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Commentary — From the Margins

The Darkness of Midnight

When this year's autumn harvest moon rises, large, orange, the long spiritual night of watching that began at Calvary will be nearing its midnight hour. A calendar day foreshadows a spiritual day. Night is the twisting or turning away from the light portion of a twenty-four hour period; day is the hot or light portion. In Holy Writ, night precedes day, for life comes from death (John 5:24) as the light portion of a day comes from darkness (Gen 1:3). Thus, a day doesn't begin at midnight when the full moon that seemed near enough to touch at sunset stands suspended far overhead, a mirror revealing the earth's—and the Church's—slow twisting away from the sun, from God.

The Apostle John used the dark/light metaphor more so than did other canonical authors writing under inspiration. Perhaps he better understood the typological relationship of the visible natural world revealing the invisible spiritual world (Rom 1:20) through the Father and the Son being the light of the world. Perhaps he thought the dark/light metaphor formed the more easily accessible vehicle for teaching spiritual children the rudimentary principles of God. Perhaps, being mature in spirit, the apostle realized that at the beginning of this long spiritual night, which began at Calvary, he saw Father and Son more clearly than would disciples who came behind him. As the harvest moon appears largest at dusk, when the curvature of the earth's atmosphere functions as a magnifying lens, the disciple Jesus loved better saw God as light than would those disciples who typologically watched God shrink as the full moon does when it rises above the horizon.

Thereat began the Church's inevitable twisting away from God, prophesied by Daniel, explained by Paul, represented typologically by the last line of the book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25). The first Eve sinned by taking upon herself the knowledge of good and evil. Determining for oneself what is right is itself evil, for such determining will absolutely cause the person to eventually rebel against God. The person, by determining what is good, places him or herself on par with God. No longer does a child/parent relationship exist. Rather, the person makes him or herself equal to God, and when the person disagrees with God, the person will rebel against God. And the most visible rebellion against God occurred in the wilderness of Paran, the haunt of Ishmael, the firstborn natural son of Abraham, when the nation that left Egypt attempted to enter God's rest on the following day (Num 14:40-41 — compare with Ps 95:10-11 & Heb 3:19).

The greater Church today attempts to enter God's rest on the following day, but the Church is presently as the natural nation of Israel was when still in bondage to Pharaoh. The natural nation did not then keep the Sabbath, a diminutive form of God's rest (Heb 4:1-9), and its failure to keep the laws of God was not reckoned against it. Until the giving of the law from atop Sinai, the circumcised nation was under a natural form of Grace (Rom 5:12-14). Only

after Sinai did transgressions of the law cause immediate execution. Thus, the Church, in bondage to the law of sin and death that dwells in the flesh of every disciple (Rom 7:25), has no sin collectively reckoned against it. But the Church is far from entering God's rest, all shadows [the Promised Land of Judea, the weekly Sabbath, Christ's millennial reign] representing heaven. The journey from Egypt to Judea must be individually and collectively undertaken. And the natural nation that left Egypt, except for Joshua and Caleb, did not cross the Jordan. Their uncircumcised children crossed. But the circumcised nation alive when the death angel passed throughout Egypt died in the wilderness because of its unbelief. Likewise, the Church today, with the exception of a spiritual Joshua and a spiritual Caleb, the remnant of Revelation 12:17, will die in the wilderness of sin. The Church will die either physically as righteous Abel was killed by his elder brother, or will die spiritually by coming under a great delusion (2 Thess 2:11-12). The greater Church collectively will never enter God's rest.

The problem with prophecy is what is revealed. Jeremiah wrote that when a prophet prophesies good things, only when those good things come to pass will the prophet be accepted. The purpose of prophecy isn't to reveal what good and pleasant thing will happen to the nation, but to reveal the evil that will befall the people so that the nation is warned, and repentance is possible. And what befell the natural nation of Israel forms a copy and shadow of what has and will befall the spiritually holy nation.

The Church, all of it, has been turning away from God since it was created when the last Adam breathed on ten of His disciples and said, Receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). Jesus was then more near than the oversize harvest moon although a virtually unbridgeable gulf separated Him from mortal human beings, for the righteous among men are barely saved (1 Pet 4:17). Many are called to righteousness. Many are called to cross this dimensional chasm, but as with the astronauts that went to the moon, few are chosen (Matt 22:14). Most wash out along the way, a narrow path that leads from sin to life everlasting. Most love the darkness, for they are poachers and prostitutes, preaching that lawless disciples will go to heaven where they'll sing praises to a Father and Son they never heard, nor believed. If disciples will not believe Moses, their righteous accuser (Deu 31:26-27), they will not believe Jesus (John 5:45-47), will not be convinced by the One who has risen from the dead (Luke 16:31). And if disciples will not hear the words of Jesus and believe the Father (John 5:24), their righteousness will not exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, and these disciples will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:20). So they should not be surprised when some of them are resurrected to condemnation (John 5:29) when their judgments are revealed upon Christ Jesus' return (1 Cor 4:5).

But many disciples will be surprised, for great will be the wailing and gnashing of teeth. Many who have been born into spiritual bondage have not fought against sin, have not striven to overcome sin, have not used the garment of Grace to practice walking uprightly before man and God. They are, instead, hypocrites, knowing the law but not keeping it, having the law of God written on their hearts and placed in their minds (Heb 8:10), thereby making the law neither far from them, nor too hard to keep (Deu 30:11). Indeed, Moses is their accuser, for under the terms of the second covenant made with the uncircumcised children of the nation that left bondage (Deu 29:1), good and life, death and evil have been placed before every

Israelite (Deu 30:15). The choice belongs to the person. Better promises were added when the mediator went from Moses to Christ Jesus, but the same choice remained. Disciples are to choose good, which will have them keeping the laws of God.

The portion of humanity who is not today called or drawn vessels, made special by being selected by the Father to be children born out of season, lives in darkness as sons of disobedience. All of humanity is born into disobedience (Rom 11:32), having been placed there through Adam and Eve's eviction from the garden of God. But a person here and one there, like grains of salt that flavor a stew, are born-from-above without the person's permission. Just as a human infant doesn't ask to be brought into this world, just as the red mud made into the first Adam didn't ask for physical life, a son of disobedience doesn't ask to be born of Spirit as a son of God prior to his birth. Life in the heavenly realm is, in this age, given to whom the Father pleases, with the promise that all of humanity at the proper time will receive such birth through the resurrection of the dead. But the few that are born early to be part of the first harvest, the barley harvest, are as lamps in moonlight. And upon these few fall the responsibility of conducting business for the Father and Son until the nobleman now away in a far domain returns. These few are to buy and sell, thereby making disciples for the nobleman until he asks for an accounting of how each called vessel used the knowledge of God given by the nobleman. Some will have brought forth tenfold increases, some five. But this last generation of earthenware vessels, upon whom the fullness of iniquity has come, have hidden their lamps, or have become moonrakers, using their lamps to lure disciples into theological shoals and reefs where shipwrecked derelicts ponder questions of Jewish national identity and the restoration of the Roman Empire. Not even hermit crabs long survive the pounding seas that twice daily cover and uncover these shallow rocks.

When King Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem captive, burning the city and destroying the temple, the remnant peoples left in this once powerful nation that could demand an oath from every kingdom or nation (1 Kings 18:10) were the poorest of the land. Everyone else had been taken to Babylon, where they would find their prosperity in the prosperity of the Chaldeans (Jer 29:7). The remnant that had been left in Judea asked Jeremiah to seek the Lord's will for them—then this remnant rebelled against God by journeying to Egypt, the geographical representation of sin, thereby leaving the Promised Land to jackals and foxes. So not until a remnant from Babylon, under Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah, returned to Jerusalem after seventy years to build a house for God were there children of promise in the land representing God's rest.

When the spiritual king of Babylon (Isa 14:4-21) sacked the spiritual temple of God and took the Church captive, this captivity formalized at the Council of Nicea (ca. 325 CE), a remnant of the early Church was left to keep the Sabbath, the weekly representation of God's rest. But this remnant rebelled against God and journeyed into sin, thereby leaving streets in the Jerusalem above deserted, the holy city empty, and the Church prospering in Babylon, where sin and death flowered together in hanging gardens. The gates of the grave would not prevail against the Church, flourishing in darkness as a night blooming bougainvillea.

After a period representing seventy years in its shadow, after twelve centuries approximately to the year—325 to 1525-1527 CE—a remnant of spiritual Israel set out from Babylon for the

Jerusalem above to rebuild the house of God...Swiss Anabaptists were the forefront on this remnant*. And following behind were Seventh-day Baptists, the Church of God Seventh-day, and coming to the middle of the past century, the Radio Church of God. Each of these fellowships, though, stopped to build for themselves roadhouses, for the journey to Jerusalem was far and the hardships many.

Again, the Sabbath represents the diminutive rest of God (Heb 4:9), represents the Promised Land, so the remnant of spiritual Israel's journey to Jerusalem can be closely dated and traced by when this remnant returned to observing the Sabbath. A mistake was made by the Church of God Seventh-day and by the Radio Church of God when both assigned observance of the Sabbath as the identifier by which the "true Church" could be tracked through history. Neither fellowship understood spiritual birth, or the typology that has the history of natural Israel being a copy and shadow of the history of the spiritual nation. Thus, in order not to have the gates of hell prevail against the so-called true Church, both fellowships were under obligation to find Sabbath-observing disciples in every generation. And both fellowships' errant assumption of identifiers caused their scholarship to assign Sabbath observance to Medieval and Renaissance sects that clearly worshiped on the first day of the week. Their errors have since effectively caused the greater Church to ignore their scholarship in other areas, thereby leaving the greater Church in spiritual Babylon to worship its king's golden idol.

The Church of God Seventh-day, and the former Radio Church of God arbitrarily placed disciples in the Jerusalem above when that holy city was as empty as the present Jerusalem was during the years King Nebuchadnezzar grazed grass as an ox. Infant baptism had emptied the holy city—it is through the sacrament of baptism, not the Sabbath, that the history of the Church can be traced.

Thus, now, almost five centuries after a spiritual decree went out to rebuild the spiritual temple (1 Cor 3:16-17) in the Jerusalem above, disciples find themselves nearing the midnight hour in the middle of the prophesied seventieth week. The last three and a half days of this seventieth week are the last 1260 days of the seven endtime years of tribulation. The dawning of the Lord's day, or day of the Lord—when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of the Most High and His Christ (Rev 11:15 & Dan 7:9-14)—resumes the 70-week count that was suspended at Calvary, and continues the spiritual 70-week count that began with the return of adult baptism. The mid-point of the Tribulation is the middle of the seventieth week for both counts. Unfortunately, there isn't as hard of a date for when the spiritual count began as there is for the natural count.

The coming of the midnight hour of this long night of watching that began at Calvary will begin the seven endtime years. And this midnight hour will find the greater Church still in Babylon, just as the physically circumcised nation was in Egypt prior to its liberation from bondage to Pharaoh. But the real dilemma is with the remnant that left Babylon to rebuild the temple in the Jerusalem above. Today, they are spiritually as the natural remnant in Judea was when Nehemiah queried his brother and certain men from Judea: "And they said to me, 'The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire'" (Neh 1:3).

Today, the Sabbath-observing Churches of God are in great trouble and shame. They are, rightfully, an embarrassment to the Body of Christ, for they are without love. They backbite each other; they snipe disciples from one another. One diminutive fellowship sends disciples still loyal to Herbert Armstrong a box of literature—literally, thousands of pages in books and booklets—whenever a former Worldwide Church of God member inquires about this tiny fellowship that doesn't want any "live" converts to get away. But then, all of the splinters of Armstrong's defunct work fish a shrinking pool of dying members, who once believed they would go to a Place of Safety decades before now, and still believe they will be physically saved from the turmoil to come. These dying members do not understand that the grave is the only physical Place of Safety to which they will ever go. And they will go to the grave, slain by either the law of death that dwells in their flesh (Rom 7:25), or by rebelling disciples that support the man of perdition.

What happens when those who would teach spiritual Israel themselves need a teacher? What happens when they will not hear of voice of Jesus—do they commit blasphemy against the Breath of God, the Holy Spirit [Pneuma 'Agion]? That case can certainly be made. But these would-be teachers will argue that Jesus never said anything to them that didn't come through Herbert Armstrong, or Ellen G. White, or Andrew Dugger, or some other roadhouse owner, such as Menno Simons, on the seventy-week-long path from Babylon to Jerusalem. And it will be with this protest still in their mouths that they will have their judgments revealed to them.

Many are called, but few are chosen, for few indeed are the disciples who will now hear Jesus' voice just prior to the midnight hour. Few, indeed, will look up, not out at the horizon where the harvest moon rose two millennia ago on this single, long night of watching. Few will see how short are their shadows at midnight, for few will ever leave the darkness, where they comfortably await their burial in denominational roadhouses.

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*Protestant reformers sought to reform the "old church," the Roman Church, to conform to the Bible, whereas the radical reformers sought to reconstruct the Church from the Bible through returning to the Apostolic era. Protestant reformers accepted infant baptism—if they rejected infant baptism, they would have acknowledged that no Church then existed, nor had existed for centuries. The radical reformers rejected infant baptism, for infants cannot choose to do good or evil. But these radical reformers were not consistent in their arguments for adult baptism, for they didn't know how to explain Jesus saying not to hinder little children from coming to Him. They didn't understand spiritual birth. Thus, they were driven from the center of theological reform, and they fled towards spiritual Judea. Unfortunately, they stopped to build for themselves houses before they reached the heavenly city above.

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