

November 2013

Dear Brethren:

It never ceases to amaze how the facts of history are so often reinterpreted to fit someone's preferred worldview. Although it should not be shocking—given the proclivity of human beings to reinterpret the past to favor the self—we still never get used to it, especially when it comes from one who was called originally by God and ordained to be a true minister of Jesus Christ. That is precisely what we have now with recent written comments concerning Raymond Cole by a long-time evangelist leading one of the major splinter groups which came out of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG).

In decades past, Mr. Raymond Cole went out of his way to avoid using personal names in writings or in sermons, even when he was defending himself and the true doctrines against serious attacks from critics. He preferred to stick to the facts of the principles and concepts at hand, setting aside any personalization. Even when some of the particular personalities attacking him in the 1970s were men of authority under God, especially Mr. Herbert Armstrong, Mr. Cole refused to show disrespect to the man God had put in office, even as David refused to show disrespect to King Saul in spite of repeated attempts by the king to kill him.

Today, however, much of that history from forty years ago is fading into oblivion, and very few of the major actors from that dusty stage are even left alive. Mr. Raymond Cole and Mr. Herbert Armstrong are both dead, as are the majority of men who were instrumental in liberalizing the Worldwide Church of God during the 1970s. One of the last survivors from that era—who held a prominent position within that organization at the time—is Mr. Roderick Meredith. Now in his eighties, it is he who is still making public statements about that history, including comments about the actions and *intentions of heart* of Raymond Cole during those years. Since Raymond Cole is no longer here to defend himself, this letter will be a defense on his behalf. As you will see, by outliving most of the rest, Mr. Meredith has the opportunity to "have the final say" about who did what, when, and for what reason back then. But the documented evidence still tells a different story. Ironically, this letter will include some of Mr. Cole's own words to answer his current accuser, because the accusations are still the same as before he died in 2001. The very best evidence to refute these new statements is the material already on the record from the past four decades.

Apologies in advance to anyone who feels Mr. Meredith's name should still be "shielded" from this rebuttal, as Mr. Cole would have preferred to do. But since Mr. Meredith is one of the last living witnesses of that history today, and is attempting to capitalize upon that very status to give increased credibility to his own personal opinions, it

has become quite impossible to reply effectively without addressing the *personal credibility* side of the issue.

Laying Down the Gauntlet

In the September–October 2013 newsletter issue to his church members (and posted for the public at large on his website), Roderick Meredith penned an article entitled, *Grow In Faith Through Trials!* The basic message was that God allows times of trial for His church, and it should not cause us to become discouraged when it occurs. He cites Mr. Armstrong's early trials in the church (quoting from his *Autobiography*), and how he had to persevere with faith. He states:

As God inspired the beloved Apostle John to tell us, "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:20–22).

As we "walk with God"—daily and hourly meditating, praying and sincerely seeking for Christ to live within us through His Holy Spirit—we will gain "confidence," as John's writing indicates. Then, more and more, He will hear our prayers and we will receive His answer "because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

So far, this is all well and good. But it is the next paragraph which lays down the gauntlet and attempts to rewrite church history from the 1970s:

Dear brethren, a number of times many brethren felt that Mr. Armstrong was not doing "those things that are pleasing in His sight" and began to withhold their tithes or even leave the Church. One of those times was when Mr. Armstrong changed how we counted Pentecost and how we handled the situations of divorce and remarriage. Many of you older brethren may remember this. So these things certainly did bring a "trial" on the Church—mainly because at least a few dozen or a few score brethren were not able to see the "Big Picture" regarding the fact that Mr. Armstrong was still preaching the Truth of God and doing the Work of God. These changes were not changing the basic approach to keeping the Ten Commandments or the law of God, but were simply "growing in grace and in knowledge" in how to handle Pentecost and divorce and remarriage.

Nevertheless, many ministers at that time, including Raymond C. Cole and others, left the Church because of some of the changes Mr. Armstrong had

made. The income would go down temporarily in some cases. But God always saw us through. This was not because we were "perfect," but because we definitely did hang on to the Truth—even growing in understanding of how to apply certain principles and how to do the Work with genuine faith.

Those brethren who fell away because of these changes were not blessed. Those ministers who followed Raymond Cole, and later those who followed Ken Westby and the great "rebellion" on the East Coast and other defections, mostly split up among themselves and virtually "disappeared" as far as having any impact on the world as a whole or doing the real Work of God.

Well, within three paragraphs, Mr. Meredith truly says a mouthful. The question is, is his "take" on all of these events accurate? We will address each of his conclusions point by point and then let you make that decision.

Were Pentecost and D&R Small Changes?

The primary point of Mr. Meredith's whole article is that we should not let "little things" distract us from the "Big Picture." He chooses to cite the change of Pentecost from Monday to Sunday in February 1974 as a *little thing*. He likewise cites the change in the marriage doctrine three months later (May 1974) as a *little thing*. Those were not corruptions of God's law, he states, but merely an act of "growing in grace and knowledge" in "how to handle" them. But does that argument hold water?

The claim is that changing the day upon which we observe Pentecost is not changing the Ten Commandments or the law of God. We all believe the annual Holy Days are part of the "law of God." So how is *the day* we observe not a serious matter? How is the proper *day* for the *weekly* Sabbath (either Saturday or Sunday) a more serious matter than the appropriate *days* for the *annual* Sabbaths? Mr. Armstrong made a huge issue out of the proper *day* for observing Passover. He absolutely *rejected* the Jews' practice of merging Passover with the first night of Unleavened Bread. But if the particular *day* for Pentecost is not really an issue of obedience or disobedience to the law of God, maybe Passover on the 14th or the 15th of Nisan is not really an issue either? Perhaps we are all just making mountains out of molehills by putting emphasis on which *days* God made holy. After all, as long as we have "good intentions," perhaps "how we handle them" is not all that critical. And yet, Mr. Meredith certainly seems to think that the doctrine of the *weekly* Sabbath is an issue, because that became a "breaking point" with him in the early 1990s when Mr. Armstrong's successor nullified the importance of *Saturday* as the Sabbath. Notice his comments a little later in the same article:

Certainly, if we in this Work turn away from the basic things such as the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath, the Holy Days, etc. then you should be able to

see through that and leave—as I had to do when Joseph Tkach completely abandoned the basic foundations of the Truth we had come to understand. That is different.

So what Mr. Tkach changed in the 1990s (including the weekly Sabbath) was a perversion of *basic Truth*, but not what the Worldwide Church of God changed in 1974 concerning Pentecost? If one still wants to debate that the weekly Sabbath is more important than the annual Sabbaths, so be it. But let us test that logic a little further concerning the other major change of 1974.

What about the change in teaching about divorce and remarriage? Was that truly just changing "how to handle" the doctrine? Prior to May 1974, the Worldwide Church of God taught that God *bound* marriages both of *the called and the uncalled*. It did not matter whether one was in the world or in the church, if it was a first marriage for each one, then God applied His *binding power* to make them "one flesh" till death do they part. This teaching can be confirmed in Mr. Armstrong's own booklet published in 1973, entitled, *Marriage and Divorce*. But the change of 1974 *reversed* that totally and said that God bound only the marriages of those who are part of *the true church*. Within short order, the new ruling was not limited just to those who already *had been* married in the world *before conversion*, but *expanded* to apply even to those *married in the church*, if one of them ever *left the church later on*! What is the actual effect of that change as it impacted members of the WCG? Individuals taught previously that they would be *committing adultery* if they married (because they already had a living spouse, even though being divorced), were now told that they were *free to marry* because that original marriage was really never bound! How does that kind of amendment *not affect* the Ten Commandments? *Before* May 1974, the member would have been breaking the seventh commandment by marrying and would face the danger of eternal damnation, but *after* May 1974, the same individual *would not be* breaking that commandment and was "just fine" in God's eyes. If that is not a change to the *basic law* about adultery—and what constitutes *the definition* of adultery—pray tell, what is?

Concerning those whom God says will never be in His Kingdom, He states:

Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, *nor adulterers*, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9–10) [emphasis mine].

It would appear that this issue of what *God* considers to be adultery should indeed be important to every member of the Body of Christ. And *the definition of adultery* was certainly changed in 1974, no matter how someone tries to spin it otherwise.

Divergent Reactions to the 1974 Changes

Mr. Meredith's statements contrast his own personal responses to the 1974 doctrinal changes with those of Raymond Cole. He implies that Mr. Cole had ulterior motives for resisting the changes. More on that later. But he highlights his own response to the crisis as a model for you and me to follow. Here is what he states about his own dilemma in 1974:

We who remained did not always fully understand these changes at first. Yet the faithful brethren had to be willing to think through where the Work was still being done and where faithful men were still teaching the basic way of God and being used by God to preach "the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" around the world (Acts 8:12). Therefore, brethren, your "faith" does not rest upon your immediately agreeing with every scintilla of each little new nuance God may show us in some aspect of our understanding the overall basic flow of prophecy. Certainly, if we in this Work turn away from the basic things such as the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath, the Holy Days, etc. then you should be able to see through that and leave—as I had to do when Joseph Tkach completely abandoned the basic foundations of the Truth we had come to understand. That is different.

First, notice a monumental admission by Roderick Meredith. He did not initially *understand* or *agree* with the 1974 doctrinal changes! In past writings and sermons, we have referred to "one particular Evangelist" who absolutely disagreed with the change in the divorce and remarriage teaching, but who "came around" in time and accepted that change to save his position within the corporate church. That was none other than Mr. Meredith. We have witnesses alive yet today who attended that very dedication ceremony of the Ambassador Auditorium on May 6, 1974, where the change in marriage doctrine was announced to the assembled ministry and their wives. Roderick Meredith was witnessed afterwards in the auditorium lobby, angry and vociferously asserting that this change was *wrong*. For the first time, we now have his own words in writing which acknowledges *he did not agree* with the change when first announced.

The question is, since Mr. Meredith consistently claims to have been so close to Mr. Armstrong, and the marriage doctrine change was *approved* by Mr. Armstrong (for proof of this, please read our articles, *The Doctrine of Divorce and Remarriage—How and Why It Was Changed!*, as well as our February 2013 *Monthly Letter*), why was he so "out of the loop" during this critical time of doctrinal "breakthrough" in 1974? He seems to cast himself in the role of an insulated local church member, uninformed, confused, and waiting for more clarification before finally "figuring out" what was going on. But that was not so! He was a high-ranking Evangelist under Mr. Armstrong in Pasadena (as was Raymond Cole), and he was *fully "in the loop"* during all of those months beginning in 1972 during which the Doctrinal Committee did their work, finally ending in that fateful announcement in May 1974. He knew as much about the arguments for and against the doctrinal change as anyone

else in the church, and knew it *early on*! And yet, even after Mr. Armstrong approved the change, Roderick Meredith still disagreed. Yes, the average laymember of the church was in the dark until sermons were finally given and letters written to explain the technicalities. But Roderick Meredith was hardly in that category. He knew!

Obviously, he has since not only come to *accept* the new definition of marriage and what God considers to be adultery, but teaches *the very same thing* to his congregants today. But the point is, if that 1974 change was indeed the act of God to help the church "grow in grace and knowledge," what is true is that Roderick Meredith was not one who was helping God make that change for the good. He opposed it. He resisted it. And now he admits that he was confused, requiring time to *come around to it*. Therefore, at least during that time, he was not a true leader in the church, but a confused follower.

By contrast, the response of Raymond Cole in 1974 was quite different. As quoted to you a number of times over the years, here is how Mr. Cole described the event:

. . . 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).

And that assessment was true. More and more doctrines were attacked and repudiated in very short order. All was done under the same banner of "growing in grace and knowledge." The Pentecost and D&R changes were used as a template to challenge every

other fundamental teaching of the church. Roderick Meredith was not part of that liberal drive to overturn God's doctrines. But neither was he willing to stand up and defend the truth under assault. Instead, his response was consistent with what he advises now to the laity: ". . . your "faith" does not rest upon your immediately agreeing with every scintilla of each little new nuance God may show us in some aspect of our understanding the overall basic flow of prophecy." Yet, God gave a very clear standard for evaluation when doctrinal *changes* are presented:

What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: *thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.* If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, *which thou hast not known*, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and *keep his commandments, and obey his voice*, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him (Deuteronomy 12:32; 13:1–4) [emphasis mine].

Rather than admonishing us to *look past* "smaller" doctrinal changes and focus instead upon the outward signs of a "great work" still being done, or other "proofs," God says even if someone is able to perform miraculous signs, but begins to tamper with the revealed Truth and pull Israel into strange new doctrines, they should reject it! This same concept was reconfirmed for the New Testament Church as well:

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

Were the changes that began in 1974 truly just "little nuances"? How were they any less significant than the changes made by Mr. Armstrong's successor in the early 1990s? As we have demonstrated to you often by this history, the changes of the 1990s were only the *final, natural result* of a philosophical avalanche unleashed beginning in 1974. They were not separate and unconnected events. The later *could never have occurred* if the precedent for doctrinal change through the "*better scholarship*" of worldly experts had not been established in 1974. The difference is, Raymond Cole recognized it for what it was in 1974. Roderick Meredith did not. The former understood that the very foundation of the Church was being assaulted, and he refused to become part of that apostasy. The latter, although highly troubled at the time by the doctrinal changes, finally mollified his own conscience by recasting them as "little nuances" which did not really mean that much.

Herbert Armstrong Confirms It Was a Mistake

As we have also documented many times in the past, even Mr. Armstrong himself admitted before he died in 1986 what was *the real error in thinking* leading to serious problems which prevailed during those early 1970s. How did he describe it? From *The Worldwide News Special Edition*, June 24, 1985, *Recent History of the Philadelphia Era of the Worldwide Church of God*:

A small few Ambassador graduates who had become ministers in the Church were somewhat scholarly inclined, especially one who had a specific problem [He is referring specifically to Dr. Ernest Martin]. He suffered from an inferiority complex. Because some of our graduates at the time were enrolling in outside universities for higher degrees, a few came to conceive that a "scholar" was in the loftiest position of humanity.

If this inferiority sufferer could feel in his own mind that he was a scholar he would feel elevated above other people and therefore delivered from feelings of inferiority. He began to question some of the established doctrines of the Church of God, such as counting the day of Pentecost, divorce and remarriage, tithing and others.

Soon he [Ernest Martin] was entering into what he considered a scholarly research to DISprove some of the Church's basic teachings.

Stopping right here for the moment, notice that Mr. Armstrong—after more than ten years of hindsight—chose to include the *pre-1974* teaching about *the counting of Pentecost* (confirming a Monday observance), as well as the doctrine of divorce and remarriage, as "*established doctrines* of the Church of God," and also called them "the Church's *basic teachings*"!

How does that compare to the way Roderick Meredith now treats them in hindsight? We already saw he called them only "little new nuance[s]," merely changes in "how we handle" the doctrines. Furthermore in his recent article, he states:

Again, dear brethren, try to see the "Big Picture," in all of this and not be "picky" and always looking for the "loose brick" or some excuse to fall away or to do your own thing (Roderick Meredith; September–October 2013).

So Raymond Cole went "overboard" in treating a Monday Pentecost and the original teaching about marriage as *basic, fundamental doctrines* of the church, considering that the foundation was under assault. Mr. Meredith, by contrast, says the changes were only picky nuances. Continuing Mr. Armstrong's quote from June 1985:

. . . Gradually one or two others, then even more, joined in a self-appointed "scholarly research" to DISprove plain biblical truths.

It became evident that those attending other universities came to consider Ambassador College as inferior and substandard intellectually and academically because of our belief in God. Secularism and the anti-God approach of evolution seemed to them far superior to the revealed knowledge of God.

Notice once again how Mr. Armstrong portrayed those pre-1974 teachings. From where did those doctrines derive their authority? From man, or from God? He labeled them as "*the revealed knowledge of God*"! That is exactly the way Raymond Cole treated them, but it did not take ten years for him to see it that way. He understood it *at the very time* Satan was attacking the church! Continuing further in Mr. Armstrong's assessment from 1985:

This brought controversy into the Church. These self-professed "scholars," influenced by teaching in universities in which they were enrolling for higher degrees, were becoming more and more liberal. They wanted to skirt as close as possible to the precipice of secularism, falling off the cliff into Satan's world.

These were the years when my commission required that I be absent from Pasadena, and traveling overseas to almost all parts of the world as many as 300 of the 365 days of the year. This liberal group, small at first, came to be in executive positions at Pasadena, surrounding and influencing the one responsible for day-to-day administration at headquarters during my absence. Much of what they did was carefully kept from me.

Those of higher rank [including both Mr. Raymond Cole and Mr. Roderick Meredith], but subject to the one in day-to-day executive administration at Pasadena [Mr. Garner Ted Armstrong], who were steadfastly loyal to the Church and its true teachings, were suppressed or gradually removed from Pasadena and sent "into the field," pastoring single churches in other locations. So much of what was going on in Pasadena was kept from me that I did not realize the direction the Church was actually traveling into controversy, liberalism and either Protestantism or total secularism.

Did Mr. Armstrong go as far as outwardly promoting *the return* to a Monday Pentecost or the former teaching about marriage and adultery? No, he did not. He did not mention Pentecost again, but he *did* reference the marriage doctrine immediately as follows:

I quote now from a memorandum by Leroy Neff, the current treasurer, who was on the first Doctrinal Research Committee and wrote concerning others on the committee. I am quoting this to give an example of the direction some of the liberals on the doctrinal committee were taking.

1. *Any marriage where the people are unconverted, or did not fully know what they were getting into, was not a valid marriage.*

2. Polygamy was tacitly approved by God in Old Testament times, so

multiple marriages or divorces in modern times might just be a form of polygamy by having wives sequentially rather than concurrently.

3. God divorced ancient Israel and then both parties were free to remarry.

4. The ministry should be able to loose marriages that God joined.

These liberals wanted complete freedom in the Church for divorce and remarriage at will [emphasis mine].

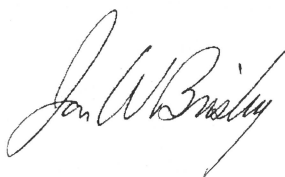
Wait a minute! Was not point number one above part of *the very change* in 1974 which Mr. Armstrong himself approved? Yes it was! The written transcript from that ministerial conference announcement at the Ambassador Auditorium on May 6, 1974, proves it! Yet before he died, Mr. Armstrong seemed to be viewing that change in a different light. Recall the way he viewed it *one year before the change*, in April, 1973. This was what he had said in a recorded Friday night Bible study in the Ambassador College Gymnasium, April 13, 1973:

So I will just tell you now, that I myself, cannot see one scintilla of an argument so far that is going to overthrow the teaching of God's Church on divorce and remarriage. . . . If we would do that, brethren, do you know what would happen in less than another three months? I'll bet you nearly hundreds and hundreds of members of the Worldwide Church of God would divorce and they would go out and marry someone else. And that would be the end of the Worldwide Church of God—and Jesus Christ would spue us out of his mouth. And anyone who does go and do that will get spued out. I have to warn you.

Nonetheless, one year after these emphatic statements, he *retracted* his 1973 booklet confirming *the original teaching* since the 1930s, and signed off on the "new change," allowing those who had been unconverted when married to be treated as "free" to remarry. In 1973, Mr. Armstrong seemed to believe the original teaching was a "basic, fundamental doctrine" of the Church. Before he died, he likewise seemed to have come to that same conclusion once again. It is only the years in the interim which seem to be at issue.

Time and space does not permit the conclusion of the analysis this month. In the December issue, we will continue to look at the recent comments of Mr. Roderick Meredith, including his condemnation of Raymond Cole as one who was looking for excuses to separate and to start his own church. Is there any validity to that charge? The evidence of the real truth is available, and it will be revealed.

Yours with sincere love and deep appreciation,



Jon W. Brisby