

unflattering stories. Leaders in public ministry must face public accountability.

Finally, the select few churches that have a ministry to artists, authors, or other prominent leaders should develop accountability methods, which could be shared with other congregations. For example, the North Anderson Church of God, Sandi Patty's home church, has had important experience in the ongoing process of accountability. When they close out the current chapter in their pastoral care of their most famous member, they will have important lessons to be shared.

Early in his career, evangelist Billy Graham and his ministry team made a list of things that had brought down the ministries of others, including financial impropriety, sexual temptations, inflated publicity, and wrongful criticism. They then made a commitment—known as the Modesto Manifesto—and laid strategies to avoid even the appearance of those things for all time to come. That commitment is a model for all ministries, even the ones that function like businesses. **CT**

*By Timothy C. Morgan.*

## THE ROAD TO ORTHODOXY

**E**vangelicals know *this*: A high commitment to following God's will is essential to Christian discipleship; so also is a strong commitment to all the truth we glean from Scripture.

But we also know *this*: Without an informed theology and experience of grace, these discipleship essentials can lead to legalism, spiritual pride, and isolationism.

That is exactly what happened in the Worldwide Church of God (WCG). Their founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, discerned certain "truths" in Scripture (including the need to keep all of God's law in order to be saved), and he placed a high demand for commitment on his followers (including, for example, a "triple tithe," comparable to what God's Old Covenant people paid). The result was not only a flawed theology, but, in many cases, legalism, spiritual pride, and isolation.

After Armstrong died, the church's new leadership emulated his commitment—and in their search for truth, left behind many of the individual "truths" he had taught.

One of the first doctrines to be questioned after Armstrong's death was his teaching that believers were not born again until the resurrection. Re-examining that teaching in the light of Scripture led the WCG leaders (who seem to function as a team) to reject their church's teaching that human beings were themselves destined to become gods, which, in turn, led them to revise their doctrine of the nature of God, which, in turn, led them to teach the biblical doctrine of the Holy Trinity. "It was a domino effect," they recently told **CT**.

In a recently published doctrinal statement, the WCG teaches in the clearest possible terms not only the Trinity, but also salvation by grace through faith. Most evangelicals should have no quarrel with this new statement, although differences in church practice and eschatology will still distinguish the WCG. Its traditional disciplines of tithing and attendance at festivals, which many believed were essential for salvation, the WCG now considers to be helpful, but optional practices.

CT met with a representative leadership group several years ago and was convinced of their commitment, both to Christ and to authentic biblical truth. That commitment, we have learned, has exacted a high price. Many members have felt betrayed by the changes and have left to join splinter groups. The change in teaching about the tithe has resulted in drastically reduced income, necessitating layoffs and downsizing of operations. Just as painful as the layoffs has been the grieving for alienated family members.

WCG leadership believes the departures have now slowed significantly. When WCG members gather this month for their annual Feast of Tabernacles worship service, there will be 30,000 fewer in attendance. (Past events have typically drawn about 85,000.) Of those who will stay away, perhaps a third are not worshipping anywhere.

Despite the losses, WCG leaders remain confident. "We believe the Holy Spirit is leading us to these things," they told **CT**. "We now know much more of what it means to take up our cross and follow Jesus," they said.

Ironically, the question around which much of the change has revolved is this: Are there Christians in other churches? (Armstrong taught that Mother Rome and her Protestant daughters together constituted Babylon the Great.) The WCG had benefited much from the Scripture

scholarship of non-WCG scholars, but it had not considered them Christians because they were not sabbatarians. Suddenly, its leaders faced the dilemma squarely: either these scholars are not Christians, or the Sabbath is not the criterion of Christian identity.

Armstrong's view was then decisively abandoned.

CT readers will be glad to know that they are no longer considered among the harlot daughters of the Great Whore. But how will we respond? Sadly, Christians outside the WCG have been suspicious and slow to extend the right hand of fellowship. (A few leaders have been helpful, WCG leaders say: Hank Hanegraaff of the Christian Research Institute and Ruth Tucker of Trinity International University, for example; and faculty from Regent College, Fuller Seminary, and Azusa Pacific University have also helped inform the transition. But by and large, Christians have made the WCG journey of faith and doctrine more difficult.) **CT** commends the WCG leadership for its courage in pursuit of truth. Can we now welcome their people into this transdenominational fellowship we call evangelicalism? **CT**

*By David Neff.*

**The post-Armstrong  
Worldwide Church of  
God's commendable  
journey of faith.**