

The Watchman Expositor

*Joseph W.
Tkach*

Pastor General
of the
Worldwide
Church of God

Moving past
"Armstrongism"
toward mainstream
Christianity?

Insiders Report: Worldwide poised to adopt
Doctrine of the Trinity

The Watchman Expositor

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Cover Story

Tkach's Worldwide Church of God

Since Armstrong's death, the WCG has undergone significant doctrinal changes. Now Joseph Tkach, the current leader, faces pressure from active and former members as he seeks to maintain control and direction amid doctrinal turmoil... page 3.

Photo courtesy: Worldwide Church of God



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Herbert W. Armstrong,
Legacy or Liability? A
Worldwide controversy.

Profile of the Month

Pyramidology and Pyramid Power

Was the Great Pyramid in Egypt built by space travelers, citizens of the lost city of Atlantis, or Noah? Are the measurements of its inner passages keys to Bible prophecy? Does the pyramid shape itself generate invisible power or energy? These questions and other are explored in this month's Profile.

Photo cover: Mystic Places (Time-Life Books)



Worldwide Church of God

Accepts Trinity Doctrine

James K. Walker

For the past several years Watchman Fellowship has been reporting substantive doctrinal changes in the Worldwide Church of God founded by Herbert W. Armstrong. Possibly the most important development to date involves reports from insiders that Joseph W. Tkach, current leader of the 98,475 member church, has approved a new doctrinal position concerning the nature of God. Church spokespersons would not confirm or deny the reports, but according to reliable sources, for the first time in its 59 year history the Worldwide Church of God is poised to embrace the doctrine of the Trinity and the Personality of the Holy Spirit.

Since the death of Armstrong in 1986, the church has been reevaluating its doctrinal position on everything from the nature of God to the use of women's cosmetics. Because of a new and more scholarly approach to issues of history and Bible doctrine, most of the unique teachings of its founder have been greatly modified or completely rejected (see *Watchman Expositor* Vol. 8, No. 5, 1991 for an in-depth discussion of doctrinal changes).

Controversy and Splits

With the changes have come harsh criticism from some members — including ministers. Some have left to form rival churches. Tkach states: "I have been accused of 'totally dismantling everything God gave the Church through Mr. Armstrong.' ... Some people think they are being faithful to what Mr. Armstrong taught

by tenaciously clinging to old doctrines the church has now changed" (*The Worldwide News*, 22 July 1991, p. 1).

Tkach rightly observed that Armstrong himself was criticized for doctrinal changes made during his life. After naming some of Armstrong's changes, Tkach listed a number of the new changes the church has made under his administration. He explained: "some today resist the change in our understanding of the biblical meaning of the term *born from above* or *born again*, the change in the use of cosmetics, the change in the acknowledgement of birthdays, the decision for the [Ambassador] College to apply for accreditation, the change

in our understanding of 'physical sin,' the change in the use of the medical profession, the change in our explanation of interracial marriage and the correction of the error some held of thinking Jesus could have failed in his mission" (*Ibid*).

These are by no means all of the changes under Tkach's leadership. In an



Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986), founder of the Worldwide Church of God, taught British Israelism, that man could become God, and that one is "born again" after the resurrection. He denied the Trinity doctrine, the Personality of the Holy Spirit, and discouraged his followers from visiting doctors or celebrating birthdays. Now, under the leadership of Joseph Tkach, these doctrines and more have been changed or are under review.

Photo courtesy: Worldwide Church of God

attempt to justify his own rival church, the Philadelphia Church of God, Gerald Flurry cites thirty major doctrinal changes since the death of Armstrong and another critic, former pastor David Pack, has compiled a list of over 150 major and minor changes. Late last year *Christianity Today* interviewed Watchman Fellowship con-

cerning the nature and depth of the doctrinal developments already under way (9 November 1992, pp. 57-58). But 1993 may mark the most significant change to date — a major new position concerning the doctrine of the Trinity.

New Trinity Doctrine

According to reliable sources outside of and within the church, a meeting took place in June at the church's headquarters in Pasadena, California said to be one of the most important since the book of Acts.

The meeting was reportedly held in three parts with the Regional Directors, Evangelists, and editorial staff and Ambassador College faculty each attending different meetings with the same agenda. Joseph Tkach Jr. presided over the meeting and K.J. Stavrinides, known as one of the church's leading scholars, served as the main presenter. He is said to have presented a biblical defense for the doctrine of the Personality of the Holy Spirit, which in recent months had been a final obstacle separating the church's view of God from the view of traditional Christian churches that hold to a Trinitarian view. This doctrine was said to have been presented to those in attendance as the new position of the church. But it is not known how long it will take this new position to filter down to the local churches and ministers.

While the church has been making tentative steps in this direction for some time, the alleged meeting marks an important new development in the church's thinking. Just two years ago, Tkach listed some differences between Protestant churches and the Worldwide Church of God stating: "We do not believe the doctrine of the Trinity. We do not believe the Holy Spirit is a third person in the Godhead" (*Worldwide News*, 22 July 1991, p. 4).

In a brief telephone interview with Watchman Fellowship, David Hulme, Director of Communications and Public Affairs for the Worldwide Church of God, would neither confirm nor deny the alleged meetings. He did, however, acknowledge the fact that the church's most recent booklet discuss-

ing the nature of God, the 1992 publication, *God Is...*, was being revised (Interview, 12 July 1993).

Holy Spirit "He" or "It"?

Hulme felt that it was inappropriate to discuss the possible nature of the revisions with Watchman Fellowship at this time. It should be noted, however, that this book does reflect the church's traditional concept that the Holy Spirit is not a personal being, but is an impersonal force — not a "He" but an "It." Under the heading "But the Holy Spirit Is Not a Person," the booklet states: "In trying to explain an apparent contradiction (how three can be one), the

Worldwide Church of God Growth and Outreach Statistics

The *Plain Truth* magazine is now published in six languages and is sent to 2.7 million subscribers worldwide.

The *World Tomorrow* television program is seen by more than 1.5 million households in America. It is also aired in 12 countries.

Youth, a magazine which targets teenagers, has a circulation of 514,000.

The WCG Personal Correspondence department answers over 4,000 letters every month.

The Worldwide Church of God Bible correspondence course has an enrollment of 155,000. The majority of these are non-members.

Current membership in the Worldwide Church of God is 98,475.

There are 827 congregations meeting weekly in 59 countries.

Through a concert series at Ambassador Auditorium, 140,000 people are introduced to the Church each year.

(Source: *The Worldwide News*, 14 January 1991, p. 1 and phone conversations with headquarters).

Trinity doctrine reasons beyond what the Bible explicitly reveals.... The Worldwide Church of God does not teach that the Holy Spirit is a person..." (p. 45).

Whether or not this is the section being revised is a matter of speculation at this point, but the church has undoubtedly made definite steps toward the Trinity doctrine in recent years. Under Armstrong's leadership, the Church claimed that the Trinity doctrine was pagan and satanic, mainly because it limited God to three Persons. Armstrong claimed, "...God is not merely one Person, nor even limited to a 'Trinity,' but God is FAMILY. The doctrine of the Trinity is false" (*The Missing Dimension In Sex*, p. 37). Armstrong taught that the Holy Spirit was not a Person therefore the Father and Son were two Persons. But God was not limited to just two Persons. According to Armstrong, each worthy member of the Church could be God.

This classic position of Armstrongism was reflected in church material for several years after the founder's death. The church's main doctrinal magazine, *The Good News*, asked, "Why should it seem strange that you will someday be the spirit-composed child of your heavenly Father? You will be what He is — God" (*Good News*, Nov./Dec. 1988, p. 5).

Even as late as 1990 in the article, "Who Was Jesus' Father?," the Good News declared, "The concept of a Trinity is nowhere found in the Bible.... it has been formulated by men under the influence of Satan.... The Trinity hides from man God's plan of salvation. The Trinity doctrine maintains that the Godhead is a closed unit into which no one else can enter" (*Ibid* Nov./Dec. 1990, p. 10).

Then in 1991, just a few weeks after the Nov/Dec. *Good News* issue was released, the article, "Who Was Jesus' Father?" was "officially declared null and void by the Church" and the magazine was discontinued (letter from Michael Snyder, Assistant Director of Public Affairs to James Walker, 7 March 1991). Later that year, Tkach explained part of the error of the article

Continued on page 18

Phillip Arnn

It stated, "You should also know that the Church's beliefs concerning the modern identity of ancient Israel are currently under review. A two-year research project is underway, which will produce either: 1) a summary of historical and theological evidence confirming the belief (after which a new work on the subject would likely be produced); or 2) a major clarification of the belief; or 3) a statement in which the belief is completely withdrawn and classed as speculation. In any incidence, the Church does not regard the belief in Israel's modern-day identity to be an issue concerning eternal salvation" (Letter dated 19 April 1991).

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of the church-owned Ambassador College, in Big Sandy, Texas.

Text of the Memo

The text reads in part: "Hi Mike! Little has been said because it was initially announced as a 2 year study project before we revise the booklet. Since it will require more time than just the 2 years to produce anything, I would not preach on the topic of Israel in end-time prophecy. ... Allow me to acquaint you with some of the problems, if you are not already aware of them.

"(1) From a Biblical overview: ... When you stop and consider the significance of Acts 4:12... the teaching of US&BC [United States and British Commonwealth] has no significance. The national identity is of no significance given Christ's sacrifice. God is no longer dealing with a single nation.

"(2) From a plan of salvation view... much of the relevance of our teaching on US & BC is reduced to — so what! ...in this life we are asked to partake of God's nature and be part of the Israel of God — spiritual Israel.

"(3) From a historical view: All of our traditional proofs are based upon folklore, legend, myth, and superstition. There may be some reliable historical evidence, but our booklet has never used any of it.

"(4) From an ethical point of view: It is a well known fact that Mr. Armstrong did not originate this teaching. In fact, earlier editions of the US & BC plagiarized vast portions of a book entitled *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright*. It is not possible to say this was revealed to Mr. Armstrong, when in fact, we can see where he copied it from — including the historical errors" (Subject: Israel in end-time prophecy, 10 August 1992).

Herbert Armstrong built a religious empire by taking minor issues, and in the case of the identity of biblical Israel, a highly speculative theory, and raising it to the level of a foundational truth. Thousands of members were brought into the church because of this one doctrine. In the light of sound biblical teaching, the remarks of Tkach Jr.'s memo, are encouraging. &

Editorial

A Worldwide Dilemma

Craig Branch

It is quite perplexing to watch the events as the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) unfold. Since founder Herbert Armstrong died in 1986, the new leader, Joseph Tkach and company have tried to correct many of the obvious errors in doctrine that the church held for so long.

But, how can the leadership make changes when the church had entrenched the belief that Armstrong was God's apostle who had restored the church which was lost with these same "inspired" doctrines?

What many inside and outside fail to understand is that many cults are not only cultic in doctrine, but cultic in practice as well. When dissension came from members who objected to the changes, a number of leaders began to implement the heavy-handed tactics of summary disfellowshipping and shunning, demonstrating an unhealthy continuation of abuse of power.

Apparently some in leadership felt that they could no longer appeal to doctrine as a point of loyalty because the doctrines were changing. Instead there was an appeal to loyalty based on the concept that the WCG is God's "only true church," that there is no salvation outside of the organization, and that to question the leaders is to question God. Watchman Fellowship has received a significant number of letters and telephone calls from members reporting intimidation, threats and abuse. These were hurt and wounded people reaching out for help.

The dilemma for evangelicals and discernment ministries like Watchman Fellowship is that many of the doctrinal changes are positive. They are moving closer to Orthodoxy. Yet despite the doctrinal advances, Watchman Fellowship continues to receive disturbing reports of religious abuse in traditional WCG congregations.

Now the defections of many of the old establishment are occurring at an increased pace. Unfortunately, these men are leaving and beginning their own churches, usually representing a return to the old heretical doctrines of the past. Several of these rival churches are discussed in this month's *Expositor*.

The most well-known alternative church is the Church of God International, headed by Armstrong's disfellowshipped son Garner Ted. But most recently, Tkach has retired long time evangelist, Gerald Waterhouse, and one of Herbert Armstrong's first evangelists, well-known Roderick Meredith. But Meredith's retirement was actually a firing and disfellowshipping. So in December 1992, Meredith parted and has now begun his own church, the Global Church of God (*Ambassador Report*, June 1993, p. 1).

It is indeed unfortunate that while moving doctrinally more towards Orthodoxy, some people are jumping ship into the dark waters of heresy. But what is also unfortunate is that the WCG has not yet taken the necessary steps to rid itself of an abusive, authoritarian mind-set. Numerous members and former members are sharing that WCG continues authoritarianism, guilt, fear, and control to manipulate members into submission.

Pray that God will truly move Worldwide Church of God away from the errors of Armstrongism and the authoritarian practices of the past. Also, *pray* that the Holy Spirit will lead WCG members to trust the Bible alone as their sole authority and lead them to God's patient and loving people in a balanced, Bible-centered church rather than into the splinter groups.

To Be or Not To Be... GOD?

Rick Branch

One of the most significant changes that seems to have taken place in the Worldwide Church of God concerns the movement away from their doctrine of man's potential to become God. While this change is admirable and one that moves the organization into a more biblical direction, the current leadership would seem to have its members believe that this false doctrine was never really taught. Rather, that it was only a misunderstanding of terms.

Joseph Tkach, the current Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God, addressed this issue in his *Personal* column. His opinions are interesting when compared to the writings of Herbert W. Armstrong, the founder of the Worldwide Church of God.

Gods vs. God?

Tkach: "Sometimes terms that are clear to us may not be quite so clear to others. Sometimes a term develops in the Church that is not appropriate. As a result, certain misconceptions can occur that are not intended.

"Even though some may have thought they knew what they meant when they said that 'we are to be "Gods,"' the term 'Gods' implies complete equality with God and a certain independence of being. That is definitely not the Church's teaching" (5 August 1991, p. 1).

Armstrong: "What then, is God's purpose for mankind? Briefly stated, God's purpose is that of REPRODUCING HIMSELF! — shocking as it may sound. God's purpose is to create spiritual sons in His own CHARACTER IMAGE! God is rearing children to become like Himself — to

be BORN into His own divine Family" (*Ambassador College Correspondence Course*, Lesson 1, p. 7).

While it is true that the Worldwide Church of God never taught that men can become *gods* (in the sense that Mormonism teaches), they have, throughout their early history, taught that men were to become God.

Shall We Be God?

Tkach: But we understand that we do not mean we will be God as God is God in all his attributes. ... As children of God they participate in the divine nature but they are not equal to God in every way. Believing that we are indeed children of God, some have erroneously concluded that we are to become totally equal with God" (*The Worldwide News*, 5 August 1991, pp. 1, 3).

Armstrong: "The PURPOSE of life is that in us God is really re-creating His own kind — reproducing Himself after His own kind — for we are, upon real conversion, actually begotten as sons, yet unborn, of God... (then at the resurrection) we shall be instantaneously CHANGED from mortal into immortal — we shall then be BORN of God — WE SHALL THEN BE GOD!" (*Why Were You Born?*, p. 21, parenthesis added).

Contrary to Tkach's assessment, the Worldwide Church of God's founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, did not simply draw an erroneous conclusion about the term, he actually believed and taught that man had the potential to *be God as God is God*.

What Is Elohim?

Tkach: "Our goal is to help people understand, not to use terms that cause them to misunderstand. Thus we say 'God the Father' and 'God the Son,' but we do not say they are Gods — they are God (*Elohim* with the singular grammatical sense in He-

Why
Were You
BORN?

*This classic Armstrong booklet teaches that at the resurrection worthy humans "SHALL THEN BE GOD!" This 1957 publication, along with others like *The Incredible Human Potential*, no longer reflect the doctrine of the Worldwide Church of God.*

brew)" (*The Worldwide News*, 5 August 1991, p. 3).

Armstrong: "For the word 'God' comes to us from the Hebrew word 'Elohim,' which means the Everlasting, Eternal, Creating, All-powerful, Governing KINGDOM. 'Elohim' means one God — not many gods. But that ONE GOD is a KINGDOM. There is but one true CHURCH — one Church, but many members! So it is with God" (*Why Were You Born?*, p. 21).

It is interesting that both Tkach and Armstrong would discuss the Hebrew term *Elohim* and both would attempt to make a different point with it. Tkach explained that there is only one God and, therefore, men cannot become God, while Armstrong said there is plenty of room in the *Elohim* for other members.

Be Like God or Be God?

Tkach: "In short, being made like God, though definitely lesser than God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be sharing in God's glory and life" (*The Worldwide News*, 5 August 1991, p. 3).

Armstrong: "Do you really grasp it? The PURPOSE of your being alive is that finally you will be BORN into the Kingdom of God, when you will actually BE GOD, even as Jesus was and is God, and His Father, a different Person, also is God!" (*Why Were You Born?*, p. 21).

No, it is not simply a misunderstanding in terms over the years that has caused some misguided individuals to misinterpret the meaning of certain words. Armstrong spelled it out very clearly in his books, "You are setting out on a training to become CREATOR — to become GOD!" (*Ibid*, p. 22).

Tkach's new position for the Worldwide Church of God is a welcome step toward a biblical view of God and Man. It is not simply a clarification of Armstrong's position. The doctrine of men becoming God was not the result of some members misunderstanding Armstrong or the use of unfortunate terminology. Members should understand this for what it is — a major and much needed doctrinal change. As some critics have claimed, Armstrong was rarely right but he was never ambiguous. ✠

Former Minister's Parting Comment

Robert Collins



The Worldwide Church of God (WCG) goes to great lengths to impress the public and the Christian community that the church is very caring for its members, as you can see from the following quotes.

Michael A. Snyder, while he was Assistant Director of Public Affairs, Worldwide Church of God, Pasadena, CA, made a statement in the *Birmingham News* (7 November 1990): "Church criticism not warranted." This was in response to the Sunday, October 28 front page coverage of recent activities within a local congregation of the WCG.

Snyder continued, "The Worldwide Church of God only suspends or disfellowships a member when a person's salvation appears threatened by individual behavior or expression of attitude, or when a person threatens to injure the church spiritually through open dissension and strife. Suspension results only after all other methods of communication have failed, and the pastor feels the individual needs to fully understand the consequences of his or her actions...."

"In order to protect the privacy of the suspended member, such actions are not announced. The only exemption to this is when a member begins to take actions that may harm the church. At that time — and this occurs very rarely — the suspension is publicly announced as a warning to members in good standing...."

Also Snyder had a response in the *Birmingham News* (11 September 1990) to the reprint article they ran on 10 August 1990 from the *Dallas Morning News* titled "Banished", dealing with ex-communication. He said the story in the *Dallas Morning News*, as described upon the review of church records, showed that no situation ever took place.

He also said comments concerning the frequency of disfellowshipment in the WCG were also untrue. He stated disfellowshipping is rarely applied and is only used as a last resort in extreme cases. Snyder stated, "The church is deeply concerned with the welfare and growth of its members and would never endorse any action that knowingly inflicted harm, whether emotional or spiritual."

I have letters from a number of individuals from the Birmingham area including Jan Brewer, Susan Nail, Jenny Franklin, and Leigh Ann Parker. They all clearly state that the ministers did not even talk to them before publicly disfellowshipping them. Then in the following weeks, these disfellowshipped people were referred to as "a group that was trying to get other members to leave the church."

This was untrue, however these statements made it appear to the attending membership that the previous disfellowshipments were justified. This is a very effective method of mind control on the minister's part.

These four individuals were obviously shocked and upset with Snyder's comment, "suspension only after all other methods of communication have failed....", which was totally untrue in how they were disfellowshipped.

[Editor's Note: In an ironic twist, Michael Snyder himself is no longer a member of the Worldwide Church of God. According to the most recent Ambassador Report, a well-known journal of former WCG members, Snyder accused the church of being a "cult" when he left.]

Testimony of Jim Baldwin

Former WCG Elder



"Dear Friends of the Worldwide Church of God: As a result of my doctrinal concerns and your counsel, it seems that my usefulness as a minister in

the Worldwide Church of God has come to an end. Since I am unable, in good conscience, to teach as I have been taught in all things or continue in the required attitude of unquestioning obedience, I ask that you please accept this letter as my resignation from the ministry and membership of the organization. Enclosed is my ordination certificate."

And with these words addressed to Mr. Kubik of Church Administration, I ended 25 years as a member of the WCG.

Since the death of Herbert W. Armstrong in 1986, there have been massive doctrinal changes... I had to ask myself, If what we now have is the truth, then how shall I account for so much error of the past.

The changes in doctrine/administration were such that I did not know what I believed anymore. The whole philosophical basis of the WCG was being so completely altered. I did not recognize the body I first made contact with in the early 60's. There was crisis in credibility of the first magnitude.

One of the major doctrines that was changed to bring it more in line with the Bible was HWA's unique and erroneous teaching on being *born again*. I decided, to satisfy curiosity, to spend some time again with HWA's old booklet (1962) to

see where he first got off the track. Well, to be brief, I found great, glaring errors in logic, ignored scriptures and false assumptions. In short, his booklet was a classic example of shoddy, incompetent research. And this from a man claiming to be God's only living apostle in these end times.

One doctrine that had bothered me for some time was our approach to disfellowshipping members. Here was a major teaching which seemed to cruelly affect many people who only had questions about doctrinal matters. When they could get no satisfying answers to their persistent questions, they were kicked out and the remaining members had to shun contact with them. I found a... copy of a page from the Constitution and By-laws of the old

The changes in doctrine/administration were such that I did not know what I believed anymore.

former name Radio Church of God. This page contained article III, section 3 "dismissal of members"... We not only ignore the Biblical commands, but we could not follow our own instructions which, if followed, appear to be very fair.

Unlike the early 60's when I first made contact with the church, there is a great deal of information critical of the organization. If I, the newly-introduced person, were to read only a third of the information available, there is no way I would want to have anything to do with the WCG. You say that this is God's only true Church and we must wait for Christ to correct the doctrines as he sees fit. This commonly-held view among the members of the WCG is a dangerous, erroneous, and Christ-insulting teaching which I totally reject since it places the blame for all the

suffering caused by our false teachings and failed prophetic interpretations on the back of Jesus Christ. He is not the blame, but ignorant, self-willed, arrogant men who fear the truth which would set men free from the abuse of self-acquired authority.

The desire to believe the invisible Christ is behind a leader has kept deceived millions marching in blind lock-step behind the popes, kings, Joseph Smith, William Miller, Ellen G. White, Mary Baker Eddy,... Jim Jones, Sun Myung Moon... and a host of other leaders who were self-deluded at best or outright charlatans at worst. We must remember a thing is not true just because one passionately believes it. Passion without proof has led many to destruction.

My next goal in the recovery process is to find out how much can be salvaged from the collapsed house the WCG built for me. This is the more difficult assignment. But this I do know — Christ is the only mediator between me and God (1 Timothy 2:5). No mortal or man-made organization can grant me salvation or deny it to me.

I will miss you all greatly. I have grown to love you as we feasted together, attended Holy Days together, fellowshipped and laughed together. I counseled you, anointed you or your loved ones when they were sick, and taught you from God's Word. Some of you I have known for 25 years.

And before you judge me, consider — I have been where you are, but you have not been where I am. Thank you for taking the time to read the many anguished thoughts of Jim Baldwin.

[Editor's Note: Jim Baldwin was a preaching Elder for 15 of his 25 years in the WCG in Charleston, NH.]

Worldwide Church of God

Splinter Groups



Worldwide Church of God

Founder: Herbert W. Armstrong
Date: 1934
Headquarters: Pasadena, CA
Current Leader: Joseph W. Tkach
Publications: *The Plain Truth*,
Youth, *The Worldwide News*

Note: The Worldwide Church of God itself is a break-off of the Church of God (Seventh-day), with which Herbert Armstrong was a minister. The Church of God (Seventh-day) is directly related to the Church of God (Adventist) Sabbatarian and the Seventh Day Adventist Church – all of which are part of the larger Second Adventist Movement launched by the controversial Baptist minister, William Miller, who predicted the Second Coming of Christ for the year 1844.

Association for Christian Development

Founder: Kenneth Westby
Date: 1974
Headquarters: Auburn, WA
Publications: *ASC Newsletter*,
The New Millennium

Foundation for Biblical Research Associates For Spiritual Knowledge

Founder: Earnest Martin
Date: 1974
Headquarters: Portland, OR
Publications: *ASK Communicator*

Giving and Sharing

Founder: Richard Nickels
Date: 1975
Headquarters: Vancouver, WA
Publications: *Giving and Sharing
Newsletter*

Church of God, International

Founder: Garner Ted Armstrong
Date: 1978
Headquarters: Tyler, TX
Publications: *The International
News*, *Twentieth Century Watch*



Triumph Prophetic Ministries

Founder: William Dankenbring
Date: 1988
Headquarters: Altadena, CA

Philadelphia Church of God

Founder: Gerald Flurry
Date: 1990
Headquarters: Edmond, OK
Publications: *The Philadelphia
Trumphet*, *The Philadelphia News*

Church of God, Denton Congregation

Founder: Austin Newell
Date: 1985
Headquarters: Denton, TX

Global Church of God

Founder: Roderick Meredith
Date: 1993
Headquarters: Glenora, CA
Publications: *The Global
Church News*

Congregation of God, Seventh Day

Founder: John Pinkston
Date: 1992
Headquarters: Kennesaw, GA
Publications: *The Congrega-
tional Herald*

Studies From Scripture

Jesus and the Law

Phillip Arnn

Members of the Worldwide Church of God have written Watchman Fellowship requesting articles dealing with doctrines. They are seeking sound biblical foundation for the new theology of their church. It is obvious that the rapid overthrow of doctrinal positions held by the church (WCG) for years has caused a number of problems for church leaders. One problem is that church ministers have not been trained to teach the new doctrines.

All ministers of the Worldwide Church of God are Ambassador College graduates. They were trained in the theology of Herbert W. Armstrong. That entire theological system has been reevaluated and replaced by the present leadership of the church. Although church leaders are writing on the new doctrinal positions in church literature, some have complained that their articles lack depth. Members report that they are being told to simply accept the new doctrines and wait for a more in depth exposition of their biblical basis.

Abroad, especially in Australia, where many hard-line, old-timers are still pastoring, members are being disfellowshipped, marked and shunned for questioning the new changes. Watchman Fellowship has received over a hundred letters and phone calls from current and former members of the WCG. Many report that in the U.S. members are being told to keep quiet about their questions. If they persist in spreading their questions to other members, they can be disfellowshipped, slandered from the pulpit and cut-off by the local congregation.

Many Worldwide members have asked WFI for more information on the relationship between law and grace. Some of the

scriptures Worldwide members are interested in are given below with exegesis considered by Bible scholars to be the historic understanding of the Christian churches.

Did the covenant with Moses annul Abraham's promise?

(Galatians 3:15-19) Beginning with verse 15, "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no one maketh it void, or addeth thereto." Paul starts out by speaking of general agreements made among men. The word *covenant* designates a legally binding document. The word *confirmed* means legal sanction or ratification. Paul states that even among men once a covenant has been made it is not changed or made void

is establishing the parties involved in the promise or covenant. The two parties are God and the seed. Paul states that the seed is Christ. Read Galatians 3:7,28 & 29. It is clear from these verses that whosoever has faith in Christ is Abraham's seed. Thus, the promises are a covenant between God and Christ and all who by faith are said to be in Christ.

Verse 17 reads; "Now this I say: A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect." Paul now comes directly to his main point; the promise of salvation through the seed (Christ), cannot be added to, subtracted from, or canceled by the law which was not given until much later.

"For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise: but God hath granted it to Abraham by promise" (verse 18).

The law will ever stand as the standard we must meet. But, as the verses in Galatians have shown we have not the power to meet them. But, in Christ, we are declared righteous based on our faith. Paul states that there is righteousness that is "apart from the law."

by future agreements. Paul wants to establish this general principle before going on to the specific question of the relationship between the Law and the promise given to Abraham.

In verse 16, Paul states: "Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Notice that the word promise is synonymous with the term covenant used in the previous verse. Paul

"What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made; and it was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator" (verse 19). Paul declares that the inheritance, i.e. salvation, must be granted by God on the grounds of the promise because the promise has pre-eminence over the law. The purpose of the law was not only to identify what constituted sin in God's sight but was actually given "that the offence might abound." as

stated in Romans 5:20. The knowledge of the law causes sin to increase. The law is given to contrast God's holiness with man's sinfulness. The law made demands but had no power in itself to effect obedience or salvation.

In verse 21 Paul says that the law is not contrary to the promise. They both have the same goal, that is to bring man into a state of righteousness before God. But, the law is unable to do that because man does not have the power within himself to obey and the law has no power it can impart to make obedience possible. Paul continues in verse 22 to explain that the law makes it plain to man that there is no escape from God's judgement. But, then Paul says that this is what God wants man to realize. The scripture says, "But the scripture shut up all things under sin". God has closed off every avenue of escape in order to point men to the promise, Jesus Christ.

Does faith abolish the law?

(Romans 3:31) "Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law." To "establish the law" is to put it in a proper perspective. The law will ever stand as the standard we must meet. But, as the verses in Galatians have shown we have not the power to meet them. But, in Christ, we are declared righteous based on our faith. Paul states that there is righteousness that is "apart from the law," verse 21. This is the righteousness of God which was promised to Abraham which would be perfected in the seed, Jesus Christ. This righteousness is a free gift and would be appropriated by faith not by works of the law.

When were the law's demands satisfied?

Jesus declares that the law will not pass away until all is fulfilled (Matthew 5:17-18).

"Wherefore the law was our school-master to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith has come, we are no longer under a school-master" (Galatians 3:24).

"For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Romans 10:4).

That is to say that Christ has fulfilled the demands of the law for us, who believe. The Moral Law, the Ten Commandments, is a revelation of God's perfect character, His perfect standard of righteousness. From that it serves three functions:

- It demonstrates how far short man has come convicts man of sin, and becomes man's tutor to lead him to Christ.
- It serves to restrain evil.
- It shows the standard for our training in righteousness – sanctification.

Does the New Testament command believers to keep the Ten Commandments for eternal life?

The "keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Corinthians 7:19).

Man can never obey the law in order to obtain or keep salvation because the law demands absolute perfection.

Christ fulfilled the requirement of the law, the demands of perfect obedience, in our place. Man receives His [Jesus] righteousness imputed by faith when he places his sole reliance, totally, only in Christ (Galatians 3:10-14, 2 Corinthians 5:21).

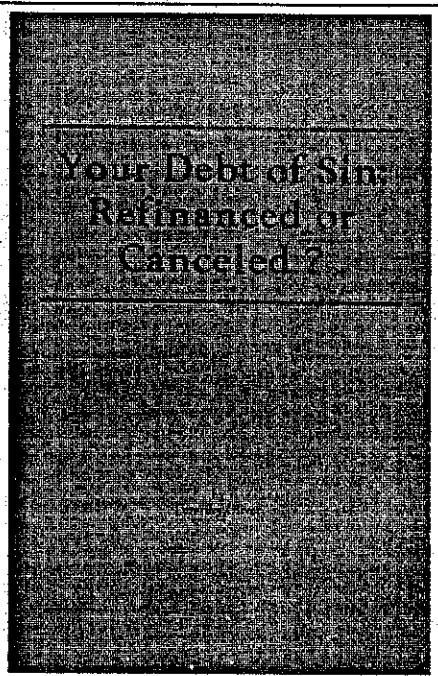
When the writers of the New Testament state that man is to obey the commandments which are now written on his heart (Hebrews 8:10-11, 10:16), they are referring to the standard for sanctification, not justification, as man with a new nature, empowered by the Spirit, is to be transformed to the image of Christ, the character of God (Romans 8:29).

Salvation by Grace or Law?

There is a subject that needs further discussion. A number of religious movements proclaim a belief in justification based solely on faith in Jesus Christ. But, when these belief systems are examined more closely, there is a stronger emphasis on the Old Testament and the law than there is on the New Testament and the

Person and work of Christ. Such a group, in the past, has been the Worldwide Church of God. In examining this group's past teachings on justification, it is obvious that they clearly taught that Christians are saved by grace and kept by works of the law.

In recent years there has been an attempt to stress the person and work of Christ in their literature and in their official publications to the membership. But, there seems to be little change in the attitude of those in position of authority that the WCG is God's sole organ of truth upon the earth, despite public pronouncements



Is your sin debt paid in full by Christ, or is it refinanced? This helpful booklet, written by Timothy Oliver of Watchman's Salt Lake City office, was designed mainly for Mormons. But it is a helpful discussion for anyone who is studying the relationship between law and grace. It is available this month for a donation of \$4.00 or more.

to the contrary. There has been no evidence of change in the attitude that whatever the church declares to be truth at any given time is to be accepted without question. If any member questions the leader-

ship, they can be subjected to strong rebuke and many have been disfellowshipped. In the minds of many in the WCG, to be disfellowshipped from the WCG is to be cut off from God and that person's fate is to be cast into the lake of fire. The doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone is a cardinal Christian tenet, but attitudes which usurp power and authority from God are foreign to the spirit of the gospel of God's love revealed in Christ Jesus. (These observations are based on over one hundred letters and phone calls received by Watchman Fellowship from current and former members of the church.)

Two Kinds of Religions

There were two main schools of thought concerning justification which emerged from the Reformation.

The Roman Catholic church's Council of Trent (1545-1563) decreed, "If anyone says by the sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred *ex opere operato* (from the work), but that faith alone in the divine promise is sufficient to obtain grace, let him be anathema" (7th session, 1547, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, by Rev. H. J. Schroeder).

The work of Vatican II brought this thought into modern life by expounding, "...the treasury of the Church is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. This

treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints.... In this way they obtain their own salvation and at the same time cooperate in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body" (Vatican II, Vol. I, Ch. 2, Sec. 5, pg. 66, January 1, 1967, No. 6, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*).

And finally from the post-Vatican II *The Code of Canon Law*, the church declares, "The sacraments of the New Testament, instituted by Christ the Lord and entrusted to the Church, ... stand out as the signs and means by which ... sanctification of humankind is effected" (Canon 840).

...the believer is only counted or declared righteous by God. The former system obligates the believer to keep the law and sacraments and remain in the true church in order to be saved.

The Protestant view was that the believer is only counted or declared righteous by God. The former system obligates the believer to keep the law and sacraments and remain in the true church in order to be saved. The latter system recognizes that the indwelling Holy Spirit abhors sin and will ever convict the believer of sin in his life. But, there are no works required of the Christian to secure eternal life. Eternal life is a present and future possession. Hebrews 10:14,17-18 states: "For by one offering He hath perfected for

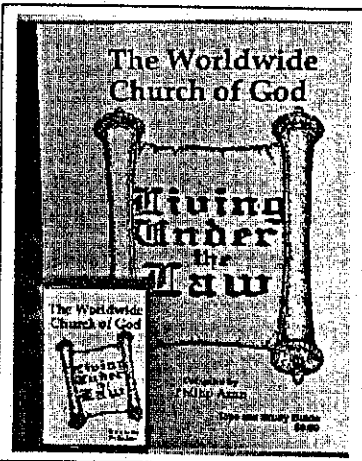
ever them that are sanctified. And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin."

The Worldwide Church of God under Herbert Armstrong taught a unique mix of Protestant and what would appear to be, Roman Catholic thinking on conversion. Armstrong taught that you were converted when you were baptized and received the Holy Spirit. He stated in the booklet *All about Water Baptism*, "We are saved by GRACE, and through FAITH—make no mistake about that; but—there are conditions!" (p. 3). Armstrong's conditions were that you remain in the WCG (God's true church) and that you obey the Ten Commandments, keep the Sabbath, the Holy Days and whatever else he declared to be truth.

The current doctrinal revisions being brought about by the efforts of Joseph Tkach and his team are to be applauded as extraordinary in light of their spiritual benefits to the church membership. But, at the same time the attitudes and practices of administration and field ministry undermine the spirit and strength of the new emphasis on grace.

The words of the apostle John are clear, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his son. He that hath the son hath life; and he that hath not the son of God hath not life." (1 John 5:11-12).

To the followers of the Worldwide Church of God and former members, may God establish your heart in peace and the assurance that you are safe in Christ. ✠



Living Under the Law

By Phillip Arnn

This cassette tape discusses the errors and doctrinal changes of the Worldwide Church of God during Herbert Armstrong 53 year tenure as Pastor General. The documentation guide contains photocopies of 21 documents including:

- *False Prophecies: Mussolini the "Beast," 1/3 of the world dead by 1975, etc.*
- *1972 Interoffice Memo: Recounts many errors and "Persecution Possibilities"*
- *Divorce and Remarriage: Heartbreaking doctrine and subsequent change*
- *God's Government: Armstrong reverses Church structure, claims Apostleship*
- *Armstrong's Salvation: by law not by grace*

Order the tape and manual for a donation of \$8.00 or more. Please ask for the set by name when you write.

WCG Accepts Trinity

Continued from Page 4

stating "Perhaps it would be helpful for me to explain here what was wrong with our article titled 'Who Was Jesus' Father?' in the final issue of *The Good News* (November-December 1990), which was designed to refute the doctrine of the Trinity. First, let me say that the author of the article was simply using our traditional terminology, understanding and reasoning. His explanations were no different from what has been generally taught in the Church. We should all realize that this is simply an area that had never been carefully studied" (*Worldwide News*, 23 December 1991, p.5.)

Tkach made it very clear at the time that the Church was not adopting the Trinity doctrine. He explained, "Someone may ask, 'Does this mean we now accept the doctrine of the Trinity?' No, it does not" (*Ibid*, p. 1). His point was that many of the arguments the church used against the Trinity doctrine were flawed in that the church did not really understand the doctrine. Also in its zeal to attack the Trinity doctrine the church used metaphors and analogies that were "biblically wrong." Tkach added, "when we attempt to point out the errors and inconsistencies in the teachings of others, we must at least understand what others are teaching to avoid exposing our own ignorance" (*Ibid*, p. 5).

By this time the church was no longer seeing the doctrine of the Trinity as a Satan inspired teaching. Tkach explained, "The doctrine of the Trinity did not originate in paganism, as we have traditionally taught" (*Ibid*, 25 August 1992, p.1). The church produced a compilation of brief doctrinal statements from current publications that was shared in 1991 during discussions with the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, a Deerfield, Illinois based seminary affiliated with the Evangelical Free Church. The document quoted Stavrinides' explanation that the Church now views Eastern, Western, Protestant, and modernist views of the Trinity, "as genuine attempts to reach a deeper understanding of God's nature" (*Summary of Doctrinal Statements and Recent*

Changes Within the Worldwide Church of God, p. 8).

Related to the Trinity doctrine, the Church no longer teaches that men can become God in the same way that Jesus and the Father are God. Tkach writes: "Even though some may have thought they knew what they meant when they said that 'we are to be Gods,' the term 'Gods' implies complete equality with God and a certain independence of being. That is definitely not the Church's teaching."

To facilitate the changes, the Church has discontinued most of Herbert Armstrong's most popular books including: *The Incredible Human Potential*, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*, *The Missing Dimension in Sex*, and Armstrong's final book, *Mystery of the Ages*, which had been heralded at the time to be perhaps, "the most important book written in almost 1,900 years" (p. xii, see *Watchman Examiner* Vol. 8, No. 5, p. 1).

Changes Fuel Attacks From Former Ministers

The Worldwide Church of God has suffered blistering attacks by former members who have seized on the changes as opportunities to promote their own rival churches. These rival churches include the International Church of God, (founded by Armstrong's son, Garner Ted), the Philadelphia Church of God, and a very serious new contender, the Global Church of God,

Other doctrinal changes:

1. A more balanced view of prophecy in light of world events (*The Worldwide News*, 23 April 1990, p.1).
2. Moves toward de-emphasis or rejection of British Israelism (See page 5).
3. Discontinuing its claims of apostolic authority (*The Good News*, April 1979, p. 25 compared to *The Worldwide News*, 31 March 1992, p.1).
4. Greater emphasis on grace and less emphasis on salvation by works such as tithing, dietary law, Sabbath keeping, etc. (compare *The Good News*, January/February 1990, pp. 6-7 with *Co-worker Letter*, 24 May 1990).

founded earlier this year by the well-known former Worldwide Evangelist, Roderick Meredith (see page 10 for a chart of splinter groups).

From the materials they produce, these rival churches for the most part continue to cling to the classic errors of Armstrongism. In their attacks on Tkach and the changes in the Worldwide Church, there seems to be little attempt to deal with issues biblically or in a scholarly manner. Most issues are settled by an appeal to Herbert W. Armstrong and his eclectic interpretation of the Bible.

Architects of Change

According to insiders, the major impetus for doctrinal changes is biblical scholarship from the Church Administration department (CHAD). Key architects of the changes include Joseph Tkach Jr. (son of the current leader), K.J. Stavrinides, and Michael Feazell, who recently received a M.A. in Religion from Azusa Pacific and is pursuing a doctorate in theology.

Evangelical Christians should be encouraged by more evidence of real and substantive doctrinal improvements on the part of the Worldwide Church of God. That encouragement should be tempered, however, by continued and widespread reports received by Watchman Fellowship and others, of spiritual abuse. In all, Watchman has received over 100 letters and telephone calls from current and former Worldwide members reporting unwarranted shunning, manipulation, intimidation, or other forms of abuse from their church superiors. A few of these testimonies are carried in this month's *Expositor*.

Even Tkach laments the fact that their own members sometimes fear writing the headquarters with questions feeling that they must do so anonymously (*Worldwide News*, 22 September 1992, p.1). Apparently many members fear reprisal for questioning the doctrinal changes or new direction of the church. According to reports Watchman is receiving, those fears are not entirely unjustified. Christians are encouraged to pray for the Worldwide Church of God and for the thousands of lives affected by its doctrine.

Eclectic = to select, pick out; 1. "Selecting from various systems, doctrines, or sources"

Philadelphia Church of God: *Teachings Of A False Prophet*

Phillip Arnn with Bill Cline and Donald Hudgel

Since the death of Herbert W. Armstrong in 1986, the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) has seen a number of former ministers leave the church. These former ministers have either resigned or have been fired because of their objections to the massive changes in WCG teachings.

The theological turn about, spearheaded by Joseph Tkach Jr, head of Church Administration and Michael Feazell, chairman of the manuscript review team has left many hard-line Armstrong supporters, who are unwilling to consider change, so furious that several have formed their own churches and declared themselves to be Armstrong's true successors.

One former minister who has formed his own church in the image of Armstrong is Gerald R. Flurry. Flurry was separated from the WCG in December of 1989. By January of 1990 he had founded the Philadelphia Church of God (PCG). Flurry has declared himself to be the restorer of the truth as taught by Armstrong. Many who have left Flurry's church have accused him of all but deifying Armstrong.

Flurry immediately began publishing a monthly newsletter, *The Philadelphia Trumpet*. At least 12 out of 18 staff members of *The Philadelphia Trumpet* are relatives, friends or former members of Flurry's last WCG congregation.

Subscription list size of *The Philadelphia Trumpet* (PT) is approximately 10,000. Most names on the list are said to be members of the WCG who did not ask to be placed on PCG's list. Flurry encourages this practice when he exhorted his followers, "If any of you have names and addresses of Church members whom you feel would benefit from this paper (other than Oklahoma City and Enid, Oklahoma), please send them to us and we will

mail this message to them. Everything will be kept confidential" (*Malachi's Message*, p. 82, 1st edition).

PCG's annual income is thought to be approximately \$1.5 million, according to estimates of former members. Flurry claims to have congregations in 16 countries.

A number of former members of Flurry's PCG have written to Watchman Fellowship requesting the *Watchman Expositor* warn people about this group. Some of their concerns are based on his doomsday prophecies of judgment on America and his teaching of a "place of safety." Some former followers of Flurry are concerned that the PCG is another Jonestown waiting to happen.

The following is a brief look at some of Flurry's teachings.

False Prophecies

1) California cursed by God for '79 receivership: "The farmers say they are 'sick' about the drought! But are they *sick* enough to repent? All Californians and other Americans and the British people are receiving a *warning* from God to repent of their abominable sins! And that repentance revolves around heeding what Herbert W. Armstrong (HWA) taught for 57 years.... Now only the Philadelphia Church of God holds fast to God's inspired teaching through Herbert W. Armstrong. HWA was God's modern day 'Elijah' who was prophesied to come in this end-time (Mal. 4:5-6, Matt. 17:10-11)" (*Philadelphia Trumpet*, March 1991, p. 10).

"God sent him and God is going to hold America, England and the world accountable for what he taught! The drought is a *major disaster* for California. But will it move people to repent? Or will it take another major disaster to awaken them?

Perhaps a devastating earthquake in the near future? Or a nuclear bomb attack? How much God has to inflict depends on our attitude!"

"...As I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:7,11). This is a powerful *warning* from God to the 'house of Israel.' HWA taught for many years that Israel today is mainly the U.S. and England. This is so terribly serious. Our nations must 'turn' — repent — *OR DIE!!* Has the state of California committed a sin for which it is being punished?" (*Ibid*)

"This drought should have 'the ring of a *BIBLICAL CURSE* — because *THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT IT IS!*'" (*Ibid*).

"Read what Herbert W. Armstrong wrote on January 3, 1980 — On January 3rd, 1979 — one year ago today — without the legally required prior notice or warning, an armed task force swooped down in a massive surprise attack, in utter violation of the Constitution of the United States, on the headquarters complex of the Worldwide Church of God, Ambassador College, *The PLAIN TRUTH* and other publications, and the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation in Pasadena, California. This invasion of state against church was made solely for the witch-hunt purpose of seeking to find some evidence to support the baseless allegations of embittered expelled members. There was no evidence. Hence there was no criminal charge" (*Ibid*).

In 1992, after a long period of heavy rainfall the Governor of California declared the state's long drought to be officially over.

2) January 16 Prediction: "You are going to see the date of HWA's death take

on more significance as time goes on" (*Malachi's Message*, p. 83, 1st edition).

"War Begins — January 16, 1991."

"I felt confident something ominous could happen on January 16, 1991. Here's why. God sent an 'Elijah' (Mal. 4:5-6, Matt. 17:10-11) or HWA before 'the great and dreadful day of the Lord.' A dreadful day is on the immediate horizon! There are major prophecies in the Bible about this man and God is going to force this world to finally accept what he taught" (*Philadelphia Trumpet*, February 1991, p. 1).

The "ominous" event turned out to be a quick and decisive military victory. It hardly resembled an event which could be construed as a warning from God of impending destruction for the U.S., Great Britain or Israel. There have been no significant events to occur on this date for 1992 or 1993.

3) L.A. riots/Ezekiel 5 prophecy:

"The blacks are learning they can break the law and get away with it. And God says in this, 'you shall burn with fire' (Ezekiel 5:2). Now we could just say that is just symbolism. But I don't think it is just symbolism. There is a pestilence or a plague of some kind. And it had to do, I think you could safely say, with burning or with what's going on in L.A., and is going to go on all over this land before it is over. And now the world sees us falling apart and our cities being burned. And there will be many more and it is going to get a lot worse because, it is prophesied here brethren. And it will, God says so" (Sermon by Flurry, 9 May 1992).

The prophecies in Ezekiel 5 are plainly referring to the city of Jerusalem (verse 5), not Los Angeles. The rioting did not spread to other cities as predicted by Flurry. This is only one of many instances where Flurry has attempted to take current events and place them within Old Testament prophecies.

4) **Angelic Revelation:** "Some of us may have known a few details of Malachi's Message before it was printed. Two or three people have said they understood most of it before it was written. That is a horrible fallacy! Malachi's Message was delivered to me and the PCG in 1989. A mighty angel directly from God delivered it! There was no need for the angel to

come if a few already understood the message! I hope all of us would challenge such views" (*Philadelphia Trumpet*, September/October 1992, p. 8).

In late October of 1992, an inquiry was made to Flurry concerning the nature of this angelic visitation. This reply was sent by Wayne Turgeon, of the Personal Correspondence Department. "God is revealing new truth to Mr. Flurry in the same way that he did to HWA — gradually showing him meanings to scriptures never before fully understood. There are no visions, voices, etc. This same process applies to the new truth about 'The Little Book'" (Letter on file).

Flurry makes a dangerous claim about his revelation, "The message of this little book WAS REVEALED 1900 YEARS AGO! HOWEVER, IT WAS NOT

A more balanced approach to biblical prophecy may be difficult to swallow for long-time followers of Armstrong. They were raised on a steady diet of authoritative dates including colorful forecasts and shocking predictions — most of which have already failed.

WRITTEN UNTIL 1989! MALACHI'S MESSAGE IS AN UNWRITTEN PART OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION!" (*Philadelphia Trumpet*, September/October 1992, p. 6). The danger lies in the warning found in Revelation 22:18, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book. If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book."

Paul, also, gave ample warning, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-8).

Also, Flurry states, "this little book WAS REVEALED 1900 YEARS AGO!" But, notice his statement elsewhere, "It's a NEW REVELATION — not something somebody already knew!" (*Philadelphia Trumpet*, September/October, 1992, p. 6, 8).

5) Claims HWA is end-time Elijah:

Flurry declares of Herbert Armstrong, "Because he is God's man. And he is the Elijah" (sermon tape, 9 May 1992). Jesus made this statement about John the Baptist, "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you will receive it, this is Elias (Elijah) which was for to come" (Matthew 11:13-14).

Gerald Flurry is falling into the same error of Herbert W Armstrong. He is attempting to find scriptural references to his own life and ministry in biblical prophecy and is assigning Bible verses (out of context) and apocalyptic significance to minor, irrelevant, local events in world history.

This is the same formula that inspired Armstrong's false prophecies. Armstrong identified Mussolini and Hitler as the Antichrist, said the war in Viet Nam would end in the universal world peace and predicted end-time events for the years 1972 and 1975 (See *Watchman Expositor*, Vol. 8, No. 5, 1991 for complete documentation).

To its credit, the Worldwide Church of God today has resisted this misuse of the Bible. Tkach has not seized on local news headlines or even major events like the recent Gulf War or the reunification of Germany as an excuse to set dates for the end of the world.

A more balanced approach to biblical prophecy may be difficult to swallow for long-time followers of Armstrong. They were raised on a steady diet of authoritative dates including colorful forecasts and shocking predictions — most of which have already failed. Many members planned their educations, careers, families — their entire lives on Armstrong's false dates.

For those followers of Armstrong, Flurry's Philadelphia Church of God should be seen for what it is — a step in the wrong direction. ❖

Global Church of God

Meredith's Prophetic Traditions

Rick Branch

For decades, the *Plain Truth* magazine carried numerous articles warning of cataclysmic disasters — which were just a few years away. An entire generation was spiritually nurtured on the prophetic speculations of Herbert W. Armstrong and other leaders in the Worldwide Church of God.

As early as 1956, *The Plain Truth* was warning faithful readers about "seven long and frightful years" which "...takes us — if the dates which appear so definitely indicated by these prophecies are correct — from 1965 to 1972!" What was to happen in 1972? The Worldwide Church of God explained, "God's work of spreading the gospel of the Kingdom of God to all the world would probably end in 1972!" (April 1956, p. 22).

Such was the norm under the leadership of Herbert W. Armstrong. From the Second Coming of Jesus only a few years away (January 1967), to the "Great Drought of 1975" (April 1967), Armstrong was rarely without prophetic ponderings.

However, under the new leadership of Joseph Tkach, the Worldwide Church of God seems to be taking a more biblical approach to understanding apocalyptic literature.

In his *Personal* column, Tkach writes, "But it is not scriptural to say 'Look, we have worked out all the chronologies and dates, and guess what, Jesus is coming back in this or that year, or within four to seven years, or in the next 20 years, or sometime in this decade,' or whatever other assessment we may think we are on safe ground to make. ... There are enough



Joseph Tkach has attempted to distance himself from both the failed prophecies of his predecessor, Herbert Armstrong, and rival factions who wish to return to date-setting and cataclysmic predictions. He writes, "There are enough doomsday prophets in the world proclaiming that Jesus is coming back in this or that year, or that some great disaster is going to fall.... But God's Church should not be among them."

doomsday prophets in the world proclaiming that Jesus is coming back in this or that year, or that some great disaster is going to fall somewhere in this or that year. But God's Church should not be among them" (*The Worldwide News*, 23 April 1990, p. 1).

In fact, Tkach appears to be so displeased with this unbiblical basis of approach that he has called it *faulty*.

"Some tend to see Bible prophecy as a sort of jigsaw puzzle or secret code God left the Church," Tkach writes. "They believe that if Church members study prophecy carefully enough, they will be able to figure out the answer to such curiosity-arousing questions as when Jesus will return, the personal identity of the beast of Revelation, or which modern nation will attack another. However, to think of Bible prophecy in this way is to think of it from a faulty premise — from the faulty premise that it is somehow important for Christians to know the answers to such questions. Consequently, a person can unknowingly miss the point of prophecy and put his or her spiritual priorities in the wrong place" (*The Worldwide News*, 9 December 1991, p. 1).

Though Tkach has made some admirable strides in giving the Worldwide Church of God a more biblical and balanced approach to prophetic understanding, it would appear that not all of the leadership is pleased with this new stance.

One example is Roderick Meredith who earlier this year broke away from the Worldwide Church of God and formed the Global Church of God in Glendora, California. Because he had been a member of the Worldwide Church of God for most of its existence, he was able to influence several hundred members to also leave.

In speaking of the Worldwide Church of God and its new approach to biblical interpretation, he writes in his newsletter, "With the truly massive doctrinal changes,

it is definitely time for men and women of faith and courage to stand up for the Truth of Almighty God" (*Global Church News*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1).

Two months later, Meredith wrote, "As more and more professing Christian organizations 'water down' Truth, or compromise with Truth in order to be 'acceptable' to the world or to 'mainstream Christianity,' it is more important than ever that we in the Global Church of God make sure that we *never* do this!" (*Ibid*, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 2).

Part of this truth that Meredith wants to maintain is the old stance, popularized by Armstrong, that prophetic speculation is a key part of the true church.

He explains, "It is absolutely vital that we preach the inspired warning message to our age that God's Word is filled with. It is vital also that the whole thrust of end-time prophecy does not become a 'casualty of compromise.'... Thank God that we in the Global Church are 'free' to preach and practice the *whole Truth*, free to warn our people of the coming world cataclysm while there is still

time, and free to do the Work of preaching the Gospel without fear or favor of men" (*Ibid*).

Meredith is certainly no stranger to predicting *cataclysmic events*. In 1966, while still a member of the Worldwide Church of God, he wrote an article for the *Plain Truth* magazine in which he noted a spectacular biblical event which could happen in 1972.

Meredith's 1965 Prediction: "...Bible prophecy indicates that the final attack on the U.S. and Britain by this coming 'Beast' power could easily be launched perhaps as early as the spring of 1972 — or earlier if this final work of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is cut short."

What was "The meaning of Hitler's fake suicide?" Meredith asked. "It's meaning could SHOCK an awed and astonished world within the next five to seven years! Its meaning could precipitate the END of this present age and the second coming of Jesus Christ! ... It is a *most interesting* date because Bible prophecy indicates that the final attack on the U.S. and Britain by this coming 'Beast' power could easily be

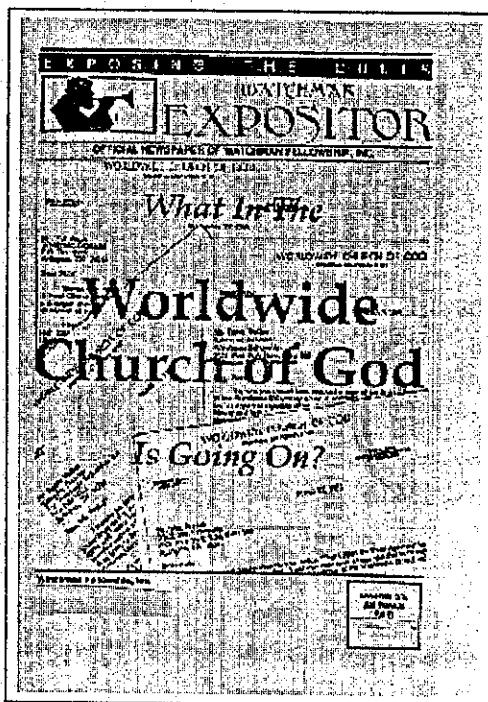
launched perhaps as early as the spring of 1972 — or earlier if this final work of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is cut short" (May 1965, p. 45).

Remember, Meredith stated that these events were based on Bible prophecy. Thus, it would appear that the prophetic speculation tradition, begun by Armstrong, will continue in Meredith's Global Church of God.

In his first newsletter he seems to have set the stage for just such a doomsday teaching style. "God insists that His servants the prophets will understand and fearlessly teach what the future holds. If teachers cannot see the revealed future, then are they true servants of God?" (*Global Church News*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 5).

Perhaps there is a more appropriate question: If teachers misinterpret and falsely predict the revealed truth then are they servants of the true God? This is the question that many who will leave the Worldwide Church of God to join the Global Church of God should be asking themselves. &

Worldwide Church of God Resources



Watchman Fellowship is offering reprints of the *Watchman Examiner*, Vol. 8, No. 5, 1991. This issue reviews:

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