

March 2014

Dear Brethren:

This month we will complete our analysis of the public statements written last fall by Mr. Roderick Meredith, who chose sadly to denigrate the character and work of Mr. Raymond Cole. In the November and December issues of this *Monthly Letter*, we addressed many of his assertions about the 1974 doctrinal changes in the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) and contrasted the divergent responses made by Raymond Cole and Roderick Meredith to those defining events.

The point of these letters is not to manufacture a crusade of "righteous indignation" against every slanderous statement or negative word written about this little remnant group. There is much derogatory writing against the precepts of Church of God, The Eternal on a regular basis, and that has been true for nearly forty years. We are used to it, and in most cases we refuse to respond to it. It is not necessary, and it is not helpful. We are confident to let our sermons and articles speak for themselves. But in this particular case, as stated before, we have the oldest surviving evangelist from that era—Roderick Meredith—now seeking in his eighties to claim moral authority to interpret the history of God's church from the 1970s in opposition to recorded facts. One who lived through those events should be counted upon to be an honest witness. That sadly is not the case, and lest many who are just now learning about that history become deceived, these letters constitute "the other side of the story." As well, we are choosing to address it to our members in this medium because it provides a marvelous *case study* to distinguish *our thinking* about doctrine and *ministerial responsibility* from all of the other groups who came out of our parent church. For that reason there is added benefit in replying to this particular challenge.

As a refresher, here is how Mr. Meredith portrayed "his take" on that history to his subscribers in his September—October 2013 newsletter:

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.

Both of these paragraphs were already addressed in detail previously, and through quotations from both Raymond Cole and Rod Meredith we showed the error of these summary conclusions, both concerning the doctrinal changes of 1974, and each man's motive for what he did in response to those changes. But here is Mr. Meredith's next statement which is yet to be addressed:

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.

In last December's issue of this *Monthly Letter*, we examined the true motives of other ministers who left the WCG in the 1970s and showed how little they had in common with Raymond Cole. We allowed Mr. Cole's own words to address the political ploy to manufacture "guilt by association." The WCG tried it in 1978-1979, and Roderick Meredith is trying the same again today. Mr. Cole's own words make a compelling rebuttal. But what about this claim that Raymond Cole "fell away," that he was "not blessed," and that he must have been wrong because his "work" after 1975 did not have any great impact upon the world? That will be our final topic to conclude this written series.

Who "Fell Away"—and When?

First, make note that Raymond Cole's *exodus* from the WCG did not *precede* that of Ken Westby, as implied in the above quote. In the December 2013 issue, we showed that Mr. Westby and approximately thirty other WCG ministers defected in February 1974 (because they wanted *more change* to church doctrines), while Raymond Cole remained in good standing within the church during those months—howbeit sidelined tenuously on sabbatic leave at the behest of Mr. Herbert Armstrong because he refused to accept *any change* to church doctrines. It was not until the very end of 1974 that Mr. Cole's ministerial

credentials were revoked and he was *put out* of the WCG. He did not leave of his own accord, because he still hoped against hope to influence Mr. Armstrong in *reconfirming the original doctrines*. Once he was put out, everything changed. That is why Church of God, The Eternal did not officially form until February 1975, a whole year after the Westby rebellion! How much difference does *an accurate accounting of verifiable facts* make in portraying that history? Compared with Mr. Meredith's revisionist account, it makes all the difference in the world.

As well, Mr. Meredith claims that Raymond Cole "fell away." Exactly from what did he fall away? Did he repudiate the *doctrines* he had been taught by Mr. Armstrong? Quite the contrary, since holding to the original teachings is what *got him into trouble* in 1974! Well then, from what did he "fall away"? He must mean the physical assembly of the WCG. But how exactly did Raymond Cole "fall"? Did he trip and stumble in some kind of accident, *falling* over a cliff? If that is the kind of "falling" we are talking about, it would be more accurate to say that he was *pushed* over the cliff by those who changed their minds about how to define doctrinal Truth. Raymond Cole did not change—they did! But even that is not an accurate portrayal of the biblical concept of "falling away." The Greek word used in the New Testament is *aphistemi*, meaning to depart or to remove oneself. It is mostly used to denote a *departure from Truth*. But it is not always used in a negative way.

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ *depart* [*aphistemi*] from iniquity (2 Timothy 2:19) [emphasis mine].

So in some cases, in order to retain Jesus Christ, we might have to "fall away" from iniquity. Whether Raymond Cole or Roderick Meredith was the one to "fall away" in 1974 all depends upon how you define what it is that God wants us to cling to without compromise. You be the judge.

After our November and December issues of this *Monthly Letter* were published, one member volunteered an additional piece of evidence about the thinking of Roderick Meredith concerning Raymond Cole as late as 1993, just after Mr. Meredith finally separated (fell away?) from the WCG himself and began his own group (Global Church of God). It is found in his booklet, entitled, *Church Government and Church Unity*. (While we have yet to secure an original copy of this 1993 booklet, it has been quoted often by others, so we acknowledge that we are relying upon the accuracy of their citations). Seeking to disparage Mr. Meredith, Mr. Gerald Flurry—one of his archrivals who leads another major splinter group today—quoted that 1993 booklet in his own article entitled, *God's Family Government* (1993, 2001), as follows:

Each must be judged individually. Some that left [the WCG] were actually ahead of the main body in understanding (not breaking up certain marriages, Pentecost on Monday, etc.) (p. 9, *Church Government and Church Unity*, 1993, by Roderick Meredith).

How amazing! At the moment Mr. Meredith decided that he himself had no alternative but to depart [*aphistemi*] from the WCG in 1992-1993, what was his opinion of Raymond Cole (who had *departed* nineteen years beforehand)? At *that moment* he asserted that Raymond Cole had actually been *ahead of the main body* in understanding! But, you might challenge, since he did not use Raymond Cole's name, how can we be sure that Raymond Cole is the one implied? Well, who else separated from the WCG because he refused to renounce a Monday Pentecost or to redefine the rules for "breaking up certain marriages"? There was none other than Raymond Cole! And Mr. Meredith's main competitors *pounced immediately* upon those words to try to discredit him in 1993 before his new group could become well established.

Today you will find no such admission from Mr. Meredith in voice recording or written word. But why did he even make such a provocative public statement back in 1993? Is it possible that once he was forced outside of the parent body and then had to contemplate the doctrines that his *new remnant group* would embrace, that he actually *considered* restoring a Monday Pentecost and the original teaching about marriage? Maybe so, maybe not. But remember, we already proved *from his own words* that when those doctrines were first changed in 1974, *he did not agree with them!* Is it so unlikely that he *may have* toyed with the idea of getting back to those correct teachings when he finally had the power to do so in his own group in 1993? Only he and God know that answer. Even if so, the idea must have quickly died because there was simply *no market* for those teachings among the WCG members he was seeking to entice to follow him. Even if his conscience told him he should "get back to the original faith," reality dictated that he would have a very hard time gaining a following if he did so. His new group soon became just one more champion, among many, of a Sunday Pentecost and approving divorce and remarriage for any cause. By the way, that 1993 church government booklet was also quickly pulled and edited to remove that *explosive admission* from page 9. That seems to be the reason we are having a hard time finding a "first edition." Mr. Meredith wanted "a do-over" for giving any credit to Raymond Cole back in 1993.

The next argument Mr. Meredith offers to discredit the beliefs and actions of Raymond Cole is the fact that this remnant group—Church of God, The Eternal—never duplicated the massive growth of Mr. Armstrong's original work, or even attempted to do a worldwide proclamation of the gospel. But will this rationale hold water?

Bait and Switch

To begin with, note that this argument seems to be *the favorite fallback* among those who reject Raymond Cole's philosophical premise once they become hindered in winning the debate on the merits of doctrine. It is an attempt to "change the subject"—a classic *bait and switch*. Raymond Cole was teaching what the Bible advocates *consistently* from beginning to end—hold fast to that which God gave by divine revelation through a chosen servant. Simple, strong, and easy to prove. They, by contrast, champion the repudiation of the "old teachings" in favor of an unending, evolutionary smorgasbord of "new truth," based upon the virtue of man's *inherent scholarly prowess* to "grow" in knowledge. The end result of their brand of "growth" was the complete destruction of the parent body by the early 1990s. That glaring fact makes them scurry to *change the subject* as quickly as possible when Raymond Cole reminds them of their former (and present) foolishness! They might as well say, "Well, regardless of the facts, you cannot be right because your church is small and not growing enough."

Not only has Roderick Meredith resorted to this kind of *red herring* to change the subject, so have many others over the years. Ironically, Gerald Flurry did the same thing while attacking Mr. Meredith over that 1993 quotation which gave favor to Raymond Cole's wisdom. Here is the full quotation by Mr. Flurry, with his interpretation:

Mr. Meredith's booklet also said this: "Each must be judged individually. Some that left were actually ahead of the main body in understanding (not breaking up certain marriages, Pentecost on Monday, etc.)" (p. 9). Please read that statement again. He said ministers who left—OR REBELLED AGAINST the Church headed by Mr. Armstrong—were actually ahead of it in understanding! All right—where are those groups today that had that "advanced" understanding and left the WCG? Where are their fruits? In most cases they have almost disappeared! They were just REBELS who NEVER produced any real fruits! Compare their "advanced" work with what God did through Mr. Armstrong. LOOK AT THE FRUITS! Anybody who says those men were "ahead of the main body" in understanding is just in abysmal ignorance! Those who left the WCG under Mr. Armstrong *may have had some technical points right*, but God could never have worked through their rotten, rebellious attitudes! Their fruits prove that! [emphasis mine]

Interestingly, Mr. Flurry seems to give way on the issue of doctrinal truth, as he admits that Raymond Cole "may have had some technical points right." Amazing! But once again, rather than to address the merits of those real issues—like does God reveal error to His true Church and then require human scholars to "fix it" over time?—Mr. Flurry resorts to the same old *red herring* to change the subject. Does it remind you of that very same ploy being used by the Pharisees to discredit the proclamation of Truth by Jesus Christ?

They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, *We be not born of fornication*; we have one Father, even God (John 8:39–41) [emphasis mine].

The Pharisees could not win *the doctrinal argument* with Jesus Christ based upon merit, so they changed to a personal attack, accusing Him of being a bastard. Where is the honesty in such a tactic? Roderick Meredith and Gerald Flurry likewise resort to the same tactic to denigrate Raymond Cole and Church of God, The Eternal, in essence calling ours *a bastard work*!

But if they are correct, then their own "works"—by comparison—should be able to *pass that very test*, right? Can they do so? We shall see!

What Is the Standard for Any "Work" of God?

There is no doubt that Herbert Armstrong set the bar very high for accomplishing a "religious work." Whether one believes he was inspired by God (as do we) or not, the physical results of his activities in the twentieth century speak for themselves. Notice his own analysis and conclusions:

But, from that moment when we began to rely solely on God for financial support not only, but also for guidance, direction, and results, the Work began a phenomenal yearly increase of nearly 30% for the next 35 years. It doubled in size, scope and power on the average of every 2 2/3 years. It multiplied eight times every eight years—64 times in 16 years. Today it is an immensely larger and greater Work than then. WHY has this Work leaped from virtually nothing to worldwide power and scope, multiplying itself continually over and over again? Certainly I had not the ability, the resources within myself, to have planned, directed, and accomplished anything remotely like the phenomenal development into the worldwide enterprises that is reality today. . . . The DIFFERENCE between THIS Work of GOD and others is just that—this is the Work of GOD and not of MEN. It started, and continued, to rely on GOD, not on MAN (*Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*).

So we see that Mr. Armstrong asserted repeatedly it was *the work of God*—not man—and that a substantiation of the divine nature of its results was found in *monumental growth*, as that message was carried to the whole world with great power. Over the years,

when challenges were made to Mr. Armstrong's teachings or authority, he very often pointed to those very things as substantiation of his credibility. He would challenge anyone to identify another work that was going out boldly to proclaim Jesus Christ's gospel of God's coming Kingdom, or that was producing the fruits of thirty-percent average annual growth, year after year.

No wonder then that most members of the church (as well as the ministry) had these two tenets—necessity to do a worldwide work and confidence in membership growth—drilled into their thinking. Those two pillars were thundered by Mr. Armstrong as *a proof* of his own authority as the last-day servant of God, and so he certainly was.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Roderick Meredith and so many others would still seek to measure any religious work today against that very same yardstick. And if that is truly the standard to evaluate whether Raymond Cole and Church of God, The Eternal are legitimate, then no doubt we miserably fail that test.

But how does Mr. Meredith (and all others) stack up against his own standard? Since he separated from the WCG in 1992 and started his own church and evangelistic work, has that church grown thirty percent on average each year for the last twenty-two years, as Mr. Armstrong's did? Not even close! No doubt his group is much larger than we are, claiming over 8000 members compared to our little fellowship of less than 500. But he began in the early 1990s with over 5000 who came out of the parent body once the new Pastor General of the WCG repudiated the Sabbath and Holy Days. Being one of the oldest Evangelists taught under Herbert Armstrong at that time, he easily "inherited" thousands at the very beginning of his own "work"—members who were looking for the best alternative to "jump to," once they decided to leave the WCG. These were members who had long since embraced a Sunday Pentecost and other very liberal doctrines, and many of whom were divorced and remarried, so they certainly would not be looking to Raymond Cole as a haven. Roderick Meredith enjoyed a huge infusion of members and tithe money to get him started by being in the right place at the right time. But that beginning membership was still only a remnant of *Mr. Armstrong's work*, not his own work.

Well then, if the proper yardstick to certify any legitimate "Work of God" is to duplicate the early growth rate of the Radio Church of God under Herbert Armstrong, then surely we should be able to document a similar thirty-percent annual increase over the next twenty-two years in Mr. Meredith's work, right?

Beginning with a membership base of approximately 5000 in 1993, at thirty-percent annual growth for twenty-two years, his group should now have *over one million members!* But wait, he is *claiming* only about 9500 total *attendees* at his 2013 Feast of Tabernacles sites (total attendance, not even baptized members). With all of the millions of dollars he has

spent over the last twenty years to do a *worldwide Work* and to make himself *heir* of Herbert Armstrong's office under God, *where are the fruits?* Where are his million members? Where is even the 150,000 members that Mr. Armstrong accumulated by the early 1970s? (Same question for Gerald Flurry, who still has fewer members even than Roderick Meredith, even though he too has spent millions to do an "Elijah work.")

Unlike Herbert Armstrong, God has not blessed Roderick Meredith's attempt to bring droves of new members into the church. And note that a large percentage of his current members are *transients*, coming from other splinter groups who likewise are trying to emulate Mr. Armstrong. So over the years they have all traded members through swinging doors, and often count the very same people as "members" who are simultaneously being counted as "members" by competitors. If you attend one service at the Feast of Tabernacles, you are counted as having "attended." But how many people attend multiple groups' meetings during the Feast and are being double and triple counted by various groups? Or how many simply attend the nearest Feast site to their home, regardless of their affiliation? The same goes for tracking tithe receipts, another common way to "count members." If you made a contribution of any kind, you get "counted." But many brethren today contribute tithes to a number of different groups, spreading around their contributions from month to month. And because these men have set themselves up to require "big numbers" to justify their legitimacy, regardless of what the facts are, you can bet they are encouraged to "pad the counts." Who knows what the true numbers are? But what we can know is this: Even according to their *inflated claims*, they are all failing miserably according to the standard they have set for us, and for themselves.

And what about the claim of warning the world before the return of Christ? Where is the "big splash" as a result of Mr. Meredith's print magazine and TV program over the past twenty years? How is he getting any attention from the world for a bold proclamation of real Truth? Is God really so weak? Is that the best God can do to fulfill His promise to do an Elijah work in the last days? Really? For a man claiming that the proof of any legitimate "work of God" today is found in a *prolific worldwide public presence* and eye-popping growth in membership, he is *failing miserably* against his own yardstick! So is Gerald Flurry and every other *Herbert Armstrong wannabe* out there today. If it were not so sad, it would be amusing. Those who hate Herbert Armstrong and his legacy have had a field day in criticizing the inept religious flailings of such men who give a bad name to the legitimate work which God did from 1934 through 1968 through a truly inspired servant—a work which bore unquestioned fruit.

The sad reality is, Herbert Armstrong got the results—none of these others has even come close! That includes, especially, Roderick Meredith. Does that fact not put him and the others in the same category as Raymond Cole according to his own yardstick? Recall what they claim:

Those brethren who fell away because of these changes were not blessed. Those ministers who followed Raymond Cole . . . 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 (Roderick Meredith; September—October 2013 newsletter) [emphasis mine].

LOOK AT THE FRUITS! Anybody who says those men were "ahead of the main body" in understanding is just in abysmal ignorance! Those who left the WCG under Mr. Armstrong *may have had some technical points right*, but God could never have worked through their rotten, rebellious attitudes! *Their fruits prove that!* (Gerald Flurry; *God's Family Government* (1993, 2001) [emphasis mine])

Since neither of these men has been able to live up to his own standards as far as *real fruits*, perhaps they too are doing *bastard works*? You be the judge. They claim Raymond Cole was never legitimate because he never *did* "a work." But how is that any worse than ones who *try* to do a work *but fail* to achieve anything?

Mr. Meredith also stated, above, "Those ministers who followed Raymond Cole . . . mostly split up among themselves and virtually 'disappeared'. . . ." Yet look at the history of the splits and divisions that have come out of his own group(s) in the last twenty years (same for Gerald Flurry). It is difficult to count the number of former members and ministers who have broken away from these leaders to start competing works. No doubt that Raymond Cole experienced a number of defections from Church of God, The Eternal over the years, but nothing in comparison to the instability shown by these very critics who have become *the poster children* for organizational infighting, division, and splintering. In attempting to denigrate Raymond Cole, exactly how are their own fruits any better? Puzzling indeed!

If the real proof that God is still active in sustaining a Church *somewhere* today requires a repeat of the worldwide *public presence* and *phenomenal growth* of the Radio Church of God from 1934 to 1968, then we must conclude that God is either a liar, very weak, or perhaps totally nonexistent. But if instead you believe that the Bible *is true* and that God is indeed *still working actively* in some way during these very dark days, then it must be because the presumptions of men about God's activities today are what is foolish. No one today is duplicating the physical success that Herbert Armstrong achieved. No one! Is God failing?

Did John Fail?

What has occurred in God's last-day church is *the anti-type* of what initially occurred in the first-century Church. History has repeated itself. So let us examine the "Work" that

God chose to do in the aftermath of apostasy by *the original parent body* in the first century. First, God prophesied that the church would be destroyed *from the inside* by men who did not love the Truth:

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also *of your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:29–30) [emphasis mine].

Within forty years of the beginning of the New Testament Church, that departure from Truth had already set in. The Epistles of Paul, Peter, and John all reflect their battle against these insurgencies which were permeating the body and taking over. By the time John wrote the book of Third John (sixty years after the death of Jesus Christ), he had already been put out of the physical, parent body, and was writing to a scattered remnant.

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and *casteth them out of the church* (3 John 9–10) [emphasis mine].

Now then, with the corruption of the parent body by 90 A.D., and John being forced out in order to hold firm to the revealed Truth, what was *the proof* that John was indeed still a *legitimate representative of Jesus Christ* from that time forward? Was it the fact that from 90 A.D. onward, John would begin to duplicate the kind of *grand Work* done from the beginning of the Church in 31 A.D.? Was John now obligated to form a remnant body that would *grow remarkably* in numbers and initiate a *huge new Work* to proclaim the gospel to the world in the second century? And if John failed to initiate such a work or to generate enough members to follow him, would that be proof that he was just an apostate "REBEL who NEVER produced any real fruits"? Maybe Diotrephes was the faithful servant, since he and others appear to have preserved the larger physical group? If numbers of members is the key, John seems to have lost out.

You might counter, but John was *prevented* from doing a revival work because he was persecuted by the Romans and ultimately exiled to the Isle of Patmos. Nonetheless, what we are really talking about is God's will, not man's will. If God determines to do a "Work," will anything stop it? Did we not learn under Mr. Armstrong that it was *God's will* to allow the first-century Church to be attacked, and for it to be infiltrated and perverted to produce the great counterfeit we know today as the Catholic Church? And do we not all accept, therefore, that it was *not God's will* to duplicate the initial grand Work of the first century into the second century? That it was actually God's will to allow *a very small remnant* of true believers to disappear from public view? That another "big Work" would not be done

for a very long time? That John was very much a faithful servant until the end, even though he never led a massive "Elijah revival" in his final years?

Why then do we assume that once God allowed His true Church in the twentieth century to be destroyed in *the very same manner*, that He intended to *immediately* raise up another similar Work under a successor to Herbert Armstrong, duplicating his early success in growing and spreading the gospel worldwide? Who says so? By what authority do they assume such an intent on the part of God, let alone attempt to achieve it themselves? If they are correct, and this is what God *really wanted to happen*, then God is the failure, because such a grand revival work *has not manifested!* Either God is the failure, or these men who have claimed authority are proven to be presumptuous! It is either one or the other.

God's intent to the contrary is shown in the last-day prophecy He recorded through Jeremiah, showing that true ministers of God would *corrupt the doctrine*, but nonetheless claim the commission to be His spokesmen in "doing their works":

The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: *in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.* But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings (Jeremiah 23:20–22) [emphasis mine].

But Roderick Meredith and these others have not "stood in His counsel," because they compromised revealed Truth to retain their political advantage among men. And because of that treachery, God is not blessing them or backing them. They are all pretenders, and their lack of fruits *in relation to their own standards* is proof of that.

Raymond Cole Never Presumed

This leads to the other great distinction between Raymond Cole and Roderick Meredith (as well as all of the others). Unlike these other men, Mr. Cole never presumed that he was commissioned by God to duplicate the work of Herbert Armstrong.

To begin with, Raymond Cole was forced out of the WCG in late 1974 while Mr. Armstrong was still leading the parent body for another dozen years until his death in 1986. Mr. Cole had no intention of "competing" with his mentor during those years, unlike all of the others who separated during that same decade (Garner Ted Armstrong, Ernest Martin, Ken Westby, etc.). Is it not ironic that if he had tried to start a competitive evangelical "Work," he would have been accused of gross disrespect for Mr. Armstrong? But in that he

chose *not* to try to do such a work, he was accused of failing to do the required Matthew 28:19–20 commission to spread the gospel. Well, which is it?

Unlike all of the others, Raymond Cole acknowledged a plain biblical truth, that God is the One who commissions specific men to do *specific works at specific times* to fulfill His will. It is the *Protestant orientation* to think that every Tom, Dick, and Harry who becomes a "Christian" has a carte blanche obligation to go out and spread the gospel in his own way. The Twelve were *hand-picked* by Jesus Christ and sent out *with authority* to do a specific work for a specific time. And when it was God's will to end that grand work, He did so. And from the time God ended the special blessings, no one was able to reignite the momentum or carry that baton into a new century.

Neither was it God's will yet to begin that prophesied *final Work* which will usher in the return of Christ (Matthew 24:14). How do we know that? Because it has not yet happened! No one has been able to do it! God will do it when it is *His will* to do it, and not before. No one will force His hand. And He will perform all that He has promised.

Raymond Cole was the only one of all of these men who refused to presume, but to simply do that which he knew God required. Herbert Armstrong was the apostle raised up by God to do a grand work in the twentieth century. That work was successful because God was behind it. But the great thirty percent annual growth of that work ceased from 1968 forward. The seeds of apostasy were already at work, culminating in the repudiation of Jesus Christ as the Revelator of Truth in 1974, after which they turned to *human scholarship* as their *new god*. Raymond Cole was forced out because he would not embrace such an abomination. After that, he humbly served only those whom God sent to him. He claimed no commission to become an apostle. He stayed within the commission he had already been ordained to fulfill, that of a shepherd to those who likewise were forced out of the parent body they had loved.

Allow Raymond Cole's own words from the February 1977 issue of this *Monthly Letter* show how he defined the work of Church of God, The Eternal in those years:

As estranged children, we are attempting to hold fast to that truth which we were taught. The very beginning of our joy and confidence. We are holding out a helping hand to all who are troubled and who are beckoning for help. And, finally, we patiently wait for the major intervention of God in the last days. We await His specific instructions—instructions related to any work which He wills to be done through us or anyone else who will remain faithful and loyal to the original call. As ministers, we must never pressure. We were called and ordained as ministers to tend the flock. For the present, none of us was called to restore truth by effecting a major evangelistic work. We will

continue to help troubled and perplexed people—of the flock of God—to restore and uphold truth internally. We are ever willing to instruct and help those who are willing to listen. Our great purpose is to study, pray and be prepared for the future. In what ways will God use us in the future? We do not now know!

Since that time, we have continued to follow this very same program. God has not yet even begun to do that prophesied warning work to the world. If the efforts of Roderick Meredith and others are God's *best attempt* to fulfil His prophecy, we are all serving a very weak, inept God, for sure. But since we do not believe that is true, then God is not to blame. He will yet do *all that He has promised*. In the meantime, we are patient to wait and to hold firm to the precepts which Jesus Christ *revealed initially* through Herbert Armstrong, and later *preserved* through Raymond Cole. All of the others are full of *bluster and pretension*.

It would behoove some to focus on certain other prophecies that God spoke regarding the aftermath of that apostasy in the last days:

Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us *a very small remnant*, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:7–9) [emphasis mine].

For who hath despised *the day of small things*? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth (Zechariah 4:10) [emphasis mine].

There have been many times in human history when God has purposed to preserve only a very small remnant for the moment. When that time is up, and God sets His hand to begin that final work to get this world's attention, rest assured it will be done with great power—not with human vanity and doctrinal compromise—and there will be no doubt that something supernatural is taking place.

Who Is Blessed?

The last point to be made is a response to Mr. Meredith's conclusion that Raymond Cole and this remnant group have not been blessed, and implying that we are on the brink of extinction. It is reminiscent of many past prophecies of our impending doom by other critics.

One writer who maintains a website dedicated to mocking Herbert Armstrong recently listed this remnant body as among "The Dying," and wrote this about us:

Church of God, The Eternal: One of the older splinters is barely getting by. Considering that it split over issues within WCG during HWA's reign that aren't even relevant anymore, and the fact that its leader Raymond C. Cole died years ago, there's not much reason for this cult to exist anymore . . . and it barely does.

No doubt that being a very small group, we are incredibly vulnerable in this world, and any number of physical threats could cause us quickly to cease from existence. Having only a small and scattered following around the world, and because we are not trying to grab a share of any spotlight, we certainly do not look like an emerging, robust enterprise.

But wait just a minute! What about the fact that we have been an organized body for nearly forty years? Does that fact count for nothing? It would be one thing if we were some new "start-up" group without any history or sure foundation. Hundreds of groups have formed out of the Worldwide Church of God, and most of them have existed only for a short time, ultimately disappearing from sight. Not so with us. We are still here! Is that just a fluke? How long do we have to "survive" in order to gain any respect for having some level of substance? Doubting the longevity of a small group which is only one year old, or even ten years old, is understandable. Doubting the staying power of a group which is twenty years old is much more of a stretch, but perhaps still justifiable. Doubting the resiliency of a group which is already *thirty years old* begins to smack more of bias. But dismissing a group which has already survived for *forty years* is downright dishonest (or at least "disingenuous"). How long do we have to continue before our detractors give us any credit? Fifty years? Sixty? None of them has remotely lasted as long as we have, even though we are smaller. And given the instability they have all shown recently, it would appear there is no guarantee that they have any more protections against extinction than do we.

Another common criticism offered sneeringly over the years is that we are just a *Raymond Cole personality cult*. Is that not what the above-quoted author implied when he said, ". . . the fact that its leader Raymond C. Cole died years ago, there's not much reason for this cult to exist anymore . . ."? Excellent point! If we are just a personality cult, then we should already have faced the same fate as so many other groups whose existence depends upon a particular messianic leader to keep its poor members brainwashed. But wait! Raymond Cole has already been dead for a dozen years. Why have we not already fallen apart and disappeared since then? Maybe the successor just happens to be an even more clever magician to keep the foolish dupes deceived? Hardly.

Is it possible that Church of God, The Eternal was never a personality cult at all? Is it possible that although small in popularity, the concept of Truth being revealed through a chosen servant by God—not man—has merit on its own? Is it possible that the former doctrines of the Radio Church of God resonate with people yet today, regardless of who the particular leader of the group happens to be at the moment?

Here are some other facts for Mr. Meredith and these others to consider: Since Raymond Cole's death in 2001, our membership has actually *ticked up* overall, not down. We have added congregations in places we never had before, including Australia and Africa. Our annual total contributions in tithes and offerings is also much more than in 2001 and remaining incredibly stable overall, in spite of increasing economic challenges in those countries where most of our members reside. Our financial reserves are *more than double* what we had in 2001. The trend in our membership is also very telling. Although we have attracted only enough new members each year to maintain and to grow just a small amount, that surely should be significant compared to so many other groups who are leaking members like sieves. And furthermore, the average age of our congregation is progressively getting younger—not older. While some groups can claim only a core of aging members who are slowly dying off, many of our newer members are much younger, including a regular flow of former children in the WCG who are now choosing "our brand" of doctrine and administration.

How then are we not being blessed? Though small, we have weathered a number of serious crises over the last forty years and not only survived each one, but emerged *stronger than before*. We have proved that our members are not just brainwashed men-followers, because they are just as committed to *the tenets of this group* today, long after the death of its founder. The income is stronger than ever, and the membership is trending younger. Exactly how do those facts describe an organization "barely hanging on" and near the brink of oblivion?

Our other advantage is that we have not assembled our followers through fear-mongering or promising people special protections from tribulation to come. Quite the contrary, we have refused to stick our necks out with any prophetic speculations, so there is no "sword of Damocles" hovering over our heads waiting for embarrassment to strike. And is it not interesting that as unpopular as our doctrines are to many—especially the teaching that all bound marriages in and out of the church are *truly bound for life*—that more and more are becoming willing to embrace such "hard sayings"?

The substance of Raymond Cole's life's work is still bearing fruit today, and with each passing year, that light becomes brighter and brighter. Roderick Meredith and others may wish fervently for our demise because our continuing existence afflicts their consciences, reminding them of the doctrines they *once preached and practiced* but have since

abandoned. But seeking to redraft history against the facts in order to soothe his conscience about his own questionable choices will not stand the light of honest inspection.

Over these past three letters you have had the opportunity to read "the other side" of that story. For those who think it matters, the distinctions in *motives and responses* by each of these ministers to prophesied attacks upon God's church is instructive.

Each one of you will stand before God to account for your own personal faith, so evaluation and discernment are imperative. We are confident in the foundation upon which we have stood and have defended lo these many years. And we are ever eager to fulfill that very same commission to support those who come to love it as we do. No one knows what the immediate future will bring, but we have implicit confidence in the promises of God. What a blessing to have a foundation based upon the sure character of God, rather than the brittle imaginations of foolish men.

Your determined and devoted servant in Christ,

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

Jon W. Brisby