

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

When any one of the called of God refutes divine revelation, and turns instead to human scholarship as the basis for confidence, he rehearses once again the pattern of human rationalization which led Israel, God's chosen and sanctified people, into rank idolatry. After everything we have personally witnessed related to the complete failure of the parent body of God's last day Church, one would think those very lessons would now be especially compelling. For it was the abandonment of confidence in God as a *Revelator* which propelled that organization into flagrant doctrinal perversion. Yet, even within some who seemed for so long to accept divine revelation and walk with the faithful remnant, were ultimately discovered seeds of this very same spiritual disease—culminating in their own failure once fruits of defiance were born in separation (Jude 17–19). "But what revealed doctrine have they changed?," we have been asked. They claim to stand in defense of the same "truth," desiring only to be separate administratively. Even though that very premise defies belief in the unity of Christ, a revealed doctrine in and of itself (Ephesians 4:3–6), there is yet one particular doctrine which now appears may have been pivotal in precipitating that first small fissure which grew over years into a significant spiritual breach. That is the doctrine of *Predestination*.

As early as 1943, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong wrote an article for the *Plain Truth* magazine entitled, "Predestination . . . Does the Bible Teach It?" In that article he confirms the teaching we all remember—for those who were in the Church during those early decades—that all of those called of God were known *by name*, thousands of years before we were born, before the foundation of the world. It was a teaching that generated excitement and appreciation, coming to realize by the inspired speaking of a last-day servant, that in spite of our total unworthiness, God ordained our very personal calling at the inception of His Master Plan for the salvation of mankind. That original article was later turned into a booklet—in 1957. Yet even in the early part of the 1960s, and perhaps earlier, an element of dissenting opinion among certain Ambassador College graduates/students began to surface, vocalizing disagreement with this doctrine. Although one might conclude it makes little difference one way or the other (this concept will be addressed later), the very seeds of the rejection of divine revelation were active in the orientation of those then seeking

to argue with Mr. Armstrong from a technical, scholarly premise. The primary contention was a false conclusion that if God knew each one of us then, as we were to become today, He must have authored every union of our ancestors which produced us, even those that were not legitimate marriages, making God the author of sin. Furthermore they claim, such specific foreknowledge would have absolutely infringed upon free moral agency throughout time. You may have heard the mantra of "free moral agency" from some of those most recently departed. This is not a mere coincidence.

We are all aware of the eventual corruption of major doctrines in the early 1970s, including Pentecost and divorce and remarriage. From that time forward, doctrine after doctrine tumbled rapidly into oblivion, once the precedent for change was solidified by an overt rejection of divine revelation as the one and only source for Truth. While the eventual publication of a perverted teaching on predestination in the July, 1976 issue of *The Good News* probably came and went unnoticed in the wake of more noteworthy changes, it nonetheless marked another example of new teaching standing in total contradiction to previously held doctrine. By 1976, the author of this new article—who was also an important adjunct to the doctrinal committee responsible for the earlier dismantling of core doctrine—stated this about predestination: "In each case, God did not know what they would do. They had free choice, and free choice rules out specific foreknowledge." Certainly this should have been troubling to those who had valued for years the teaching that God knew us by name from the beginning, should it not? Yet, a much earlier attempt to publicly "modify" this doctrine became visible in the 1973 reprinting of Mr. Armstrong's 1957 booklet. Most of the original wording is preserved, except that Mr. Armstrong's original inclusion of the phrase, "[k]new you thousands of years before you were born!"—from the bottom of page 14—was mysteriously dropped in the 1973 version. Why? For those scholastically-oriented men who were forced to keep their own beliefs about predestination in the closet for so many years, the stage was being set for their public debut, in the midst of a changing political climate that was already emerging to expedite fundamental doctrinal repudiation. It was the perfect environment to begin a bold revealing of their fallacious orientation toward Truth.

If one is claiming to be the defender of pure, unadulterated doctrine and divine revelation, it would seem inconsistent to simultaneously believe and defend this revised, perverted teaching about predestination, would it not? Especially when there is such clear confirmation of the original teaching in 1943, and the subsequent aberrations that crept in years later? Yet that is exactly what is professed and taught by ones who once walked with us. As recently as 1993 we began to hear publicly, within our midst, that one cannot know for sure whether we were really known by God from the foundation of the world, and that the whole issue is purely a "speculative consideration." By 1995 the premise of maintaining neutrality on the subject had turned to definitive written arguments, attempting to debunk Mr. Armstrong's original teaching using the very reasonings advanced by those early "scholars" in the 60s. It is interesting to note that the surfacing of this erroneous concept

predates the first accusations against the character of this ministry by a number of months. Although we cannot know for sure, is it possible that resistance by this ministry to the advances of doctrinal perversion concerning predestination in 1993 could have been a critical catalyst in the ultimate separation that took place years later? God alone knows the answer to that question. But because it was certainly involved in some way as an agitating factor, it is important we all understand the true Church teaching about predestination. We need to recognize that Satan, more than anything else, desires to hide from us the knowledge of who we really are, and the true significance of the gift God has preserved for the faithful. Is there any better way to discourage potential heirs of God's family than to convince them surreptitiously that they are not truly set apart for a special purpose after all? Who profits the most if God's chosen turn to believe the process of their selection within God's plan was not as significant as we once thought? Does this concept strengthen our appreciation for the value of our calling, or does it serve to diminish not only the perception of our own role in His Master Plan, but the very omniscience of the Supreme Architect Himself?

What Did the Church Teach?

In his 1943 article, Mr. Armstrong was addressing the erroneous concept that human beings were predestined to be either saved or lost. Through a rehearsal of the overall plan of salvation, he showed very effectively what predestination does and does not mean. One excerpt summarizes it very well:

"Predestination has to do with BEING CALLED. Not with being saved or lost. Those now being called, in this age, were foreknown, and PRE-destinated to be called now—to be the FIRST to put their hope in Christ. All others have their call later" (*The Plain Truth*, November-December, 1943).

To confirm this he cited key scriptures related to predestination. Notice them:

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30).

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, . . . In whom also we have obtained

an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ (Ephesians 1:4–5, 11–12).

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (2 Timothy 1:9).

In making his point, Mr. Armstrong also confirms that those called to be part of the firstfruits were known *by name* thousands of years ago, *before* the foundation of the world. The Church taught that God, knowing the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10), knew who would be born through the generations of men, by virtue of the exercise of each individual's free moral agency. Given that advance knowledge of those freewill choices to be made, He used this knowledge in selecting specific individuals to fulfill His perfect plan throughout the ages. What was taught then is that our advanced calling from the foundation of the world does not infringe *one iota* upon our free moral agency to choose right from wrong.

Even as this explanation of the doctrine will seem simple and comprehensible to those led by the Spirit, dissenters who carry their own brand of misconceptions and speculative thought will leap upon every word and concept to refute what we received as revelation, similar to the centuries old debates over predestination among the uncalled scholars. We will look at the specific arguments advanced to refute the revelation of Jesus Christ, but first however, remember that technical explanations are never the fundamental proof of the Truth. Divine revelation is the source of Truth. Technical explanations are always, at most, a substantiation of that revelation—never the proof. So as it was with the doctrine of Pentecost, divorce and remarriage, and every other teaching which came under attack, so is it likewise with the topic of predestination. Any technical argument which does not confirm that which we received by revelation can be categorically rejected as perversion.

The Foundation of Error

Let us first address the fundamental concepts of those challenging predestination. Then, as we move through each individual argument you will see how these preconceptions dominate and skew their interpretation of the evidence.

To begin, what about the idea that for God to have known us by name, as we are today, before the foundation of the world, this means He must have "pulled the strings" Himself to make each event occur, including every adulterous relationship that may be found in our ancestral lineages? The direct leap in thought is that if God knew it would occur, then He is automatically and categorically the author of those events. Does this assumption make sense? Is someone's free moral agency to make his own choice automatically compromised

because someone else knows his character well enough to recognize what choice will be made? On a lower plane, what about a married couple who have come to know each other very well over many years. Because a wife "knows" her husband's proclivities well enough to make very accurate predictions about what foods he will choose, what words he will speak, or what actions he will take in given situations, does this wife's knowledge of his character and tendencies impact his capacity to choose? Or does he still have full capacity to make his own choices, in spite of his wife's foreknowledge of his pattern of behavior? If that husband makes a choice which is in conflict with God's law, does the fact the wife "knew" he would choose that path make her responsible for his sin? Obviously not. But can God's superior knowledge be applied under this principle? Far above this limited kind of intuitive human knowledge, God actually *knows* the literal end from the beginning.

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure (Isaiah 46:9–10).

Does this not explain the existence of the inspired scripture, containing God's very detailed long-range prophecies which will certainly be fulfilled? Yet, this very God who knows all things past, present, and future, also asserts that we are absolutely in control of our personal choices. He does not compel us without recourse to obey Him. Else, why would He have told us to choose?

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live (Deuteronomy 30:19).

The dissenters, knowing these scriptures, rationalize that God must choose *not to know* certain things, believing such foreknowledge of God requires manipulation of our choices. The example of God's test of Abraham is cited as proof of this concept. They assert God did not know whether Abraham would be willing to sacrifice Isaac as instructed until the test actually played out. "And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son* from me" (Genesis 22:12). Do we really believe God did not know the end from the beginning in this case, or that He chose not to know? If God really did not know until this event whether Abraham would be faithful, why had God already made a covenant with him years earlier?

And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee (Genesis 17:3–5).

The covenant had already been made. To assert God did not know Abraham's character yet and needed the test of Isaac's sacrifice to gain that knowledge presumes God jumped the gun in making a covenant with him years earlier. Anyone who presumes that foreknowledge automatically equals manipulation of the outcome must adopt such a belief to make their ideas plausible. They assert further that if we do not accept the concept that God truly *did not know* beforehand the outcome of Abraham's test, we deny a literal understanding of scripture and are destined to deny every other direct statement in the Bible.

Christ Is the Example

But what about the example of Christ? Let us apply the same rationale and see if the concept holds up. Was Christ predestined before the foundation of the world? "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). Few will argue that Christ was foreordained to be born of flesh and to die for the sins of mankind thousands of years beforehand. But was this Christ also predestined to have very specific physical features and to become the exact person born in the flesh thousands of years after that plan was ordained?

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him (Isaiah 53:1–2).

Not only was Jesus Christ foreordained to accomplish a particular mission, He was prophesied hundreds of years before His birth to have specific physical features. These features result from unique gene combinations, including and perhaps dominated by the physical lineage of His eventual human mother, Mary. For the Father to have known the Son before the foundation of the world, exactly as He would be in the flesh both spiritually and physically, there must certainly have been foreknowledge of exactly who would marry whom throughout all generations from Adam to Mary. That being true, do we conclude then that all of those physical ancestors of Jesus had no free moral agency to choose their own mates? Were they all merely automatons acting out a predetermined plan with no options to make personal choice? Or did they really have the free choice that God promised, only allowing that He used advance knowledge of their freewill choices to overlay and harmonize the execution of His Master Plan?

Furthermore, were all of the physical ancestors of Jesus free from moral corruption and of totally pure lineage? Rahab the harlot was an ancestor of Jesus (compare Matthew 1:5 and Luke 3:23–32). Because she first came into contact with Israel and her eventual husband, Booz, from circumstances of a sordid past, does this mean God must have been the author of her sin, in having predetermined she would be Christ's ancestor? Or did He merely choose to select her for His purpose, even knowing ahead of time what choices she would make in her own life? God called every one of us out of sin.

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence (1 Corinthians 1:26–29).

Because He predetermined to confound the mighty through the use of base sinners, do we impute our original sins to God, since they were necessary to fulfill His will? Such logic breaks down when it is carried to its necessary and full conclusion.

Was Christ a Free Moral Agent?

If it is true as claimed, that "free choice rules out specific foreknowledge," and we have already seen that Christ was absolutely predestined to fulfill a very specific and detailed commission, do we then conclude that Christ was not a free moral agent? Notice how specific His commission really was, and how many things He did "that the scripture might be fulfilled," (John 13:18; 19:24, 28, 36–37). Was He not predetermined to triumph over sin, that He should become the first of many future sons? "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet" (Matthew 1:21–22). Were not the specifics of His crucifixion described in the Psalms hundreds of years before they actually occurred (Psalm 22:13–18)? Do we say then that Christ was merely a robotized being, going through the motions to fulfill a prophesy that He could neither alter nor possibly fail? If this is how we view Christ, it is a denial of our Savior:

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in

all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Our only hope of salvation is if Christ, born in the flesh, and with the very same pulls of human nature, overcame that flesh and the temptations of the Adversary, through the exercise of free moral agency under the influence of a full measure of the Holy Spirit. If He was prevented through predestination from failing, then His accomplishment was insignificant, and our hope in Him as a Savior would be fruitless. On the other hand, if Christ, being very definitely predestined and foreordained to accomplish a specific mission, did so with absolute use of free moral agency, how then can it be true that "free choice rules out specific foreknowledge"? And if it is true of Christ, then it must also be true of anyone else God might choose to predestinate for a specific purpose. It should now be apparent the concept of predestination is not trivial by any means, because it absolutely flavors our philosophy of the identity of Christ, the patriarchs, as well as our own hope within God's plan.

Take Jeremiah and Judas Iscariot as further examples. Was Jeremiah known by God before his birth? "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). Dissenters will admit that Jeremiah was actually known by name before his birth, because this text makes it irrefutable. But they attempt to say God only predestinated a very few unique individuals to fulfill special commissions, otherwise it is the offices, not specific individuals, that were foreknown. But even though they will admit Jeremiah was such "an exception," do they accept or reject that Jeremiah was a free moral agent? According to the idea that any foreknowledge prevents free moral agency, we must conclude they view Jeremiah as one who mechanically carried out a calling in which he used no personal will to accept or reject God. Notice also Judas Iscariot. "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me" (John 13:18). Jesus actually chose Judas, knowing he would betray Him. What about the Old Testament prophecy that He would be betrayed for exactly thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12–13)? This means the Father and the Son had advance knowledge about the choices Judas would make, even the specifics of the financial transaction he would make with the Jews. Does this mean therefore that Judas did not have free moral agency? Was he created as a puppet with no option to do anything but act out a predetermined part, ending in failure? Among other things, this concept refutes the very point of Mr. Armstrong's article—proving we were not created already predetermined for either failure or success.

Technical Arguments

Understanding now the premise of those who will not accept the revealed teaching—that we, as the called, were each known by name at the time God began His creation—let us examine the arguments being used from the interpretation of Greek words to support their conclusions.

First, we are told every single text in Paul's Epistles which deal with the subject of predestination uses the aorist tense, and therefore these scriptures cannot be used to confirm that our predestination really happened as far back as the time of creation. Romans 8:29–30 is cited as an example:

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

The aorist tense in Greek is unlike anything in the English language. It is a tense that expresses fact without relationship to time. Therefore, even though the King James translators translated this passage in the past tense, we are told it should be more accurately understood to read, "whom he foreknows, he predestinates, he also calls, also justifies, he also glorifies." The intent of this argument is to say the verb tense is the only means we have to ascribe time relationship, and therefore if it is aorist tense, no conclusions can be drawn about "when" these things occurred. But is this true?

What is totally omitted is the fact these scriptures contain particular Greek verbs which *themselves* define a time order, regardless of the tense used. The verb translated "foreknow" is the Greek word *proginosko*, meaning to know beforehand. Therefore, regardless of whether we use *proginosko* in the past, present, aorist, or future tense, the verb itself tells us that there was knowledge which preceded something else in time order. It is similar to the English word, "prejudice." Prejudice means to pre-judge, or to draw a conclusion *before* considering the facts. Whether we say he *was* prejudiced, *is* prejudiced, or *will be* prejudiced, the verb definition itself still tells us in each case that a conclusion precedes in time the considering of facts. Many verbs do not have their own time reference and are absolutely dependent upon the tense to give it that relationship. But not so with *proginosko*, and not so with another important verb in Romans 8:29, translated "predestinate."

The word translated "predestinate" is the Greek verb *proorizo*, meaning *determine beforehand, ordain*. Once again, without help from the tense of the word, aorist or otherwise, the verb itself makes it plain something was determined prior to something else

occurring, a clear time and sequence delineation. Therefore, a very safe way to translate Romans 8:29 is, "For whom he knows beforehand, he also ordains beforehand to be conformed to the image of his Son." Verse thirty then defines the specific sequence of events which must occur in their proper order to achieve salvation. "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Romans 8:30). Even when you remove the past tense, it shows that first comes predestination, a determining beforehand, followed by a calling. Those called who are judged worthy by their obedience to God (using free moral agency to choose to obey rather than reject God) are then granted the glory of sonship in God's eternal family.

But *when* did that sequence of events begin to transpire? When did that original foreknowledge take place, preceding our calling? Was it really at the time of the original creation? The dissenters attack this with their next argument, claiming that the phrase "from the foundation of the world" is mistranslated. Notice it in Revelation 17:8:

The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

To us, this plain language shows that there were those whose names were not written in the book of life, and therefore by implication, those whose names *were* written. When? From the foundation of the world—substantiating Mr. Armstrong's assertion that the called were known by name thousands of years ago. So how then is this refuted? First, we are asked to believe the antecedent of "foundation of the world" is not "names," but "book of life," meaning it was only the book of life that was from the foundation of the world, not our names *in* that book. What is the substantiation for this stretch of logic? None, except that it appears to strengthen a preconceived notion which is greatly challenged by this text.

The other argument centers around the word "from," in "from the foundation of the world." The Greek word is *apo*, meaning *from*, or in some cases, *since*. Therefore, to prove God did not really know us by name at the time of the very creation, we are told the proper translation should be "since the foundation of the world." In this way, it can be claimed "the foundation of the world" is only a benchmark for reference, from which time people began to be called *since* then. Using this interpretation, it can be claimed God's foreknowledge of us could have been as recent as moments before we were born, eliminating anything significant about the entire concept of predestination. But there is a serious flaw in using the word "since." First, reasoning that "since" is preferred over "from" is purely speculative.

There is no evidence offered to show that "from" is not the correct translation of *apo*. Furthermore, there is one key text which removes all doubt about the very timing of our predestination.

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will (Ephesians 1:4–5).

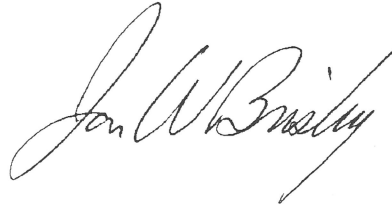
Here we find the phrase "before the foundation of the world." Unlike the other texts which use the word *apo*, the word "before" is from the Greek word, *pro*. *Pro* means *before*, simply and directly. There is therefore no opportunity to cast doubt upon the meaning of this phrase. Within this text we find confirmation of the specific time when the sequence of events listed in Romans 8:29–30 began to be initiated. When did He choose us? *Before* the foundation of the world! The dissenters attempt to gloss over this fact because it refutes all of the other suppositions in their arsenal. Again, they even attempt to introduce the "aorist red herring" by saying "before" does not really mean "before," because the tense is aorist. But whether you say "he *chooses* us before the foundation of the world" or "he *hath chosen* us before the foundation of the world," the meaning and time distinction is still clear. When did (or does) the choice occur? *Before* the foundation of the world!

Combining this text with the others we have seen, there is only one interpretation that fits them all and reveals a singular, harmonious conclusion. That is, we were chosen *before* the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), at which time our very names were written in the book of life (Revelation 17:8). Those chosen for that purpose were then called to a knowledge of the Truth in an appointed time, granted the opportunity to choose to obey God, and then if judged worthy, will be born gloriously into the Kingdom of God (Romans 8:29–30). THIS IS PRECISELY WHAT MR. ARMSTRONG ORIGINALLY TAUGHT BY REVELATION, AND IT IS ABSOLUTELY SUPPORTED FROM THE TECHNICAL STUDY AS WELL.

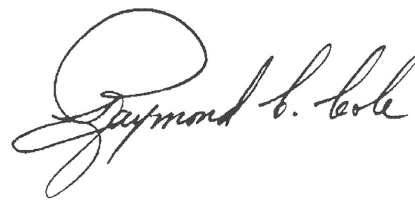
Remember, the basis of our faith lies in the belief we were called to a knowledge of the Truth through a chosen servant commissioned by God in these last days, and that that servant received from God the very same message delivered to Moses, to Jesus Christ, and to the chosen apostles. We believe that revelation is absolutely substantiated from the Holy Scriptures. We are not interested in the postulations of those who reject divine revelation, who deny Herbert W. Armstrong was that chosen servant, or who feign belief in the former, while insidiously picking apart those elements they do not personally favor on the basis of human scholarship. We certainly will not become the spokesmen for an Adversary who would like nothing better than for the elect of God to begin to doubt the significance of their foreknowledge and calling.

May your confidence continue in that foundation which is spiritual, immutable, and everlasting. May you hold fast to the revealed Truth, free of doubt that you were truly chosen of God by a personal calling, known by name before the foundation of the world.

Your devoted servants in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jon W. Brisby". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Jon W. Brisby

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is highly stylized with large loops and flourishes, particularly at the beginning and end.

Raymond C. Cole