

# ***Continuing History of the Church of God***

*from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> centuries*

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*The photograph on front cover is of the remains of ancient Philadelphia taken in Turkey in 2008 by Joyce Thiel. The photograph on back cover is part of the original Church of God building in Jerusalem taken in 2013 by Dr. Bob Thiel.*

***The Book of Revelation mentions a continuing group of seven churches that are Christian, plus an eighth (including her daughters) that is part of the synagogue of Satan. Do you know how the Bible and church history points out the differences between true and false churches?***

***There are many churches that claim to be Christian, yet they often disagree on major points of doctrine. Where is the true Christian church today that kept the original faith? What would it look like? What has it looked like throughout history?***

***Do you really know? Who changed doctrine? Who continued with the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3)?***

***Could the small (by worldly standards) Continuing Church of God currently be the most faithful remnant of the Philadelphia portion of the true church (Revelation 3:7-13)? If so, how might its existence impact the 21<sup>st</sup> century?***

***All who wish to truly be faithful Christians really need to know what happened to the church that Jesus founded.***

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# 1. Two Possibilities and Seven Church Eras

Was there an early, original form of Christianity that was so persecuted and so maligned, yet continued from c. 31 A.D.? Even today would it be overlooked by most who profess Christ?

Jesus, Himself, taught that the gates of Hades (death) would not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:18). From a biblical perspective, then there must still be a true Christian church in existence that has continued from the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

Do you *really* know where Jesus' true church is?

## Two Possibilities

Despite the fact that there were many early heretics, there are really only two possibilities for Christ's true church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: it is either a highly Greco-Roman influenced group of one or more churches, or it is a church or group of churches from some other, more truly apostolic and biblical, source.

For those of us who believe the Bible, there are no other options.

Could a small group and/or collection of small groups actually be the continuation of the true church? Or must the true church be a relatively large group or organization? In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, would Jesus' true church be scorned by the world or be a major player highly involved in the world's political scene?

## The Church of God has the Right Name and the Right Size

The predominant biblical name of the true Church in the New Testament is "Church of God" (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:16,22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Timothy 3:5,15).

Throughout history, the true church has normally used a version of the expression "Church of God" (or "the churches of Christ," cf. Romans 16:16) though often with another word with it (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Timothy 3:15).<sup>1</sup> Various small Sabbatarian

“Church of God” (COG) groups, like the *Continuing Church of God* (CCOG),<sup>2</sup> claim to have doctrinal and ‘laying on of hands’ succession ties to the original apostles and their true spiritual descendants. Does this have biblical and historical support?

Jesus taught that the true church would be a “little flock” (Luke 12:32), hated by the world (Matthew 10:22), and persecuted (Matthew 10:23). He also taught only a few would find the way to eternal life in this age (Matthew 7:14; 20:16). The Apostle Jude indicates that the number of saints in this age would be relatively small (Jude 14), as did the Apostle Paul (Romans 11:5) and the Apostle John (cf. Revelation 14:1-9). The Bible shows the true church faced tribulations (cf. John 16:33) and many who falsely claimed to be part of it would arise (Acts 20:29-31). It is inconceivable that there could be 2 billion real Christians today.

If a very small body of believers could be “the true and most faithful church,” does it make sense that God is mainly working through a relatively few during the church age? Most professing Christians apparently doubt that fact. But is that the case? If so, how does this impact salvation? Which church is faithful?

### **History Holds Clues to the Identity of the Faithful Church**

Jesus’ teachings prove that there must be a group (or multiple groups) that constitutes the true church. If history can show what the early apostolic and faithful post-apostolic church believed, the only real candidates for that church would be those who still have those same teachings and practices today.

When looking into early church history beyond the biblical account, we are faced with looking at whatever documents are left that were not destroyed by imperial or religious sources. But the sincere believers can know the truth (cf. John 8:32; 17:17).

### **Seven Churches of Revelation**

Seven towns that were consecutively served by an ancient mail route are discussed in the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation. Partially because they were consecutive, number

seven (which biblically indicates completion), and Jesus is discussed walking in the midst of them (Revelation 1:11-13), etc., some scholars have taught that the seven churches represent a prophetic outline of Christ's church throughout history.<sup>3</sup>

It is also true that some of the characteristics of each of the seven churches exist through the entire Church Age—this may be part of why Christians are repeatedly admonished to hear “what the Spirit says to all of the churches” (Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). An eighth, but larger and *false*, church is also discussed—and twice it is referred to as the ‘synagogue of Satan’ (Revelation 2:9; 3:9).

The 19<sup>th</sup> century theologian Joseph A. Seiss wrote of the seven:

These seven churches, then, besides being literal historical churches, stand for the entire Christian body...the seven churches represent seven phases or periods in the Church's history, stretching from the time of the apostles to the coming again of Christ, the characteristics of which are set forth partly in the names of these churches...It is simply the predominance...which distinguishes the seven eras from each other. The seven periods, in other words, coexist in every period, as well as in succession, only that in one period the one is predominant, and in another the other.<sup>4</sup>

The Book of Revelation is clearly a book of prophecy (Revelation 1:3) as several statements made to the seven churches (e.g. Revelation 1:19; 2:22; 3:3; 3:10) simply cannot have been intended to be completely fulfilled by the physical churches they were addressed to in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, scripture itself proves that many of the messages to those churches were prophetic, with some of those prophecies intended for those in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Will you be like the Bereans of old to search the scriptures to see if these things are so (Acts 17:10-11)? Can you accept the authority of scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) and true history to prove this and hold fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21, KJV)?

## **2. Location of the Early Church: Jerusalem, Pella, and Asia Minor**

The Bible shows that the New Testament Church began in Jerusalem of Judea on the day of Pentecost around 31 A.D. (years from 27-33 A.D. have been proposed, with 30 or 31 the most likely).

The Bible records that after being filled by the Holy Spirit on that day, the disciples began to preach and thousands were added to the true Church that day (Acts 2).

Most, today, do not seem to realize what early Christians believed, practiced, or taught. Most will not accept the truth.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian J.J.L. Ratton reported:

The early Church at Jerusalem, retained most of the distinctive customs of the Jews, such as circumcision, kosher meats, the Jewish Sabbath, the Jewish rites, and worship of the Temple. Our Lord, Himself, lived the exterior life of a Jew, even so far as the observance of Jewish religious customs was concerned. The early Church of Jerusalem followed His example. The Jews looked upon the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem simply as a Jewish sect, which they called the sect of the Nazarenes...S. John was a leader of the Nazarenes.<sup>5</sup>

Although the apostles with the true and original faith dispersed from Jerusalem, the Bible shows that Jerusalem, not Rome, was where the early church leaders conferred on topics of importance (see Acts 15; Galatians 1:18; 2:1-9).

It should also be understood that the Bible shows that the so-called “Jewish” practices were observed by Christian leaders outside of Jerusalem in places like Damascus (cf. Acts 22:11-13) and Asia Minor (Acts 13:14), and even praised in Thessalonica.

The Apostle Paul commended the Thessalonians in Greece for following the practices of Christians in Judea:

13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. 14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

According to the Apostle Paul, a way to determine the true from the false church was to see how well religious leaders followed the practices of the Church of God in Judea. Paul also warned against those that differed rising up (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

According to the 4<sup>th</sup> century Catholic historian Eusebius of Caesarea, starting in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the first fifteen bishops/overseers of Jerusalem “received the knowledge of Christ in purity.”<sup>6</sup>

Those leaders kept the seventh-day Sabbath, avoided unclean meats, were considered to be Nazarenes, and had other practices that many today consider to be Jewish.<sup>7</sup>

### **Christians May Have Been Warned to Flee to Pella**

Near the time of the deaths of the Apostles Peter and Paul, major changes happened in Jerusalem. Beginning in 66 A.D., there were revolts in Jerusalem by the Jews that resulted in probably all the Christians fleeing and ended in Jerusalem’s destruction by the imperial Roman authorities in 70 A.D.<sup>8</sup> The Jewish Temple was destroyed then (but Christians ended up with some of its bricks).

One difference between those of the Jewish and Christian faiths in Jerusalem then was that the Christians did not fight against the Romans.<sup>9</sup> Prior to the final siege the Christians left for Pella, reportedly by being warned by God's Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

Some Christians later came back and built what seems to be the first Christian building in Jerusalem. It was built on a hill known

as Mount Zion, resembled a synagogue, and seems to have been originally made from bricks from the destroyed Jewish Temple.<sup>11</sup>

The faithful who claimed to have fled Jerusalem for Pella and returned were called Nazarenes. This may be because Jesus Himself was prophesied to be called by that name (Matthew 2:1, 23) and/or because the Apostle Paul was reported to be a leader of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5).

Later, the Nazarenes ended up in “synagogues of the East” according to the Catholic priest and doctor Jerome.<sup>12</sup>

Jerome reported that the Nazarenes taught the millennial reign of Jesus Christ on the Earth.<sup>13</sup> Those Jerome referred to essentially ended up dwelling in Syria, Asia Minor and Armenia (while others went elsewhere). The Catholic historian Epiphanius wrote that the Nazarenes who fled to Pella from Jerusalem, professed Christ, believed the entire Bible, kept the Sabbath, and had various practices he considered to be Jewish.<sup>14</sup>

Modern theological scholars, like Larry Hurtado, have realized the early Christians, including the Nazarenes, held what has been termed a semi-arian or binitarian, not unitarian nor trinitarian, view of the Godhead.<sup>15</sup> So did Jesus (cf. Matthew 11:27).

### **There Were Changes in Jerusalem**

Until about one hundred years after Jesus Christ was killed, it appears that the majority of Christian communities not affiliated with Simon Magus (Acts 8:18-23) or his followers (ignoring those with Alexandria, some Ebionites, and some small groups) practiced true New Testament Christianity.

The majority of the early professors of Christ in Jerusalem were what has been termed *Judeo-Christians*.<sup>16</sup> Despite influence from people associated with Simon Magus,<sup>17</sup> they were the majority of professors of Christ in Jerusalem until the death of Bishop Judas,<sup>18</sup> possibly about 134 A.D.<sup>19</sup>

They may also have been the majority of professors of Christ in



Jerusalem during parts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries (some Nazarene Christians claimed continuity of succession from the 1<sup>st</sup> through at least the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries to the present).

A 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century Arabic Islamic manuscript contains a section that shows that Jesus' disciples kept the biblical Holy Days. It also says (around 135 A.D.) the Romans offered a deal: those who professed Christ, but would compromise in how they worshiped and would eat unclean meats like the Romans would gain support, and those that would not would be subject to persecution.<sup>20</sup>

Those whose descendants ended up in the Greco-Roman churches took the deal, while those in the Church of God refused. The Greek Orthodox said that their bishop Marcus (who they claim succession through) attained goodwill from the Roman Emperor,<sup>21</sup> presumably for accepting that type of deal.

Yet, the COG faithful would no longer associate with the compromisers. The compromising group then convinced the Romans to persecute, and the other group fled the persecution. The report also shows that the COG faithful were the ones with the actual New Testament—they apparently had much (if not all) of the entire “canon;” yet the compromisers did not (this may partially explain why the Greco-Romans took centuries to finalize their canons of scripture).<sup>22</sup>

The historian E. Gibbon reported this split between those called Nazarenes and those who followed a possibly Latin bishop named Marcus occurred around 135 A.D., after Hadrian defeated the Jews and established Ælia Capitolina.<sup>23</sup> Roman Catholic scholars correctly have claimed that true ‘apostolic succession’ *in* Jerusalem ended when Ælia Capitolina was erected.<sup>24</sup>

Around 135 A.D., the Christians in Judea were forced to make a decision: either they continue to keep the Sabbath and the rest of Jesus' commands and flee Jerusalem or they could compromise and support the heretical Marcus who would not keep the Sabbath, etc. Sadly, most compromised and fell away from the truth. But not all did.

## Splits in Jerusalem and Sunday Passover

History shows that there were at least three early splits in Jerusalem. The first split was from the heretical original Ebionites who did not believe in the virgin birth. The second split (completed c. 135) was from those who now claim to be the Eastern Orthodox (they followed Marcus) who did not believe in truly following God's law (although they *claim* otherwise). Thus, only a small number from Jerusalem remained faithful.

Something similar seems to have occurred in Rome because of Emperor Hadrian's anti-Jewish views. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, a Sunday Passover was accepted in the Greco-Roman world to replace the Nisan 14<sup>th</sup> Passover that the early Christians (as well as Jesus) kept. This change may have been part of an attempt to persuade Emperor Hadrian that many who professed Christ in Rome were distancing themselves from practices considered to be closely tied to the Jews (who were now out of favor because of their revolts).

The third "split" in Jerusalem was more of a 4<sup>th</sup> century takeover. After Hadrian, some Christians and Jews did return to Jerusalem. Later history records that Constantine's supporters started to take over the Christian "synagogues" in the early part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and completed that takeover once the "Byzantium empire had completely pervaded the country."<sup>25</sup> At that time, the Orthodox bishops basically ceased using the title of "Bishop of Ælia Capitolina" and instead switched to "Bishop of Jerusalem."

Many scholars realize that the second century change to Easter-Sunday and to a weekly Sunday was apparently related to the persecution from Hadrian. The 19<sup>th</sup> century scholar J.B. Lightfoot wrote:

The Church of Ælia Capitolina was very differently constituted from the Church of Pella and the Church of Jerusalem...the Churches of Asia Minor...regulated their Easter festival by the Jewish Passover without regard to the day of the week, but...those of Rome and

Alexandria and Gaul observed another rule; thus avoiding even the semblance of Judaism.<sup>26</sup>

Change set in among those in Hadrian's new city. There were differences between the faithful of Pella and Asia Minor and the compromisers in Rome, Alexandria, Gaul, and Ælia Capitolina—not keeping the original date of Passover was one of them.

Faithful Christian leaders that refused to switch from Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> to a Sunday observance have been labeled Quartodecimans (essentially Latin for *fourteenth*) by most historians—with many of the Christian leaders so identified apparently being in Asia Minor near the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

### **Was the True Church Expected to Change Doctrine?**

Of course, an important question is, “Was the church supposed to change its beliefs and practices throughout history or be faithful to what the apostles originally received?”

The Bible says the church was not to change its core doctrines, as Jude wrote:

3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to **contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints** (Jude 3).

Yet, history shows that many people who claim Christianity did not heed Jude's admonition. Many consider the truth too difficult to actually live by, especially if others influence them. Jesus warned that “tares” acting like Christians would be sown by the enemy (Matthew 13:24-43), and history confirms this.

Despite compromise by many, there were still apparently faithful Christians in parts of Palestine during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries according to Catholic reporters, such as Priest Bagatti:

The followers of the Lord remained also in Capharanum...At Tiberius we have evidence of the Judaeo-Christians, called *Minim*, from Jewish sources which tell of disputes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries...

Sakin...Nearby is Bainah, called an “engulfed” village just because it was inhabited by Judaeo-Christians.<sup>27</sup>

By the 3<sup>rd</sup> and later centuries, Greco-Romans tended to minimize the importance of those that held to original Christian teachings.

Although many do not believe that Christians should have certain practices similar to Jews (such as the Sabbath), the New Testament refers to true Christians as “Jews” (Revelation 2:9; 3:9; cf. Romans 2:28-29). Hence from the beginning, God intended that His true church would appear to be somewhat “Jewish.”

But as history shows, pretty much all real Christians left Jerusalem in 135 A.D. and the majority of those who professed Christianity in the Jerusalem area immediately thereafter were not faithful to the original teachings of the Christian church.

That was a difference between the true and false church that remains even until the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Jesus said that His real followers were to be set apart/sanctified by the truth/God's Word (John 17:17).

Can you believe and live by the truth? The original faith?

### 3. Rome, Jerusalem, and Asia Minor

The New Testament clearly shows that there were faithful Christians in Rome (e.g. Romans 16:1-16). There undoubtedly were many true Christians in Rome for decades, if not possibly centuries. However, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, the majority of those who professed Christ in Rome seem to have shifted from following original Christianity to various forms of “Christianity” based to a degree on allegory and human tradition.

While certain Catholics have tried to persuade the world that Rome succeeded Jerusalem as headquarters of the Christian Church (as early as 42 A.D. by some Catholic accounts<sup>28</sup>), this is not supported by the Bible nor the early records of history.

#### **Peter Was Not Given the Title Bishop of Rome**

Since Rome is a Gentile dominated area, was there a bishopric for Rome given to Peter?

The Apostle Paul wrote the following, which is from the *Rheims New Testament of 1582* (RNT)—which is a Roman Catholic approved translation of the Latin Vulgate into English:

7. ...to me was committed the Gospel of the prepuce, as to Peter of the circumcision 8. (for he that wrought in Peter to the Apostleship of the circumcision, wrought in me also among the Gentiles) (Galatians 2:7-8, RNT).

These verses would seem to eliminate even the possibility that Peter was intended to be Bishop of Rome as it was essentially a Gentile city. As the letter/epistle to the Galatians was written approximately 50 A.D., at least that late, Peter was not considered to have been the Bishop of Rome.

*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, even admits about Peter, that “we possess no precise information regarding the details of his Roman sojourn.”<sup>29</sup> *No precise information* means that the Roman Church has essentially relied on late accounts, that claim that Peter was in Rome and/or died in Rome. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century,

Hippolytus of Rome wrote of Peter's early whereabouts:

Peter preached the Gospel in Pontus, and Galatia, and Cappadocia, and Betania, and Italy, and Asia.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, even Roman accounts suggest that Peter could not have been in Rome very long, if at all, in the first century.

### **Peter and the Founding of the Church in Rome**

The Bible shows that Peter and Paul did not start the Church in Rome. Paul makes it clear in Romans 15:20-22 that he did not found (nor co-found) the church in Rome. Also, the Bible indicates that no one prior to Paul preached publicly to the Jewish leaders there (Acts 28:17-23).

This historical understanding is confirmed by Eamon Duffy, a Catholic scholar and a former member of the *Pontifical Historical Commission*, who wrote (bolding and italics mine):

**Neither Peter nor Paul founded the Church at Rome, for there were Christians in the city before either of the Apostles set foot there ... all the indications are that there was no single bishop at Rome for almost a century after the deaths of the Apostles...**

Neither Paul, Acts, nor any of the Gospels tells us anything direct about Peter's death, and none of them even hints that the special role of Peter could be passed on to any single 'successor'. **There is ... nothing directly approaching a papal theory in the pages of the New Testament ...** Paul's epistle to the Romans was written before either he or Peter ever set foot in Rome.<sup>31</sup>

### **Early Claimed “Bishops of Rome”**

According to the so-called *Apostolic Constitution* of the year 270, Linus was appointed the first bishop of Rome by St. Paul. After Linus came Clement, chosen by Peter. Yet, “the Catholic Church has made it a point of faith that popes are successors of

St. Peter as Bishop of Rome. But Peter never held that title; he was only invested with it centuries after he had died.”<sup>32</sup>

Today, Roman Catholics teach that Peter ordained, and was first followed by, Linus, who allegedly was followed by Cletus, and then Clement.<sup>33</sup> Many Eastern Orthodox do not believe that Peter was ever a bishop of any city, including Rome.<sup>34</sup>

As historians realize, certain Catholic writings simply are contradictory in regards to claimed early bishops of Rome.<sup>35</sup> Notice the following admission by Catholic scholar and priest Richard P. McBrien (**bolding mine**):

**Peter was not regarded as the first Bishop of Rome until the late second or early third century ... History, "the teacher of life", teaches that there were no popes in the modern sense of the word (that is, as the sole Bishop of Rome) until the middle of the second century. Until then, the church of Rome was governed not by a single bishop but by a committee or council of elders and presbyter-bishops ... Indeed, there is no evidence that Peter himself ever functioned in an episcopal role in Rome.**<sup>36</sup>

Early reports, and even Roman Catholic writings, essentially admit there is absolutely no clear early proof that Peter founded an apostolic succession in Rome beginning with Linus—yet that assertion is *now* the official Roman Catholic position.

It was not until the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century that there were any who actually took the title “Bishop of Rome.” History shows that it was not until Anicetus (circa 155) that anyone was clearly considered to be a bishop of Rome. Some suspect that Pius, who apparently preceded him, may have been the first—but this is less certain than Anicetus. There was also no “College of Cardinals” until the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>37</sup>—this is another change.

This “Bishop of Rome” title may have been the result of Hegesippus coming to Rome in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and asking some of the Romans for the names of their early leaders.

While it is recognized that Asia Minor and Jerusalem originally had bishops/overseers appointed by the original apostles,<sup>38</sup> since this was not the case in early Rome, Hegesippus' list of leaders were ultimately assigned dates of "reign" and posthumously were called "Bishops of Rome."<sup>39</sup>

### **A Confederation Involving Rome Started to Form in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century.**

Sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, a real confederation between what became the Roman Catholics and the Alexandrian and Ælia Capitolina branches of the Orthodox Church began to form. Rowan A. Greer, professor of Anglican Studies at Yale Divinity School, noted:

...the existence of the ecumenical Great Church, was the achievement of the late second century rather than the condition of the earlier period.<sup>40</sup>

The expression "ecumenical Great Church" is an interesting one, as the Greco-Roman confederation (which included the Latin post-135 A.D. Jerusalem) did end up adopting a variety of beliefs and practices from even Gnostics and pagans who made some profession of Christ and was *ecumenical* in that sense.

### **No Continuing City**

Even though there are several churches that claim direct descent from places such as Alexandria, Antioch, Asia Minor, Jerusalem, and Rome (what the Orthodox call the "Apostolic sees"<sup>41</sup>) one very real question is: *Was it biblically possible for any "headquarters" of the true church to remain in the same city?*

Let us look at what Jesus taught on this matter:

22 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. 23 When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes (Matthew 10:22-23).



Jesus, of course, has not yet returned. Whatever Christians there have been in the area of Judaea/Palestine have been chased through all the significant cities in that geographic region since Jesus made this statement. The horrible Crusades also probably helped to insure this. Jesus must be referring to more cities than just those in the area of Judaea/Palestine (such as those Jacob was alluding to in Genesis 49:1-27 and James in James 1:1).

Although Jesus taught His church would be continuing (Matthew 16:18), He also prophesied it would not be possible that any headquarters of the true church could permanently remain in one city for nearly two thousand years (Matthew 10:22-23), that Jerusalem was not essential for worship (John 4:21-24), and that His church would have significant tribulations (John 16:33). **Statements from Jesus prove that only a church whose headquarters moved relatively often could possibly be the true church.**

Rome, since the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century, however, has essentially been a continuing “Catholic” city (although leading Roman Catholic Bishops were based out of Avignon, France in the 14<sup>th</sup> century).

Because Roman Catholics may have concerns about translations by non-Catholics, let us look at something taught from the Book of Hebrews using the *Rheims New Testament*:

14 For **we have not here a permanent city**: but we seek that which is to come (Hebrews 13:14, RNT).

Thus, the New Testament effectively proves that no single city, including Rome (which Catholics tend to call “The Eternal City”<sup>42</sup> in apparent Christian contradiction of the New Testament), could have remained the headquarters of Christendom. The Bible shows that it is the Church of God (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28), and not a single city, which would be continuing throughout the Church age.

Furthermore, if there were any such “permanent city,” some think it would be Jerusalem (cf. Revelation 21:2). Yet, as far as Jerusalem goes, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Irenaeus wrote that it was

“deservedly forsaken” and no longer useful for bringing forth fruit.”<sup>43</sup> Although the Eastern Orthodox consider Irenaeus to be a saint and Jerusalem to be one of the five “Apostolic Sees,” *their saint* Irenaeus taught that God was finished using Jerusalem then. Irenaeus’ “forsaken” statement is possibly referring to those that fled Jerusalem prior to its destruction in 70 A.D. or more likely the 135 A.D. takeover. Jerusalem did not continue throughout the church age as THE leading church, nor did any other city for over a thousand years during this age.

### **Where Are the Places that the Apostles Went?**

Catholic tradition, possibly from the Catholic theologian Hippolytus in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (that may or may not be completely valid and may not actually have been written by him as some attribute it to “pseudo-Hippolytus”), basically claims that most of the apostles were in parts of Asia Minor and/or Judea, that Jude went to Mesopotamia, and that Thomas went further east to India.<sup>44</sup> Most of that is also discussed similarly in *Fox’s Book of Martyrs*.<sup>45</sup>

### **The New Testament Church Focus Was Asia Minor**

The writings of the New Testament show that Asia Minor was a major focus for the true Christians.

There are a total of 27 books in the New Testament. At least 9 books of the New Testament were directly written to the church leaders in Asia Minor. The ones clearly addressed to those in Asia Minor include Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy (Timothy was in Ephesus), Philemon, 1 Peter, 3 John, and Revelation. According to *The Ryrie Study Bible* John’s Gospel, 1 Corinthians, 1 & 2 John, and possibly Philippians, were written from Ephesus. In addition to these 14, there seem to be more as 2 Peter, and possibly Jude, may have also been mainly directed to one or more of the churches in Asia Minor.

The Book of James was written to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1). Some of them were in Asia Minor. Others, according to the historian Josephus, were

“beyond Euphrates.”<sup>46</sup> It is also likely that some other books were written at least partially from Asia Minor. Acts, for example, specifically has a portion written to Christians in Ephesus. Peter specifically wrote to the scattered Christians who were dispersed in areas of Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1-2).

So probably 14 to 20 New Testament books were written to or from Asia Minor (plus it has been *claimed* that all four gospel accounts were as well, though this is less certain, though one or more besides John may have been). There is only one book written to those in Rome (it never mentions any of the so-called Roman bishops), with 2 to Corinth, 2 to Thessalonica, and 1 to Crete (Titus), a total of 6 letters seemingly not sent from nor addressed to those in Asia Minor.

What this clearly shows, is that although there were Christians in various areas, the focus for the New Testament writers were the churches in Asia Minor. Even the last book of the Bible is addressed to the churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 1:4,11).

Dr. T. V. Moore noted:

The type of Christianity which first was favored, then raised to leadership by Constantine was that of the Roman Papacy. But this was not the type of Christianity that first penetrated Syria, northern Italy, southern France, and Great Britain. The ancient records of the first believers in Christ in those parts, disclose a Christianity which is not Roman but apostolic. **These lands were first penetrated by missionaries, not from Rome, but from Palestine and Asia Minor.** The Greek New Testament, the Received Text, they brought with them, or its translation, was of the type from which the Protestant Bibles, as the King James in the English, and the Lutheran in German, were translated.<sup>47</sup>

Jesus told His disciples to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Jesus said that those who claimed to follow God should tithe (Matthew 23:23); the New Testament shows that tithing was transferred to the Christian ministry (Hebrews

7:1-12; 1 Corinthians 9:1-14). It would seem that tithes (Luke 11:42) and offerings (cf. 2 Corinthians 9:7) financed the Church of God missions (cf. Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20) as the Christians in Judea/Palestine, the British Isles, and Asia Minor continued many of what are often called “Jewish practices.” Melito of Sardis (in Asia Minor) confirmed the success of the missionary outreach “to the uttermost parts of the inhabited world” by the latter portion of the second century.<sup>48</sup>

The New Testament records that in addition to Jerusalem/Judaea (where the Bible shows all the original apostles, and Paul, spent time), the apostles went to Antioch, Asia Minor, and parts of Europe. The Bible shows that Paul was in Jerusalem, Asia Minor, Rome, Greece, Antioch, Rhodes, Malta, Sicily, Spain and many other places. It states that John was in Jerusalem and Patmos. It shows (or at least indicates) that Peter was in Jerusalem, Antioch, Caesarea, Cyprus, Joppa, Asia Minor, apparently Mesopotamia, and elsewhere. It states that Peter and John went to Samaria (Acts 8:14). It shows (Acts 1 & 2) that all the disciples were originally in Jerusalem before dispersal (the exact lands they were dispersed to is not normally stated).

Another scholar observed:

From the destruction of Jerusalem to the final passing away of the generation of immediate disciples of the Apostles, during the mysterious creative period of Christian history, Asia Minor was the chief centre of the Church's life. St. Paul and Timothy, St. John and St. Philip, Papias and Polycarp, Melito of Sardis and Apollinaris of Hierapolis, continue without a break the succession of leaders from the middle of the first to near the close of the second century of the Christian era. It is true that in time the primacy, which had come to Asia Minor from the East, passed away...<sup>49</sup>

The *primacy* of Asia Minor continued into the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and its succession into the 21<sup>st</sup> century through its spiritual descendants.

19<sup>th</sup> century church historian J.F. Hurst also noted the following:

**The school of Asia Minor** consisted less in a formal educational centre than in a group of theological writers and teachers. The whole region had been a scene of active theological thought since Paul's day. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century it **leaned towards a literal and Judaistic type of Christianity**, but in the third it assumed a broader character. **It opposed Gnosticism and suppressed Montanism.** Polycarp, Papias, Melito of Sardis...were its leaders in its first period...<sup>50</sup>

Thus, the influence of the “Judeo-Christian” region of Asia Minor has long been known. The fact that many in the *area* changed/compromised in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century is also known by historians (the truly faithful remained faithful).

### **The Seven Churches of Revelation 2 & 3: A Priestly Puzzle?**

The emphasis on Asia Minor in Revelation has long puzzled certain Catholic scholars. Notice one “explanation” by the late Roman Catholic priest H. B. Kramer:

The seven cities named were situated in the west and center of proconsular Asia ... And why not send copies to the most important churches of all, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome? Surely those cities needed to be warned as much as proconsular Asia. The Apocalypse itself being inspired and written at the command of Christ states positively that the Lord chose those churches and dictated each letter...

The following explanation is therefore ventured, because our Lord would more probably select the churches most suitable to receive his message for *supernatural* than for natural reasons. These seven churches and bishops may have been guilty to such a marked degree of the defects, faults and vices stated in the letters, that they would most likely admit their wrong doing if their attention was called to them. Such faults would court spiritual disaster in any persecution.<sup>51</sup>

Priest Kramer was biblically wrong on several of his points. First, as nearly all scholars seem to recognize, most Christians had left Jerusalem decades before Revelation was written, so it was not then quite as important a location for many early Christians.

Second, other than Paul being imprisoned there, there is no biblical evidence that Rome had become important to Christians in any major way in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century.

Third, it is difficult to determine how important Antioch of Syria, a city without any late apostles (though it undoubtedly had some faithful Christians), was during the latter portion of the 1<sup>st</sup> century as a location for Christians as opposed to Asia Minor. Asia Minor is the area where the Apostles John and Philip were in the latter portion of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

But fourth (and perhaps biblically most important), two of the seven churches of Revelation (Smyrna and Philadelphia) received no condemnation in the letters. **Suggesting that the seven churches were chosen because they were guilty of “defects, faults and vices” that were in the letters to them is simply wrong.** Of course, perhaps Priest Kramer and others should simply accept the fact that Christ Himself chose those cities. And there simply is no *biblical* support that Christ Himself ever chose Rome for Christian leadership purposes.

Thus, from the point of view of the New Testament, it appears that Asia Minor, not Rome, was a major focus of the Christian community in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century.

The apostles, or their disciples, did go to many lands, and there are indications that at least some version of Christianity touched much of the Eastern Hemisphere. However, Asia Minor seems to have been the focus for many of the original apostles.

### **Apostle Peter was the Leader, but Not Bishop of Rome**

We in the Church of God have long maintained that Peter initially held a preeminent position among the original apostles.

Notice what the late Worldwide Church of God Pastor General, Herbert W. Armstrong, taught:

In founding God's Church, Jesus worked primarily through one man, Peter, even though He originally chose His 12 disciples. Few have ever noticed that Peter was the real leader ... The Jerusalem conference (Acts 15) showed that PETER was predominant over even Paul, although Paul was the ONE MAN God worked through primarily in the ministry to gentiles.<sup>52</sup>

While accepting Peter's leadership, we in the *Continuing Church of God* simply do not teach that he held the title "Bishop of Rome" or that he was succeeded by an elder in Rome named Linus who was supposed to rule over all Christendom. We believe that the Apostle John, who apparently outlived Peter by 30 or more years and lived in Asia Minor, would have become the preeminent 'successor' some time after Peter's death.

Interestingly, Jesus stated that Peter would be killed, but then indicated that the Apostle John may be allowed to live a much longer life (John 21:17-22). And this is what happened.

### **The Apostle Paul and the Apostle John Were in Ephesus**

What many people do not realize today is that Ephesus and the surrounding area in Asia Minor had churches founded by Paul, John, Philip and perhaps other apostles. Timothy, who was appointed as a bishop by Paul, was based in Ephesus.

Both the Roman and Eastern Orthodox churches used to consider that Ephesus was an original "apostolic see." *The Catholic Encyclopedia* teaches that "the See of Ephesus, {was} founded by St. John the Apostle" (and that eventually Constantinople gained control of that area).<sup>53</sup>

Sometime before Jerusalem was destroyed, the Apostle John moved to Asia Minor. The faithful were loyal to the Apostle John's biblical teachings and practices. Note the following according to author and Lutheran minister, C. Bernard Ruffin:

John ... made his way to Ephesus to take over the “orphaned” churches of Asia, once superintended by the martyred Paul. This would have been around A.D. 66 or 67.<sup>54</sup>

Notice the timing. The Christians had fled Jerusalem around this time, Paul and possibly Peter were martyred near then, and that is about when John took over the churches (and it may have been as late as 69 A.D. or perhaps much earlier or much later).

Unlike Rome, Ephesus was a church mainly commended by Christ in the book of Revelation (Revelation 2:1-6) and Ephesus was the second largest city in Asia Minor. The biblical references to the famed city of seven hills (Rome) that Jesus had John pen in the Book of Revelation (i.e. 17:1-9, 18) are negative.

In his letter *to the Ephesians*, the Apostle Paul makes clear that the Church was not just built on Peter but is built on the foundation of the apostles (PLURAL) and the prophets, with Jesus as the CHIEF cornerstone, and including all the members in the church as well (Ephesians 2:19-22). Thus, since the Apostle John was believed to have been the last of the original apostles to die, he would have had the mantle of authority (cf. 2 Kings 2:8-14) and he lived in Ephesus not Rome.

### **Overlapping Church Eras**

Revelation 2 & 3 shows an apparent overlapping succession of churches, each with different strengths and weaknesses, as well as attitudes, that existed throughout the entire church era.

The early church in Ephesus was led by Paul for at least three years (Acts 20:17,31), then probably Timothy (1 Timothy 1:3), and later John. It is known that there was succession of Gentile-area church leaders that traced themselves back to John.<sup>55</sup>

Ephesus clearly was a Gentile church (Ephesians 2:11; 3:1) that kept God's Holy Days, such as Pentecost, as Paul testifies in 1 Corinthians 16:8. Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread were also kept, as Polycrates' later testimony confirms.<sup>56</sup>



## **John Succeeded Peter as the Human Leader of the Church**

Paul once noted that it was “James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars” (Galatians 2:9) of the Church in Jerusalem (Cephas is the Aramaic word for Peter).

Peter was an important apostle. However, once James and Peter were killed, this only left one pillar, the Apostle John, who moved to Ephesus. It may be that one of the reasons that Peter and John were together so much was for John to get additional training to be the “successor” of Peter (this would seem to be why God had David in Saul’s court, per 1 Samuel 16:17-18, years before he became Saul’s successor on the throne).

Is it not logical that if anyone was to be the leader to succeed Peter, it would be John? Even if some question that, the fact is that because John was an apostle, he was also capable of passing on any legitimate form of “apostolic succession” himself.

Is it logical that the one who wrote the last books of the Bible would be the primary leader of the church until he died?

Since John seemingly outlived Peter and seemingly all the other original apostles, it should be no surprise that church leadership would have transferred to him. It would be illogical that John, an original apostle, would be subservient to any of the four claimed “bishops of Rome” (after Peter)<sup>57</sup> while he lived.

This is especially true since none of those early “Bishops of Rome” claim to have held the position of apostle (nor clearly were called bishop)—a bishop is essentially an elder who is a pastor or overseer (compare Acts 20 vss. 17 and 28).

John specifically taught what he learned from the beginning and the Bible is clear that John taught the truth of Christianity from the beginning (1 John 1:1-3; 2:3-4). Does your church *really* teach the same truths as the Apostle John did?

(For more on the true faith, please check out our free, online at [ccog.org](http://ccog.org), booklet *Where is the True Christian Church Today?*)

## **Passover & Footwashing: The Bible Warns Against Those Who Would Not Follow John**

It may be of interest to note that John wrote that the “antichrists” are those that did not follow his practices (1 John 2:18-19,24). The Apostle John basically taught that there were two groups that professed Christianity: those who followed his teachings who were the faithful ones, and those who did not, who were of the party of the antichrists. So, what may have been the first specific doctrinal departure from the practices of John that we have a clear historical record of?

The changing of the date of Passover (and later, the practices associated with it)! History records that the Apostles John and Philip continued to keep Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup>, and not Sunday.<sup>58</sup>

Also, it should be noted that Greco-Romans tend to observe “Easter” or “Pascha” on a Sunday *morning*, yet according to the Apostle Paul, Jesus kept the Passover “on the same night in which He was betrayed” (1 Corinthians 11:23). Passover was always to be observed at night on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan—and still is by those in the *Continuing* Church of God.

Furthermore, the Greco-Romans (including most Protestants) made other changes. Notice the following from historian B.W. Bacon, apparently related to the passage mentioning footwashing in 1 Timothy 5:10 and John 13:10 in 1<sup>st</sup> century Ephesus:

... a rite of the Ephesian Church, a washing of the feet of the Bride. In 13:10 it is interpreted to remove post-baptismal sin.<sup>59</sup>

It is related because footwashing is a Passover-related practice that was being done in the Apostle John’s area. John himself recorded that footwashing was a practice that Jesus implemented the same time He implemented the bread and the wine on His final earthly Passover (cf. John 13:12-15; Matthew 26:17-28).

Yet now, most who profess Christ do not practice footwashing. Since both the practices of taking bread and wine and the

footwashing were implemented by Jesus at the same time, it would seem that true followers of Christ would follow BOTH practices AND do them at the same frequency.

But most Protestants do not participate in footwashing at all.

Astoundingly, look at what is admitted by a Lutheran scholar who does not believe Christians should follow John's account of Jesus' words on footwashing:

John xiii. 13-15. Now the principle argument for footwashing as a Christian sacrament is based on the *literal* interpretation of these words by our Lord.<sup>60</sup>

And that is true. The true literalists, those who actually do believe in *sola Scriptura*, will do what Jesus inspired the Apostle John to write. Those who do not actually believe the Bible will look for ways to reason around the meaning of the words of Christ, and instead follow traditions of men.

In God's plan, it is apparent that the Church in Ephesus was not to remain the dominant era of the church. It seems to have ceased being so by about 135 A.D.,<sup>61</sup> the time by which nearly all of the leaders (except Polycarp, who was a direct successor of the Apostle John) ordained by the original apostles were dead.

135 is the same time of the second major takeover of Jerusalem (the first in A.D. 70) since Jesus' ascension into heaven in Acts 1. This was the end of a line of faithful bishops in Jerusalem, as the so-called *Jewish* were not let in starting in 135.<sup>62</sup>

So by the end of 135, there were no living apostles in Ephesus (John died c. 100) nor faithful bishops remaining in Jerusalem.

Thus, A.D. 135 was probably about when Polycarp of Smyrna began to be recognized as the top faithful human leader of the church by Christians throughout Asia Minor and likely other parts of the Roman Empire. Therefore, around 135 the Ephesus era ended and the Smyrna era began (though there was some likely overlapping).

## 4. Smyrna of Asia Minor and Polycarp

The Apostle John lists the church in Smyrna after the church in Ephesus in Revelation 1:11. In the early second century, Ignatius of Antioch wrote (c. 107-128) of it:

The Ephesians greet you from Smyrna, from where I am writing you. They... have refreshed me in every respect, together with Polycarp, the bishop of the Smyrnaeans.<sup>63</sup>

Notice that Polycarp is called a bishop (an overseeing pastor) in Smyrna, which is in Asia Minor. This early 2<sup>nd</sup> century document seems to be the first to call anyone a bishop who is considered by any currently existing group as a successor to the original apostles (other than perhaps Ignatius himself who is in the Orthodox Church of Antioch's succession list). There is no such early statement about any "Bishop of Rome."

Notice what Irenaeus of Lyon wrote in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century:

Polycarp ... was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna ... always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time.<sup>64</sup>

Irenaeus' reported that Polycarp was appointed bishop (pastor/overseer) of the Church in Smyrna by the apostles in Asia. Irenaeus also said that there was a list of men who succeeded Polycarp until the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century and that they held to the teaching of the apostles. They held to the original faith (Jude 3).

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern U.S.A. wrote:

Polycarp ... Appointed to be Bishop of the See of Smyrna by the Apostles themselves, at the age of 40, he provides us with an important link in our long historical

chain of Orthodox tradition clasping together the Apostles and the Second Century Church.<sup>65</sup>

*The only documented known real (and perhaps most widely accepted—as Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and COG scholars tend to accept this) apostle to “bishop” transfer of leadership for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries that continued until at least the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century was through Polycarp of Smyrna.*

Polycarp and his spiritual descendants have what has been termed “apostolic succession.” While the Greco-Roman churches *claim* Polycarp to be one of their saints, the truth is that only the Church of God has the same teachings and practices of that original church, such as Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, binitarianism, and the millennium. These are teachings that were *later* condemned by Greco-Roman leaders and councils.

### **A Semi-Arian/Binitarian View of the Godhead Was Held**

Notice the following New Testament teaching on the Godhead:

**2...God, both of the Father and of Christ...8...**  
Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; (Colossians 2:2,8-9)

Polycarp, as would be expected of a true Christian, called the Father *God* and Jesus *God*:

But may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus ... bestow on you a lot and portion among His saints, and on us with you, and on all that are under heaven, who shall believe in our Lord and God Jesus Christ.<sup>66</sup>

However, he never referred to the Holy Spirit that way—this is a “semi-arian” or “binitarian” view. Polycarp, like others before him, confessed to a binitarian view of the Godhead.<sup>67</sup> A view that a council called by a Roman Emperor condemned in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

Irenaeus, who claimed to have met Polycarp, also held a binitarian view of the Godhead. He wrote that the Bible only calls the Father and Son God, which is a binitarian position:

... there is none other called God by the Scriptures except the Father of all, and the Son, and those who possess the adoption.<sup>68</sup>

Notice that Irenaeus is also indicating that Christians (“those who possess the adoption”) are a third type of God (this is consistent with what Theophilus of Antioch wrote<sup>69</sup>).

A binitarian (or ‘Semi-Arian’) view was embraced by those in Asia Minor and elsewhere.<sup>70 71</sup> Early Christians absolutely did NOT believe that Jesus was a co-equal member of a trinity. Even Tertullian admitted that the majority of professing Christians in his day did not believe it, as he wrote, “the majority of believers, are startled at the dispensation (of the Three in One).”<sup>72</sup>

The binitarian family explanation of the Godhead with the Son subservient to the Father was not only scriptural (Luke 22:42; John 14:28; Ephesians 3:14-15), it was documented in many of the early writings that the Greco-Romans currently accept.<sup>73</sup>

### **Passover Was Kept on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan in Asia Minor**

Eusebius noted that in Polycarp’s region:

... the parishes of all Asia, as from an older tradition, held that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which day the Jews were commanded to sacrifice the lamb, should be observed as the feast of the Saviour's Passover.<sup>74</sup>

An “older tradition” perhaps would be more accurately called *the original practice of the apostles*, which was also specifically done by Jesus (cf. Mark 14:12-25). Polycarp and his spiritual descendants continued the practices of the apostles in their area, who were known to have been Philip and John in the latter portion of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and the Apostle Paul earlier. Irenaeus

reported that Polycarp was firm about when to observe Passover and did not accept the authority of the Roman Bishop Anicetus:

And when the blessed Polycarp was sojourning in Rome in the time of Anicetus, although a slight controversy had arisen among them ... For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp to forego the observance [in his own way], inasmuch as these things had been always observed by John the disciple of our Lord, and by other apostles with whom he had been conversant; nor, on the other hand, could Polycarp succeed in persuading Anicetus to keep [the observance in his way], for he maintained that he was bound to adhere to the usage of the presbyters who preceded him. ...Anicetus conceded to Polycarp in the Church the celebration of the Eucharist, by way of showing him respect;<sup>75</sup>

### **Polycarp Accepted the Authority of Scripture**

The text called the *Life of Polycarp* indicates that Polycarp and/or the Apostle Paul kept the Sabbath and the biblical holy days (specifically mentioned are the Sabbath, Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day) in Smyrna and had a high regard for scripture.<sup>76</sup>

Irenaeus stated:

Polycarp related all things in harmony with the Scriptures.<sup>77</sup>

That is basically why we in the *Continuing Church of God* consider that Polycarp was faithful. Unlike the heretical Justin Martyr,<sup>78</sup> Polycarp endorsed the commandments of God in his *Letter to the Philippians*.<sup>79</sup>

### **Harris Fragments Show Connection to the Apostle John**

Perhaps it should be mentioned that there is a document known as the *Harris Fragments* (ca. 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century) that also discusses Polycarp. Basically it stresses Polycarp's connection

with the Apostle John, indicates he was baptized at age 18, suggests he was appointed bishop of Smyrna by John, and records that he died a martyr's death at age 104.<sup>80</sup>

Here are some translated quotes from the *Harris Fragments*:

There remained [---]ter him a disciple[e ---] name was Polycarp[p and] he made him bishop over Smyrna...He was... {an} old man, being one hundred and f[our] of age. He continued to walk [i]n the canons which he had learned from his youth from John the a[p]ostle.<sup>81</sup>

The above quote is important and helps refute at least three claims. First, it is an early account which claims that Polycarp was taught by John. Some scholars have questioned the connection between those two.

Second, by mentioning the term “canons” (which seems to be in the singular form in the actual Greek<sup>82</sup>) the *Harris Fragments* could possibly be suggesting that John passed the knowledge of the proper books of the Bible to Polycarp—and that would seem to be the case. But even if canon(s) meant only the measure of the right way to be a Christian, then all should realize that to be faithful to apostolic Christianity that they should imitate Polycarp and John as they did Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1).

Third, it is important because one of the early so-called “proofs” of infant baptism that some Greco-Romans have claimed is that since *supposedly* Polycarp was 86 when he died, he was therefore baptized as an infant as some have improperly claimed. But Polycarp was baptized at 18.

### **The New Testament Canon Was Known in Asia Minor**

A couple of comments on the New Testament “canon” probably should be made. Let us notice something from *The Catholic Encyclopedia*:

But though the formal idea of canonicity was wanting among the Jews the *fact* existed.<sup>83</sup>



Thus, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* seems to support the idea that the canon of Old Testament scripture existed without the requirement of formal councils on the matter, and that also is what happened with the New Testament.

Interestingly, the Hebrew scriptures have a prophecy that suggests that the disciples of Jesus would finalize the Bible:

16 Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among my disciples (Isaiah 8:16).

And that is what happened (cf. 2 Timothy 4:11-13; 2 Peter 3:15-16) when John later finalized the New Testament.

John, while living in Patmos and Ephesus, wrote the final 3-5 books of the Bible. Hence, he would be the logical one to have truly known the New Testament canon. Thus, it had to be in Asia Minor where the canon was first known. Furthermore, Revelation 22:18-19 itself seems to suggest that God had John then finalize all that would be considered as scripture for the church age. All this occurred in Asia Minor, not Rome.

Interestingly, a review of Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians* shows that it seems to refer to **all** 27 books of the New Testament<sup>84</sup> (some scholars believe only *most* of the books are referred to<sup>85</sup>) and a couple from the Old Testament (Psalms, Jeremiah). Thus, Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians* helps demonstrate that Asia Minor had the full biblical canon from the beginning. This is most likely because the Apostle John would have passed that knowledge on to Polycarp.

Some scholars do recognize that it was those in Asia Minor, not Rome, who first knew which books made up the New Testament canon. Even Catholic scholars have admitted and/or shown evidence that the 2<sup>nd</sup> century church leaders in Asia Minor knew books of the New Testament better than those elsewhere did.<sup>86</sup>

Notice also the following from the late Protestant scholar, James Moffatt:

Was not the Apostolic Canon of scripture first formed ... in Asia Minor? Was not Asia Minor ahead of Rome in the formation of the Apostolic, Episcopal, ministry? ... The real thinking upon vital Christianity for centuries was done outside the Roman Church.<sup>87</sup>

Also, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Protestant, named B.F. Westcott, wrote pertaining to the church in the late 2<sup>nd</sup>/early 3<sup>rd</sup> century:

The canon of Asia Minor... {was} free from Apocryphal additions.<sup>88</sup>

Yet, it needs to be understood that **those in Rome and Alexandria were then confused** about what books constituted the New Testament. They accepted non-canonical books!

Around the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, a document commonly called the *Muratorian Canon*, possibly by Caius, an apparent Roman Catholic supporter, stated the following:

We receive also the Apocalypse of John and *that of Peter*, though some amongst us will not have this latter read in the Church. The *Pastor*, moreover, did Hermas write very recently in our times in the city of Rome, while his brother bishop Pius sat in the chair of the Church of Rome. And therefore it also ought to be read; but it cannot be made public in the Church to the people, nor *placed* among the prophets, as their number is complete, nor among the apostles to the end of time.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, the false *Apocalypse of Peter* was accepted as scripture by many in Rome, some there doubted the Book of Revelation (called the *Apocalypse of John* above), and the *Shepherd of Hermas* (called the *Pastor* above) was read, though not considered actual scripture by some in Rome.

This was simply not the case among the faithful in Asia Minor, as they had the true canon. Since Polycarp was a disciple of John, it is more logical that the true church could be traced from

the last apostolic head of the Ephesus church to the first major head of the Smyrna church. Serapion of Antioch, who was in communion with the COG leaders in Asia Minor, said that the proper books were “handed down to us,”<sup>90</sup> thus negating the idea of a late canonization, even the need of a formal canonization (there certainly also could have been actual lists back then that have not been made public or were lost or destroyed).

Perhaps it should also be mentioned that around the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Nazarenes confirmed that they had the scriptures and that they came from God, not a Greco-Roman council. Jerome wrote that the Nazarenes taught:

... God has given us the Law and the testimonies of scriptures.<sup>91</sup>

Epiphanius noted that the Nazarenes, “use not only the New Testament but also the Old.”<sup>92</sup>

### **Which Church Really Gave the World the Bible?**

Now, while many believe that because of the *Latin Vulgate Bible* by Jerome, the Catholic Church of Rome gave the world the Bible, those who espouse that view overlook the question of where Jerome got his information.

Based on records in Latin and other languages, scholars Ray Pritz and Priest Bagatti both concluded that Jerome got some of his information on the Bible from the Nazarenes and from various Jewish synagogues.<sup>93</sup> Since Jerome did deal with “Nazarene Christians,” and reported that he was friendly with at least “one of the Hebrews that believed,”<sup>94</sup> this is logical.

Therefore, then it would appear that the claim that the Roman “Church gave the world the Bible”<sup>95</sup> neglects to mention that while they and the Greek Orthodox had many of the books (often too many), **their churches most likely got what should be considered the canon of the Bible from those in the true Church of God, also known later as the Nazarenes in Asia Minor and in Jerusalem!**

This seems to be indirectly acknowledged by some modern scholars. Notice a 21<sup>st</sup> century account by Gerd Theissen:

Therefore we can advance the hypothesis that above all those writings entered the canon on which the Christian communities of Asia Minor and Rome could agree.<sup>96</sup>

Taking this a step further, even those who later compromised in Asia Minor apparently recognized that they knew of the complete canon and thus they (and probably others) influenced the Church of Rome (the fact that the false *Gospel of Peter* suggests that the resurrection was on the last day of unleavened bread—which is clearly in conflict with the canonical gospels—may also have been a factor in rejecting such writings).

### **Polycarp and Smyrna Were Faithful**

*The Catholic Encyclopedia* states:

Smyrna ... Christianity was preached to the inhabitants at an early date. As early as the year 93, there existed a Christian community directed by a bishop for whom St. John in the Apocalypse (i, II; ii, 8-11) has only words of praise ... There were other Christians in the vicinity of the city and dependent on it to whom St. Polycarp wrote letters (Eusebius, "Hist. Eccl.", V, xxiv). When Polycarp was martyred...the Church of Smyrna sent an encyclical concerning his death to the Church of Philomelium and others.<sup>97</sup>

St. Polycarp ... In Asia the Apostolic Age lingered on till St. John died about A.D. 100; and the sub-Apostolic Age till ... when St. Polycarp was martyred ... Smyrna, in which, in the person of Polycarp, the sub-Apostolic Age had been carried down to a time still within living memory, and the Church of Ephesus, where, in the person of St. John, the Apostolic Age had been prolonged till "the time of Trajan".<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, Eusebius records that upon Polycarp's martyrdom, Polycarp's critics called him, and not someone in Rome, the "father of the Christians."<sup>99</sup> Polycarp held to many Church of God doctrines that are now in conflict with those of the Church of Rome. Many Catholic writers support the idea that Smyrna was an important part of the true and faithful church, even though the Catholic Church of Rome does not follow many of the Christian beliefs originally practiced there.

Despite the fact that Polycarp denounced some of the practices of the Roman Catholics, they have a church in Izmir (anciently called Smyrna) dedicated to him. Yet, building a church to honor Polycarp does not change the fact that he denounced leaders who attended the Roman Church, or that the Roman Church does not follow very much of what Polycarp stood for.

Polycarp himself wrote that "many"<sup>100</sup> (which likely included many in Rome) were following vain/false forms of Christianity.

Polycarp felt that the true church would be a "little flock" (Luke 12:32) or "remnant" (Romans 9:27; 11:5) since he warned about "the vanity of many."<sup>101</sup> Thus, it should be of little surprise that the true church would be small throughout history. Writing of Polycarp's martyrdom, those in Smyrna called themselves, "the Church of God which sojourns in Smyrna."<sup>102</sup>

### **Melito and Theophilus**

Apparently sometime after Polycarp became a bishop, Melito became the Bishop (pastor) of Sardis and the Theophilus became the Bishop (pastor) of Antioch.

In one of his documents, Melito produced the oldest Christian writing that has been found that lists the Books of the Old Testament.<sup>103</sup> Melito's specific reference to an *Old Testament* should also be considered as conclusive evidence that there was also a recognized *New Testament* by the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century.

In his list, Melito did not include any of the extra, so-called deuterocanonical books that the Greco-Romans use today.

Essentially, it appears that Melito went to Jerusalem to prove that he already had the canon, perhaps because someone had raised an issue about some book (perhaps one of the so-called “deuterocanonical” books) and he simply, by listing what he did, verified that the ‘deuterocanonical’ books were not part of the canon (Catholic scholars, like Priest Bagatti, tend to realize that Melito would have no need to check out the New Testament canon in Palestine as he would have likely have had better knowledge of it than anyone in Palestine<sup>104</sup>). Melito’s list of the Hebrew books further confirms that the churches in Asia Minor had the true canon from the beginning. Perhaps it should be mentioned that Jerome only included the ‘deuterocanonical’ books because he was forced by certain Greco-Roman bishops to do so, even though he called them apocryphal and not sacred.<sup>105</sup>

Melito’s list also confirms that there was a link between the Christians in Asia Minor and the relatively few Judeo-Christians in the Jerusalem area then. Priest Bagatti wrote:

This gives us a glimpse of the contacts Melito {sic} made with the Christians of Jewish stock...<sup>106</sup>

These were ties that the Greco-Romans would not have had. Like the Christian Jews, Melito kept Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, instead of on a Sunday as most of the Romans were doing then. Melito taught against the use of idols and taught against placing the teachings of fathers (tradition) above that of the Bible.<sup>107</sup> These positions are in conflict to positions now held by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, even though they declare that Melito was a saint (and a prophet).

Regarding millenarianism, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* notes:

... a large number of Christians of the post-Apostolic era, particularly in Asia Minor ... put a literal meaning into these descriptions of St. John's Apocalypse ... A witness for the continued belief in millenarianism in the province of Asia is St. Melito, Bishop of Sardes in the second century ... Gnosticism rejected millenarianism. In

Asia Minor, the principal seat of millenarian teachings, the so-called Alogi rose up against millenarianism ...<sup>108</sup>

The truth is that even the Greco-Roman churches, for probably over a century or two after Melito, also believed in a literal millennium, although that view is now condemned strongly by the Roman Catholic Church.

The millennial teaching is the only doctrine associated with Antichrist in their current version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.<sup>109</sup> Yet, Melito and others promoted it.

### **A Binitarian View**

As would be expected, Melito held a binitarian view of the Godhead as his writings specifically teach that the *Father and the Son* are God,<sup>110</sup> yet do not do so related to the Holy Spirit.<sup>111</sup>

Near the time when Melito wrote, Theophilus of Antioch wrote several papers. Although Theophilus is in the *claimed* succession lists of both the Antiochian Orthodox and the Syriac Orthodox churches, he held views that differ from what they now hold.

Despite some who misunderstand his writings, Theophilus did not teach that the Holy Spirit was the third person in a trinity.<sup>112</sup>

### **The Ten Commandments**

History shows that we see “Judeo-Christian” practices in Asia Minor, Jerusalem (a portion of it), and Antioch all during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. From various writings, it is clear that Melito<sup>113</sup> and Theophilus<sup>114</sup> endorsed keeping the Ten Commandments. God resting on the seventh-day was one of those *ten heads/* commandments that Theophilus had written about.<sup>115</sup> No faithful Christian taught that the Ten Commandments were somehow “done away.”

Theophilus further understood that basically the point of the Bible was love.<sup>116</sup> Ray Pritz indicated that Theophilus was a Nazarene/Ebionite.<sup>117</sup>

Both Melito<sup>118</sup> and Theophilus<sup>119</sup> taught that Christians should oppose idols. Theophilus specifically condemning the practice of having idols/icons of those who once lived and venerating/serving them because of traditions from their fathers. Thus, we see that many *claimed* Greco-Roman “early fathers” condemned views and practices that many Greco-Romans hold.

### **Begotten Now, Born-Again Immortal at the Resurrection**

In another area of doctrinal interest, groups like the *Continuing Church of God* teach that true Christians are begotten by God once they receive the Holy Spirit and are “born again” at the resurrection. The Catholic saint Hippolytus (3<sup>rd</sup> century) seemed to understand that as well.<sup>120</sup>

Theophilus specifically taught that humans are born-again at the resurrection<sup>121</sup> and that humans are not now immortal, but that those who keep the commandments await immortality at the first resurrection, when they become God.<sup>122</sup> Even the third century Catholic Bishop Commodianus agreed with this and taught it happened after “six thousand years are completed.”<sup>123</sup>

### **Polycrates Stood for Scripture Above Roman Tradition**

Polycrates was a Christian bishop/pastor/overseer who lived in Asia Minor. Eusebius quoted what Polycrates wrote to Roman Bishop Victor about Passover:

We observe the exact day; neither adding, nor taking away. For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the day of the Lord's coming, when he shall come with glory from heaven, and shall seek out all the saints. Among these are Philip, one of the twelve apostles, who fell asleep in Hierapolis; and his two aged virgin daughters, and another daughter, who lived in the Holy Spirit and now rests at Ephesus; and, moreover, John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and, being a priest, wore the sacerdotal plate. He fell asleep at Ephesus. And Polycarp



in Smyrna, who was a bishop and martyr; and Thraseas, bishop and martyr from Eumenia, who fell asleep in Smyrna. Why need I mention the bishop and martyr Sagaris who fell asleep in Laodicea, or the blessed Papius, or Melito, the Eunuch who lived altogether in the Holy Spirit, and who lies in Sardis, awaiting the episcopate from heaven, when he shall rise from the dead? All these observed the fourteenth day of the passover according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith. And I also, Polycrates, the least of you all, do according to the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have closely followed. For seven of my relatives were bishops; and I am the eighth. And my relatives always observed the day when the people put away the leaven. I, therefore, brethren, who have lived sixty-five years in the Lord, and have met with the brethren throughout the world, and have gone through every Holy Scripture, am not affrighted by terrifying words. For those greater than I have said ' We ought to obey God rather than man'...

...I could mention the bishops who were present...And they, beholding my littleness, gave their consent to the letter, knowing that I did not bear my gray hairs in vain, but had always governed my life by the Lord Jesus. <sup>124</sup>

Note that Polycrates:

- 1) Said he was a successor of the Apostles.
- 2) Said he was faithful to the teachings of the Gospel.
- 3) Relied on the position that teachings from the Bible were above those of Roman-accepted tradition.
- 4) Asserted he was being faithful to the teachings passed down to him.
- 5) Provided what appears to be a successor list for Asia Minor (including Smyrna and Ephesus—it is not simply a listing for one specific city).
- 6) Was the lead writer for the churches in Asia Minor.
- 7) Reported he and his predecessors observed the day of putting out leaven.

- 8) Refused to accept the authority of Roman tradition over the Bible.
- 9) Refused to accept the authority of the Bishop of Rome, as did his predecessors.
- 10) Asserted his life was to be governed by Jesus and not opinions of men.

These statements demonstrate that those in Ephesus under John's leadership, as well as those in Smyrna under the leadership of Polycarp, those in-between Polycarp and Polycrates, and later those affiliated with Polycrates, ALL observed Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> day and ALL refused to accept Rome's position as it was not of God. It may also be of interest to note that Roman Catholics, and others, consider that John, Philip, Thraseas, Polycarp, Sagaris, Apollinaris and Melito were genuine, faithful, saints. Not one of the 'Smyrnaean' leaders listed by Polycrates would ever accept that the teachings or traditions of any Roman Bishop were on par with scripture. It was reported that the Apostle Philip taught the laying on of hands,<sup>125</sup> which scripture supports (Acts 6:5-6, 8:17, 19:6; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; Hebrews 6:2), for leaders such as deacons, elders, and bishops.

It is also reasonable to suspect that they did not accept the position of Eleutherius (Victor's immediate predecessor) who supposedly ruled that Christians could violate biblical dietary laws.<sup>126</sup> Protestants do not seem to realize that unclean meats were taught against until at least the latter portion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century by Irenaeus,<sup>127</sup> yet were officially endorsed no earlier by Rome than Eleutherius who was the bishop from 175-189 (although some accepted eating them previously).

Some Catholics refer to Polycrates as one of their saints.<sup>128</sup> And while we in the *Continuing Church of God* consider that Polycrates was a real saint, the Catholics may wish to ask why a saint refused to listen to the Bishop of Rome.

The reality is that there were two major groups then. The Greco-Roman churches like to act like leaders who held COG doctrines were in true communion with them, but that was not the case. Many of the early leaders that the Roman and Eastern Orthodox

churches claim as saints in Jerusalem, Asia Minor, and Antioch held COG doctrines which those churches either denounced or do not practice, but that we in the CCOG still do.

### **Apollinaris of Hierapolis**

Another Gentile-area church leader around the time of Polycrates was Apollinaris of Hierapolis.

According to Protestant scholars:

Apollinaris was bishop of Hierapolis on the Maeander, and, Lightfoot thinks, was probably with Melito and Polycrates, known to Polycarp, and influenced by his example and doctrine.<sup>129</sup>

Hierapolis is a region in Asia Minor, near the town of Laodicea. Like Melito, Polycrates, Polycarp and the Apostle Philip (who died in Hierapolis<sup>130</sup>), Apollinaris would be considered a Quartodeciman as he also called the biblical date (Leviticus 23:5) the “fourteenth day, the true Passover of the Lord.”<sup>131</sup>

Yet, that view was condemned by Hippolytus of Rome around that time.<sup>132</sup> There were two groups with different views. One of which contended earnestly for the biblical faith (Jude 3) and guarded it (1 Timothy 6:20), and the other which do not properly do so, but instead relied on unbiblical traditions.

### **Tertullian Claimed Only Two Possible Groups**

Tertullian, the so-called “father of Latin theology,” apparently concluded that there were only two *distinct* possibilities of apostolic succession around 200 A.D. as he also wrote this in his *Liber de praescriptione haereticorum*:

Anyhow the heresies are at best novelties, and have no continuity with the teaching of Christ. Perhaps some heretics may claim Apostolic antiquity: we reply: Let them publish the origins of their churches and unroll the catalogue of their bishops till now from the Apostles or

from some bishop appointed by the Apostles, as the Smyrnaeans count from Polycarp and John, and the Romans from Clement and Peter; let heretics invent something to match this.<sup>133</sup>

Tertullian was probably aware of elders in Rome prior to Clement, as well as possible bishops of Smyrna prior to Polycarp (such as perhaps Strataeas, who Paul may have appointed, and Bucolus<sup>134</sup>), but he seems to have believed that the apostolic succession could only have gone through Polycarp (whom he listed first) or Clement.

Since the two churches Tertullian described did not believe the same things in other ways (e.g., those in Asia Minor were biblical literalists, while those associate with Rome often resorted to allegory or claimed tradition), only one could be valid for being the truly faithful successor: Those, then, in Asia Minor.

### **Serapion Adds Interesting Information**

Serapion of Antioch made some interesting statements. Here is one:

**That ye may see also that the proceedings of this lying confederacy**, to which is given the name of New Prophecy, is abominated among the whole brotherhood throughout the world, I have sent you letters of the most blessed Claudius Apollinarius, who was made bishop of Hierapolis in Asia.<sup>135</sup>

This “New Prophecy” is a reference to those affiliated with Montanus, including Tertullian. At that time, the Church of Rome and those in Alexandria had not yet denounced Montanus, but tended to support him. Thus, Serapion was warning against the Greco-Roman confederation that was forming—and he called it a *lying confederacy*.

Serapion also condemned Marcion,<sup>136</sup> as earlier had Polycarp of Smyrna.<sup>137</sup> Serapion also had other writing which implicated some of the Greco-Romans.<sup>138</sup> Now, while Tertullian by this

time wrote that Rome finally got rid of Marcion,<sup>139</sup> Rome had tolerated Marcion, who some scholars call “the first Protestant,”<sup>140</sup> for decades.

Also, many of the Greco-Romans (including Origen of Alexandria) accepted the falsely-called *Gospel of Peter* and *Epistle of Barnabus*. Serapion of Antioch used the term pseudepigrapha (ψευδεπιγραφα) when he denounced these books.<sup>141</sup> These books were contrary to the original faith, yet greatly influenced the Greco-Roman confederation.

(The term pseudepigrapha comes from the Greek *pseudo*, meaning “false,” and *epigraphēin*, meaning “to inscribe” Basically, a pseudonymous writing is one where an author is falsely claimed to have written it, when in truth someone else wrote it and tries to deceive by putting a (normally) famous person’s name on it.)

This ‘lying confederacy’ Serapion condemned came about by the influence of several sources. Irenaeus has been pointed to as being an early promoter of the “universal church” confederacy that certain others later also pushed<sup>142</sup> and Serapion denounced.

Consider, also, that there is a view among some scholars that “orthodox Christianity is really the product of a late second-century, church father, Irenaeus.”<sup>143</sup> While some scholars, like Dr. Darrell Bock deny that is true,<sup>144</sup> the reality is that Irenaeus greatly affected the course of church history when he chose the Greco-Roman confederation over the Church of God.

Furthermore, defenders of Greco-Roman ‘orthodoxy,’ including for example Dr. Bock and the 19<sup>th</sup> century theologian Adolf Hilgenfeld, essentially point to writings from those we in the *Continuing* Church of God would consider to be apostates, such as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Hippolytus of Rome as being instrumental in developing what they consider to be ‘orthodoxy.’<sup>145</sup>

While acting like those writers were mainly defining/defending original Christianity, the reality is that though denouncing some

falsehoods, they were pushing a deviant version that the Greco-Romans later corrupted even further.

Most of those listed ‘orthodox’ individuals, as well as the influential Origen of Alexandria, accepted one or more books (like some of the pseudepigrapha and/or *Shepherd of Hermas*) as canonical that were not.

Although the Greco-Romans eventually dropped the false books from their New Testaments, the influence of those that believed in those books remained.

Understand that Serapion of Antioch was teaching that the group he supported (including those in Asia Minor which he maintained fellowship with), had no part with Marcion (who taught against the Old Testament, did not recognize much of the New Testament as valid,<sup>146</sup> and taught there was a greater God than the Creator<sup>147</sup>) or Montanus. Yet, Serapion taught the group(s) that had accepted them was emerging as a lying confederacy.

Thus, there were two groups that both Tertullian and Serapion wrote about, and Serapion condemned the Greco-Roman one.

### **Don’t Catholic and Protestant Scholars Know This?**

Since Tertullian’s and Serapion’s writings are not secret, don’t Catholic and Protestant scholars realize that Tertullian and some others taught two possibilities for the faithful church?

Certainly they do.

However, as they have tended, the Greco-Romans continue to teach that certain early people and locations who opposed their doctrine were still part of THEIR churches. The fact that the Smyrnaeans, for one example, clearly did not accept Roman authority and taught doctrines contrary to what the Greco-Roman churches teach, is not emphasized to their memberships. Some scholars also somehow rationalize other doctrinal differences away as temporary.<sup>148</sup>

But, the fact that the Greco-Romans actually claim that many of the Smyrnaean leaders are saints, does not change the fact that these early Christians held positions that are now considered to be so heretical to the Greco-Roman confederation that they would NOT accept these saints in their churches today.

Protestant scholars also have consistency problems related to the Smyrnaean leaders.

The fact is that the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Smyrnaean leaders, who had direct ties to Antioch through leaders like Serapion (died c. 211), blatantly refused the authority of any Roman bishop and even seemed willing to insult one or more of them.

This is something that Protestant scholars should point to showing that the Christian world was not under Roman authority. And while they do that to some degree, there is a certain bit of hesitation to emphasize this fact because the Smyrnaean leaders clearly advocated being faithful to biblical practices that Protestant leaders to this day still do not follow.

Instead, the Protestants show, by generally observing Easter Sunday and not Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup>, that they have accepted human traditions through Rome that were rebuked by the Smyrnaean leaders.

Because Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant scholars know that there was a significant group of “anti-Roman” Christians in 2<sup>nd</sup> century Asia Minor, they would certainly not wish to trace their doctrinal histories specifically through them lest they be more easily caught for their inconsistent practices.

But the *Continuing* Church of God, which did not come from the Greco-Roman nor Protestant churches, does in fact trace its history through these Smyrnaean leaders.

Can you really accept the truth of church history? Many people, sadly, cannot handle the truth or change because of it.

## 5. Apostolic Succession List in Asia Minor

The following is a chronological list of those that seem to have been true “apostolic” Christian leaders (who would have had hands laid upon them as that was the practice in Asia minor; cf. 2 Timothy 1:6) put together from the Bible, Polycrates,<sup>149</sup> *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, and certain historical records:

**Peter/Paul/James** through death circa 64-68 (mainly oversaw churches from Asia Minor and Jerusalem— Peter’s date of death may be the least certain).

**John** through death circa 98-102 (oversaw churches from Ephesus of Asia Minor).

**Polycarp** through death circa 155-157 (oversaw churches from Smyrna of Asia Minor).

**Thraseas** through death circa 160 (oversaw the churches from Eumenia, but died in Smyrna).

**Sagaris** through death circa 166-167 (died in Laodicea of Asia Minor).

**Papirius** through death circa 170 (oversaw churches from Smyrna of Asia Minor).

**Melito** through death circa 170-180 (oversaw churches from Sardis of Asia Minor).

**Polycrates** through death circa 200 (oversaw churches from Ephesus of Asia Minor).

**Apollonius** through death circa 210 (oversaw churches from Ephesus of Asia Minor).

**Camerius** through death circa 220 (possibly oversaw churches from Smyrna of Asia Minor).

**Pionius of Smyrna** martyred circa 250 (was faithful during the time of a leader, Eudaemon of Smyrna, who compromised with the pagans)

Thus, there were known leaders/bishops for nearly two centuries in the Christian church that simply were not based out of Rome. These leaders held to Church of God and not Church of Rome doctrines, despite the fact that the Roman Catholic Church claims them as their saints. The Roman and Eastern Orthodox Catholics have oddly, condemned many of their teachings. These men were Church of God, not Roman Catholic, leaders.



Historical records demonstrate that many of these Asia Minor leaders confronted heretics. History never shows that they ever accepted the authority of any bishop of Rome (or Alexandria, for that matter). Actually, history shows that the true Christian leaders in Asia Minor either defied or ignored those Roman/Alexandrian leaders. There were also faithful leaders in Antioch until the death of Serapion in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

Those of us in the *Continuing* Church of God consider ourselves to be the spiritual descendants of the Ephesians and Smyrnaeans (as well as the early faithful in Antioch) and clearly can document a succession of leaders from the 1<sup>st</sup> through early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. We in the CCOG also consider that we represent the most faithful remnant of the Philadelphia era of the COG living on into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Following the Apostle John and the early Jerusalem leaders, those beginning with the apparently Gentile Polycarp (his name is Greek) would be considered as leaders of the Smyrna era. The Smyrnaeans were faithful Christians who endured much persecution from non-Christians, heretical leaders of breakaway groups, and ultimately the forming Greco-Roman confederation.

Although bishop Eudaemon looked to be carrying the ‘mantle’ of succession in Smyrna,<sup>150</sup> spiritually Pionus appears to have had (or gained) it, as Eudaemon sadly compromised (and lost the leadership mantle if he ever had it). Yet, the presbyter Pionius did not.<sup>151</sup> Sadly, by the mid-late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, because of political maneuverings, persecutions, and even a non-COG bishop known as Gregory Thaumaturgus, the Greco-Roman churches were able to dominate the area of Asia Minor, an area that they had previously not been able to.<sup>152</sup> (Gregory allegedly had signs and lying wonders,<sup>153</sup> cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11, and was seemingly the first to claim to see an apparition of Jesus’ mother Mary.)

Towards the end of His direct message to the Church in Smyrna, Jesus said “you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death” (Revelation 2:10). Various Church of God groups have taught that one of the persecutions in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by Roman authorities fulfilled this prophecy.<sup>154</sup>

## **6. Heretics Were Often in Rome, but Were Denounced by Church Leaders in Asia Minor**

Every writer of the New Testament recorded warnings about false or heretical teachers and their teachings (e.g. 2 Peter 2:1-3). Many false leaders did arise, as Jesus Himself foretold they would (cf. Matthew 24:11, 24). The Christian church was definitely affected early on by false leaders and other heretics.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries, a number of heretics who professed Christ went to, or were based in, Rome as well as Alexandria, Egypt. Among these were followers of Simon Magus (who was condemned by the Apostle Peter in Acts 8:20-23), Cerinthus (condemned by the Apostle John), Marcion (who personally came to Rome), Valentinus (who personally came to Rome from Alexandria, Egypt), and Montanus. The last four were condemned by church leaders in, or based out of, Asia Minor.

Even those now considered to have been early supporters of the Church of Rome (such as Justin,<sup>155</sup> Tertullian,<sup>156</sup> Irenaeus,<sup>157</sup> and Hippolytus<sup>158</sup>) condemned Simon Magus and his followers for doctrines such as using statues for worship, revering a woman, incantations, mysteries, mystic priests, claiming divine titles for leaders, accepting money for religious favors, preferring allegory and tradition over many aspects of scripture, divorcing themselves from Christian biblical practices considered to be Jewish and having a leader who wanted to be thought of as God/Christ on Earth. Yet, versions of these practices/doctrines have since emerged within the Greco-Roman churches.

In the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Roman-supporting historian Irenaeus wrote that the idea that the Old Testament laws are dissimilar and contrary to the Gospel came from followers of Simon Magus.<sup>159</sup> Irenaeus essentially taught that Simon and his followers practiced lawlessness. Irenaeus also noted it was the Apostle John from Ephesus and Polycarp from Smyrna (major cities in Asia Minor) who strongly denounced the Gnostic and similar heretics.<sup>160</sup>

Valentinus, Cerinthus, and Marcion are considered by Catholic

scholars<sup>161</sup> and others<sup>162</sup> to have been Gnostic heretics.

### **Valentinus was a Trinitarian**

Valentinus was a 2<sup>nd</sup> century heretic who attempted to blend much pagan Gnosticism with what he perceived to be the Christian faith. He came from Alexandria and went to Rome. Valentinus and his followers clearly believed in merging Greek pagan philosophy with Christianity, believed in tradition over the Bible, believed in having a higher knowledge, endorsed a non-immersion form of baptism, and developed the idea of God existing as three hypostases. He taught that Jesus really was not made flesh, taught that Jesus was a defect, and taught that man was not fashioned from the earth.<sup>163</sup>

According to Catholic bishop Marcellus of Ancyra, Valentinus' teachings on the Godhead corrupted part of the early church:

Now with the heresy of the Ariomaniacs, which has corrupted the Church of God...These then teach three hypostases, just as Valentinus the heresiarch first invented in the book entitled by him 'On the Three Natures.' For he was the first to invent three hypostases and three persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he is discovered to have filched this from Hermes and Plato.<sup>164</sup>

Valentinus, whom Polycarp denounced, is believed to have been the first person affiliated with Christianity to teach the trinitarian concept of three hypostases or make any clear statement of 'equality' regarding three alleged persons of God.

On the other hand, Polycarp,<sup>165</sup> Melito,<sup>166</sup> Theophilus of Antioch,<sup>167</sup> and the Apostle John (John 1:1-3) specifically referred to both the Father and the Word/Son as God, but never referred to the Holy Spirit as God. Ignatius did the same in his letters to the Ephesians and the Smyrnaeans.<sup>168</sup>

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, even Roman supporting leaders such as Irenaeus<sup>169</sup> and Hippolytus<sup>170</sup> held a binitarian view. Early

trinitarians, like the Montanists and Valentinians, were called heretics. It was not until around 381 that even the majority of Greco-Romans formally accepted a trinitarian formula like most of the Protestant churches accept today.

## **The True Gospel and Another Gospel**

Jesus started out preaching the good news of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15). Kingdoms require a king, territory, subjects and laws. The good news is that God will come to the earth and His Kingdom will eliminate pain and sorrow (Revelation 21:4). Of course, to be part of this kingdom requires repentance of sins (Acts 2:38), the sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 10:12-14), the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9), the acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior (Titus 2:11-14), proper baptism (Acts 2:39), the keeping of the commandments to “walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:3-6), having the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9-11), and allowing Jesus to live His life in us (Galatians 2:20). The fact that sinners will be saved after conversion is also part of the gospel.

The Apostle Paul warned that various ones turned away from the true gospel to a false one and condemned them for doing so (Galatians 1:6-9).

Simon Magus brought forth another gospel that included ritual/human tradition over grace (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 2:8) and obedience to God (cf. Jude 4)—and according to Eusebius, via Justin, Simon Magus “led many people of the inhabitants of Rome astray.”<sup>171</sup> The Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:1, 14-15) seemed to turn the grace of the gospel into lasciviousness<sup>172</sup> (cf. Jude 4). Marcion also brought forth another gospel of turning grace into lasciviousness (cf. Jude 4), eliminating the Sabbath and other commandments (cf. 1 John 2:3-6; Hebrews 4:9), and denying the coming kingdom (cf. Revelation 20:4-6). Valentinus' gospel changed Jesus into something that could not have fulfilled scripture (cf. Philippians 2:5-11) (as did Montanus) and blended pagan philosophy with the pretense of scripture (cf. Colossians 2:8). These heretics basically taught about the person of Jesus Christ but did not understand Him or His message. Versions of their *other/different*

*gospels* have infected what is often called Christianity outside the real Church of God.

**Table of Early Heretics/Heresies Generally First Denounced by Leaders of Asia Minor**

| <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Century Heretic</b>                                 | <b>Heresy</b>   | <b>Heretic/Heresy Denounced by Asia Minor Leaders</b>   | <b>Tolerated by Rome Until</b>   |
|---|---|---|--|
| Simon Magus,*<br>Nicolaitans,*<br>Marcion,<br>Montanus,<br>Valentinus | Promoted a different gospel.  | Peter (Acts 8:20-23), Paul (2 Corinthians 11:4), Church of God in Ephesus (Revelation 2:6), Polycarp, Melito, Thraseas, and Theophilus. | Variations of the different gospels have been accepted by essentially all of the Greco-Roman faiths. |
| Cerinthus   | Excessive allegory, improper tradition, improper festivals, and apparitions sometimes as sources of doctrine. | Apostle John in Ephesus.  | Variations adopted by Greco-Roman faiths.  |
| Marcion   | Sabbath and Ten Commandments done away.   | c. 155 A.D. by Polycarp and later by Theophilus.  | Rome tolerates anti-Sabbath teaching to this day.  |
| Marcion   | Jesus not coming for millennial reign.  | c. 170 A.D. by Melito.  | c. 180 Marcion excommunicated, but heresy later accepted.  |
| Valentinus  | God is three hypostases.  | c. 155 A.D. by Polycarp.  | Still accepted; adopted by Council in 381.   |

| <b>Heretic</b>   | <b>Heresy</b>   | <b>Denounced by</b>   | <b>Rome Until</b>  |
|--|---|---|--|
| Valentinus and Anicetus  | Traditions in conflict with the Bible can be source of doctrine.                  | c. 155 A.D. by Polycarp; c. 170 A.D. by Melito.                                   | c. 180 A.D. Valentinus was excommunicated, but heresy still accepted.  |
| Anicetus, Victor, and other early Roman leaders                  | Passover is on Sunday.  | c. 155 A.D. by Polycarp; c. 195 A.D. by Polycrates.                               | Still accepted.  |
| Montanus   | False prophecies.   | c. 157 A.D. by Thraseas and later others, like Apollonius.                        | c.206-218 A.D. Montanists finally denounced.   |
| Montanus   | God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  | c. 157 A.D. by Thraseas and others.   | Later adopted and now still accepted.  |
| Tradition originated in the “Gospel of James” circa 120-200 A.D. | Mary remained a virgin after giving birth to Jesus or Mary is a perpetual virgin. | c. 200 by some in Asia Minor <sup>173</sup> and Jewish-Christians. <sup>174</sup> | Adopted as the 5 <sup>th</sup> General Council of Constantinople in 553 granted “perpetual virgin” title to Mary. Now a Catholic dogma. <sup>175</sup> |
| Noetus/Sabellius   | Father is same as Son.  | c. 200 by Smyrna presbyters.  | c. 220 A.D. finally denounced; though a version still accepted.  |
| “Gospel of Peter”  | Considering false gospel as scripture.  | c. 200 by Serapion of Antioch.  | Probably into 4 <sup>th</sup> century. <sup>176</sup>  |
| Platonic-Gnostic and pagan                                       | Cross is a Christian religious  | c. 4 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> centuries by Paulicians of Armenia and        | This heresy started to appear in the   |

|  |                                      |   |  |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| sources, including Justin Martyr claiming Plato. | symbol of signing and/or veneration. | Asia Minor. It could have been denounced prior, but the practice was not so widespread in Asia Minor earlier. | 2 <sup>nd</sup> century and was essentially finally formally adopted at a council in 843. <sup>177</sup> |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|

\* While these were originally 1<sup>st</sup> century heretics, their heresies lasted and versions of them were denounced in Asia Minor/Antioch in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and by other COG leaders in later centuries. Although Greco-Roman supporting leaders outside of Asia Minor/Antioch sometimes denounced these particular heretics, their churches often ended up adopting portions of their heresies. 3<sup>rd</sup> century African Bishop Nepos stood for the millennium and the Bible and denounced allegorical Greco-Roman opponents.<sup>178</sup> There were other heresies introduced in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries that were never accepted by the faithful Quartodeciman successors to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Asia Minor leaders, as they did not teach the Jewish apocrypha, special dress for the clergy, clerical celibacy, immortal souls going to heaven, baptism by sprinkling, unclean meat consumption, military service for Christians, a mystic Eucharist, or a winter holiday somewhat coinciding with Saturnalia/Mithra ceremonies, etc. Even certain Catholic/Orthodox “saints” in the first few centuries originally condemned many of those particular doctrines. Variations of such teachings are now accepted by the Roman and Eastern Orthodox Catholics.

Historical evidence shows that leaders in Asia Minor denounced heresies generally before Rome did. And sadly, Rome adopted or later accepted some version of many of these denounced heresies.

Would the leaders of the true Church be more likely to tolerate or denounce heretics? The answer should be obvious (and to those it is not, recall that Jesus, Peter, Paul, Jude, John and others denounced false religious leaders in the New Testament).

*It should also be noted that contrary to the views of some, Polycarp did keep the Sabbath and Ignatius did not write that it was replaced by Sunday—he wrote to not keep it Judaically, like the Jews that Jesus objected to (e.g. Matthew 12:1-14) did.<sup>179</sup>*

## **7. Mithras' Pontifex Maximus Constantine Led to Other Changes**

In 310 A.D., the Roman Emperor Constantine claimed to see an apparition/vision of the sun-god.<sup>180</sup> As emperor, Constantine also held the title of Pontifex Maximus, allegedly the bridge-builder (link) between the pagan god(s) and humankind. He followed the sun-god Mithras, whose 'birth' date was December 25<sup>th</sup>. He had the picture of the sun-god on coins until at least 326 A.D.<sup>181</sup>

Various heretical changes were adopted by the Greco-Roman churches sometime after Constantine made partial endorsement of their religion. Some of the most obvious changes adopted because of (or related to) him probably had to do with military service, altars and other buildings, dress of the clergy, giving political power to bishops, changing the millennial teaching, and the acceptance/promotion of idols and icons.

### **Another Apparition/Vision and the Military 'Christianized'**

Most do not seem to realize that, originally, those who professed Christ would not kill or participate in carnal warfare: This was in accordance with Jesus' admonitions, as He expanded the on what constituted murder (e.g. Matthew 5:21-22) and what He expected of His people (e.g. John 18:36). Followers, such as the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 10:3-4), also supported non-militarization.

People considered as saints by the Greco-Romans such as Justin,<sup>182</sup> Theophilus,<sup>183</sup> and Hippolytus<sup>184</sup> all wrote against military participation for those who professed Christ. Yet, major changes occurred according to a former Roman Catholic priest:

Whereas up to the year 175 there was not a single Christian soldier, in 416, by an edict of Theodosius, only Christians were allowed to enlist.<sup>185</sup>

But this was only a change for the Greco-Romans, not the true Christians. The endorsement of military warfare by their leaders and followers has probably been the cruelest change adopted by the Constantinians. That change came because of Constantine



who claimed to see a spear with a cross bar in an apparition in 312.<sup>186</sup> He then told his soldiers to paint crosses on their shields and kill. This was something one would expect from an antichrist/pagan, but not from a true follower of Jesus Christ.

Notice what Catholic scholars have reported about Roman emperors, Constantine, conquest, and Mithraism:

**Mithraism was first and foremost a military cult...**<sup>187</sup>

...many of the emperors yielded to the delusion that they could unite all their subjects in the adoration of the one sun-god who combined in himself the Father-God of the Christians and the much-worshipped Mithras...Even Constantine...cherished this mistaken belief...Could not Sol Deus Invictus, to whom even Constantine dedicated his coins for a long time, or Sol Mithras Deus Invictus ...become the supreme god of the empire? Constantine may have pondered over this. Nor had he absolutely rejected the thought even after a miraculous event had strongly influenced him in favour of the God of the Christians...As pontifex maximus he watched over the heathen worship and protected its rights...the believers in Mithras also observed Sunday as well as Christmas. Consequently Constantine speaks not of the day of the Lord, but of the everlasting day of the sun.<sup>188</sup>

It should be of little surprise that a follower of Mithras who had plans to unite his empire would want followers of any new religion he claimed to also be militaristic. He switched the name of Mithras' birthday and celebrated it as Christ's by 336 A.D.<sup>189</sup>

But that was not the only change. Consider an observation from Roman Catholic scholars Will and Ariel Durant:

Christianity was the last great creation of the ancient pagan world.<sup>190</sup>

The Durants basically are teaching "Greco-Roman Christianity" was a pagan creation, as many non-biblical practices entered

their churches, which increased after the time of Constantine. This would not be said of real Church of God groups as they have not adopted non-biblical holiday practices from the pagan world. ‘Judeo-Christians’ condemned Constantine and Greco-Roman holidays, like Christmas, in the fourth century <sup>191</sup> (see also the free booklet, online at <http://www.ccog.org>, *Should You Keep God’s Holy Days or Demonic Holidays?*).

### **Emperor Constantine Convened the Council of Nicaea**

Shortly after also gaining the Eastern Empire, Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. He declared himself a lay-bishop, and while not even baptized, began changes that the Greco-Roman churches adopted.

This Council did not prohibit pagan sun-worship, but instead decreed that true Christians should not keep the seventh-day Sabbath nor should they be allowed to keep Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Prior to Constantine, the Greco-Roman churches rarely condoned persecution, yet from Constantine on, this changed as even *The Catholic Encyclopedia* has admitted.<sup>192</sup> Furthermore, c. 332 A.D. Constantine issued his famous *Edict Against the Heretics*.<sup>193</sup> Basically, he set in motion persecution against those who were opposed to his syncretic ‘Mithratic-Christianity.’

Also, along with his mother Helena, Constantine embarked on a program to put together churches from pagan temples (as well as build some others that had semblances to the temples associated with Mithras) and include items such as altars. His supporters also pushed out the faithful in the Church of God on Jerusalem’s Western Hill (known as Mt. Zion). His mother Helena’s campaign to acquire relics and ‘holy sites’ was a major factor in getting the Greco-Roman churches to accept idols and icons.

In certain locales, Emperor Constantine decreed the death penalty for those who would not eat biblically unclean animals,<sup>194</sup> in contradiction to scriptures about that (Leviticus 11) as well as those on how to handle vegetarians (Romans 14:2-4). Other emperors tended to follow Constantine’s lead. The persecuting

Emperor Theodosius, around 381 A.D. decreed the death penalty to any who would dare keep the biblical date of Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan as all the faithful early Christians did.<sup>195</sup>

The Greco-Romans also adopted statues, images, altars, candles, and incense, which they did not have in the third century.<sup>196</sup> Mithraism even had “a sort of pope,” according to Catholic sources.<sup>197</sup> Within a few decades after Constantine died, Roman Bishops adopted the titled Pontifex Maximus, a pagan title for one who was supposed to connect God to man.

The Greco-Romans also ended up adopting other trappings of paganism including having clerical leaders wear mitres (a type of hat the priests of Mithras and other pagans religions had<sup>198</sup>) having fancy clerical dress like the Mithratic priesthood,<sup>199</sup> Mithras birthday (December 25<sup>th</sup>) as Christmas, and other biblically-foreign doctrines and practices.<sup>200</sup>

Yet, since many Mithratic and other pagan practices were adopted so long ago, most who now profess Christ do not realize that they have tended to follow the practices of the false church.

Notice what a leading Protestant scholar (H. Brown) admitted:

**It is impossible to document what we now call orthodoxy in the first two centuries of Christianity.**<sup>201</sup>

That is true. Dr. Brown was specifically referring to doctrines like the Greco-Roman trinity<sup>202</sup> and other teachings that are contrary to those that the *Continuing* Church of God holds.<sup>203</sup>

It is the *Continuing* Church of God that actually can document that it holds to teachings and practices of those it considers to have been saints in the first two centuries of Christianity as well as not adopting the ones that those associated with Constantine’s militaristic sun-god used to compromised faith.

The Greco-Roman “synagogue of Satan” changed doctrine and became militaristic persecutors of the faithful—and this caused the faithful to frequently flee (cf. Matthew 10:23).

## 8. 1,260 Years in the Wilderness

Because of persecution in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the faithful had to flee into the wilderness. This fleeing was prophesied for “1260 days” (Revelation 12:6). And for the next 1,260 years locating true Christians was much more difficult (in Bible prophecy, a “day” can represent a year, cf. Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6).

This fleeing is also consistent with what Jesus taught:

23 When they persecute you in this city, flee to another (Matthew 10:23).

That is what the true and faithful did. They, like others before them (cf. Acts 14:5-6), fled. Various ones, not part of the COG, have indicated that the faithful, “Judaeo-Christians” became “clandestine” and hid.<sup>204</sup>

Dr. B.G. Wilkinson noted:

The Church in the Wilderness is the connecting link between apostolic Christianity and God’s people today...it is generally recognized that the 1260-year period did not begin in apostolic times...When one accepts the Bible rule that a day in prophecy {often} stands for a literal year of 360 days...a “time” is a prophetic year... By these two direct statements of the prophetic period we know that the church was to be in the wilderness for 1260 years.<sup>205</sup>

During this 1260 years, the Greco-Roman confederation gained a lot of political power and control. The alleged appearances of apparitions, eucharistic ‘miracles,’ and other enchantments (cf. Isaiah 47:1-12), along with persecution, kept Europe and parts of Asia under Greco-Roman religious domination.

### **The Faithful Still Existed**

Because fear of persecution as well as theological contamination, many in the remaining time of Smyrna attempted to be separate

from the Greco-Romans.

Jerome,<sup>206</sup> Epiphanius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa,<sup>207</sup> Augustine,<sup>208</sup> and others reported about the Sabbath-keeping separatist “Nazarene” Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Here is an account by Roman Catholic Priest Bagatti:

Epiphanius ... Joseph told him that in some localities of Galilee, as Nazareth, Sepphoris, Tiberias, and Capharnaum, the Jews and the Judaeo-Christians strictly observed the *habdalah*, so that they did not permit “either Hellene, or Samaritan, or Christian” to live among them...the Judeo-Christian church was very diffused in this zone and stronger than in Judea. Their separatistic character had impeded contacts and therefore also penetration.<sup>209</sup>

In other words, the faithful Christians did not consider the Greco-Roman confederation of churches to be faithful to original Christianity and maintained separate worship from them. That summary is the position that faithful COG groups still hold.

Some of those who have been referred to as Paulicians and Cataphrygians were part of the original Church of God and kept Church of God doctrines, while many with those names did not.

It may be of interest to note that Priest Bagatti stated this around this time period about those he called “Judaeo-Christians”:

Gregory of Nyssa...He could not understand the mentality of the Judaeo-Christians...<sup>210</sup>

The same situation of two opposing communities appears in two letters of St. Gregory of Nyssa ... in 381 ... he himself was not considered a true Christian by some who held the three resurrections, the millenarianism, the restoration of the Temple with bloody sacrifices; these are all doctrines of the Judaeo-Christians ...<sup>211</sup>

We in the Church of God have been called a variety of names. We do not wish to be labeled as Protestant. Protestantism is a Roman-derived movement we were never part of.

It should be understood that like the Judeo-Christians referred to by Gregory of Nyssa, those in the *Continuing* Church of God do believe in the three resurrections and millenarianism. However, the Bible does not require that a Jewish temple has to be rebuilt in this age; nor is it clear that this was a required position by the Judeo-Christians of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century (there may have been a misunderstanding there). Regarding the restoration of bloody sacrifices, we believe those will apparently occur in the millennium as per Zechariah 14:21.

Notice an interesting, but highly important, observation by Priest Bagatti:

In conclusion, **regarding the Nazarenes, both St. Epiphanius and St. Jerome have nothing to condemn them for except the observance of customs forbidden by the Councils.**<sup>212</sup>

And that is a major difference between the true Church of God and the Greco-Romans and their Protestant offspring. The Greco-Romans accept certain of the Councils as authoritative, but are selective as some contradict others. We in the true Church of God never have accepted any of the Greco-Roman councils as divinely authoritative. The Eastern Orthodox, however, define themselves by seven of these councils and sometimes call themselves “the Church of the Seven Councils.”<sup>213</sup> They generally teach that it is the seven councils which the Orthodox Church takes as its standard and guide.<sup>214</sup>

### **Jerome and Augustine Changed Their Positions**

The millennium was always a Christian belief and even the Catholic saint Jerome had once understood the truth about the millennium and later changed his mind. However, he still understood that Nazarene Christians felt there was a connection between the Feast of Tabernacles and the millennium:

St. Jerome (*PL* 25, 1529 & 1536-7) speaking of how the Judaeo-Christians celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles... tells us that they gave the feast a millenarian significance.<sup>215</sup>

Like the original Christians, we in the *Continuing Church of God* also keep the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. We believe that it is commanded and that it foreshadows the coming millennium,<sup>216</sup> as did the 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> century “Judeo-Christians.”

The Catholic saint Augustine once believed the truth of the millennium, but then changed his mind.<sup>217</sup> Since Augustine held this view into the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, he also helps prove that it was an early or original view that the Roman Church *changed*. The millennial teaching simply comes in conflict with the idea that the Greco-Roman Church is the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Notice how *The Catholic Encyclopedia* explains some of that:

... they began to speak of the Church as “the kingdom of God”; cf. Col., I, 13; I Thess., ii, 12; Apoc., I, 6, 9; v, 10, etc.<sup>218</sup>

The reader is shown by *The Catholic Encyclopedia* that they can look up “Col., I, 13; I Thess., ii, 12; Apoc., I, 6, 9; v, 10”, so they may wish to do so. Why? Because those that do will learn that none of those verses say anything about ***the Church*** being the Kingdom of God. They basically teach that believers will be part of the Kingdom of God or that it is Jesus’ kingdom.

The truth is that people started to believe that the Greco-Roman Church was the kingdom because the Church-State alliance formed and enforced compliance with certain beliefs, not because of what the Bible teaches.

## **The Pergamos Church**

Pergamos is the third of the seven churches listed in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 2:12-17). The Pergamos Church became

predominant during the 5<sup>th</sup> century and remained so until probably the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Some Celts reportedly using the name “Church of God” in the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>219</sup>

History shows that God had people in Pergamos and in various hidden areas. Though they called themselves “Church of God,” they were referred to as descendants of the Nazarenes, Paulicians, Bogomils, Cathars, Patarenes, and towards the end, some of the Albigensians, etc.<sup>220</sup> However, not all peoples referred to by those names were in the true Church.

In order to survive, many apparently decided that they need to compromise. This seems to have included partaking in non-faithful Passover-type services, which the Bible condemns (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:20-21).

Pergamos was told “I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is” (Revelation 2:13, literal translation). Pergamos was the capital of the Roman province of Asia in Asia Minor. Just as the initial local Church at Pergamos was situated in a city where Satan swayed human politics, much of this work of God’s church occurred within the bounds of the government of the Eastern Roman Empire.

From the very beginning, these people were not popular with the Greco-Roman Catholics.

### **The Papal-Antichrist Theory**

Those of the Pergamos era considered the predominant Greco-Roman religion to represent forces that were anti-Christ.

Actually, a Catholic source suggested that it was the Paulicians who first came up with the papal-antichrist theory in the 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>221</sup> (not that antichrists are limited to various popes however, per 1 John 2:18).

Since “Pontifex Maximus” was a pagan title signifying the greatest (*maximus*) bridge-builder (*pontifex*) between mortals and “the gods,” it seems that when the Roman bishops started to



refer to themselves this way, while condemning those who held to a semi-Arian view of the Godhead (as well as those holding to a Nisan 14<sup>th</sup> Passover date), it was clear to the faithful of the true Church that this could only be done by one who so exalted himself like the antichrists that the Apostle John had warned about (1 John 2:18-22; 2 John 7).

Note that there is speculation that the idea of a *Latin* or *Roman* anti-Christ may have been developed by Polycarp, and that he possibly would have learned this from the Apostle John. It should be pointed out that even some Roman Catholic writers have themselves speculated that the final Antichrist would be a pope.<sup>222</sup> But it apparently was not until the late 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century that the Bishops of Rome became influential and heretical enough to have such a resemblance to the final antichrist to be so identified by the Paulicians.

### **Those in Pergamos Were Persecuted**

Certain Romans reacted furiously to the Paulicians and often had them persecuted.<sup>223</sup> *The Catholic Encyclopedia* calls the Paulicians heretics because they were basically against idolatry, religious use of the cross, and Catholic ritualism.<sup>224</sup>

The historian, Fred C. Conybeare observed this about some affiliated with the Paulicians:

They are accused by their Armenian opponents of setting at naught all the feasts and fasts of the Church, especially Sunday ... The Sabbath was perhaps kept ... they were probably the remnant of an old Judaeo-Christian Church, which had spread up through Edessa into Siuniq and Albania...We know that the Pauliani continued to keep Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan...Of the modern Christmas and of the Annunciation, and of the other feasts connected with the life of Jesus prior to his thirtieth year, this phase of the church knew nothing. The general impression which the study of it leaves on us is that in it we have before us a

form of Church not very remote from the primitive Jewish Christianity of Palestine.<sup>225</sup>

Some true Passover-observant Christians may have kept both Saturday and Sunday in a form of spiritual compromise. Pergamos was criticized for its compromising tendencies (Revelation 2:14-15); being heavily involved with false religion seems to be a type of fornication that the Bible condemns (Revelation 14:8; 17:2,4; 18:3,9; 19:2).

Harvard scholar H. Brown wrote:

The Bogomils ... Its doctrine of God is highly dualistic ... There is no True Trinity.<sup>226</sup>

One of their so-called “dualistic” teachings was that this is Satan’s world. Georgi Vassilev noted that an:

... important idea of Bogomils and Cathars, i.e. that this world is the kingdom of the devil.<sup>227</sup>

Perhaps it should be noted that groups like the faithful in the Church of God also believe that this is Satan’s world/age (cf. Matthew 4:8; Luke 4:5; 2 Corinthians 4:4). This will change, however, when Christ returns (Revelation 11:15). This being Satan’s world is part of the reason that the Bible warns us to not love this present world (1 John 2:15-17).

Another reason that their teachings are called dualistic is probably because, as non-trinitarians, they would have most likely been binitarian.

After the Paulicians, the Eastern Orthodox also oppressed the Bogomils, a group that seems to have been related to the Paulicians.<sup>228</sup>

Notice also this from *The Catholic Encyclopedia*:

The heresy of the Bogomili was started in the tenth century ... followers called themselves Christians and

considered their faith the only true one. In Bosnia they were named Paterines. The Paterines, or Bogomili ... forbade intercourse with those of other faiths, disbelieved in war.<sup>229</sup>

The following is apparently from the work *History of Armenia* by Chamich and is from a 1054-1058 A.D. letter written by Gregory Magistros against the Manichaeans (note that I have left out additions by the editor/translator F. Conybeare):

... they represent our worship of God as worship of idol. As if we, who honour the sign of the cross and the holy pictures, were still engaged in worshipping devils.<sup>230</sup>

Thus, there were groups that rightly claimed that the Constantinian Christians were involved in demonic practices when they used idols and icons (called “the cross and holy pictures” above). At least one Roman Catholic mystic has suggested that the descendants of the Manicheans would be a problem for Catholics in the latter times.<sup>231</sup>

It is of historical interest to note the following doctrinal admissions in the article on the Paulicians in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (bolding mine):

They honoured not the Cross, but only the book of the Gospel. They were Iconoclasts, rejecting all pictures...

The whole ecclesiastical hierarchy is bad, as also all Sacraments and ritual. They had a special aversion to monks...

Since Gibbon **the Paulicians have often been described as a survival of early and pure Christianity**, godly folk who clung to the Gospel, rejecting later superstitions, who were grossly calumniated by their opponents...

In Armenia the sect continued in the “Thonraketzi” founded by a certain Smbat in the ninth century.

Conybeare attributes to this Smbat a work, “The Key of Truth”, which he has edited. It accepts the Old Testament and the Sacraments of Baptism. Penance, and the Eucharist. This work especially has persuaded many writers that the Paulicians were much maligned people. But in any case it represents a very late stage of their history, and it is disputed whether it is really Paulician at all.<sup>232</sup>

Edward Gibbon was a British historian who was not in any “Church of God.” Yet, apparently because of his historical research, he and some other outsiders have concluded that some of the Paulicians were a remnant of the true church. Not all called Paulicians, however, held true doctrine.

Interestingly, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* article also admits:

The emperor Alexius Comnenus is credited with having put an end to the heresy. During a residence at Philippopolis, he argued with them and converted all, or nearly all, back to the Church (so his daughter: “Alexias”, XV, 9). From this time the Paulicians practically disappear from history. But they left traces of their heresy. In Bulgaria the Bogomile sect, which lasted through the Middle Ages and spread to the West in the form of Cathari, Albigensians, and other Manichaean heresies, is a continuation of Paulicianism. In Armenia, too, similar sects, derived from them, continue till our own time.<sup>233</sup>

Notice that even some Roman Catholic scholars know that it is possible that some of the Paulicians were the survivors of an early and pure Christianity and that they had spiritual descendants that continued into the future (Alexius Comnenus died in A.D. 1118 and essentially dealt with the Paulicians at Philippopolis in the late eleventh century<sup>234</sup>), such as those within the Thyatira era, as well into modern times! This, combined with Gibbon’s account, is supportive of the view that a ‘laying on of hands’ (Hebrews 6:2) continued from the beginning, through the late eleventh century, and then beyond.

The Cathari were also known to be pacifists, as were the faithful among the Paulicians. Of course, there were many called by those names that were not faithful.

*The Catholic Encyclopedia* even interestingly states this about the Cathari:

Cathari (From the Greek *katharos*, pure), literally “puritans”, a name specifically applied to, or used by, several sects at various periods...To their geographical distribution they owed the names of “Cathari of Desenzano” or “Albanenses” ... However attractive it may be to trace **the origin of the Cathari to the first centuries of Christianity**, we must be cautious not to accept as a certain historical fact what, up to the present, **is only a probable conclusion.**<sup>235</sup>

From the above, we glean that the name Puritan apparently did come from Cathari. And that even though Catholic scholars prefer to believe it *is only a probable conclusion*, the spiritual ancestors of the Cathari can be traced to the first centuries of Christianity.

Thus, some Catholic and other scholars realize that there were groups that held to the original practices of the Church of God, but that were subject to persecution because of it. Sadly, this has often happened throughout the history of the true and original Church.

Persecutions, including economic ones, by the Third Lateran Council in 1179, continued, and that particular council also condemned some known as the Cathars, the Patarenes, and the Coterelli.<sup>236</sup>

It has been observed that some of Coterelli (spelled Cottrell when Anglicized) moved to England and were also Sabbath-keepers who came to Rhode Island in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>237</sup> (and some descendants continued at least two centuries longer than that with COG doctrines). Thus, it would seem that a baptismal succession through the laying on of hands has to have

occurred, in at least one continuous family with Church of God doctrines, such as the Sabbath, from 12<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>238</sup>

It should be also noted that there is evidence that the Church of God had followers during the time of Pergamos and Thyatira from the British Isles to Europe to the Middle East to Africa to Armenia to India to Russia to China and elsewhere.

## **Thyatira**

The Thyatira era of the church began in the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and lasted until around the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to the Reformation, the Bohemian Waldenes referred to themselves as “Church of God”<sup>239</sup> (some, but probably not most, of the Waldensians, were in the true Church of God).

The Bible records that Thyatiran Christians would have a tendency to compromise when they should not have (Revelation 2:18-28). Undoubtedly, those in areas dominated by those of the Greco-Roman faiths felt pressure to do so.

The Cathari “**called the cross the mark of the beast,**” and opposed Catholic doctrines such as purgatory and indulgences.<sup>240</sup>

The famous ‘Spanish Inquisition’ took place during this era and was not limited to those in Spain. Some of the unholy inquistitors reported that some that they tortured held to Church of God doctrines and would not bow down to Roman idols. Much of the historical records of the COG that remain were written by and/or retained by those who were not in the COG.

## **The Popes Claimed More Authority**

Innocent (poor choice of name) IV was the Roman Catholic Pope from 1243-1254. According to Priest McBrien:

Innocent IV was the first pope to approve the use of torture in the Inquisition to extract confessions of heresy...He followed the principle, “the end justifies the means.” He raised nepotism to a high art, placing

relatives in key positions in order to create a network of loyal supporters, and erased distinctions between church and personal revenues.<sup>241</sup>

Several decades later, Pope Boniface VIII took a bizarre and highly overreaching step. In 1302, he issued what is known as the bull *Unam Sanctum* that claimed:

We are obliged by the faith to believe and to hold—and we do firmly believe and sincerely confess—that there is one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church and that **outside this Church there is neither salvation nor remission of sins** ... Therefore, if the Greeks or others say that they are not committed to Peter and his successors, they necessarily confess that they are not Christ's sheep ...

... in this Church and in her power are two swords ... Both are in the power of the Church, the spiritual sword and the material. But the latter is to be used for the Church, the former by her; the former by the priest, the latter by kings and captains but at the will of the priest ... Furthermore, we declare, state, define, and pronounce that **it is altogether necessary for salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff**.<sup>242</sup>

This was a blasphemous position to take. The Bible says:

10 ... the name of Jesus Christ ... 12 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 4:10,12).

The Pope is NOT Jesus Christ and being subject to a Roman Pontiff is simply not a biblical requirement for salvation. Yet, most mainline Protestants who trace their history, trace through and including this period of time. This was not God's Church.

As his pronouncement was made as a matter of "faith," was Pope

Boniface VIII **infallible** when he published it? If so, then this seems to disagree with positions taken by some of the later popes, as well as the Bible.

## **Apparitions and Protestantism**

Various ones during the time of Thyatira held to what Catholic scholars have called the “Papal-Antichrist theory” that the Protestant Reformers such as Martin Luther later held to.<sup>243</sup>

While the later Protestant Reformers did object to indulgences, they did not reform enough. The Protestant Reformers were not truly ready to “contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered” (Jude 3) or continue those doctrines (1 Timothy 4:16). Yet, their protests, fightings, and political pressures were factors in a loosening up of the Greco-Roman grip so, that in time, the true Church of God did not have to be hidden in the wilderness. However, the time will come when an ecumenically-changed Greco-Roman confederation will come and result in another period for the Church of God to flee to the wilderness according to biblical prophecy (cf. Revelation 12:14-17; Daniel 7:25).

Something else that occurred during the time of Pergamos and Thyatira was an increased reporting of ‘Marian’ apparitions. While many may not consider those to be that significant, from a historical perspective, Catholic scholars credit the appearance of the ‘Lady of Guadalupe’ in 1531 as the reason that Latin America became essentially Roman Catholic. A claimed apparition in Russia in the 14<sup>th</sup> century has been credited for the widespread acceptance of icons and the Russian Orthodox Church in that land. Satan has used apparitions throughout history (cf. Isaiah 47) and likely will again in the future.

The Cathari opposed the pope and held some of the doctrines that we would consider to be Church of God doctrines:

Agreed as the Cathari were in opposing many customs and doctrines of the established Church, they were divided among themselves and broken up into sects. According to one document seventy-two existed.



There are two Churches they held; one of the wicked and one of the righteous. They themselves constituted the Church of the righteous, outside of which there is no salvation, having received the imposition of hands and done penance according to the teaching of Christ and the Apostles. Its fruits proved that the established Church was not the true Church. The true Church endures persecution, does not prescribe it...The Roman Church is the woman of the Apocalypse, a harlot, and the pope anti-Christ. The depositions at their trials indicate that the Cathari made much use of the Scriptures...the Cathari also renounced priestly vestments, altars, and crosses as idolatrous.<sup>244</sup>

The Cathari seemed to recognize that there were basically two church groups. The persecutions from the unfaithful church tended to make the true Christians flee to more mountainous regions as those areas were more remote and thus a safer place to live then. However, the faithful still had to have outside interactions and apparently many compromised to some degree to remain alive. The fact that they taught they had “received the imposition of hands” helps demonstrate that the *laying on of hands* practice was continued among the faithful.

Because of their aversion to crosses, inquisitors like the Roman Catholic saint Dominic, forced those who recanted their faith to wear yellow crosses:

During the Inquisition, some who recanted because of torture and persecution were forced to wear two yellow crosses:<sup>245</sup>

Might crosses again be a symbol of the persecutors? Even today, it seems that crosses are probably the most common icon/idol associated with the Sunday-keeping churches.

### **Sabbath-keepers in Transylvania**

Adventist researcher Daniel Liechty reported Gentile Sabbath-keepers in Transylvania in the 1500s who kept the biblical Holy

Days, such as the Feast of Trumpets, which they called Day of Remembrance, and the Day of Atonement.<sup>246</sup>

Historical records support the view that Gentile Christians did keep the biblical Holy Days, and did so outside of Jerusalem.

### **Catholic Leaders Strongly Restricted and Discouraged Reading the Bible Then**

And, while those associated with Thyatira may have stimulated increased interest in Bible reading in France and elsewhere, this caused concern among Roman leaders.

In November 1229, the Council of Toulouse declared:

Canon 14. We prohibit also that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old or New Testament; unless anyone from motive of devotion should wish to have the Psalter or the Breviary for divine offices or the hours of the blessed Virgin; but we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books.<sup>247</sup>

As one born into a Roman Catholic family, once I began to read the Bible for myself, I quickly realized that the Vatican did not always teach what the Bible said, and ultimately realized that the true Church of God taught more truths of the Bible than any other group (including the Protestant groups).

The universal reading of scriptures was actually condemned in 1713 by Pope Clement XI in the *Bull Unigenitus Dei Filius*.<sup>248</sup> Although that *Bull* cites Acts 8, that actual biblical chapter seems to support the idea that all should read scripture, but that they should consult with the ordained ministry about points that they do not understand. This instruction is consistent with the rest of the Bible (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 3:16).

### **Protestant Issues**

The true Church of God is not Protestant. Sadly, and actually,

those associated with the Protestant movement condemned people with COG doctrinal positions in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Protestant leaders condemned and/or called for the death of COG followers because of doctrines such as the Sabbath, refusal to baptize infants (or to accept infant baptism as valid), refusal of military service, and teaching the millennial reign of Jesus Christ.<sup>249</sup> This included some called Anabaptists.<sup>250</sup> Despite condemnations, there were faithful Christians in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa during the time Protestants arose.

Look at this admission from the Protestant scholar and theologian Harold Brown:

...when the **Anabaptists and other radicals discovered Scripture to be teaching things the Lutherans found detestable**, Lutherans learned the usefulness of tradition...<sup>251</sup>

Greco-Romans, including Protestant Lutherans, often rely on tradition and NOT *sola Scriptura*. Lest any feel that Protestantism does not discourage paying too much attention to the Bible, look at what Dr. H. Brown also wrote:

Although classical theology is certainly not without problems, historically it is almost always the case that appeal to the Bible alone, disdaining the tools of theology, leads to the reemergence of ancient heresies.<sup>252</sup>

That is an absolutely astounding admission. A Protestant scholar is essentially warning against *sola Scriptura* as he seems to prefer human traditions. Furthermore, perhaps it should be mentioned that one of the specific doctrines that Dr. Brown was referring to was the trinity. And that is because appeal to the Bible alone, *sola Scriptura*, as many Protestants claim, simply *does not* allow for belief in various traditions such as Sunday, the trinity, Easter, Christmas, etc.<sup>253</sup>

## 9. The Sardis Church Era

Sardis is the fifth of the seven church eras. The Sardis Church became predominant by/during the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

This is approximately 1260 years after the Smyrnaeans fled because of edicts of 4<sup>th</sup> century Roman Emperors. This later time seems to be when the COG no longer felt that it needed to flee and began to come out in the open.

### The Church in England Begins to Emerge

The Church of God in England started to emerge about this time. Bryan W. Ball noted:

...from the late 1640s, with new religious liberty and freedom of expression and practice, the seventh day came into the open in a way previously unknown in England.<sup>254</sup>

*The Catholic Encyclopedia* noted:

Persons rejecting infant baptism are frequently mentioned in English history in the sixteenth century ... As early as 1535 ten Anabaptists were put to death, and the persecution continued throughout that century. The victims seem to have been mostly Dutch and German refugees.<sup>255</sup>

Some groups related to them used the term “Church of God” and practiced “feet-washing.” In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Anabaptists taught millenarianism and were condemned by Roman Catholics for that belief.<sup>256</sup>

Despite condemnations, the true church persisted in those centuries, but not as part of the Protestant movement. Some claim that a seventh-day group may have begun meeting in Braintree, England no later than 1527.<sup>257</sup> Seventh-day Sabbath-keeping was causing controversy in England in 1584.<sup>258</sup> There was a sabbath-keeping church that apparently became

established in the United Kingdom in the late 1500s/early 1600s known as the Mill Yard Church.<sup>259</sup>

Some Sabbatarians observed something on Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Priest Falconer wrote of them:

‘the fourteenth of the March moon’ to coincide with the Jewish Passover, and should be followed by the eating of unleavened bread for seven days.<sup>260</sup>

They also taught against eating swine’s flesh.<sup>261</sup>

History records that other COG doctrines, such as the doctrine of the laying on of hands, were specifically taught.<sup>262</sup>

In the 1600s there were several Sabbath-keeping congregations in England and some in the Americas according to O. Leonard:

Sabbath keepers of the middle ages ... and ... transferred to America, in Rhode Island in 1664-65, and earliest showed itself in Newport, R. I., in 1644.<sup>263</sup>

From these groups, many became known as Sabbatarian Anabaptists or later Seventh Day Baptists (SDBs). Irrespective of what they were called originally, most of those groups tended to be loosely affiliated. Some of them kept COG doctrines, while others were more Protestant in approach.

Precisely when those of the true Church came to America is not totally certain, but there were clearly Sabbath-keepers there in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It seems of interest to note that A.N. Dugger and C.O. Dodd considered the churches in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to be part of the Sardis Church of Revelation 3:1; which ones were truly COG and which were not, however, is not always clear.

### **Seventh Day Baptists Claim Predecessors that Were COG**

Here is some information about one of the earliest groups in America (Piscataway, N.J) and their recorded beliefs in 1705:

“The Church of God keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ, living in Piscataway and Hopewell, in the province of New Jersey, being assembled with one accord, at the house of Benjamin Martin, in Piscataway, the 19th day of August, 1705...

The faith of the Piscataway church reads as follows:

“I. We believe that unto us there is but one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ, who is the mediator between God and mankind, and that the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of God. I Corinthians 3:6, I Timothy 2:5, II Timothy 3:6, II Peter 1:21.

“II. We believe that all the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, given by inspiration, are the Word of God -- II Peter 1:19, 20, 21, II Timothy 3:16, Mark 7:13, I Thessalonians 2:13, Acts 4:29, 31 -- and are the rule of faith and practice.

“III. We believe that the ten commandments, which were written on two tables of stone by the finger of God, continue to be the rule of righteousness unto all men. Matthew 5:17, 18, 19, Malachi 4:4, James 1:21, Romans 7:25, Romans 3:21, Romans 13:8, 9, 10, Ephesians 6:2.

“IV. We believe the six principles recorded in Heb. 6:1, 2, to be the rule of faith and practice.

“V. We believe that the Lord’s Supper ought to be administered and received in all Christian churches. Luke 2:19, I Corinthians. 11:23, 26.

“VI. We believe that all Christian churches ought to have church officers in them, as elders, and deacons. Titus 1:5, Acts 6:3.

“VII. We believe that all persons thus believing ought to be baptized in water by dipping or plunging, after confession is made by them of their faith in the above said things. Mark 1:4, 5, Acts 2:38, Acts 8:37, Romans

6:3, 4, Colossians 2:12.

“VIII. We believe that a company of sincere persons, being formed in the faith and practices of the above said things, may truly be said to be the Church of Christ. Acts 2:41, 42.

“IX. We give up ourselves unto the Lord and one another, to be guided and governed by one another, according to the Word of God. I Corinthians 8:5, Colossians 2:19, Psalm 84:1, 2, 4-10, Psalm 133:1.” -- Idem, pages 120,121, Vol. 2, No. 3.<sup>264</sup>

**Although the Seventh Day Baptists (SDBs) now claim the above church, the fact that it** taught that it was part of “The Church of God,” left out the term trinity, and stated that the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of God, shows those in it were NOT what are NOW called Seventh Day Baptists. SDBs officially now teach the trinity. It is the non-trinitarian Church of God that continues to teach that the Holy Spirit is simply the Spirit or Power of God.

Some Sabbatarians in New Jersey encouraged footwashing in 1750.<sup>265</sup> Furthermore, this practice of footwashing was also followed in Virginia and other churches in West Virginia, and the Middle Island Church adopted it in 1870.<sup>266</sup> It is still annually practiced within the *Continuing* Church of God.

### **Sabbath Keepers in Canada Were Persecuted**

The first Sabbath-observers in Canada were brought to Quebec against their will in March 1757 by a French priest.<sup>267</sup> Most of these ones ended up being killed for their faith.

### **Seventh Day Baptist Changes**

Although there were small groups of Sabbath-keepers, from the 1600s through to the 1800s, changes set in. The Seventh Day Baptist movement overtook many in America and elsewhere. And sadly, many of those that stayed in certain Sabbatarian churches did become SDBs, and held less of the truth.

The SDBs have basically documented several changes and doctrinal differences in their own pronouncements and books.<sup>268</sup> There was a separation between the SDBs and those who were in the Church of God as those truly in the COG would not accept the trinity.<sup>269</sup>

It appears that many of those in the U.S.A. who kept Church of God doctrines in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were those whose descendants became part of the Church of God, Seventh Day.

Even the New London church, which the SDB's claim was one of theirs from the 1600s, incorporated as "Church of Christ" and not SDB in 1784.<sup>270</sup> Many of those who became the SDBs seem to have used the terms "Church of God" or "Church of Christ" until towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

While there were scattered Sabbath-keepers in parts of America, Asia, Africa, and Europe in the 1800s, a lot of events occurred in the U.S.A. in that century. During the early 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in the U.S.A., the Church of God clearly separated from those who became known as Seventh Day Baptists. In the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) also rose up, but mainly came up from another source with limited SDB influence.

It appears that only a small part of the COG may have been associated with the early Adventist movement. Also, most did not unite behind any group until the group initially called Church of God (Adventist) (CGA) later became more like how the group was when it officially later changed its name to Church of God (Seventh Day) (CG7).<sup>271</sup> Many of the early CGA leaders had some affiliation with the SDAs, and some of those leaders were apparently not truly part of the COG.

The late John Kiesz wrote:

It is evident that there were Sabbath-keeping groups (independent) besides the Seventh Day Baptists, before and during the time of William Miller's preaching and prediction of the end of the world, in 1844...When the



Whites made their tours over the Eastern and Midwestern states in the early 1860's for the purpose of effecting cooperation and general organization, they found many congregations of Sabbath-keepers. Many of them became affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventists, while others began to fellowship and cooperate with those who later became known as the "Church of God."

**Some of the groups remained independent of all general organizations.** Subsequent church history shows that although some of the independent Sabbatarian groups aligned themselves neither with the Seventh Day Baptists, nor with the Seventh-day Adventists, yet for logical reasons, as far as they were concerned, did actually desire cooperation and fellowship in order to more effectively propagate gospel truths as they saw them.<sup>272</sup>

The real COG was not truly an off-shoot of the SDAs as the SDAs tend to teach. Unlike the SDAs, we also do not consider that their Ellen White was God's prophetess.

### **CGA Officially Becomes CG7**

Having come to some prominence by 1895, in 1903, A. F. Dugger became an editor of the *Bible Advocate*.<sup>273</sup> In 1905, A. F. Dugger became the sole editor and seemed to be the primary leader of CGA until 1909/1910; he died in 1910.<sup>274</sup> In 1909, Jacob Brinkerhoff became the editor of the *Bible Advocate*.<sup>275</sup>

In 1914, he retired and was replaced by Andrew N. (otherwise known as A. N.) Dugger.<sup>276</sup> In 1923, CGA changed its name to Church of God (Seventh Day) (CG7). A.N. Dugger taught that the true COG had apostolic succession:

The Scriptures teach us most emphatically that the apostolic virtue and power was handed down from apostle to apostle by the divine ordinance of laying on of hands and prayer. -- Numbers 8:10, 27:28; Acts 6:6; 13:3; I Timothy 4:14; II Timothy 1:5.

**That the Sabbath-keeping “Church of God,” has a most definite link of connection back through holy men to the days of the apostles is certain.** The very same faith, and practice in divine worship, have been definitely handed down to the present time by strong men of God, filled with His blessed Holy Spirit, zealous for the precious commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus, fervent in zeal, and faithful unto death.<sup>277</sup>

Ordinations in the old CG7, like those in the modern CCOG, involved the laying on of hands combined with the anointing with oil.<sup>278</sup> A.N. Dugger also taught about the COG existing throughout history as the churches of Revelation 2 & 3, although the group now called CG7 no longer holds to that teaching.<sup>279</sup>

In addition to apostolic succession, according to A. N. Dugger, there are three unique doctrines that separated the Churches of God from the Protestant sects: the observance of the seventh day Sabbath, non-trinitarianism, and teaching against the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and he concluded that the COG had the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints”<sup>280</sup> (Jude 3).

In the 1920s, CG7 had works in Argentina, Australia, several Balkan states, Barbados, Bermuda, Bolivia, Canada, Costa Rica, China, Cuba, Dominica, El Salvador, England, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Palestine, Panama, South Africa, Sweden, Trinidad, the United States of America and West Africa.<sup>281</sup> In 1923 it was reported that there were also converts in Spain and Syria.<sup>282</sup> In 1933, CG7 also reported that it had congregations in Cuba, Egypt and Jerusalem. In the 1920s, in addition to English, Church of God literature was produced in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, German, Spanish, Chinese, two languages of India, Portuguese, French and Italian.<sup>283</sup> It should be noted that CG7 was then quite small.

CG7 had a split in 1933; A. N. Dugger felt he did not need to abide by a particular vote. The year 1933 was when the mantle passed and the Philadelphia era apparently began, under the

leadership of Herbert W. Armstrong, who was one of “the Seventy” listed in 1932/1933 by A.N. Dugger’s group.<sup>284</sup>

But Herbert Armstrong said he did not become part of the new reorganized group, though he cooperated with it to a degree. He later considered that CG7 was part of the Sardis era of the COG and had lost various truths (cf. Revelation 3:1-6).

While CG7 has grown considerably since the 1930’s in membership (especially in places like Latin America), it has tended to become somewhat more Protestant in its approach, but not nearly to the degree this happened with the SDBs and SDAs. Nevertheless, CG7 has softened its positions enough on some matters that it is not nearly as separate from mainstream Protestants as the Philadelphia remnant of the Church of God is.

In 2007, then CG7 President Whaid Rose actually declared “We are Protestant.”<sup>285</sup> Although some of its members have long considered themselves to be the “original Protestants” (far predating the Reformation), Whaid Rose’s use of the expression seemed intended to suggest that he considers CG7 as part of the modern Protestant churches. Those who better understand in the Church of God do not consider themselves as Protestant.

Consistent with Herbert W. Armstrong’s teachings, many believe that CG7 is part of a group which was warned it would lose truth and that it needed to “repent” and “watch” (Revelation 3:1-6). CG7 truly has lost prophetic, historical, and doctrinal knowledge.<sup>286</sup> However, the Bible indicates that a few in Sardis may notice this loss and be faithful. CG7 does still observe the seventh-day Sabbath, observes the Passover annually (including footwashing, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, though they call it the Lord’s Supper), keeps the Ten Commandments, avoids unclean meats, etc., and holds to certain other COG doctrines and practices.<sup>287</sup>

The current CG7’s lack of prophetic knowledge, like its heavily preterist positions,<sup>288</sup> may be part of why Jesus warned Sardis, “**you will not know what hour I will come upon you**” (Revelation 3:3). Sardis was not, and is not, the most faithful COG.

## 10. Herbert W. Armstrong and the Start of the Philadelphia Era

In 1926, Herbert (W.) Armstrong began to study the Bible in earnest after his wife Loma began to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. After learning and studying, notice something he wrote:

My shocking, disappointing, eye-opening discovery, upon looking into the Bible for myself, had revealed in stark plainness that the teachings of traditional Christianity were, in most basic points, the *very opposite* of the teachings of Christ, of Paul, and of the original true Church!

Could the original and only *true Church* have disintegrated and disappeared? Could it have ceased to exist? No, for I read where Jesus said the gates of the grave would never prevail against it. Also He had said to His disciples who formed His Church, “Lo, I am with you always.”

Then I saw that the very PURPOSE of the Church was *to preach Christ’s GOSPEL!* It is HIS BODY -- His instrument by which HE carries on GOD’S WORK!

I looked carefully at that Gospel as Christ Himself preached it, and taught it to His first ministers. It is recorded in the four books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. At almost every point of teaching that Jesus enunciated, the teachings of traditional Christian bodies today are just the opposite.

THEY WERE NOT PREACHING THE SAME GOSPEL AT ALL, BUT A TOTALLY OPPOSITE MESSAGE! This was shocking -- incredible -- unbelievable! Yet I was compelled to see it was true!

Jesus *began* the work of preaching the very Gospel which GOD the Father had sent to mankind through Him. He commissioned His disciples -- His Church -- to

carry this same Gospel to all the world...But WHERE was it going on *today*?

I knew now that when I found the one and *only* true Church, I would find a Church *obedient to God* -- keeping His commandments -- having the testimony of Jesus Christ, which is the TRUTH of the Scriptures.

I had been much impressed by a description of the true Church, as it is to be found in our time -- just before the second coming of Christ. It is found in Revelation 12... My intensive study had revealed one thing plainly: “the commandments of God” mean “Sabbath keeping” to most traditional denominations. They say, “The commandments are done away!” They reject “the commandments of God.”

That automatically ruled out all churches observing Sunday. So far as I could learn, it reduced the search to three small groups -- the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Seventh-Day Baptists, and a little, almost unheard-of church called the Church of God...

I looked into the teaching of the Seventh-Day Baptists. I found it to be virtually identical, except for observing a different day of the week, with other Protestant denominations -- especially the Baptists.

But of these three churches to which the search had been narrowed, only one had the right NAME for the true Church. This was the small, little-heard-of Church of God whose headquarters were at Stanberry, Missouri.<sup>289</sup>

CG7 was a disappointment to him, however:

But this left me quite confused. For this was a *little* Church, especially compared to the Roman Catholic, the Methodist, the Baptist, the Presbyterian, the Lutheran, or other large churches numbering millions of members. Then I saw where Jesus called His Church the “little

flock.”...I was deeply perplexed. Here was a little church, with scattered members probably numbering less than 2,000 -- mostly in rural areas. Apparently, as nearly as I could learn, it had only a very limited number of local churches, none as large as 100 members. As I began to come in contact with some of its leaders, they seemed to be men of little education -- no college degrees -- its ministry could hardly be described as an educated ministry. Their preaching had a certain fire, yet seemed totally to lack the POWER that attracts sizable audiences, that moves people, stirs hearts, and changes lives. I could see no visible results.

Could *this* be God’s one and only true Church on earth? The very question seemed preposterous!

Yes and yet, small, powerless, resultless, impotent though it appeared to be, here was a church with the right name, “keeping the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ,” and *closer*, in its doctrines and teachings, to what God had been opening my eyes to see plainly in His Word than any other church of which I knew! Small and impotent though it appeared, *it had more Bible TRUTH than any church I could find!*

At this time, God was opening my understanding to *some* Biblical TRUTHS which this church did not accept; and also to some errors, even though minor, which it did embrace.<sup>290</sup>

So, despite his disappointments/expectations, this former Quaker began to attend with the Church of God (Seventh Day).

On February 26, 1929, Herbert Armstrong wrote a letter to A. N. Dugger who responded with:

Dear Brother Armstrong: ...

**I feel we are entering into a new era for this message and that it is going to take on new life. In fact the**

**time for the message is now here.**<sup>291</sup>

Later, Herbert W. Armstrong felt that a new era for proclaiming the gospel message had begun—the Philadelphia era!

In response to some writing from Herbert Armstrong, on July 28, 1929, A. N. Dugger wrote the following:

Dear Brother Armstrong:

I ... have just finished the manuscript on the Third Angel's Message and British Israel ... You are surely right ... I cannot use it ... May the Lord bless you ...<sup>292</sup>

This was another disappointment from CG7. Its leader acknowledged error, but was afraid to correct it. This has happened too many times throughout church history.

Anyway, in June 1931, Herbert Armstrong had hands laid upon him and was ordained a minister by a CG7-related group. However, he had other problems with CG7, and reported:

I did not fully realize, then, that this was a crucial turning point in the history of the Church of God. My wife and I did not leave the Church. This was God's Church. Of that I was not, then, completely sure. They came *closer* to Biblical truth than any other -- but I was seriously disturbed by their lack of power and accomplishment.

What actually was happening, though we did not understand it then, was that a NEW ERA was dawning in the history of the Church of God. The words of Christ are quoted in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of the Book of Revelation, foretelling the history of God's Church in seven successive eras, or phases. Events since that time have that revealed was the transition from the "Sardis era" (Rev. 3:1-5) into the beginning of the 'Philadelphia era.'

Mrs. Armstrong and I continued to fellowship with these brethren. I continued to work with them, and with their ministers, as far as that was possible. The lay brethren continued to look to me for the leadership for getting the Work of God going to the world.<sup>293</sup>

After he was on radio, Herbert Armstrong realized that electronic communications could reach a lot of people. Yet, it seemed that CG7 did not share his vision to reach the world with the Church of God message with power. So in the 1930s, he began to disassociate himself from CG7 (which he considered to be part of the Sardis era). CG7 was a much larger group and very few actually left it to support Herbert Armstrong for over a decade. He and his wife, also, ended up keeping the Feast of Tabernacles alone for many years. Most in CG7 did not think that the doctrinal issues that Herbert Armstrong raised were the right reason to leave CG7 and start a new organization.

Herbert Armstrong called his group, in the first issue of his magazine *The Plain Truth*, the “Radio Church of God.”<sup>294</sup>

### **The Philadelphia Era Emerges as the Gospel of the Kingdom Begins to be Proclaimed in Power**

Jesus had John record that Philadelphia would be faithful and go through open doors (Revelation 3:7-13). Herbert Armstrong believed that those doors to be opened had to do with proclaiming the gospel, as he wrote:

But Christ said to His Philadelphia era Church, that because we have but little strength, He would OPEN THOSE DOORS TO US (Rev. 3:8).<sup>295</sup>

The PURPOSE for which Christ built the Church exemplifies its WORK...1) To ANNOUNCE to the world for its witness the coming Kingdom of God...2) To prepare the people to whom God adds to the Church ... God has always worked with humans...The WORK consists of proclaiming the Gospel, by radio, by television, in print.<sup>296</sup>



Herbert Armstrong also met personally with world leaders in Europe, North America, Africa, India, China, Japan, Philippines, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and elsewhere to give a witness of the gospel to the world (cf. Matthew 24:14). At one time approximately 20 million people per month read the old WCG magazine *The Plain Truth*. It went to about 194 countries/territories out of 204 considered possible then.<sup>297</sup>

Those in that church were sometimes branded as members of a cult, and various ‘Catholics’ and Protestants interfered with his ability to get the gospel out in various media.

Yet, Herbert Armstrong understood and taught “God’s way of GIVE,”<sup>298</sup> as contrasted with Satan’s way of get. He also understood that the individual purpose for each human was to be able to give love in a unique way (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-28)<sup>299</sup> and that “building character”<sup>300</sup> in this life was important to help in the next.<sup>301</sup> He knew that the “meaning of life” was related to the purpose that God was working out on the earth.<sup>302</sup>

He basically taught that because those called of God will strive to live according to His law, they will have tests and trials that will build a certain type of “character” (Romans 5:1-4, NJB/NKJV) (δομική).<sup>303</sup> This character could be considered a type of the “testimony of our conscience” (2 Corinthians 1:12, RNT) that God wants His true children to possess.

### **At Least 18 Truths Were Restored to the Philadelphia Era**

Herbert W. Armstrong wrote, “At least 18 basic and essential truths have been restored to the True Church since” the year 1933.<sup>304</sup> In a sermon in 1983, he listed the following:

1. True Gospel
2. Purpose of God
3. God’s Plan through the Holy Days
4. Proper Hierarchical Church Government
5. Who and What is God?
6. What and Why is Man?
7. Spirit in Man

8. Firstfruits In this Age
9. Knowledge of What the Millennium Truly Is
10. Truth About the Holy Spirit
11. Christians are Begotten Now
12. Born-Again at the Resurrection
13. Identity of Physical Israel
14. How the Identity of Israel Opens Up Understanding of Bible Prophecy
15. Second and Third Tithes
16. Identity of Babylon and Her Daughters
17. Satan has Deceived the Whole World
18. We Are to Be Separate<sup>305</sup>

Herbert Armstrong claimed that the Ephesus era of the true Church of God had the above truths.<sup>306</sup> Although many of the subsequent churches had many of them, this doctrinal knowledge was lost to the apparent main body of the Sardis Church of God by the time he became acquainted with them. He had attended with CG7 because it had the most truth, but left because they were no longer the pillar/ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

Those of us in the *Continuing* Church of God accept that these 18 doctrines are part of what Jesus referred to in Revelation 3:10 when He told the Philadelphia portion of the Church of God to “hold fast” to what it has.<sup>307</sup> We also believe that each of them is solidly based upon the teachings of the Bible.

### **The Purpose of Church and Salvation to Be Offered to All**

In the *Mystery of the Ages*, Herbert W. Armstrong taught:

Now, why the Church? Christ came also to call out selected and chosen ones from Satan’s world to turn from Satan’s way into the way of God’s law and to qualify to reign with Christ when he comes to replace Satan on the throne of the earth. Those called into the Church were called not merely for salvation and eternal life, but to learn the way of God’s government and develop the divine character during this mortal life in the Church age...God’s master plan calls for offering

salvation and eternal life to every person ever born, but his plan calls for doing that in a time-order.

Those called out of the world and into the Church at this time are called for a specific purpose and a specific work. This specific work was to make possible the spiritual training to aid in the conversion of humanity as a whole. They are called at a time when they are persecuted and fought against by Satan and by the rest of the world. The rest of the world will be called at a time when Satan is removed and they are aided and helped by Christ and the saints then made immortal in the kingdom of God.

Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving world and the professing traditional “Christianity” to this fact (II Cor. 4:4). Satan has deceived the entire world, including a professing traditional “Christianity” (Rev. 12:9)...

God...has called and still calls and prepares the CHURCH to overcome Satan--whereas those now blinded, uncalled and cut off from God have NOT had to overcome Satan. WHY?

WHY the CHURCH?

That we may QUALIFY to rule WITH and UNDER CHRIST in the kingdom of God--that we may prepare the way for the ULTIMATE CALL AND SALVATION OF THE WORLD.<sup>308</sup>

These beliefs are held by the *Continuing* Church of God. “Our God is the God of salvation” (Psalm 68:20). “All flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6). All will have an opportunity in this life or in “the age to come” (Matthew 12:32). His church taught that its ministry had ‘laying on of hands’ continuity.<sup>309</sup> His church also taught that the Laodiceans (Revelation 3:14-22), the era after Philadelphia, would not have the same focus on doing the work and loving the truth, and needed to repent.<sup>310</sup>

## 11. J. Tkach and the Start of the Laodicean Era

Herbert W. Armstrong died on January 16, 1986. This is apparently when the Philadelphia era of the Church of God ended and the Laodicean era began. Just prior to his death, Herbert Armstrong announced that Joseph Tkach would succeed him in running the church, as an evangelist.

Joseph Tkach publicly pledged to continue with the same doctrines and practices that Herbert W. Armstrong had implemented. He even stated that no man could fill Herbert W. Armstrong's shoes, but that he would follow in Herbert W. Armstrong's footsteps. Yet, within months, some subtle changes (omissions/change of emphasis) began to occur in WCG. Probably the first significant change was that the Tkach Administration no longer publicly taught that WCG represented Philadelphia and CG7 represented Sardis.<sup>311</sup>

After several years, this Administration made many changes and essentially taught against many of the teachings that Herbert Armstrong once embraced. It essentially nullified the need to keep the Ten Commandments, and 'changed' the gospel. Many, sadly, put up with it (2 Corinthians 11:4) while others (including me, Bob Thiel) attempted to show the Tkach Administration from scripture that it was going the wrong direction.

About two months before he died (he died September 23, 1995), Joseph Tkach invited me into his home in Pasadena to meet with him on personal matters. By this time, I had decided that he had made too many changes to be a true Church of God leader. Once meeting in his home, I was even more convinced that I should no longer have any affiliation with his Worldwide Church of God. So, I completely left WCG to attend the Global Church of God. After a management coup in GCG, I left for the Living Church of God. Then later, after certain heresies, etc. were taught by LCG, I led the formation of the *Continuing* Church of God.

Upon the death of Herbert Armstrong, Joseph Tkach took over and helped lead a great apostasy and that is consistent with what some passages about Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7-13 warn.

Upon Joseph Tkach's death he was replaced by his son, Joseph Tkach, Jr., who he had appointed to take over. Joseph Tkach, Jr. removed more COG teachings from the Worldwide Church of God and made the apostasy even more complete. There was a separation of wheat from tares (Matthew 13:24-30).

Because of the changes that occurred during the two Tkach administrations, many, sadly, left the truth of the Bible entirely. This was a major falling away (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:3). Roughly, two-thirds who had claimed to be faithful fell away, which is consistent with a prophecy in Zechariah 13:7-9.

In 2009, the Worldwide Church of God changed its name to Grace Communion International (GCI)<sup>312</sup> and now considers itself essentially another Protestant denomination. GCI has very little doctrinally that distinguishes it from the rest of the world's churches. GCI now does not tolerate many of the teachings that Herbert Armstrong endorsed. GCI is NOT a real COG.

Because of the changes imposed through the two Tkach administrations, during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, most people who attended WCG had to decide to change or leave. Some left for mainstream Greco-Roman groups, others left all religion, while some became GCI Protestants. Some became part of CG7. Yet, many others who left formed various Church of God groups or scattered into home churches.

Most who left WCG and claim COG affiliation do not teach or practice all the truths restored to the Philadelphia era of the Church of God, do not place their priority on proclaiming the gospel, do not have sufficient integrity, and/or have various significant differences from Herbert Armstrong's old WCG.

In this author's opinion, many of those who left WCG, but still consider themselves to be part of the Church of God, became part of the *Laodicean era* of the Church of God, with some becoming part of Sardis and even a few becoming part of Thyatira. None of those groups properly understand key end time prophecies, etc. and unless they repent they will end up going through the Great Tribulation (cf. Revelation 2:22, 3:3; 3:14-19).

## **12. The Philadelphian Church and the Global/Living/*Continuing* Church of God**

One group that was mainly faithful for a time to the teachings and practices of the Bible and the basic doctrines of Herbert Armstrong's old Radio/Worldwide Church of God was the Global, then Living Church of God. Its physical human leader was been Roderick C. Meredith, who left WCG in late 1992.

In January 1993, Dr. Meredith began a church with the name Global Church of God (GCG). About two years later, evangelist Dibar Apartian joined with him. While trying to please various ministers, Dr. Meredith made certain statements on governance and other matters that concerned many (including this author).

Then, after an unusual series of legal moves by some individuals who did not share his public vision for leading the church, Dr. Meredith decided it was necessary to leave GCG in late 1998 to form the Living Church of God (GCG in the USA shut itself down within a year). For a short time, my COGwriter.com website served as LCG's website until LCG's website got going.

Later, Dr. Meredith made me (Bob Thiel), over my objections, promise that I needed to tell him when I thought that he was "pulling punches" doctrinally. In early 2002, after LCG came out with its first public *Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs*, I sent him an email where I mentioned that I felt he was pulling punches doctrinally and informed him that the *Official Statement* seemed Laodicean. Many, but not all, of the additions I requested were adopted by LCG officially in November 2002.<sup>313</sup>

### **Prophetic and Doctrinal Matters**

In the Summer of 2005, Dr. Meredith appointed me to be an advisor to the evangelists on matters of doctrine and prophecy. Some of my advice was heeded, but much was agreed to, but not implemented. It was LCG's failure to keep promises and to publish known errors that was distressing. One LCG evangelist flat-out told me that it did not matter that errors were being sent out as most of their readers would not really know the difference.

This I found to be outrageous and unacceptable (cf. Jeremiah 48:10).

Before that happened, on October 3, 2008, **Dr. Meredith telephoned me and stated, “God may consider you to be a prophet.”** Shortly afterwards I told that to Dibar Apartian, who told me, “You are either ‘the one’ (‘the one’ to lead the Philadelphians at the end) or the biggest threat to the Church!” In 2010, Dibar Apartian confirmed I was not the biggest threat, but instead that God had an important end-time role for me.<sup>314</sup>

In January 2009, Dr. Meredith told me that if he raised himself to the office of apostle that he might ordain me as a prophet (which made me wonder about his view of spiritual gifts and theological authority). Although he did not raise himself up nor ordain me, in the Fall of 2011, two LCG ministers told me that I did not need to have hands laid upon me to be a prophet. I disagreed and **I specifically prayed about this ‘prophet matter’ and asked God to give me insight on whether He might consider me to be a prophet when I was to visit LCG’s offices in Charlotte, North Carolina in December 2011.**

**This prayer was answered** when I ended up having had hands laid upon me by LCG minister Gaylyn Bonjour on December 15, 2011. He laid hands upon me and anointed me with oil and unexpectedly prayed that I would be given a “double-portion” of God’s Spirit (which Gaylyn Bonjour ended up telling me was reminiscent of the mantle passing from Elijah to Elisha; cf. 2 Kings 2:9-15 and what this anointing could mean).

Gaylyn Bonjour’s mantle comments then, and in March 2012, made me wonder if the mantle had truly been passed and if the final phase of the work could begin (cf. Acts 13:41; Isaiah 22:20-23; Romans 9:28).

Earlier, back on December 16, 2011, there was a private lunch in Charlotte with me and LCG evangelists Dr. Meredith, Richard Ames, and Dr. Douglas Winnail. Richard Ames prayed, with “Amen” concurrence from Dr. Meredith and Dr. Winnail, that I would continue to do the work that God has had me to do, etc.

Richard Ames also specifically called my writings/work “an additional witness.” Hence, there was a broad top-level concurrence with the evangelical and prophetic fruits of that work. Various promises were made to me by Dr. Meredith in meetings that month concerning doctrinal corrections, several of which he specifically assigned due dates in January 2012--yet none were kept that year nor the next. Instead, LCG ‘doubled down’ and publicly promoted positions that several of its top leaders had admitted to me were errors. The Bible shows that the Jewish religious leaders somewhat knew about Jesus (John 3:1-2), yet betrayed Him (Matthew 27:18). Sadly, though various LCG evangelists knew/suspected my role in 2012 and agreed to fix errors, in their own manners, they betrayed me and the truth.

Consider also something that Herbert Armstrong wrote:

PERSECUTORS HAVE CALLED me a "false prophet." Now how would you KNOW whether the accusation IS true- or false? ... Actually, it probably is not very important to *you* to know whether my persecutors are right or wrong, when they call me dirty names, hurl epithets, resort to innuendo, impute sinister motives, strive to discredit, attempt character assassination. What is important to YOU is whether what you read in The PLAIN TRUTH really is the truth - whether what you hear over The WORLD TOMORROW broadcast is true-not whether I, as an individual, am true or false.

I think our readers know by now that we always say: "DON'T believe what we say *because* you believe in us." We say "Listen with open mind, without prejudice, then CHECK UP in your own Bible-*prove* whether it is true, and BELIEVE what you find *proved!*" I don't seek to induce people to believe in ME-I seek to lead them to believe in JESUS CHRIST!<sup>315</sup>

As far as accepting what I teach, I only expect people to believe me as I teach matters consistent with the Bible and facts. Don't *simply* believe me, but do believe the truths taught that are backed up by the Bible and/or historical or other facts.



As far as LCG goes, a series of doctrinal errors and issues came out of LCG in 2012. These truly raised concerns that LCG was not properly representing Philadelphia era teachings any more. It was not representing the pillar of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).<sup>316</sup>

On October 18, 2012, an LCG email to me said that over 20,000 booklets with known errors that perpetuated Catholic ‘myths’ would be distributed to the public.<sup>317</sup> In 2012, LCG called one doctrinal change (the falling away from false Christianity to another false form) as its distinguishing and unique doctrine and indicated that those who did not accept the change were either not Christians or were blinded by Satan.<sup>318</sup> My pleadings for standing up for the truth were ignored on this and several other doctrinal, historic, and prophetic issues.<sup>319</sup>

When we first discussed the ‘falling away’ in 2008, Dr. Meredith told me the position that he essentially adopted in 2012 was heretical. Yet in 2012, he would not distance himself from it, despite my repeated requests. Instead he embraced it, then later highly promoted it. He made it clear in an inaccurate letter he supposedly wrote (others wrote/assisted writing parts of it) dated 12/28/12 that he did not want to issue any retraction to this heretical doctrine, deal with literature/doctrinal issues I had been promised would be dealt with, nor truly embrace the final phase of the work. These all demonstrated that LCG was not qualified to hold the Philadelphia mantle as it was no longer truly grounded in truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The old Worldwide Church of God taught, “Christ has demonstrated His ability to ... reject from the Church those unfit to wear the Christian mantle.”<sup>320</sup>

Regarding the *mantle*, Roderick Meredith once wrote:

In II Kings 2:8-15, we find the account where the great prophet Elijah was taken up into heaven — turning his office and mantle over to Elisha...he asked for a "double portion" of Elijah's spirit to be upon him. As Elijah ascended up to heaven, his mantle fell on Elisha. ...

Today, you should personally awake to the fact that the mantle and power of Elijah will be manifested among

God's true servants in this age. For as John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17), so God says of our day:<sup>321</sup>

Unlike Herbert Armstrong who restored truths to the Philadelphia era, and Bob Thiel who added many more details to those truths and restored more that was lost regarding church history, prophecy, and doctrine, Dr. Meredith never not claimed to do that. Nor did he fulfill the prophetic office. Yet, *he* wrote that someone had to. He died on May 18, 2017.

Consider also, even after I left LCG, an email from LCG evangelist Douglas Winnail sent to me on January 7, 2013 stated, “we made comments to you that ‘you may be a prophet.’”<sup>322</sup>

### **The formation of the *Continuing Church of God***

My own experience with LCG seems to have some parallels with that of the late Herbert Armstrong and CG7.

Although unlike Herbert Armstrong’s experience with A.N. Dugger (because A.N. Dugger said he would not make the changes), those leaders often told me that they would correct various errors and deal with certain matters, yet they did not. Furthermore, although they agreed with much that I discussed with them concerning the final phase of the work, instead of implementing what we discussed, they essentially shut that door on December 28, 2012.

The prophet matter, the anointing, LCG doctrinal issues, the willingness by LCG to distribute known error, integrity issues, etc., persuaded me that the transition period was truly over and that the final phase of the work would have to be done outside of LCG. So, on December 28, 2012, it was necessary to form the *Continuing Church of God* (CCOG). LCG sent false information out about Dr. Meredith’s prophet comments about me the next month (cf. Romans 1:18; Jeremiah 48:10a).

The *Continuing Church of God* set out to fulfill Matthew 24:14 and Matthew 28:19-20 and to lead the final phase of the work.

Websites were developed, YouTube ‘television’ channels begun, a printed magazine started (which quickly became available in multiple languages), radio interviews were begun, and the Gospel of the Kingdom was proclaimed to the world. CCOG now has congregations around the world and is one of the largest COGs.<sup>323</sup> The annualized 30%+ growth per year that CCOG has averaged is reminiscent of what the old Radio Church of God once had: LCG has longed for that itself to show God’s “blessings,” but has not gotten close to attaining it.<sup>324</sup>

## **Dreams and the *Continuing* Church of God**

Do dreams and prophets have any place in the Christian Church today? Are any related to the *Continuing* Church of God? Of course, many do not want to believe that God uses dreams or will discount the ones they hear about.

Yet, the Bible shows that God often chooses to work with prophets through a dream:

6 “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. (Numbers 12:6)

Notice that the above says that God will speak to His prophet in a dream. Years ago, I had a dream, which while I did not understand it at first, as it became more and more fulfilled over the years, I began to understand it and believe it was from God.

I was about 50 at the time (which essentially makes me an ‘old man’ per Numbers 8:25; cf. John 8:57). At first it made little sense. Yet, the Prophet Jeremiah at least once wondered about a message he received and later determined it was from God (Jeremiah 32:6-8), and the Apostle Peter at least once had a vision that he did not understand (Acts 10:9-17) until later as well (Acts 11:5-17). The same goes for Daniel (Daniel 8).

In my dream, there seemed to be two parallel lines. LCG’s then presiding evangelist, Roderick Meredith, was on the top line and I was on the line much below. In the dream, I kept calling up to

Dr. Meredith, but he never would respond. This lack of response made no sense to me during the dream. Then after what seemed to be a long time, the lines-crossed with his line dropping and my line going up.

One reason that I did not understand it at the time was that I was on relatively close speaking terms with Dr. Meredith then (he repeatedly told me he considered me to be his friend, plus he had later appointed me an adviser to LCG on matters of doctrine and prophecy), so that aspect of the dream made no sense. Also, since I had no intentions of leaving Living Church of God then (and certainly no plans to start a separate church), it was not clear what the dream was saying. Another reason I was unsure about the dream then was that I had not had any anointing for the Holy Spirit beyond baptism when I had that dream.

But these matters changed eventually. For one, as mentioned before, when I had hands laid upon me I was unexpectedly anointed for a ‘double-portion’ of God’s Spirit (cf. 2 Kings 2:9) on December 15, 2011 by an LCG minister.

Furthermore, over time, Dr. Meredith became more distant from me, would not keep various promises to me, and ultimately stopped speaking with me. And after I got a letter from him on 12/28/12, it was clear to me that there was no way that the Philadelphia mantle could be with him or any of his remaining leaders.<sup>325</sup> These subsequent events showed me that the dream was being fulfilled. This dream gave an outline of what would happen in the future and that has happened.

Notice also:

28 The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream;  
And he who has My word, let him speak My word  
faithfully. (Jeremiah 23:28)

I also had another dream (and do not recall precisely when, but it was prior to 2012) reminiscent of a vision of Isaiah’s. In that dream, I recall responding to a request from God and saying,

“Here I am, send me” (cf. Isaiah 6:8). I have spoken God’s word faithfully as those who have heard me preach can attest.

The Bible shows God often chooses to work with prophets via dreams (Numbers 12:6) and I had at least two that events later confirmed (which I told LCG leaders of). The Bible records God often has used dreams to give messages (Genesis 20:3-7, 28:10-17, 31:10-13, 31:24, 37:5-10, 40:5-18, 41:1-32; Numbers 12:6; Judges 7:13-15; 1 Kings 3:5-15; Daniel 2:3-45, 4:4-27, 7:1-28; Matthew 1:20-25, 2:12, 2:13, 2:19, 2:22; Acts 2:16-17; 16:9).

Though many discount all dreams, Herbert W. Armstrong believed that his wife Loma Armstrong had a dream from God prior to the start of the Radio Church of God, although it took him some years to accept the validity of it:

God spoke to my wife in what might have been an intense unusual dream, or a vision — but it was years later before we came to realize that this really was a message from God.<sup>326</sup>

That dream had two parts having to do with proclamation, with the second part running until Jesus returned.<sup>327</sup> This was a dream to a woman that preceded the start of the old Radio Church of God that Herbert W. Armstrong led. About dreams, he wrote:

99,999 times out of 100,000, when people think GOD is speaking to them in a dream or vision in this day and age, it is pure imagination, or some form of self - hypnosis or self - deception. I have only come to believe that this dream was a bonafide call from God in the light of subsequent events.<sup>328</sup>

He was correct that most dreams are not from God, even if people think that they are. Dreams from God are shown to be correct in the light of subsequent events (though just because a dream ends up being correct, that does of itself, not prove it was from God as there can be other factors, cf. Deuteronomy 13:1-5, but God does sometimes use dreams, per Numbers 12:6 and Acts 2:17-18—said He would do so in the end times; cf. Joel 2:28).

Two questions to ponder are: what about the second half of Loma's dream and have there been any dreams from God in more recent years? If the first proclaiming part of Loma's dream was from God, then the second part (which Herbert Armstrong did not fulfill) must have to be fulfilled later.

We in CCOG are doing THAT end time proclamation work that Mrs. Armstrong's dream told of! Consider also that beyond Loma D. Armstrong's and my own dreams, there was at least one other dream that essentially confirmed that the mantle had passed to me and the *Continuing* Church of God. This dream came to a woman named Fesilafai Fiso Leaana of New Zealand after going to bed on December 8, 2012.<sup>329</sup> Portions of it, too, were also confirmed by subsequent events, including the start of the *Continuing* COG.<sup>330</sup> Consider that the Bible teaches:

16 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' (Matthew 18:16)

19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. (1Timothy 5:19)

Since Gaylyn Bonjour has always freely admitted that he did the 'double-portion' anointing, my account of that always has had a second witness. Despite the anointing answer to prayer, plus confirmed dreams, *many Laodiceans act like the ancient Sadducees and will not accept how God works* (Mark 12:23-32).

With the addition of various facts, plus the dream from Fesilafai Leaana (whom I did not meet until September 14, 2013), it looks that God was planning on making it clearer for true Philadelphians to see that the mantle location had truly changed.

Others, also, later had dreams confirmed related to the CCOG.

The Bible shows that God used dreams in both the Old and New Testaments. The New Testament also prophesied that God would use dreams in the last days (Acts 2:17). Biblical steadfastness and confirmed dreams should provide proof to those who really believe the word of God that God is working through the CCOG.

**Furthermore, consider that if God used a dream prior to the start of the Radio Church of God, does it not make sense that God would use dreams again for the final phase of the work?**

The true faith has long been “spoken against everywhere” (Acts 28:22). Sadly, most will discount dreams and their confirmations as proof of anything they do not wish to believe. Many want more dramatic signs (Matthew 12:38; 1 Kings 19:11-12), but God does not always do it that way—He wants people to accept *His* signs (Matthew 12:39-42; 1 Kings 19:12-14).

### **Proclamation Success**

Philadelphians should have success in proclaiming the gospel and going through the doors that God opens (cf. Revelation 3:7-9). Right after CCOG formed, I posted that CCOG would reach more people in its first 30 days than any non-GTA (Garner Ted Armstrong) group ever had, and this came to pass.<sup>331</sup>

Also, contacts from essentially every nation on earth have since been verified as viewing CCOGs websites (ccog.org, ccog.asia, ccog.in, ccog.eu, cdlidd.es, etc.) and/or cogwriter.com. The www.cogwriter.com (which is a website of this author) reached over 220 nations, entities, and territories as measured by AWstats within a short time of the formation of CCOG. The YouTube channels of the *Continuing* Church of God have been viewed in at least 220 countries. Plus we also have animations.

Additionally, specific websites were acquired and further developed to reach and target people in the English-speaking world, Spanish-speaking world, Asia (with different sites and languages), Europe, the Philippines, Africa, and elsewhere. Tens of millions of computers have been reached through Google campaigns. Millions of people have been reached over the radio. We have had our materials translated into over 100 languages. And thousands of books and magazines have been given away.

While the real COG is small (Luke 11:32; Jude 14; Romans 11:5), and the Philadelphia remnant itself is smaller during this Laodicean age, all should realize that the Bible indicates that

none should despise “the day of small things” (Zechariah 4:10). The CCOG has been the fastest growing xWCG group in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

How could all that be accomplished without big budgets or a large staff? Well, the Bible teaches:

6 Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit  
(Zechariah 4:6).

Thus, as God pours out more of His Spirit in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Joel 2:29-31), a small number of people will apparently be used to finish His work (cf. John 4:34).

Jesus Himself said that the Philadelphian Church only had “a little strength” to go through the “open door” He set before it (Revelation 3:8). A group with little strength is normally not a huge one. We in the *Continuing* Church of God are striving to lead the final phase of the work.

### **God Has a Loving and Exciting Plan**

The Bible teaches that God has a plan for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:38) and is a God of love (1 John 4:8,16; John 3:16).

The Bible also shows that God will intervene for the elect’s sake (Matthew 24:22) and that He has a loving and exciting plan for humankind (Revelation 21:1-8). “The LORD is good” (Nahum 1:7). Since “God is love” (1 John 4:16), He made humankind in order to share His love. His commandments also teach how to love Him and our neighbor (Psalm 119; Matthew 22:36-40; James 2:8-11). And He wants humankind to depart from evil and to do good (Psalm 34:14; Galatians 6:7-10).

We in the *Continuing* Church of God believe the Good News of Christ, His Gospel of the Kingdom, is that Jesus will return and He and His saints will rule, He will expect humans to obey the Ten Commandments, and that humankind will do well during this millennium precisely because most will obey God. We believe that the Ten Commandments express love to God and



our neighbor (cf. Matthew 22:36-40); they are the law of liberty (James 2:8-12). “Let brotherly love continue” (Hebrews 13:1).

The first sermon given in the *Continuing Church of God* was titled *It's All About Love*. That was also the title of an article in the first edition of our *Bible News Prophecy* magazine.

The New Testament is clear that God wants Christians to develop holy godly character:

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

14 **Pursue peace** with all people, **and holiness**, without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct (1 Peter 1:15).

Christians are to surrender to God (James 4:7), have Jesus live His life in them (Galatians 2:20), strive to live as Jesus lived (1 John 2:6), and are to receive love (John 3:16), and give love (Romans 13:8-10; 1 John 4:7-11). This is what true Christianity is all about. True Christians are to make eternity better. However, according to Jesus, few will properly follow the biblical instructions in this age as they find it too difficult (Matthew 7:14). Paul wrote that only a “remnant” would be part of the elect in this age (Romans 11:5).

Yet, the Bible shows that God always had a plan that would take into account how human beings would have rebelled against Him (cf. 1 Peter 1:20-21). Since God is all-knowing (Isaiah 46:9–10), we in the CCOG believe that God is smart enough to have developed a plan that does not result in the vast majority of humanity having to suffer endless torment.

Unlike those with Calvinist beliefs, we in the *Continuing Church of God* truly believe:

**20 Our God is the God of salvation (Psalm 68:20).**

Certainly “the God of salvation” has a plan of salvation that works for more than just a relative few.

Notice also:

43 Whoever is wise will observe these things, And they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord (Psalm 107:43).

God’s plan is wise and is based upon His loving kindness. All will have an opportunity for salvation at the time that is best for each of them. Although this “apocatastasis” view was part of early Christianity, it was condemned by the Greco-Roman Council of Constantinople in 543, as by that time the doctrine of “purgatory” was gaining greater acceptance.<sup>332</sup>

Interestingly, the Eastern Orthodox never adopted purgatory as a dogma and some there still hold to the view that God may call people as late as near the time of the “Last Day”<sup>333</sup> (cf. John 7:37-38; Revelation 20:11-13).

We in the *Continuing Church of God* believe that God’s plan is *logical* and will result in nearly everyone who ever lived repenting, accepting Jesus, and being saved, no matter what their religion or background was. We believe that there are hundreds of verses in the Bible that show this and that this is God’s will (e.g. 2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16-17). This plan is also consistent with writings about Christianity throughout history, although most in modern times seem to wish to overlook that fact (see also our free, online at [www.ccog.org](http://www.ccog.org), booklet: *Universal Offer of Salvation*).

Those in the faithful Church of God specifically believe that the Bible teaches that God made everything and it was very good (Genesis 1:1-31). God made humans upright (Ecclesiastes 7:29).

Yet, humans thought that they could disobey God's commands (Genesis 3:6). Because of that disobedience, God stopped humans from having immediate access to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22-24) on their own (John 6:44). God had a plan of redemption from before the foundation of the world involving Jesus Christ (Revelation 13:8).

Like early Greco-Roman saints such as Irenaeus<sup>334</sup> and Hippolytus,<sup>335</sup> we in the *Continuing* Church of God believe that God gave humans 6,000 years to live their own way, mainly apart from Him, to be followed by Jesus' millennial reign.

This 6,000 years is also very close to being up (likely in the next decade). We also believe the Bible reveals that humans will mess things up so badly towards the end that, unless those days were shortened, "no one would survive" (Matthew 24:22, NIV).

As the Bible teaches, we in the *Continuing* Church of God also believe that some are elect now, while many others are blinded:

14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded (Romans 11:7).

4...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 Corinthians 4:4).

We understand Jesus' teaching that those blinded do not have their blindness held against them (John 9:41; cf. Isaiah 6:9-13).

This is most likely part of why scripture shows:

6...all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Luke 3:6).

2 O You who hear prayer, To You all flesh will come (Psalms 65:2).

13 Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, 14 Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people, A marvelous work and a wonder; For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden."...24 These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, And those who complained will learn doctrine. (Isaiah 29:24)

16 I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, And crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, And not forsake them. 17 They shall be turned back, They shall be greatly ashamed, Who trust in carved images, Who say to the molded images, 'You are our gods.' 18 "Hear, you deaf; And look, you blind, that you may see. (Isaiah 42:16-18)

10 The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; And **all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God** (Isaiah 52:10).

When people are no longer blind and Satan ("the god of this world," 2 Corinthians 4:4, KJV) is cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10), the White Throne Judgment will begin (Revelation 20:11-12), and salvation will be offered to all whom were blinded to it before (cf. Romans 11:7,17).

25 "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25).

God is just and God will do right. All who ever lived will have a real opportunity for salvation.

When Revelation 20:12 states, “And the dead were judged,” we in CCOG believe that these people actually get judged. Yet, certain Protestants claim that these people are “the wicked dead,”<sup>336</sup> which implies that they were judged prior to the time of the Great White Throne Judgment.

While the apparent majority of mainstream Protestants and Roman Catholics teach that most will suffer eternal torment, the Bible shows that “mercy triumphs judgment” (James 2:13). The Bible shows that God will plead with all flesh (Jeremiah 25:31; Isaiah 3:13) and that many will respond (Isaiah 42:16-18; 65:24; Ezekiel 11:16-20; 36:24-38; Hosea 2:23).

Although not all will accept, and this is not a second chance (those who truly had a chance and rejected God’s Holy Spirit will not get that opportunity to be forgiven per Mark 3:29), most will repent.

We in the Philadelphia portion of the Church of God believe that God is wise enough and loving enough to have a plan whereby salvation will be offered to all, and accepted by most.

We in the *Continuing* Church of God teach that most who ever lived will accept God’s generous offer (cf. Psalm 107:1-3; Matthew 8:11; Psalm 66:3) of salvation through Jesus (Acts 4:10-12) — who came so that all might be saved (John 3:16-17).

## **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Remnant Philadelphia Church**

Why is there a remnant of the Philadelphia portion of the Church of God extant during the Laodicean age?

To finish the work of God (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20) including preparing and leading the “short work” (Romans 9:28).

Why is this now being led by the *Continuing* Church of God?

Is it because we are smarter than others?

No.

It is because we are among the weak that God has called to “confound the mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:26-31) and He will do this through His spirit (Zechariah 4:6-10). Also because, in areas that there seem to be a conflict, we believe the word of God over traditions of men—even if those traditions come from recognized COG leaders.

The most faithful in the COG do strive to be faithful to promote biblical Christianity, do strive to obey God, AND do spend resources to proclaim the gospel and warn those who may listen.

### **Non-Philadelphia Christians and the Greco-Romans**

The Bible also refers to certain Christians as “lukewarm.” Laodicea is the last of the Churches of God mentioned in the book of Revelation (Revelation 3:14-22). As the last, it will seemingly be the most dominant in terms of numbers, in the end time. Since Jesus is not pleased with the work of the Laodiceans, and the gospel of the kingdom must be preached to the world as a witness, so that the end can come (Matthew 24:14), it must be those of the *Philadelphian Church* that best go through the open door of Revelation 3:8 to proclaim the gospel. And that is part of why the Philadelphia remnant has to exist.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that the Book of Revelation does indicate that some of three other church eras will be around at the end—and they will all apparently be subject to the Great Tribulation (for Thyatira, see Revelation 2:22; Sardis, see 3:3; and Laodicea, see 3:19). Yet, Jesus does promise to protect the Philadelphians, and *only* specifically the Philadelphians, from this hour of trial (Revelation 3:10; though some repentant Thyatirans (Revelation 2:22), etc. may also be spared.

The Vatican, Eastern Orthodox, and various Protestants are working towards ecumenical unity. According to a Byzantine

prophet, there will be a final (the Orthodox officially recognize seven previous ones) ecumenical council:

*Saint Neilos the Myrrh-Gusher* (died 1592): During that time the Eighth and last Ecumenical Synod will take place, which will satisfy the contentions of the heretics...<sup>337</sup>

By satisfying “heretics,” clearly this council compromises and changes the religion, which will be called “Catholic.” If heretics are truly heretics from the teachings of the Bible, should their complaints be satisfied?

In 2014, the Eastern Orthodox called for an eighth ecumenical synod to be held in 2016 at the Hagia Irene,<sup>338</sup> but then changed the location (to Crete) and did not call it ecumenical.<sup>339</sup> Since Constantinople Patriarch Bartholomew has stated that unity with the Vatican cannot occur without a council/synod,<sup>340</sup> another council could prove to be quite important for the future.

The Apostle Paul warned that deceivers would grow worse in the end (2 Timothy 3:13), and the real goals of the ecumenical agenda are wrong. The Bible warns against a coming universal, ecumenical, Babylonian unity (Revelation 13:4-8; 18:4; Zechariah 2:6-7). It also teaches that true Christian unity will not exist until AFTER the return of Jesus (Ephesians 4:13; Revelation 19-22; Zechariah 2:10-13).

Additionally, the Bible warns about a leader who “shall intend to change times and law” (Daniel 7:25). The Catholic saint Jerome wrote that this leader was the King of the North and Antichrist.<sup>341</sup> He, like many, confused the two as the Beast/King of the North is primarily a political-military leader who will persecute the saints, per Daniel 11:30-35, while the final Antichrist is primarily a religious leader per 1 John 4:1-3 who will support that Beast per Revelation 13:12.

Yet, consider if an antipope convened/attended an ecumenical synod that satisfied heretics; would he not also be supportive of changing laws?

We in the *Continuing* Church of God have been warning against the religious ecumenical movement and have been subject to condemnation for doing so.

We are also warning that the Bible tells of terrorism (Leviticus 26:17; Deuteronomy 32:25), but that for a time, this will likely be diminished after a temporal peace deal is confirmed (Daniel 9:27). After the deal is in place, many will feel that a lasting human-led age of peace is possible, yet sudden destruction will come (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

### **The Final Phase of the Work**

During the final phase of the work, there will come a persecution of true believers, Christ's gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the world as a witness, the two witnesses will rise up (Revelation 11), angels will give messages, and Jesus will return.

The Greco-Romans have prophecies/writings against the rising up of the faithful who keep the Sabbath, who stand for original Christianity, are opposed to trinitarianism, and who teach the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. Do you wish to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29)? Or will you fall for the threats, signs, and lying wonders from the “synagogue of Satan”?

Part of the final phase of the work will involve:

- Dealing with the ecumenical agenda/religion that will rise up (cf. Daniel 11:36-38; Revelation 13:4,8; 14:8-13; Matthew 24:14-15) with signs and lying wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12),
- Dealing with a Lady/Virgin/harlot who would deceive utilizing sorceries, enchantments, and more (Isaiah 47:1-13; Revelation 17:1-9,18; 18:7,23-24),
- Enduring the Beast power who will take steps to eliminate them (Revelation 13:7,13-17; 14:12-13; Daniel 7:21,25).



Those who will be faithful during this onslaught should not be ignorant of Satan's devices (cf. Job 5:12; 2 Corinthians 2:11), including false prophecies and twisted versions of church history (cf. Isaiah 47:10). "Doctrines of demons" will deceive some who thought that they were God's people (1 Timothy 4:1). Explaining biblical prophecies will lead to persecutions.

It is the highly dedicated in the real Church of God that will help finish the final phase of the work before (Matthew 24:14-15) and during (Revelation 11:3-14) the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord. Christ's gospel of the kingdom will not please the Beast.

Presuming no major organizational changes, for many reasons, the final phase of the work will be led by the *Continuing* Church of God. Continuing and proclaiming the faith once for all delivered from the beginning (Jude 3; Acts 14:21-22). During the final phase of the work, the faithful in God's Church will take a stand against the views of those who will support the compromised persecuting religious power (cf. Revelation 17:1-6) and many will be killed (Revelation 6:11; 14:13). Though aspects of this have occurred throughout history, in the end it will be a major testing of the patience of the saints of the holy covenant (Daniel 11:28-35; Revelation 14:8-12).

This final phase of the work seemingly will include identifying what is happening in the world (and specifically in Europe, the Middle East, and the Anglo-descended nations), finishing the proclamation of Christ's gospel of the kingdom as a witness along with persecution (Matthew 24:9-14), the rise and work of the two witnesses (Revelation 11:2-12; which will likely overlap a few days with Matthew 24:14), the likely assistance to the two witnesses by the scattered flock (Revelation 20:4; cf. Luke 9:2-6), the three angel's messages (Revelation 14:8-11; plus other angelic interventions), and the witness of those persecuted and martyred for Jesus (cf. Revelation 17:6).

Faithful Christians need to be "ready to give an answer" (1 Peter 3:15, KJV), "ready to give a defense" (1 Peter 3:15, NKJV) to those that will tend to support the power that God opposes. Part of the way that the more faithful will be able to resist these

“traditions” will be by better understanding the Bible, church history, prophecy, and Satan's plans and tactics.

Christians need to know the truth about true Christianity and Satan's significant counterfeit (John 8:32). The Greco-Roman leaders may point to a misleading version of early Christianity, a claimed succession of bishops, and various private prophecies /apparitions/signs as proof of their legitimacy. This “proof,” combined with military and economic control (Revelation 13), will be overwhelming for many people.

But still, the Bible shows that not all will be deceived, and a great multitude will respond to the message of God as brought forth during the tribulation (Revelation 7:9-13) by His two witnesses and the rest of the church. This will greatly anger the Beast and the False Prophet, who will insist that the Christ the two witnesses are proclaiming is the same one that they and their earlier prophets have indicated is the Antichrist.

Most will be deceived because they do not know the God of the Bible nor what the actual practices of the early true Christian church were (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11). Most will ignore the Bible, ignore this text, and/or challenge some of the statements in it. Most will conclude that COG trials are not for them. Most will come up with reasons to not respond to the historical truth.

Although I have tried to be careful with sources, inadvertent mistakes are bound to happen. I do expect some may challenge references as well.

Those who wish to follow Jesus need to follow the example of the Bereans and search “the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). They can also independently look into church history and find out that the only explanation of what happened from the beginning to the end makes biblical sense, for a God of love, is essentially the message that we in the Church of God proclaim.

The Bible shows that many who support the Beast and the False Prophet will actually fight against the returning Jesus Christ

(Revelation 19:19). Sadly, several “Catholic” private prophecies clearly also encourage this.

### **The Bible Shows that Jesus and His True Followers Will Win**

Yet, Jesus will, of course, win. His millennial kingdom will be established, despite what any leader/pontiff believes. And while some will rebel after the millennium (Revelation 20:7-10), after the second resurrection (Revelation 20:11-12), there is an age to come where nearly all who ever lived will be resurrected (Revelation 20:5).

God will seek those that have been lost (Ezekiel 34:11-16).

Since God is a God of love, nearly all of them will accept their first real offer of salvation (which may last up to one hundred years per Isaiah 65:20-25; cf. Romans 11:26;9:6).

And for those who accept God’s way of life, including keeping His commandments will be part of His eternal kingdom:

1 Now 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. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." 6 And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. 7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. 8 But the

cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:1-8).

14 Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. 15 But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. 16 I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches (Revelation 22:14-16).

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20).

Until then, the Bible shows that God will guide His church, from the beginning to the end. God will call all who will have an opportunity for salvation (Isaiah 52:10, 56:1; Luke 3:6) for in the *Continuing* Church of God we believe, "Our God is the God of salvation" (Psalm 68:20).

### **Can YOU Believe and ACT on the TRUTH?**

The original Christian church had many practices that seem Jewish to Greco-Romans. Many groups have claimed to be part of the true COG, but have betrayed it—even the Apostles had this problem (1 John 2:18-19; 2 Corinthians 11:13-14, 3 John 9-10).

As this text has hopefully shown, there is a compelling case for those who love the truth, that Christ's church was to continue with those same "Judeo-Christian" practices and was prophesied to be composed of the churches of Revelation 2 & 3.

Can you believe the truth?

Many will not, despite having the truth explained.

Consider the following prophecies from the Old and New Testaments:

<sup>5</sup> Look among the nations and watch — Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. (Habakkuk 1:5)

<sup>41</sup> 'Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.' (Acts 13:41)

Check out the scriptures and historical references in this booklet and believe the truth. Do not harden your heart (cf. Hebrews 3:8).

The Bible teaches that you are not to let family, traditions, societal pressures, or so-called intellectuals stop you from truly following Jesus (Matthew 10:37, 15:9; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; 1 Timothy 6:20).

I pray that, despite my own flaws and imperfections, by putting together so many scriptural and historical references, I have made a compelling case that the most faithful church, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with connections to that original Christian church, is the *Continuing* Church of God.

Let brotherly love continue (Hebrews 13:1).

*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”* (Revelation 3:13).

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*Contending earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude3).*

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## **Continuing Church of God Website Information**

**CCOG.ORG** The English language website for the *Continuing Church of God*. Also, with links to materials in 100 languages.

**CCOG.ASIA** Asian-focused website, with Asian languages.

**CCOG.IN** India-focused website, with Indian languages.

**CCOG.EU** European-focused website, with European languages.

**CCOG.NZ** Website targeted towards New Zealand.

**CCOGAFRICA.ORG** Website targeted towards Africa.

**CCOGCANADA.CA** Website targeted towards Canada.

**CDLIDD.ES** This is a totally Spanish language website.

**PNIND.PH** Philippines-focused website, with some Tagalog.

## **Radio & YouTube Video Channels**

**BIBLENEWSPROPHECY.NET** Bible News Prophecy online radio.

**Bible News Prophecy** channel. YouTube sermonettes.

**CCOGAfrica** channel. YouTube video messages from Africa.

**CCOG Animations** channel. Directed towards young adults.

**CDLIDDsermones** channel. YouTube sermons in Spanish.

**ContinuingCOG** channel. YouTube video sermons.

## **News and History Websites**

**CHURCHHISTORYBOOK.COM** Church history website.

**COGWRITER.COM** News, history, and prophecy website.

## **Free Booklets at CCOG.org include:**

*Christians: Ambassadors for the Kingdom of God*

*Faith for Those God Has Called and Chosen*

*God's Holy Days or Demonic Holidays?*

*Is God Calling You?*

*Is God's Existence Logical?*

*Prayer: What Does the Bible Teach?*

*Proof Jesus is the Messiah*

*The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*

*The Ten Commandments: The Decalogue, Christianity, and the Beast*

*Universal Offer of Salvation: Can God save the lost?*

*Where is the True Christian Church Today?*