

Church of God, The Eternal

P. O. Box 775
Eugene, Oregon 97440
www.cogeternal.org

The late Raymond C. Cole
Founding Pastor
Jon W. Brisby
Pastor, Director

Offices in:
United States
Philippines
Switzerland

Announcement Letter December 2001

Dear Brethren:

Greetings to all of you, our dear brothers and sisters of the common faith, from your humble servants in Eugene, Oregon. It would be so nice to be able to write personally to each one of you on a regular basis, but we are at least thankful for the opportunity to maintain contact through this monthly *Announcement Letter*. We are certainly a scattered remnant, but God has preserved each one of us in our geographic locations for His own reasons. Is it possible we have been sprinkled like salt in a variety of locations for a purpose, dispersed widely to be a seasoning witness to others by our examples? Such was the feeling in the early years of the church, when there were too few in many given areas to have regular Sabbath meetings. But like as then, we know God loves and respects the example of all those who know that Truth, and who will not compromise that unique Way, even for more frequent fellowship with others. Your sacrifice has been tremendous. Rest assured it does not go unnoticed, or unappreciated. May God grant us all the tenacity to continue holding fast to that unalterable standard, the very Word of God—Jesus Christ—until our course is finished.

Spiritual Principle

There are so many temptations extant in the world today. We are each fighting unique, and in many cases, very serious problems in our personal lives. Yet in spite of all the physical trials we may be facing, there is probably no greater threat to any of us than the presence of spiritual counterfeits of Jesus Christ, urgently vying to entice us into their clutches. "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:11–12). Satan is incredibly subtle (Revelation 12:9). Deception is not deception if we very easily recognize it for what it is. No, the art of deception is effective in blinding the minds of many of God's called ones because it is always packaged in a credible wrapper. A counterfeit is such because it looks almost identical to the original article. It requires training and expertise to identify a "good"

fake, based on knowing the real attributes of the genuine. Whether we are speaking of counterfeit currency, a forged piece of artwork, or a false minister claiming to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, avoiding deception requires knowledge of the unique attributes of the real versus the copy.

Those of you receiving the sermon tapes have already heard much of the series, "What Is the Unity of the Spirit?" Certain aspects of recently covered material bears repeating here in writing, to provide all of you with the tools needed to evaluate properly current realities. By in large, most of our brethren have been able to recognize the difference between the legitimacy of Jesus Christ's ministry through Mr. Raymond Cole over many years, versus the counterfeits of those who separated themselves to set up competing works. But our experiences over the last few years provide an invaluable case study from which we should all learn. If there are any remaining questions about the real cause for the departure of a particular minister from our fellowship in 1998, let the following summary spell it out clearly. Those who have the integrity to seek the truth will be able to recognize the stark contrast in orientation between those two spirits.

What has been claimed by some of our former brethren? Basically, they claim they hold to the same doctrine as we do, but that they are under a different administration. They claim it was a difference of opinion—comparable to the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas—that caused them to separate from our fellowship, and that they are therefore legitimate in the eyes of God. At the same time, some also claim they were forced out by a hateful orientation of this ministry. We do not intend to address the personal "he said—she said" accounts, or rely on hearsay, but we will address specific factual information from documented sources. Is there really no difference between our groups doctrinally, but only administratively? Has God really provided a choice for His people, so that we can pick the ministry that we like the best? Does this orientation really bespeak the unity that God has in mind for His faithful remnant?

When Paul and Barnabas separated (Acts 15:36–41), certain facts were very evident. There was no doctrinal controversy in any way. The disagreement was restricted to the issue of taking John Mark with them on their ensuing visits to the churches. It is obvious that God allowed this parting as a means to send Barnabas to a different jurisdiction to spread the gospel and minister to a distinct group of brethren. From that time forward, Paul and Barnabas were not in the same areas, and certainly not vying for the same brethren, seeking to entice members to defect from one to join the other. They were each sent by God to totally separate geographic areas. They were not working in contradiction to one another in any way.

By comparison, the minister who left our fellowship established his own church in the same area, and has sought to attract members to leave us and join him. And unlike the

mutual respect that Paul and Barnabas still shared for each other as ministers of Jesus Christ, we have been accused in writing by the departing minister of all manner of evil fruits. How can this remotely be compared to the relationship between Paul and Barnabas?

Is it true there is no doctrinal difference between us? There most certainly is a difference. Beyond everything that has been claimed, the fundamental issue which sparked the final division involved defining the "faith once delivered." For all the years of Raymond Cole's leadership in Church of God, The Eternal, he thundered that the faith once delivered was that which was initially revealed to *that servant* whom God used to raise up the church, referring to Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. Raymond Cole never accepted the idea that divine revelation came to anyone but Herbert Armstrong. Revelation never came by committee among early graduates of Ambassador College. And Raymond Cole never proclaimed that the very first perversion of doctrine in the Worldwide Church of God was the change in Pentecost in 1974. Pentecost was the first change that was so serious that it required our separation from that body, but it certainly was not the first corruption. Included among previous changes were the land sabbath, certain worldly holidays, predestination, and duck meat. In each of these cases Mr. Armstrong had initially taught us the truth, based on divine inspiration, and then later allowed certain scholarly Ambassador College graduates to persuade him to change his mind on the basis of their personal research. It was the same weakness in character that eventually led to the Pentecost and D&R changes in 1974, but the seeds of that weakness had already been manifested long before. Raymond Cole never accepted these changes prior to 1974. He hearkened to what Mr. Armstrong had first proclaimed as the Truth in each case, and refused to accept the scholastic amendments Mr. Armstrong later approved. Since they were less visible doctrines, Mr. Cole was able to keep the truth himself and was not compelled to teach error, so it never became an issue of separation at that time. Not until the changes of 1974 was he compelled by liberals to either support and proclaim these false doctrines, or get out.

By contrast, our former Assistant Director began to create his own definition of the faith once delivered sometime during the late 1990s, which contradicted what Mr. Cole had always stated. What was this alternative definition? From one of four memorandums addressed to Mr. Cole in 1998 advancing his personal definition of the faith once delivered, this minister wrote:

The reason for my being here is the belief that the church *was* doctrinally pure. If it is true that the Worldwide Church of God had error all along, what are we doing here in this configuration. . . . These recent issues that have come up are not a small matter. They fly in the face of our premise for being here. If after all these years we are saying the church had a number of errors in it, then we have no foundation to support our contention that the doctrinal changes made in 1974–75 were illegitimate because the church was doctrinally pure. They will open the door for doubts and eventual rejection by some of the truths we are teaching today.

But Raymond Cole *never said* the church was doctrinally pure just prior to the February, 1974 change in Pentecost! Where did that concept ever come from? Anyone who had ever talked to him in detail about such issues knew there were certain earlier changes that had crept in prior to 1974 which he never accepted. The basis of the teaching of Church of God, The Eternal was *never* that the church was in a state of "doctrinal purity" in 1973, 1970, or even 1965. Yes, most of the original revelation was still intact through those years, but to believe that our premise ever included the claim we were doctrinally pure in any one of those specific years is ludicrous. You will not find such a statement by Raymond Cole. And our foundation as a group is not shaken one iota by saying so, regardless of the contrary assertion. In fact, our foundation is reinforced all the more! God revealed His Truth to Herbert Armstrong, and no one else. God chose a man who had the capability of departing from the truth in order to fulfill prophecy. That potential weakness was there all along. Even as early as 1972, Mr. Armstrong had begun to claim the first proof we are God's true church is our willingness to admit error and change. Divine revelation as the basis of truth had already taken a back seat to the intellectual prowess of Ambassador College scholars. This virulent thinking did not surface overnight, but was taking root among many, even during the years of greatest growth. But God did not remove His blessings until those sins had come to the full.

Once this disagreement between Raymond Cole and his assistant over defining the faith once delivered became apparent, the automatic question became, how would it be resolved? The answer? Who was it whom God used to teach us the importance of divine revelation as the key for evaluating all that we had experienced in the break-up of the church? In the heat of the battle, and in the midst of the blinding smoke from every man's private postulations about truth during those devastating years, it was Raymond Cole—and Raymond Cole alone—who stood firm and threw us the life raft of divine revelation as a fundamental doctrine. It was the one Mr. Armstrong had at one time thunderously emphasized, but which had become forgotten by all except Mr. Cole. It was he and none other who stood tall and defended the original teachings on the basis of revelation through a chosen servant. By comparison, this later assistant had kept a corrupted Pentecost on Sunday for two years in 1974 and 1975 without batting an eye, and never would have gotten his feet down spiritually if not for the help of Raymond Cole. In a letter he wrote to a senior evangelist on June 6, 1975, while he was still a minister in the WCG, this minister wrote:

Raymond Cole has a paper (80+ pages) and presents some serious questions concerning Sunday Pentecost. Our paper only presents half the coin, and I have some serious doubts about a Sunday Pentecost. *I'm not convinced one way or the other yet*, but I believe Raymond's paper is going to have to be answered [emphasis ours].

Given these facts, who was the teacher, and who was the student? Which one of these two men did God use to continue a faithful ministry to fulfill the promise of Jesus Christ, not to leave us without a shepherd?

For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me (1 Corinthians 4:15–16).

Who then has that authority—and the true credibility—to define the faith once delivered? Might it be the first evangelist ordained by Mr. Armstrong in 1952, who stood strong in the face of doctrinal corruption in 1974? Or is it the latecomer who wrote the following in the same letter quoted above: "I'm not planning on jumping ship. I may force the issue here because I'm not going to compromise my conscience *any more* for a pay check or security [emphasis ours]." This man admits he had been compromising to that point. Thank God, Raymond Cole was able to help him out of this spiritual wilderness soon afterward in late 1975. But how sad that he has since entangled himself in another spiritual trap so many years down the road. Whose definition of the faith once delivered will you acknowledge?

This is the question we all had to answer for ourselves when it became apparent this assistant would not give up his own concept, and insisted on forcing the issue with Mr. Cole in 1998. At that time, the next serious doctrinal perversion then raised it's ugly head—church government. Had he and others truly believed that God was inspiring Raymond Cole as the leader—the head under Jesus Christ—of this small remnant group, such a controversy never would have taken form to begin with. But those who left presumed that the Assistant Director was really equal with Raymond Cole before God in authority. They treated the disagreement as one which should be settled by two equal partners in the ministry. But when was God's church—let alone this group—ever lead by a ministerial partnership? Raymond Cole had *always* been the Director! It had always been top-down government. And even though Mr. Cole had always given great latitude to his assistants, taken their advice, and sought to make each administrative decision with total unanimity, when it came to doctrine, there had never been any negotiation. The ministers who left us in previous decades also discovered in time that Mr. Cole was flexible on many things, but doctrine was not one of them. Those who erroneously viewed proper ministerial authority as an equal partnership were unhappy when Raymond Cole would not "come to the table" to negotiate a compromise. The assistant was certainly willing to compromise, seeing he was the one trying to change the definition of the faith once delivered! But thank God, Raymond Cole was not. So those who were looking for fruits of compromise, and saw none in Mr. Cole, accepted the hateful things stated and written about him by his assistant, and then separated themselves from our fellowship. While the issue of church government was never listed as a reason for the departure, it has been this author's contention from the beginning that government was a root issue all along. That has since been substantiated by some who have left our fellowship to join the counterfeit, admitting their objection to us is one of church government!

If certain ones have left us over church government and joined the other group, is that not evidence that we have a different teaching on church government than they do? And is

not church government a major doctrine within the church? It certainly is, and always has been. Then is there any doubt that counterfeit group does not teach the same doctrines as we do? That should now be clear!

With this in mind, what is the proper teaching on church government? We have written a number of pieces on this topic in recent months. Please refer to the June, 2001 *Monthly Letter* for clarification. In it we reconfirm that top-down government was never the evil that caused the destruction of the church. It was the *abuse* of those God-given offices that destroyed the faith of many. Furthermore, Church of God, The Eternal has been organized with top-down government for all of its twenty-six-year existence. No one can honestly claim that we have changed on the doctrine of government. Our demonstrable fruits over all these years tell the story.

It is the former assistant of Mr. Cole who has rejected top-down church government, referring to it as "hierarchy"—a dirty word—and now advocating democracy in the ministry. It is he who subtly inserted such concepts within some of our own early literature. His new group lists two men equally as Pastors, unlike Church of God, The Eternal which has always had a Director and a subordinate Assistant Director. And please take note of this next important point:

This former minister's own definition of the faith once delivered states that before 1974, the Worldwide Church of God had pure doctrine. With that in mind, what was the doctrine on church government in our parent body during all of those years when the doctrine was "pure"? Was it ever democratic? Did Mr. Armstrong ever use a power-sharing structure among the other men? Never! It was always top-down government! Therefore, by his own definition of the "pure doctrine" of the church before 1974, one would expect him to be a staunch advocate of top-down government. But strangely, it is just the opposite.

When one sets aside the personal attacks, slander, and appeal to human emotion that was key in the separation three years ago, the documented facts provide those who are honest with every piece of evidence needed to avoid the deception of our spiritual adversary. As we have emphasized before, in the end, the most damning evidence is the fact they left for reasons other than doctrine. Although many of them did not realize it at the time, they certainly did harbor false doctrine as their premise. But the reasons they *claimed* for separation were not doctrinal at all. It was personal. Yet in 1976, this former assistant stated in a sermon:

And I've said this before—I said it to the folks back east and I'll say it again to all of you; if you left that former affiliation for any other reason but doctrine, then you left for the wrong reason. Your foundation is as shaky as sand, and there is no way it's really going to last when the chips are down. Unless you begin to realize that the only basis and the only reason for ever leaving should

have been *doctrine*; not emotions, and not fault-finding with the sins of other people. Now if you left for that reason then you have a foundation.

Yet this same minister sent to this author a letter of personal attack against Mr. Cole on October 14, 1998. Nowhere in this letter was even the *claim* that Raymond Cole had departed from the original doctrine. When this author answered by pointing out this fact, the following statement was returned in another letter of accusation. "Now you say the doctrine is the only yard stick. Not so. Jesus said to judge by the fruits. The fruits of this local church are sick." What happened to doctrine being the only reason for separation? Where is the consistency? And in the end, who is the real author of such accusation (Revelation 12:10)? Was this not precisely what was prophesied to occur within the Body of Christ?

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).

In the end, brethren, if we are earnestly seeking the truth, God has provided the means to distinguish the genuine article from the counterfeits that currently exist, as well as those that will yet be proliferated before the return of Jesus Christ. May God grant you the wisdom and the spiritual skill to discern between those opposing spirits. If we look to the clear standards established by Jesus Christ, we should always be able to identify the imposter—the counterfeit—and never have to live in doubt.

Birth

Mr-s. Jean-David Aviolat: Their healthy baby boy was born Monday, December 3. Matthew weighed 7 ½ pounds and was 20" long. Jean-David and Stephanie would like to thank everyone for their sincere prayers concerning a timely and uncomplicated birth. Mother and baby are doing fine.

Office

The cutoff date for 2001 tithes will be January 4, 2002. All 2001 tithes must be received at the office by this date. Please keep this in mind for those contributions you wish to have included in your 2001 statement. Remember, they must be dated 2001.

Deaths

Mr. Douglas Anderson: We were saddened by the death of Mr. Douglas Anderson of Eugene, Oregon. Doug died Monday, November 12, after a long struggle with cancer. He will be deeply missed by all who knew him. Our condolences are sent to his wife, Cecile, his children Doug, Jr., Sheila, Paulette, and his extended family and friends.

Trip Schedule

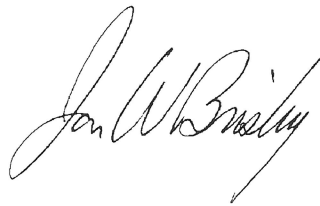
December 15, 22

Luzon, Mindanao, Philippines

Tape Schedule

Tape Schedule	Mailed	Played	Title/Tape #
WSE-RC R (76)	11-14-01	12-08-01	Answers to Accusations
WSE-JB 33-6A&B	11-14-01	12-15-01	What Is the Unity of the Spirit?
WSE-RC 48 (R)	11-28-01	12-22-01	Man Shall Live By All of God's Word
WSE-JB 33-7	11-28-01	12-29-01	What Is the Unity of the Spirit?
WSP-RC 5-1	12-12-01	01-05-01	Are We Stuck at Our Red Sea?
WSE-JB 25	12-12-01	01-12-01	Does the Truth Come First?

In Christ's service,



Jon W. Brisby