singapore have 6948 and 4484 respectively. The conclusion, they say, is to make every country as prosperous as Hong Kong and Singapore and forget about population control schemes.

"Each additional worker means a bigger pie for all. Thus food production, to name perhaps the most obvious resource, far exceeds the growth in population. Indeed, we have reached the point where famine is almost always man-made ... whether in Stalin's Ukraine, Mengistu's Ethiopia or the Khmer Rouge's Cambodia." (*The Australian*, May 18, 1993).

What figures did these people use to reach their conclusions? That the famines in Ukraine, Ethiopia and Cambodia were man-made does not negate the fact that food resources are getting scarcer. In the case of China, the industrial pie is getting very large indeed - China is now reported to be the third largest economy in the world - but the agricultural pie is shrinking. A specialist at the Chinese Agriculture Ministry, Mr. Yi Yan Li, said recently that of China's 400 million peasant labourers, 160 million are surplus requirements. He described this as a "severe problem."

For several years, China's agricultural share of the GNP has been declining steadily. China Daily commented recently that the grain production will continue to drop in the coming years due to the "shrinking arable land and

deflated enthusiasm among farmers" (*SMH*, May 13, 1993). So much about food production exceeding population growth.

The Far Eastern Economic Review ignores the fact that both Hong Kong and Singapore have no food resources of their own except some fishing industries. When other nations will stop selling them food because they won't have enough for their own people, their industrial pie will amount to nothing. People cannot eat video recorders, computers or television sets.

How many countries have a labor shortage aside from Hong Kong and Singapore? Virtually every other country in the world has a large pool of unemployed people. Unemployment has become the scourge of the modern world. The technological revolution of the last few years has had the effect of reducing, not increasing the number of people actively involved in the work force. Hong Kong and Singapore have benefited from an unusual set of favorable circumstances: proximity to large trading blocks, tourist destination, educated population, etc.

As for the statement that "each additional worker means a bigger pie for all," the Chinese leaders obviously have not heard about that one yet. For more than a decade they have been trying desperately to stabilize their population at 900 million. They even imposed fines on those that had more than one child and rewarded those who followed this policy. Today, China has 1.2 billion people and still growing.

By the turn of the century, India is expected to overtake China as the most populous country in the world. India can ill afford that when it can hardly feed its people now.

At present, China imports about ten million tons of grain every year. By the end of the century, it will need to import up to 100 million tons a year. That is about half the present world trade in grains. Where will they buy their wheat from when other countries will need to increase their purchases accordingly?

With the doubling of the world population in about thirty years time, every country will need to feed twice as many people as it feeds now. Does anyone seriously think that food production will double in that time? Then double again in less than thirty years, and keep doubling with every new generation?

It is simply impossible for food production to keep up with the population growth when the farming area must shrink in order to make room for more human settlements. Even if the "pie" is not shrinking, the slice from it will be getting smaller as more people will need to be fed from it. But the world does not need to wait thirty years to reach a crisis point. We are already familiar with famines, droughts, ecological disasters, greenhouse effect, ultraviolet radiation, social unrest, crime, drugs, unemployment, family breakdown, epidemics, etc.

Massive changes in the weather pattern have produced major disasters around the world. We have become used to describing natural disasters in superlatives terms - the worst, the biggest, the most, the longest, of everything: hurricanes, earthquakes, droughts, volcanoes, floods, famines, etc.

"A record number of tornadoes (1381 in all) touched down on US soil last year, as well as America's costliest disaster, Hurricane Andrew, which destroyed \$20 billion worth of property in Florida alone. Nor is the outrageous weather limited to North America. Hailstorms the size of tennis balls last week bombarded France, a country whose precious vacation time has been marred of late by blazing springs, cool summers and snowless ski slopes.

Farmers in Western Queensland, Australia, are currently suffering the state's longest and most widespread drought. New Delhi recorded its hottest day in more than 40 years in June; Rome last week had its hottest day of this century. Torrential rains have become so severe in Hong Kong that meteorologists coined a new term - black rainstorm alert - to signal their approach.

Weather-related losses at Lloyd's of London are staggering. Says underwriter Richard Keeling: 'From what we have experienced over the past four or five years, either we have been very unlucky or things are getting worse out there...'

Why are so many records being set in so many places right now? Could it have anything to do with the holes mankind has drilled in the ozone layer? The forests it has levelled? The greenhouse gases it has pumped into the atmosphere? No reputable scientist will say that what the world is experiencing now is the early effects of global warming - even if a few privately suspect it to be so." (*Time*, July 19, 1993).

Three weeks later, *Time* magazine wrote again:

"Floods are as ancient as Noah's time and as new as last week. In southern China rushing rivers have killed more than 150 people over the past two months and left 1.6 million homeless. In Nepal at least 1,800 died two weeks ago as flash floods and landslides swept away mountain villages; 1,350 lost their lives in northern India and Bangladesh after the monsoon hit the subcontinent with more than usual severity. In the US, the cost of damage to homes, businesses and farmland from overflowing Mississippi and its tributaries is expected to reach \$12 billion." (*Time*, August 9, 1993).

Only two years ago, nearly three quarters of Bangladesh was under water and in central China 3000 people died and more than 200 million had their lives disrupted by flood. Now, floods ravage these countries again.

In Africa, the drought has been extending southwards from the Sahara region through the eastern rim all the way to the southern parts. Some of those countries have been forced to round up animals in their national parks and relocate them elsewhere to save them from complete annihilation after the rivers and their natural habitats have dried up. They cannot do the same with human beings for there is no where to move them.

Here in Australia we have been experiencing the worst drought on record too. *Time* magazine did not tell the whole story when it said that Western Queensland was affected by the longest and most severe drought. New South Wales and other parts of the country are just as affected. At the same time, South Australia suffered \$2 billion loss of farm produce in the worst flood in that state's history.

The drought in New South Wales brought with it another unexpected disaster. Without enough rains to flush down the "fertilizing" phosphates from the land, a growth of poisoning algae have infested thousands of kilometers of

vital river systems, and created a health hazard to dozens of towns and cities, and millions of cattle, sheep and native animals.

Droughts are a natural occurrence in this country, but the severity and frequency with which they have been occurring lately indicate that they no longer follow a natural cycle. Man has had a leading hand in bringing about this disaster.

Not long after I arrived in this country, a little over a decade ago, I was offered a job in a small country town in central New South Wales. As I traveled to take up my position there, I was appalled by what I saw in the countryside. In many places you could look as far as the horizon and not see a tree in sight. This is not the area marked as desert on the map, but the most fertile agricultural land in the country.

The farmers have cut down the trees to make it easy for their agricultural machinery and to increase their profit. In the Australian climate this is nothing short of madness. In so doing, they have weakened the soil against wind and rains, and created conditions for continuous and severe droughts.

Two years ago, the city of Melbourne was paralysed not by a rainstorm, but by a dust storm. That is why trees are so important to the land: they anchor down the soil, provide vital relief from heat for humans, birds and animals, maintain humidity in the soil, draw in the clouds and precipitate rain, help maintain a natural cycle and minimize the need for artificial fertilizers.

In my days as a child in Romania, I remember how my parents used to take particular care to maintain a few trees on each parcel of our land. We did not have much land, only about four hectares, but that was almost sufficient for our needs because it was well taken care of. Although the crops were not growing very well in the shadow of those trees, this was more than compensated by the fruits we were collecting from them. You would be surprised by how much fruit you can collect from a few well cared for trees. My parents used to sell some, make brandy from others, and still have enough to dry up for the winter. We had no fridge and no supply of fresh fruits during the winter, but we did not suffer because of that. Our attics were full of fruits, seeds and nuts, our cellar full of vegetables - some raw some pickled - and with the meat and dairy products from our few animals (a cow, about a dozen sheep, a couple of goats, a dozen chickens or so) we had an almost idyllic lifestyle. The people in the village led a healthier life style than we do now in the cities with all our amenities.

My parents never planted the same crop two years in a row. They always alternated crops. But all that was destroyed when the communists came with their "scientific socialism." The trees, the hedges and the dams were leveled out and everyone was forced to work on huge featureless estates. They never alternated crops, always planting wheat. Within a few short years, the land lay in ruins and the people in misery.

The communists must be the only people in the history of the world who never learned from their mistakes. No matter how bad things became, they persisted with their ill-conceived practices. When the crops kept failing, they decided that it was because of saboteurs. So they started arresting and killing the leading and most efficient peasants, "the enemies of the proletariat." They were made an example to other reluctant peasants, but things did not improve. The communist utopia turned into an indescribable nightmare. And to think that there are still people who believe in that kind of communism and want to restore it.

Before the communists took over, Romania was one of the granaries of Europe. Now it is an impoverished country. Romania is also one of the worst hit countries by the drought which has affected much of Eastern Europe and Russia. Nature inevitably takes its course on those who disregard its laws.

The question is who forced the Australian, the American and other free world farmers to adopt equally destructive farming methods? Is it a mere coincidence that with the destruction of most of the world's forests and the adoption of such ruinous farming methods, the world finds itself in a crisis of survival?

The Cold War ended with the demise of communism, but how much hope does capitalism offer?

"As far back as 1942, William Hocking, professor of philosophy at Harvard, dismissed the nostrum that urbanization was the key to economic and social progress. 'Capitalism can maintain its health only on three conditions,' he wrote. (i) It must take the problem of employment as its collective responsibility: it must satisfy the will to work. (ii) The owning and use of capital must be general. (iii) Ownership in its sense must be widely diffused; this means the ownership of real property instead of mere abstract tokens such as money and securities. And real property comes to its best expression in the farm operated by its owner or owners, for here we have capital bearing its natural and unchallenged fruit in direct response to labor and intelligent investment.

Five decades later such concepts are not even worth a laugh in a society which prefers to make its money out of paper-shuffling, but is now, as a result of this interpretation of progress, flat on its back waiting for the Keating-type recovery which, whether in Australia, Britain or the United States, never comes.

One of the West's most successful practitioners of 'playing the markets', Sir James Goldsmith, put his finger on the nub. 'When people are forced to move from the countryside to the towns, both the countryside and the towns are destabilized. The famous favelas of Brazil, the slums of such mega-towns as Rio de Janeiro, did not exist before the Green Revolution, which was supposed to eradicate hunger throughout the world by applying science to agriculture and thereby increasing output..

Large mechanized, scientific farms did produce more food per person directly employed, but those no longer employed were chased into towns, creating vast urban concentrations with their attendant slums.

As they were uprooted not only from their homes but also from their cultures and families, the refugees and their children were reduced to dependence on welfare and crime.'" (B.A. Santamaria, *The Weekend Australian*, July 31, 1993).

There are now close to 30 million unemployed people in the Western industrial countries, and their numbers are still growing.

"Germany is in its worst recession since the postwar recovery; Britain, mired in it for the past three years, is struggling to clamber out of its longest slump since the Great Depression. 'No one's job has been safe. That's

virtually unprecedented,' says Howard Davies, director general of the Confederation of British Industry." (*Time*, July 5, 1993).

"The continuing international recession (apart from China and the developing Asian economies) has many people concerned that the world's trading system is on verge of collapse, with serious consequences including increasing political conflict between the US, Europe and Japan...

The result of the renewed Japan-bashing and the enthusiasm for 'managed trade' and the North American Free Trade Agreement by the Clinton Administration may not merely be the relative impoverishment of the world economy. The dangers inherent in allowing the US to slide into regionalism are greater than that... The world - especially the Western world - has undergone a transformation during the past 10 years. It has been a decade marked by rapid, cataclysmic change that has produced a new configuration of social, economic and organizational forces." (*The Bulletin*, August 3, 1993).

The former Soviet Union gave us Chernobyl then it collapsed. The world breathed a sigh of relief in the hope that the Cold War and the danger of nuclear confrontation were over. What the world did not know then was that the legacy of communism is just as catastrophic for the world as the danger from its nuclear arsenals: "Russia's nuclear-powered submarines and ice-breakers pose a greater danger of nuclear accidents than do its atomic power plants, according to Jane's Intelligence review" (*The Sun-Herald*, August 8, 1993).

People who are environmentally conscious know about the devastation caused by the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska. But how many people know that in the vast Russian wilderness, four times that amount is being spilled every day from the decaying antiquated oil installations? The damage done to the environment by the oil spill and its many accompanying fires is incalculable. The topsoil is being destroyed and the ground below, which was permanently frozen, is beginning to melt. Scientists fear that this will affect the global climate. Already in 1990, the temperature in the Arctic Circle reached 40 degrees Celsius, eight degrees above the normal.

On the political scene, things are hardly better. The West has put all its hopes in President Yeltsin's ability and determination to introduce democratic reforms in Russia. But what will happen when he is no longer on the scene? He is in poor health, and while there seem to be no obvious contenders who can step in his shoes and continue his reforms, there are many powerful rivals who call for the restoration of the Russian empire.

On the economic sphere, the one great resource that gives Russia its hard currency and keeps its grossly outdated industry going, is oil. But now it has been estimated that its oil reserves will dry out within a decade. What will the political and military leaders do when they see their people being decimated by hunger and their nuclear arsenal brought to nothing for lack of fuel? The dangers coming from that part of the world are yet to be comprehended.

Last year, gathered at the Rio International Summit, more than one hundred heads of states to discuss the frightening deterioration of the environment. They discussed things, and that's all. Has anyone heard anything about that event since?

Human beings have an uncanny ability to discuss things when they get to a crisis point, then leave the problems to others to resolve. This time, however, the problems will not be resolved by others. The world is no longer facing temporary local problems, but intractable worldwide problems. It is no longer a question of survival, but one of salvation. But science cannot save; only God can.

Human beings, however, have decided that there is no room for God in their deliberations. Even when the world is crumbling around them, when it is becoming obvious that life itself is in danger of extinction, they will not turn to the only source that can save them.

They seek immortality through "scientific" methods such as cryogenics (deep-freezing of the corpse in the hope that one day scientists will discover the secret of immortality, cure their diseased bodies and revive them to eternal life), and perpetual replacement of body parts with robotic devices or genetically cloned body parts. That's the kind of immortality science offers humanity.

That educated people can come up with such absurdities is a witness to the bankruptcy of our educational system. That is the effect of compartmentalizing our tertiary studies in rigid disciplines without any relation to each other. It should be obligatory for all university students to study humanity subjects. As it is, we get medical graduates without ethics, lawyers without morals, and scientists with distorted visions of the future.

They need to study not just any humanity subjects, but the good old fashion classics, philosophy and religion. During my university studies, the head of the Religious Studies Department once said that "time was when in philosophical studies people talked about God and the meaning of life, about ethics and values, but no more." These days they have a "Theory" that if people understand what they study, it is not worth studying.

Searching for truth, God, and a moral purpose in life does not go well with evolutionary thinking. In the struggle for survival there is no room for compassion, altruistic feelings and transcendental goals. Hedonistic materialism and the pursuit of mindless pleasures, are the things that count in our "enlightened" society. That is why humanity finds itself on the brink of catastrophe.

RELIGIOUS DECEPTION

While human beings refuse to believe in the true God, they have no qualms about believing in demonism, satanic rituals, witchcraft, blasphemy, infidelity, adultery, horror, perversions, incest, etc. Go to any bookstore and see how many books you find there about these subjects, and then see how many books you can find about God. Few people suspect that there is a spiritual connection in all these things.

It is no mere coincidence that at a time when the very survival of life on this planet is in question, humanity finds itself in the darkest spiritual condition. The problems the world is facing these days are the ones Jesus Christ said would occur at the end of this age. In the twenty fourth chapter of the book of Matthew, He spoke of wars and rumors of wars, of famines, pestilences, earthquakes, tribulations, betrayals, lawlessness, etc. Anyone reading that chapter would not fail to recognize that they are very much part of our world today.

Jesus Christ said that these things will culminate in a world conflagration of such magnitude that unless God intervenes to cut those days short no flesh will survive. Why is it then that in spite of all these ominous signs people still do not understand the urgency of the times in which we live? It is because of deception. Deception on such a scale that staggers the imagination.

Jesus Christ began and finished His prophecy by telling His followers to be on guard against false preachers, false prophets and false christs:

"Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' And Jesus answered and said to them: 'Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am Christ,' and shall deceive many.'" (Matt. 24:3-5).

"And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ' or 'There' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you before hand." (Matt. 24:22-25).

If religious deception is so widespread and plays such an important role in world affairs at this time, why don't we hear about it more often? Who are the people who are deceived, who are the deceivers, and who are the elect? Herein lies one of the most astounding mysteries of all time. Arm yourself with a good Bible, and get ready for the discovery of your life.

THE WORK OF ELIJAH

At one time, the disciples of Jesus Christ came to Him and asked:

"Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' Then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist." (Matt. 17:10-13).

Before Jesus Christ returns to this earth, a prophet must come in the spirit of Elijah to restore all things. Not just a few things, but ALL THINGS. The question is, what are the things that need to be restored?

To begin with, if there is so much deception at this time, the first thing that needs to be restored is truth. In the Bible, truth is associated with the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and falsehood with a false gospel. The most obvious place to look to see if a deception has taken place is in relation to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, this is what Apostle Paul wrote:

"But even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

If the Gospel was already being veiled from those who did not believe the truth two thousand years ago, what must be the condition of the world now? What gospel is being preached in the churches these days? If it is the correct gospel, why is there a need for Elijah to come and restore all things? 'All things' surely must include the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. The most important thing then that needs to be restored is the Gospel that Jesus Christ delivered to us.

When the god of this world set out to deceive the world, he chose the Gospel as his main target. Getting people to believe a wrong gospel means causing them to lose their salvation.

The true Gospel is virtually unknown even among the Christian churches let alone among the rest of the world. If Christ were to return before Elijah completed his preparatory work, He would not be recognized as a Savior; He would be regarded as a hostile alien. Dozens of films have been made about the arrival of dangerous aliens, but none about the arrival of a benevolent and loving Savior. If you think that there is no connection between what they

do in Hollywood and the religious deception perpetuated in the world, you do not understand what the world is being prepared for.

The Bible says that before the great day of the Lord, the whole world will be gathered to do battle against Jesus Christ (Rev. 16:14-16). This means that Elijah will not have had much success in getting the world to believe his message, but at least his work will serve as a witness against an unbelieving world.

The next thing which needs to be restored, and one which connects well with the first, is faith. In a discussion with His disciples Jesus Christ implied that when He returns there will be little faith in the world: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Truth and faith go hand in hand. If one disappears, the other is sure to follow suit. Truth about God's plan for mankind and faith in His love and power of salvation are the missing ingredients in the world today. But how can people believe in God when they are bombarded from birth till death with the fallacy of evolution? Our educational system is not designed to reveal God, but to prevent human beings from discovering Him.

Even the Churches of God - the most fundamentalist of all churches - have succumbed to this deception. To be sure, they don't preach straight Darwinian evolution - they have sweetened it with gaps and long ages - but this does not make it any less satanic.

The third important element missing in the world today is love. A well-known song says, "what the world needs now is love, sweet love." Yes, love sweet love, the problem is, those who sing it know little about true love. They have equated love with lust and infatuation, and while there is plenty of that around there is precious little true love, the love that comes from God.

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." (Mal. 4:5-6).

There has been much discussion in the churches about who "the fathers" in this passage might be. The Churches of God have decided that they are the Patriarchs of the Old Testament. They have not explained though how one is to turn the heart of dead people to their children and vice versa.

Most biblical prophecies have a dual fulfillment. In this case, the word refers as much to our human parents - families are torn apart by divorce and hatred - as to our heavenly Fathers. The prophet Isaiah wrote:

"Look down from heaven, and see Your habitation, holy and glorious. Where is Your zeal and Your strength, the yearning of Your heart and Your mercies toward me? Are they restrained? Doubtless You are our Father, though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O Lord, are our Father; our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name." (Is. 63:15-16).

The Patriarchs are not the fathers; "Abraham is ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us", but God the Creator is. And so is Jesus Christ. When the first humans were created God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness". He did not say, I will make man in My image, according to My likeness, but "Our image" and "Our likeness".

When one of the disciples asked Jesus to show them the Father, He said: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14:9). And when they asked Him to teach them how to pray, this is what He told them:

"When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues [and churches] and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.
Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." (Matt. 6:9-13).

Jesus Christ used the word 'Father' no less than four times in this passage to refer to our Creator God. But why did He not tell His disciples to pray to the Fathers instead of the Father, did He not know that there were at least two people at the moment of creation? Of course He knew, He was the second Person (John 1:13). But the convention throughout the Bible is that we pray to the Godhead, the Creator God and Father of all.

Jesus Himself prayed to the Father, and since He acknowledged that the Father is greater than Him (John 14:28), we must follow his example and pray to the Father too, not the Fathers.

We could have cited only the first verse of the "Lord's Prayer", to prove our point, but we thought we'd give you the whole thing in case you decide to try it sometime. When you pray, do it slowly and think about the meaning of each verse. When you finish once, do it again, and a third time if need be. After that, you may bring before God your other problems.

Do not go before God with requests only; start by giving Him praise, glory and honor; thank Him for His great creation, and for calling you to become His son or daughter. You will notice the peace of mind and the confidence that come with prayer almost from the beginning. The more you pray, the better you will feel.

There is no prescribed amount of time required for prayer, but as a general guide if you begin and end your day with this formula, you have what should be your minimum for the day. In the Bible, there are examples of short and effective prayers and of long prayers. Jesus Christ used to pray by the hour, but you are not Jesus Christ and neither am I.

Some churches forbid their followers to repeat the Lord's Prayer - the Churches of God among them - on the pretext that Jesus Christ told His followers not to engage in vain repetitions. Repeating the "Lord's Prayer" twice or three times slowly for the purpose of sinking in its message is not vain repetition. If you have ever heard the Hare Krishna people chanting their mantras you will understand what a vain repetition is. Even some Christian churches have a fixed formula which they repeat ad nauseam. That is vain repetition.

When you pray, imagine the Father and Jesus Christ on their throne listening to you, ready to help you overcome your problems and weaknesses. Do not think of God as being distant and unapproachable, but as a loving and forgiving Father.

You must not put anyone between you and God such as a saint or Mary the mother of Jesus. Neither should you listen to those who say that God and Jesus Christ are not distinct persons. This is what the ministers in the Worldwide Church of God are preaching these days:

"We do not believe that the Bible teaches that the Father and the Son are persons. Neither do we believe that the Father created Jesus." (*The Plain Truth*, January 1993, p.2).

What Bible do these people read? We have not heard of a Bible that does not teach that God created us in His image. And if He created us in His image, then we look like Him, and He like us. If Jesus Christ was not created by the Father, then to whom did He pray all the time and whom did He call Father? To say that He was not created by God is to deny that He had a Father, and that is blasphemy. Have these people ever read these Scriptures:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have preeminence." (Col. 1:15-18).

"And to the angel of the church of Laodiceans write: 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, The beginning of the creation of God.'" (Rev. 3:14).

This only shows how far the Churches of God have departed from the truth. Any wonder that Elijah must come to restore all things.

Jesus Christ took upon Himself human nature to show us the way of salvation. He delivered to us the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, was crucified, resurrected, and was seen by hundreds of people before He ascended to heaven. Yet, those who claim to be His ministers say that neither He nor the Father are persons. Great is the spiritual darkness that has fallen upon this world.

If you wonder why we keep referring to the Churches of God, it is because they play an important role in the Bible, and because they have become the leading deceivers in the world today.

Isn't it remarkable that the first thing people do when they depart from God is to deny His existence? The Jews also deny that God has any specific image or form. That is what the chief rabbi of the Great Synagogue in Sydney declared recently.

There are dozens of Scriptures in the Old Testament which show that God has the same characteristics that we humans have. He speaks, He eats, He walks, He gets angry, He forgives, He has feelings and body parts as we do. And it cannot be otherwise, for we have been created in His image.

Do you understand now the meaning of these Scriptures?

"I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation called by My name. I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts." (Is. 65:1-2).

Who are the people who sought God and did not find Him? In the Old Testament, the Jews; in the New Testament, the Christians. Not the true Jews and the true Christians, but the pretenders. (See John 8:37-44; Rev. 2:9).

God is our Father and to Him we must turn our hearts and love Him if He is to turn His heart to us and love us. Unless Elijah fulfils this important mission, the world will perish. The word "curse" in Malachi 4:6 can be translated as "utter destruction." But why has God turned His heart away from us? Because human beings have turned their hearts away from Him in the first place. What is God to do when puny human beings say that He does not exist, that they created themselves?

If Elijah's work is so important for the salvation of the world, why is he alone in doing this work? What are the ministers and the priests preaching in their churches? Why are they not out there working with him? Is it not because they have been deceived by the god of this world with a false gospel and are unable to recognize the true Gospel anymore?

"Now the spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons." (1 Ti. 4:1).

"For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many." (Matt. 24:5).

Be careful therefore that you do not fall under the spell of those who are led by "seducing spirits", who think and that they are ministers of Christ, yet are deceiving those who accept their doctrines.

THE TWO WITNESSES

Before the return of Jesus Christ, the Bible says that there will be only two people in the world who will be witnessing God's message:

"And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy [there are already droughts in most parts of the world]; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood [devastating floods are also with us], and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire [disease epidemics, AIDS, TB, cancer and the like are creeping all over the world]. Now when they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where our Lord was crucified.

Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three and a half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

Now after three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.' And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them." (Rev. 11:3-12).

The signs that accompany the work of these prophets are with us now. The two witnesses are either in the world right now or will appear shortly. It should be noticed that the Bible does not say that during their testimony the earth will be struck with all those plagues, but that they have power to strike the earth with all plagues "as often as they desire." They may not desire to strike the earth with any more plagues than it already has, so these are not the signs by which they could be recognized.

The Scriptures say that fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies. But what kind of fire could that be? It cannot be real fire, for it would devour them too. It is the words that come out of their mouth that devour their enemies – that is the kind of fire.

At the end of their testimony, they will be killed and all "those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them." That is quite a feat; here you have two people speaking the truth, preaching and witnessing the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, yet the world hates them. In a world saturated with falsehood, iniquity and deception, one sure way of causing people to hate you is to speak the truth. Which raises an important question: will Elijah hate these prophets too? Both the work of Elijah and that of the two witnesses are to be done at the same time, just prior to the return of Jesus Christ. If no one else recognized the two witnesses, Elijah certainly would. How can we explain then that all those who dwell on earth will rejoice over their death? The only possible explanation is that Elijah is one of them. But if the two witnesses are equal before God, one sitting at His right side and the other at His left, why did Jesus Christ say that before His return Elijah, not Elijahs, will come to restore all things? How can Elijah do the work of one person in one place and the work of two in another? Jesus Christ gave us the answer to this astonishing Bible mystery:

"The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?' And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?' So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.'" (Matt 19:3-6).

The two witnesses are a husband and wife team. Only in marriage can one person be two and two people be one. Apostle Paul clarified this point when he said that a woman couldn't preach but be in submission to her husband.

"Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness, with self-control." (1 Ti. 2:11-15).

A woman is saved not by preaching, but by childbearing. She redeems herself from the bondage of Satan by fulfilling the holy role given to her by God – childbearing. In the case of the two witnesses, her role is to stand by her husband during the most perilous time in the history of the world. Although she couldn't preach, she can, nevertheless, be a witness in her own way. To be a witness, one does not need to be a preacher. Anyone can be a witness. All he or she needs to do is to be faithful to God, be righteous, chaste, truthful, loving, humble, helpful, etc. In other words, she witnesses by example not by preaching. This does not prevent her from answering questions about her faith, or from addressing small groups of women. But she could never hold spiritual or administrative positions in the Churches of God. Any church that permits a woman to usurp the role of men ceases to be a Church of God. So while the husband is doing the work of Elijah, preaching and teaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and restoring the things that need to be restored, both of them are witnesses of God – each in their own way.

The world started with a husband and wife failing before God; it will end up with them redeeming themselves by doing the work of God together when no one else is doing it.

Adam was the son of God (Luke 3:38; Gen. 1:26-27). But Adam and Eve sinned and hid themselves from their Father (Gen. 3:8). In His disappointment, the Father of Mankind (Gen. 5:1-2) turned His heart away from His creation and hid His face from them too (Isa.59:2), then let them learn their own lesson. Now, six thousand years later, the lesson is complete. The world is on the verge of destruction. Unless God turns His heart to us and saves us, we will perish. That is why the work of Elijah and his companion is so important.

Satan and his ministers will be furious when their work is exposed and brought to an end, and will kill the two witnesses. That will be the end of the reign of Satan, of his ministers, and of this age.

"Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been shattered, all these things shall be finished." (Daniel 12:7).

Who are the holy people whose power shall be shattered in the end time? The words "time, times and half a time" equal three and a half years – the length of time the two witnesses would be doing their work. The holy people, whose power shall be shattered, are none other than the two witnesses. When they will be killed, "all these things shall be finished", this age shall have run its course, and a new age began.

THE GREAT DECEPTION

When Jesus Christ was asked by His disciples, what will be the sign of His coming and of the end of this age, He replied:

"Take heed that no one deceive you. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many... Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads let him understand)..."

Then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened... Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matt. 24:4-5,15,21-22,30).

"Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming... lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: **Watch!**" (Mark 13:35-37).

Ever since that time, for nearly 2000 years, there has been no shortage of attempts to unveil the seemingly impenetrable mystery of the "abomination of desolation", but to date we know of no one who has succeeded. The latest publication on this topic, coming from the leader of one of the Churches of God, tells us that the "abomination of desolation" is an idol which will be placed in the holy place, inside a temple which is yet to be built in Jerusalem. This is how he actually begins his booklet:

'Christ's strange warning about an "abomination of desolation" means, literally, "the abomination of the desolator," which ALL AUTHORITIES GENERALLY AGREE MEANT AN IDOL, or idolatrous apparatus, to be set up in the holy place (in the temple of God] by the individual who would destroy Jerusalem, or cause it to become "desolate.'" (Garner Ted Armstrong, *The Abomination of Desolation*, Church of God, International, Tyler, Texas: 1990; emphasis added).

The author readily admits that the idea of the "abomination of desolation" being an idol is not his, but one which has been peddled around by many "authorities". His booklet, which is full of inconsistencies and contradictions, throws no new light on this topic - it simply rehashes what others have said in the past. In fact, it does not even give us as much information as one can find in a good encyclopedia of general knowledge.

A notable omission in his booklet, as it is in all books on this topic, is an explanation of the words, "whoever reads, let him understand." What is it to be understood? If it is as simple as placing an idol in the temple of God, why make it sound mysterious by adding, "whoever reads, let him understand?" The author seems to hope that by ignoring this question no one will be bothered by it, but that is not good enough because, as you shall see, without knowing the meaning of these words, this mystery cannot be understood.

After his sweeping introductory statement, the author moved quickly to another great mystery - the "little horn" of the prophet Daniel. He knows that there is a connection between this "little horn" and the "abomination of desolation" (it has been a common theme in these kind of writings since at least the eleventh century), but like all the others he does not quite know how to explain it.

On page 12 of his booklet he says: "This 'little horn' represents some kind of government which persecutes God's true Church!" Some kind of government? Is this supposed to be a revelation?

Then on page 13 he says: "This 'little horn' symbolizes a human leader who sits in a position powerful enough to change times and laws." And on page 25, his "little horn" suffers yet another metamorphosis: 'This false prophet is the "little horn" of Daniel - the government which finally held sway over the final seven heads of the Roman Empire.'

Still, on page 26, he, or it, becomes the mighty Antichrist, the "man of sin", and the "false prophet".

"The leader of this great false church is the FALSE PROPHET of the Bible prophecy, the ANTICHRIST. He is the 'little horn' of Daniel. He is the 'man of sin' of II Thessalonians 2. He is the 'abomination of desolation' PERSONIFIED, for he is the one who will sit in the temple of God, making the blasphemous claim that he is God!"

Garner Ted Armstrong wants us to believe these statements for no other reason than that they come from him, for the proofs he brings to substantiate them are either slim or non-existent. And it cannot be otherwise, for when someone relies on other people's writings to such an extent, it is hard to give references without revealing that he had little or nothing to add to the topic.

Towards the conclusion of his booklet, we find yet another gem:

'Should a famous statue that millions have kissed - a blackened bronze statue of a figure with a strangely Byzantine or Grecian cast, one who is supposedly the "Peter" of Rome - be moved inside the temple; should this man himself ensconce himself inside the temple, then you will have seen the ABOMINATION SET IN PLACE; and horrifying, unimaginable DESTRUCTION will follow.' (p.28).

When will this "horrifying, unimaginable DESTRUCTION" occur? "When such a temple is built, you should be aware that the final events depicted in this article are VERY NEAR." (p.27).

Now, if the author himself does not quite know when and what to watch for, how would his readers know it? "Should a famous statue... be moved inside the temple, should this man himself ensconce himself inside the temple... should be aware that the final events... are very near."

Should... should ... should. But what if these things shouldn't happen that way? What if a statue is not moved inside the temple? What if "this man himself" will not "ensconce himself inside the temple"? What if such a temple will not be built? What if the holy place is not inside a temple? What if the "abomination of desolation" is not an idol after all? What then?

Then those who watch for them will be found asleep when Jesus Christ returns and will miss out on their salvation (John 14:3). It will be too late for them to do anything about it when they realize that they have been duped with a false gospel.

The mystery of the "abomination of desolation" is connected with the greatest deception the world has ever seen. We will show you that:

- 1) The "abomination of desolation" is not an idol.
- 2) The holy place is not to be found in any new temple.
- 3) Most of the events said to happen in the future, have already occurred.
- 4) The "little horn" of the prophet Daniel is not the same as the "false prophet", and
- 5) We will finally reveal the meaning of the words, "whoever reads, let him understand".

A NEW TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM?

A few years ago, a group of evangelists led by G. T. Armstrong, went to Jerusalem to the Jewish leaders and asked them when they are going to build the new temple. What the Jewish leaders thought of this phenomenon we do not know, but we can imagine their bewilderment at being asked by, of all people, "Christian" evangelists when they are going to build a temple for a God and a Messiah in whom they do not believe.

It is a well-known fact that on the site on which the ancient temple of God stood there is now the Dome of the Rock. Destroying that mosque in order to build a new temple would not be particularly conducive to a harmonious atmosphere in the current peace negotiations between the Arabs and the Jews. That would surely dash any hope of reconciliation between the two peoples.

About ten years ago, a follower of G. T. Armstrong, on hearing that the temple could not be built because of the Dome of the Rock, decided to speed up things by attempting to burn it down. He was disowned immediately by the church, but that does not nullify the fact that it was that kind of preaching that drove a disturbed man to such an extreme action. Who can guarantee that other people will not follow in his steps when they hear that their Savior cannot return because the temple could not be built?

Interestingly enough, the people who preach that a new temple must be built say that no sooner will it be finished than it will be destroyed again. Great encouragement for the Jews to build, but that is how these people think that God operates: putting His servants through enormous difficulties only to see their work go up in a puff of smoke as soon as it is finished.

Now, if a temple were needed for the return of Jesus Christ would God have left human beings to grapple with such an insurmountable problem? Would He not have made provision for such a development?

Another "Christian" evangelist, and leader of a new "Church of God", one W. F. Dankenbring, realizing the difficulties created by the Dome of the Rock, announced recently in bold headlines in his church's magazine that he found the solution. He discovered - by means only he knows - that the Dome of the Rock does not actually stand on the exact temple site but just next to it. Thus, he reckons, it is possible to build the temple next to it without destroying the Dome.

Now that is an ingenious solution. What a sight that would be: a Jewish temple side by side with a Muslim mosque. Like going to the market, people would be able to choose whom to worship. No one would be able to say anymore that the Jews and the Arabs cannot live side by side. Before long they would exchange ideas and share in their religious experiences. The Jews will be keeping the Ramadan and the Arabs the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. A New World order indeed. The problem is, we would need to change the Bible, for the prophet Isaiah wrote:

"Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and beside Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you." (Is. 43:10a-12a).

But the gospel according to Dankenbring would read: "Behold there is another god beside Me now. A foreign one, too."

Our Arab friends might take objection to this by pointing out that Allah is no more foreign than is Yahweh. And they would be right, of course, for both names refer to the same God, the God of Abraham the Patriarch of both the Jews and the Arabs.

Not many people know that the Jews and the Arabs have a common heritage and an equally important role to play in world affairs. Interestingly enough, just as Israel descended from twelve tribal leaders (Gen. 35:23-26), so have the Arabs (Gen. 17:20; 25:12-16). Much can be said about the spiritual significance of the parallels between these two peoples; sufficient to say here that from God's point of view if a temple was needed in Jerusalem for the return of Jesus Christ, the Dome of the Rock would be as good as any temple built by the Jews.

What Christians need to ask themselves however is this: could such an important event, the return of Jesus Christ, be dependent upon the whims of human beings? What if the Jews cannot or will not build the temple?

It is a well-known fact that the Jews attribute many of their sufferings in the Diaspora to the Christians. We should, therefore, not be surprised to find that on hearing that the return of Jesus Christ depends on them building a new temple, they may well decide to avenge themselves by never building it, thus leaving the Christians in limbo, forever waiting for their Savior to return.

The Jews could hardly be expected to facilitate the return of Jesus Christ when they have their own messiah. Earlier this year, it was widely reported that a ninety-one year old man from New York, the leader of the ultra-orthodox Lubavitcher sect, Rabbi Schneerson, is their messiah. The man suffered a stroke and is unable to talk and walk anymore, but such 'minor' impediments did not prevent his followers to regard him their messiah.

The Jewish people are practical people. It is not for them the talk about salvation and immortality in an undefined future kingdom. They want tangible blessings here and now. This is where their newly found messiah comes in handy.

"This is not just spooky stuff," says Joseph Gutnick, speaking about a messianic prophecy that says he will find diamonds in the West Australian desert. "It isn't abracadabra or spooky. I am a practical man. Everyone knows that I am practical. But my leader Rabbi Schneerson, has predicted that I will find gold and diamond deposits so big they will boggle all our imagination." (*The Australian*, May 31, 1993).

One wonders just how the Jews came to believe from the following Scriptures that an old man in a wheelchair is their messiah:

"I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'" (Ps. 2:7-9).

"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed. Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him." (Dan. 7:13-14, 27).

Well, that is what happens when people reject the New Testament, for had they read Matthew 24:23-27, they would have known better than to regard a frail old man as their messiah. Two thousand years ago, they chose a murderer in place of the Messiah, now they chose a man in a wheelchair. And yet, these are the people to whom the Churches of God are looking to prepare the way for the return of Jesus Christ.

When they were God's chosen people in Old Testament times, they built the great temple of God in Jerusalem which was sanctified by God's Holy Spirit (1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chr. 7:1-2). But would God sanctify a temple built by them now in their present condition? Under the New Testament, only those who repent and worship God and Jesus Christ receive the Holy Spirit and become holy people. The Jews have not repented and have not received the Holy Spirit yet. The time will come when God will grant them repentance and the Holy Spirit, but not before the return of Jesus Christ:

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look upon Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieves for Him as one grieves for a firstborn." (Zec. 12:10).

They will "look upon" Jesus Christ "whom they have pierced" after He comes back. Then they will become God's leading people once again and lead other nations in God's ways (Zec. 8:23), but until then they are in no position to build a holy temple for God in Jerusalem or anywhere else.

Those who say that a new temple must be built now do not understand that under the New Testament we, the followers of Jesus Christ, in whom the Holy Spirit resides, are the temples of the living God:

"And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them, I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'" (2 Cor. 6:16).

Yes, what agreement has the temple of God with idols? None whatsoever!

THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

At one time, when Jesus Christ was performing miracles and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, the chief priests and scribes came to Him and asked: "Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave you this authority?" (Luke 20:2).

According to them, He had no authority to do such things because He was not a graduate of their rabbinical colleges. What do you think would happen if someone who is not a graduate of present-day theological colleges, and is not an ordained minister or priest, came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, would people believe him? We saw earlier what will be the fate of the last two witnesses of God - not a soul in the world will be glad to hear their message. This is what Jesus Christ said about John the Baptist, the first "Elijah":

"As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in king's houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: "Behold I send My messenger before your face, who will prepare Your way before You."' (Matt. 11:7-10).

If the first 'Elijah' came dressed modestly in clothes made of camel's hair, we can hardly expect the second 'Elijah' to be dressed like those in king's houses. Indeed, the Bible says that the two witnesses will prophesy "clothed in sackcloth" (Rev. 11:3). Since 'Elijah' and his wife will be doing the work of the two witnesses, it is clear that they will be neither rich nor people of authority. In the Bible, sackcloth is a sign of poverty, affliction and humility - the things that have characterized the people of God since the beginning of time. But these are not the things that characterize the people of authority these days. Have you ever seen a church leader "clothed in sackcloth"?

G. T. Armstrong takes comfort from the fact that people in "authority" agree with him that the "abomination of desolation" is an idol. Since we do not agree with him, it means that we are not "authorities." We are terribly distressed about that, but then "authorities" in what? Surely, he does not mean "authorities" in the knowledge of the Bible, because if he does we are far from impressed with what we read in his booklet.

For us, it is nothing if we are not "authorities," we do not make a living from preaching the Gospel. No one can accuse us of false pretences, but for one who claims to have been a preacher for decades, it would be quite a shame if he were found wanting. People could get very angry if they find that they have been duped with a false gospel.

It is an awful responsibility preaching the Word of God, for it could affect the salvation of many people. That is why if one is not too sure of what he preaches, it is better not to preach it at all.

There is not a single place in the Bible which would so much as even hint that the "abomination of desolation" is an idol. But notice what Jesus Christ said about abominations:

"And He said to them, 'You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. FOR WHAT IS HIGHLY ESTEEMED AMONG MEN IS AN ABOMINATION IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.'" (Luke: 16:15, emphasis added).

Did you grasp that? Those who are highly esteemed among men are an ABOMINATION in the sight of God. Astonishing, isn't it? The more one is esteemed the more an abomination he must be. By this definition there are many abominations in the world, but the highest of all must be THE "abomination of desolation."

Idols are nothing in the sight of God. They are worthless creations of people's hands which can neither justify themselves before men nor cause any desolations. But human beings are a different story; they can do both.

The "abomination of desolation" is not an idol, but a human being, as we shall prove.

Who are the people held in the highest esteem in the world today aside from music, film and sport stars? Religious leaders, of course! There is one leader in particular that stands out above all the others. He causes quite a stir whenever he leaves his den - the world watches and wonders at his movements and utterances.

Even if no other proof is available, this Scripture alone tells us where to look to find the "abomination of desolation." But there are a lot more proofs in the Bible, and a lot more explicit too.

Unlike politicians, religious leaders do not have responsibility over people's educational, physical, and social needs. They are never required to submit themselves to elections as politicians do. Most of them reign supreme from the moment they ascend to their position until they die. Their only responsibility is to watch over people's moral and spiritual needs and standards. Yet, if the present conditions in the world are any guide, theirs is the most spectacular failure in the history of the world.

FALSE MINISTERS

One of the most puzzling statements made by Jesus Christ is found in the book of Mathew:

"Then Jesus spoke to the multitude and to His disciples, saying: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.'" (Matt. 23:1-4).

Why would Jesus tell His followers to remain submissive to hypocrite leaders who say one thing and do another? The answer, as given by Him, is that these people sit in Moses' seat. By virtue of the position which they hold, they are forced to uphold the law of God in word if not in deed. God is working through His congregations regardless of who is leading them.

Does this mean that true Christians must remain in servitude to such hypocrites all their lives? Certainly not! While He does not encourage anyone to leave the church of their own volition, it is a different story if they are expelled for no fault of their own. He foresaw the time when all His followers will be put out of synagogues (and churches), and warned them not to stumble when that happens: "These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service." (John 16:1-2).

There are few people in the Christian churches today who believe that these Scriptures refer to them. They think that because Jesus Christ used the word synagogue, they refer to the ancient Jewish congregations only. But just because we no longer call God's congregations synagogues but churches, does not mean that these Scriptures are not valid now. What do you think is the meaning of these words?

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matt. 7:21-23).

If these verses do not refer to the priestly ministers in the Christian churches these days whom do you think that they refer to? They cannot refer to the Jewish rabbis for they do not do such things in the name of Christ.

Throughout history, true Christians have had to live amongst people who have falsely claimed to be Christians, and to grow spiritually in spite of the example given by their leaders. It could not have been otherwise, for this world belongs to Satan (John 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4). The Churches of God have had to blend into and operate within the apostate churches of this world.

"I know your works, your labor, and your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars." (Rev. 2:2).

"I know your works, tribulation and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are [spiritual] Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." (Rev. 2:9).

Notice how Jesus Christ associated the word synagogue with His churches. Many of those who claim to be apostles (leaders in His churches) are in fact members of the synagogue of Satan.

"Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are [spiritual] Jews and are not, but lie - indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you." (Rev. 3:9).

"I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells." (Rev. 2:13).

Here is one of the most puzzling statements in the New Testament: Jesus Christ said that Satan has a throne amongst us. But where is that throne? How is it that no one is aware that Satan has a throne on earth and dwells among us? Is it not because Satan has deceived the world about the way he acts and looks like? He is usually portrayed as a half-goat, half-man creature, with horns, pointed ears and tail, and a trident in his hand, ready to pounce upon any unsuspecting individual. He is an unreal figure, a fantasy creature, in other words. This is not surprising, for he is "father of lies" and master of deceptions (John 8:44).

This, however, is nowhere near the way he really looks like. Satan was an angel and angels look like human beings. "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels." (Heb. 13:2).

Angels have walked on this earth and spoken with human beings without being recognized as angels. In like manner, Satan is able to walk among us and talk with us without us knowing who he really is. Moreover, he is not content with being just an ordinary person; he sits on a throne in the temple of God, claiming to be God. Isn't that why he was cast down out of heaven in the first place - for wanting to be like God? The Apostles told us that he transforms himself into an angel of light:

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works." (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Satan has transformed himself into an angel of light by taking the shape of a human being with an aura of religiosity, who sits in the temple of God claiming to be God, or "Holy Father".

TRIALS BY FIRE

In the last few years, great turmoil has arisen in the Churches of God. People have been disfellowshipped or have left these churches by the thousands. A trial by fire has fallen upon many, but few understand why. Few know that such trials are sanctioned from above and are a necessary phase in the process of salvation.

One's spiritual development cannot mature while he depends on other people for guidance. There comes a time when children need to break loose from their parents and take control of their own lives in order to grow into mature and independent adults. Present day church leaders are not interested in making their followers wiser and more righteous than they are. Yet, unless your righteousness and your understanding exceed that of your spiritual mentors, you will not enter the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5:20). But how can one become wiser than his teachers?

"You, through Your commandments, made me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I kept Your precepts." (Ps. 119:98-100).

Keeping the commandments of God, testifying to the truthfulness and correctness of God's ways, is the way to wisdom.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
A good understanding have all those who do His commandments." (Ps. 111:10).

What matters most for one's spiritual growth and salvation is not belonging to any particular congregation, but keeping God's commandments and meditating on His law. If you are expelled from a church for no fault of your own, it does not mean that your name has been erased from God's Book of Life. Membership into the Church of God is in heaven not on earth. If you are able to fellowship with like minded people so much the better, but if you are not you have nothing to fear. Most of the examples of God's people in the Bible have led solitary lives. Apostle Peter wrote:

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." (1 Peter 4:12-13).

False ministers can disfellowship you from a local congregation, but no one can put you out of the true Church of God except Jesus Christ (Rev. 3:5). He does not do that lightly. Only if you harden your heart, if you prove incorrigible, will He wipe your name from God's Book of Life. The important thing is never to allow bitterness or hatred to enter your heart, for that is what your enemies want. It would give them the reason to say that they were right in expelling you in the first place.

When you feel overwhelmed by a trial, follow God's own advice:

"Come, My people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you [and pray, worship and meditate]; Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past." (Is. 26:20).

No man has endured a greater trial than Jesus Christ has. Before crucifixion, He asked the Father that if it were possible, to take that "cup" away from Him. Nevertheless, He said, "not as I will, but as You will." (Mat. 26:39).

It was the will of God that He goes ahead with that sacrifice, and He did not flinch from such an exceedingly difficult trial. How would you react if you knew that wicked people were about to take your life through excruciating torment without you having done anything to deserve it? If the Spirit of God dwells in you, and you belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9), and the mind of Christ is in you and you think like Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:5), you too will be able to offer your body as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1) and say to God, "not my will but Your will be done Father."

Before His trial, Jesus Christ told His followers:

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33).

We have peace in Christ, regardless of the tribulations which we endure, because our Lord overcame the world. Overcoming, never giving up in the face of all adversity, is what all Christians must do. Not being obstinate or inflexible, but bending with the times and bowing one's head in humility before the powers that be. If the world thinks that this is a sign of weakness, so be it. We know who we are and where we go. Living the life of a Christian, with the trials that we must endure, requires a strength that is beyond the capability of those who follow the ways of the world. If we overcome, it is not by ourselves, but through the strength that comes from God (Matt. 19:26). This is what Jesus Christ promised to those who overcome:

"And he who overcomes, and keeps My words until the end, to him I will give power over the nations - 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; As the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces' - as I also have received from My Father." (Rev. 2:26-27).

"To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

"He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." (Rev. 2:7,11).

"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life."

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." (Rev. 3:5,21).

"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved." (Matt. 10:22).

"And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved." (Matt. 24:12-13).

Overcome... overcome... overcome... endure... that is what Christians must do if they wish to attain salvation. Some of the most difficult trials do not come from the world, but from the people you least expect. There is nothing more painful for Christians than the threat of being separated from their Savior. This is the fear by which the hypocrites keep their followers in bondage. By equating the human congregation with the spiritual body of Christ, they wreak havoc amongst those who do not understand the Scriptures.

Can human beings, who are in the bondage of sin no less than their followers, have discretionary power over who will be saved and who will not, who will be in the Kingdom of God and who will not? The Scriptures say that we have all been baptized individually in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13,27). But the body of Christ is spiritual, therefore the Church of God is spiritual.

It is true that Jesus Christ told His disciples that "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Mat. 18:18), but this does not apply to those whom He calls hypocrites, who place heavy burdens upon His followers.

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture says the Lord. Therefore thus says the lord God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: 'You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold I will attend to you for the evil of your doings, says the Lord.'" (Jer. 23:1-2).

"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves Should not the shepherds feed the flock?
You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock..."

"Therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord! 'Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them.'" (Ezek. 34:2-3, 9-10).

"For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth;
For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have departed from the way;
You have caused many to stumble at the law." (Mal. 2:7-8).

Those who think that these Scriptures refer only to the shepherds of ancient Israel, should consider this: When all the other Apostles have departed from the scene, John, the last of the Apostles, was prevented from contacting the members of the Church of God by people who "loved to have preeminence among them" (3 John 9). Now, if they have done that to the Apostle whom Jesus loved the most (John 13:23, 20:2, 21:7), how much more will they do it to you and me? I do not complain, for what they have done to me has turned out to my advantage, but others may not be as lucky and as strong in the faith. They could stumble and that would be an unpardonable sin. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matt. 18:6).

Apostle John did not revile the man who prevented him from contacting the members of the Church of God. All he said was, "if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does". Then he told his followers: "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God." (3 John 11).

Apostle Paul foresaw that after his departure the churches he established would be taken over by "savage wolves":

"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore WATCH, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears." (Acts 20:29-31, emphasis added)

Apostle Peter spoke of such people too:

"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness THEY WILL EXPLOIT YOU with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." (2 Peter 2:1-3, emphasis added).

And Apostle John said:

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1).

If the Churches of God were taken over by false apostles, false ministers, false teachers, and false prophets, right under the eyes of the Apostles, what must be the condition of these churches now?

These warnings are more valid now than ever, for by now the deception is complete. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God is unknown even among the Churches of God, let alone among traditional Christianity, or the rest of the world. What they preach in the churches these days is not the true gospel, but a parody of it.

Apostle Paul placed a double curse on anyone who preaches a different gospel:

"But if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8-9).

The only way you may know if you have the right Gospel is by studying the Bible and by comparing it with what they preach in the churches. Those who are not willing to have their words scrutinized by the standards of the Bible do not deserve to be listened to. It is your responsibility to make sure that the gospel you receive is the true Gospel, for if it is not you will pay for your negligence with your salvation.

CONFLICT OF REVELATIONS

About two decades ago, while I was living in Canada, I went with the church into which I had recently become a member, to my very first Feast of Tabernacles. The feast site was located in a beautiful resort area in the Potomac mountains in the state of New York (You do not normally associate New York with beautiful resorts but, surprisingly, there was such a place).

It was an impressive festive atmosphere, and we enjoyed ourselves during an entire week of celebrations. Every day we would gather from the surrounding area, from hotels, motels and guest houses, to the huge meeting hall where we met people, exchanged ideas, fellowshiped and listened to dozens of sermons.

In the meeting hall, you could rub shoulders with thousands of ordinary members from the eastern part of the USA and Canada, but not with the ministers; they were a class apart. Congregating in the front near the stage, they were separated from us by a rope and security people who made sure that no one crossed from our side to theirs.

It was a similar story with regard to the sleeping quarters. While we were scattered over a huge area, some of us having to travel for up to an hour to get to the feast site, the ministers enjoyed plush quarters nearby and fellowshiped amongst themselves.

Before the festivities started, an evangelist came onto the stage and told us that in that church it was not customary to clap hands or make ovations after a sermon. Once an evangelist has delivered his sermon, he could not come back for an encore as they do in the theatre. But, he added, there were exceptions. When the two great leaders of the church came to deliver their sermons, we were allowed to show our gratitude and appreciation.

So when the great man, the late Herbert W. Armstrong, made his appearance, people clapped, whistled, shouted, stomped their feet; you would have been excused for thinking you were at a rock concert. The scene was repeated a few days later when his son, "in whom he was well pleased", Garner Ted Armstrong, made his appearance. The two men were highly esteemed by the church members, and they reveled in that kind of adulation. The church, of course, was the Worldwide Church of God.

Herbert W. Armstrong began his sermon by calling us "brothers and sisters." A sacrilege under the circumstances if there ever was one. "I have new revelations for you" he told us. Unfortunately, I have forgotten what those revelations were. Nothing earth shattering; he always had new revelations for us. Just about every other word was a "new revelation" with him.

A major problem developed for me when I, too, began to have certain revelations. But my revelations were of such a nature that I could not confess them to anyone, for if I had, most certainly, I would have been put out of the church.

After joining that church with great hope and expectations, I began to see that things were not quite what one expected from the "only true Church of God" in the world. The prevailing view in that church was that the higher one was in the hierarchical ministerial scale, the closer he was to God. Herbert W. Armstrong and Garner Ted Armstrong were so high, they were right up there near God: one at His right side and the other at His left. It was a general belief in the church that they were the two witnesses of the end time spoken of in the book of Revelation.

The ministers, though not quite as high, were nevertheless still very high up on the scale to heaven. That is why they were separated from us: they could not afford to be tainted by mere mortals.

But this is a familiar story, for I think it is the same in every church these days. The ministers, priests, preachers or "apostles", consider themselves in a class of their own, always being careful with whom they mix. It is just that in some churches the distinction between them and other people is observed more carefully than in others, the Churches of God being, no doubt, the strictest in this regard. A visitor to any Church of God would be struck, for example, by how ill at ease the ministers are amongst their own people. More often than not, after a sermon they remain up front seeking the company of their own families or of other ordained people. Ordinary members usually need to make an appointment to see them.

When I returned from that Feast of Tabernacles, I set about to study the Bible in earnest, convinced being that I was on the track of major discoveries. Not surprisingly, the more I studied it the more things I discovered which were not in accordance with what the ministers preached. Nevertheless, I continued attending church services quietly for several more months, until I was certain that I was not making a mistake. Then I decided to have a discussion with the minister.

One day, after the Sabbath services, during an evening social occasion, I approached him and said that I would like to have a discussion with him, but that I would prefer some witnesses. He called two deacons who happened to be nearby and waved at me to talk. I wanted witnesses because in that church they had the nasty habit of disfellowshipping people for the slightest disagreement with the ministers. Once disfellowshipped, the person would become a pariah, everyone in the church being forbidden to speak with, or contact, him again. I thought that if I was going to be disfellowshipped, at least people would know that it wasn't because I had committed some horrible sin, but because I had disagreements with the ministers over church doctrines.

I began by telling him that God has called me to be one of His witnesses, and that the Bible does not support the idea that tithing is a law under the New Testament. As soon as I finished, without entering into any discussion with me, he said: "if that is what you believe, then you are out of the church."

That church did not allow for the possibility that God would bypass the church ministers, especially the two leaders, to call an ordinary member, who could barely speak English, to be His witness. Why would God do such a thing when there were so many people in the church capable of doing a better job? Why indeed!

There is nothing wrong or unusual about wanting to be a witness of God. Anyone who believes the Word of God, accepts the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, lives a righteous life, knows the Gospel and is prepared to face the consequences that come with witnessing it, can be a witness. From God's point of view, the more witnesses the better. But the ministers in the Churches of God have set themselves up as arbiters over who may or not may not serve God. Those who feel that they have been called by God to do His work, are lampooned and ridiculed, and expelled from the church.

TITHING AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Since not many people know what the tithing principle is all about, an explanation is needed here. Tithing was the taxation law God gave to ancient Israel. Out of the twelve tribes, eleven were to give ten per cent of their produce to the tribe of Levy. That tribe had no land allocation, as they were to be full time in God's service. They, in turn, had to give ten per cent of their income to the families of priests who alone performed the religious rites. In the end, everyone ended up with approximately the same income.

The priests and the Levites received additional income as burnt offerings, sin offerings and Holy Day offerings, but their surplus was to be used for providing relief for the orphans, the widows, the needy and the strangers.

Those who think that this may not have been enough to cover all the welfare and social needs of their society should remember that in ancient Israel widows and children were well taken care of. If a husband died and left no inheritor, his brother if he had one, had to marry his widow and his firstborn son would inherit his brother's estate and continue his line. Because all children received a land allocation, poverty was not a serious problem in ancient Israel. It should not be forgotten either that God promised to bless them greatly and keep them healthy, if they remained faithful to Him and obeyed His laws.

When Israel increased in number and spread out far from the feast site, and it became difficult for them to cart their tithes on their journeys every year, they were allowed to convert their produce into money and take that to the designated place once every three years. There, they were to use the money to enjoy themselves, cover their expenses, share their joys with the poor, and then give the rest to the Levites.

Those who think that after spending on themselves and the poor, there was not much left to give to the Levites, should know that the Middle East was one of the most fertile areas in the world at that time. This is how the Bible describes it:

"Then they came to the valley of Eschol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs. Then they told [Moses] and said: 'We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.' (Num. 13:23,27).

When they went to their Feast of Tabernacles, they did not have to spend money on exorbitant hotel prices and silver service meals in restaurants. They lived in tents and enjoyed healthy outdoor meals. They could never have spent the tithes gathered over three years in that manner.

The law of tithing remained in use as long as religious judges ruled Israel, but when they decided to be like their neighbors and asked for a king, it fell into disuse. They discovered that it cost a lot more to maintain a king than a priest. This is what God told them when they made that request:

"And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.'"

"And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the Lord will not hear you in that day." (1 Sam. 8:7,18)

When King Solomon built the great temple of God in Jerusalem, plus temples for himself and for some of his wives and concubines, he imposed heavy taxes upon the people. When he died, they asked his son to reduce their taxes, but when he refused, the nation split in two. Ten tribes separated from the royal line and formed the nation known as Samaria, while Judah and Benjamin became known as Judea.

That was the beginning of the fall of Israel. Weakened by the split and by the departure from God's law, Samaria was soon conquered and taken into captivity by the Assyrians. Later, the Assyrians were pushed out of the Middle East by the rising Babylonian Empire and migrated in a north-westerly direction, taking with them their captive nations. It was then that the ten tribes of Israel became lost to history.

In recent times, many historians have postulated, not without foundation, that the Anglo-Saxons, the Scandinavians and some central European peoples descend from the lost ten tribes, and that the Germans descend from the Assyrians. Have you ever wondered why Hitler built his Third Reich on the notion of Aryan supremacy? Students of ancient history would tell you that the Aryans were natives of the Middle East and that the swastika was an emblem used in the Middle East in ancient times. The word "Saxon" comes from the words 'Isaac' and 'sons', meaning the sons of Isaac, Isaac's sons, Saxons. And the word 'British' comes from the Hebrew words 'Berith' and 'Ish', meaning 'people' and 'covenant', or people of the covenant.

Later, the Babylonians conquered and took captive the nation of Judah. When that empire fell to the Medo-Persians, some of the Jews returned to their land, but before long they found themselves under foreign domination again. Temporarily they were under the domination of Syria and Egypt, but then came Alexander the Great and later the Romans, and the Jews were never masters of their land until this century.

Under those circumstances, tithing could not be enforced as a law, but it remained a voluntary act practiced by those who could afford it, as a few examples from the time of Jesus Christ clearly show (Mat. 5:23; Mark 12:41-44; Luke 11:42, 18:12).

In the twentieth century, however, a new "monarch" arose in rediscovered 'Samaria'. Herbert W. Armstrong saw himself as coming from the lines of both the ancient kings of Israel and the Apostles of Jesus Christ. He revived the tithing principle, declared it to be a law, imposed it upon the Church of God, and punished everyone who disagreed with him and questioned its validity.

One of his most prized and trumpeted discoveries was that the people of Great Britain and the USA are the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh, the leading tribes of Samaria and the inheritors of Israel's birthright. He took great pride in portraying himself as a great leader, flying around the world in his executive jet, taking expensive gifts to those kings and national leaders who received him.

I once sent him a letter in which I expressed my opinion that it would have been more appropriate for him to take along a Bible and preach from it, rather than those expensive gifts. Surprisingly, I was not expelled from the church then, but there followed a lengthy article in the church magazine in which he explained why such gifts were necessary. He said that they were in preparation for the eventual preaching of the Gospel. The fact that the Apostles did not need such gifts in order to proclaim the Gospel seemed to be of no significance to him. I have doubts that he ever preached the Gospel to those leaders because, as I was to discover later, what they preach in that church is not the correct gospel anyway.

In his meetings with the world leaders, and in his writings, he portrayed the Worldwide Church of God as the paradise on earth. Tons of church literatures were sent freely around the world to anyone who would receive them. But what those writings never revealed was the enormous burden the members of his church had to endure to maintain his life style and that of his adjutants, and to produce and mail all that "free" literature.

When he built the Worldwide Church of God, he borrowed heavily from the Old Testament principles, tithing being one of them. But he did not go to the Jewish people to inquire how they understood and practiced that principle, nor did he follow the example of the Apostles of Jesus Christ who never asked their followers to tithe. He devised a brand new way of applying this principle.

In ancient Israel, welfare and social services were not provided by government agencies. The priests and the Levites were responsible for these services. The people of Israel did not pay additional taxes to the government to provide these services - they did not even have a government as we understand it now. The priests judged and governed the people according to the law of God. That is why saying that tithing is a law under the New Testament is a sham and a perversion of a good but temporarily inactive principle.

In the Kingdom of God, and during the Millennial Kingdom, the tithing principle will become valid again. That is because the governments of men and their myriad of taxes will be abolished and only the Government of God with its minimal tax system will be applied.

This is not to say that at present those who are in need may not receive additional help if such help is available without imposing undue hardship on other members of the church. But whatever is done, it must be done on a voluntary basis, not as a matter of law.

To make matters worse, tithing in the Churches of God is not understood to mean ten per cent of one's income - tithe coming from the word ten - but, through some convoluted thinking, they say that it means up to thirty per cent. They talk of a "first tithe", a "second tithe", and a "third tithe", even though no such things are ever mentioned in the Bible. And to add insult to injury, they tell their members to calculate their tithes not on the basis of their net income, but on their gross income. And if that wasn't enough, Herbert W. Armstrong used to send an average of one letter a month requesting special offerings on the pretext that the church was in dire financial straights. It was a perennial problem in that church; its finances were never in good standing order.

After paying government taxes, tithes, Holy Day offerings and special offerings, the members of these churches are left with less than fifty per cent of their income to provide for themselves and for their families. Without much to spare, they are unable to socialize with people outside the church, thus becoming social cripples, totally dependent upon the church environment for their needs. This is how the church under Herbert W. Armstrong has been described recently:

"Uniquely, the "Philadelphia era" [the Worldwide Church of God] was viewed as an era when God's GOVERNMENT was being re-established; when the emphasis was on rulership, on discipline, unquestioning obedience, respect for a hierarchical ministry - even fear that the fate of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5) would come upon anyone who dared withhold information from, or attempt to deceive, a minister.

"It was to have been an era when the office of an apostle was present in the church - although this time, unlike the 'Ephesian era,' this office, viewed as the highest human office next to Christ, would not be granted to perhaps 15 to 17 men, but limited to only one man, who ruled supreme over the church."

Who do you think these words belong to? None other than Garner Ted Armstrong (*The International News*, Aug./Sept., 1991, p.3). He is not being honest by putting all the blame on his father, for he was the second in command and thus just as responsible for those abuses.

If these writings give the impression that he has repented and changed, think again. After starting the new church with the best of intentions, denouncing the old abuses, he has slipped right back to the old ways and is now

competing with other splinter groups in praising the virtues of the good old times. That is not unexpected, for it is impossible for someone to maintain a profligate lifestyle without tithing and a tight control over church affairs.

I once explained to the local minister that after complying with all those tithes and offerings, I did not have enough to support myself and to help my parents who depended on me but who lived in Romania. He told me that the tithes were not mine to do what I wanted with them: they belonged to God, therefore they had to be given to the church without questioning. But, he assured me that if I gave generously to the church, God would take care of my parents. So I gave generously to the church, and they nearly starved to death. During my membership in that church, they had the most miserable time of their lives.

What the minister told me to do was tantamount to tempting God - forcing Him to bless me because I gave generously to the church. But not knowing any better I obeyed him, and so I ruined both my parents and myself.

Now notice what Jesus Christ told the Pharisees who were imposing a similar regime on their followers:

"Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother', and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me has been dedicated to the temple" - is released from honoring his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" (Mat. 15:3-9).

What I found particularly galling was that before I joined that church, no one told me about all those tithes and offerings. When someone shows an interest in their church, the ministers follow a well-scripted method. First, they insist in seeing the person at home for an interview. One can't just show up at their religious services for they are secret. The secrecy gives them a sense of uniqueness and makes the new recruits feel special.

During the interview, they tell the inquirer about the great blessings he can expect from being a member of such an exclusive church. Then, at the last minute, like an afterthought, they mention that the church believes in tithing. But by then he is well and truly hooked. Isn't ten per cent worth the price of being a member of the "elect"?

When they mentioned to me that the church believed in tithing, I thought, I could cope with it. But after I was baptized and began attending church services regularly, I discovered that they had a "second tithe," a "third tithe," mandatory Holy Day offerings and special offerings. But it was too late for me to do anything, for if I left the church after being baptized, unimaginable evils would befall me on the Day of Judgment. That is what they tell their followers and how they manage to keep them saddled with such extraordinary burdens.

Can anyone imagine such methods, such blackmail, being employed by the Apostles of Jesus Christ to draw members into the Churches of God?

In America they take great pride that their constitution guarantees the freedom of speech and freedom of religion, but that same constitution, which is a model for those in most Western democracies, does not guarantee protection against charlatans who use those same freedoms to enslave others. It was only through my earnest study of the Bible that I discovered the truth about the real Churches of God, and about these synagogues of Satan. This is what the patriarch Jacob, the father of Israel, said about tithing: "Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will bless me, and keep me this way... I will surely give a tenth to You.'" (Gen. 28:20,22).

Assuming that tithing was still a law under the New Testament, there is no conditional "if" in the present day "Churches of God." They tell their members to tithe first, regardless of whether they can afford it or not, then expect God to bless them later. But God does not feel obliged to bless people just because they become impoverished by unscrupulous ministers. He expects His people to discover the truth and free themselves from those who would keep them in bondage. Apostle Peter wrote: "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage." (2 Peter 2:19).

Unless people study the Bible, worship God and pray to Him earnestly, asking Him for guidance and wisdom, they will find themselves in bondage to the very people who claim to give them freedom. The Apostles did not impose even a "first tithe" let alone a "second" and a "third tithe" upon the churches which they established. This is what Apostle Paul told the elders of the Ephesian church:

"I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:33-35).

He provided not only for himself, but also for those who were with him. He gave the elders an example that they "must support the weak." Herbert W. Armstrong must have thought he was among the weak and, currently, so must his son and a number of other church leaders who continue to preach these doctrines.

They have turned the Scriptures upside down: instead of feeding the weak, they are being fed by the weak. Apostle Paul recognized that those who preach the Gospel full time are entitled to live of the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:14). But he made it clear that whatever people give, they must be allowed to do so voluntarily according to their abilities, not as a matter of law. Later, when the churches required that he devote himself full time to the preaching of the Gospel, this is what he wrote:

"Did I commit sin in abasing myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the Gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what was lacking to me the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.

As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! But what I do, I will also cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it." (2 Cor. 11:7-15,22,4).

Here you have it all in one chapter. Apostle Paul preached the Gospel free of charge. Even when he was in need, he did not demand tithes from those to whom he was preaching the Gospel. He accepted instead gifts from the brethren belonging to other churches who gave them willingly, not because they had to "because the tithes belonged to God." He let everyone make up their own minds whether they wanted to offer anything to the church or not - he never became a burden to anyone.

Is it not remarkable that those who were preaching a false gospel and placing heavy burdens upon the people (most likely tithing) were having an easier time than the Apostles who were preaching the true Gospel freely? And who were those satanic ministers? People of Israelite origin who claimed to be the children of Abraham. Not much has changed in two thousand years.

If one wants to follow the letter of the law and uses the Bible selectively, it is easier to make a case that under the New Testament people are to give not ten per cent, but one hundred per cent of their possessions to the church (Luke 18:22). That is how the very first churches set up by Apostle Peter were organized:

"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of the lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need." (Acts 4:32-35).

It was a wonderful idea - true communism, if you wish - but the disciples discovered soon that in a hostile world, God's utopia couldn't last long. Shortly afterwards, the Christians were scattered from Jerusalem in all directions (Acts 8:1).

The churches, which they established among the Gentiles afterwards, were organized on a different principle. When some of the churches fell on hard times, Apostle Paul asked those who could help, to "lay something aside, storing up as [they] may prosper" (1 Cor. 16:1-4). He did not tell them to give their tithes unconditionally "because the tithes belonged to God," but to give voluntarily as they prospered. But those who write long articles about tithing in the New Testament never quote these examples.

If the members are able and willing to give ten per cent, or any per cent, of their income to the church so much the better, but there is no basis by which this may be imposed as a law. Yet, as G. T. Armstrong himself admitted, in the Worldwide Church of God people were actually punished if they did not disclose everything and conformed to all dictates of the ministers.

If people are being robbed by any other means, the perpetrators are brought to judgment, punished, made to pay back or even jailed. But if they do it in the name of God, nobody can touch them. Nobody, that is, except God. Woe to the country whose ministers are robbing the poor, the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. All these things apply in my case. After my father died in the Second World War, my widowed mother who lived with my grandparents brought me up. They all suffered greatly when I became a member of that church.

The Apostles understood perfectly well that there were going to be differences between the Jewish churches and the Gentile churches, and were particularly concerned not to put any unnecessary burdens upon the latter. During a very important council held in Jerusalem, this is what they decided:

"And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.'" (Acts 15:7-11).

They came together to settle the question of circumcision for the Gentiles, but then discussed a whole range of other issues. James, the leader of the Jewish church in Jerusalem, concluded their meeting with these words:

"And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, 'Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

'After this I will return and rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuilt its ruins, and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord who does all these things.'

Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." (Acts 15:13-21).

No new yoke and no other troubles are to be placed upon those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, except to abstain from idols, sexual immorality, things strangled and from blood. Where are the "first tithe," the "second tithe," the "third tithe," the mandatory Holy Day offerings and the special offerings in these writings?

Hardly anyone who has been touched by the ministers in the modern day Churches of God has not suffered financial, personal or family problems. They specialize in splitting families and in causing problems for their members. That seems to be their trademark. A more appropriate name for them would be the synagogue of troublemakers. Why synagogue? Because they preach, among other things, the Old Testament restrictions on food.

In the Old Testament, such restrictions were in accordance with the law of God, but in the New Testament they no longer are. Since Jesus Christ purified everything, there is no longer such a thing as a clean or unclean animal. Apostle Paul went so far as to say that those who preach such doctrines are inspired by demons:

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." (1 Ti. 4:3).

All creatures are to be received with thanksgiving by those who know the truth. Those who preach otherwise do not know the truth. Christians are not made unclean by eating flesh which previously was thought to be unclean.

"Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

(Matt. 15:11).

"Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience sake; for 'The earth is the Lord's and its fullness.' If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no questions for conscience sake." (1 Cor. 25-27).

The ministers in the Churches of God think they know better than Jesus Christ and His Apostles, and have taken upon themselves to override their teachings. Jesus Christ gave His followers power not only over all kinds of flesh, but also over venomous serpents and scorpions (Luke 10:19; Mk. 16:18; Acts 28:3-5). If people suffer from these things it is because their faith is weak, but it was not so from the beginning.

During my membership in the Worldwide Church of God, I dismayed my parents by telling them to stop eating pork and rabbit, two of the most popular dishes in Romania. I broke their heart when they realized that all I had achieved after abandoning my job, family, country and friends, was to become a member of a strange cult which took from me not only my money, but my mind also.

Two years before I joined that church, I escaped from Ceausescu's Romania. I did not leave that country for economic reasons, for I had a job as a radiotelegrapher officer on a merchant ship, one of the most prized positions in the communist world. Rather, I left it because I could no longer bear to see the brutality and injustice which the communists were inflicting on the people.

I arrived in the "West" believing that war with the "East" was imminent. My hope was to fight with the liberating armies of the "West" to free my people from the communist yoke. But when I arrived in the "West", I discovered that no one was preparing to invade the communist world. The war psychosis of the "East" was just another communist ploy designed to keep the people under tight control.

When I realized that it would be a long time before I could see my family and friends again, if ever, I fell into a period of deep introspection and depression. It was then that I found solace in religion. What interested me particularly was the notion of salvation. I had heard about salvation before but was never able to investigate it.

So I began attending church services in the Romanian Orthodox Church, the religion of my parents. Seeing that I was interested in religion, the priest asked me to enroll in a theological seminary to become a priest. He told me that while I was training for the priesthood, the church would support me to obtain a university degree of my choice which would enable me to supplement my income if need be. Most of the Romanian communities in North America were too small to maintain a full time priest. So they helped their priests earn additional income from secondary jobs. Although I was tempted, in the end I declined the offer when I realized that my heart was not in it. Their services made me feel good for a while - they filled an emotional and spiritual need in my heart - but that feeling began to wear off when I did not get intellectual satisfaction.

After that, I went to some Protestant churches and even to the Catholic Church for a while, but they were no better. If anything, I found their services even less inspiring and fulfilling.

My great disappointment came from the fact that no one gave me satisfactory answers about the reasons for their beliefs. Their attitude seemed to be that you do not question your religion, you just accept it. That wasn't good enough for me. I wanted assurance that my beliefs would be based on solid foundation, not just feelings.

As I was contemplating my future, I heard on radio a preacher with a difference. He challenged his listeners to "prove all things in the Bible", and offered "free" literature to those who were interested. I sent for his literature and before I knew it, I was a member of the Worldwide Church of God. That preacher was Garner Ted Armstrong.

Ironically, after I studied the Bible carefully, I discovered that neither he nor his ministers were taking his advice seriously. It gives me no pleasure now to have to write these things about him and his church.

TO BE OR NOT BE DISFELLOWSHIPED?

Expelling a person from a tightly run church can be a very disturbing experience, but that does not seem to bother the ministers in the Churches of God. For them it has become a matter of routine.

Now, if there is ever a need to expel someone from a church, this is how Jesus Christ said it should be done:

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." (Mat. 18:15-17).

Poor tax collectors, they've never had a good name. Anyway, only if a person refuses to listen to a personal correction, to witnesses, or to the church, is he to become like a "heathen and a tax collector" - to be disfellowshipped, in other words. The remarkable thing about my case is that I was the one who asked for witnesses to prove my innocence, yet I was still the one who was disfellowshipped. And that without a warning, without an explanation, and without the right to a reply.

The minister cared neither for the words of Jesus Christ, nor for what other people in the church might say. He knew that no one dared say anything if he wanted to remain a member of that church.

The ministers in the Churches of God usually invoke an example given by Apostle Paul when they disfellowship people from their church. When Apostle Paul found out that a man was living in sin with his step mother, he told the Corinthian church to disfellowship him immediately (1 Cor. 5:1-5). That was a correct decision because the sin was already well known in the church, and the nature of the sin required that drastic action be taken to show people that such behavior is not tolerated in the Churches of God.

Later, when he heard that the man had repented and was heartbroken, he asked the church to forgive him and receive him back (2 Cor. 7).

Now, even if my ideas represented a danger to the church, I still deserved an explanation and a hearing in which I could explain the basis of my beliefs. But the minister proceeded to isolate me quickly, fearing probably that other members of the church might follow my example and start questioning their doctrines. This raises the question, is the Church of God so shaky in its beliefs that it cannot stand analysis of its doctrines? That is not how the Apostles dealt with those who asked questions about their teachings. They welcomed such inquiries and took the opportunity to expand upon the reasons for their beliefs.

Only the Catholic Church acted quickly during the Middle Ages to isolate and eliminate the "heretics" who obeyed the Bible rather than its priests. Since the Churches of God have taken the Catholic Church as their master, should we be surprised if we find that the same spirit works in both churches these days?

The day after I was disfellowshipped, I decided to take my case to the leaders of the church. I was prepared to accept that a local minister could make a mistake, but my hope was that the leaders would have a different attitude. I was convinced that if they gave me the opportunity, I could show them from the Bible that they made an error in regard to the tithing doctrine. So I took my meager savings and flew from Toronto, Canada to Pasadena, California, where the headquarters of the church were located.

But when I arrived there, before I told anyone who I was, I was met by a security person who told me that if I stepped foot on their college grounds I would be arrested. They had a college there in which they trained young boys to become ministers in the church, a practice which went totally against the biblical principles. My minister, a graduate of that college, must have contacted them by telephone and told them to receive me that way.

After about week of trying, when they perceived that I would not leave until I talked with someone from the leadership, I was seen by two top evangelists who, after listening briefly to me, told me that they were not interested in what I had to say.

After extracting from me nearly three thousand dollars - a lot of money in those days - they would not even listen to what I had to say, let alone check it in the Bible.

Only then did the scale of corruption and deception that were going on in that church became evident to me. Until then, I still believed that they were genuinely mistaken in their understanding of the tithing doctrine, and that if someone showed it to them in the Scriptures, they would repent, relent and change. But there was no mistaken understanding in that church. They knew perfectly well what they were doing. They knew very well that the tithing doctrine gave them a lavish lifestyle which they were not prepared to abandon.

I went back to my hotel room, I put my thoughts on paper and sent a copy to all the top evangelists. I hope they still have that letter, and I would advise them to read it again. It might interest them to know what has transpired over the last nineteen years. They know that nineteen is an important cycle in God's calendar. I had no idea then that it would take that long before God turned events around in such a way as to force me to challenge them again.

When I returned to Toronto from Pasadena, I discovered that the two "brethren" with whom I used to share a flat had locked me out. The problem was, most of the furniture in that flat belonged to me. Apparently, the minister had told them that when one is put out of the church, he is worth nothing in God's eyes anymore. So they were free to help themselves with impunity to whatever I had. That was the caliber of the ministers that were coming out of their college.

And so, for the second time in my life, I lost everything. First, to the communists, then to the religionists - the second hardly more scrupulous than the first.

Ironically, when I joined the Worldwide Church of God, I was so impressed with the position, prestige, wealth and authority of their ministers, that I submitted an application to be admitted to their college. They turned me down, but never told me why. I thought I had a good record, but it must have been too good for their liking. They were not interested in people who were dedicated to God, but in those who were subservient to their leaders.

Several weeks passed during which time I considered the things that were happening to me. I was lucky enough to still have a job, but the people with whom I worked must have thought I had become a zombie. Whenever we had a break, I would withdraw aside and keep my own company. They did not know what was happening to me and I could not tell them. I was working as an electrician in the construction industry at that time.

For several weeks I kept thinking that perhaps after I stirred them up, they would look into the Bible, discover that I was right, invite me back into the church, give me back my belongings, and apologize for the way they treated me. But it wasn't to be. When that did not eventuate, I decided to make it easy for everyone by taking the first steps towards a possible reconciliation. After all, they still had my belongings, and although they were not many, they were mine and I needed them.

So I rang the minister and told him that I would like to have another discussion with him. He immediately asked me if I had repented. That took me by surprise, for I had no idea what I was supposed to repent of. But I realized that if I said repent of what, it would have been the end of my reconciliation attempt. So I told him that I was sorry for what happened, thinking that later I would be able to find out the exact sin he wanted me to repent of. He then said that I could attend church services again if I wanted to.

I went back to that church only to discover that they had no intention of revising any of their doctrines. The members of the church did not appear to be particularly happy to see me back either. I still do not know what the minister had told them about me, but it must have been awful for they did not seem to be able to forgive and forget. I could not avoid thinking about these words of Jesus Christ: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." (Matt. 23:15).

When I realized that there was no room for me in that church anymore, I decided to distance myself from them as far as I could. So I immigrated to Australia with the hope of starting a whole new life.

If anyone wonders if I received back my belongings, I did not. My "brethren" did not offer to return them to me and I did not ask for them. I only asked for a Bible and a guitar, but when I received them, the Bible was all right, but the guitar was a wreck.

After moving to Australia, I embarked upon university studies and obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree (majors in Study in Religions and Ancient History and minors in Anthropology and Psychology), and two Graduate Diplomas (Librarianship and Education). I married a university colleague, obtained a job as a Teacher/Librarian, then settled down to what I hoped would be a quiet and enjoyable life.

My life was quiet and enjoyable all right until, that is, the Churches of God entered my life again. One day, on my way to work, I noticed a poster advertising religious literature from a new Church of God. My curiosity got the better of me and I sent for it. Great was my surprise when I discovered that the leader of this new church was none other than Garner Ted Armstrong. Destiny was crossing our paths again. I had the uneasy feeling that no matter what I did or where I went, we were bound to come into conflict again.

It was then I learned that Herbert W. Armstrong was dead (he was not supposed to die before the return of Jesus Christ) and that all hell had broken loose in the Worldwide Church of God after I left it. Garner Ted Armstrong left that church too, or was put out of it, and formed his own church. A number of other evangelists followed his example, took their followers, and formed their own "Churches of God."

When I read their literature, I realized that all of them were still preaching and promoting the same old heresies, only that this time they were coming from more quarters. As far as I could determine, none of them left because they had some new insights, but because their future wasn't too sure in the old church.

I realized then that God would not forgive me if I did not disseminate the knowledge He had given me, and did not expose the deceptions these people were perpetrating in His name. And so, in 1990, the first edition of *The Christian Herald* made its appearance. The leading article in that issue was "The Gospel of the Kingdom of God". If you haven't read it, send for a free copy. You owe it to yourself to find out the truth about this important subject.

But 1990 proved to be an important year from another point of view. In that same year Garner Ted Armstrong published his booklet, *The Abomination of Desolation*. Rather than revealing who or what that is, he hides its identity by directing people to look in the wrong place, for the wrong thing, at the wrong time. That could not be allowed to pass unchallenged and unexposed.

THE "MAN OF SIN"

Garner Ted Armstrong said that the "man of sin" will be sitting in the holy place, in a temple of God which is yet to be built in Jerusalem. He based his prophecy on Apostle Paul's letter to the Thessalonian Church. Here is a quotation from his booklet (p.20), with his comments interspersed in square brackets.

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come [the second coming of Christ], except there come a falling away [apostasy!] first, and that the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

Who opposed and exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God [a temple which is yet to be constructed in Jerusalem!], showing himself [claiming] that he is God...

And now ye know what withholdeth [withstands; resists. Paul is speaking of himself, as one who was "holding back" this growing apostasy] that he might be revealed in his time.

For the mystery of iniquity [it was a "mystery" religion; one which condoned sin, or "iniquity"] doth already work; only he who now letteth [restrain] will let [continue to restrain], until he be taken out of the way." (II Thess. 2:3-7).

Then he continued:

"Here we see a human religious leader who will ensconce himself inside the temple in Jerusalem and actually claim to be divine! - claim to be god!" (pp. 20 -21).

And again:

"Paul clearly said the 'man of sin' would sit in the temple of God. But today, there is no temple in Jerusalem." (p. 27).

There is no better example of unfounded assumptions being read into the Scriptures than this one. Apostle Paul never said that the "man of sin" would sit in the temple of God, but that he was ALREADY SITTING in that temple when he wrote his epistle. Neither did he mention Jerusalem as the city of the temple of God.

That is a very important biblical passage, which requires an in-depth analysis. For this reason, we will quote it again in its entirety from the New King James Version:

- v.1 "Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you,
v.2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.
v.3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,
v.4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.
v.5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?
v.6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.
v.7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.
v.8 And when the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.
v.9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,
v.10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.
v.11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie
v.12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

There are several important points in this passage that need to be remembered:

- * There will be a great falling away from the truth of God before the return of Jesus Christ (v.3);
- * The "man of sin" and "son of perdition," will be revealed before the return of Jesus Christ (v.3);
- * He was already sitting in the Temple of God claiming to be God when Apostle Paul wrote his epistle to the Thessalonians (v.4);
- * The "mystery of lawlessness" was already at work then (v.7);
- * The position which this man was holding, will be in existence when Jesus Christ returns (v.8);
- * The "man of sin" has the power of Satan behind him (v.9);
- * Those who follow him will perish, "because they did not receive the love of the truth" (v.10);
- * There was a certain lie which this man was preaching at that time (v.11).

The first question to be answered is where was the temple of God in which this "man of sin" was sitting? Instinctively, people think that it was in Jerusalem, but this cannot be true for a number of reasons:

1) The Jews did not worship any human being who claimed to be God. Had they not just killed Jesus Christ for saying that He was the Son of God? How much less would they have worshiped someone who claimed to be not the Son, but the very God Himself?

2) There are no historical or religious documents speaking of a human being who ensconced himself in the temple of God in Jerusalem claiming to be God, between the time of Jesus Christ and the time the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. If that had been the case it would, most certainly, have been mentioned by the Apostles or by the historians of that period, but no such mention was ever made.

3) Why was Apostle Paul afraid to name this "man of sin" in his letter? "Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?" If he had been a Jew he would have had no hesitation telling the churches who he was, for he openly blasted those people who caused problems to the Churches of God. But whoever this man was, he was a feared person.

The reason he could not be mentioned was that the letter could have fallen into the wrong hands. Now, who were the people who were feared by both the Jews and the Thessalonians at that time? The Romans, of course!

The Romans were the masters of the ancient world and they did not take kindly to anyone who spoke disparagingly about them and especially about their leaders. It is in Rome, therefore, that we must look for the "man of sin" who sat in the temple of God claiming to be God.

It is a great error to assume that Jerusalem was the only city in the world in which there was a temple of God. It is true that only the temple in Jerusalem was sanctified by God, but that does not mean that there were no temples of God in other cities. Virtually every ancient city had a temple dedicated to God or to some other deity.

With this in mind, let us now compare what Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans with what he wrote to the Thessalonians:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man and birds and fourfooted beasts and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." (Rom. 1:18-25).

Notice the similarities between the two epistles:

- * The people mentioned in both of them take delight in unrighteousness.
- * They both reject the love and the truth of God.
- * Both worshipped what they ought not to.
- * Both were given by God to strong delusions and passions.
- * Both believed the lie.
- * And both did things that were Satanic in nature, even though Satan was mentioned by name only in the letter to the Thessalonians.

It is obvious that in both epistles Apostle Paul was speaking about the same people. Since we know that the first were Romans, it follows that the second were Romans too. We should not be surprised then if we find that the "man of sin" was a high standing Roman.

The Romans, more than any other people, were infatuated with images of "four-footed beasts and creeping things" and have remained so ever since, as any visitor to Italy can confirm. That is why we must look for the "man of sin" not among the Jews, who to this day have observed God's injunction against making and worshipping images and statues (Ex. 20:4-5), but among the Romans who take pleasure in such things.

In the book of Acts we find that when Apostle Paul visited Athens, "his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols" (Acts 17:16). If he was so "provoked" by the idols of Athens, we can hardly imagine that there could have been such idols in Jerusalem. No such complaint was made by any of the Apostles against the Jews. Athens, however, could not have been the city of the "man of sin" because the Greeks had no dominion over the Jews and, after this episode, Athens played little role in the life of the early Christians, whereas Rome played a mighty and murderous one.

We notice that Apostle Paul made no comment about his "spirit being provoked within himself" when he visited Rome, even though that city was given over to idols more than Athens was. The Romans had the habit of carting anything of value from the conquered territories to their capital, and monuments, artifacts and idols were of high value to them.

The reason Apostle Paul said nothing about the Romans was that he knew when to keep his mouth shut. He knew that he would not have received the same reception in Rome as he did in Athens. The Romans were too busy with their murderous pleasure games to have time for philosophical discussions as did the Athenians in the Areopagus (Acts 17).

It is fashionable these days to think of the Romans as a civilization far advanced for their time, and in many respects they were. But we must never forget how the "Pax Romana" was achieved. Only the Romans were capable of decorating their roads with impaled human beings, left to die a slow agonizing death; or use them as torches for their night carnivals; or make a spectacle of them being torn apart by animals; or watch them fighting gladiator games till death.

It was the Roman predilection for the macabre that provided a fertile ground for the murderous Catholic inquisition later on. Can anyone imagine such "sports" being practiced openly these days in any country of the world?

The Romans were tolerant of other peoples' religions as long as they acknowledged the supremacy of the Roman gods. But the Jews and the Christians refused to do so, and paid heavily for their attitude.

As happened throughout history, the religion of the dominant civilization influenced that of the conquered peoples. We should not be surprised then, that the Roman religion exercised a powerful influence over other religions of the empire, including Christianity. Apostle Paul saw that occurring already during his time, and warned his followers to be on guard against it.

It is from Rome that he saw "the mystery of lawlessness already at work". It is there that he saw the man who came "according to the working of Satan". It is from there that he saw the lie being spread over the conquered nations.

Who then was the "man of sin" who had authority over religious matters, who sat in the temple of God claiming to be God? Was he the emperor? No! It could not have been the emperor for a number of reasons:

- First, not all emperors received divine honors. Caesar and Augustus were deified after they died; Tiberius disapproved of the cult of emperor worship; Caligula demanded to be worshipped while alive and was murdered; Claudius I, the ruling emperor when Apostle Paul wrote his epistles to the Thessalonians, suffered from a speech impediment and was despised by the Senate.

You may have seen the British television series "I Claudius" which dealt with that period. Claudius was depicted as a bumbling, stuttering individual, always outwitted by his wives. Did he look as if he might have been the man who was worshipped as God?

The film producers were not particularly concerned with historical accuracy, for the records show that he was in fact one of the better and more sensible of the Roman emperors. He improved the administration and the judicial system over the empire and was generous with Roman citizenship, but because he was held in low esteem by the disgruntled senators, he did not receive divine honors even after death, let alone while alive.

Neither was it Nero, the next emperor and the one in whose reign Apostle Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans. Under Nero, the Christians suffered their first major persecution, but that not because he demanded divine honors, but because he needed scapegoats for the fire which destroyed Rome.

Emperor worship was not a common practice until much later. Domitian, Trajan and Hadrian were the first emperors who persecuted the Christians for that reason, and that was after the Apostles had disappeared from the scene.

- Second, even when some emperors received divine honors, there is no evidence that any of them actually sat on the throne in the temple of God claiming to be God.

- Third, the Scriptures say that the "man of sin" will be destroyed at the return of Jesus Christ. Since no man could have survived that long, it means that the Scriptures are referring not to an individual, but to a position or office. Since the position of emperorship disappeared with the disintegration of the Roman Empire, it follows that the emperor could not have been the "man of sin."

The only position in the Roman world which was held in high esteem then, which rivaled that of the emperor, and which has survived to this day, is that of Pontifex Maximus.

Armstrong's idea that Apostle Paul was putting some restraints on Pontifex Maximus and keeping him from being revealed (2 Thess. 4:6-8), is as spurious as the one that he was a Jew. It was the emperor who overshadowed and kept in check the power of Pontifex Maximus, but when the emperors were no longer on the scene, Pontifex Maximus became the undisputed leader of the Roman world, and still is to this day.

The position of Pontifex Maximus goes as far back in Roman history as there are recorded documents. Indeed, the earliest chronicles of Roman history, dealing with events of religious significance (famines, eclipses, etc.), called "Annales Pontificum," were written by Pontifex Maximus. As the chief priest of the Roman religion, he presided over religious ceremonies in the temple of God, served by a group of girls called the Vestal Virgins.

The story is that when the Romans abolished their monarchy and instituted a Republic, late in the sixth century BC, they still needed a king for religious ceremonies. So they bestowed the title of "Rex Sacrificulum" (King of Sacrifices), and "Rex Sacrorum" (Sacred or Divine King) upon Pontifex Maximus.

But there was another title of which Pontifex Maximus was very fond of: "Father of the nation". It is not clear how he obtained that title, but since the Romans believed that he came down from the gods, it is not hard to see why he felt that he was the "Father of the nation".

When you combine the titles, "Divine King" with "Father of the nation" you come up with "Divine Father", a title which belongs to God and to Him alone. Can you see now why Apostle Paul spoke of a "man of sin" sitting in the temple of God claiming to be God?

During the Republic, the legislative power was held by the Senate, the executive power by the two praetors, later consuls, but the religious power with all its accoutrements and honors was held by Pontifex Maximus.

When Julius Caesar became the undisputed leader in Rome, he acquired for himself the title of Pontifex Maximus. He felt that he was entitled to it because his genealogy reached back to the Trojan hero Aeneas, the founder of Lavinium - the parent city of Rome - and through him to the goddess Venus. But other Roman senators were not happy that he declared himself "Sacred King", and fearing that he intended to re-establish the monarchy they killed him. Unfortunately, what they feared in Julius Caesar they got in Octavian Augustus.

Augustus, who is considered to be the first Roman emperor, also acquired for himself the title of Pontifex Maximus. After him, that title passed on to all Roman emperors, but for them it was only an honorific title; the real function and religious authority remained with the chief Roman priest who continued to sit in the temple of God as "Divine Father" surrounded by the Vestal Virgins.

There is a similarity here between the Roman imperial system and the present arrangement in the Anglican Church. Nominally, the Queen of Great Britain is also head of the Anglican Church, but the religious authority and functions lie with the Archbishop of Canterbury.

After the Roman Empire disintegrated, the title 'Pontifex Maximus' remained the sole preserve of the chief Roman priest.

PONTIFEX MAXIMUS TODAY

Since Apostle Paul prophesied that the "lawless one" will be consumed at the return of Jesus Christ, the question is who holds that position now? To find that out, if you do not already know, we will take you on a short trip of Europe.

When I married, my wife and I were both university students and could not afford to take a proper honeymoon. But we agreed that as soon as we had enough money, we would take a tour Europe to compensate it. Being born in Australia, where winters are rather mild, my wife wanted to see Europe covered in snow. So, a few years later, we booked ourselves onto one of those organized tours which took us through about half a dozen countries beginning with Britain. After the tour started, I noticed that in almost every major city we stopped, the tour guides made a point of taking us to visit the local cathedrals. As a person interested in history and religion, that turned out to be an unexpected bonanza for me.

One could not fail to be impressed by those magnificent buildings. Architecturally impressive, with intricate ornaments and imaginatively incised stories in acres (literally) of stained glass windows, they are a monumental reflection of the length, effort and expense the people of the Middle Ages went to in order to show their dedication to God.

As we took our tour in mid (northern) winter, a time when there are many celebrations associated with Christmas and the New Year, we had the chance to observe a few religious ceremonies in progress. During such occasions, I discovered that impressive as these buildings are, they are, in fact, quite ill fitted for their intended purpose. Because they are so big - they could easily accommodate thousands of people - they are cold, eerie, dark, damp, and generally speaking, uninviting.

I never saw more than a handful of people, a few hundred at most, worshipping in there at any one time. Many times I wondered if these buildings were ever full of people. In most cases, people worshipped God in a central area surrounded by hundreds of tourist onlookers - not a particularly conducive environment for inspiring and reflective worship.

The custodians of those buildings have entombed some of their kings, queens or famous personalities, right in the middle of the worship area. I don't know how other people feel about it, but I am always uncomfortable when I stand on someone's grave. That brought to mind the following Scriptures:

"For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their carved images." (Ps. 78:58).

"And he said to me, 'Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. No more shall the house of Israel defile My holy name, they nor their kings, by their harlotry or with the carcasses of their kings on their high places.'" (Ezek. 43:7).

The cathedrals are usually located on the highest vantage point in their respective cities. You can see their spires and bell towers long before you come near them. These are the high places of which God speaks in not so flattering terms in the Bible.

In Old Testament times, God gave specific instructions to His people on how to live. Their places of worship, their camps and their living quarters, were to be kept clean and holy at all times, otherwise He said, He would not live among them. When someone died, the body was to be taken and buried away from the camp. Those who handled the corpse were unclean until the sun set. Then they performed certain purification rites and rejoined their families and community.

Although we no longer live under the Old Testament rules, such ideas of cleanliness and holiness make as much sense now as they did then. No one needs to be isolated and undertake purification rites, but common sense should tell everyone that corpses are not to be buried inside places of worship.

We continued our tour until we reached Rome. That city proved to be quite a revelation. With all the things that we encountered until then, I was still not prepared for what I found there.

The great temple of God in that city - St. Peter's basilica - is the most magnificent building I have ever seen. In beauty, size, design, and general impression, it far surpasses all the other cathedrals of Europe. Unlike the others, it is not dark, cold, or damp, but well lit and aerated. That was truly the work of a genius. Someone called Sangallo is said to have been the original architect, but Michaelangelo designed the dome and finished the building. It is that dome, more than anything else, that makes the difference. It has wide clear windows which allow plenty of light and ventilation, giving it a more pleasant and livable environment. The mild weather of Rome certainly helps, but even so it still bears little comparison with other cathedrals.

Yet, great as that building may be, there are negative aspects about it which overwhelm the positive ones. They have saddled it with such an array of idols it is a wonder it hasn't started sinking under their weight. Inside, outside, on top, below, surrounding it, leading away from it and coming towards it, they

are everywhere. And underneath its floor, they don't have just one, two, or a few carcasses, but an entire cemetery of papal crypts and tombs.

The obsession these people have with death is overwhelming. During my wondering about that place, I had vivid images of Christ on the cross, and felt as if an invisible hand was pressing hard against my soul. As Apostle Paul said when he visited Athens, my soul was troubled too when I saw how given over to idolatry those people are. I was glad when I departed from there and hope never to return to that place again.

In the innermost part of St. Peter's, there is an elevated throne facing the worshippers. Who do you think sits on that throne during religious ceremonies? None other than Pontifex Maximus.

Not many people know that among the many titles the Popes have is also that of Pontifex Maximus. The shortened title, "the Pontiff", by which they are better known, comes from Pontifex. This gives the lie to the claim that the "Bishop of Rome" owes his position to Apostle Peter. The title Pontifex Maximus goes back hundreds of years before the time of Apostle Peter.

Now, would Apostle Peter appoint as bishop over the Church of God the one whom Apostle Paul called the "man of sin"? What would Pontifex Maximus have replied if Apostle Peter went to him and said, "I would like to appoint you bishop over the Church of God?"

"Appoint me bishop over what? I have the Roman world at my feet, all religions of the empire worship and respect me, and you want to appoint me bishop over an insignificant Jewish sect whose leader we have just crucified? Who do you think you are?"

"Well, you see, I am the chief Apostle of Jesus Christ!"

"Chief what? How many people worship you, how big is the temple in which you sit, how many virgins (as in Vestal Virgins) serve you, how much gold and silver and other riches do you have?"

"Oh, no! You see, in our religion these things don't mean anything anymore. We strive to achieve perfection by renouncing worldly possessions. We only worship God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son. Only in this way can we hope to inherit eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Renounce my position and my good life in this world for eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven? But I already have immortality within myself and will go to heaven when I die anyway. Besides, I have power to grant divinity to other people as well - have I not deified after they died the two most important personalities in the Roman world - Caesar and Augustus?"

"You have no immortality within yourself and have deified no one. What you believe is not true and it does not come from the true God, but from demons and seducing spirits. If you want to receive eternal life you need to repent, worship our God and His Son Jesus Christ and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. It may be that God will forgive you the blasphemy of calling yourself "Divine Father", and grant you the Holy Spirit to enable you to overcome your vanity and weaknesses."

"Are you calling me vain and telling me that when I die I will not go to heaven, that those whom I deify are not in heaven listening to our prayers, that our lady the "Queen of Heaven" is not up there surrounded by all the saints?"

"No one has risen to heaven except Jesus Christ and no one will be going to heaven until after the resurrection. Then everyone will be judged and only those who are found worthy of it will be granted eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. You can read the Scriptures and find out the truth for yourself."

"The Scriptures? Read the Jewish Scriptures? We have our own Roman Scriptures - the Pontifical writings to which I myself have added a few things. They tell us that we have immortal souls and that when we die we go to heaven. There, we will hold similar positions as the ones we held in this world; the higher, richer and more esteemed one is in this world, the greater he will be in heaven."

"No, no, no, it is the other way around. The richer you are in this world and the more esteemed you are, the lesser chance you have of making it into the Kingdom of Heaven. And the poorer and more despised you are now, the greater will be your reward in heaven."

"I am not going to put up with your obstinacy anymore. Take this man and throw him to the lions; that will teach him to come to me with such outrageous religion."

Hah! He wants me to give up my great position to become bishop in the poorest religion in the empire. And they won't even worship me and the emperor. This religion ought to be banished from the empire. I will speak to the emperor and see what he can do about it."

This dialogue, of course, never took place, for Apostle Peter never went to Rome. But it shows the unbridgeable gap that existed between the religion of the ancient Roman world and the Christianity of the Apostles.

THE BLASPHEMY

Some people may well say that although the Pope holds the position of Pontifex Maximus, he does not actually claim to be God. Doesn't he? We noticed how in ancient times Pontifex Maximus claimed to be "Divine Father". In like manner the present day Pontifex Maximus claims to be "Holy Father", another title which belongs to God and to Him alone.

Why do you think Jesus Christ told His followers never to call anyone on earth "father"? "Do not call anyone on earth father, for One is your Father, He who is in heaven." (Matt. 23:9). He saw what the Romans were doing and wanted to prevent His disciples from committing the same sin.

The Pontiff does not need to say he is God, he says that he is "Holy Father", which is just the same or worse. For there are many people in the world who think that they are gods, but only one who thinks that he is the Godhead, the "Holy Father".

Before He was crucified, Jesus Christ prayed:

"Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. HOLY FATHER, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are." (John 17:11, emphasis added).

By calling themselves "Holy Fathers", the Popes have made it sound as if Jesus Christ prayed to them. Could there be a greater blasphemy? More than a billion Catholics the world over call their Pope "Holy Father" not realizing that they too are committing blasphemy by doing so. By assuming for themselves the title "Holy Father", the Popes not only disregard the words of Jesus Christ, but break the second commandment too:

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain." (Ex. 20:7).

"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." (Matt. 12:31-32).

Can you see how Apostle Paul's prophecy about the "man of sin" sitting in the temple of God, claiming to be God, or "Holy Father", has been fulfilled right through the ages without people realizing it?

Fulfilled prophecy is the greatest proof the Bible offers that it is the inspired Word of God. The fact that this prophecy is being revealed now, at the conclusion of this age, is a sure sign that we are close to the return of Jesus Christ.

Apostle Paul said that before the return of Jesus Christ the "man of sin" will be revealed, and the Churches of God will fall away (2 Thess. 2:3-4). Both of these prophecies have now been fulfilled.

“ON THIS ROCK”

A recent video distributed by the Vatican entitled, "On this rock: a look inside the Vatican", says that St. Peter's basilica was built upon the bones of Apostle Peter, because Jesus Christ commanded His followers to do so.

Now, we saw how God does not like carcasses buried inside His places of worship. Would Jesus Christ then have told His followers to do something the Father does not like? Notice what He actually told His disciples:

"When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'

He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'

And Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.'" (Matt. 16:13-18).

The Catholics understand this to mean that Jesus Christ wanted them to build a temple upon the bones of Apostle Peter. They do not know or ignore the fact that in the New Testament the word "church" denotes a group of people, not a building. Early Christians met in synagogues, in private homes, in parks, in subterranean caves, wherever they could find a quiet place to worship without being disturbed.

What Jesus Christ meant was that Peter was to become the leading Apostle in His Church, and that is exactly what happened. He took the initiative in establishing both the first Jewish churches and the Gentile churches (Acts 2:14-47; 10:34-48). Yet he did not think of himself as being the foundation of those churches.

In a confrontation with the Jewish leaders he said this about Jesus Christ: "This is the stone which was rejected by the builders, which has become the chief cornerstone" (Acts 4:11). So, who is the "chief cornerstone" - the foundation of the church? Apostle Peter himself said that it is JESUS CHRIST, not himself. Apostle Paul also said:

"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3:9-11).

The Catholic leaders have decided to have another foundation for their church. They love to have relics of dead people in their churches, and since they could not have anything from the body of Jesus Christ, He no longer being dead and available, they settled for the next best thing - the bones of Apostle Peter. The problem is, Apostle Peter never went to Rome. He wrote his epistles from Babylon, which is in the opposite direction to Rome from Jerusalem. He went to Babylon because many of the people of Israel were still there from the time of their captivity. He remembered that Jesus Christ commanded them to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:6). In his epistle to the Romans, Apostle Paul wrote:

"And so I have made my aim to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, but as it is written: 'To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.'" (Rom. 15:20-21).

The Holy Spirit did not allow the Apostles to duplicate each other's work. If Peter had already been in Rome, Paul would not have been allowed to go there. The two Apostles went in different directions, one to the "uncircumcised", and the other to the "circumcised."

"But on the contrary, when they saw that the Gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the Gospel for the circumcised was to Peter; (For He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles)

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised." (Ga. 2:7-9).

The Romans were uncircumcised Gentiles, that is why Apostle Paul, not Peter, went there to preach the Gospel. After Apostle Peter opened the way for the Gospel to be preached to the Gentiles, he went back and preached the Word of God to the people of Israel - the lost house of Israel.

The book of Acts tells us that the Holy Spirit did not allow Apostle Paul to preach the Gospel in Bithynia, a place in Asia (Acts 16:6-7). Many people have wondered why? The answer is found in one of Peter's epistles: "Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." (1 Peter 1:1).

Bithynia was an area covered by Apostle Peter. That is why Apostle Paul was not allowed to preach there. In Bithynia lived "the pilgrims of the Dispersion".

Apostle Peter also mentions Galatia, a place where Apostle Paul established a church. What this means is that the "pilgrims of the Dispersion" had a colony there. Apostle Peter sent his greetings to the Israelites living among the Galatians, but he did not go there personally. Interestingly enough, the Galatians had a major problem with false ministers of Israelite origin who wanted to introduce to them the entire law of Moses and who preached salvation by law instead of by faith.

If Apostle Peter had been in Rome, the Jews of that city would have known about Christ, but when Apostle Paul arrived there this is what they said:

"We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.

So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved." (Acts 28:21-24).

The Jews of Rome knew nothing about "this sect", except that it was "spoken against everywhere". Does that sound as if Apostle Peter had already been there? Since Peter was first and foremost Apostle to the "circumcision", it is inconceivable that he could have gone to Rome without preaching Christ to the Jews first.

But what about the possibility that Apostle Peter went to Rome after Apostle Paul or while he was there? None whatsoever! Firstly, because what was true of Paul was also true of Peter. God does not play favorites (Gal. 2:6). If Paul was not allowed to preach where Peter had been, the reverse was also true.

"So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: 'The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, "Go to this people and say: 'Hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; For the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them. Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!'"

And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." (Acts 28:25-31).

When the Jews were no longer interested in hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Apostle Paul remained in Rome for two more years preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. The book of Acts ends there without telling us what happened to him in the end, but in his second epistle to Timothy he wrote:

"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my Gospel for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure." (2 Ti. 2:8-9; 4:6, N.I.V.).

After preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God for more than two years (from 63 AD and 66 AD - the time Apostle Peter wrote his epistles from Babylon), Apostle Paul found himself chained and ready to die. That was the time of Nero's persecution. He told Timothy that at his hour of trial he was abandoned by all except Luke (2 Ti. 4:9-11). Now, would Apostle Peter have abandoned him if he were in Rome at that time? Or would he have gone to Rome after Paul had been there, knowing the ravages Nero was causing among the Christians? What purpose would it have served? The Gospel had already been preached there and, as you saw, the Spirit did not allow them to duplicate each other's work.

Jesus Christ expects His followers to be ready to lay down their life for the Gospel at any time, but He would not approve of anyone jumping into the fire or into the mouth of lions just to show his/her willingness to die. Apostle Peter certainly would not have done that.

THE BIG LIE

You noticed how in his epistles to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, Apostle Paul wrote that those who rejected God have been given over to believe "the lie" (Rom. 1:24-26; 2 Thess. 2:11). The question is, what is that lie? To find it out, we need to look at the differences between early Christianity and the Roman religion.

The Apostles preached that at the end of this world, every human being will be resurrected and judged. Those who have repented and changed to a righteous life will be granted eternal life in the Kingdom of God, while those who continued to live in sin will be disposed of in a great lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15). Meantime, every human being who has lived and died, is unconscious (at rest, or asleep, as the Bible puts it - Dan. 12:13; 1 Cor. 15:6), and shall remain so until the time of the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13-17).

It is a very simple Gospel, but one which has been greatly corrupted by Satan and his ministers (2 Cor. 11:3-4).

The Romans, on the other hand, believed that people do not really die, but "pass away". Immediately after death, they said, people take on a different existence and, after judgment, continued to live forever either in heaven or in hell (the underworld). According to them, it would have been impossible for human beings to completely vanish from existence because they have an immortal soul.

It may surprise people to know it, but this belief is as old as the world itself, having its origins in the Garden of Eden. It is with this lie that Satan deceived Eve and Adam. He told them that if they ate of the forbidden fruit, they would not die but be like God.

"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"'

And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

And the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" (Gen. 3:1-5).

Eating of the forbidden fruit was supposed to give them the knowledge of good and evil and make them eternal like God - the very opposite of what God said would happen. Satan urged them to experiment, to find out the truth for themselves rather than rely on God's revelation. They did, and ever since humanity has been experimenting and searching for the truth, without ever finding it.

This is **the lie** of which Apostle Paul wrote about - the idea that every human being, sinful or otherwise, will live forever. This lie became the mainstay of all religions, except true Christianity.

The idea of reincarnation, common to the eastern religions, is based on this lie too. The soul, being immortal, keeps reincarnating until it reaches Nirvana, or unconscious existence, or nothingness.

Most people who believe in reincarnation, do not know that the final aim of this chain of birth and rebirth is nothingness. They take pleasure at the thought of being reborn as kings, queens, or other famous personalities - never commoners - without realizing that their final destination is nothingness. You would think that after the trauma of so many births and deaths they would aspire for something more exciting, but then when it comes to the philosophy of life human beings have hardly excelled in their logic.

Even the atheists, the people who profess not to believe in God, believe in some form of immortality. I remember when, as a child, the communists would take us on parades and tell us to chant, "Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live". Nobody believed that nonsense, for we all knew that, to use a common expression, he was as dead as a dodo, but who could argue with those besotted communist ideologues.

It was to restore truth to the world, the truth that was lost in the Garden of Eden, that God chose a people for Himself. He gave them new laws, statutes and judgments - a new philosophy of life, in other words - and told them to go out and be an example to the world. But the Israelites had a better idea: they decided to keep God to themselves. One of the reasons for which the Jews killed the early Christians was that they took the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21-22).

When the Jews failed in their mission, God chose a new people for Himself. He also told them to go out and take His Message to the world, but, like the Jews, the Christians failed in their mission too:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:19-20).

How many people "observe all things" these days as God commanded? Not many people, to be sure. That is why in the Millennium there will be another reversal of fortune.

There is a reason why God has been gathering the Jews from all nations back to their ancestral land. In their ignorance, they killed the "Prince of Peace", but throughout their long ordeal they maintained God's "oracles" (Rom. 3:2). The world will be astonished soon when they see the Jews preaching Christ and leading all nations back to God.

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'People shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities; The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, "Let us continue to go and pray before the Lord, and seek the Lord of hosts. I myself will go also. Yes, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and pray before the Lord.'

Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'" (Zec. 8:20-23).

Those who are currently engaged in peace negotiations, trying to divide Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs, should consider the following Scriptures:

"For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon desolate;
They shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, and Ekron shall be uprooted.
Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of Cherethites!
The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines:
'I will destroy you; so there shall be no inhabitant.'

"The sea coast shall be pastures, with shelters for shepherds and folds for flocks.
The coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed their flocks there;
In the house of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening.
For the Lord their God will intervene for them. And return their captives."

"I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the reviling of the people of Ammon, with which they have reproached My people, and made arrogant threats against their borders. Therefore, as I live," says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "Surely Moab shall be like Sodom, and the people of Ammon like Gomorrah - Overrun with weeds and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation;
The residue of My people shall plunder them, and the remnant of My people shall possess them."

"This they shall have for their pride, because they have reproached and made arrogant threats against the people of the Lord of hosts. The Lord will be awesome to them, for He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth;
People shall worship Him, each one from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations." (Zeph. 2:4-11).

The amazing thing about traditional Christianity is that instead of following the examples and teachings of the Apostles, it has adopted, almost in their entirety, the beliefs and practices of the ancient Romans. If you compare the Catholic Church with the Roman religion, you will not find many differences. The Romans simply took the name of Christ, stamped it upon their beliefs, and called that Christianity.

It was easy for them to do so because by the time the emperor Constantine made it the religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity had so thoroughly been influenced by the Roman religion, it was no longer recognizable as the Christianity of the Apostles.

The Orthodox and Protestant Churches hold similar beliefs to those of the Catholic Church because they are all daughters of Catholicism. They did not "protest" against the departure from the original religion, but against the papal abuses.

The notions of immortality of the soul, going to heaven or to hell after death, sainthood after death, worshipping of images, etc., are demonstrably not biblical in origin. Even the Holy Days are completely different from those observed by the early Christians.

There is not a single place in the Bible which says that human beings have an immortal soul. On the contrary, there are many examples which say that they DON'T have immortal souls.

Jesus Christ preached resurrection of the dead (Matt. 22:31), not resurrection of those who are already in heaven. If people are already in heaven or in hell, why do they need to be resurrected and judged again?

The Bible uses the terms "saint" or "saints" to refer to the people of God while they are alive, not after death. If you open a concordance, you will find dozens of places where these terms are used, yet none refers to dead people. Not only that, but the biblical saints die: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." (Ps. 115:15).

How could that be - God is happy when His saints die? Simple: those who die as saints could no longer sin. They wait in the grave until the resurrection time, then they will be granted eternal life in the Kingdom of God. As Job lamented:

"Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past,
That You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again?
All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes." (Job 14:13-14).

Job did not say, if a man dies, shall he go to heaven or to hell, but shall he live again? And what change was he thinking about? The change that God promised Daniel too:

"But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance **at the end of the days**". (Daniel 12:13).

Daniel, Job and Noah were considered righteous men by God (Eze. 14:14,20). Yet, God did not promise them a good life up in heaven after death, but rest until they rise to receive their inheritance.

Traditional Christians would be horrified to hear that their saints could die. How could they die if they are in heaven and have an immortal soul? The truth is the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant saints, are neither in heaven nor are they immortal.

When people die, they are dead forever, unless they are resurrected. Life only occurs after birth or after resurrection, never after death. There could never be life after death because death is the very antithesis of life. The two do not mix; one cannot be dead and alive at the same time.

The Apostles spoke about resurrection from the dead, never about the immortality of the soul. Human beings do not have immortality within themselves, nor could they obtain it by themselves. They need Jesus Christ for that:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:8-10).

"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all." (1 Ti. 2:5).

"Jesus Christ said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" (John 14:6).

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).

If traditional Christianity is to be believed, there is another name by which men can be saved - Satan. He told the first humans that by sinning they become like God, that they get an immortal soul and live forever. This lie is now the mainstay of all churches and religions.

Let us now analyze the Scriptures that appear to justify the belief that human beings have an immortal soul and go to heaven or to hell immediately after death.

The most commonly used example is the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). The misunderstanding in this case comes from the fact that people do not understand what parables are or what purpose they serve. Biblical parables are allegorical or symbolic representations of the Kingdom of God and are not meant to be taken literally. They require interpretation.

Jesus Christ interpreted many of His parables to His disciples, but not this one. Nevertheless, it is not hard for us to establish what message He wanted to convey through it. Those who lead a profligate, selfish and careless life now will not enter the Kingdom of God, while those who endure their trials patiently will get their reward then.

That this parable is not intended to be taken literally, is easily demonstrated by comparing it with another parable - that of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). There were ten virgins who were waiting for their bridegroom to arrive when they all fell asleep after he tarried a little. At midnight, a voice was heard which told them to go out and meet him. But when they awoke, five foolish virgins found their lamps going out because they had not taken enough oil. While they went out to buy more oil, the bridegroom arrived. He took the wise virgins into the wedding chamber, locked the door behind and left the foolish ones out.

If this parable were to be taken literally, it would mean that one man could marry five or ten virgins all at once. Assuming that anyone would be brave enough to do that, he would be breaking the most fundamental principle of God's creation - one man for one woman. It is against the law of God to marry more than one person because, as Jesus Christ said, from the beginning God made them male and female (Matt. 19:4).

While this parable, like the one of Lazarus, cannot be taken literally, it too conveys an important principle: those who are not preparing themselves properly will not enter the Kingdom of God.

When there are two Scriptures, one a statement of fact the other a parable, which appear to express different viewpoints, the parable must be interpreted in the light of the statement of fact, not the other way around. Contrary to the general opinion, parables were used to hide the truth, not to reveal it.

"And the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the heart of this people has grown dull. Their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them.'

'But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.'" (Matt. 13:10-17).

The parable of Lazarus then, like all the others, is not meant to reveal the truth, but to hide it from those who do not deserve to enter the Kingdom of God. That parable has nothing to do with going to heaven or to hell after death. Those who take it at its face value, do so at their own peril.

There are several aspects about Lazarus' parable which show that it cannot be taken literally.

(i) In the Kingdom of God, there will be no more pain and suffering (Rev. 21:4). Yet, in this parable, the rich man was very much in agony. The divide which Jesus Christ said existed between Lazarus and the rich man, which could not be crossed, is death.

(ii) The Scriptures say that "the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten" (Ecl. 9:5). In Lazarus' parable, the dead are very much alive and conscious. They talk, they suffer, they plead, they reason, they do the things which only living people can do.

(iii) If this parable were to be taken literally, it would mean that Lazarus went to heaven before Jesus Christ did. But the Bible says that, "no one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven". (John 3:13).

(iv) Apostle Paul said that David, the famous king of Israel, is "both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day... David did not ascend into heavens" (Acts 2:29, 34). Now, if "a man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22) is not in heaven, you can be sure that neither Lazarus nor anyone else is.

The notion of going to heaven or to hell immediately after death is connected with the belief that the human soul is immortal. If you take that away, there is nothing left to go to heaven or anywhere else. While there are no Scriptures saying that the soul is immortal, there are Scriptures which say that it is not:

"Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine;
'THE SOUL THAT SINS SHALL DIE'" (Ezek. 18:4, emphasis added).

Lest people think that the prophet made a mistake, God repeated this statement:

"THE SOUL THAT SINS SHALL DIE" (Ezek. 18:20, emphasis added).

Nothing has changed between the Old and the New Testaments to change this fact. Jesus Christ confirmed this when He said that God is able to destroy both the body and the soul in hell (Matt. 10:28).

Now, while traditional Christianity preaches that the soul is immortal, the Churches of God have gone to the other extreme - they deny that human beings have any souls at all. They say that the body and the soul are one and the same, even though Jesus Christ clearly identified body, mind and soul as separate entities (Matt. 22:37; Rev. 6:9).

Someone once quoted to me the following Scripture to prove that the souls of the sinful people, being immortal, will be tormented in hell fires forever.

"Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'" (Rev. 14:9-11).

Imagine for a moment that you have an animal which needs to be destroyed. Personally, I love all animals - God created them all for a purpose - but some animals need to be destroyed sometimes. (Some people would say that there are human beings who need to be destroyed too, but we will not enter into that argument here. True Christians do not decide over other peoples' lives; they leave that to God).

If that animal were to be thrown into a very hot lake of fire, how long do you think it would be tormented there? Within minutes, if not seconds, all that would be left is smoke from its burning. That smoke will then be going upward forever.

Now, if I were to tell you that the smoke from the torment of that animal ascends forever and ever, would you understand that to mean that the animal itself is tormented forever and ever? All creatures made of flesh and blood, human beings included, if cast into a lake of fire and brimstone, will burn and vanish quickly, and the smoke of their torment will ascend forever and ever.

That is a very different story from saying that sinful people will be tormented forever and ever in the hell fire. The unrepentant human beings leave God no choice but to have them destroyed quickly in that lake of fire.

Who needs to keep the sinful people alive and in torment forever? God doesn't, and neither will His sons.

If those who are saved could look down from heaven and see the sinful being tormented in hell, one wonders who would be in greater agony, those who watch or those who suffer.

Anyone watching human beings, or animals for that matter, in that kind of torment, and not feel for them and want to end their agony, is not worthy of the Kingdom of God. Among those in hell may well be people who were once your relatives or friends. Could you bear to see them suffer in hell fires forever, without ever being given the chance of a reprieve? And that just because they chose to live their miserable seventy years or so in sin? That is not Christianity friends; that is a satanic religion. Satan may want to torment his prisoners forever, but not God.

God says that He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God is not willing what? That people should suffer in hell fires forever? No, He is not willing that any should PERISH. Those who will not repent will PERISH when they will be cast into that lake of fire.

Another Scripture often quoted in support of the "immortal soul" concept, is Revelation 20:10.

"And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

Here we have the Devil, the beast and the false prophet cast into the lake of fire and brimstone and "tormented day and night forever and ever". How do we explain this? First, we have a problem of translation. This is how the Revised Standard Version interprets this verse:

"And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

Noticed the difference? In one place, the beast and the false prophet "are", and in the other "were", cast into the fire. The correct translation is "were", not "are". Revelation 19:20 tells us that the beast and the false prophet were cast alive into the lake of fire one thousand years earlier, at the beginning of the Millennium (cf. Rev. 20:3). Since we established that human beings do not last for long if cast into a lake of fire, it means that the "beast" and the false prophet "were", not "are", in that lake of fire. The "beast" and the false prophet are human beings representing religious empires or churches, as we shall see.

But first we must answer the question of why is the devil cast into that lake of fire - have you not been told that the devil cannot die because he is spirit being? The Churches of God have been preaching this doctrine for decades, and Garner Ted Armstrong has been one of its main exponents.

Well, I learned a long time ago not to trust what people preach without checking it into the Bible. The truth is that as much as the devil and his servants would like to think otherwise, he will be destroyed when God is finished with him. Remember, with God all things are possible (Matt. 19:26).

If Jesus Christ, the very God Himself, could come into this world and die, then the devil could be turned into a human being and made to die too, if that were the only way of destroying him. But we need not concern ourselves with how God will destroy him, the fact is that at the end of this world, Satan will be finished with.

The prophet Ezekiel wrote a story about a rebellious king. The language he used indicates that he did not write about a human being but about an angel. As it turns out, that is the story of Lucifer's rebellion and his transformation into Satan.

"Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord God:

You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. [No human being is the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. All human beings are born in sin and need to repent].

'You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering... You were the anointed cherub who covers;

I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you... Therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones..."

Therefore I brought fire from your midst [from within you]; It devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who knew you among the people are astonished at you; and you became a horror, and shall be no more forever.'" (Ezek. 28:12-19).

When this perfect cherub realized how beautiful he was he became vain, corrupted his ways, defiled God's sanctuary, and turned to iniquity. The prophet Isaiah, describing the same event, wrote:

"How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How are you cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!
For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

"Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.
Those who see you will gaze at you, and consider you, saying:
'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms,
Who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities,

Who did not open the house of his prisoners?" (Is. 14:12-17).

Because of his rebellion, he was unceremoniously cast down to earth where, in the end, he will be brought to ashes. Spirit being or not, the devil will end up in the grave [sheoul], the same as all rebellious, unrepentant human beings.

Those who have been worshipping the devil, in the belief that they will live with him forever in hell, will have to reconsider their plans. There is no life for the wicked even in hell.

How then do we explain the Scriptures which say that the devil, the beast and the false prophet will be tormented forever in that lake of fire? It should be obvious by now that this is a symbolic language. Since we know that all of them will be brought to ashes, it means that their torment will remain forever only in the memory of those who are saved. They will make a good topic for discussion during the endless feasts people will enjoy in the Kingdom of God.

There is yet another explanation which tells us that those who are cast into the lake of fire will not remain there forever:

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Rev. 21:4).

What things have passed away? Everything, the whole universe, including the notion of time as we understand it.

In the Kingdom of God, there is no more division of time, for there is no more night (Rev. 22:5). Time will mean nothing. When you live forever, the notion of time loses its significance. People will no longer count their years. If they were to count years when there is never an end, they'd go mad. How many years does eternity have? What would be the purpose of counting years when no one will grow old enough to die?

People will never worry about tomorrow, or the next year or the year after that. They will live and enjoy themselves without reference to time. Therefore, the phrase "the former things have passed away" means that everything connected with this world, including the universe and its movements, which create the notion of time, will have passed away. It means that the lake of fire, and those who have been cast in it, will pass away too. It also means that the agony of those who are tormented "day and night" will end when days and nights end. The new world will be completely different from the one we now know.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city. New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

"But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light.

"And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there)". (Rev. 21:1-2, 22-25).

Human beings find it hard to disassociate themselves from the notion of time and conceptualize permanent existence. They celebrate birthdays as if some earth-shattering event had occurred that day. Then they ask how old is God? To which God replies: "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14), meaning He exists without reference to time.

"I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last" (Rev. 22:13). God is permanent, ageless and all encompassing. We live in Him and through Him (Rom. 11:36). We must therefore tune ourselves into the wavelength of His mind (Phil. 2:5) if we want to achieve perfection and be with Him and with Jesus Christ forever.

This is what the purpose of life is all about - to become holy and perfect as our heavenly Father is holy and perfect (1 Peter 1:15-16; Mat. 5:48). God cannot entrust us with eternity until we are perfect as He is. Then He will resurrect us into His Kingdom and we shall be with Him forever. Every sin we commit derails us from the path of salvation and makes it that much more difficult for us to attain our goal.

The much-vaunted "hell" is nowhere else but here on earth. Anyone who fails to understand the purpose of the trials and tribulations that human beings must endure, fails to understand the purpose of life. We are born into this world to overcome our human nature and to become God-like. That is why we are called the children of God (Deut. 14:1; Ps. 82:6; John 10:34, etc.), why God wants us to call Him Father (Matt. 6:6,8,9), and why Jesus Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers (Heb. 2:11).

The ministers in the Churches of God have excelled themselves again by denying that we can become sons of God just like Jesus Christ. Because the Holy Spirit does not allow them to call themselves sons of God, they want to make everyone else believe the same, and thus lose their salvation. Salvation is dependent upon what people believe; that is why the Apostles emphasized the importance of right belief.

We, who believe, are born "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). We believe, therefore we know that we are the children of God and that He will resurrect us at the appointed time.

God will not force people into His Kingdom against their beliefs. Many times Jesus Christ said to those who sought His healing, "be according to your belief". So believe, because a lot of things depend on it, including your salvation and eternal life.

THE HOLY PLACE

It was important that we resolved the problems arising from Apostle Paul's letter to the Thessalonians before we discussed Jesus' prophecy of Matt 24:15 dealing with the "abomination of desolation" and the holy place. That is because virtually every person who has written on this topic, has assumed that the holy place is to be found in the temple of God mentioned in 2 Thess. 2:4, and that this temple is yet to be built in Jerusalem.

We already saw why the Jews are in no position to build a holy temple for God at present. But could the holy place be found in the great temple of God in Rome? The answer is no. St Peter's may be the greatest temple of God in the world, but from what I have seen there not a single patch of ground can be said to be holy in that place.

Where then can the holy place be? To answer this question, we must establish what makes a place holy in the first place. When the people of Israel built the great temple of God in Jerusalem, that temple became holy only after God sanctified it with His Spirit (1 Kings 8:10; 9:3). Unfortunately, it did not remain holy for long. The prophet Ezekiel tells us that the people of Israel profaned it with their adulteries and idols (Ezek. 23:37-39).

But that temple did not stop being a temple of God when it was profaned; it only stopped being a holy temple. Later, after it was destroyed and rebuilt, it was sanctified and rededicated to God. Jesus Christ held it in very high regard - He threw out the people who turned it into a market place (Matt. 21:12-13).

The difference between the temple of God in Jerusalem and the one in Rome is that while the first was sanctified by God with His Spirit, there is no evidence that He ever did the same with the one in Rome or indeed with any other in the world. Would God sanctify a temple in which a puny human being usurped His title by claiming to be "Holy Father?"

As we pointed out earlier, under the New Testament, human beings who repent and receive the Holy Spirit, are the "living temples" of God (Acts 7:48; 2 Cor. 6:16). Under the New Testament people can worship God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24) wherever they are and whenever they wish. Nevertheless, in order that Jesus' prophecy be fulfilled, we must have a holy place. Since this cannot be found in any existing temple, we must look elsewhere for it.

One of Moses' most unusual experiences gives us some clues:

"And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.'

So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is HOLY GROUND.'" (Ex. 3:2-5, emphasis added).

A place becomes holy whenever and wherever God makes His presence felt. Is the holy place of Matthew 24:15 then in Mount Sinai? If God were still there it would be holy, but to our knowledge that bush is no longer burning. What other place then can be said to be holy now that was holy at the time of the Apostles? Jesus Christ expected them to know where the holy place is therefore we must look for a place that has remained holy ever since. Not long before He was crucified, during a confrontation with the Jews, He said:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.' Then the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.'" (John 8:56-57).

Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament. He was the God who was married to the nation of Israel, the husband who had to die in order to make the Old Testament null and void, to create a New Testament. He was the Creator who, with the Father, was present at the beginning of the world.

The person who spoke to Moses and made that bush burn was Jesus Christ Himself. This means that the holy place of Matthew 24:15 has something to do with Him. What place then was holy when He was on the earth that would still be holy when He returns? What place has His presence stamped forever?

There is a church in the Orthodox quarter of Jerusalem called *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre* that is said to have been built upon the tomb of Jesus Christ. Could that be the holy place? How could it? There is nothing holy about a sepulchre. Sepulchres are associated with death, but God is a God of the living not of the dead (Mark 12:27).

We saw earlier that God does not like tombs inside His temples of worship. But this is different, some might say; this is not just an ordinary tomb, this is the place in which Jesus Christ was buried. If this were different, God would have told us so, but there is nothing in the Bible to indicate that anything has changed in this regard.

After Jesus Christ was crucified and buried, three days later some women came to His tomb with spices and fragrant oils to anoint His body. To their astonishment, they found the tomb empty. As they were wondering what had happened, an angel said to them: "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!" (Luke 24:5-6). Among them, it seems, there was also the one to whom Jesus Christ had told earlier:

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?' She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'" (John 11:25-27).

Obviously she had forgotten, for if she hadn't, she would not have been surprised to find the tomb empty. But even the Apostles had not believed Jesus Christ. Although He told them many times that He would die and be resurrected after three days, it did not sink into their minds that He was serious about it, until they saw Him alive after being dead.

The people who built that church upon the tomb of Jesus Christ and called it *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre*, did not believe the Scriptures either, for had they believed them, they would not have sought to worship God where He cannot be found. Some monks actually keep a permanent vigil by that empty tomb, but what purpose that is supposed to serve, only they know. Do they expect Jesus Christ to come out of it a second time? There is one Scripture, however, which leads us unmistakably to the identification of the holy place:

"The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul." (Lev. 17:11).

Jesus Christ made atonement for our souls by shedding His blood on Calvary (Luke 23:33). When Cain killed Abel, his blood cried out to God from the ground (Gen. 4:10). The body of Jesus Christ was resurrected and raised to heaven, but His blood is still in the ground in which it was shed. From there it cries out to God, as a witness against a sinful world. **THAT GROUND IS THE HOLY PLACE!**

Tradition has it that in the garden just outside *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre* is the place in which Jesus Christ was crucified. That is the holy place on which the "abomination of desolation" must not stand, for when it does, it will trigger a tribulation such as the world has never seen.

Ironically, had the people who built that church upon the sepulchre built it instead of the holy ground, it would have been a church as no other in the world - a truly holy temple of God. But as it is, they have profaned both themselves and their followers by worshipping God in a manner He does not like, in a place He cannot be found.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

During Jesus' trial, Pontius Pilate asked Him a number of questions with the view of establishing His guilt. Up to a point, Jesus cooperated with him fully, but at one stage He refused to answer any further questions. Pilate became confused and puzzled; something wasn't right.

The "crime" of which the Jews accused Him, was that He declared Himself to be King and Son of God. But from Pilate's point of view none of these things were worthy of death.

Many kings in the Roman Empire were quite happy to live under the Roman tutelage, as they benefited from the Roman law and order. Not having to worry about outside aggression, their communities led a happy and prosperous life. As far as Pilate was concerned, there was no reason why the Jewish king could not retain his position if he remained subject to the Roman authorities.

Pilate knew that Jesus Christ had caused no trouble to the Romans up to that time. He had never heard of Him before. These days, when we read about the ministry of Jesus Christ we tend to think that the whole world was watching. Far from it, it was very much a local affair. Jesus Christ became well known in the villages and towns where He traveled and performed miracles, but beyond that few people knew about Him. Few were aware of the spiritual battle He was waging against Satan on behalf of the world.

When He was in danger of being apprehended by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, He went back to Galilee. From our perspective that is just a stone's throw away, but at that time it was far enough to allow Him to disappear among its villages.

It did not take Pilate long to establish that Jesus Christ was not the type of person who would cause an insurrection, so he wanted to release Him. But then the Jews cried out: "If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself king speaks against Caesar" (John 19:12). Faced with this kind of blackmail, Pilate had little choice but to accede to their demand.

Let us return now to the actual interrogation, and see why Jesus Christ refused to continue defending Himself, thus acceding to His own death. First we'll have a look at the Gospel of Matthew:

"Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him saying, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' So Jesus said to him, 'It is as you say.' And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing.

Then Pilate said to Him, 'Do you not hear how many things they testify against You?' And He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly." (Matt. 27:11-14).

The Gospel of John gives us additional details about this particular scene:

"Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this Man?' They answered and said to him, 'If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you.'

Then Pilate said to them, 'You take Him and judge Him according to your law.' Therefore the Jews said to him, 'It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,' that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die. Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?'

Jesus answered him, 'Are you speaking for yourself on this, or did others tell you this about Me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me. What have you done?'

Jesus answered, 'My Kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My Kingdom is not of here.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?'

Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a King. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'

Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?' And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, 'I find no fault in Him at all.'" (John 18:29-38).

These passages are so impregnated with meaning I never tire of reading them. Why did Jesus Christ not give Pilate an answer to the question, "What is truth?" He could easily have said, "I am innocent, that is the truth," but He chose to remain silent. Silence at times can give a more powerful message than the spoken word.

Pilate was getting awfully close to things neither he nor the Jewish leaders were meant to know at that time. When Jesus Christ realized that, He gave him no further answers.

The question, "What is truth?" leads to the unlocking of one of the most astounding biblical mysteries - the identification of the "abomination of desolation."

Jesus Christ told His disciples that the Word of God is TRUTH (John 17:17). He also told them that He was "the way, the TRUTH and the life" (John 14:6). Apostle John wrote: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and TRUTH." (John 1:14, emphasis added).

Truth, then, was Jesus Christ Himself. Now, while He had no hesitation telling Pilate that He was a King, and Pilate believed it, for he wrote the sign "King of the Jews", which was placed above Jesus' head (John 19:19-22), He could not tell him that He was the TRUTH. Why? Because that word made a vital link between Messiah and the "abomination of desolation", and between the Jews and the Romans. There was a possibility that Pilate and the Jewish leaders could have understood the meaning of the events in which they were involved, and Jesus could not allow that to happen.

Since Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea, it is not unreasonable to expect that he had a good idea of what the Jewish people believed. He must have known, for example, that the Jews were expecting a Messiah - a deliverer from their foreign domination. If he did not know that, he was not doing a very good job, because the Romans had more trouble with the Jewish people as a result of their religious beliefs than with any other people in their empire.

The Jews knew about the arrival of the Messiah from the book of Daniel. Daniel's prophecies speak of a Messiah who will come and deliver them from their oppressors. The Jewish leaders would have been more than happy to accept Jesus as their Messiah, if He had shown any indication that He was going to fight the Romans. But He had no such plans in mind; He came to free people from sin, not from foreign domination. Deliverance from their oppressors had to come much later.

What the Jewish leaders did not understand was that the Messiah was prophesied to come twice: the first time to be sacrificed for the sins of the world (Dan. 9:24-26), and the second time to be installed as king over the whole world (Dan. 7:13-14).

When the Jewish leaders told Pilate that Jesus must die because "He made Himself the Son of God," Pilate did not dismiss that as a fanciful accusation. The Bible tells us that he "was afraid" (John 19:7-8). Unlike the Jews, who could not conceive that God could become human, Pilate had no difficulty with that concept. The Romans were used to the idea that God could take the form of a human being. Wasn't Pontifex Maximus being revered as God?

With this background in mind, we are now ready to discover the identity of the "abomination of desolation".

THE "ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION"

When the prophet Daniel received his prophecies, he confessed that he did not understand them.

"Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, 'My lord, what shall be the end of these things?' And he said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.'" (Dan 12:8-9).

These words were closed up and sealed until the time of the end, which means that if we are able to unlock these mysteries now, we live in the time of the end. We hope, dear reader, you understand the importance of the times in which we live. If you do, turn to God and give Him His long overdue praise and glory, while He may be found. The world is entering momentous events that will shake it to its foundations. Continued the angel to Daniel:

"Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." (Dan. 12:8-10).

"None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." We could claim that we are wise, but we won't, because we are not. Certainly not according to this world. Nevertheless, God gave us these mysteries that we may pass them on to you. God would like to deal directly with the leaders, but we do not know of any who are prepared to listen.

The first six chapters of the book of Daniel describe mostly Daniel's and his companions' life in the Babylonian captivity. Because Daniel remained faithful to God through all his trials, God started communicating with him and revealing to him the future. In chapter two he is called to interpret a dream of King Nebuchadnezzar. This is what he said:

"You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all - you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters all things; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." (Dan. 2:37-40,44).

This dream reveals that there were to be four great kingdoms (empires) in the world's history. (There have been other great empires, but God speaks here only of the four great Gentile empires which were to affect the history of Israel from the time of Daniel onwards).

The first kingdom is being identified as that of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar himself. From this passage, however, we do not know the identity of any of the other kingdoms. All we know is that after the last empire, God will set up the Kingdom of Heaven which shall never be destroyed.

To find out the identity of the next two kingdoms, we need to go to the eighth chapter:

"I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no beast could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great.

And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the male goat had a notable horn between his eyes. Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power.

And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand. Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven.

And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down. Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all these and prospered." (Dan. 8: 4-12).

When Daniel confessed that he did not understand what he was writing about, this is what the angel told him:

"Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be. The ram which you saw, having two horns - they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king.

As for the broken horn and the four that stood in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power. And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understand sinister schemes. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; He shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; He shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people.

Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human hand." (Dan. 8:19-25).

Here, the second kingdom is revealed to be that of Media and Persia, and the third kingdom that of Greece. But the fourth kingdom is not mentioned anywhere in Daniel's prophecies, nor anywhere else in the Bible. Nevertheless, we are given enough clues as to be in no doubt which kingdom that is.

All of Daniel's kingdoms are represented by animals and horns. The fourth and last kingdom begins as a "little horn" out of one of the four divisions of the Greek kingdom. With the advantage of hindsight, we can look back in

history and see what great empire rose from one of the branches of Alexander's empire. A kingdom that became exceedingly powerful, it expanded towards the south, towards the east and towards the "glorious land" (Israel) and, at the height of its power, it destroyed the mighty and the holy people, and rose even against the Prince of princes.

The problem is, no Great Empire has ever been recorded in the history books as having risen out of any of the branches of Alexander's Empire. Something isn't right: either Daniel's prophecies are wrong or history books are not right. This apparent discrepancy led many theologians to believe that Daniel's prophecies were written not by Daniel, who lived some five hundred years before Christ, but by someone else who lived only two hundred years before Christ. Up to that time, these prophecies parallel historical events very well, but from then on they no longer do (at least not according to the history that is being taught in schools and universities these days). The impostor who wrote these prophecies was correct as long as he related past events, but when he had a go at predicting the future he went terribly wrong.

Most theologians who lecture in universities, belong to this school of thought. This is what they taught me in my Studies of Religions.

Another group of theologians, among them those from the Churches of God, preach that most of Daniel's prophecies are yet to be fulfilled. G. T. Armstrong, W.F. Dankenbring, J. W. Tkach, and many other church leaders, belong to this school of thought.

Before I commenced my university studies, I spent enough time studying the Bible, that if I found a discrepancy between it and history books, I knew that the Bible is always right. But that position did not go well with my university lecturers. I was heading for failure until I realized that if I wanted to complete my degree, I had to play by their rules.

In my naivete, I assumed that at the tertiary level people are allowed to search and discover the truth, but truth is the last thing these people want. I had a similar shock there to the one I had in the Church of God, only that this time I decided to play by their rules. When I understood that what counted with the lecturers was not the truth but our ability to regurgitate what they gave us, I gave them what they wanted. They gave us rubbish, I gave their rubbish back to them, and they loved it.

In my first year at the university my marks were average, but by the time I finished they were among the highest. So much so that when I graduated, I was asked to go back and do postgraduate work; not by the head of the Religious Studies Department, but by the head of the Ancient History Department. Unfortunately, the need for a job forced me to undertake different studies.

My lecturers in the Religious Studies Department were not some unknown entities or insignificant personalities. Most of them held important positions in Christian denominations. One of them is now head of the Anglican Church in one of the Australian states. He was the worst offender as far as the Bible was concerned.

During the week they were "demythologizing" the Bible to us (taking out the supernatural), and in the weekend they were preaching from it to their followers. Great sermons, no doubt!

My strength came from the fact that I was studying both religions and ancient history. Surprisingly, I found that the lecturers in the Ancient History Department had more confidence in the Bible than those from the Religious Studies Department. The historians had little doubt about the authenticity of the New Testament writings, but the theologians were still searching for the "historical Jesus".

Interestingly, those who lectured us on Hinduism, Buddhism, other eastern religions, and Islam, never thought of "demythologizing" their sacred books. They always spoke with reverence about their faiths. Not so the Jewish and Christian theologians.

Some time after I finished my university studies, I became determined to discover the truth about the conflict between Daniel's prophecies and history books. So I went to the library, I piled a set of books in front of me, and went to work. I was surprised by how easy it was to discover where the problem lay.

If you take a look at a map of Alexander the Great's Empire, you will notice that it extends eastwards from Greece to the Middle East, to Egypt, Mesopotamia, and all the way to the Indian subcontinent. When he reached India, Alexander is said to have wept because there were no more civilized worlds to conquer. Which reminds me of a discussion I had with the head of the Ancient History Department early in my undergraduate studies. I told him that when I will finish studying ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome and the Middle East, I would also like to study the ancient histories of China and India. He looked at me and, after a pause, said, we don't cover China and India in Ancient History studies. I asked him, why not? He then said that if I wanted to study those areas I would need to go to the Anthropology Department.

That is how I discovered that at a time when in the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin there were flourishing civilizations, other countries had not yet developed writing and have no documents which could be studied in Ancient History Departments. For this reason they are given over to Anthropological Departments which specialize in analytical studies of artifacts and remnants of early peoples. It may well be that in view of recent discoveries these areas will be included in Ancient History studies one day, but at present they are still in the Anthropological Departments.

It is the anthropological people who keep pushing the "threshold" of human civilization further and further back in time (a sure way of generating news and getting a name for themselves). They say that human beings have appeared in a primitive form hundreds of thousands or even millions of years ago. It doesn't bother them that the first great civilizations appeared suddenly in the Middle East about six thousand years ago, and that the early humans were as developed and as capable as we are now. No evolutionary progress has been observed since that time. In fact, the opposite is true: because of sin, human beings are becoming more and more degenerate.

To return to the historical maps, if you look at the map of Alexander's empire, you will notice that it does not show any territories west of Greece. But Greece was a great imperial power for hundreds of years before Alexander appeared on the scene, and its empire extended both east and west. To prove this, look at a map of the Greek world during the Great Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC). Locate on that map the area marked as Magna Grecia (the Greater Greece).

Don't look at the Greek archipelago for that, but look instead at southern Italy. You will find that Sicily, southern Italy, much of the western coast of Italy, the city of Naples (Greek Neapolis), even southern France with the city of Marseille (Greek Massilia), were all colonies of Greece.

Now, what happened during the 70 years or so after the Peloponnesian War, did these territories stop being inhabited by the Greeks? Of course not, but because historians have chosen to ignore this part of Greece after Alexander rose to power, they have in effect drawn a curtain over Daniel's prophecies. In so doing, they have kept hidden the identity of the "little horn" and of the "abomination of desolation" to this day.

The Bible does not speak of the kingdom of Alexander, but of the kingdom of Greece. While Alexander is symbolically recognized as a great Greek king, the kingdom of Greece neither started, nor ended with him. The kingdom of Media and Persia had suffered major defeats at the hands of the Greeks more than a century before Alexander was even born - Marathon in 490 BC, Salamis in 480 BC, Plataea and Mycale in 479 BC, etc. The greatest Greek achievements (architecture, arts, literature, philosophy, science) were achieved between the years 600 and 400 BC - the so-called classical period - and that was before Alexander appeared on the scene. Many of those achievements are unsurpassed to this day.

The fact that the Greek Empire extended over a large part of Italy gives us the vital link between the Greek world and the Roman Empire. When a wave of Celtic tribes - the Gauls - invaded and plundered Italy in 390 BC, it was the coastal Greek City States that helped Rome to repel and recover from that invasion. It was the Greek City States also that strengthened Rome afterwards and helped it conquer its immediate neighbors to the south and to the north. After that, Rome kept expanding until it proved unstoppable - the Greek States themselves falling under its dominion. What happened after that, as they say, is history. Whether by design or circumstance, Rome kept expanding until it conquered all the known civilized world. The "little horn" of Daniel did indeed rise out of one of the branches of the Greek Empire. It is this "little horn" which was in control of the "glorious land" at the time of Jesus Christ.

In Daniel's prophecies, the terms "king" and "kingdom" are used interchangeably. We know who the kings of Babylon, of Media and Persia, and of Greece were, but who was the king of the Roman Empire. History books again will tell you that the Romans had no king. But we discussed this earlier and saw that they not only had a king, but a "sacred" one at that. Daniel said that, "the fourth beast... was different from all the beasts that were before it" (7:7). About the horn he wrote:

"And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words."

"I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom." (Dan. 7:8, 21-22).

How cleverly Satan has hidden the identity of this horn until now. Who made war against the saints - the holy people, the people who chose to follow the Bible rather than the apostate priests - and prevailed against them? Tell a Catholic that the "little horn" is none other than their "Sacred King" and he will probably tell you that their "Holy Father" not only does not make war against the saints, he makes them all the time. But who can make war against the Catholic saints? Who can make war against dead people? Nobody, obviously! The truth is that those whom the Bible calls saints, are very much alive, or were until the Romans, and later the Catholics, got hold of them. The saints and holy people of Daniel are those who have died as martyrs at the hand of the Roman "beast" - Jesus Christ Himself being one of them. Notice what Daniel said next:

"And out of one of them [out of one of the four horns] came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down. Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast TRUTH down to the ground. He did all this and prospered." (Daniel 8:10-12, emphasis added).

Who was the Prince of the host? Jesus Christ! Who was the TRUTH? Jesus Christ! Who was cast down to the ground? Jesus Christ! The "little horn" who was given an army to put an end to the daily sacrifices and cast TRUTH down to the ground was none other than the Roman Empire and its representative king, Pontifex Maximus. After Jesus Christ was "cast down", the horn went on to prosper for centuries, just as Daniel prophesied.

"Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, 'How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?' And he said to me, 'For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.'" (8:13-14).

For prophetic purposes, in the Bible, one day equals one year (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:4-6). Since God considers the Roman empire to be a continuation of the Greek empire, if we go back to the time the holy temple in Jerusalem (the sanctuary) and the nation of Israel (the host) fell to Alexander in 333 BC and count 2300 years, we come to the year 1967. What major event occurred then? The six day war in which Israel took control of the temple site. Continued Daniel:

"And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the DAILY SACRIFICES, and place there the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION." (11:31, emphasis added).

There is a huge lapse of time here between one event and another. With the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the sin sacrifices were no longer necessary. Jesus Christ put an end to those sacrifices when He sacrificed His own body for our sins.

"So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things to come, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

For then would they not HAVE CEASED TO BE OFFERED? For the worshipers, once purged, would have had no more consciousness of sin. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.
In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have no pleasure.
Then I said, 'Behold, I have come - in the volume of the book it is written of Me-
To do Your will, O God.'" (Hebrew 9:28, emphasis added)

Who killed Jesus Christ and put an end to the daily sacrifices? Pontifex Maximus and his armies! Who replaced THE TRUTH with THE LIE, the true Gospel with a false one? Pontifex Maximus and his religion! Who usurped Jesus Christ as head of the church? Pontifex Maximus! Who made himself God by claiming to be "Holy Father?" Pontifex Maximus!

Daniel tells us that the "little horn grew up to the host of heaven, and cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them" (8:10). Who rose up to heaven and cast some of the angels to the ground?

"Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. And she bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and to His throne." (Rev. 12:1-5).

Satan the dragon drew a third of the stars of heaven [a third of the angels of God] to the ground. He then stood before the woman to kill the Child as soon as He was born. The woman with the twelve stars is the kingdom of Israel with its twelve tribes. The Child is Jesus Christ. The dragon with the seven heads and ten horns is the Roman Empire. The seven heads are the seven hills upon which Rome is built, and the ten horns are the last ten leaders who shall rule over the last revival of the Roman Empire.

The power behind Pontifex Maximus is none other than the power of Satan. But we noticed that Satan is also the power behind the "man of sin."

"The power of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of THE TRUTH, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie." (2 Thess. 2:9-11).

Wherever we look in the Bible, we find that the power behind the enemies of the people of God, behind those who practice a false religion, behind those who propagate "the lie", behind those who hate the truth, is Satan.

From the book of Revelation we learned that Satan's throne is here on earth. That throne is not located in some distant corner of the earth among primitive peoples, but at the center of the most advanced civilization on earth - the Western civilization.

Daniel's prophecies also tell us that the "little horn" is called the "abomination... who makes desolate". This horn is connected with the killing of the Messiah:

"And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the sanctuary... but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering." (9:26-27).

Daniel also tells us that, "they shall take away the daily sacrifices (they shall kill Jesus Christ, in other words), and place there the "abomination of desolation" [bring Pontifex Maximus to stand on the place in which Jesus was crucified] (ch. 11:31). Remember, these prophecies are seen from Daniel's perspective, and they relate events which were to take place five hundred years into the future, but for us, these events took place some two thousand years in the past. Can you see now why Pontifex Maximus must not stand on that place? Because people serving one in that position shed Jesus' blood in the first place.

One Scripture used by many to justify the assertion that the "abomination of desolation" is yet to appear, is this:

"And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; He shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; He shall destroy the mighty and also the holy people. Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart; He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human hand." (Daniel 8:23-25).

The sentence, "in the latter time of their kingdom" has been interpreted to mean the end of the world or the end of this age. But in the latter time of what kingdom? The kingdoms of Media and Persia (v.20), and of Greece (v.21). Indeed, this last king and kingdom arose in the later time of those kingdoms. Rome gained ascendancy after Greece.

Daniel said that this king shall prosper and thrive and destroy the mighty and holy people. This could not be done in a short period of time. People don't just prosper and thrive suddenly. Such events require time. But neither the Jews nor the early Christians had any way of knowing how long that would take. Now we do - it took nearly two millennia.

The kingdom of Pontifex Maximus is prophesied to last until the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God (Dan. 7:8-14). How marvelously accurate this prophecy has proven to be. Pontifex Maximus has maintained his dominion, his kingdom, his position and influence, long after the original Roman Empire has vanished. He has continued to dominate the world through a different kind of empire - a religious one. An empire with no borders, but one with which no power could contend with, yet one which is now rapidly coming to an end.

"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.'

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, "I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow." Therefore her plagues will come in one day - death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her.'" (Rev 18:1-8).

THE FALSE PROPHET

Garner Ted Armstrong said that the "abomination of desolation" and the false prophet are one and the same, and we say that they are not. Here is the proof:

"And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are." (Rev. 20:10).

The "beast" and the false prophet are identified as two separate beings. Here is further proof:

"Then the beast was captured, and with him [the beast is a him] the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone." (Rev. 19:20).

The two were cast alive into the lake of fire - two, not one. Notice how the false prophet deceives not the people of God (not for the lack of trying), but those who "received the mark of the beast" - the religion of "the beast." They are the people who will refuse to accept the Gospel preached by the two witnesses, and who will rejoice at their death. The "beast", the false prophet and the witnesses of God are all present on the earth at the return of Jesus Christ.

The "abomination of desolation" has been in existence for a long time, but the false prophet appears on the scene only at the end. From Daniel we learned that the "beast" is the king of the fourth kingdom, but who is the false prophet? In what church will he make his appearance? Would he arise within traditional Christianity or within the Churches of God?

It all depends on what purpose he will serve. To be false, one must be contrasted with something that is true. One cannot be a false prophet if he arises in a church that is also false. One cannot deceive that which is already deceived. To be false, a prophet must arise within a Church of God.

We already saw that many false prophets and false ministers have arisen in the Churches of God, but in order to receive the "honor" of being THE great false prophet, he must be above the others - he must be a leader.

Jesus Christ said that prior to His return, "false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect." (Matt. 24:24).

Who are the elect at this time? The two witnesses. The great false prophet will try to deceive the very witnesses of God. How? By preaching a false gospel; by trying to deceive them with demonic doctrines; by trying to enslave them with phony tithing doctrines; by directing their attention away from the real "abomination of desolation"; by lampooning them for serving God; by throwing scorn on their work; and when none of these things work, by killing them or arranging to have them killed.

Do you understand what is happening in the world at this particular junction in world history? Can you see why God is ready to destroy the world, unless "Elijah" succeeds in turning the hearts of the Fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the Fathers?

By the time of the end, the break between God and His creation is complete. On the one hand we have the "wise" and "educated" of this world teaching people that there is no God, that they created themselves through evolution, and also two powerful religious figures, one within traditional Christianity, the other within the Church of God, preaching satanic doctrines, yet regarded by the world as great servants of God, and on the other, you have a man and a woman, "two olive trees and two lampstands standing before the God of the earth" (Rev. 11:4; Zec. 4:11-14), preaching the true Gospel, crying their heart out, telling people that they are being deceived, that the world is heading towards catastrophe, yet few people taking note of their message.

Too far-fetched to be true? Well, read the Bible, find out the truth for yourself, and believe it, for it is true. If it weren't for the two witnesses, the world would vanish as if it had never existed. God does not need this world anymore. He loves it and wants to save it, but if the world continues to reject Him it will be left to its own self-destructive ways.

Enough people have qualified to be His sons and daughters, that if those remaining do not repent and give Him glory, He will discard this world as one discards a rotten apple. Then He could bring forward His Kingdom by one thousand years, and resurrect only those who have qualified so far. The rest will be judged and burned, and forgotten forever.

When God says that unless people turn their heart to Him, He will destroy the world (Mal. 4:6), He means it. So do your part: repent, turn to God, love, honor and worship Him, for in so doing you will both save yourself and help save the world.

SALVATION NOT DAMNATION

Jesus Christ said that if we want to become sons of God we must love even our enemies.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:44).

It is a tall order for a human being to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, yet Jesus Christ said that this is not only possible, but a necessity if we are to become sons of God.

As sons of God we are required to love those who hate and harm us, for in the final analysis what they do to us is for our benefit. This cannot be done just as a lip service, but from the heart, for God knows our hearts. Without love there is no forgiveness, and without forgiveness there is no salvation. Since we preach salvation and not damnation, we give an example by loving and forgiving everyone who has wronged us in any way at any time. As Apostle John wrote:

"He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes." (1 John 1:9-11).

This raises the question, must we forgive the "abomination of desolation" and the false prophet? The answer could only be yes. They are the enemies of the people of God, but Jesus Christ told us to love our enemies, and since we are His followers we obey Him.

We do not avenge ourselves on anyone, regardless of what they have done to us. Vengeance belongs to God (Rom. 12:19). We lay our problems and burdens before our God and our Savior, knowing that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28).

An example given by Jesus Christ in one of His discussions with the Pharisees is of particular relevance to us now. After He healed a man who was blind from his birth, the Pharisees put him out of the synagogue when he confessed that only a man from God could have done such a miracle. Later, when Jesus Christ met him, He asked:

"Do you believe in the Son of God?' He answered and said, 'Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?' And Jesus said to him, 'You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.'

Then he said, 'Lord, I believe' And he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.'

Then some Pharisees who were with Him heard these words and said to Him, 'Are we blind also?'

Jesus said to them, 'IF YOU WERE BLIND, YOU WOULD HAVE NO SIN; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains.'" (John 9:35-41).

We believe that if Pontifex Maximus and the false prophet were asked if they were aware that what they did was wrong and what they preached was false, they would say that they were not. They would surely say they always believed they were serving God. For this reason, we must give them the benefit of the doubt, accept their explanation, and forgive them. Remember, the Bible says that, "they will put you out of the synagogues [churches]; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service" (John 16:2). Therefore we accept that they did these things in ignorance, just as the Jews killed Jesus Christ in ignorance (Acts 3:17).

When people confess their sins, admitting that they committed them in ignorance, if they are genuine about it, that amounts to an act of repentance. We have no choice but to forgive them. Let us not forget that at first Apostle Paul persecuted the Church of God too. He also thought that he was doing God a service.

Jesus Christ died for us and forgave us our sins; therefore, we must also forgive those who have sinned against us. As children of God we have both the power and the willingness to love and to forgive. Those who cannot, or will not do so, are not the children of God, and cannot be saved. If you have difficulty accepting this, pray to God, give Him honor and glory, and He will empower you through His Holy Spirit to behave like His son.

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 7:7-12).

Think deeply about the meaning of these words, and put them into practice. Love all human beings, but above all "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). In so doing, as we said, you will both save yourself and help save the world.

THE END

At the time of writing this article, it was announced that the Israeli government has extended a formal invitation to the Pope to visit that country. The Pope is said to have accepted the invitation with tears in his eyes.

It will be the first time in the history of Israel that a Pope has visited that country and its capital Jerusalem.

A visit to Jordan and parts of Jerusalem in 1963 by Pope Paul VI, can be discounted as having served any prophetic purposes for the following reasons: (i) Daniel's prophecies are about the Jews and the people of God, not about the Arabs. (ii) At that time it was not known who the "abomination of desolation" was, nor where the holy place was located. Since Jesus Christ said that if people are not aware of their sins they are not held accountable, Pope Paul VI could not have profaned the holy place even if he happened to pass unwarily over it. (iii) Jesus Christ said that when the "abomination of desolation" stands in the holy place, it will be the beginning of the great tribulation and of the end of this age. Since neither of these events have occurred, that visit could not have fulfilled the prophecies associated with the end of this age.

However, when the present day Pontifex Maximus goes to Jerusalem and steps on the holy ground, it is a different story. The significance of this event is well known because we have sent this magazine to the leaders of all nations, including the Pope and other religious leaders.

How soon after this event do we expect to see the world plunged into catastrophe? We cannot tell. All we can do is quote what Jesus Christ said. You draw your own conclusions from this:

"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand." (Matt. 24:15-25).

Bear in mind that 1997 is the last year of what we call the 'age of man' - six thousand years since the creation according to the chronology of Bishop Ussher - and the beginning of a new age, the last thousand years called the Millennial Kingdom. This transition cannot happen overnight. The years immediately prior to and following this event are fraught with danger for the world.

There are people who have gone to great lengths to calculate the exact date of the return of Jesus Christ. Most of the dates they have come up with revolve around that year. We believe that even if this is correct, it is a very dangerous practice. Jesus Christ said that it is not for us to know the exact date of His return, that only God knows that (Matt. 24:36). And that for a very important reason: human beings are to be ready to receive their Lord at any time. Setting dates could cause them to lose their guard and be caught unprepared. Anyone who tries to outguess God, places himself in competition with Him, and that is a sin.

Jesus Christ spoke in general terms about the signs leading to that event, and we advise you to read the entire 24th chapter of the book of Matthew. The only sure sign He gave us as indicating the imminence of those events, is the one about the "abomination of desolation" standing in the holy place. That is the one discussed and revealed in the pages of this magazine for the first time.

It is not a mere coincidence that God has revealed this mystery to us now just prior to its fulfillment and so close to the conclusion of this age. This is a sign that He is about to intervene in world affairs, to bring humanity to account for its waywardness.

The Polish priest who is now in the chair of Pontifex Maximus does not have to be the man who profanes the holy place. He can drop his garbs, get on his knees before the Almighty, not before the statue of Mary or whatever, declare that he was not aware of what he stood for, ask for forgiveness, then run from that place as fast and as far as he can go. He can let another take his place, for there are many people who care little about pleasing God, and more about pleasing themselves.

Anyone who goes to Jerusalem as Pontifex Maximus and steps on the ground onto which Jesus Christ shed His blood, conscious of what that gesture means, makes himself the "abomination of desolation." That sin will not be forgiven in this world nor in the world to come.

"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has TRAMPLED THE SON OF GOD UNDERFOOT, COUNTED THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT BY WHICH HE WAS SANCTIFIED A COMMON THING, AND INSULTED THE SPIRIT OF GRACE?" (Heb. 10:26-29, emphasis added).

The same is true of the false prophet and the ministers of the Churches of God. If they willfully continue to deceive and fleece the followers of Jesus Christ, "after they have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries."

God does not make anyone an "abomination of desolation" or a false prophet; they make themselves as such. It remains now to see who dares make himself one or the other. As of now, based on the power and understanding that God Almighty has given us, and on the fact that these people have done their work in ignorance, we declare that nobody is an abomination or a false prophet. The purpose of this work is to correct, not to condemn. We accuse no one of anything. On the contrary, we give them all the chance to repent and turn to the true God.

You know now where to look and what to watch for. Watch, therefore, and be ready, for the day of the Lord is truly at hand! Watch and sin no more!

"For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation." (Ps. 149:4).

"A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; The simple pass on and are punished." (Pr. 27:12).

“ANNUS HORRIBILLIS”, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BLESSINGS?

Queen Elizabeth II said that 1992 was "annus horribilis" for the British monarchy. So many articles have been written about that expression that it will, no doubt, become a classic, forever attached to her name as is, "if they have no bread, let them eat cake" attached to Marie Antoinette.

Only a year earlier, in her Christmas message, Her Majesty asked her subjects to stop and count their blessings. We dutifully obliged and discovered that we did not need to stop; we could have counted our blessings while running.

But we do not complain, for we know that there are millions of unemployed people in the British Commonwealth, and countless more in the rest of the world, who would do anything but count blessings at Christmas. But as far as Her Majesty's speechwriters are concerned these people do not exist, for it is clear that her speech was not addressing them.

We do not suggest that there was a connection between Her Majesty's Christmas message and the fact that a year of blessings was followed by "annus horribilis", but as head of a great commonwealth of nations and especially as head of a church, Her Majesty could have been aware that "he who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker" (Pr. 17:5). God does not take kindly to those who despise the poor even if they happen to be monarchs.

But what do these things have to do with *The Christian Herald*, one may ask? Nothing much, except that if Her Majesty had heeded our messages, she could have been better prepared for, or even avoided, "annus horribilis". Personal, family, or national misfortunes, do not just come out of nothing. Those who govern according to the will of God, who acknowledge that they owe their positions to Him, are not put to shame (Rom. 10:11).

There are laws - heavenly laws - which guarantee that those who do the right things, as far as God is concerned, are guaranteed happiness and peace of mind, though not necessarily wealth.

But the members of the British monarchy were not the only people who ignored our messages. The Prime Ministers of Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada - to mention only those of the white English speaking nations - plus the Premiers of five Australian States, all ignored our messages. All were removed from office in disgrace. Only one State Premier acknowledged it, and he was the only one who was returned comfortably to office.

President Bush was too busy basking in his Gulf War victory to have time for our messages too. He should have. But all these people were politicians; monarchs are never removed from office, are they? That is true, but then, with God everything is possible. In ancient times, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, one of the greatest kings who ever lived, was removed from office at the height of his glory when he became vain and ignored God's messengers. Then, after living like an animal for seven years, he repented and sought God's forgiveness, after which he was granted greater glory than the one he had before. Then he wrote:

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to abase." (Dan. 4:37).

How many world leaders praise, extol and honor the King of heaven? At present, we know of none, but soon, everyone will. But whether that is going to do them much good, let alone save them, is another question.

"As I live says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us shall give account of himself to God." (Rom. 14:11).

It is possible that the reason our message is so universally ignored, is because it does not come through diplomatic couriers or through a "proper" magazine. It may be worthwhile for our leaders to know what the Apostles said about God's servants:

"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

"However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew." (1 Cor. 2:1-2,6-8a).

"We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! Even to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now." (1 Cor. 4:10-13).

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through poverty might become rich." (2 Cor. 8:9).

A damning assessment of the leaders of this world from the Apostle who wrote most of the New Testament. If the world does not accept our message because it does not like its packaging, it will have to live with the consequences of its values. We come in the spirit of the Apostles, and both they and Jesus Christ were poor people. Through poverty we become (spiritually) rich.

A BEACON TO THE WORLD?

After writing about the USA twice before we thought that we would give it a miss this time. But how can we? After all the evils they have been committing in that country (rampant sexual perversions, adultery, teenage promiscuity, bestiality, Satanism, drug abuse, uncontrolled crime, murders, spiritual deception, etc.), we did not think they could still come up with something new to shock us. We were wrong.

Last year, their leading cultural figures awarded their greatest honor to a film that glorifies cannibalistic sexual orgies. We did not see the movie and do not intend to, but they sprung upon us television advertisements that shook us. A demented face, with wide, transfixed eyes, suckling his own saliva, coming towards us on screen, following a terrified girl and uttering words which we cannot even print.

That is what these people call entertainment. That is their greatest cultural achievement. That is what they export to the world and the values they honor. And those advertisements are supposed to draw in people to see the movie. This world must be sicker than we thought.

Is there any wonder that America finds itself in the condition that it is?

"Perhaps no-parole life sentences for certain sex crimes would be a more straightforward answer. In any event, such laws offer our only hope against an epidemic of sexual violence that threatens to pollute our society beyond the possibility of its own rehabilitation." (Andrew Vachss, "The nasty truth about sex offenders", *The New York Times* in *S.M.H.*, January 7, 1993)

A society threatened by sexual violence beyond the point of its own rehabilitation. And these words do not even come from a religious person.

In America, religion no longer offers solutions. Religion is now part of the problem. People have been deceived so many times by those who claim to speak in the name of God, they no longer know what to believe or whom to trust anymore.

And, as usual, what happens in America is soon imitated in other countries. The British glitterati followed the example of their American cousins by giving their prize to a movie that glorifies transvestite "love". Then the Australians, not wanting to be left behind, gave their highest honor to a movie that emphasizes racism, sadism and violence. A prominent Australian commentator wrote about that film:

"There are violence, racism, murder and (confused) ideology... they depict a contemporary interpretation of the general rehearsal for the end of the world." (G. Henderson, *S.M.H.*, January 5, 1993).

'A contemporary interpretation of the general rehearsal for the end of the world.' Little does he know how close he is to the truth.

LETTERS...

Dear Grigore, Many thanks for sending me *The Christian Herald*. I have read it from cover to cover and found it very interesting.

I was very sorry to read of the terrible and brutal treatment of your mother at the hands of the Romanian "Securitate." At least now you know that she is asleep, awaiting her time of resurrection. This world is certainly a sick and sorry place, and getting worse all the time.

I commend you for lifting up your voice loudly and boldly, proclaiming the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ and the impending judgment coming on all nations. Of your integrity and sincerity I have no doubt.

I wholeheartedly agree that the USA is headed for the most spectacular and dramatic fall of any nation in history. My own beloved country of Great Britain and your adopted country Australia are also heading for captivity.

Where I disagree with you is that the identity of the nation of Assyria, the instrument of God's wrath against Israel. I still believe most firmly that it will be Germany that God will use to punish Britain and USA. The nations comprising the present Common Market, won't necessarily be the ones which will form the end time "beast-power." Anyway time will tell and as our Lord Jesus Christ said we must all be alert and WATCH.

I can only guess that you obtained my address from a copy of... magazine. I support... and firmly and sincerely believe him to be the prophesied "Elijah." I hope you can respect that position even if you don't agree with it yourself.

Feel free to send me *The Christian Herald* if you wish as long as you realize my support is elsewhere. The other main point of disagreement is that I believe that some form of temple worship will soon be reinstated on the Temple mount in Jerusalem. This is a vital point of Bible prophecy. It will happen, just watch and see.

Thank you again for sending me your literature.

May our great God go with you and your loved ones, and guide and protect you always.

Sincerely with love, N.W.S.

Friend, you raise a number of important issues. We are happy that even though you do not agree with everything we say, you still found our magazine interesting enough to read it from cover to cover.

Thank you for your kind words about my mother. In her situation, the greatest blessing God could have bestowed upon her was to put her to sleep until the resurrection time. The barbarities she suffered in the last year of

her life, in fact in all the years of her life, are beyond description. Only those who have suffered at the hands of the communists know what they are capable of.

Since that time they have been watching my movements closely. I suppose they are biding their time. But if they knew what they are getting into with their next infamy, they would not hurry.

We do not preach that the USA, Britain, Australia and other white English speaking countries are going into captivity. That is what the Churches of God are preaching. What we say is that they will suffer terrible devastation, as indeed will the whole world, but in the end they will come out of it. This is what God said about them: "Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it." (Jer. 30:7).

The Churches of God say that the descendants of Jacob will be taken into captivity by a European alliance of ten nations led by Germany. Then they are supposed to be relocated to the Middle East, in the area of ancient Israel. Could anything be more absurd?

How could Germany and her allies spring a surprise attack upon the white English speaking nations and take them into captivity? Even if only a fraction, let's say ten per cent, survive, that would still leave over forty million people. Could they all live in the land of Israel?

These people don't know that Abraham's and Jacob's descendants are to dominate, and indeed inherit, not only the land of ancient Israel, but the whole world. If any nation is to go into captivity it will be the nations that will attack them, not the other way around. What people need to understand is that the end time conflagration will be so devastating, there will be neither victor nor vanquished. The Bible says that unless God intervenes and cuts those days short, no flesh shall be saved alive. (Matt. 24:22).

Many nations will disappear from the face of the earth, particularly those that come against Jerusalem (Zec. 14). But a number of people will survive and life will go on for another thousand years.

Regarding the other nations descending from Jacob, it is worth repeating what we said in an earlier issue:

"The Bible - the unshakable Word of God - has preserved for us the examples of those nations which have polluted themselves with the same kind of pollutions now rampant in the USA, the British Commonwealth, and a few other nations. God made it clear that there will be a heavy penalty for any nation which allows its people to do these things:

'You shall not lie with a woman. It is an abomination. Nor shall you mate with any beast, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before a beast to mate with it. It is perversion.

'Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for all these the nations are defiled which I am casting out before you. For the land is defiled: therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.

'You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your nation or any stranger who sojourns among you (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), lest the land vomit you also when you defile it as it vomited out the nations that were before you.' (Lev. 18:22-28).

In that same issue we also wrote:

"In a front page article, in one of Australia's major newspapers (*Sydney Morning Herald*, Aug. 10, 1990), a journalist described what he discovered when he inquired about the latest in children's computer programs. What appeared at first to be a seemingly innocuous article of interest only to the younger generation, turned out to be neither innocuous nor childish, but a grisly saga of unspeakable abominations and perversions. Here is part of what the journalist wrote:

'Without much trouble, I arranged a meeting this week with a young man who prefers to be known by his nom-de-modem of Crud. I was shown a selection which ranged from shots of *Penthouse* centerfolds to the latest La Cicciolina movie (*The Rise and Fall of a Roman Empress*) to Animal House, which features unspeakable acts with dogs, donkeys and chickens, to 'interactive party games' in which the player(s) can compete... The kids don't need access to the family video, they can do it in the privacy of bedrooms... anyone who knows how to use a computer and a modem can obtain this stuff, and parents wouldn't even have a clue.'

"One might have expected that such a story would stir to action the custodians of society's moral and spiritual standards, but he would have been disappointed if he thought that way. Not a voice of concern from a preacher, a member of parliament, an educationist, a community leader or from the ordinary people was heard. These people's feelings have been dulled to such an extent by the fall in moral standards that nothing shocks them anymore. The religious leaders (in most countries, but especially in America) are busily preaching week by week, telling people what they want to hear instead of what they ought to hear, feeding themselves instead of feeding the flock (Ezek. 34:8). Is it any wonder that the national leaders are so blind when it comes to their countries' future and vital interests?

"One would be excused in hoping that perhaps what the journalist described in that article was an isolated case in some sleepy suburb of Sydney, but he would be wrong again if he thought that way. The young man's computer was connected to an international network distributed from, where else but - you guessed it - the United States of America:

'Most of the material is taken from an overseas network of bulletin boards - there is much demand for the output of a military installation in the US Mid-West where bored computer operators create much of the raunchier electro-porn... "There is no control over it" said Crud...'

"No, there is no control over it at all, nobody cares what happens to our younger generation anymore. No one cares what kind of adults they will grow up to be with that kind of garbage in their minds, for once it's fixed in there it cannot be taken out..."

"The United States of America has become the most morally and spiritually polluted land on earth. Rampant homosexuality, bestiality, Satanism, glorified adultery, teenage promiscuity, crime, theft, blasphemies... everything God condemns in the Bible, they do. And now the children, the last frontier as it is, they too are to be corrupted and infected with these unspeakable abominations through the insidious use of modern technology. And as if it is not enough to do it to their own people, they are exporting it to their friends overseas. These days, to be in the good grace of the United States' government, you must allow your people the same kind of "freedoms" they allow their people, otherwise you are not a good friend."

This is what we wrote three years ago and little has changed since. In many respects things are worse now. The descendants of Jacob, who ought to be the leaders in upholding God's law, are the worst transgressors. That is why when we talk about trying times ahead, it is not just a flight of our imagination, it is a biblical imperative necessary to cleanse the land of its moral, spiritual and physical filth.

Such widespread cleansing of the world cannot come from Germany or from any of her present allies. The only nation north of Israel capable of unleashing such a devastating fire is Russia. We suggest you read our article "Daniel's End Time Ten Nations 'Beast-Power' Revealed" again. You will notice there that the danger to "Jacob" comes from the north not the north west. We noticed that Church of God publications now put Japan north of Israel too. The evangelists who preach such absurdities, who are building "imperial" schools ought, instead, to take some basic lessons in geography themselves first.

Assyria was indeed the "rod of God's anger" throughout much of history, the last time being during the Second World War. If it weren't for the conflict with Germany, Britain and France would still have their empires. Germany way well play a vital role in keeping Russia on her feet until that great day - she has already invested in Russia more than any other country - but the end time devastation will not cum from Germany but from Russia. And a lot sooner than people realize.

You say that... is "Elijah". A man who describes the Churches of God from the book of Revelation in terms that we cannot even print, forgetting that the Churches of God are the body of Christ; who admits extracting money from people on welfare benefits with phony tithing doctrines; who does not accept Genesis as an accurate account of creation; who takes upon himself to modify the Scriptures to suit his demonic ideas; who commits blasphemy in almost every issue of his magazine; who is using the Scriptures to preach hatred as no man has ever done before; this man is "Elijah"? O man, how deceived can you be!

Well has Apostle Paul said that even Satan transforms himself into an angel of light and his ministers into ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Read the Scriptures friend, and see what the real "Elijah" is supposed to do.

Saying that a false minister is a minister of Christ is blasphemy. Be careful, therefore, what you say and to whom you give your allegiance, "for by whom a man is overcome by him also he is brought into bondage" (2 Peter 2:19).

Your man claims to have discovered certain prophetic dates, but what does that prove? Satan knows God's calendar too. He knows that he has but a short time (Rev. 12:12). Should we be surprised then that his ministers know a few dates too? We would be surprised if they didn't. But have you checked out those dates and his prophecies to see how accurate they are?

He and other church leaders derive much joy from the fact that they have been blessed with prosperity. They say that this is a sign that the work they do is the work of God. As with everything else they have turned the Scriptures upside down. Could it be that they are being blessed because they do the work of the god of this world? (Luke 4:6; 2 Cor. 4:4). Satan was prepared to give Jesus Christ the whole world if He worshiped him (Luke 4:5-8). Make no mistake about it: Satan has the power to bless his servants too.

Don't you know what the Apostles have said? Apostle Paul, the man who worked harder than all the other Apostles, and who wrote most of the New Testament said: "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). "Even to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless" (1 Cor. 4:11). Like Elijah, the Apostles were poor people who suffered for the sake of the Gospel. You do not often hear today's evangelists praising the virtues that come from suffering. That does not go very well with the idea that people must expect blessings if they give generously to the church.

You say that some form of Temple worship will soon be reinstated on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem because this is a vital point of Bible prophecy. We cannot find any such prophecy for this time. And what if the Jews begin such a worship on Temple Mount, what would that prove? They can do anything they want on Temple Mount at present, from the Christian point of view it means absolutely nothing, as our previous article, hopefully, makes this clear.

Dear Mr. Sbarcea, I was sent a copy of your magazine *The Christian Herald*. I did not write for it but it is not unwelcome. I will be happy to hear what you have to say.

It would not be fair if I do not tell you that I am a minister in the Church of God and that I represent Garner Ted Armstrong.

Am I right in presuming that you had some unpleasant experience with the Worldwide organization, and/or perhaps even with ours? Also, you sound not Australian but Romanian. I am of an ethnic origin too, and can sympathize with the difficulties you are facing in the work you are doing. Keep in touch. We are not enemies. Sincerely, P.M.P.

It is nice to know that the ministers in the Churches of God now want to hear what I have to say. Time was when they would not have a bar of it.

Thank you for reassuring me that we are not enemies. I already have enough people on my trail without having to worry about the Churches of God too.

You say that you are a minister in the Church of God and that you represent Garner Ted Armstrong. That does not surprise us anymore. We expect anything these days. We have noticed that he now thinks he is God - the Church of God, International is now called after his name: "The Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelistic Association". As the Bible says, "he shall do what his fathers have not done, nor his forefathers."

We, on the other hand, represent no human being. Jesus Christ died for us, He is our Savior, and He alone we serve and represent. Good luck with your savior.

You wonder if you are right in presuming that I had some unpleasant experience with the Worldwide Church of God, and/or perhaps even with your church? Oh no, how could anyone have unpleasant experiences with these people? They are so pious they wouldn't harm a fly, would they?

Dear Greg, It is some time since we received your interesting letter. We appreciated hearing from you and thank you for the material you sent. You are a good Bible student and your studies are very deep. We are sure the subject matter has taken a lot of study.

The "Alpha and Omega Christian Foundation" you have started sounds like an interesting organization and the description and purpose statements should be the ideal of all Christians. Do you have several who work with you and do you have special services or is this an interdenominational organization with members from within other churches and organizations?

We work with an interdenominational Sabbath organization that has members in various Sabbath keeping churches. The purpose of this organization is to promote the Sabbath (7th day).

We are interested in all our new found Australian brethren. We enjoyed meeting with all of you at Kiama. Is there to be a Feast there again this year? It was a very nice area by the ocean... peaceful and restful place to worship.

Thanks again for sharing your ideas with us. We are interested in hearing from you. We are not the deep Bible students you are, but we do appreciate your commitment and we can enjoy each other's fellowship even though we may not all see eye to eye on all Bible subjects.

Pray for the brethren here in America. B. & S.R.

Friends, you say well that the purpose statement of "Alpha and Omega Christian Foundation" should be the ideal of all Christians, but unfortunately it is not. In spite of the religious revival taking place in the world, the ranks of those who truly follow Jesus Christ and believe the Gospel is thinning rather than growing.

Belonging to any religion or worshipping any god is not good enough. You know what Jesus Christ told the Samaritan woman: "You worship what you do not know; We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews [the spiritual Jews]" (John 4:22).

Elsewhere He said: "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

One can no longer assume that all those who say they are Christians are indeed followers of Jesus Christ. Not long before he was executed, Ceausescu declared that he was a Christian too.

We are not an interdenominational organization, we are nondenominational. No, we are not many, but few. Our group is so small, it could not be smaller. We do not rely on numbers for this work, but on God.

Since we discovered that the Churches of God no longer preach the right gospel and do not observe the Holy Days in the manner of the New Testament, we no longer attend their feasts.

We do pray for the people who are in need all over the world and shall always continue to do so.

Dear Grigore, Thank you for the letter and the materials you enclosed. I am looking forward to reading your paper on the holy place. The reason I observe God's Holy Days and festivals is because I believe these are instituted forever (Lev. 23:41; Ex. 31:13; Matt. 26, etc.). I further see 2nd tithe as inseparably connected to the keeping of the feasts of God (Deut. 12:17; 14:22,23, etc.).

The first tithe belongs to God (Lev. 23:30). The fact that He gave it to the Levites, temple, etc., and the fact that the Levitical system became defunct or disbanded did not nullify the tithing laws. Christ confirmed (Luke 11:42): "These ought you to have done." [Apostle] Paul agrees (I Cor. 9). He further states in the same manner should the New Testament be supported as was the old temple (v.13).

The Old Testament temple received support by means of tithes and offerings. [Apostle] Paul called it his "right" the support which the Corinthians were giving to others. This caused [Apostle] Paul to work for himself, but did not do away with God's tithing laws. Any case this is just to explain my reasons for sticking to God's laws in total. At present, I am using my tithes to advertise and send truth (literature) to others in South Africa. I've just printed my first booklet (I am Africaner speaking).

How about a family photo? Please! It would make it more personal. Greetings and Christian closeness. M.H.A.

Your decision to adhere to "God's laws in total" may be fine, but what do you want to achieve by that, salvation by law? Don't you know what the Apostles have said?

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them'. But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'The just shall live by faith'. Yet the law is not of faith, but 'The man who does them shall live by them.'

Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? - just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3:10-12; 5-7).

We are not against people observing God's Holy Days, indeed we encourage them to do so. But in the New Testament there is no connection between the Holy Days and the tithing principle. There is no need for anyone to go to a temple or to any special feast site. People can observe the Holy Days wherever they are. Jesus Christ said: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). In Luke 11:42 He was addressing the Pharisees who were still under the Old Testament. But when the New Testament was instituted, the Apostles felt no need to "tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs," and did not require these things of their followers either.

If tithing is a law under the New Testament, then the Apostles were the first to break it. Except in the book of Hebrews, which discusses the situation of the Jews, none of the other epistles even mention tithe or tithing.

Apostle Paul would be most unhappy to hear you say that he supported the tithing doctrine. He went out of his way not to put any burdens upon the churches which he established, so much so that he became unpopular with some of them because of it. You are twisting his words and changing the meaning of the Scriptures, and I don't need to tell you what the consequences are for that. You make the same errors the leaders of the Churches of God are making. They do not understand the difference between the Old and the New Testaments, nor how to keep the Holy Days in the Spirit of the New Testament. They tell their followers to observe the Holy Days in the manner of the Jews. To whom do you think Jesus Christ referred to when He said that there are people who claim to be spiritual Jews, but who are a synagogue of Satan?

Why do you want my photograph? I will gladly give you my writings, but not my picture. You know that those from the Churches of God, and other churches, are in love with themselves - they keep publishing their glossy photos in their publications. I am afraid we are not in the same class. I would rather take the chance of ending up like Jesus Christ. He must be amusing Himself in heaven at the pictures they have made of Him. Or perhaps He is furious. We shall know that soon.

OPEN LETTER TO GARNER TED ARMSTRONG

**This is an edited version of an open letter sent to G. T. A. in Oct. 1989.
Subsequent developments justify its republication.**

Dear Mr. Armstrong,

About six weeks ago I sent you a letter, which appears to have become lost, since I received neither reply nor acknowledgement of it. For I cannot believe that you received it and ignored it, as this would not be characteristic of a servant of Jesus Christ, especially since it covered important matters of church doctrine and practice.

But since we know that "all things work together for good to them who love God" (Rom. 8:28), there is a reason why the Spirit moved me to write an expanded open letter addressed to the whole church rather than to just one individual. For no matter how important one person may be, our Christian ethic teaches us to subject our personal interests to those of the larger community - Christian community first, the rest of the world second.

In my previous letter, I informed you that since I left your church I have been completely unaware of the major developments which have been taking place in the Worldwide Church of God. During this time, with the exception of the first couple of years in which I stumbled and suffered a painful withdrawal from the rigidity of the Worldwide Church of God, I have not departed from the law of God. Indeed, I put more time into studying and understanding the Bible and practicing the Christian way of life than I have done before.

For most of those years, I have been involved in an exhaustive search for the "little flock of Jesus Christ" against whom "the gates of hell would not prevail" (Luke 12:32; Matt. 16:18). I applied the biblical test to every denomination and religion that I could find, but none passed it. Then, by accident, I came across a poster advertising your new church and with great expectation I read your publications. Here are my findings which I think are of interest to you and to your church.

In your brochure, *Who, What is the Beast of Revelation?* page 2, you say, "The Pope in Rome is called 'holy' and yet the Bible says only God is holy!"

You do not give the reference to show where the Bible says so, but we assume you have in mind Revelation 15:4, "Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested", or 1 Sam. 2:2, "There is none holy like the LORD, for there is none beside You, nor is there any rock like our God."

The context of these verses indicates that God is not being compared with human beings, but with other gods. Indeed, other Scriptures reinforce this view.

"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Num. 23:19).

"And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent." (1 Sam 15:28-29).

"To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal and compare Me, that we should be alike? They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver on the scales; they hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god; they prostrate themselves, yes, they worship. They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it and set it in its place, and it stands; from its place it shall not move. Though one cries out to it, yet it cannot answer nor save him out of his trouble. Remember this, and show yourselves men; Recall to mind, O you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me." (Is. 46:5-9).

That Revelation 15:4 does not refer to human beings can also be deduced from the reference to the song of Moses in the previous verse to which it is linked.

"They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: 'Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!'" (Rev 15:3).

The song of Moses is found in Exodus 15:1-19. Of particular relevance is verse 11, "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

These examples make it clear that when the Scriptures say that God alone is holy He is being compared with other gods, not with human beings. As for human beings, the Bible says the very opposite of what you say: it encourages them to be holy just like our Father in Heaven is holy: "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). And, "Be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4), and again, "He who is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev. 22:11).

Unless human beings become holy they shall in no way enter the Kingdom of God. From the moment they repent and receive the Holy Spirit they embark upon the road to holiness and, in various degrees, they are holy.

People could get a very wrong impression by reading that the Pope commits blasphemy by calling himself holy. We all know that he is not holy. We also know that he commits blasphemy in a number of other areas, but not in this. The most that can be said about this claim is that he is a liar and a hypocrite, like the Pharisees of Jesus' time who said one thing and did another.

Saying that he is holy is not the same as saying that he is "Holy Father," a difference that seem to escape you and your ministers. Here are a few papal blasphemies as they are revealed by a former Jesuit priest:

"In the beginning the cross was never represented in art or sculpture - no one dared depict Him in his utter humiliation... Who would dare recrucify Christ?"

"The first tenth century Greek representations of Jesus suffering on the cross was condemned by Rome as blasphemy. Soon the Church of Rome itself yielded to its fascination."

"The church was responsible for persecuting Jews, for the Inquisition, for slaughtering heretics by the thousand, for reintroducing torture into Europe... but the doctrines responsible for those terrible things still underpin his [the Pope's] position." (Peter de Rosa, *Vicars of Christ*, pp. 3,4,27).

The Pope's blasphemy comes from doing these things in the name of Christ, from presenting a statue of a humiliated figure and telling people that that is their savior, from sanctifying and worshipping the dead, from placing Mary between God and His creation, from telling people that they have inherent immortality when they don't, and, of course, from exalting himself to the position of God by assuming His title of "Holy Father".

This book presents an extraordinary litany of papal inequities and blasphemies. Pity that the author ended up by losing his faith in God, as if God is to be blamed for the Pontiff's sins.

In another of your publications, *What is the Mark of the Beast* (p.32), we find this amazing statement: "Holy (a blasphemous term!)". How could "holy" be a blasphemous term when the Bible is permeated with it? Think about it Mr. Armstrong, who is committing blasphemy in this case? NO, THE WORD "HOLY" IS NOT A BLASPHEMOUS TERM! God is holy, Jesus Christ is holy, the "Comforter" is holy, many angels are holy, and They all want us to become holy too.

Then in the brochure, *Did Life evolve or Was it Created*, you write:

"What we see in the solar system and throughout the universe is proof of a gigantic battle; the wreckage of the original 'star wars' when a great archangel attempted to unseat God from His throne, and was instead cast down to this earth." (p.4).

What we see in the solar system is no such thing Mr. Armstrong. That is because when the "original star wars" took place, the solar system and the universe were not yet created. This same idea you take up again in more detail in a later publication, *The Shocking Truth about Satanism*. In the fifth chapter you connect Satan's rebellion with the creation of the universe. You then reach the conclusion that the book of Genesis does not describe the creation, but the recreation of the world. You say that Satan and his demons ruled over an earth which contained no human beings and that God forced His former archangel and all his rebellious angels to be confined to this earth for an unimaginable period of time prior to the creation of man. You go on to say that oil, natural gas, and coal are nothing more than the fossil relics of those bygone days, formed from the remains of dinosaurs and a thousand other species buried in the catastrophes of the past.

It would take me a long time to fully disprove these evolutionary fallacies, something which I cannot do here. However, I shall try to explain briefly why this is not so, remaining that if you want a more detailed information, I shall write a longer explanation later.

Firstly, the question of fossil fuels. Scientists have proven that it does not take billions of years for these to be formed. Such fuels have been produced in laboratory conditions in a matter of days. The secret is heat and pressure. Therefore, all those dinosaurs and other prehistoric species did not need to live in the pre-adamic world, a world which did not exist, as I shall prove shortly, but in the world between Adam and Noah.

And, of course, another explanation is that when God created the world, He created these things and placed them where they are for future use. Prophetic utterances and fulfillments indicate that this is rather the case.

Secondly, the book of Genesis describes original creation, not a recreation of the world. Your entire thesis rests upon the meaning of the word "was" in Genesis 1:2, which you say should be translated "became." You quote Is. 45:18 to prove your point. May I suggest that you read that verse again. Rather than supporting your view it reaffirm what is in Genesis.

Regarding the meaning of the words "tohu" (without form) and "bohu" (void) in Genesis 1:2, they describe a certain phase in the process of creation, not that the world reached that stage as a result of Satan's rebellion. Both these words have several interpretations (see Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies) and it is unwise to take one meaning out of context and make it support your unique assumption, when virtually all other biblical scholars have accepted them as they are translated in Genesis.

Thirdly, evidence is mounting that the earth and the universe are very young indeed - under ten thousand years old. Here are a few examples which throw a spanner in the evolutionary time scale:

1. It is a well-known fact that the earth is enveloped by a strong magnetic field and that in its core there is a strong electric current. Scientists have discovered that this magnetic field is decaying rapidly at a measurable rate.

If this rate had always remained the same (The evolutionists believe in uniformitarian geology, that is what we observe in the world now is the way things have always developed. The creationist view, on the other hand, is that there were upheavals in the past, such as Noah's flood, which changed the face of the earth rapidly), then 8 000 years ago the earth's magnetic field would have equaled that of a magnetic star, a clear impossibility. 20 000 years ago, the heat generated by the interaction between the magnetic field and the electric current would have dissolved the earth. One million years ago, the figures for the magnetic field reach impossibly high levels.

2. A steady stream of cosmic dust is falling on the earth and the moon at a measurable rate. If this has been occurring for 4.5 billion years (the age of the earth according to the evolutionary time line), large deposits should have accumulated by now, but they have not. American scientists were worried that their moon craft would submerge in a layer of dust as deep as 30 meters, so they constructed it with long legs and pancake type landing pads capable of keeping it on top. But when the astronauts landed on the moon, they found less than half a centimeter of dust, which could have accumulated in less than ten thousand years.

3. Every year about 27 billion tons of sediment is deposited on the ocean floor. If this rate had been maintained for one billion years, the length of time evolutionists say it took life to evolve from the chemicals in the sea, this sediment would now be approximately 30 kilometers deep. The actual sediment is less than one kilometer, nowhere near the amount expected according to the "geological time." (Sylvia Baker, *Bone of Contention, Is Evolution True?*, C.S.F., Qld., 1980, p.23)

4. The sun is burning about one billion tons of its mass every second. Scientists have been suspecting for some time that the sun is shrinking. Recently this has been confirmed by a Chinese scientist, Professor Wan Lai of Shanghai Observatory of Chinese Academy of Sciences. He discovered that the sun has shrunk 410 kilometers in 273 years, from 1715 to 1987. This means that the sun is shrinking at an average rate of about 1.5 kilometers every year. At this rate, a million years ago the sun would have been double its present diameter. Ten million years ago,

its size would have made it impossible for life to exist on earth. 210 million years ago, the surface of the sun would have reached the earth. (*The Australian*, April 14th, 1990).

All these figures create no problem if the biblical account of creation is accepted. But those evolutionary fables are given credence by uninformed and unbelieving theologians who try to "harmonize" the Bible with modern "scientific" discoveries, not realizing that there is no conflict between true science and the Word of God.

In the last few years, more and more scientists have realized that what has been accepted as a scientific fact was nothing more than an unsubstantiated theory. The world has fallen prey to a lie that has been with us since the beginning of time. Misguided attempts at bridging theology with modern science bring no honor to our Creator God. The time element makes no difference in the creating act of God. As Jesus Christ said, "with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). If God was able to create the world billions of years ago, He was equally capable of creating it 6000 years ago. God is not limited by man's inability to understand His power.

Jesus Christ said that the world began when Adam and Eve were created, not billions of years earlier:

"And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female.'" (Matt. 19:4).

"But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female." (Mark 10:6).

"You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; and they will grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail." (Heb. 1:10-12).

So, the beginning is associated both with the creation of the earth and of human beings. Jesus Christ would have known that, for He was there (John 1:1-3). Anyone who says otherwise contradicts Him and the Bible. True ministers of Christ would not do that. This is what a noted scientist and evolutionist said not long ago:

"John Eddy, a leading high altitude research astronomer in the USA opened a conference (in 1976) with the claim that whilst he suspected the solar system was at least 4.6 billion years old, there is not much in the way of astronomical evidence to disagree with the value of only 6,000 years proposed by Archbishop Ussher." (John Eddy, *Geotimes*, September 1978, p.18 - "Report on Symposium at Louisiana State University").

"There is not much in the way of astronomical evidence to disagree with the value of only 6000 years proposed by Archbishop Ussher" - not much proof in the universe of your gigantic star wars battle, is there?

Now to answer the question of Satan's rebellion - when and where did it take place? Firstly, a brief look at the account of creation:

* First day - God created a huge rock with a molten core covered in water and floating in darkness in a limitless expanse of the universe. It was "without form" because water was floating about it without any particular shape, and "void" because no life had yet been created. These verses do not say that the world was in confusion as you believe; they simply describe the first stage in the process of creation.

* Second day - God created the atmosphere with the clouds in heaven.

* Third day - God created the vegetable kingdom.

* Fourth day - God created the sun, the stars and the rest of the universe. The light which shone the first day did not come from the sun. It must have come from God Himself. We know that He shines like the sun when He reveals Himself (Rev. 22:5). The fact that the sun and the stars were not created until the third day, is further proof that the earth did not exist for long ages before the first humans were created because if it did it was a solitary planet in a dark expanse of the universe. No specie could have lived in such conditions. And, of course, Satan and his rebellious angels could not have ruled over a world devoid of any sign of life.

* Fifth day - God created all the sea creatures.

* Sixth day - the dry land creatures were created, including Adam and Eve.

* Seventh day - a day of rest for God and for the whole creation. God fellowshiped with His creation, with Adam and Eve, and warned them to be on guard against the evil one.

Satan was already in existence when God created the world, therefore his rebellion must have occurred while he was still in heaven, not on the earth, as it is generally believed.

Ezekiel's writings, which describe the fall of Lucifer and the appearance of Satan (Ezek. 28:11-19), confirm this. The king of Tyrus (anti-type of Lucifer turned Satan) was in "Eden, the Garden of God." This "Eden, Garden of God" cannot be the same as the Garden of Eden in which Adam and Eve were placed. This is located "upon the holy mountain of God" where the cherubs and the "stones of fire" lived. This could only have been in heaven, for it is there the "holy mountain of God" and the "stones of fire" (the angels) are found. It was there that iniquity was found in this "covering cherub."

Notice what God said He will do to this rebellious cherub? "I will destroy you, O covering cherub... I will cast you to the ground, I will lay you before kings, that they may behold you."

Notice also the future tense as it is correctly translated in the King James Version. At present he is very much alive and active, and spends time both on earth and in heaven (see Job 1:6, Eph. 6:12, Rev. 12:10).

Satan's rebellion therefore, occurred in heaven at an indeterminate time in the past before the world was created. What people need to understand is that there was more than one rebellion. Apostle Peter said that one such rebellion occurred during the days of Noah (1 Peter 3:18-20). Any wonder that there was so much devastation at that time. It was probably then that Jesus saw Satan fall from heaven as lightning (Luke 10:18).

There will be another final battle in heaven between Michael and his angels, and the Dragon and his angels (Rev. 12:7-8). Here, Sir, you make another error by saying that this battle has already taken place (*The Shocking Truth about SATANISM*, p.14). When that battle will take place, this is what will happen on the earth: "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil is come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows he has a short time" (Rev. 12:12). Anyway even if this battle has already taken place it could only have happened in recent times and it has nothing to do with what you call "mind boggling struggle... in which the whole universe is wrecked!"

I hope you have the courage and the moral and spiritual rectitude to acknowledge your errors and make the necessary corrections. As head of a church you carry a heavy responsibility towards those who trust you with their spiritual enlightenment and salvation.