

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

This will be an unusual letter, at least compared with what you are used to receiving from me. In all the years I have been writing these letters to the church at large, I have primarily addressed specific doctrinal or administrative subjects which read like topical articles. I have also followed Mr. Raymond Cole's approach in writing in the third person, without reference to myself. This month you will receive something quite different. I want to share some very personal thoughts with you on a variety of topics related to the last-day church as we exist at this time. I hope this personalized approach will provide a perspective for you that you might not otherwise receive.

On Our Remnant Members

It still amazes me to think about the incredible examples that have been set by a number of people I have come to know and love in this body over the past twenty-six years. The constituency of our fellowship has certainly changed over those years, but there has always been a solid core who have proved through many trials that they really do believe and love this way of life. Their observable fruits have been evidence of that, and I have been greatly inspired and encouraged by their examples.

When I first joined this group in 1981, we were mostly former Worldwide Church of God members, very recently forced out, and many dealing with that trauma like the loss of a loved one. Well, that physical church body *was* a loved one—it was dear to us—and losing such "belonging" with them produced many of the same reactions as does the death of a family member. Intense grief, denial, confusion, and even anger and resentment seemed to flavor the reactions of many who came out. During those first ten years of our existence as a remnant group (beginning in 1974–75), there were many who came and went, having been scattered into the wilderness by an apostate ministry (Jeremiah 23). Many at that time came to this group for different reasons, often for the wrong reasons. We became a halfway house for some of those who were on their way out of the parent organization, but not decided yet upon what they really believed and valued. The same was true of a number of ministers who came with us during that time but ultimately "flaked out" at some point.

But through it all, there was a stable core who really did believe the things Mr. Armstrong had first taught, and they were intent on holding fast to those principles. They found refuge in this little group, and they found a source of spiritual nourishment to sustain them. A number of them have since died. Some are still here today, consistent as ever in their defense of that truth. This is the foundational nucleus which has sustained us with real continuity all these years.

However, as time has marched on since those initial traumatic years, an increasing number of our members today are ones who were never members of the Worldwide Church of God, and maybe even never heard about the teachings of Herbert Armstrong until recent decades. Yet in many of these individuals have been manifested likewise the fruits of tenacity to begin walking in that way of life and to defend it at all costs. It has been a very real proof for me of the power of God's Holy Spirit still at work, even though the number of those new ones being called at this time has been relatively small. Although our current membership consists of people from vastly different cultures and upbringings from around the world, and although fewer than ever can now say they were called back in the days of the Radio Church of God, this body still reflects strongly a sincere love for the very same things which became the original foundation of Church of God, The Eternal—which were likewise the foundational tenets of our parent body.

On Our Beliefs

It is really amazing that a little group like ours has shown absolute solidarity to the very same doctrines over thirty-two years. Whether others agree with us on those specific teachings or not, that example of continuity is itself an incredible witness. It is something that none of these other groups who likewise came out of our parent organization can claim. They have all justified amending their teachings under the banner of "spiritual growth." Many of their leaders believe that Herbert Armstrong had the authority to change doctrine, and now that they are leading a group of their own, they arrogate to themselves that same authority. After all, what good is wielding such authority if it is never used? So they change, and they keep changing. Some change very rapidly while others change much more gradually, but nonetheless, change they do. The fact we refuse to change our doctrines in any way is scoffed at. They consider us to be that stodgy little group who is "stuck in the past." But that label certainly does not bother us in the least. The truth is, we make them uncomfortable because we are their ever-present conscience, reminding them of what they used to believe, but no longer keep. As time marches forward, there are more (even if only a few) who are finally recognizing the benefits of a slate of doctrines which are absolute, as opposed to being kept continually off balance by leaders who come up with "new truth" unexpectedly, claiming special visions or who-knows-what other evidence. It is unsettling

to have no sure foundation, and eventually in time many more of God's people will come to value the idea of Jesus Christ truly being a Rock—One that does not move.

Our premise has always been and will continue to reflect what the Bible clearly shows: Truth comes to man only by a purposeful revelation of God. Man cannot discover spiritual truth for himself. God will not allow it, even by accident. It must come by miracle only—not scholarly study; and the means by which God has always—without exception—delivered that Truth is through the preaching of a commissioned human servant. Individual church members do not get that revelation of true doctrine personally and individually from God. They must receive it through hearing and responding to the *inspired preaching* of a chosen servant (1 Corinthians 1:21; Romans 10:14–15; Ephesians 3:1–5). God leads each called member by the Spirit to recognize the voice of Jesus Christ *as proclaimed by a human preacher* (John 10:2–5, 14). The Bible is so absolutely clear on that. Why do so few of His children today see it? Why do they continue worshiping the idol of their own minds and their own human reasonings, when that can never bring them to God? Those who refuse to accept that simple formula for receiving Truth are doomed to wander in confusion and deception, as their very fruits have demonstrated for over thirty years (2 Timothy 3:7; 2 Peter 1:20). And what God has revealed is absolute. His Truth is a reflection of His perfect character, which never changes. Herbert Armstrong claimed he received his teachings by the divine miracle of God. As did the Apostle Paul receive doctrine by a divine miracle, so claimed Mr. Armstrong to have received his own teachings (Galatians 1:11–12). If so, those teachings were of God—not man—and can never change. If they were actually faulty and needed correction, that is evidence it was never of God to begin with and Mr. Armstrong was never an inspired servant at all. It is that simple—truly the simplicity of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3), which is why no one will have excuse in the day of judgment for not understanding. These principles undergird all that we profess and hold dear. This belief in God's formula for the revelation of Truth accounts for all of our beliefs on individual doctrines, and why we refuse to change any of them.

On Myself

It has now been over ten years since I was first tapped by Mr. Raymond Cole to become a minister. Those of you who know me or have heard me speak about it know it was never an office I ever aspired to hold. I was very happy with my successful career in the secular world, and in simply striving to be a positive member among the laity of God's church. I still wake up sometimes and feel startled at the reality of my current situation. Not only did I have to adjust to becoming an ordained minister, but four years later I had the weight of this whole remnant body thrust upon my shoulders in the wake of Mr. Cole's death. Even though I knew he was weakening physically in those last couple of years, I refused to

consider that one day he would not be around. I did not want it to be that way. So much for my own will. We all deal with the reality of God's plans for us, and it often takes us in directions we could never have anticipated.

So I was left with the mantle of responsibility for this remnant body in September 2001. One of the greatest tests of my own personal faith is belief that firstly, I was called out of all the billions on this earth to be part of the handful (only several thousand) of firstfruits in this current last-day Church of God. I think that is a challenge we all share together. It seems so impossible, does it not? After all, who are *we*? And what are the odds that you and I would be separated for such an incredible purpose to fulfill the very prophecies of the continuation of the true Body of Christ in this age? But next, to see the majority of the ones we loved in that parent body (already so few in the world) reject the Truth and follow a human ministry into error—leaving us as some of the only ones *that we know of* on the face of the earth to continue keeping that Truth alive—that seems truly incredible—fantastically impossible! Out of so many thousands, we are only a few hundred.

But on top of that, to believe that I was personally selected by God to serve as one of those few ordained servants to minister to His beloved remnant, that is a challenge to faith and belief I cannot even begin to describe to you. Then add to that a belief that I was personally intended to become, not just an assistant, but eventually the human servant through whom God would defend this faithful remnant as Pastor and Director—that, my dear friends, is a test of my own faith you cannot even begin to imagine. How much I identify (even if only in a small way) with the feelings expressed by Moses and David when they asked of God, "Who am I?" (Exodus 3:11; 2 Samuel 7:18).

My initial reaction is always to say, no way! It is absurd. It cannot be. It must be certainly the height of vanity and self-deception to even think it possible. But what are my alternatives? If I was not legitimately placed here by God to do this job, it is because Raymond Cole was not authorized to appoint me as his successor. And if he made a mistake in something so important to the Church, then he could not have been guided by God's Holy Spirit. And if he were not inspired in that critical decision, he could never have been himself truly pastoring a faithful remnant at all. In that case, he must have been deceived, like so many others out there setting up their own groups. And if that is so, then our whole basis for belief in the faith once delivered is faulty. But if that is true, and the Worldwide Church of God was correct in changing so many doctrines—because Mr. Armstrong only got some things right but many things wrong—then that convinces me Mr. Armstrong could not have been a legitimate servant of God either. God's true church possesses revealed truth from the beginning, and the Bible shows plainly that wherever that church exists, it must hold fast to that divine revelation given at the beginning (1 John 2:24). If Herbert Armstrong did not receive divine revelation of Truth from the beginning—worthy to be defended against all

attempts at change—then his whole ministry was a sham, and no better than all these other "works of men" prolific in the world.

So what am I left to believe? If I refuse to believe that Mr. Armstrong *was not* inspired as an apostle in this day, and knowing Raymond Cole was the only Evangelist in that parent body who *held fast* to the first teachings when all others changed, then God must have indeed established and inspired Raymond Cole to pastor that prophesied remnant (at least a portion of it). And given his continuity to that Truth until his dying day, his actions must have been guided and inspired by the true God, including my own ordination and eventual succession to this office. In essence, I am left to either accept my role in this office as one ordained of God, or else condemned by my personal beliefs to reject *the entire body of doctrine* ever taught by Herbert Armstrong. Because I cannot in good conscience reject that way of life I value so much, I likewise cannot deny the position I find myself in today, no matter how incredible and absolutely absurd it seems to me humanly.

Many of our detractors will jump all over that chain of logic with multipronged "evidence" to prove that this group—and myself as its human leader—is grossly deluded. But these particular comments are not intended for the naysayers. They are written for you, so you will understand my own personal feelings about the office I now hold.

Please do not misunderstand me. I do not now perform my responsibilities in your service with any reservations or regrets. Not at all! There is no more rewarding work I have ever done in my whole life. And I feel that my time in this office has been greatly blessed so far. I have felt inspired in my writing and speaking to produce material that may bear my name technically, but I know could never have come from my own mind. It is a real "rush" to feel that inspiration, and I pray often that God will help me remember never to take it for granted, or ever begin to assume credit for His work. There is nothing of value in me. But I have had the privilege of getting to know many of you personally, as God has made it possible for me to travel all over the world to visit you. Sometimes I stop and think, these are the children God is grooming for the very most auspicious offices in His eternal Family government. What an awesome responsibility has been laid at my feet, to minister to those future Kings and Priests and to help them now in their times of need to fulfill that glorious calling. It makes me reflect with fear and reverence how important is my own example in helping you remain encouraged to hold fast. May I never become responsible for hanging a millstone around the neck of any one of God's very dear ones. I have a framed plaque hanging in my office which reminds me of the words written by the Apostle Paul concerning his own human vulnerability: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27). May I never forget the warning in those words.

On Mr. Raymond Cole

There are so many today (in the church at large) who either err in setting their leaders on a pedestal in the place of God, or else at the other extreme, showing resentment and disdain for any expression of respect for a church leader. So when I comment on my feelings for Raymond Cole and what he meant to me personally, I am sure those at the fringes will seek to misconstrue according to their own biases. But again, my comments are meant for those who are sincere and well-grounded in the Truth, not those who lack requisite spiritual balance.

At the time I first met Raymond Cole, I was a rebellious youth who was quite disdainful toward the ministry as a whole. I had found no minister in my personal experience in the Worldwide Church of God (during my teen years) who did not have some political agenda influencing his choices and decisions. Their collective fruits made it seem like one big game. The fact they were still there "in good standing" in the late 1970s was proof they had compromised to keep their jobs, bowing to whatever whims came most recently from "Pasadena." It was from my parents' teaching and their personal examples (thanks Dad and Mother) all my life that I had come to value God's truth. But that foundation was being strongly assaulted because of 1) my natural carnal rebelliousness as I moved toward adulthood, and 2) the hypocritical examples I saw in ordained servants who were supposed to stand for something, but really did not. With those two factors combined, I was well on the road to becoming totally estranged from the church during the year I attended Ambassador College as a freshman in 1980.

It was my coming into contact with the teachings of Raymond Cole in 1981 that began to turn that around for me. Finally, here was a philosophy about Truth that made absolute sense from the Bible (from the articles and sermons I had studied). It supported the legitimacy of Mr. Armstrong's inspired ministry and the things I felt down deep inside were right, but also answered the perplexing questions about why everything was going so wrong in God's church. And here was a servant who had proven his own personal integrity by sacrificing money, position, and personal security to stand upon principle. (Even those lower level ministers who eventually followed Mr. Cole for a time had not stepped out independently to do what was right. They waited for Raymond Cole to become established within this remnant and only months later joined him when he could offer them a salary to replace the ones they would be giving up in Worldwide. All of those men eventually proved their defective character and separated from us in bitterness.) In my state of mind at the time, I was not really looking for or expecting to find such a refreshing example of sincerity. I had become very jaded, sarcastic, and disrespectful. But having stumbled upon a true example of integrity in Mr. Raymond Cole, it made all the difference in the world to me. It was literally a defining point in my life. Even so, I did not set aside my rebelliousness overnight.

For several years after joining this remnant body, I was still evidencing that youthful rebellion in various ways. Raymond Cole knew that too, but never accosted me with unsolicited advice or condemnation. He was ever so patient and kind to me. I only came to appreciate that wise example of benevolent leadership much later. All too many ministers behave like they cannot wait to give someone a corrective lecture. Not so with Mr. Cole. Had he done that with me at the time, I might likely have bolted. His wisdom in dealing with me and with others in kindness and patience is something I will never forget.

Until his dying day, Raymond Cole held fast to those same convictions about revealed Truth. And he proved over the years that I knew him that he was serious about defending those doctrines against any and all attacks. His principles were not for sale to anyone, no matter how dear that individual might have been to him. Dissenters can question whether he was correct in his conclusions about doctrine, but none can say he was not faithful to defend that which he believed was right. None of the other Evangelists and ministers in the USA stood tall to defend what they believed was right. (Mr. Jean Aviolat was the only ordained servant in Europe to hold fast, and did so independently, before knowing about Mr. Cole. You may never understand what strength of character that requires until placed in a similar situation yourself.) In 1974, many of these other ministers also had serious doubts about the doctrinal changes to Pentecost and especially the marriage doctrine, which were both rammed through by a "kangaroo court" of a doctrinal committee. But after thinking it through and counting the cost to themselves personally, they found ways to make their consciences accept "the easy route" of going along. They were not willing to pay the price required to defend the true teachings. That is what made Mr. Cole's example so absolutely unique.

There have been many over the years who have accused Mr. Cole of all manner of evil. Ironically, at the same time some have accused him of being a hardhearted, unfeeling tyrant, others have simultaneously called him a weak, pandering liberal, without the spine to make difficult but necessary decisions. Such assessments have always struck me as amusing, excepting for the emotional toll I know it took upon Mr. Cole personally. The fruits of the choices he made—and which are clearly documented for all to read—are proof that both assessments are entirely without merit. He had always asked God to grant him the ability to manifest real love for God's children, as expressed so deeply in the example of the Apostle John. By his fruits, I witnessed many times the fulfillment of that very prayer through the decisions he made in dealing with members. His willingness to sacrifice his own feelings to help someone else made a major impression upon me, time after time. But the downside of such deep abiding affection is a vulnerability to becoming hurt when others take advantage of that outpouring of love.

I know personally of many instances where the ones Mr. Cole made the greatest personal sacrifices to help, later turned on him and accused him bitterly. For any of you at

large who eventually may read this—and were ones who were guilty of this unthankful and callous behavior—shame on you, and may God grant you the mercy of His forgiveness by your true repentance before it is too late. I despise your hatred and your fruits of bitterness, in that you refused to face your own personal weaknesses, but instead sought to justify yourselves through attacking the one who helped you most. It was the manifestation of Satan's spirit, manipulating you weak ones who could not discern the source of that deceptive power driving you. How diabolical. How utterly devastating. And for Mr. Cole, how absolutely heartrending to see those he loved so deeply and had invested so much in, turn to such deception and venomous response. I have copies of personal letters which some of these have written to me, accusing Mr. Cole and seeking to influence me to agree with them. For some reason, they cannot see that, regardless of the specific "he said-she said" issues being debated, their very guilt is manifested in their own words, which aside from all else is clearly anathema to the Spirit of God. In talking to his accusers, I have been struck by their emotional venom and vitriolic hatred. If they are correct—and are truly the ones manifesting the Spirit of Jesus Christ—I will gladly forfeit my place in His Kingdom. I do not desire to live forever in a Family where such fruits prevail. By comparison, when talking to Mr. Cole about the same circumstances, I received a reply of empathetic grieving concerning them, as he manifested less concern for himself than he did for the dangerous path being taken by these self-estranged sheep, and their potential impact upon other dear children.

Some of these who became enemies claim I was simply duped by a Machiavellian charlatan who put on a good act in my presence, while harboring a sinister Jekyll and Hyde personality towards others, and that I never knew "the real Raymond Cole." Well, to these I say, you are foolish indeed if you think I am so gullible. My father did not raise such a fool. I have lived and functioned successfully in this world—better than most of you have ever done—for a number of years, and accomplished much in the cutthroat world of corporate politics by utilizing the ability to read people and their real motivations. I take no credit for it. It was a gift given me by God. He opened the doors and blessed me to be successful in such an environment without being required to compromise my principles. I thank Him continually for that gift. But do you really think I could be so discerning in so many other complex venues of life, and yet be such a patsy concerning Raymond Cole? Sorry, but "that dog won't hunt."

No, I had many opportunities to see "the real Raymond Cole" when his guard was certainly down. No one who is contriving a false front can maintain it perfectly. Little glimmers of the true orientation will always seep through in time, in spite of a deceiver's best efforts to conceal. I knew him well enough to know he was not perfect. He never claimed to be. But with Mr. Cole, I never saw any deceptive intent. But with his accusers, I *did indeed* see very troubling fruits. They could not see that while they were attempting to sway me with their subtle words, they were actually sending strong signals that screamed against the Spirit of Christ. It was as plain as a neon sign at midnight.

I will relate one instance in my personal relationship with Mr. Cole that I will never forget. It was the first trip I made with him (and his very last one) to visit the brethren in the Philippines in December 1997. He and I were sharing a small house that was part of the Ortiguero family compound in Bacag, Pangisinan, on the island of Luzon. It was early Sabbath morning, just after dawn, and he and I were sitting there relaxing after rising, contemplating the duties of the day ahead of us. We sat in silence for a long time. Then he suddenly began to talk with grief and concern for those who were making devastating choices in their lives. I sensed at that moment that a whole canvas of faces was flashing before his eyes, and he was suddenly plunged into an overwhelming state of grief. His grief was not for his own personal burden at the hands of those who had already turned in hatred (and some who were even then succumbing to that deceptive spirit in our midst), but for those very individuals he loved so much who were harming themselves so terribly. He was seeing the hundreds and thousands of friends he had known over fifty years in God's church, who had turned eventually against the faith. He broke down and literally wept at that point. It was the most stunning, spontaneous manifestation of outgoing compassion I had ever witnessed in another human being. That memory is seared upon my mind.

I pray often that God will grant me to feel that love for His children so deeply, which is impossible without a strong measure of the Holy Spirit. Brethren, I admit to you freely I am not at that level, although my love is certainly deep and abiding for you all. But I have a long way to go to reach that which Raymond Cole had attained, let alone what Jesus Christ manifested to us all so perfectly. I have more of a tendency by nature to hold back emotion to protect myself. That is a very effective tool to avoid being hurt, but is nonetheless a manifestation of selfishness, not the fruit of unconditional sacrifice and outpouring of love. Christ gave Himself totally, without any reservation for self. He was likewise vulnerable to being deeply hurt by those who repaid His kindness with unthankfulness and brutality. But He was strong enough to prevent such abuse from making him bitter. We have the inspired accounts of the Bible to verify those historical acts of Jesus Christ. I am blessed likewise to have witnessed a partial manifestation of that kind of love in the behavior of Raymond Cole. God please help me to learn to love that way too.

On My Helpers

In spite of the dismal track record of past ministers who have assisted Mr. Cole for a time in serving this body, I have been incredibly blessed so far with assistants who have shown themselves very devoted to the faith once delivered. Among the ordained Elders given authority by me to serve you in the USA are Mr. John Byrd, Mr. Bud Kidwell, Mr. Richard Litz, Mr. Robert Litz, and Mr. Leon Whitaker. We also have ordained deacons in scattered places around the country, not to mention specific laymembers who assist in local

areas as "lead men." Internationally, the ordained Elders include Mr. Jean Aviolat in Europe, Mr. Isaya Owak in Kenya, and in the Philippines, Mr. Corsino Canta, Mr. Eduardo Cambil, and Mr. Mario Roque. They each have their faithful helpers as well.

I have found all of these men to have been tested significantly, and manifested very positive fruits overall. I am frankly amazed that so many individuals from such diverse backgrounds can share a love for the very same doctrines. These men have been incredibly responsive to me in learning and accepting the things Mr. Raymond Cole preserved from his own instruction at the feet of Mr. Armstrong. There is no doubt in my mind it is a manifestation of the miracle of God's Holy Spirit. Otherwise, such unity could never be achieved. It certainly is not manifested in these other groups.

That being said, I am not unaware of the constant pressures seeking to destroy these servants. Satan loves nothing better than to destroy an ordained minister, to accentuate the wound to the entire body. It is one of the reasons I did not want that mantle for myself. I am fully aware that there are many additional pitfalls that such servants can encounter, and I realize that as a human being, I am not impervious to those threats. If I recognize that vulnerability in myself, I certainly recognize it in the lives of these other men as well. While I am ecstatic about the current unity we enjoy, I am not so naive as to think it might always remain so. We have experienced far too many instances in the past thirty years where men who seemed to manifest good fruits for a time would eventually falter and fail. I am happy to say I honestly do not sense any such weakness in our current ensemble of ministers at this time. No, I am fully aware of weaknesses we all have as human beings, and none of us is without faults, but the proof that we are acting with the legitimate authority of Jesus Christ is our commitment to proclaim the unadulterated truth first revealed in this age through Mr. Armstrong. You can each assess whether we are doing that by what we preach and write publicly. We can and will make errors of the flesh in our own personal lives. Thankfully, God is not holding you accountable for ferreting out our private weaknesses like a tabloid reporter. If we go apostate, you will know it by the things we preach from the pulpit. A man who has become truly corrupt in private will not be able to prevent that from manifesting in his public speaking. If the Holy Spirit deserts him, it will become manifest to you all in time. Yes, we all make mistakes, but that, however, does not constitute a failure of our prime directive in representing Christ.

If any one of us should ever depart from that body of doctrine and begin to teach something contradictory, not one of you should follow. Neither Raymond Cole nor I have ever tried to get you to follow us as men. We have consistently pointed you to the faith once delivered, and admonished you to hold fast to that doctrine without compromise. We did not invent it ourselves. We only learned it as you did, from the servant God used in these last days to raise up His Church. We have no personal badge of pride from originating any of these teachings. They were all delivered to us. We are simply custodians of those truths.

The very best legacy of Mr. Raymond Cole is the fact this remnant body has held together so cohesively in the past six years since his death. Had we been merely a personality cult (as some have claimed), such cohesion would have begun to crack long before now. That has not happened. Their accusations are ringing more hollow every year that elapses with our survival and enrichment. Our fruits as a body speak much louder than the words of our detractors. If they were honest, they would likewise have to admit our persistent flourishing is a stab to their own consciences. They thought they could destroy us, but God helping us, we have prevailed like the Rock of Gibraltar. You have not simply been duped by my own personal "charisma" since 2001 to keep us all together. I appreciate the personal regard and support I enjoy from so many of you, but I have adjured you all to hold fast to the faith, and to follow us only as long as we continue to proclaim that Truth consistently. I have every confidence that should I one day turn to contradict that foundational faith, you will recognize it immediately and resist following me into error. I pray that my own legacy will be to have prepared you to face all potential threats to your salvation, and to be able to discern the right course in the heat of battle. The day is coming when we all may be scattered to the four winds, without the close support of a ministry through sermons and letters as we enjoy today. I want you to be able to stand in that day.

With that in mind, I want to warn some of you to be very careful in withholding your support from these assistants that are helping me. Yes, I realize that many of you have had very bad experiences with selected ministers, either ones in our own fellowship in past decades who are now gone, or in other groups before you joined this remnant body. Respectfully, many of you are like old battle-scarred tomcats who have seen your share of back-alley fights, having lost many patches of fur, and having had your ears chewed into ragged remains. Because I love you dearly and respect you so much for the battles you have survived, I implore you to be very careful not to allow your past experiences to poison you for the present and the future. I know it is difficult, but we must always remain responsive as "little children" (Matthew 18:3–4), no matter what we have endured.

Some of you immediately put up your defenses when a new elder is presented to you. You have seen so many fail in the past, you assume the odds are that this next one will likewise prove defective. Rather than give that man the benefit of the doubt and hope and pray for his success, you instead withdraw and seek to nitpick any word or action which might possibly reflect "a rotten apple." It can so easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy. I understand why you may naturally respond that way. It is a carnal defense mechanism common to us all. But the key word there is "carnal." It is a means to protect the carnal self from potential hurt. But I am telling you it is wrong nonetheless. If you have any respect for my own integrity, if you feel I have proved by my own personal fruits that I am a sincere and legitimate representative of Jesus Christ, then please also give the benefit of the doubt to those men I have delegated to help me in this work. Jesus Christ said, "He that heareth you

[those delegated helpers] heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16). The same applies to those helpers at lower levels who act with the authority of the Pastor and Director. If you believe I am an apostate minister, then you have every reason to believe that my assistants are likewise corrupt. But if you are ones who happen to believe I am a faithful servant, please do me the honor of showing the same respect to those God has inspired me to appoint to your service. God is watching and evaluating all of these things. If any one of these men (or myself) should truly depart from the faith one day, you should be fully prepared to withdraw your support *then*, and avoid being led astray. But you should have no fear of giving those men the benefit of the doubt now. Do you not know how to discern? If you have been paying attention to all that Mr. Cole and I have written and spoken, you have all that you need to respond correctly in the day that one of us may truly manifest the spirit of apostasy. But until that day, please do not become guilty of slighting Jesus Christ presently because of the failure of other men you have known before.

On Wolves and Misguided Sheep

It is a sad reality that the true flock of God is always subject to the attempted influence of wolves. But God has allowed it for a reason (1 Corinthians 11:19). Some of these are ones who may never have been legitimate children at all (tares), and others may truly be ones who were once dear children, but who have simply given themselves over to the deceiver. In any case, the hallmark of their behavior is an attempt to influence others to think like they do. They are virtually never able to stand alone in confidence. It is as if they crave others to substantiate their chosen path. Without that popular support, they feel subconsciously inferior. So they work with fervor—even pathetic desperation—to convince others to accept their ideas. If they are sincerely confident they have the truth, why can they not simply practice their faith quietly and leave others to their own beliefs? But no, it does not seem to be in them to do so.

By contrast, we are not attempting to insinuate ourselves into the lives of anyone else. Many may reject our doctrines, but they can hardly accuse us of trying to ensnare others surreptitiously. Well, in fact one or two have made such an accusation in times past, but our fruits easily prove the opposite to be true. We stand upon personal conviction to uphold those things which the entire church once kept collectively. We are not proclaiming some new and personalized doctrine. And unlike the wolves, our faith is not predicated upon needing to convince others to agree with us. We are content to practice our convictions quietly, no matter how many or how few agree with us. We do not go out attempting to seduce others to follow. We simply answer the inquiries of those who seek us out, and

support those who manifest a common belief in those things we cherish. Mr. Raymond Cole never sought to get brethren to separate from the Worldwide Church of God and to follow him. In fact, he was afraid that some—being too weak and confused—might actually be better off staying in the parent body (for the present time) than to separate and attend with us. How different is that orientation from the wolf, whose goal is to use any mechanism possible to get someone to make a move, hardly considerate of the spiritual state of the individual involved. The wolf and the hireling do not really care for the sheep (John 10:10, 13). They simply use the sheep as pawns for their own selfish ends.

I have seen a number of ones I once counted as friends turn into wolves. I am not speaking of ones who simply become confused, change their minds about what they believe, and then separate from our fellowship. I at least have respect for one who acts upon his convictions and is willing to go quietly on his way, leaving the rest of us alone. That is a far cry from the one who turns bitter and hateful, separates because he cannot get the ministry to adopt his own private interpretation of doctrine, and then wages a campaign of letters, e-mails, and phone calls to influence others to follow. Such an act manifests no legitimate concern for the people, but merely an attempt to spite this ministry by "depriving them" of members. There is a serious price to be paid one day by some of these, if they do not repent of such diabolical behavior.

It is amazing also how similar are many of these in their orientation. Oh, they each select different "pet" doctrines to debate. For one of them, it might be rejection of the Hebrew calendar. For another it might be the interpretation of marriage technicalities. For yet another it might be mesmerization with prophecy, or coming to believe he has some special spiritual gift or calling not being acknowledged by the ministry. But in the end, the choice they all make to separate from us unifies them in belief in one particular aspect—government and authority.

Ones have written me "heartfelt" letters, attempting to show me how we are wrong on some specific points of doctrine, and trying to set me straight. In some cases they even claim Mr. Armstrong as their champion, accusing Raymond Cole of departing from what Mr. Armstrong originally taught. But when I have proven to them from old writings what Mr. Armstrong *clearly taught* on a topic—and that we are absolutely faithful in our obedience—have they been willing to admit they were mistaken and abandon their own private interpretation? No, hardly. The use of Mr. Armstrong's name is only a convenient tool to lend credibility to their argument as long as it seems to further their cause. But when they have been forced to admit I am right about his true teaching, they then try to change the subject and eventually conclude by criticizing Mr. Armstrong! If Mr. Armstrong does not agree with them, it must be he who was wrong. It is amazing to see the transition that takes place in these people's minds once they finally reject the anchor of authoritative doctrine coming by divine revelation through a chosen servant. I have seen many nod their heads in

agreement with the idea of divine revelation, as long as it does not run afoul of one of their pet doctrines. But let an incompatibility become exposed, and you will see them turn in hatefulness toward Mr. Armstrong. You might be surprised at the raft of letters I have on file from individuals who have done this. Initial letters praise Mr. Armstrong when they believe he supports them. Then the final letters in the series of exchanges shows a totally different appraisal, condemning Mr. Armstrong as being "just a man," and accusing us of "worshipping a man" because we appeal to the authority of divine revelation as our final evidence. Invariably, they all end up asserting they refuse to abandon a concept that God *revealed to them through their own private Bible study*, rather than accept what Mr. Armstrong taught. Amazing. I have several such letter series written over the years by different antagonists concerning different doctrines. They all seem very different at first, but then wind up reading like virtual clones of each other at the end. I have literally marveled when comparing the choice of words between these individuals. It is actually chilling to recognize the very same source of inspiration in them all. They, of course, think it is the Holy Spirit guiding them. But we recognize it as a rejection of the authority of Jesus Christ, who chose to reveal true doctrine only through the ministry of a chosen human servant. Satan hates that concept of authority. So do those who are deceived into rejecting the teachings of Mr. Armstrong in favor of their own "revelations." Beware the one who thinks he has some inside track with God and has received some "special" revelation. What arrogance.

What really amazes me is that some of them really expect me to take their "position papers" seriously. But have we not been very clear about what we believe? Have we been at all vague about our devotion to the principle of divine revelation through a chosen servant? What part of that teaching do they not understand? The very basis of our existence as a remnant body is belief in this principle. We would never have existed as a body had this not been the primary tenet of Mr. Cole in 1974. And we would have been destroyed subsequently many times over had we ever abandoned that concept. To us, that principle undergirds all other doctrine. It is our anchor. It is that which tethers us in safety to the Rock, protecting us from every storm. So how do these self-proclaimed prophets not get that we do not intend to depart from it? They read our articles and *Monthly Letters*, they listen to our sermons, and they nod their heads for months and even years, professing agreement with this principle of truth and divine revelatory authority. How then do they think we will so readily abandon it—severing our very lifeline—just because they come up with some new concept that seduces them personally?

To them I say, go peddle your wares somewhere else. We are not interested. Go ahead and take exception with our interpretation of doctrine, but never doubt our resolve to hold fast to our beliefs. You will sooner convince the Pope to stop being Catholic than you will convince this ministry to change our doctrines. Attempting it only makes you look

foolish, like Don Quixote fighting windmill battles. If you want to convince us you are not being manipulated by Satan, then go your way and leave us in peace to practice our faith. That is what one truly led by the Holy Spirit would do. But every new letter, e-mail, or phone call seeking to influence only reinforces the reality you are helplessly being manipulated by a force who is battering you into spiritual oblivion. Prove me wrong. Leave us in peace. Any other action proves the contrary about your inspiration.

To you, faithful brethren, recognize that they cannot help themselves once they give themselves over to that hateful spirit. But you need not fear them. If you know the Truth, and have confidence that Jesus Christ truly manifested Himself in this age through the preaching of a commissioned apostle, then you need never be troubled by these deluded ones. This ministry can and will provide you with the training you need to try the spirits and discern Satan from Christ. But it is you who must use those tools. We cannot prevent you from listening to them or reading their papers, if you choose to allow it. And unlike other splinter group leaders, we will not threaten you to try and prevent you from being seduced. In the end, you will each have to stand upon your own spiritual feet before God. Yes, the faithful ministry is required by God to keep wolves out of the midst of the flock. We do that by preventing certain ones from attending our services, who might use those assemblies to sow discord and doubt. But today's technology provides many communication opportunities for brethren besides assembly in church services. You must each choose what you will allow and to whom you will listen.

To this date, our fellowship has been very stable overall. Ones who have thought they were so "influential" turned out to have little or no impact upon our members after they departed. And any who may have departed with them only proved they did not really believe what we do about divine revelation. It is my strong personal belief that the body we have today is unusually unified in doctrine. For every one who has departed, God has sent new ones (and even more) to replace them. I am therefore not worried that you are seriously subject to the deception of these wolves. In fact, I relish seeing you all pass those tests and thereby demonstrate to the defectors how little their concepts are regarded. That is a very strong statement—a witness. But I must be careful never to become smug. As Mr. Cole always reminded us, God is going to allow those threats and tests of the sheep to the very end. That spirit of apostasy continues to work deceptively. We must never become complacent or think we are immune to deception. But based upon the choices so many of you have already made, I really do not worry or fret about your future decisions. Whenever someone next comes on the scene, attempting to deceive you, I look forward to your proving once again that you really do "get it."

On Our Future

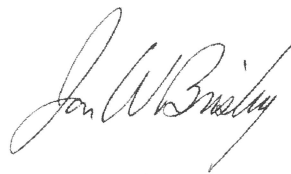
God has not chosen to reveal details about what lies ahead for us. But then, it is His specific intent that we learn to live by faith (Romans 1:17). Therefore, we do not fret over the future but simply focus on that which God has given us to accomplish at this time.

Mr. Cole came to recognize that God had approved him to minister to a remnant in the aftermath of the 1974 apostasy, but did not intend for him (or anyone else for that matter at the time) to try and duplicate Mr. Armstrong's commission to do a grand evangelical work. He did not intend to presume a commission not expressly granted, nor did he intend to set up some competitive work to challenge Mr. Armstrong. For all these years we have been staying that course, ministering to those God sends, but resisting any other presumptive endeavor. It is not that we refuse to participate in more of a grand work if it is God's will to ordain it, but we are patient to wait for God to lead. If and when it is His purpose to change our focus, He is very capable of communicating that directive. But recognize that, respectfully, I do not intend to take that direction from a laymember. I honestly do not expect God to deliver such an auspicious assignment to the ministry through the cajoling of one of His sheep. I hope that does not offend any of you, but all too many in years past have attempted to influence Mr. Cole (and now me) into doing "a work." When it is God's time to do it, nothing will prevent it. Do we believe that? Or do we somehow think God is too weak and insipid to bring these things to pass? I do not.

The most important things we all need to be doing right now is preparing ourselves for the future through putting on more of the mind of Jesus Christ—overcoming and bearing spiritual fruit. Why is that commission so unpopular to many? It will be the very source of your eventual success, or the reason for your eventual demise if you do not engage it with all your might. Let the rest of God's timetable take care of itself. He will lead us step by step at the time we need to act. In the meantime, I will continue pursuing the very mission first begun for this remnant body in 1975—that which Mr. Cole followed until his death in 2001—and that which I have continued until now. God helping me, I do not intend to deviate from that directive unless and until He specifically tells me to do so.

I will continue working to serve you all, and expending my energies to encourage, inspire, and provide spiritual guidance in these troubled times. I am so thankful for the opportunity to do this job for your benefit.

Yours with devotion and appreciation,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first name "Jon" being particularly prominent.

Jon W. Brisby