

Research article:

SHOULD WE 'MOVE ON' FROM THE OLD DOCTRINES WHICH CAME INTO THE WCG? OR SHOULD WE HAVE CONTINUITY?

**By CM White
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In the matter of doctrine, should we water-down what was brought to us via HWA? What about social issues and values? Much has been made of certain Churches of God trying to find their identity - can you have an identity without holding on to one's origins and roots?

Should we have symbolic and doctrinal continuity with the teachings of HWA or alter them, water them down or place them on the shelf? What have been the expectations and hopes of most Church of God members?

Should we 'move on'? Yes, in the sense of moving forward by utilisation of members and in doing the Work. But not in changing or refusing to uphold the truths which came via HWA.

One of the more disgraceful comments being pushed by a small group is that we should 'move on' from the Biblical teachings that came through HWA and the historical links to WCG. All they seem to want is the Sabbath, Holy Days and (supposed) Christian living while ignoring the other 90% of the Bible which HWA taught and which we all once believed. God is central to all of this - our faithfulness to the truths He has restored in these days. After all, it is our God Who inspired the following scriptures:

"contend for the faith which was once delivered" (Jude 3) and "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1Thess 5:21).

The principle of maintaining our teachings (ie taking a conservative approach) whilst progressively looking at new ways of proclaiming the Gospel, involving the members and structuring the Church administratively to go forward in a world in many ways different to what it was thirty or forty years ago, is one which Herbert Armstrong practiced.

In doctrine, his theology was largely based on the teachings of the Church of God (seventh day) and Glengarry Rupert. But he built on those foundations and value-added to them; he also carefully sifted through the materials of others such as JH Allen, to pull together a comprehensive and systematic theology. In reaching the world, he was initially local, then regional, later he founded a college; he then used TV extensively, met world leaders and so on. Administratively he had a local church approach, followed by more collegial with input from other men in the 1950s. In the 1960s the Work revolved around three men primarily, in the 1970s around two men; and in the 1980s around one man (himself) and a Council of Elders.

Similarly, today, we should go deeper and deeper into the teachings which came via him, with more detail and information to back them up. We should use new technologies to further the Work in addition to existing technologies and utilise the talents and spiritual gifts in the congregation. And in administration, where there is no single man obviously 'head and shoulders' above the rest, succeeding HWA, that an approach with appropriate checks 'n balances, input, participation and means to provide impartiality and justice in affairs involving conflict should be adopted. In these areas Mr Armstrong may be described as a 'progressive conservative'. He moved forward with technology, administration and gained a deeper understanding of the Bible - an understanding which he passed on to us and summarized in his excellent "Mystery of the Ages".

Should we preach popular concepts of Christian living or Biblical concepts of Christian living?

Strangely enough, many of those that wish to go on about supposed 'Christian living' claim that it was seldom taught in the old WCG and yet have all sorts of excuses not to fellowship,

help the under-privileged or study the Bible to know God's will. In fact, they wouldn't give you a glass of water in Summer or a slice of bread in Winter. So much for their 'Christian living'. As many WCG members used to exclaim in the late 1980s-early 1990s - 'never has there been so much preaching about the word love and Christian living and yet so little of it has been demonstrated. The fact is, under HWA, he taught character development and associated Bible study, prayer, fasting, fellowship, principles of right relationships, health and so many aspects of developing Godly attributes etc - so much for the false claims that we taught very little Christian living in the old WCG. The fact is that fellowship and socialising was much better in the old WCG than anything experienced by the general membership since that time. The fact is, I have looked over church sermon notes stretching back over twenty years and there was an excellent balance on all aspects of scripture including Christian living, doctrine, prophecy, and so on. The fact is, for so many today, worn out by the spiritual struggle, they have lost their zeal for Bible study - it has become too difficult for them. Researching the scriptures has become 'vanity' and 'intellectual' because it means solidifying doctrinal understanding and that takes effort.

They wish to drop much of what they knew and try to be nice, calling it 'Christian living. Yet, without knowing it, being nice is not all there is to Christian living. A deep study and understanding of God's Word is an essential criteria which many have lost sight of.

Where is this leading us to then? The easy option of supposed 'Christian living' - talking about Christian living without using God's Word as the foundation and the framework, is leading us into a new era of claiming to hold on to the truth while in practice absorbing the world's 'values' and not having zeal to hold on to our truths. Out the window they go. And the vacuum is filled with supposed 'Christian living' - but they have not yet justified Christian living without doctrine or a framework of Biblical values. Their 'Christian living' appears to be a spaghetti of ideas thrown around - when they talk or publicly pronounce it, it does not fit within a plan, framework or upon a foundation. In fact, it comes very close to 'replacement theology' - of replacing God's laws, doctrines, prophecies and outreach, bearing no real fruit, with this world's churches attempts to promote a Christian living without seeking the full counsel of God's Word. They see many doctrines as hindrances to 'Christian living', that intense Bible study is 'intellectualism', that we need more music and singing at church services and less teaching of God's Word.

When one discusses these things with these people, 'Christian living' to them is obviously merely trying to be nice. While that is very important, most non-Sabbatarians out there try and be nice, as do most Hindus, Moslems and atheists! Most people try and be nice - but is that good enough? Is it acceptable to God? Or is it the easy option - are they trumpeting that we must try and be nice while not deeply drinking in of the Word of God and His will, His truths and His values? What I am trying to say is that by eschewing much of the Word of God for THEIR interpretation of 'Christian living' - THEIR form of righteousness - which God labels as filthy rags. The fact is, trying to practice 'Christian living' without the truth, right values, true doctrine, a positive attitude toward outreach etc is hardly acceptable to God. Dumping large portions of the Word of God, watering-down truths as if they were an impediment to

living a good life or attracting new people, is not Christian living! There can be no acceptable Christian living without fervently believing in and proving true doctrine.

Where is God in all of this? Is His will not paramount? Yes, let's try and be nice with the assistance of His Spirit, but let's not forget what real Christian living is - what the Word of God is all about, and not what we want to think it is - which is almost invariably what the world interprets it as.

To exacerbate this decline in Biblical understanding, some are now calling for less and less Biblical teaching on the Sabbath about doctrine, prophecy, the Kingdom or the Work. Instead, they want more sermons speaking smooth things, or about problems on marriage and child-rearing. They know not that the more one concentrates on problems, the less likely they will be solved. While we must attend to problems, we should also adopt a Godly approach by putting on Christ and being like Him - look outwards, reach out, help others, fellowship and do a Work. Proclaim the Kingdom of God and the prophecies. Warn Israel. Study deeply the doctrines, typology and other fascinating areas of God's Word. Be forward looking and quit concentrating on problems in sermons. Preach the Kingdom of God and all of God's Word, not your particular interests or having little 'digs' at members publicly.

Having considered these attacks upon our origin, roots and doctrinal heritage, I offer the following comments:

1. this term of moving on reminds me (and others) of what Tkach and co used to push. Where did this lead us?
2. many who say this are liberals who water-down so much; they refuse to uphold much of their church's beliefs; they malign those members loyal to the truth; make statements such as 'we should move on' from HWA and his teachings and shelve most of them; or state that all of Tkach's changes were fine except the last ones dealing with the Sabbath and Holy Days
3. could they please explain what it is they are going to 'move on' to? Any move onwards from those heights of understanding is only downwards. They may also wish to explain at the same time why in four years since their particular group has formed they have continued the WCG ways and lifeless messages and hints being dropped all over the place in that group? Has this not meant an additional four years of Tkachism - demoralising, lifeless messages that do not build up, but which may be heard in any Sunday church? Why is this so? And is this leading ever more members to either reject or have little interest in much of what HWA taught?

As a result of the 'food' fed to some of them, they have experienced a vacuum, which they are beginning to fill with all sorts of false ideas. 'Itching ears' is leading many away from the truth (II Tim 4:3-4). Bizarre ideas are filling the heads of many who once were very logical and rational in their thinking. They now think it is 'fun' and 'freedom' to experiment with false

teachings - after all the nature of God, for instance, is only a 'little and minor thing' to them, as some of them state. They seem to think that the truths that came via HWA are open for debate and change, as if these doctrines are just petty little toys to play with. They cannot see them as precious truths.

4. if their current sermons and statements reflect the only doctrines they wish to hold on to, how come their congregations/areas are not being blessed? Is there a connection? Do they wish to 'move on' to hold on to just a handful of doctrines? Where are they taking us and why are they not being upfront and honest about it?

5. we are meant to be fishers of men with adequate nets. Currently we are not even attracting WCGers or non-aligned sabbatarians, let alone new people. The reason: potential members from these sources see us as not continuing the WCG/HWA tradition and do not understand where we fit in to the overall mosaic. They seek a spiritual home they know and cannot find one. So what do they do? They stay alone or in tiny pockets, bored to tears without stimulating fellowship and powerful, meaty sermons. Gradually they lose the truth and many of them are picked off by Satan, they terrible being who did not pick them off when they were initially confronted by the apostasy in their former association.

They cannot understand why some churches do not follow what even the world knows is the correct in this context - honoring the human founder - in this world's churches they do not worship Wesley, Calvin etc because they are mentioned in their groups' literature - but at least they know to honour them and recall their roots. What then is the real reason for not honoring HWA and remembering our roots? Is it not to use either the forgetting or the maligning of the founder to sneak in even more changes? Destroy the human founder and it follows that you destroy the doctrines.

Fruitless 'pipsqueaks'

It never ceases to amaze me that some people, utterly fruitless, have such big babbling blazing mouths spitting words of hatred toward a deceased man. Filled with bitterness, they harangue HWA over some minor point of doctrine or something they have misinterpreted about HWA's statements on prophecy. Yet these 'pipsqueaks' that have produced nothing but venom, stand up before the congregations hammering at HWA, not knowing what they are saying, offending loyal members, putting off newcomers and showing their ignorance and haughtiness. Yet there is no right of reply to these 'pipsqueaks', know-it-alls who are utterly unproductive, negative and dogmatic about something they know little about.

Notice what HWA wrote about these attitudes in another Church amongst a few of the people he encountered there. Firstly, some of the ministry were jealous of him, antagonistic and had a competitive spirit (*Autobiography*, Vol 1, page 474, 1973 edition).

Some of these jealous ministers were looking for all kinds of excuses for having a go at him that they then picked on his wife according to the *Good News*, June/July 1980 (a series titled "The History and the Beginning and Growth of the WCG") page 24:

"But in all boldness I said that if one of these men dared say a word against my wife, I would forget I was a minister, and close their mouths with my fists! ... and the brethren would have backed me in shutting their mouths from accusing my wife".

It's a pity that some tried to provoke one to that extent, but what else is new? Nothing has changed.

Mr Armstrong later wrote "... opposition from other ministers, both within this church and without, was met at every turn continually" (page 319 of the *Autobiography*). In that aforementioned series he writes "Persecution from their [jealous] ministers continued" (September 1980, *Good News*, page 28). Now this quote is excellent:

"Always the brethren ... had been more than friendly to me - they really did love me and my wife. It was their jealous ministers, who were fruitless in the work, who persecuted me" (August 1980, *Good News*, page 4).

You can read about HWA's experiences in the last few chapters of the *Autobiography*. It was merciless how they tried to turn the membership against him. There is surely nothing new under the sun.

HWA didn't go through all those experiences just to be persecuted again after he had died and for everything God had raised up via him to be destroyed! The immense amount of truth restored was not restored just to be watered-down and shelved (with the exception of the Sabbath and Holy Days according to the radicals and liberals). If people don't wish to hold on to the full truth but wish to rather to change it, they can always return to the WCG - but for pity's sake, leave us alone and stop hurting us.

Back to the Future!

To reverse this perception we should adopt the following measures:

a. adopt the name "Plain Truth" for its official magazine and *Good News* for its members' magazine (the title PT is generic and cannot be copyrighted). The PT to have the same intelligent style of the old PT with articles of substance. There should always be something new and challenging for the reading audience. The current magazine has virtually nothing new - you can read just about everything in it in any other magazine

- b. occasionally use HWA's name and in the forthcoming booklet on "This is the United Church of God" mention proudly our roots and HWA as our human founder (what are they ashamed of?)
- c. adopt the "Tomorrow" broadcast (LCG is now using the name of World Tomorrow, so we should use the name "Tomorrow" for the time being)
- d. create a lion and lamb logo similar to WCG's (nothing illegal with that and WCG seldom use it nowadays)
- e. utilise all of Dwight Armstrong's hymns - members are not interested in singing protestant songs. CGI used Dwight's hymns since 1978/79 which were published in their own hymnal - WCG will not sue for using Dwight's hymns
- f. build bridges for the purpose of co-operation to other similar Churches of God (see my paper *A Strategy For Inter-Church of God Harmony and Co-Operation - What You Can Do* submitted to various Churches of God in 1995 on co-operating - and not necessarily merging groups).
- g. adopt the missing bits from the *Fundamentals of Belief* which most members are not aware were left out
- h. ensure that all local church libraries have copies of HWA's books and booklets as well as video and audio tapes of him
- i. have a series in the magazine on the plan of God titled "Mystery of the Ages" and other titles which would identify us with HWA and our roots
- j. re-adopt the Ezekiel Warning Message (the captivity doctrine) which appears to have been 'dropped' or 'shelved' along with others without formal announcement in similitude to our former association's behaviour
- k. proudly stand up against all sin and not just sabbath-breaking (eg abortion, euthanasia)

Once we approximate the above, we can then have our own identity which some want. But it must be one which is a continuum of our historical roots and gives the appearance of being what we were like, not something so radically different that it is like a totally different church. The only difference from the old WCG should be governance/administrative style, not the direction, doctrines and approach.

Then, and only then, will we have growth and great blessings from God. In the meantime, spiritual Israel appears to be approximating physical Israel. As the physical 'holy seed' is

today being slowly bred out, so the spiritual holy seed is blending with the world and losing its characteristics. This mixing with the world is what the seventh era is warned of. It is an era which is not interested in a strong Christ-like message to the world. Herman L Hoeh in *A True History of the True Church* warns of the Laodicean Era:

“This frightful condition lies now ahead of us. Just as the remnants of the Sardis era of the Church exist side by side with the Philadelphia Era, so we will continue our work to the very ‘end time’ when another group will appear - a group not accounted worthy to escape the coming tribulation. Another separate work [from Philadelphia] is yet to arise made up of begotten individuals who are spiritually lukewarm! Woe to any of us if we take part in such a work ... It is time to wake up! if you become complacent, lacking in zeal, looking upon the church as a social club, instead of having your heart in the gospel, you, too, may find yourself in the ‘Church of Laodicea’ left to suffer the impending, horrifying tribulation” (p31).

Recapturing Social Values after 13 Years of Liberalism and Watering-Down

Currently Churches of God have a variety of committees examining various matters. It may now be the time to establish a Social Committee to produce position statements by the Church. In some cases, policies may develop from these positions. Below are the various social issues infecting the Western World, especially Israel and now the Church of God, spiritual Israel. Alongside them I briefly describe suggested positions.

SOCIAL ISSUE	SUGGESTED POSITION
ABORTION	Abortion is murder except in the case of the mother’s life being under threat
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT	The Church should endorse the Biblical view that capital punishment by civil authorities for murder is correct
EUTHANASIA	Euthanasia is suicide/murder and is not endorsed by the Church
GAMBLING	Gambling is contrary to Biblical principles and must not be practiced by members
HOMOSEXUALITY & LESBIANISM	These are serious sins and these people will not be permitted to attend services without repentance
INTER-RACIAL DATING AND MARRIAGE	HWA was correct on this issue and his stance is soundly Biblical, backed up by science and history. Inter-racial

marriage is a sin and no minister will marry inter-racial couples

RADICAL FEMINISM

The Bible permits women's involvement in the Church in various service areas. But at no time may a woman be ordained to eldership, give sermons, sermonettes or opening/closing prayers

SMOKING

Smoking harms ones health and is therefore wrong. While the specific spirit of the 'clean & unclean' law is about meats, the principle is to avoid food that is harmful to us

SURROGATE MOTHERHOOD

This is clearly immoral and unscriptural

THE STATUS OF THE ANGLO-SAXON POWERS IN THE WORLD

Due to the liberal influence of the media, our people are beginning to slide toward the media's views. We need strong articles in our magazines

There is no legislation in place preventing us from having policies and doctrines on these issues. The only areas where legislation comes into play is in the area of vilification and discrimination in Government employment. So we should not be afraid of facing these issues and adopting Biblical principles lest we "flee when none pursueth" (Prov 28:1. See also 30:30).

I am concerned that the liberal media is beginning to make inroads into the philosophy and values of the Church of God. We no longer have a Gene Hogberg who used to write excellent articles on some of these issues, or sermons, or articles in Church publications. Thus we have a responsibility and a duty of care to protect our people from the hazards of radical and liberal philosophies from infiltrating the Church today. The television networks, newspapers and weekly news magazines essentially push liberal-globalist ideas and dogmas.

Our people, particularly our youth, need material to counter these wicked ideas and they need to be armed with the necessary tools to counter them in their lives. If we do not do something about it, our next generation will be liberal-leftists which will ensure that our essential truths will be lost.

In a recent weekend edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (8 May 1999), Padriac McGuinness noted that the mainstream churches are lurching more and more liberal. The more liberal they get, the more their leaders and the media call for ever more liberal doctrines and social stances (eg feminism, homosexuality, inter-racial mixing), claiming that only if they adopt more radical social positions will they ever be able to recapture their growth. Yet, as he demonstrated, they decline further in membership while the conservative community groups springing up are growing rapidly at the expense of the liberals.

The moral?: by becoming more and more worldly or by watering-down the true doctrines or not strengthening our social values, will only lead to even greater curses upon us. Compromising with the world and shelving certain doctrines does not result in growth, no matter the good intentions of those who think that 'if we can just drop this or that doctrine we will be less offensive to the world and growth will occur'. In practice the opposite always occurs.

A E Harvey noted that the Laodicean Church

"had identified itself with the city's fame and prosperity, and so had lost hold of its own distinctive values ... [it had] symptoms of accommodation to the secular world" (*The New English Bible Companion to the New Testament*, p800).

How familiar that sounds!

Finally, there are millions out there that feel that they have been dispossessed by our Western institutions – the dispossessed majority, who would agree with our above social positions, if adopted. They have been fleeing the established churches and are staying at home and are upset at the direction of our nations because of the eschewing of those values. I feel that we have potential for tens of thousands of members if we were to adopt our traditional (and Biblical) conservative social ethic position. This is a prime way of becoming 'fishers of men' in these last days.

God is central to all of this - His ways, truths and work. Instead of watering-down, let us build solidly up. Let us go deeper and deeper into the truths as revealed. Let us find even more proofs for them, with more angles, insights, information and references providing more proofs for a modern generation.

If we are to ever again become fishers of men, the Churches of God should once again take the biblically correct social positions, proclaim the full truth which came via HWA and both teach them to the world and to the Churches of God as a whole.

THEN THE WAR-CRY SHOULD BE: **BACK TO THE FUTURE! BACK TO OUR ROOTS TO ENSURE STABILITY AND GROWTH.**

Let us indeed move on under the guidance of the holy spirit with deeper understanding of God's Word, doctrine, prophecy, outreach and administrative style, not watering-down His truths.

But, let the liberals 'move on' - and I wonder where they will 'move on' to? Quietly and deceptively making unauthorised changes? Or should they 'move on' elsewhere? Perhaps back to the organisation they came out of.

**"When a Land [or Church] rejects its legends,
Sees but falsehoods in the past,
And its People view their sires [ie pioneers]
In the light of fools and liars,
'Tis a sign of its decline,
And its splendours cannot last.
Branches that but blight their roots,
Yield no sap for lasting fruits."**

(F R A Glover of England, 1861)

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The purpose and desire is to foster Biblical, historical and related studies that strengthen the Church of God's message & mission and provides further support to its traditional doctrinal positions.
