

February 2025

Dear Brethren:

This month marks an important benchmark for us, and it is fitting to bring it to your attention. February 2025 is exactly fifty years since the original founding of Church of God, The Eternal as a legal entity. We have documented much of this history in past years, but a *Golden Anniversary milestone* seems to be a good moment to shine a spotlight upon these facts once again. The purpose is not just to pat ourselves on the back for our endurance, but to rehearse the importance of certain key events from our history *which still matter*, lest we forget the reason for our original founding as a church body, or our mission for our future.

Exactly three years ago, in the February 2022 *Monthly Letter*, we provided a detailed exposé concerning the whys and wherefores of this church's original formation. That issue was entitled, *Why Did Church of God, The Eternal Form in 1975?* We recommend that you reread that *Letter* because those historic facts continue to be very relevant for all of us today. In short, this piece rebuts a number of past misperceptions about Church of God, The Eternal by some who easily think of us as *just another WCG splinter group*. We are not like any other group, and our history proves it. In case some of you who are newer to our fellowship might likewise share some of these misperceptions without realizing it, here is a brief summary of the facts.

### Summary of Historical Facts

Raymond Cole never chose to leave the Worldwide Church of God nor to start his own new group. Raymond Cole stayed as long as he possibly could within the church that he loved—to show respect for Mr. Herbert Armstrong. He did not depart until he was *put out* by a formal letter from Mr. Frank Brown (Division of Financial Affairs/Personnel Department of the WCG at Pasadena Headquarters) dated January 23, 1975. That letter reads:

It was with the utmost regret that Mr. Garner Ted Armstrong has found it needful to terminate you as an employee of the Worldwide Church of God, to disfellowship you, and to revoke your ministerial credentials and license to preach as a minister of the Church. You should no longer in any way represent or hold yourself out as a minister of the Church or as one authorized to act in its behalf.

It is amazing how many, in past years, have attempted to claim that Raymond Cole departed from the WCG so that he could start his own church. Many other ministers did exactly that. But here is the evidence proving that such was not so in our case. Another valuable *Monthly Letter* series to read was published in three installments from November 2013 to March 2014. This series is entitled, *History of '74 in God's Church: Raymond Cole vs Roderick Meredith*. It tells the story—with historical documentation—of the defections of other high-ranking ministers of the WCG in early 1974, and the bases for *their choices* to leave the church. Raymond Cole was still a member of the church through all of this tumultuous era (even though he had been sent out on sabbatical leave by Mr. Armstrong), so he had nothing whatsoever to do with this cabal of defectors (about thirty-five of them) who left in 1974.

Yet, sadly, when Mr. Armstrong wrote in 1978 in retrospect about these defections—in the aftermath of his own son's expulsion from the church at that time—he lumped Raymond Cole in with all of the others, as if there were no distinctions. This is what he wrote to the church in the September 25, 1978 *Co-Worker Letter*:

God forbids and condemns going off separately, one being of Paul, one of Apollos, one of Cephas—one of Garner Ted, one of Raymond Cole, one of Ernest Martin, one of Ken Westby.

After this letter went out to the whole WCG membership, Raymond Cole wrote an answer to members of Church of God, The Eternal, just to set the record straight. His *Monthly Letter* dated November 1978 provides a detailed rebuttal, clarifying *in no uncertain terms* that his orientation was very different from that of Garner Ted Armstrong or any of those other men. Here is a lengthy, but important, excerpt from Mr. Cole's letter:

Perhaps the oldest form of ridicule is guilt by association. If one wants to make an individual or group look bad, simply list him or the group along with those whose actions are obvious and disapproved.

The real issue is doctrine. By Mr. Herbert Armstrong's own admission, the Worldwide Church of God should return to its original teachings ["Get Back on Track"]. Therefore, as a group, we cannot be ridiculed and impugned for remaining faithful to the original doctrine. Those ministers who have ridiculed us for our doctrinal stand are now embarrassed. So, they now resort to character assassination. But if character defects are the criterion we should use to substantiate men or organizations, by all means the *last place* we should look for an example is Pasadena. Those who say we are holding this posture because we want a following, or want to be important, or want to be the head

of a church, are imputing motives. They do *not* know the mind and heart. We all have faults, brethren, but there is a vast difference between character defects which lead to blatant sin and doctrinal changes, as opposed to personal faults and shortcomings which do not. Let us be honest and look at the doctrinal issue, because this is the real and only issue.

What will be said here has nothing to do with lifestyles, character defects, or any personality quirks. It is strictly limited to doctrine, convictions, and beliefs.

Mr. Armstrong's September 25, 1978, letter lists me (including the estranged brethren) in a list of defectors from the Worldwide Church of God. He writes: ". . . God forbids and condemns going off separately, one being of Paul, one of Apollos, one of Cephas—one of Garner Ted, one of Raymond Cole, one of Ernest Martin, one of Ken Westby."

The immediate impression is that all these groups left the church for the same reasons. That impression is absolutely false. All the others listed *wanted* doctrine changed. In fact, they were the forerunners for the actual changes made within the Worldwide Church of God. If the doctrines finally adopted by the Worldwide Church of God were truly the "new enlightenment"—the revealed Truth of God—these men received the revelation before the Worldwide Church of God did. Was God confused? He must have sent the new revelation to the wrong people.

On the other hand, we believe God gave the truth initially to the Church—and it could not have been the true Church unless there were a called, end-time servant to whom the truth was given and who was commissioned to proclaim that way of life. Therefore, the instructions of the Bible—*hold fast that which we were taught*—had to apply to us. We are holding to that revealed truth.

May I ask why that difference was not noted? Regardless of the plain instructions of the Bible to hold fast to that truth, should we forsake God in order to be loyal to a man or a physical church?

Next, the impression is left, with all who blindly read the contents of that letter, that *we deliberately left the Church* in order to pull a following after ourselves. Nothing is farther from the truth! *We were forced out of the Church*. We were told to compromise beliefs, preaching the strange heresy the Church had adopted, or be terminated from employment and from the Church.

Relative to this demand, the Bible was explicit. Hold fast to the truth. This we did.

Finally, the impression is left that we *created or established a separate church*. This impression is deliberately created! From the beginning, we have never regarded ourselves as a separate church. Being put out of the Church, either literally or by circumstance, we became estranged brethren because of *our belief of the truth*—truth which Mr. Armstrong, by his desire to return to it, admits was the Truth of God.

If Jesus Christ were the embodiment of the Word of God—the truth—and He could not change, how can we be wrong to hold fast to the truth initially given to God's servant of the last days? For, the only way the Worldwide Church of God could have been the true Church is by having received the unchangeable Word—Jesus Christ, the Truth and the way of life! By our continuing in that way, we continued in the body of Christ, the body of Truth. If this is not true, then not one single person called of God prior to the doctrinal changes was in the body of Christ—the true Church.

We do not mind being condemned for what we believe. But to falsely accuse by association is certainly NOT of God. Is it not time, for those who presently claim to be the servants of God, to be honest? Let them admit the fact we are still doing precisely what we were taught—taught by that very servant himself [end of citation].

The point of republishing this material is not to rehash painful history for the sake of justifying ourselves. All of these stories from the past explain why we ever formed to begin with as a remnant fellowship in February 1975, and how we *are still very different* from every other organized group that likewise came out of that parent body. Painful as it may be, we would not be here today if not for these historical events. And those past events are still very relevant for our current and future work.

### **Purpose for Incorporation**

One of the best ways to commemorate the founding of this group fifty years ago is to republish some of Mr. Cole's first words to our new membership back at that time.

To begin with, what was the purpose of creating *a legal non-profit corporation* called Church of God, The Eternal? In the very first *Monthly Letter*, written in March 1975, Mr. Cole stated this:

Our purpose for seeking legal existence is purely economic. An advantage to you. If it had not been for the *legal* necessity of incorporating, we most assuredly would not have done so. Why? We are determined, absolutely, to continue in that faith once given to us. The same faith into which we were called, taught and baptized. If that parent institution out of which we came ever acknowledges its error of change, we will most willingly and humbly return to her fold. But, due to present circumstances, we must zealously hold fast to that priceless way of life to which we were called. Truth, a Way of Life, is not always synonymous with a physical organization. If it were, then I would ask, why the many transitions indicated from the lips of Jesus Christ and prophetically by John in Revelation second and third chapters?

God's instruction to us is: continue in the beginning confidence all the way to the end. See Hebrews 3:6–14.

In closing, for your dedication and courage, I want to say thank you. We are most grateful and do sincerely pledge our lives in service to you.

The "economic advantage" he was speaking of has to do with a tax benefit that the US government provides for citizens who make charitable contributions to non-profit organizations. In essence, it is a legal way to make it easier for church members to reduce their tax burden, because of our country's *traditional encouragement* in supporting churches. Many other countries have no such provision, but the USA still does. There are those who now claim that no such "corporate registration" is required to access this tax benefit, but the point is, Mr. Armstrong originally registered the Radio Church of God in the 1930s, and, therefore, Mr. Cole had no problem in registering Church of God, The Eternal either. Take note that this had nothing to do with thinking of ourselves as "a separate church." That is why Mr. Cole went to great lengths to emphasize this very point. God's Church is a *spiritual organism*, not a physical one! Creating a manmade legal entity has no bearing upon how God views things. But we have always been taught that it is very fine to take advantage of legal benefits afforded to us in man's legal system, as long as it does not threaten our ability to worship God and to put Him first. Anyone who criticizes legal registration of churches as being a sin is merely advancing his own "new doctrine"—one which was never part of the revelation of God to His true Church.

Because of the potential mental stumbling block to members who want to ascribe too much importance to "legal registration" of churches, Mr. Cole repeated often that we do not consider ourselves a "separate church" from our parent body. In his *Open Letter From Raymond C. Cole*, released in article form in January 2000, entitled, *Church of God, The Eternal—Who We Are*:

Based on my understanding that a remnant only would continue to exist until the return of Christ, I was adamant about the fact we were not a separate group—only estranged brethren. Our lawyer was informed of this concept at the time of incorporation. He personally told me he understood exactly what I was saying.

Before the actual incorporation I had addressed in prayer a couple of things with God. Being aware of the apostasy of the church in the last days and seeing and hearing the anguish, sorrow, and fear generated by those changes, I had attempted to impress upon God—and perhaps myself—the desire and fact no future departure or change would be accepted or permitted within the body of Biblical doctrine which had been revealed. I simply could not see myself allowing the people to go through once again what they had already experienced.

With Raymond Cole, it was always about "the doctrine"! Many over the years have mocked that and sought to infer "some other" motivation for the formation of this group. It is easy to say it was just another human vanity project, and as with most new churches, that turns out exactly to be true. But not with this church group! Raymond Cole was dead serious about his devotion to a body of doctrine that he believed had been inspired by God through Mr. Herbert Armstrong. He truly believed that it has always been *the Church of God*, not the church of Herbert Armstrong. God was the Founder, even though He used a human agent to bring to us His revealed Way of Life. That was the original premise of this remnant body.

From that same 1999 article, under the subheading, *Our Purpose Remains Unaltered*, Mr. Cole further stated:

What God gave to Moses, He gave to Christ. What Christ taught to the apostles, He commissioned them to proclaim in their designated areas. What Christ and the apostles taught was the same as was revealed to Paul. And what all those servants taught is exactly what was given to an end-time servant (Matthew 28:19–20). For those who will hear, our purpose is to honor and proclaim that same way of life—the faith once delivered. In that way is found no part of the way given to Gentiles—people of the world (Deuteronomy 12:1–3; 4:1–40; Acts 14:16). We want the ways of God. We are not interested in any of the traditions or customs of this world. God's servant of these last days at no time made the pagan customs of this world a part of the doctrine. The spirit which introduces change, and/or a relaxation of the doctrine is as much at work today as it was in the past. The called of God must be on guard incessantly. That spirit is a deceiver. He will do anything to destroy.

One concluding observation seems to be necessary. Those who believed and loved the Truth of God have remained strong, loyal, and faithful. On the other hand, it seems that everyone who was "argued" into acceptance of the "faith once delivered" has failed ultimately. It, indeed, seems like God is separating those who believe and love the Truth from those who must surely have accepted only on the basis of their own personal intellectual prowess.

So, in 2000—twenty-four years after this remnant group first formed—Mr. Cole was still advocating *the exact same approach* to church doctrine that had led to our initial founding. There had been no change whatsoever in all of those years! Until his dying day in September 2001, Raymond Cole held fast to that very same set of doctrines first proclaimed through Mr. Herbert Armstrong during the first forty years of the twentieth-century church. If anyone was skeptical about potential ulterior motives back in 1975, by 2001 they certainly had no justification to doubt his motives. He remained consistent for a quarter century until his death.

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matthew 7:16–20).

You can choose to disagree with Raymond Cole's "take" on church doctrine and its origins, but you cannot claim with any integrity that he did not follow through on his own personal convictions.

### **What About a "Work"?**

Another common criticism leveled at Raymond Cole and Church of God, The Eternal for decades is that we need to be doing a major "Work" to spread the gospel to the world—as Herbert Armstrong did—or else we can hardly be legitimate. There are many former members of our parent body who still use this as their preferred yardstick for evaluating remnant fellowships of the WCG. What was Raymond Cole's "take" on this important topic? From Mr. Cole's December 12, 1975, *Monthly Letter* to the church, he wrote:

In no way do I consider what we are doing a separate work. From the beginning, I stressed the fact we must not conduct an antagonistic work. Our function is to fulfill the specific requirements reiterated time and time again in

the New Testament: Hold fast, continue in that way which you were taught, maintain your initial confidence—that which you had from the beginning. . . .

Again, as stressed from the beginning, we are not and must not proselytize. We want to fulfill whatever Jesus Christ did—whatever He purposes for us to do today. Whatever we are directed to do by Christ, that we will do. We just want to be sure it has His complete stamp of approval. It must be remembered, the people whom God called belong to no human being or organization. They are the Children of God. If God so wills that the scales of darkness be removed from the eyes of certain individuals, that must be considered His responsibility. If He sends them to us, we will attempt to help with all the strength, love and kindness God will grant us.

Twenty-five years after Mr. Cole wrote these words, he confirmed once again—without wavering—the very same premise for everything that he was doing. Again, from *Church of God, The Eternal—Who We Are* (2000):

Based on three distinct concepts, I was very much aware that the creation of a "work" was contrary to the will of God. First, all early ministers had been taught and knew well no individual has a right to appropriate to himself a "work." Only those called of God and divinely commissioned are authorized to perform such a work. Such a work must be of God. Does He not have the right to call and commission whom He pleases? Secondly, several ministers and other men had left the church and were attempting to perform a "work." The result was bedlam—a world of confusion. Anyone listening to them would have been made to wonder. On the surface all seemed to sound pretty much the same. Yet, each was stoutly inferring he is the only right one. And now that "time" has passed, several of these supposed "works" are defunct. Did God fail? Or, was this failure merely an evidence of an initial presumption on the part of those who believed themselves to be doing a work? Further, where is the indication, Biblically, that a major work by a chosen servant would follow the apostasy prognosticated for these last days? Are not these conditions, perhaps, part of the reason for the concise and powerful statement of Christ, "This gospel shall be preached unto all the world and then shall the end come"? Being objective about the matter, it seems almost impossible, if not absolutely impossible, for any man to proclaim successfully the gospel message during these traumatic and perverse days. Is it possible that is a part of the reason for the fact that message will be proclaimed by the two witnesses who are yet to come on the scene and for the fact a mighty angel must yet proclaim the everlasting gospel? Add to the above the fact Israel in captivity will contribute to the proliferation of that message.



The third reason we did not establish a "work" is found in the prophetic condemnation of some presumptive individuals who appropriate to themselves works in the last days (Ezekiel 13 and Jeremiah 23—prophecies for the last days).

Where God wills to establish a work, backed by His power and authority, it will occur and it will accomplish the purpose for which it was established.

All presumed "works" today are pathetic. Further, for the most part the original message is not being proclaimed. What God accomplished through His end-time servant, Mr. H. W. Armstrong, was awe-inspiring. He spoke the same message that Christ taught. The same message that the Twelve Apostles taught. The same message which the Apostle Paul taught. That message was exactly the same as God gave to Moses. Compare the following: Hebrews 4:1–2; John 12:47–50; John 5:43–47 and Matthew 28:19–20. How many of those who had appropriated themselves the commission of a work were proclaiming the same message Mr. Armstrong initially taught? [end of citation]

What this documentation proves is that Raymond Cole had a legitimate personal conviction about doctrine, administration, and the source of appointed offices throughout his entire tenure leading this remnant fellowship. He did not do as many other church leaders do, deciding at some point that God had "commissioned him" for a *new mission* as an apostle or prophet. No, since God never intervened to direct Mr. Cole in any new direction, he maintained his focus upon serving the scattered sheep whom God sent to him. His personal fruits over a quarter century as our Pastor became strong evidence of his continuity.

### **The Last Quarter Century**

What about the activities and fruits of Church of God, The Eternal over the most recent twenty-five years, since the death of Mr. Cole? Each of you are very capable of judging that, because the current Pastor is fully on the record in sermons, letters, articles, and published books, confirming his true convictions under God.

In all of that evidence, have you seen any doctrinal deviation from that of the first quarter century, while we were all under the direction of Mr. Cole? Changing circumstances in which the church operates in this world require us to adapt. But have any of those "adaptations" resulted in a change in doctrine of the church? Have you seen any departure in philosophy from 1975 by this ministry in how we see our purposes to defend the Truth of God or in feeding and inspiring the sheep? Have we taken any "new tack" to begin presuming prophetic offices, or to try to behave as if we have a "new mandate" to copy the evangelical

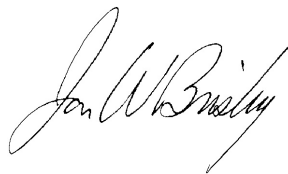
"Work" of Herbert Armstrong? Or, to the contrary, have we continued *the exact same mission* for this remnant fellowship as first established back in 1975?

Mr. Raymond Cole always had detractors, and so does this current ministry. We have always been relatively a small body of believers and so always vulnerable, as the world would view it. There are many instances over our fifty-year history when we might have been destroyed as an organized body. Hundreds of other groups who formed as remnants from our parent church have come and gone—lasted a few years and then faded into oblivion. Often, those groups depended upon one particular *patriarchal leader* to keep the group together. Without that particular personality, the group simply loses its "glue." But with Church of God, The Eternal, that is not so! Those who claimed for years that we were all just "following Raymond Cole," are hard pressed to explain why we have continued a quarter century after his death with just as much strength and stability as ever.

Yes, the passage of time has proven something that none of us could ever have certified just by making claims. Raymond Cole was sincere when he asserted in 1975 that *his true love* was the doctrine that God had revealed through the ministry of Herbert Armstrong. But holding firm to that conviction for a quarter century—until his death in 2001—became the evidence. Likewise, many of you who claimed that you did not join Church of God, The Eternal decades ago to be part of a personality cult, were absolutely sincere. But *the proof of that assertion* was borne out by your faithful devotion to this remnant fellowship long after the death of Mr. Cole. The most recent quarter century of our history has provided the opportunity for all of us to prove that we each truly love the same thing that Raymond Cole also loved back in 1975. It has ever been about the Truths revealed to a called people by Jesus Christ upon this earth through a legitimate ministry.

Not one of us knows what the immediate future holds. We are still just as vulnerable, physically, as we ever have been. But, if we share any part of that Body that Jesus Christ promised to preserve until the very end of this age (Matthew 16:18), then He will continue to preserve us, to defend us, to inspire us, and if we hold firm until the end, to save us.

Your most willing and appreciative servant in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned centrally below the typed name.

Jon W. Brisby