

March 2016

Dear Brethren:

This month, our mailing to you includes a letter that I wrote to the ordained ministers of Church of God, The Eternal in January 2014. It was a letter written for those men in particular at that given time, but which I now believe would be beneficial for the entire church today.

My reason for releasing this letter is twofold. First, because of my current workload and travel schedule, it would be a stretch to complete the next "new material" that I want to give to you in *Monthly Letter* form. Therefore, republishing an old letter helps solve that problem. Second, the content in this letter includes material that will help reconfirm to all of you what is the underlying orientation of this ministry in serving this remnant body.

Publishing a ministerial letter is not unprecedented. The letters that the Apostle Paul wrote personally to Timothy and Titus to instruct them in how to care for the Church not only became public, but became books of the Bible. Please do not misunderstand. The attached letter is anything but on a par with Holy Scripture. But what it shares in common is a confirmation of the proper orientation of the ministry in doing its work, as well as a defense of the faith once delivered for the entire church. Lest anyone believe that I am saying *one thing* to the people about what we stand for, but something quite different in private to my ministerial assistants, I want this letter *on the record* as proof that I am serious about all that I have claimed publically in doing this job since the death of Mr. Raymond Cole. I hope that it will be of value to you as members of this remnant body as a confirmation of our collective mission and philosophy in this work.

Please note that the attached letter is being provided to you exactly as it was sent to the ministerial recipients in January 2014. At that time, it did not undergo our standard office editing process, so any typographical or grammatical errors are totally those of the author.

May God continue to sustain each one of you in that divine work of putting on the mind of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Yours with heartfelt love and devotion,



Jon W. Brisby

January 8, 2014

Dear Friends, Elders, and Fellow-servants,

I am writing this much-overdue letter to the ordained elders who assist me in serving this little flock from our North America region. Your role as shepherds to this remnant group is so very critical, and your friendship to me, personally, has been ever so much appreciated during these many years that I have known you. So much has happened since the death of Mr. Raymond Cole in 2001, and I know that there will be even more dramatic events in the times ahead for all of us. I want you each to know how much you are loved and appreciated, and how optimistic I am for our future. The challenges are always great, the threats serious, but with the continuing help of God—as He has provided it all of these past years—what confidence we can have as we face the unknowns of a perilous future.

I could write pages and pages, but will try to keep this fairly short. My intent is to provide feedback in general and to reconfirm our collective mission in serving this little remnant group. It is imperative that we have the same philosophy about what we are doing together, and unless I communicate properly, that may not always happen. To the extent that I have not communicated directly and frequently, I apologize for that. The last time I wrote to you as a group was five years ago. Since then, Mr. Leon Whitaker has died, and Mr. David Brandenburg has been added to our ranks. While we do communicate one-on-one as necessary throughout each year, there are times when a collective letter is appropriate, and I believe this is one of them. In absence of that communication, what can happen is the same thing I wrote about in past *Monthly Letters* which occurred to Mr. Armstrong—something I call "organizational drift." It is the slow and unintentional change away from the original and intended philosophy of a group. It has nothing to do with the level of sincerity of the ministers. But it has everything to do with the need for a wise leadership hand used *lightly*, but *decisively*, to keep the enterprise on its proper and intended course.

I am thinking of this letter not only as an instrument of communication with each of you today, but as a *document for the future* to confirm our philosophy as shepherds of Church of God, The Eternal, regardless of who those elders may be by name. As I stated to the brethren at the Feast of Tabernacles this past year, as well as to the Board of Advisors in our last meeting, I do not view myself as indispensable in this role as Pastor, Director. This is God's work, not that of any man. I do not know God's future will, but I am working and planning with the assumption that I will not be the final physical leader of this group before the return of Christ. If I am, so be it. But if I am not, then wisdom dictates that I attempt to leave things in good order for a potential successor. And there is nothing more important than the *underlying philosophy* about what we are doing and how we should think about our jobs as shepherds. If we get that right, then everything else afterwards will fall into place accordingly.

Ironically, the main things I want to communicate are the very same things I communicated to you five years ago in my March 18, 2009 letter. I have enclosed that letter copy for each of you, because it is still the foundation of what I want us to remember and to think about in doing our jobs.

With that letter in mind, I want to reiterate again that I do not have *carte-blanche* to do anything I choose, or to adopt any philosophy I want to regarding this remnant group. I was ordained by Raymond Cole (actually, by God) with a very *narrow mission*. That mission is to hold firm to *the faith once delivered* and not to vary from that path one iota. I am authorized to preach only those things which are part of *that particular faith*. I have no authority to change, alter, or to expand my role beyond those prescribed limits. Yes, God can certainly expand a mission if it is His desire, but in absence of such a purposeful divine act, I have no power to do so myself. And I have received *no such increase* of authority or change of mission to date. So regardless of the fact I have now been Director of Church of God, The Eternal for more than a dozen years, I have gained no more latitude or authority than that which I had initially. Men have the tendency to "award themselves" new powers or prerogatives by virtue of advancing seniority. I do not intend to make that mistake, God helping me. My *sense of constraint* is just as fresh in my mind today as it was the day I was ordained as a minister in 1997, let alone just as real and restrictive as the role of Director I inherited after Raymond Cole died. Raymond Cole never forgot the constraints under which he was commissioned to serve God's people. I am operating under the very same constraints today. And absent a new, divine commission by God Himself in the future, so too will any successor of mine be constrained.

The next point relates to how we define that *faith once delivered*. The majority of God's people today will not even embrace the idea of revealed doctrine that is inspired and cannot change. But among the very few who *do* accept that concept, it does not mean all is automatically unity and accord. How that faith is defined is critical. What is included in the faith once delivered? What is not included? How is that decision even made? Disagreements over that question led to the separation that took place in our fellowship back in 1998, when Mr. Cole's long-time assistant began to advance a contrary definition of "the faith." My point is not to go through the expansive definition here. It is possible that this will be my sermon theme for the fall Feast of Tabernacles. We will see. Suffice it to say here that Raymond Cole was the one God used to define what is included in that faith. He was *the eyewitness* who learned at the very feet of Herbert Armstrong from the earliest years of God's work in the twentieth century. He is the one God preserved with the authority of a witness to confirm what came by divine revelation through a chosen servant vs. what crept in by other means. The proof of that faith is not just finding references to a particular teaching in an old article. The original revelation of Jesus Christ was under assault *from very early on*, and many ideas crept in by men who, in hindsight, did not manifest good fruits. Yet their concepts became printed in church literature. How will we know then? Raymond Cole taught us, and we believe God actively led him to confirm that Word.

But I realize this requires a strong element of faith. One could accuse me of simply *picking and choosing* "what I want" to be included in "the faith." After all, if we cannot simply accept a principle printed in an old booklet or *Correspondence Course* lesson, what prevents me from accepting or dismissing a teaching according to my own personal whim? Firstly, let me say that I do not have the power, personally, to accept or reject any teachings as part of the faith. I was taught like all of the others in this remnant group by Raymond Cole. My perspective on these issues was wholly shaped by his teachings, both publically and through my many private associations with him over the years. It is Raymond Cole's credibility that is at stake, and contingent upon how we view his legitimacy. I am a witness of what Raymond Cole thought about many issues, based upon his personal association with Mr. Armstrong. Much of that can be affirmed by turning to old Radio Church of God literature. But some of it cannot. Example: When a 1960s *Good News* magazine includes a *Question Box* item saying that Social Security does not have to be tithed because it is a "gift" from the government, and gifts are not subject to tithe, should we accept that as part of the faith once delivered? Without any other reference, that would likely be the case. But Raymond Cole confirms that this was already a change away from what Mr. Armstrong originally taught, even if you cannot find that he addressed it in writing previously. Who then will we trust for an answer? Some may want to cite the 1960s statement as "evidence." And I realize that in asserting "undocumented" testimony by Raymond Cole, it may seem weak by comparison. But I assert to you, and to anyone else who asks, that Raymond Cole was either a good tree or an evil tree (Matthew 12:33). God either preserved good fruit through his ministry for us, or else He did not. Which is it? The same man through whom we first learned about the very concept of *the faith once delivered* also taught us the difference between many of these smaller issues in question. If not Raymond Cole, who else has the authority to confirm?

In some cases, I truly do not know for sure about a certain teaching. Those are the times when I wish we still had Raymond Cole here with us to ask, since he was the witness. Thankfully, I have never yet run across one of those "unresolved" issues which was salvational in nature. In every case, they were only speculative at most, with no relevance to understanding what God requires of us in obedience. That is the good news. On the other hand, there may be concepts that one or more of us may remember from our own histories in the church and may have *thought* was part of that faith. The question is, who has the authority to confirm what *was* and what *was not* included in that faith? One of you? Even me? No way! Again, many individuals who have come to embrace *the concept* of a faith once delivered do not necessarily wind up defining it the same way.

The point is, defining the faith once delivered has already been done, for all of those historic teachings which matter most. What is speculative can remain speculative, because it is not essential to the salvation of God's people. Raymond Cole was the instrument whom God used to teach us the difference in what matters, and I am commissioned to hold firm to that body of teaching. That is what this little group has always been about. That is what we will continue to teach and to emphasize. It will always be up to the individual member to

either accept or to reject our teachings. They are all free moral agents. But what the ministry of Church of God, The Eternal will teach and represent is not up for debate. We have a long history of confirming those doctrines. They were not my doctrines, so I have no pride of authorship in any of them. I am simply a steward, and I intend to defend them without apology to anyone. And any future successor to me in this office needs to be prepared to defend them as well, without apology.

The next point: *The faith once delivered* includes not only "old teachings" which came directly through Herbert Armstrong, but also "newer teachings" which were added by God by divine inspiration through Raymond Cole after 1974. This is not a dead Church. We have indeed continued to "grow in knowledge" over the past forty years, contrary to what our detractors claim. I gave a whole sermon series at the Feast in 2012 on this theme. We do indeed have "new knowledge" that was never yet revealed through Mr. Armstrong. But it was given as a gift through Raymond Cole for the benefit and security of a remnant church which would *need more* in order to withstand the attacks of the future. That new knowledge includes our understanding of *the concept* of the divine revelation of Truth through chosen servants, the underlying nature and purpose of prophecy, and the true nature of God's Work. These are not teachings which contradict any previous *doctrine* revealed by God through Mr. Armstrong. But they do certainly contradict *past presumptions* which were made without God's inspiration; presumptions allowed by God to flourish for a time as a means to bring about the very prophesied apostasy. That apostasy had to occur! Why and how? Because mistakes were made that were not according to God's wisdom. Once a remnant was preserved in the aftermath of that apostasy, God fed us with *new understanding* to help us make sense of what we had lived through, and as *a compass* to help us avoid *those same mistakes* for the future.

Why am I summarizing these principles? Because this is what we stand for. By "we," I mean Church of God, The Eternal. Many individuals disagree with us on one or more of these issues. That has always been so, and will always be so. But nevertheless, while I am Pastor and Director, we will not waiver from this premise one iota.

That then brings me to the next point, and the crux of the matter. What is your role in all of this? I have talked about my role, and Raymond Cole's role. What about each one of you? What is your role? As it relates to this remnant group, you are each my assistants, under my authority. You have no authority from God as it relates to this fellowship *apart from* that which comes from the Director. Good old top-down government. An assistant's authority can never equal or exceed that of his director. If your delegated authority derives from my office, and I am specifically limited in the scope of my own authority, none of you can possibly possess any greater authority than do I. That means you are constricted *even as I am* in what you can teach to our sheep. These are principles I referenced in that letter to the elders five years ago. Please be sure you understand it. It is critical. It is not that I doubt any of you today. It is simply that in *every past case* where ministers under Mr. Cole defected, it is because they disagreed with one of these major points—invariably! As long as all of us are on

the same page with *these vital principles*, we are likely to stay together in unity for the duration. But if that ever changes for one or more of us, that cohesion surely will be lost. And as I mentioned before, this will likewise be true for any relationship of ministers who may serve this remnant body in the future, long after some of us may be dead, if that be God's will. The principle is timeless. It will always be the essence of our unity.

As members of this fellowship, we are all sheep, and brethren. And each member has much latitude to embrace or reject our principles. We have a number of members who may not agree with some of our teachings. As long as they do not cause division, they are left in peace. The role of the ministry, however, is different. As I am constrained, so are each one of you constrained. You are not "free agents" with latitude to teach as each one decides God may be leading you, *if* that "inspiration" leads you beyond the prescribed limit of your assigned office. You were each ordained to assist me in *my mission* to serve this remnant. I was ordained in the very same way, so I can speak about it from personal experience. Raymond Cole ordained me to assist him in fulfilling *his mission* to serve this flock. From a human standpoint, they were Raymond Cole's sheep, not mine. I hope you understand I realize they are all truly "Christ's sheep." But even Paul was inspired to speak of those sheep, physically, as "his children," and called himself their "father" (I Corinthians 4:15). Paul was not being sacrilegious or trying to "poach" Christ's children away from Him. He was simply speaking of *the physical means* by which God brought them into the Body, and it was through Paul, as the human instrument. In the very same way, members of Church of God, The Eternal came in because of the work God did through Raymond Cole, and by none other. He was therefore the "father" of those brethren in the same sense Paul claimed it. When I was selected to be ordained, I understood this principle. I was not being ordained to receive a commission of my own, or a separate "territory" of my own. The territory was already that of Raymond Cole's. My new job was to help Mr. Cole tend *his assigned territory*. And I willingly and gladly did so within those parameters. I understood that I was not a free agent, with latitude to teach whatever I wanted. I made it a point to ask Mr. Cole what he wanted me to focus upon so that I could help him the best way possible in fulfilling *his mission* to serve the sheep.

Once Mr. Cole died, by God's decree through him earlier, I took on his mantle. Now they became "my sheep." Not only did I inherit the sheep who had been "his," I became the instrument through whom God continued to send new converts. Over the past dozen years, there are many who never knew Raymond Cole, but who were nurtured initially in this way through my personal efforts. Even when some were referred through other members, the work to solidify them in this group was mine. Each of you has helped me with certain ones who are in your geographical areas, but your roles have always been to help me with "my sheep." I hope that is not an offensive concept. As I said, I am not asking any of you to embrace anything that I have not already done by example previously. I believe my own approach to my job as Raymond Cole's assistant is exactly the correct one. When I laid hands on each one of you (which I did), I made sure to do so using very similar words as did Raymond Cole during my ordination. You were ordained specifically to assist me to confirm the faith once

delivered to God's sheep. Even as I was ordained to be a helper in another man's commission before God, so were you. I am very hopeful that none of you feels "constrained" by that role, or infringed upon. Your work as helpers is critical, and very much an aid to me in my inherited commission.

With that in mind, let me turn to more specifics about the focus I would like to see in future sermons and writings for the church. As I was sure to ask Mr. Cole for guidance in what he wanted me to focus upon to provide the best assistance possible, I hope you do not mind if I call upon you, as my own assistants, in the very same way.

As I encouraged the elders to do in my 2009 letter, now I do so again with even more emphasis. I want each of you to select material for sermons and letters which confirms the "trunk of the tree." But I need to give more specifics about what this actually means. Obviously, it means I do not want any of you advancing new interpretations of Bible passages, even if it is to confirm an acceptable underlying principle. Frankly, none of you has the credibility in our fellowship to do that, and doing so not only does not help me serve this flock, but causes me *more work* to answer questions of sheep who are unsure. Mr. Cole asked me to avoid the same thing, and for this very reason. I am asking you for the same courtesy. Stick to a reconfirmation of *foundational principles* that are part of the faith once delivered. Within that parameter is much opportunity. You were not ordained to come up with "new takes" on spiritual principles. There are many creative ways that each of you can reinforce the same basic principles from your unique perspectives and styles. But I want the message to be clearly consistent with principles already established by this ministry.

This leads me to the next point in defining the "trunk of the tree." Please take note again of the way I defined the faith once delivered above. You are not safe in simply choosing to repeat material written in the 1950s or 1960s. In many cases, you will confirm truly the foundation of divine revelation. But in other cases, you are subject—*inadvertently*—to espousing one or more concepts that were introduced by *uninspired men*, not by God through Herbert Armstrong. How can you avoid falling into this trap? The key is the documented teachings of Raymond Cole! Again, it is *Raymond Cole* who confirmed to us *as a witness* what principles were truly part of that foundation, and which ones were more dubious. How can you be sure to select truly valuable topics? Do not select a topic for which you cannot quote Raymond Cole, either from his sermons or *Monthly Letters*. I hope again that this does not strike any of you as restrictive. It is *the very same restriction I placed upon myself* for the most part, so why is it wrong to require it of my assistants? So this is my edict: If you want to cover a topic from the old days of the Radio Church, do not do so unless you can confirm the principle directly from Mr. Cole, and then be sure to quote Raymond Cole.

This is one of the ways your assistance to me can become stronger. Our members have come to believe that the original revelation came through Herbert Armstrong, but that this same Truth was *preserved* and then *magnified* by Raymond Cole. If you are not quoting Raymond Cole, I promise you there are many brethren out there asking why he is being avoided. Solution: Do not just teach "the milk" principle of the foundation, but also the "meat" of the *magnified principle* God provided through Raymond Cole. Please leave any

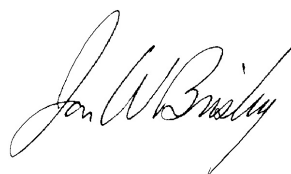
difficult or speculative issues to me. I think I have demonstrated over the years that I am earnest in seeking to preserve the foundational faith, and to confirm the vital role that Raymond Cole played in preserving that faith from being destroyed, and I believe that most of our brethren have confidence in my orientation. Therefore, I am asking each of you to let me handle the gray and murky issues, when they need to be addressed at all.

Otherwise, I assure you, we have our hands full just to reconfirm vital principles that are our "trunk of the tree." It reminds me of the circus performers who would spin plates on the top of thin poles. One by one, the guy would add another spinning plate to a new pole. Each previous plate was always slowing and needing to be spun again to keep it from wobbling and falling. He would run from plate to plate, trying to keep all of them spinning without any of them crashing down. That is how I view the whole laundry list of "trunk of the tree" doctrines that we have to confirm. There is never a time when a principle does not need to be reinforced "ever again." No, we do not want to make the mistake of "harping" on one principle too much, if it does not truly *add anything* more than what we have already provided. But we surely do not want to forget some of those plates which have been spinning quite a while on their own. Which ones are starting to wobble? Where can we pitch in and get one of those plates spinning faster again? This is the way I would like all of us to view our work together as a team. But I want a heavy dose of magnified principles from Raymond Cole included. Therein lies the spiritual food that will most help our brethren to face successfully the spiritual tests before them. We have twenty-five years of *Monthly Letters* written by Mr. Cole, as well as hundreds of sermons over that same period. That is a lot of spinning plates. Those are the plates I want us working together to keep spinning.

Already this letter has become much longer than I intended. There is still so much more I could write, but this is the gist of the points I felt inspired to write for the benefit of our collective work in serving this little flock.

Please, if any of you have any questions or concerns, I promise you that I am a devoted friend and confidant. Please let me hear from you. Besides being ministers, you are firstly beloved members of the Body of Christ, and secondly my beloved friends in the faith. Your role as ministerial elders is highly valued, and I am truly optimistic about the example we can set together as a small—howbeit very bright—light in this very dark world.

Yours with love and sincere appreciation,

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