

Observations of a Spin-doctor

Listen up, class! It's time for an ancient history lesson!

A long, long time ago in a land far away, when I was a boy growing up in Liverpool, England, I came to be an expert spin-doctor. Every evening and weekend during the summers, my friends and I would meet at the North Park in Bootle where there was a wonderful playground, which featured all the equipment an active youngster could ever need: banana slides, monkey bars, a Witch's Hat, a rocking horse, a Wedding Cake, see-saws and, of course, lots of swings.

In the comparative safety of the nineteen-fifties, we would spend many hours there, showing off to the girls – yes, even after Kenny Dyson fell off a swing and broke both of his wrists! My expertise was not on the swings (neither was Kenny's!), but was rather on the Witch's Hat and the Wedding Cake. These were roundabouts shaped like their respective namesakes. I cannot claim that I was proficient at very much at that young age, but I did have the unique ability to get those machines spinning so fast that the girls would be just a-screaming. Oh, sublime happiness!

The Wedding Cake, especially, was a very interesting piece of equipment and I, being so very studious like most eleven-year-old boys, learnt some elementary laws of physics from it. The faster it spun, the greater was the force to eject the kids who were holding on for dear life. The closer the kids were to the outside perimeter of the Wedding Cake, the greater was the force to throw them off – much greater than if they had dragged themselves closer to the centre. This was the result of a phenomenon called "centrifugal force."

Our ancient history lesson is over and now it's time for a science lesson! Here is Webster's definition of centrifugal force:

- 1. The force that tends to impel a thing or parts of a thing outward from a center of rotation.**
- 2. The force that an object moving along a circular path exerts on the body constraining the object and that acts outwardly away from the center of rotation.**

Boring stuff, eh? Well no, it really is quite interesting! Centrifugal force is incredibly powerful; almost limitless! Scientists and engineers have invented machines called "centrifuges," which take advantage of its principles. Here are some excerpts from the Funk and Wagnall's Encyclopedia article on the Centrifuge:

Centrifuge: Mechanical device using the principle of centrifugal force to separate substances of different densities. A common centrifuge is a container that is spun rapidly. The only limit to the centrifugal force is the strength of the metal of which the device is made. Centrifugal forces may be thousands of times as great as the force of gravity.

Centrifuges may be used for rapid separation of substances that would normally separate slowly under the influence of gravity. For example, the draining of water from a wet solid may be accelerated by spinning the solid. This principle is used in the spin cycle of an ordinary automatic washing machine.

Numerous other applications of centrifugation have been made. For the separation of isotopes, for the separation of blood cells from whole blood, and for the separation of sugar from syrup.

The smaller the diameter of a centrifuge, the greater the forces and accelerations exerted on the contents and the more rapidly it may be spun without breaking.

As mentioned in the above excerpt, the most common use of a centrifuge is to separate substances. To repeat one of the article's examples, a spin dryer separates water from clothes.

Some readers may not enjoy the topic of science, but please bear with me for just a little longer. Isaac Newton's third law of motion (which is, of course, really *God's* law of motion!) states that "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." The equal and opposite reaction to centrifugal force is called "centripetal force," which tends to pull a spinning object in towards its centre of rotation.

Is your head spinning with all this? To get your mind around this concept, please think about the world spinning around on its axis. The earth's surface is moving quite fast (about 1,000 miles per hour at the equator) and the strong centrifugal force generated by this spin would like to separate you and me from our beloved terra firma and throw us out into space! But along to the rescue comes the centripetal force of gravity, which pulls us down to earth again. Notice, by the way, that our Creator designed the size and spin speed of the earth so that, all across its surface, the centrifugal force and the gravitational pull are perfectly balanced. A slight imbalance in favour of centrifugal force and we would all be space walkers. A slight imbalance in favour of gravity and we would all be crushed into the earth.

Threshing, winnowing and mill-grinding

Let us now, as we move into our subject's spiritual symbolism, drop in briefly on our school's agriculture class. The Bible frequently uses the symbols of the agricultural processes of threshing, winnowing and mill-grinding to picture God's punishment, removal, separation and perfecting of various peoples. Here are some examples:

For He left of the army of Jehoahaz only fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand foot soldiers; for the king of Syria had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing. (II Kings 13:7)

A wise king sifts out the wicked, and brings the threshing wheel over them. (Proverbs 20:26)

And it shall come to pass in that day that the LORD will thresh, from the channel of the River to the Brook of Egypt; and you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel. (Isaiah 27:12)

For the black cummin is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over the cummin; but the black cummin is beaten out with a stick, and the cummin with a rod. Bread flour must be ground; therefore he does not thresh it forever, break it with his cartwheel, or crush it with his horsemen. (Isaiah 28:27-28)

Behold, I will make you into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth; you shall thresh the mountains and beat them small, and make the hills like chaff. You shall winnow them, the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them; you shall rejoice in the LORD, and glory in the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 41:15-16)

And I will winnow them with a winnowing fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children; I will destroy My people, since they do not return from their ways. (Jeremiah 15:7)

And I will send winnowers to Babylon, who shall winnow her and empty her land. For in the day of doom they shall be against her all around... For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor when it is time to thresh her; yet a little while and the time of her harvest will come." (Jeremiah 51:2, 33)

Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:35)

Therefore they shall be like the morning cloud and like the early dew that passes away, like chaff blown off from a threshing floor and like smoke from a chimney. (Hosea 13:3)

Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron. (Amos 1:3)

But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD, nor do they understand His counsel; for He will gather them like sheaves to the threshing floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hooves bronze; you shall beat in pieces many peoples; I will consecrate their gain to the LORD, and their substance to the Lord of the whole earth. (Micah 4:12-13)

His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:12; See also Luke 3:17)

Historically, rotary devices have been used in all three of these processes. Rotary winnowing machines, which use the principle of centrifugal forces, were in use by the Chinese as early as 40 BC. The English rediscovered them in the eighteenth century. Here is an interesting excerpt from the Lindesmith family history web-site (<http://mjgen.com/lindesmith/2joseph.html>):



First built in 1786 in England, the fanning mill (or winnowing machine which separates the wheat from the chaff) was a square or rectangular shaped box with a crank handle on the outside and two sieves and a paddle wheel on the inside. When the handle is cranked the paddle wheel rotates creating an artificial breeze while the sieves rock from side to side. Grain is dumped into the fanning mill from the top and the chaff is blown out the front by the artificial breeze created by the paddle wheel. The grain works through the sieves and comes out of the machine into a bucket on the ground. Many farmers used thresher-separators by 1875 to thresh and clean grain, but kept fanning mills to “super clean” the grain before planting.

After having read the above quotes, here are some questions to consider: Has not God's church been threshed, beaten, separated and scattered? In today's tiny congregations, does it not sometimes feel as though we have been ground to powder, or as though we have had heavy cartwheels rolled over us? Are there perhaps two levels in the threshing and winnowing of God's people?:

- i) Collective, church-wide threshing and winnowing, in which the church is beaten and threshed in order for God to separate useful, wheat-like members from useless, chaff-like members; then is winnowed to blow the chaff away, thus completely separating the two.
- ii) Individual threshing and winnowing, in which each individual Christian, possessing both wheat-like and chaff-like character traits, is beaten and threshed in order to separate the useless chaff of his character from the useful wheat of his character; then is winnowed to blow the useless chaff away.

Some more interesting questions. Will our threshing and winnowing take place all at once at the return of Jesus Christ... perhaps when all our physical chaff is removed and burnt in the fire? Or are these processes gradual? Do they come gradually with increased physical and spiritual maturity? Does the mill-grinding process symbolize God grinding His useful wheat grain into useful flour to be made into useful loaves of bread – perhaps in order for each of us to be increasingly identical to the true Bread of Life – our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ (John 6:35, 48)?

Spiritual roundabout

I believe that the people of God's church are being threshed and winnowed right now. I believe that we are spinning on a spiritual centrifuge or roundabout, and that vast forces are still being exerted to separate us and to throw us out of our circles of fellowship. Once upon a time, through the power of God's Holy Spirit, we enjoyed a fair level of unity within the church. Generally, having little in the way of common interest outside the church, we would have had fellowship with very few of those who became our church friends. Our main bond was formed through the power of God's Holy Spirit:

**Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
(Ephesians 4:3)**

After the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) began to move toward what their leaders now term "orthodox evangelical theology," many members and their families began to leave – to spin out, as it were – in different directions and for different reasons. Some who left WCG actually loved that organization's "new direction" – but thought that the church was not changing fast or radically enough and, consequently, moved over to other Protestant churches. Some abandoned religion altogether and returned to the world. Some became so mistrustful of corporate churches that they decided to worship God alone at home. Here we see the spirit of separation and fragmentation at work. A spiritual centrifugal force!

Other church members resisted this urge to fly apart. So that they could continue to worship and fellowship in the truth of God with people of like mind, they joined other branches of the church of God. Some formed new branches. Here we see the spirit of unity at work. A spiritual centripetal force!

But all was not well, even for this latter group. Members were leaving the parent church at different times and in different areas. In many – if not most – cases, the location and time that an individual or group left the Worldwide Church of God seems to have largely determined which new church group they joined. As the months and years progressed, some of the members who had joined these new groups came to disagree with some of *their* practices, policies or teachings, and then suffered the added heartbreak of a second separation. Some then joined or formed yet other church groups and some, being disillusioned by their recent disappointments and experiences, rejected corporate churches altogether and, to this day, remain alone or in tiny "living room" church groups. This cycle and seemingly downward spiral of the scattering of God's church continues as some members become intolerant and mistrustful of even the slightest doctrinal, procedural, or personal differences with their fellows.

Jesus said that not one stone of the temple would be left upon another (Matthew 24:2). We have come to see that this prophecy might refer just as much to God's spiritual temple – His church (Ephesians 2:19-21; II Corinthians 6:16; I Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19) – as to the physical temple that was still standing during the time of Jesus' human sojourn on earth. From this astonishing possibility, more questions arise: How far will the dismantling of God's spiritual temple go? How much more must God's people be scattered and separated? What constitutes a "stone" of God's spiritual temple? One congregation? One church family? One church member (I Peter 2:4-8)? I only list the questions here. I do not claim to have all the answers.

Many have blamed Satan for the scattering of God's church. Others have blamed the church leaders and the field ministers. Some leaders and ministers have put the burden of responsibility on the members. Although all of these may have been used as tools in the process, we have come to understand that this scattering of the church is really *God's* doing; that it is His corrective punishment upon His church as a whole, and that it is a second fulfillment of His many prophetic warnings that He would scatter His people if they continued in sin and idolatry. Space does not allow the reproduction of even a small fraction of the many scriptures that detail these warnings and the first fulfillment of the scattering of God's people. Here is just one of the earliest of His warnings from way back in the time of Moses:

**And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me... I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.
(Leviticus 26:27, 33)**

God was very patient with His Old Testament "church." He bore with Israel's disobedience and idolatry for hundreds of years before He finally scattered them. God does not try to hide the fact and has no reason to be ashamed of the fact that it is He who punishes His children by scattering when they continue in sin. It is He who has the ultimate authority and control over what happens to His church – Old Testament and New.

At first, this came as a shock to many. "Why would God punish *us*?" one might ask. "After all, are not *we* the ones who rejected WCG's new direction?" These questions crossed my mind too. But once we come to see the love, logic and justice behind the corrective punishments administered by our loving Father, there are a few even more critical questions we need to ask ourselves: If the scattering of the church is God's doing, is it then wrong for us to resist the forces that seem to be pushing us toward even further separation? Or should we just give in to these forces and let them take their natural course?

The answer to both questions, I believe, is "No." I believe that, as a result of His course of punishment, God wants His people to repent, and to follow up that repentance by striving to pull together. I do not believe that He wants His children to slide to the edge of the roundabout where we would be in danger of being thrown off altogether:

I... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

God wants us to endeavour to maintain unity with our brethren. Yes, to endeavour. To work at it. To push against this spiritual centrifugal force of further separation and scattering. Such effort is not an attempt to thwart God's punishment, but rather may be compared to an ongoing spiritual exercise that is imperative for our spiritual health. Our heavenly Father wants His children to ultimately enjoy the same level of unity He has with Jesus Christ. Although impossible now because of our human weakness, one day those who overcome *will* have this same level of unity:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are... That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. (John 17:11, 21-23)

Please notice, in the above passage from John 17, Jesus' repetition of the tiny Greek word "o," which is translated as the English, "may be." This term implies that, although ultimate unity within the family of God is a real possibility, it is also a *conditional* possibility for each Christian. Until the time for this ultimate unity comes, we must do the best we can to work hard, using the God-given power of His Holy Spirit, to maintain and increase church unity. It is not easy. It will not be easy. It is not meant to be. Nothing precious and worthwhile ever is.

Even within our local congregations and groups, we do not all think exactly alike in every doctrinal and personal area. With the varied backgrounds and experiences that have individually shaped us, thinking *exactly* the same on every single topic is impossible at this time. Remember the centrifuge article? It stated that "the smaller the diameter of a centrifuge, the greater the forces and accelerations exerted on the contents." It is the same with God's church. When we were in our larger congregations, it was comparatively easy for a member, when confronted by differences (doctrinal or otherwise) with another, to simply avoid him or her and to go seeking the friendship of other members – others who held ideas and viewpoints closer to his own. This does not work so well in the tiny groups we have today. There are often only two choices for the members of our small groups: Either love 'em or leave 'em! Faced with differences (in many cases, minor ones) of doctrinal or personal opinions, some church members have taken the *leave 'em* option – the separation option – and now sit alone each Sabbath Day.

We must face the fact that, until Jesus Christ returns and sweeps away every doctrinal uncertainty, there are a few areas of scripture that will remain subject to a certain degree of human interpretation. Until that time comes, we need to be loving, patient and tolerant toward those who do not think exactly as we do on certain points. Please allow me to repeat, from Ephesians 4:1-3:

I... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In saying this I am not, of course, proposing that we all return to the Worldwide Church of God. Neither am I advocating that organization's slide towards Protestantism. Nor am I suggesting that we should at this time put all of our efforts and resources into attempts to unite the various branches of the church of God. No matter hard we might try to do this (as some have), it will not happen until it is God's time to do it. That may not be until the time of the Place of Safety. It may not be until the time of Christ's return. In Mark 10:9, Jesus says, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." We might turn this around and say, "What therefore God hath put asunder, let not man attempt to join together."

What I *am* saying is that we should all be trying hard *now* to find common ground with our brothers and sisters inside the groups God has provided for us and, as natural and appropriate opportunities (not artificial or forced ones!) arise, with those in other church of God groups. Let us not be throwing rocks at other church of God groups because they may have different priorities and leadership styles, or because they have slightly different teachings on certain matters than we do. God knows who and where His people are. *He* is the Judge in these matters, not you or I.

Finally, there is one effect of the action of a centrifuge that we have not yet mentioned. When all the spinning and separation is complete, the compositions of the component substances are left denser and more concentrated than before. Likewise, if each church member makes every effort to respond appropriately to God's correction, our congregations will become closer and more unified than ever.

Please be patient with one another's differences. Do not major in the minors. We seem to be spinning faster and faster as the end of the age gets closer and our groups get smaller. Get away from the outside edge. Drag yourself to the centre. Don't expect it to be easy. It will not be. Hold on for dear life!

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