

itself without the courage to act is a poor motivation.

The elders had to “[take] the oversight” of the ecclesia, and “feed the flock of God” (1 Pet. 5:2; cf. Acts 20:17,28). They were to pray over the sick when called to do so (Jas. 5:14), and be capable of preaching and teaching the Word of God (1 Tim. 5:17).

The qualifications of elders

As stated above, elders were also bishops, a word which means ‘shepherds’ in the Greek. Hence we have the words of Peter: “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

It is not absolutely certain that all bishops were elders, but their qualifications are found in Titus 1:7-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7. They had to be “blameless” and to have “one wife”. They must have believing children, and not be dishonest, nor violent, etc. They were not to be novices. They were also to be valued as ecclesial fathers (1 Cor. 4:15), but not actually called such (Mt. 23:9). It goes without saying, therefore, that elders needed to live up to such high expectations in

order to become the “ensamples” that Peter specifies.

Conclusions

In the absence of direct Spirit guidance, our own method of electing ecclesial elders is perhaps the best possible, except that our arranging brethren combine the work of elders and deacons. As we have said, deacons and deaconesses were ministrants, who did the more common tasks in the ecclesia, leaving the elders to handle the weightier issues.

Our system of electing arranging brethren does not normally make any stipulation regarding age, although, since experience is usually the criterion, those elected are usually middle-aged and upwards. It would be nearer to the Scriptural model if the general administrative work in the ecclesia was left to an arranging committee corresponding to deacons, whilst a smaller group of older, more experienced brethren were the elected elders, taking the oversight generally, and advising on the more difficult issues. This, of course, may not always be possible in small ecclesias.

Finally, the Acts 15 model teaches us that it is a Scripturally correct and wise policy for the whole ecclesia to give their final approval on all major issues. It is a policy that has served our community well, and we should be grateful to those early brethren who instituted it.



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Iron and clay at the EU summit

Nigel Bernard

THERE IS a deep irony about the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. It represents the kingdoms of men united against the things of God, but this unity also has an inbuilt disunity. For, although the image has a head consisting only of gold, its feet and toes are iron and clay. In interpreting this, Daniel says: “And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to

another, even as iron is not mixed with clay” (2:43).

When the Roman Empire ruled, it did so with absolute authority. Today in Europe there are those who no doubt would like to see a return to this type of rule. There is, however, an ingredient present today which cannot be ignored and which prevents a return to a model of European rule that is iron through and through. This ingredient is the increased influence of the

common man, or, as it says in Daniel, “the seed of men”.

In the last couple of hundred years, particularly as a result of the French Revolution, the common people have had an increased say in the government of their countries. This manifests itself in a number of ways, including voting, protests and even revolution. One example of the power of the people was seen in the way the Roman Catholic Church suffered in nineteenth-century revolutionary Europe. This is spoken of in Revelation 17: “And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire” (v. 16). However, a few verses earlier we read of their “one mind” (v. 13) towards the beast that they will have at the time of the end. So are they united or disunited? They are as united as iron and clay mixed together.

In December 2003 the talks at a European summit in Brussels on the constitution of the European Union (EU) collapsed. What was at the heart of this collapse? Why could not a handful of men exert their iron authority and agree? The problem was that agreement could not be found on the voting rights of less populous countries. That is to say, should countries with smaller populations have the same voting power within the EU as countries with larger populations? Governments were meeting together to agree a constitution but they could not ignore the “seed of men” factor. The failed summit highlighted the reality that Europe is not only iron but also clay.

In addition to the iron and clay state of Europe being manifested, the summit also highlighted two other interesting features in relation to prophecy. Firstly, the continued antagonism between the British Tarshish power and Europe was seen. As the *Sunday Telegraph* stated: “In private, Jacques Chirac, the French president, blamed Britain for not supporting the Franco-German position”.¹

The second feature of note is the continued development of Franco-German unity, an axis which is currently at the heart of the development of the beast in the latter days. Indeed, the failed summit may in the end only serve to drive this unity forward. The *Sunday Telegraph* article goes on to say that Chirac “indicated that a hard core or ‘pioneer group’ of states would push ahead with European integration regardless of how the new members of the EU behaved. ‘It will give an engine, it sets the example’, said Mr Chirac. ‘I think it will allow Europe to go quicker, further and to work better’”. In amongst the clay the iron is still there.

Around the same time that the European summit was failing, Saddam Hussein was captured by the Americans. Although the capture of Saddam Hussein was a key success for the Americans, there are still many difficulties which need to be surmounted if stability and peace are to be achieved in Iraq. The difficulties that the Americans and their allies are experiencing in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq provides a stark contrast to the way in which Christ and the saints will deal with the aftermath of the destruction of the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar. The Americans are hoping that the Iraqis will soon be in a position to govern Iraq themselves once more.

When Christ returns, the Kingdom’s future success will not depend on others. Christ will not destroy and then expect others to govern. As Daniel said: “the kingdom shall not be left to other people” (2:44). God’s Kingdom will not be democratic, relying on the support of “the seed of men”. The judgements of Armageddon will be part of a clearly laid out purpose that will eventually lead to peace throughout the whole earth.

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1. Brown, C. and Elliott, F. (2003), “Chirac blames Blair as EU constitution talks collapse”, *Sunday Telegraph*, Dec. 14, p. 1.

Testimony Index 1981–2003

We are grateful to Brother Brian Armour of Brisbane, Australia, for supplying the four-page Subject Index for 2003. An index to *Testimony* articles covering the period 1981–2003 inclusive is available on the Bible Web website, which he helps to run, www.bibleweb.org. The index can be downloaded as an RTF file for personal use if desired. This website contains various other items of interest, such as pamphlets about Christadelphian beliefs and items on current events, and indexes to other Christadelphian magazines.