



LEGACY INSTITUTE

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord Jesus,

For the past several years, Legacy Institute has had a growing friendship with a Sabbath-keeping group in Portugal called the “*Universal Church of Jesus Christ*” (now called the *Alliance of the Churches of God 7th Day of Portugal*.) They came into being before the *Radio Church of God* was founded by Herbert W. Armstrong and have remained faithful to the Word of God and growing in grace and knowledge all these years. *NOTE: Just because we have not known about others who are obviously part of the Body of Christ doesn't mean they don't exist!*

This Portuguese church organization has been very supportive and helpful to the *Worldwide Church of God of Angola*, which numbers over 5000 and continues to remain faithful to the Commandments of God. Recently, our Portuguese friends told us about an international ministerial conference for Sabbatarian elders (sponsored by the Church of God 7th Day) scheduled for the end of April in Warsaw, Poland. Gloria and I were invited to attend this conference.

We really wanted to go. But, we are in the middle of trying to purchase the land for the Legacy school and we needed to be in Thailand to take care of legal matters. In Thailand, nothing is ever as easy as we would like it to be, or happens as quickly as we would like it to happen! So, I asked Legacy's Secretary, Herbert Vierra, to represent Legacy Institute at this meeting. Here are excerpts from Herb's report of his trip:

Warsaw Journal

April 27, 2004 – May 1, 2004

Today I'm making a historic trip to Warsaw, Poland to attend a European Sabbath keeper's conference, sponsored by the International Ministerial Congress (IMC) of the Church of God 7th Day (COG7D). Leon and Gloria Sexton had initially planned to go themselves, but they needed to remain in Thailand on the dates of the conference and asked me to attend in their stead. Our friends and fellow brothers in Christ in Portugal told us about this conference last year. It sounded like a good idea and something we might be able to duplicate for Asia.

Tuesday, April 27 I arrived in the historic city of Warsaw. At the airport troops in camouflaged uniforms carried machine guns, including the women. The customs agents were also in military type uniforms. I learned later that an important EEC meeting was taking place and the government brought in

police from all over country for added security. They even closed down part of the city, allowing no one in or out without special passes.

When I arrived at the hotel I was greeted by Vitor Quinta and Paulo Coelho and others who were in the lobby (*Vitor Quinta and Paulo Coelho are elders in the Alliance of the Churches of God Seventh Day of Portugal*). Paulo invited me to share his room. Immediately, I was introduced to Roberto Torre' and Mario Di Paulo, pastors from southern Italy. Whenever God's people get together there is so much to talk about. We talked and talked and talked. Soon we were soon joined by Bill Hicks from the United States (Director of Missions Abroad for the COG7D) and Ramon Ruiz from Mexico (President of the *International Ministerial Congress [IMC]*). These two men were the ones who actually put the conference together and were accompanied by Ivan Senina from Portland, Oregon. He is a Russian immigrant who would serve as translator for the Russian and Ukrainian representatives.

After dinner we gathered in a hotel meeting room where I met other ministers from Germany, but most were from the eastern part of Europe (Poland and the Czech Republic). Two other men from the Ukraine joined us. I counted 24 that first night. To open we sang a couple of songs. It's difficult to explain the emotion of singing together *a cappella* with these men from around the world. Here are the words of one of the songs we sang:

*"I love you Lord, and lift my voice,
To worship you, oh my soul rejoice.
Take joy my King, in whom you hear.
May it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear."*

Thursday, April 29 Before I begin telling you about today's events, I want to mention a few important items...

Last summer Vitor told me the Universal Church of Jesus Christ (IUJC) had combined with a COG7D congregation and changed their name to the *Alliance of the Churches of God Seventh Day of Portugal (ACG7D)*.

The *International Ministerial Conference (IMC)* is a loosely confederated organization of the COG7D. That is, those who belong to the IMC are not necessarily COG7D Churches, but Sabbath keeping groups who fundamentally share the same doctrinal beliefs.

Time is set aside each morning for devotionals... a time of singing and praying to God, and a brief message of exhortation, similar to a sermonette.

Today we began to hear presentations from the various groups present, describing the Work of God in their respective Church areas. Over the course of the next few days we would also hear a presentation on the work of the IMC and their mission work around the globe.

INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

Portugal Rui Quinta made the presentation. He speaks very good English. He told us that to their knowledge there was no Sabbath keeping church in Portugal before the 20th century. In the 1920's a Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) missionary by the name of Paul Meyer traveled to Portugal. With the help of two local men, Francisco Navalho and Alberto Mendes he was able to raise up a small church. Then in 1928, controversy over the teachings of Ellen G. White caused this small group to split. In 1931 two new churches were formed, the IUJC, pastored by Mr. Navalho, and the Church of Christ (COC), pastored by Mr. Mendez. These two sister churches got along fine until about 1940. Some disagreement caused a rift. A third church was formed from a split with Mr. Mendez' congregation and this new group adopted the name

the COC of Portugal. This new church eventually became a COG7D congregation. Then, a little over a year ago they and the IUJC joined forces to become the ACG7D of Portugal.

The ACG7D of Portugal has five non-salaried pastors and about 150 members. They are very active in producing literature in Portuguese, and joined the IMC 2 years ago. The IUJC has been of immeasurable assistance to the *Angolan Worldwide Church of God* in Africa.

Italy The COG7D in Italy became members of the IMC in 2002. This is a very young church, formed in 1995, pastored by Roberto Torre and a newly ordained elder, Mario Di Paulo. Mr. Torre is a former state police sergeant and told us there are only two officially registered Sabbath keeping churches in Italy, The SDA church and the COG7D he pastors, both registered with Italy's Ministry of the Interior.

The IMC and its Missions Mr. Hicks and Mr. Ruiz gave an impressive presentation of the activities of the IMC around the world. Some of the highlights:

- Over 700 congregations in Mexico.
- Over 900 congregations in Brazil.
- Over 100,000 members in Africa.
- Over 160 congregations in Guatemala.
- Over 225 congregations in India.

The activities and growth of the work of the IMC in the last few years are extraordinary. Mr. Hicks told us their focus is in four areas:

- Church planting
- Home missions
- Missions abroad
- Disaster relief funds (A tithe of the IMC's income is placed into this fund.)

Presentation on the IMC Not all groups present at this conference are members of the IMC. IMC wants to encourage participation and membership. The goal of membership is to 1) pool evangelistic efforts and 2) encourage doctrinal integrity.

Vitor Quinta gave a lengthy presentation on Doctrines of the Anti-Christ.

An Important Development After dinner I was invited by Ramon Ruiz to give a presentation on the work of Legacy Institute on the Sabbath. I'm honored he offered me this time. What a blessing to be given a chance to share the news of the Work God has given us to do in Thailand, Burma and India.

Friday, April 30, 2004 Our meetings began at 8:00, with a devotional. We sang a song, were led in prayer, which was followed by another song. Then, one of the pastors from Germany gave a brief message of encouragement.

More international updates were presented...

Poland The Poland Church of God joined the COG7D in 1999. They have 120 members with about 25% of those being children. The presenter spoke about their literature base. Some interesting titles were:

- The Truth about the Catholic Church, its Sacraments and Dogmas.
- The Parables of Jesus
- The Prophecies of Revelation
- History of the True Church of God in the United States

He said they also produced a CD of Christian songs.

Poland has a high rate of unemployment (about 20%). The result is the Church finds it needs to provide financial assistance to about 40% of their membership.

England The COG7D in England was established in 1960 by members who emigrated from the West Indies (Jamaica). They have 17 congregations, 15 ministers, 14 deacons and 13 missionary workers. Membership is about 500. We were told their present focus is on evangelism.

After lunch, we took the afternoon off for a "walking" tour of certain parts of Warsaw. Most notably, we stopped in the part of town where a Jewish ghetto once existed before the Nazi invasion of Poland. We stopped and took photos at several memorials, including a former train station where Jews were systematically transported to concentration camps. There is no way to describe what it is like standing on the same ground where 300,000 people were taken to their deaths.

Devotional After dinner we returned to our meeting room for an evening devotional. Roberto Torre gave a spirited presentation on grace and works.

Sabbath, May 1 A historic day! Poland, along with 9 other countries officially became part of the EEC today. Security has been extremely tight the last few days.

More International updates...

Ukraine / Russia Things are a bit different in their part of the world. They were oppressed under the communist regime for so long it still impacts them today. Two men made presentations. For the Ukraine we were told their Church formed in 1940. There were about 3,000 members and 33 congregations.

Germany Actually there are two German congregations with separate fellowships. Each made presentations. I also learned that both groups are mostly Polish immigrants who live in Germany. They have 180 members.

Czech Republic The roots of the Church in the Czech Republic go back to the 1920's and came out of the SDA movement. He told us the Church consists mostly of Polish brethren who got jobs in the Czech Republic. They have 30 members and call their Church the *Fellowship of Christians of the 7th Day*.

Serbia Vitor Quinta from Portugal told us of contact from a man who lives in Serbia who speaks very good English. They asked this man to make a survey of Sabbath keepers in Serbia. He reported one week ago there were 4 groups:

1. North – Church of God 7th Day Christians with about 30 members.
2. There is a Sabbath day Christian Church near Belgrade with about 100 members.
3. Lastly, he found a group of 4 people called the *Church of God, an International Community*.

Legacy Institute I gave an update on the activities of Legacy Institute in Thailand, Burma and India.

IMC Proposals and Discussions Out of this action, the delegates present chose to form a European IMC. It was very interesting to be present and witness this historic event on the same day Poland was admitted into the EEC. Of special note for us was an invitation extended to all present to attend an IMC conference in Brazil in 2006... and encouragement for the new European IMC to invite this conference's

observers (*Legacy Institute* and *Youth Missions International*) to attend future conferences since we were both founding participants.

Concluding Comments and Reflections

After dinner Bill Hicks gave a very moving sermon on getting on with the Work of spreading the gospel. One cannot help but draw closer to these dedicated men after spending all waking moments of three entire days together. It's humbling to hear the stories of struggle and persecution of God's people in this part of the world. In many ways it's not unlike the struggles of the Karen and Kachin brethren in Burma. Of course there are differences, but it is clear God's Spirit was present and that we all have the same basic end goals. Who knows how God may use our friendship and fellowship to further HIS ends in the future? It was tough to say good-bye. I look forward to meeting with these men again.

The value of the fellowship and bonds of brotherhood that have come out of this meeting are beyond measure. Not only have the bonds between the men from the Portuguese Church of God and me increased but now there are new bonds with many other brothers in Christ. Thanks to our great God.

I am greatly encouraged by this opportunity to meet more of God's people and intend to keep in touch with our new friends and brothers. Again, as for the future, who knows how we may be of help to one another.

Let's continue to pray that Almighty God continues to stir up the Spirit of unity and brotherhood among the many scattered Churches of God all around this world.

Herb Vierra

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Bridge Building

Legacy Institute is actively engaged in what I call "bridge building". We are not alone. God has, all this time, been working with other Sabbatarian organizations to further His Divine Will. The *Alliance of the Churches of God 7th Day of Portugal* and the *Church of God 7th Day* are only two of many brother organizations that are faithful instruments of the Almighty.

Some of us who came out of the former Worldwide Church of God had the mistaken idea that "only we" had been chosen by God to carry out His Will! Well, if there are any among us out there who still cling to this erroneous, exclusivist idea – I say: "Wake up and smell the coffee!!" God told Elijah that He had chosen many others who had not bowed the knee to Baal! Elijah thought he was alone. Elijah was wrong!

Fellow laborers, we don't have much time left. Things are heating up all over the world. Britain, America and Israel are becoming more and more isolated from the rest of the nations with each passing day. The winds of change are building in intensity. Sweeping shifts in the power structures of the world are taking place under our very noses! Our job is to preach the True Gospel of the soon coming Kingdom of God as far and as wide as possible, *before* the prophesied worldly powers (backed by evil spirits) gain ascendancy and move to stop us!

The Church of God elders from *DIFFERENT COG* organizations in Europe have gotten together to discuss in what ways they can **cooperate together** to accomplish this commission *given by Jesus Our Lord*. Tomorrow, I leave for Burma for a meeting of Church of God elders who are coming

together to discuss the same thing; ***“How can the Churches of God work together to accomplish the Great Commission?”***

It makes me stop and ask the question: *Why aren't we doing the same thing in America?* Why aren't the various COG's that now exist after the breakup of the WCG making every attempt to *find ways to cooperate with one another* and also with organizations like the COG7 out of Denver?

I know some ex-WCG Church of God elders who have *boldly reached out* and done some of their own “bridge building”. I admire them for this and encourage them to continue. I also know that they sometimes have done so with the risk of condemnation coming from their own Church leadership!! That is tragic!

We need to ask the question, ***“Why wouldn't a church leader want to create a dialog with other Church of God organizations to discuss ways to cooperate together to accomplish the divine commission given to us all?”***

We don't have to join together into one, single church organization to find ways we can cooperate together! All we have to really do is humble ourselves under the mighty Hand and Divine Leadership of the Almighty King of Kings, Our Lord and REAL Head of the Church, Jesus the Christ, and reach out to our many brothers and sisters in Him!!!

And that is the problem. Some of us are not willing to humble ourselves and make the first move. But I have a wake up call for those who refuse to exercise humility in this matter. It is very simple:

Jesus will not accept any minister who is unwilling to humble himself.

I don't care how long this person has been a minister. I don't care what “rank” this person has presently or in the past. I don't care how many letters he can put after his name (i.e. MA, MM, ThD, PhD). I don't care about his long list of achievements! The bottom line is: – is he willing to humble himself at the feet of Jesus and perform ALL His Will!?

And I see NO necessity of joining together into *only one human organization* in order to cooperate in doing God's Work! It might be easier. And we might feel a lot better about it! BUT, it just is not necessary. Legacy Institute's relationship with the Kachinland Church of God, the Portuguese Church of God and others PROVES this.

I also believe that the Church of God 7th Day's sponsoring of *International Ministerial Congress* meetings OPEN to the various Churches of God *ALSO* proves this!

Neither do I believe we ALL have to agree on every point of doctrine. We can't even do that in our own congregations, let alone all Sabbath keeping Churches of God around the whole world! The Bible tells us we are to GROW in GRACE and KNOWLEDGE. This means *none of us* are where we ought to be. It means we ALL are at various stages of spiritual understanding. NO ONE has the corner on all truth except Jesus Himself. We can learn from EACH other – if we are willing to HUMBLE ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit of God to work among us all in a spirit of UNITY and COOPERATION.

And when I say “UNITY” I am talking about the unity of the Holy Spirit! Human, corporate church organizations are a human invention, a fabrication. Human church organization should only be a tool to get the Work of God done – not REPLACE the SPIRITUAL government and leadership of Jesus. But far too often, the latter has been the case. Instead of the organization serving the Work – the “work” has been serving the organization!

Now right here some will accuse me of advocating a kind of anarchy where everyone does that which is right in his own eyes like in the book of Judges. No, that is certainly not true. What I am advocating is HUMILITY and COOPERATION among various COG organizations. If you say, “I will not cooperate with you unless you disband *your* group and come under the authority of *my* group”, this is not exercising humility. And without humility, there can be no cooperation.

I am not so naïve as to believe that ALL of the various COG groups can somehow get together and form one giant COG and live happily in harmony ever after. The human history of the Church of God proves this a false idea. There have been, and still are today, too many ministers and other church leaders who have their own personal agendas. They are wolves in sheep’s clothing that only care about gaining a following after themselves.

Brethren, I DO believe that we all can do *much, much more* to achieve unity of the Spirit by cooperating together to do God’s Work. We should be looking for common ground – NOT make our differences a reason to divide and separate ourselves from other COG brethren.

For instance, why should there be 3 or 4 different Feast of Tabernacles sites sponsored by different Churches of God – ALL in the SAME city at the SAME time – holding to fundamentally the SAME doctrines – preaching fundamentally the SAME sermons and with many of the people in attendance either acquainted with each other or even RELATED to each other - *but worshipping separately!*?

This certainly does not represent a demonstration of the fruits of the Spirit as outlined in Galatians 5: 22-23. Let’s look at what it says:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

Brethren, we need to try harder and do better – before Satan is allowed to shut us all – REPEAT – ALL of us – down! The time for backbiting, one-upmanship, empire building, self-righteousness – all the things that prevent the different Churches of God from working together to accomplish the Great Commission – now need to be laid aside. There is just too much Work to be done! And our time to do it keeps getting shorter and shorter!

Lets all encourage our pastors and other church leaders to seek out and find ways in which our various fellowships can find common footing for cooperation. Start with combined potlucks. Move on to joint sports and youth activities. Find ways of cooperation in evangelistic programs. Trade Sabbath speakers. I know I am asking a lot here. There is always danger in sticking one’s

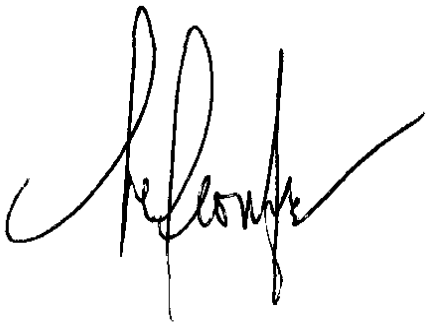
neck out. But with Jesus Christ ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE! – **IF** we are willing to humble ourselves.

Anyway, I will be talking more about this in future letters. Now I must get ready to leave tomorrow for the COG ministerial conference held this Pentecost in Burma.

Please pray that God stir up His Spirit of cooperation and mutual respect among the various pastors and elders in Burma (Myanmar).

God be with all of you during Pentecost.
Until next month,

Your Fellow Harvester in God's fields,



WHAT IS LEGACY INSTITUTE?

LEGACY INSTITUTE is a private, non-profit, charitable foundation and is not affiliated with any human church organization. Legacy Institute seeks to serve and help mankind in the spirit and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. His instructions were to freely give. This means without discrimination and without prejudice. Your donations to Legacy Institute are tax deductible in the USA.

Leon Sexton

P.S. I spent last Sabbath with our Karen brethren in Bangkok who are waiting to immigrate to America. You will be pleased to hear that Kaiser is doing much, much better! (Remember, he was the one who was captured and tortured by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army and Burmese Army Intelligence.) I anointed him and several others of our brethren while there. Samya, Juliana and their 2 sons will be leaving for St. Paul, Minnesota on May 28th. Jack, Elizabeth and their family will be leaving for the U.S. on June 6th. They are not sure where they will be resettled yet. As soon as I know what their new addresses are, I will contact some of you in the area to give them a brotherly welcoming!

May God bless you all.