

CHURCH OF THE  
E T E R N A L

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"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." – Matthew 24:14

May 16, 2005

Dear Members and Co-Workers:

Very heartfelt greetings from San Diego! I trust and pray that all of you are blessed in your physical and spiritual walk of life, and I ask God for His special intervention for those of you who are suffering because of persecution, trials and tribulation.

As I write this letter, I am reflecting on the work of the *Church of the Eternal God* (CEG) and its corporate affiliates in Canada and Great Britain, and the – at times – "long and winding road" we have been traveling together. By July, CEG will have been in existence for four years. Of course, the *Global Church of God* in England (Global) has been operating for 12 years, and the *Church of God, a Christian Fellowship in Canada* (CGCF), for 5 years. We have had our share of trials and persecution from the outside and even the inside – and we can expect that this will continue. How are we, as individual members, to act in the face of such problems?

This year constituted my thirtieth Passover in the Church of God. I know that some of you have been in the Church for much longer than that. But still, I believe that thirty years of observation and experience in the Church have given me some insight in the questions which I want to pose in this letter: Why do people leave the Church? Why have *so many* left over the years? And what can we – who have stayed loyally in God's Church – learn from their conduct, so that we don't make the same tragic mistake?

In my thirty years in the Church, I have spent more years as a member than an ordained minister, and I want to address these questions from both a ministerial and a membership viewpoint.

As I said, I have seen people come and go – and many left *before* the terrible and abominable changes were introduced in the Church in the early 1990's – after Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986. But even later, people still left faithful Church of God (COG) organizations, such as CEG, CGCF or Global, for a variety of reasons. (I want to clarify that we are not saying that CEG, Global or CGCF are "*the*" Church. But we do believe that we are *part of* the spiritual body of Christ, and when supporters or even members leave CEG, Global or CGCF *for wrong reasons*, they leave the Church – as this would also be true for other COG organizations, which are part of the spiritual body of Christ. In such a case, it does not matter whether those who have left CEG, Global or CGCF join another group or not – they would still have turned their back on the *spiritual organism* of the Church of God.)

As Mr. Armstrong has told us so many many times, people leave because of **wrong attitudes – often in rebellion to godly ordained government in His Church!** Of course, they will never admit that. They will have all kinds of explanations as to why they *had to* leave. However, there appears to be only two legitimate reasons for leaving a COG organization. One is doctrine (and

this must be a *substantial* deviation from the truth, affecting one's understanding of God and of man's potential, as well as one's way of life – and not some disagreement over a technical, nonsalvational, theoretical point, which has absolutely no consequence for our relationship with God or our daily walk in Christ). The other legitimate reason for leaving is real (not just imagined) serious wrong active or passive conduct of the leadership of the organization, constituting gross violation of the Christian walk which we are all instructed to live by.

In most cases, these were not the reasons why many people left the Church over the years prior to Mr. Armstrong's death, and these are not the reasons today, why people may leave a faithful COG organization. I vividly recall the attitudes of people, who left the Church, when I was still in Germany. One member rejoiced when a minister allegedly did or said something wrong. The member, who later left, stated about the minister: "Now we've got him." Another member left in anger because he was not successful in a task assigned to him, blaming God and the world for his misfortune. Others left, *claiming* that the minister was too harsh; that they disagreed with the direction of the Work under Mr. Armstrong; or that they had a different understanding about an insignificant technical point. But the real reason always seemed to have been a *wrong attitude*. They might have become *upset* about the fact that the ministry did not share their special understanding or their unique knowledge of a nonsalvational issue; or because they did not receive the kind of recognition that they thought they deserved; or because they were just growing weary of living God's way of life – including the requirements to tithe and give offerings, and to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days (compare Malachi 1:13; Isaiah 43:22).

I have observed over the years that very often, the attitude of members who left became *bitter and finally hostile* toward Mr. Armstrong, the ministry, and the membership. Former friends became their enemies. Most of the time, they tried to contact others to explain their conduct, and to try to convince them of the righteousness of their cause.

Sometimes, members felt compelled in their minds to contact those who had left, in order to bring them back. This was virtually never successful – unless the contact was made with the express permission or request of the ministry.

At one time, a friend in the Church in Germany told me that he was going to discuss the reason of the former member's departure with the former member. I pleaded with him not to do that (knowing that the ministry had been so far unsuccessful in their dealings with the person who had become quite *hostile*), and to leave the matter to the ministry and to God. He thought he knew better. He did get involved, and it carried him, ultimately, right out of the Church as well.

My friend should have realized that *hostile attitudes* are contagious. He should have known that they can be disguised and not easily detectable. He seemed to have forgotten that even Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, and so his ministers or servants can appear as ministers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). I explained to my friend, sadly to no avail, that God instructs us to avoid those who cause division among brethren. (Let me insert here that I sometimes wonder how God would have felt if someone would have told Moses that they wanted to become intermediaries or "peacemakers" between Moses and Korah, by finding out who was to be blamed for their problems.)

I learned from experience that we can't be more righteous than God. If God says that we must avoid those who cause division, then this is what we ought to do – for our own protection (compare Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:9, 11, 13; 2 Timothy 2:16-21; 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 6:3-5). This does not mean that we cannot have any social contact with them – especially if family members are involved. But it does mean that we are to avoid discussions of spiritual matters and the alleged "cause" for their departure.

The Bible tells us that those who leave us were not really with us (1 John 2:19). This is so true. Over the years, I have seen that people left the Church (under Mr. Armstrong) because of *attitude* problems. But their wrong attitude was associated with other shortcomings: Members did not have the same doctrinal understanding on certain points that the Church had; they did not read the Church literature because they thought that they could not understand it or that they knew everything anyway; they did not "have the time" to read it, while spending their time on entertainment or reading *dissident* literature; or they felt that the literature was not "scholarly" enough. People accused Mr. Armstrong of teaching heresy, because he did not properly understand Greek or Hebrew. We are occasionally receiving similar accusations. Not much has changed, has it?

Others have read the Church's literature (again, I'm speaking about the time when Mr. Armstrong was still alive) – not to learn from it, but to find fault – perhaps with the motivation of finding an "excuse" to leave. This, too, is still happening in God's Church today.

Dear brethren, we must understand that when we leave God's Church, we are cutting ourselves off from Christ, and we will wither and fade away (John 15:1-2, 6). Christ established the Church to help the members to become perfect (Ephesians 4:11-16). Paul even said that at times, people must be given over to Satan for a while, with the hope that they will come to repentance and return to the body of Christ (compare 1 Corinthians 5:5). We have seen incidences over the years when some who left the Church became *directly influenced* by Satan the devil. I am sure that they never thought that something like that could happen to them, when they left. But it did. Satan is very subtle – so much more so than we could ever imagine.

God has given us a great opportunity to help fulfill His commission to His Church. Those who leave the Church miss out on that opportunity – and if they don't repent, they will even miss out on their eternal salvation. It is THAT serious!

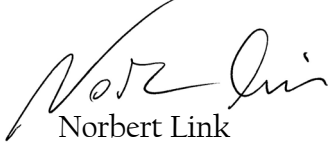
I know that God is still sifting – and you know it, too. And I can say with Peter that those of you who have shown your loyalty to God and His Church (of which CEG, Global and CGCF are a part) have been becoming stronger in the process. Your faith has been tested, and it has been purified (compare 1 Peter 1:6-7, 22). And as Paul, so am I confident that God will bring to completion the good work, which He has begun in *you* (compare Philippians 1:6) But let us also PRAY for those who have been tossing this opportunity aside – that they will come to repentance before it is too late. So many have left the Church over the years, and only very few have returned. Where are the others today? In Germany, for example, we used to have 1,500 members at one time. If I were to count today's membership in all known Sabbath-keeping COG groups, I would only reach a small fraction of that original number. Where are the rest? What are they doing today to fulfill God's command to preach the gospel in all the world? They are doing nothing in that regard – and they thereby ignore and neglect the *very reason* why God called them *today* – ahead of the vast majority of mankind to be called *in the future*. And unless

they repent of their refusal to respond to God's purpose for their calling, God will label them as unprofitable servants.

Let me close by thanking all of you truly loyal and faithful members and supporters from the bottom of my heart for your dedication. We can only fulfill God's commission if we are staying and working together – in mind, dedication, purpose and zeal.

Much needs to be accomplished. We have only just begun. And let us never forget that God's Church moves forward *on its knees*.

In Christian love,



Norbert Link

PS We will be conducting our first *public* Bible lecture on **Sunday, May 22, 2005, at 6:30 pm** at the Embassy Suites, 211 East Huntington Drive, Arcadia, CA 91006. The topic of the lecture is, **"Europe Is Uniting—What Does This Mean to You?"** If you are in the neighborhood, we would be excited to welcome you. Please feel free to bring any of your friends who might be interested in the topic. And please, pray for a successful lecture.