

February 2013

Dear Brethren:

Last November, we continued our analysis of the history of the Radio Church of God and the work of Mr. Herbert Armstrong, delving deeper into the events which ultimately allowed for the radical shift in *organizational and cultural personality* from the 1930s through the 1980s. That church did indeed change dramatically, and Mr. Armstrong eventually spent the very last years of his life trying to reconstitute those things he felt had been lost during the 1970s. Our analysis in the November issue centered on the similarities and differences between two of the first four students at Ambassador College in 1947, Herman Hoeh and Raymond Cole. We provided Mr. Armstrong's own accounts of those early college years to introduce these two men, and then described the general roles they each played in that dynamic and growing church during the twenty years following their matriculations and ordinations in 1952. For all of the apparent similarities in these two men, the divergent choices each would make under political pressure in the early 1970s would define the underlying philosophical rift which, by the early 1990s, would transform the entire church.

1972–1974—The Foundation Cracks

Between 1972 and 1974, the first major rift would occur to divide Herman Hoeh and Raymond Cole between two competing and starkly contrasting philosophical camps. Until that time, the two men had been united in their mutual support and defense of Herbert Armstrong and his rulings as Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God. There had certainly been threats to the church in previous decades, but those had always been relatively minor by comparison. Members would leave, and even some ministers would choose to separate. But since the church was growing at an average rate of thirty percent each year (through 1968), any potential repercussions from defections were always mitigated by the greater influx of new members. For many years that church had *real momentum*. And sustained momentum is a wonderful balm to mask organizational weaknesses.

But by the early 1970s, that momentum had petered out. Notice Mr. Armstrong's admission in 1972:

Yesterday the Budget Committee met to set the budget for the coming year, 1973. God's Work is a GROWING Work. It is geared to a pattern of CONTINUAL GROWTH. We cannot go on to successfully COMPLETE the Great Commission the living Christ is carrying on through us, UNLESS we do have a real healthy INCREASE in income year by year. For 35 years that increase was approximately 30% year by year. The increase is far short of that this year -- has been for three or four years (*Co-Worker Letter*, November 1972).

Why such a reverse by 1972? This too will be covered in more detail in its own chapter. But for now, in quick summary, understand that the church had been conditioned by the ministry *for years* to expect that the very last-day prophecies of the Bible concerning the Second Coming of Jesus Christ "might possibly" be fulfilled between 1972 and 1975. When that time period arrived and it became apparent that events in the world did not make those prognostications realistic, a great part of the church became very disappointed, and even worse, restless. Restless, because many members had been conforming to certain doctrines of the church which were very difficult to bear, especially the prohibition of marriage for one who was previously divorced. As long as they believed that Jesus Christ would return "soon," they tolerated this burden as a necessary sacrifice in order to be spared prophesied cataclysmic tribulation and the loss of ultimate salvation. But once any real hope of a "quick end" to their physical toil in this world was dashed, a sudden *priority shift* emerged to make their current lives "more bearable" within the church. If time was going on after all, many demanded the right to marry whom they chose. The great new growth in membership ended, and the wider undercurrents of unrest became most ominous to a ministry now facing the fruits of the disappointment they themselves had engendered through ill-advised prognostications about "the last days."

The sudden reality of this loss of new growth caused the whole ministry to sit up and take notice. Why had the momentum ceased? Where would the church go from here? What would happen if this was not just a temporary setback? What if total membership actually started to shrink? As Mr. Armstrong stated, the budget of the church for decades was "geared" toward having—not just modest annual growth—but *significant* growth in contributions to fund an expanding work. The idea of stagnation, let alone contraction, was appalling.

Calls for change became loud and persistent. Something must be done, but what? Highly placed ministers, especially Mr. Armstrong's own son, Garner Ted Armstrong, began to champion the relaxation of certain "hard-line" doctrines of the church to calm the restlessness of the laity. Suffice it to say here that the battle lines became drawn between two camps within the ministry; one defending the long-held doctrines of the church, and the other advocating a progressive "recalibration" of teachings to make it more palatable for members to remain loyal, preserving their goodwill (a.k.a. financial support). Many of these "liberal" ministers had secretly harbored contrary views about some of Mr. Armstrong's doctrines for years (and admitted so years later in their personal writings). But these "positions" could never gain any traction during the 1960s because Mr. Armstrong was *adamant* in defending his original teachings, including the teaching condemning divorce and remarriage in the church. So those with progressive doctrinal views had to "lay low" and bide their time. The crisis of the early 1970s provided the opportunity they had been waiting for. Before he died in 1986, Mr. Armstrong wrote retrospectively about that volatile time period, and this is how he assessed *the root cause* of the decline in church growth:

Now a recap of what has happened to the Church and its work.

God had blessed His Church with an unprecedented approximate increase of 30 percent per year for 35 years. As these liberals began gaining more and more control God removed His blessing. I have often said that God blesses us as we please Him. During these liberal years in the 1970s, the income virtually stagnated. In 1974 the Church experienced a 1.6 percent decrease in income under 1973, the first negative growth in the Church's history. It fell another 4.8 percent the following year (*The Worldwide News*, June 24, 1985).

Herman Hoeh and Raymond Cole Take Sides

Where did Herman Hoeh and Raymond Cole fall philosophically during these volatile years? They both were considered conservative "old timers," and therefore neither was part of the progressive camp. Mr. Herbert Armstrong himself was viewed by these progressives as an obstacle to their "new truths," and stodgy lieutenants like Herman Hoeh and Raymond Cole were seen as strengthening him *to remain recalcitrant* to any change. Garner Ted Armstrong and his contingent were desperately seeking a way to get his father's approval for the changes they considered imperative. Yet, when the doctrinal debates finally came to a head in 1974, Raymond Cole and Herman Hoeh would wind up on opposing sides.

Recall that Herman Hoeh had made his reputation since his days in Ambassador College as a serious scholar. Having been awarded a doctorate degree in religion by Mr. Armstrong in the early 1960s, Dr. Hoeh emerged very early as the church's most respected "biblical authority." Although the fundamental teaching on major doctrines had emanated from Herbert Armstrong, it was Dr. Herman Hoeh who added *technical credibility* to many of them through his skill in research and exegesis. Mr. Armstrong had come to value highly and lean upon Herman Hoeh to provide scholarly defense for the most controversial teachings, including the marriage doctrine. And even through March 1974, Herman Hoeh had held firm in stating that, biblically, there was *no possible justification* for such a change. In this, he and Raymond Cole were much agreed.

By early 1974, Mr. Armstrong was under enormous pressure. He was being told by senior ministers that many members were withholding tithes and offerings, waiting for the "relaxation" of specific teachings, especially the marriage doctrine. The income was indeed down drastically. Membership had fallen by 1.4%—the first such loss in church history. As Executive Vice President, his son, Garner Ted Armstrong, and his hand-picked "Doctrinal Committee" were clamoring for the changes which would ease this pressure and save the day. Yet it appeared Mr. Armstrong was still not willing to compromise his principles, seeing no biblical evidence whatsoever to justify the changes being advocated. How convenient it would be, however, if someone discovered a "legitimate" new argument to permit members to divorce and remarry, but there simply was none. That is, not until Dr. Herman Hoeh provided the solution.

Through March 1974, members of the Doctrinal Committee continued to wrack their collective brains to come up with some "credible" technical argument which would convince Mr. Armstrong to make the change. Since argumentation over the meaning of Greek and Hebrew words was not working, they had to come up with a better ploy. In mid-April, while the committee was toying with a new—but even weaker—plan, Herman Hoeh unexpectedly provided them with the "magic bullet" for which they had been waiting. This scintillating new argument was so clever, it provided exactly the kind of logic which would appeal to Mr. Armstrong and give him cover for approving the change. But most importantly, it would relieve the increasing pressure upon ministry and laity alike, which presumably threatened to destroy the whole church. (The details of this technical doctrinal argument are not the topic of this letter, but likewise will be covered in a separate chapter.) When asked afterwards by another prominent minister why he made such an about-face in his position, Herman Hoeh stated, "Why, I never knew what Mr. Armstrong wanted. When I knew, I gave it to him" (*The Doctrine of Divorce and Remarriage—How and Why It Was Changed*, Church of God, The Eternal, 1975). In other words, once he understood that Mr. Armstrong (even under great duress) would actually *relish* an immediate solution to the problem, Dr. Hoeh was very willing to feed to the Doctrinal Committee a clever technical argument to make it happen. And that is just what he did.

Less than two weeks later, near the beginning of May, a clandestine group of evangelists led by Garner Ted Armstrong appeared at his father's home one evening to lay out their new "evidence" for a change in the marriage doctrine. Discovering that Herman Hoeh was the source of this "new truth" was actually a major selling point to Mr. Armstrong. The men left that night with "a sell," and the announcement of a major revision of church doctrine was announced days later at the annual Ministerial Conference.

How did Raymond Cole react? Here are his own words on the matter:

. . . For the conference, nearly every minister, elder, and even some lead men in church areas had been flown into Pasadena. Something definitely was in the making. There were, according to my best recall, about 700 men and their wives present for the opening session. The first order of business was the dedication of the newly constructed Ambassador College Auditorium. With these celebratory events out of the way, the conference quickly turned sober and anticipatory. Nearly everyone was deeply concerned about projected doctrinal decisions. The anticipated day came. Mr. H. W. Armstrong began attempting to explain the proposed change for the doctrine of divorce and remarriage. He could not do it. He quickly yielded the floor to his son. You are aware of the information distributed. Succinctly, the conclusion was that many marriages were never marriages and that divorce was acceptable.

To say the least, I was stunned. The preparatory work of the committee had already been written, duplicated, and distributed to all the ministers with the exception of myself. I heard the conclusion for the first time in that fateful meeting. So shocked was I that I experienced one of the severest headaches of my life—for some three days. It was incredulous. I could not believe my ears. The thought flashed through my mind, "Now nothing will be restrained from them." The way was paved. Doctrine after doctrine will fall at the hands of those who had no love for the truth. I knew my days within Worldwide Church of God were limited (*An Open Letter From Raymond C. Cole*, December 1999).

By the end of that same year, because he refused to go along with this and other changes to long-held doctrines—even though approved by his beloved mentor and Pastor General, Herbert Armstrong—Raymond Cole was put out of the church, having his ministerial credentials in the Worldwide Church of God officially revoked. Ironically, it was Herman Hoeh who was sent to visit Raymond Cole at his home in Coquille, Oregon, in mid-1974 to assess where he stood, and whether there was a chance he might "come around" and accept the new church doctrines. Herman Hoeh was accompanied on that visit by another senior minister, Raymond McNair (who was likewise one of the earliest graduates of Ambassador College and ordained by Mr. Armstrong—along with Herman Hoeh and Raymond Cole—in 1952). Even after the dust had settled for several months since the May announcement, Raymond Cole was adamant that he would never accept or teach those "perverted" new doctrines. Based upon that face-to-face interchange between two old friends, the die was cast.

Herman Hoeh, by comparison, survived and thrived during those volatile times, negotiating his way through the political minefields between the "liberal" and "conservative" camps, and preserving his reputation by all as the church's most scholarly authority.

If Herman Hoeh and Raymond Cole had had so much in common, especially their joint mentorship under Mr. Armstrong through the early years of the church and Ambassador College, how and why would they take such different paths in 1974? The answer to that question may be found in another part of the early history we have not yet examined. Let us go back now and look a little deeper at some very influential and telling events which occurred in the late 1940s.

Youthful Contentions With Herbert Armstrong

What was not previously mentioned is that both Herman Hoeh and Raymond Cole had *personal contentions* with Mr. Armstrong as young men which offer additional insight into their strengths and weaknesses, and which events certainly came to inform their later choices.

First, Mr. Armstrong reveals an early story about Herman Hoeh which very few today have ever heard:

Since I could do no other, I was forced to choose instructors trained in the prevailing system of education. But I sought those of outstanding qualifications and adequate degrees. I wanted the best!

There was the woman professor of English. She had at least two Ph. Ds.—some eight degrees altogether. This surely sounded like the best. She had taught many years in India. I did not know, when Mr. Dillon and I employed her, that she was filled and saturated with Hindu philosophies, occultism, and eastern beliefs. She highly respected insects—especially butterflies.

Professor Mauler-Hiennecey frequently jested with her.

"Well," he would say, "what have you decided this morning you are going to be in your next life—a butterfly, bed bug, or beetle?"

Soon I found that our English professor was introducing all kinds of Hindu or Indian expressions and philosophies into her teaching. Now it so happened that the 18-year-old Herman Hoeh had begun, prior to coming to college, to delve into occultism. It had pricked his curiosity. And he had a scholarly mind with a good degree of intellectual curiosity. This interest in the direction of occultism disturbed me greatly.

I realized at once that this young man was a very important potential, but still immature and inclined to get off balance on some tangent, unless taught the necessity of sound balance. I went immediately to work on this problem. I now had to combat both his intellectual interest, and the influence of our new English professor.

I had a very serious talk with Mr. Hoeh. I did not try to refute or even discredit occultism or mystic Indian teachings. I was afraid this might drive him to it the more. Instead I reasoned that it was better to take up one field of study at a time. I tried to show him that what I was going to teach him at Ambassador College was BASIC knowledge—that, to lay his researches into the occult fields on the shelf for the time being, and acquire this FOUNDATION of knowledge would be the proper *preparation* preliminary to his study of the mystic fields.

In other words, I did not ask him *not* to delve into this thought, but tried to persuade him to arrange a time-order system in his study.

"And since you have now enrolled at Ambassador College," I reasoned, "why not put this first, now you are here, and then take that up *later*?"

He agreed. And thus, instead of getting off balance prior to full mental maturity, I was able to steer Herman Hoeh on the track of intellectual BALANCE and sound-mindedness. He had been gifted with an extraordinarily intellectual mind. Now it was being anchored to the course of sound balance and right UNDERSTANDING. And *what an asset it has become to God's Work!* (*The Plain Truth*, "Autobiography," July 1963)

This enlightening story about the young Herman Hoeh is found only in the *original version* of the *Autobiography* written in serial form in *The Plain Truth*, and was never included in the book version later published in 1973, and certainly not the further revision of 1986. One might be led to wonder why. Was it the fact that Herman Hoeh had editorial authority over the republishing of these very works through the 1970s and wished to *de-emphasize* this potentially embarrassing personal history? We cannot say. But what is fact is that Mr. Armstrong's original—unabridged—accounts of these events cannot be found in the repackaged versions distributed by the church during the 1970s and later.

In any case, we learn that Herman Hoeh had been fascinated with the occult and with Eastern religion, but to Mr. Armstrong's understanding, he had renounced all such leanings through his studies at Ambassador College. Notice Mr. Armstrong's comments at the end of the story, providing another contrast between these two young students:

As time went on, it became evident to both Raymond Cole and Herman Hoeh that our English professor was not at all in harmony with the real objectives of Ambassador College. She expressed later in the year that she still felt there was some hope for Mr. Hoeh, but she had given Mr. Cole up as hopeless. However, Mr. Hoeh stuck loyally to his agreement to pursue his studies into the Bible under me first. So he proved hopeless, too, for her.

Along about March in that school year, Mr. Hoeh and Mr. Cole came to me together about this instructor. Mr. Hoeh reported that she had told him she was *sent* to Ambassador College by invisible forces in the east, for the purpose of *destroying* the college before it could get fairly started—and that she had said that if she could have just six more weeks' time, "there won't be a grease-spot left of this college."

So that was one of the oppositions from within, at the outset of the college (*The Plain Truth*, "Autobiography," July 1963).

So Raymond Cole apparently had no interest whatsoever in Eastern religion and was considered "hopeless" by this Hindu professor, while Herman Hoeh had shown "some hope" which had nonetheless been dashed by the aggressive influence of Herbert Armstrong.

But Raymond Cole himself had a much more prickly contention with Mr. Armstrong during that same time period which likewise tells us much about the man. His problem was not one of dabbling with Eastern religions alongside the Bible, but one of coming to grips with *the real source* of all Bible truths. What follows is Raymond Cole's own description of his early indoctrination concerning Passover, and the volatile episodes with Mr. Armstrong which led to his changing his whole orientation toward Bible truth:

My future maternal grandfather and his brother for unusual reasons became aggressively interested in the Bible at a very young age. As a result of

their study they became aware of the significance of Palestine in the scheme of world affairs. They left their parents, and home state of Michigan and traveled to Palestine—while the country was still a mandate of Great Britain. Shortly after arrival in Palestine my grandfather-to-be became acquainted with the daughter of a British journalist.

The two boys continued their Biblical endeavor. They became acquainted with a number of Jewish religious bodies. One, the Essenes, had a considerable influence upon their thinking. That particular group with whom they associated kept "the Passover" on the night of the 15th of the first month instead of on the 14th. They were quite strongly convinced. Consequently, after my grandfather, his new bride, and his brother returned to the United States they strongly believed and continued to keep "Passover" on the night of the 15th. In the process of time I, too, was indoctrinated with the same concept. . . .

Now a point made earlier comes into play. College was going well. I thought I was intensely satisfied. But, by the spring of 1948, I was facing the approach of Passover. Mr. Armstrong being aware of the family belief, made a gentle approach in attempting to teach me the error of "observing Passover" on the 15th. After a number of rather lengthy discussions on the subject, Mr. Armstrong felt that a truce was best for that year. But the issue was not yet settled. I returned to college in the fall of 1948. The spring of 1949, bringing Passover, inevitably came. That year the subject took on a different dimension. On many occasions Mr. Armstrong had insisted vociferously that God revealed to him the truth he was preaching.

A circumstance about which I am not proud and for which I apologized to Mr. H. W. Armstrong, and repented before God, perhaps will help some to understand the gravity of this matter of divine revelation. I was very much technically oriented. I wanted facts. Logic must rule. Because of these fundamental differences in philosophy, conflict loomed large. Mr. Armstrong was insisting emphatically that God had revealed His truths to him. I, on the other hand, wanted to see tangible and technical proof. The conflict all too frequently took on an ugly dimension. Both of us being very aggressive and vocal, our conversations became strained and cutting. For days Mr. Armstrong continually insisted God had revealed to him that which he was preaching. My concepts respecting Passover—the 14th or 15th, the 31 A.D. issue and other less significant subjects—being stripped away, I was left with a single decision to make. Was I going to protect the self, or was I willing to accept in faith and absolute conviction that which had been demonstrated—divine revelation. One of the greatest psychological releases I have ever experienced came at the moment when I decided Mr. Armstrong was right—God reveals His Truth to a

chosen servant. It, therefore, is absolute and cannot change. Now can you understand why I was so troubled by the changes which constituted the apostasy of 1972–74? (*An Open Letter From Raymond C. Cole*, December 1999)

Indeed, this helps explain very well why Raymond Cole and Herman Hoeh each approached the crisis of 1974—twenty-five years later—in very different ways. Many today will argue that the young Raymond Cole was foolish to allow Herbert Armstrong to *bully him* into abandoning his commitment to "scholarly proof" for every biblical teaching, replacing it instead with "blind faith in a man." But that is beside the point at this juncture. Given that this transformational experience *did take place*—but only for *one* of these young students and not the other—it helps answer why these two with so much in common took very divergent paths under pressure years later.

As we saw, Herman Hoeh retained a devotion to *technical human scholarship* as his underlying confidence, while Raymond Cole traded this very same reverence for scholarship for belief in *the invisible operation of God through the divine inspiration of a chosen servant*. Furthermore, it would appear that the ideological "rightness" of any technical doctrine was less important to Herman Hoeh than to Raymond Cole, given Mr. Hoeh's willingness in 1974 to "change sides" about doctrine if it would solve a momentary physical crisis in the church.

What appears to be true is that Herman Hoeh manifested a *personal devotion* to Herbert Armstrong, *the man*. If Herbert Armstrong insisted rigidly upon defending a teaching as having come to him by God's divine inspiration, Herman Hoeh would gladly provide the technical "Bible proof" to make that position credible within scholarly circles. But if Mr. Armstrong changed his mind for whatever reason, Dr. Hoeh was equally willing to rework the technical exegesis to support the new doctrinal position. Once he knew what Mr. Armstrong wanted, he was there like a *Bible scholar for hire* to provide the "evidence" to give that position legitimacy.

Raymond Cole, by comparison, became an *ideological zealot*, convinced that all Truth is absolute and comes by the specific and purposeful inspiration of God. He believed that God works through a hand-picked servant to reveal that absolute Truth, and that Herbert Armstrong was such an instrument in the twentieth century. Ironically, even though Raymond Cole and Herman Hoeh had vastly different ideas about *the source of spiritual truth*, as long as Mr. Armstrong held firm to his original convictions about doctrine, both of these men were walking *side-by-side* in support of their mutual mentor. This was the case for over twenty-five years. On the surface, it would have appeared to most that both men were devout "Armstrongites."

But here is the twist: Unlike Herman Hoeh, Raymond Cole did not believe Herbert Armstrong had the authority of God to change doctrine. It was Herbert Armstrong who had *hammered that into his young mind* by claiming the authority of Jesus Christ for the things he

was teaching! And so Raymond Cole came to believe strongly that no man—not even a bonafide apostle of God—has authority to change doctrines already revealed, because Truth comes from Jesus Christ, and Christ is absolutely dependable to give real Truth, when it is given at all. Here is how he summarized that conviction:

After much reading, studying, and praying I had accepted the idea of divine revelation. And, though never discussed specifically, the concept of revealed Truth that could never be changed or altered took on a special meaning to me. I lived with the absolute conviction that the Truth had been given to him [Herbert Armstrong] and that it could not, nor ever would, be changed. From my study of God's Word I knew that revealed Truth was absolute (*An Open Letter From Raymond C. Cole*, December 1999).

It was that very different orientation toward spiritual truth which led to the divergent choices of Herman Hoeh and Raymond Cole in 1974. While Herman Hoeh proved his loyalty to *the man*—no matter what edicts he made concerning doctrine—Raymond Cole proved *disloyal* to the man, by choosing his conviction about *doctrinal certainty* over any *change of expediency*, even when the change came from his beloved mentor whom he believed was God's instrument on earth.

The Lasting Critical Dynamic

Some might view this story as an interesting little piece of church history, but not much more. They would be wrong. As mentioned before, the *underlying dynamic* which manifested in the pressure cooker of the 1974 crisis within the Worldwide Church of God is *the very same one* which would play out again twenty years later, in 1994. The only difference is, by then, Mr. Armstrong was dead and the newest doctrinal changes were being implemented by a successive Pastor General.

At the time Herbert Armstrong died in January 1986, Raymond Cole was still leading a small remnant group which had formed in early 1975, holding fast to the same doctrines first taught by Mr. Armstrong so many years before, including the sanctity of marriage. It is ironic indeed that although vilified by his former ministerial colleagues and considered a traitor by Mr. Armstrong himself, Raymond Cole refused to make any derogatory comments in return, believing yet that although Mr. Armstrong had erred in approving changes to doctrine at the behest of the liberals, he was still due respect as the man through whom God had made that priceless way of life available to all during the twentieth century.

Conversely, in January 1986, Herman Hoeh was still a highly-respected Evangelist within the WCG, loyal to his mentor till the end. He had survived the purge of 1978, when Garner Ted Armstrong (as well as other high-ranking "liberal" ministers) was finally put out of

the church by his father. He thrived during the days of the church legal problems with the State of California, and the "Back On Track" years when some of the original "conservative" doctrines (like avoidance of makeup for women) were re-instituted, changed, and then changed back again. He was there to provide the technical justification for every doctrinal position at every moment, whatever it might be, as long as he knew what Mr. Armstrong wanted.

After Mr. Armstrong's death, his appointed successor, Joseph Tkach, Sr., began to change more and more of the church teachings over the ensuing years. By 1994, the heart of Herbert Armstrong's fundamental teachings had been virtually gutted, and many of the long-time ministers who had been loyal to Mr. Armstrong refused to tolerate any more. You see, even though Mr. Armstrong had appointed Joseph Tkach—and he theoretically carried *the very same authority* as Pastor General of *God's true Church* as had Mr. Armstrong himself—recognition of that authority obviously had its practical limits. Somehow, the idea of the Pastor General being able to change major doctrines (like Mr. Armstrong had begun to exercise in 1974) was tolerated only to a certain point. When the new man began to do away with the seventh-day Sabbath, the annual Holy Days, and to embrace many Protestant doctrines as well, the conservative ministers finally balked. Refusing to tolerate these changes in doctrine, they were forced out of the Worldwide Church of God and began to minister to brethren who likewise loved the original doctrines and refused to accept these new changes.

Oh, wait a minute! Does that not sound familiar? Where have we heard about a long-time minister of the church who refused in conscience to accept changes to major doctrines, rejecting the notion that any man—even the Pastor General, under God—had such authority? Yes indeed, it was 1974 all over again! But this time, the very same ministers who had labeled Raymond Cole as a traitor for defying the authority of "God's chosen servant" by rejecting strange new doctrines, *were now themselves* defying "God's chosen servant"—Joseph Tkach—to avoid accepting strange new doctrines! Amazing.

Of course, they crafted their explanation around the premise that Herbert Armstrong—as an apostle—had authority that his successor never possessed. But it is quite a stretch of credibility. The underlying fact is this: From the time that Herbert Armstrong began to give in to those who convinced him *under duress* to compromise the core teachings (which he likely still believed were true), a new precedent was set which would make it *impossible* over time to hold back the floods of radical change! In 1974, the die had been cast, and even though it took twenty years to play out completely, the overturning *of even one doctrine* on the basis of "human scholarship over divine revelation" was the beginning of the end.

The Final Chapter

But what about Herman Hoeh? What did he do during the late 1980s, after Mr. Armstrong's death, when his mentor's legacy was being systematically annulled by the new

Pastor General and the Worldwide Church of God was turning into a Protestant assembly? Surely he sided with one or more of the other senior ministers to defend Mr. Armstrong's teachings? No, actually. He remained loyal to the physical organization (which became a member of the National Association of Evangelicals and began to teach the Trinity—a doctrine which Herbert Armstrong despised), continued to remain above the political fray, and collected his pension from the church until he died in November 2004. From all of the eulogies written about him after his death, the common sentiment emphasized his kind, down-to-earth approach to people, his ability to avoid taking sides, and keeping positive relations with everyone on all sides, in spite of doctrinal disputes. Here is one particular eulogy written by Raymond McNair which is telling:

Although I often spoke to Dr. Hoeh through the years, in more recent years (after I left the WCG in 1993), I did not have much contact with him. He would write or phone me from time to time, and I did the same. But during the last few years, I had very little contact with him. So far as I know, he continued to work with the men at Headquarters during these times, apparently feeling that, for personal reasons, he did not need to sever his relationship with the leaders of the WCG, because of the sweeping doctrinal changes which the Church leaders were making at Pasadena. He seemed to want to maintain cordial relations with people in the various Churches of God (including many of the Church leaders), and would discuss various matters with some of them from time to time. [He also had close ties with some of the leaders of the Buddhist faith.]

This last bracketed statement is true, for Herman Hoeh was known from the 1970s to have ties with Buddhists of Southern California and in Thailand in connection with humanitarian projects. Members of the Wat Thai Temple of Los Angeles, California, attended his memorial service and eulogized him. Whether he had actually embraced any of their religious ideologies or not is much debated. But the history of his fascination with Eastern religion as a young man certainly has kept the speculation alive. What is fact is that he did not feel compelled to defend the teachings of Herbert Armstrong publically in his later years. Perhaps he still believed them and practiced them privately, but his choices make this all very much a mystery.


Raymond Cole died in his home in September 2001. There was no doubt at all what he believed until his dying day. He remained adamant about the idea of truth revealed by Jesus Christ alone through a chosen servant, and the conviction that Herbert Armstrong was indeed such a servant in this age. Although he was likewise known for his kindness and acts of personal sacrifice in dealing with individuals, his uncompromising defense of unalterable truths from the pulpit certainly cost him among those who demanded *compromise and conciliation* as the price for their favor.

Rigid adherence to uncompromising doctrinal "truths" at any cost, on one side; flexible elasticity and progressive evolution of beliefs on the other side. Two polar extremes which

defined the divergent end points of two men who seemingly had begun together in unison. It is the very same set of forces which affected *everyone else* in that organization to a lesser or greater degree over the decades. Why were certain individuals originally attracted to Herbert Armstrong's brand of religion in the first place? When difficulties arose over time, why did so many react in such radically different ways? The history of Herman Hoeh and Raymond Cole together provides one of the best laboratories for isolating those hidden dynamic forces at play.

In future editions, we will continue to unfold additional segments of this fascinating history. The point is not to tell stories for their own sake, and certainly not to criticize particular individuals. But if we do not understand what happened in the past—and more importantly, why—we are much more likely to repeat blindly the very same mistakes. God recorded many stories of individual success and failure in the Bible to be a teaching tool for you and me. That teaching is also available in the personal stories of those who have had significant impact upon the Church of God in our age.

Yours with sincere regard and heartfelt devotion,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial "J" and a stylized "B".

Jon W. Brisby