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PLAIN TRUTH

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WHAT A NEW WAR IN KOREA WOULD MEAN

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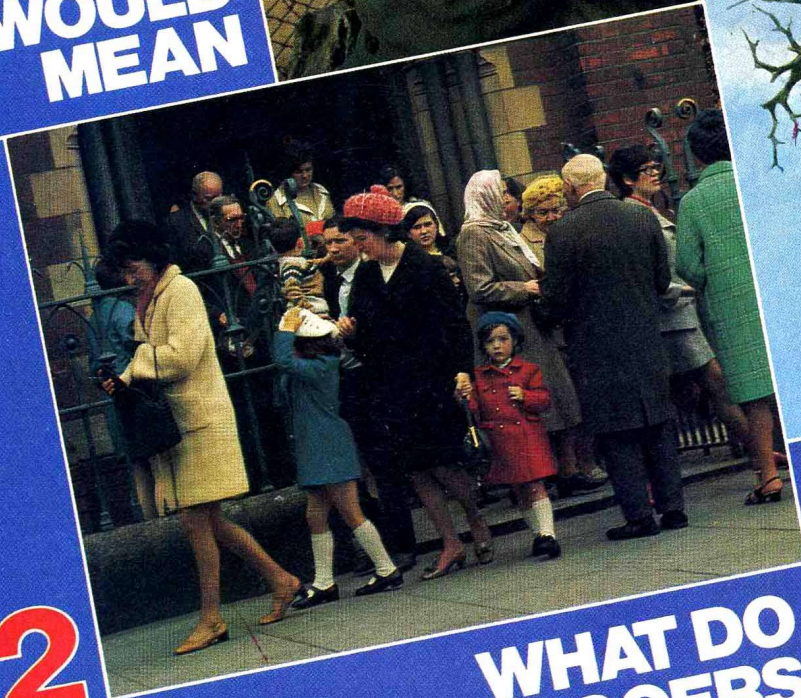
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WHAT DO CHURCHGOERS BELIEVE? AND WHY?



Personal from...

Hope for the Future

Do you see a bright future ahead? For you? For humanity? Personally, I do—and if you can join me in saying that, you are one in a hundred thousand!

Where is any *good news* today? Where is any future to be found in nations developing nuclear weapons which can erase all human, animal and plant life from the earth? Where is any hope to be found in the wretchedness, ignorance, poverty, squalor and filth in which more than half the world's population lives? Where is any joyous anticipation to be found in prosperous "have" nations where sources of drinking water—the rivers and lakes—are being polluted, where the air we breathe is being befouled, the soil is worn out and contaminated, and the foods are being robbed of nutrition in food factories; where homes and families are being broken up, crime is rapidly increasing, racial problems and violence are erupting, and sickness and mental disturbances multiplying?

Where is happiness today? Sixty years ago, driving along country roads in Iowa, I saw and heard farmers plowing behind teams of horses, singing happily as they walked. Today, the farmers ride tractors—but where did the singing and the happiness go?

Can we find encouraging reassurance for tomorrow on university campuses where the leaders of tomorrow are consigning morality to the limbo of an outmoded past, where suicides are on the increase, and where unproved doctrines are being absorbed by impressionable minds?

Where do we find inspiration in the assertions of world leaders and the so-called "great," who are warning us that we must adjust to a future of growing problems and dangers where there are **NO SOLUTIONS**?

Well, for those who hold the above prevailing concepts, the future must indeed appear discouragingly bleak—if they take a look at it instead of kidding themselves into assuming that by ignoring the dangers they will somehow go away.

There is a **CAUSE** for every effect.

There is a **CAUSE** for the state of the world today. And there has to be a **CAUSE** that will produce the peaceful and happy world tomorrow. There had to be a first cause for

the very existence of matter, of life, of forces and energies. But today, it is considered "intellectual" to be willingly **IGNORANT** of that. I have said before, that in the first two centuries of the so-called Christian era, it was popular to embrace gnosticism—meaning, "we know." But today, it is popular to embrace agnosticism—meaning, "we don't know—we are ignorant." Today, ignorance is embraced and labeled "knowledge."

Is it **IGNORANCE** to recognize the facts of the great First Cause who reveals the true cause of all of today's ills? Is it wise, intellectual and knowledgeable to be deliberately ignorant of basic facts and truth?

There are two main ways of life—two basic principles—two fundamental philosophies. One is the way of **GIVING**, the other of **GETTING**. One is **LOVE**, the other **LUST**. One believes it is more blessed to give than to receive. The other insists that acquiring, taking, accumulating, through the ways of competition, leads to progress and happiness.

The one way is God-centered, the other is **SELF-centered**. The one accepts the golden rule, the other says, "Do it to others before they do it to you." The one is the way of the divine nature; the other, the way of human nature. The one is the way of humility; the other, of vanity.

This world—all civilization—this world's society—is based on the hostile, competitive, **SELF-centered** way. It has produced every wail of human woe. It is the way that now threatens the extinction of humanity.

This all means one thing. Man, imbued with human nature, is utterly **UNABLE** to solve his problems. He can only worsen problems and create new ones. By the "knowledge" and efforts of man, this world is doomed and hopeless.

Is there, then, nothing to live for? Is there no hope for the future? Not within the knowledge, the skills and abilities of this world's great minds. Of self-professed "great" men, God says, "Professing themselves to be wise, they have become fools!"

But there emphatically is a bright future ahead! The world tomorrow—which *The Plain Truth* proclaims—will bring world peace, universal prosperity, universal right education, universal good health. (Continued on page 45)

A very large segment of the population of the Western world attends church on Sunday mornings. Why do they go? What do these churchgoers believe, and why? The plain truth is a little shocking—and illuminating!

WHAT DO CHURCHGOERS BELIEVE? AND WHY?

by Herbert W. Armstrong

Nothing is so astonishing as the truth! It is often stranger than fiction. Most people who attend church regularly, or even occasionally, would be really surprised if they should probe into their own minds far enough to ask why they go, and just what is their religious belief—and why?

Do You Know?

As a baby, I was taken to church. As a child, I was taken to Sunday school and church. It was a Quaker church. I attended church until I was eighteen. Then I began attending the theater, athletic contests, and dances instead. But when we were married, my wife and I felt we ought to attend church. We looked over the churches in the general area of our home, selected one that was convenient and respectable, with a modern building, a friendly and personable pastor, and members we liked socially.

But WHY did we join? WHY did we attend church?

Well, we just felt we ought to—that's about all. Did we stop to analyze *why* we ought to attend church? Well, no. We supposed all people

should attend church, should they not? Hasn't everybody always *heard* that one should go to church? It seems we had.

Most people simply assume, take for granted, and accept without question what they've always heard. Usually they don't know why.

What Did We Believe?

Did we have a definite religion? Reflecting back, my answer would have to be "No." How about you?

What did we believe? Well, we had no deep-rooted convictions. We believed, of course, those things we had most often heard in church. We supposed there was a heaven and a hell—an ever burning hell. We believed—or supposed we did—in the immortality of the soul. We believed in observing Sunday as the weekly day of worship, in celebrating Christmas, New Year's and Easter. From boyhood I had heard the pastor talk about a few weird things, or names, that had absolutely no meaning to me—"Pentecost," "grace," "Antioch," "sanctification," "justification," "dead in trespasses and sins." Of course I knew all those things came out of the Bible—but then, I always said: "I just can't understand the Bible."

And, speaking of the Bible, what

does the average churchgoer think about the Bible? I think that in those years I was typical of many. It was "the good book." I did, in a way, regard it with a certain superstitious awe. It was beyond my comprehension. Of course I assumed our church got its beliefs out of the Bible. The preacher alone could understand it.

Did I look on the Bible as "the Word of God"? Well, yes, I suppose so. But then I never thought of it in *specific* terms as the message, the instruction of God, to give man the explanation of what he is, why he is here, where he is going, how he ought to live, and how he can be happy, prosperous, and enjoy life more.

Somehow religion was for Sunday morning—except that I had been taught that its prohibitions lasted all day Sunday. It was sin to go to the theater on Sunday—and probably at any time, since it was regarded as worldly—and it was a sin ever to dance, smoke, swear, or drink. Playing cards was sin, too. Aside from a few such things, I had no idea what my church *believed*.

Except for a few such church teachings, religion was for Sunday morning and had no connection whatever with my life otherwise. Of

course church membership often supplies a portion of one's social life, and many men attend to make valuable business contacts.

Religion? Well, I vaguely remembered hearing that Adam was the first man, and that he sinned, and "fell"—whatever that meant. As a result I hazily conceived that life was like a one-way trip on a train. Because of Adam, the switch in the track at the end of the line was thrown to shoot us all down to hell. So I supposed we needed to "get saved," although I had been taught that I had a "birthright membership" in the church, so I guessed I probably was already "saved"—at least I don't remember that I ever worried about it. When one was "saved," the switch in the track at the end of life's journey was then thrown so that when one got to the end of the line he would be shot instantly up to heaven, "to be with the Lord in mansions above," "over the river," or "on the other shore," wherever all that was. Anyway, it was "up yonder," and when they called the roll, I took it for granted I was going to be there.

And what was my idea of God—and of Christ—and of the devil? Well, God was One to fear and be appeased, in a way—and yet, if we pleased Him, He could make things break our way for us. If we faced a frightful tragedy and possible death, crying out to Him might save us. But generally, I think I rather took it for granted that God didn't want us to be happy or enjoy life—He certainly frowned on all worldly pleasures. Christ, however, was more kind and loving—He was our Savior. Above all, neither God nor Christ were REAL to me—they were in reality "far off."

Now these were not definite, concrete beliefs or deep-rooted convictions. They were just ethereal, vague assumptions. I never gave them deep or specific thought. I just took them for granted, supposing everybody believed these things. My mind was focused on the material interests of the moment—things closer to hand. As I said, religion was for Sunday. It had no relation to or connection with the rest of life as a whole—my school, fun, play, hobbies, and, as I

grew older, business, philosophies and beliefs.

What a "Bible Christian" Is Like

But when I was 34 years of age, my religious nonchalance was rudely jolted. My wife and I were visiting my parents in Salem, Oregon. Mrs. Armstrong returned from a visit with one of my mother's friends—a neighbor. This woman seemed to be a sort of "Bible Christian." She had handed her Bible to my wife and asked her to read a certain passage aloud. Then, without any comment whatever, she asked my wife to turn to another passage and read it aloud—then another and another. All these passages seemed to connect in an orderly sequence.

"Why!" exclaimed my wife in astonishment. "This is not what I've always been taught! Have I always been led to believe *just the opposite* of what the Bible teaches?"

"Well, don't ask me," smiled my mother's neighbor. "I didn't teach you a word. You just read it yourself out of the Bible."

Mrs. Armstrong came running to tell me what she had discovered. Suddenly her religious belief had been changed. To me, she had become a religious fanatic. What she had read out of the Bible was diametrically contrary to the general teachings of the churches. I was angered, furious. Argument did no good. She had all the answers—and right out of the Bible. This was the incident that challenged and angered me into the first real study of the Bible of all my life.

I said, "You can't tell me that all these churches are wrong. I know they get what they believe out of the Bible!" So I devoted six months to intensive, almost night-and-day research and study to try to find, *in the Bible*, what I had been taught in church. I, too, was astounded to find just the opposite. I obtained the literature of churches supporting their beliefs. I searched the commentaries, the lexicons, the Bible encyclopedias. I searched out the arguments of higher criticism on these points. I tried my best to overthrow my wife's new Bible beliefs—but they definitely were in the Bible.

Now I was no longer carelessly assuming or taking for granted

without question what I had heard or what others accepted. I was *proving* what was true. And it was *not* what I *wanted* to accept. Rather, it wounded my pride. It was humiliating. It was traumatic. It brought me to the most difficult decision of my life—to admit not only that I had been wrong—but to see my own self, for the first time, as I really *was*—an abhorrent, rebellious, vain human who was guilty of sin and unworthy of God's grace and mercy and love.

It was a bitter decision—I now felt my life was worthless—but I told God that if He could use such a worthless life, I would give it to Him in unconditional surrender.

At last, once I swallowed my pride, admitted defeat, was humbled, had repented, and accepted the Christ of the Bible—a different Christ than I had previously pictured—I had found the true SOURCE for belief.

What a difference there is between professed "Christians" who are churchgoers, and true BIBLE Christians! I *know* that difference because I have been both!

An Honest Approach

Regardless of whether one has been *angered* into an honest study of the Bible, as I was, or whether he has never been to church or heard anything else in the first place, regardless of *WHY* he looks into the Bible for himself, he will find the same thing there that I found—if he is honest and willing.

If a person born and reared on a faraway uninhabited island in mid-ocean, who had never heard *any* religious belief, had a Bible and was able to read, he would be a total stranger to many of the things I was taught in church. He would see, in the Bible, just what everybody else does who looks into it *honestly*.

What's wrong, then? When today's "enlightened" clergy, and the theological seminaries where young ministers are educated, spend more time trying to determine how much of the Bible they wish to classify as myth, and how little as truth; when only one percent of theological students, by actual survey, believe in any second coming of Christ which is stated and affirmed repeatedly in the Bible;

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OLDEST THING

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Scripture says a day with the Lord is as a thousand years. I just don't think the Bible should be used to deny what any honest person can plainly see—namely that the earth must be older than 6,000 years."

Indeed, as *The Plain Truth* has often explained, the Bible allows for a world before Adam and a universe that may be billions of years old. (Write for the free booklet *Did God Create a Devil?*)

But what of Noah's Flood, which the Bible chronology would date at between two and three thousand years B.C.? Did the bristlecones survive the Deluge?

The answer is obviously yes. The Flood described in the book of Genesis killed primarily animal life, not plant life. Because of Noah's Flood, "all *flesh* died that moved upon the earth" (Gen. 7:21). Yet plant life generally survived. For example, Noah sent out a dove which brought back an olive leaf growing on the newly emerged land (Gen. 8:11). Perhaps the bristlecones were (supernaturally?) preserved in the same fashion.

Beyond 10,000 Years?

According to Bannister, tree-ring chronologies will probably be extended even further—perhaps beyond 10,000 years. "In the next decade or two," Bannister told *The Plain Truth*, "I believe the Europeans may develop a continuous tree-ring chronology even longer than what we've achieved."

But one thing is certain: If the bristlecone pine chronology is indeed accurate, then many traditional and conventional concepts in archaeology and prehistory are destined to be seriously challenged and perhaps revised.

Outliving even the giant sequoias by nearly 2,000 years, the bristlecone pine is proving to be a treasure trove of intriguing and useful information. Perhaps it is only fitting that the world's oldest living thing should also provide the key to so many fascinating riddles of the past. □

Personal from...

(Continued from page 1)

This coming utopia does not depend on the planning or doing of men. It will be produced *in spite of men*.

The greatest event of all history will be the coming of the *living* Jesus Christ again to earth. But this time, He is not coming as the gentle young man from Nazareth, bringing the announcement that led to His flogging and death at the hands of angry men. Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He went to the throne of the government of the vast universe to be GLORIFIED, and coronated as supreme RULER over the entire earth. When He returns, the world will know something of the meaning of "*the power and the glory!*"

His eyes will flash like flames of fire. His face will not be pale white. It will be like the sun shining in FULL STRENGTH. He will come with all the POWER that created the universe! He is coming to crush every government of men, as if to grind them into powder! He is coming as the King of kings, ruling over ALL NATIONS.

He is coming to *change human nature!* He is coming to enforce the way of outgoing concern, of love, of giving, serving, sharing, helping, instead of grasping, taking and self-centeredness.

Yes, I see a very bright future—just ahead! It's the only real GOOD NEWS in the world today! □

CHURCH GOERS

(Continued from page 3)

when theologians and the professional clergy "interpret" the Bible to mean the very opposite of what it plainly says, in order to pretend that it supports their pagan teachings, then you may *know* what is wrong.

If you will read Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel 13 and 34, which are prophecies of conditions *now*, in our day; Christ's statement of Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 24 of the false preachers that would deceive the MANY; and the many statements in the Bible that the whole world would be deceived, you will begin to understand. It is indeed hard for one born, reared, and steeped in this world's education, religion, customs and ways, to realize that this is *not* God's world, but Satan's. It comes as a jarring *shock!* I know. I've experienced it!

The Bible ought never to be interpreted. It means what it says, and it says what it means. Taken as it *is*, it *makes sense*. (We have two booklets to help you in your Bible study. They are titled *Read the Book* and *How to Study the Bible*. Request them by return mail.)

Don't be a spiritual coward. Look into it *for yourself*. It's full of surprises—it's full of TRUTH—it's full of the way to a positive peace of mind, to prosperity, abundant living here and now, and to salvation in joyous eternal life—FOREVER! God's world is soon coming—the peaceful, happy world tomorrow! □

What can we do for you?

This magazine is free, but the message inside is priceless. That's why we'd hate to see you miss even one issue—so we're announcing the following easy-to-use services. Let us know what you need—just use the handy coupon below and check off any of the following services • Change of address • Free trial subscription • Additional free literature.

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