

Church of God, The Eternal

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

Offices in:
United States
Philippines
Switzerland

Announcement Letter January 2004

Dear Brethren:

Greetings to the faithful of God in every place He has planted you around this earth, from your loyal ministers and servants in Eugene, Oregon. By the time you receive this letter, God willing, another ministerial trip to the Philippines and Australia will have been successfully completed. Yet to meet our publication deadline for this issue, this letter is actually being composed in advance of that departure. In spite of the increasing volatility of events around this world, as long as God continues to provide the means, we intend to continue reaching out to the scattered brethren to serve and support them through personal visits, sermon tapes, and these monthly letters. We are so thankful for the continuing mercy God has granted us as a small but viable remnant, and with His help we shall never doubt His ability and determination to safeguard us in these troublous times.

As we already look forward with anticipation to the spring Holy Day season just three months away, I am ready to announce the expansion of responsibilities for four ordained elders in our fellowship. This year I will begin using these selected men to assist with sermons throughout the year and at the Feast of Tabernacles, in addition to the duties they already hold within Church of God, The Eternal. These men are Mr. Leon Whitaker of Vancouver, Washington; Mr. John Byrd of Bend, Texas; Mr. Richard Litz of Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota; and Mr. Robert Litz, also of Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota.

As you are aware, since the death of Mr. Raymond Cole in September 2001, there has been only one preaching minister in the United States. But as I have mentioned before, this fact did not cause me to feel anxious nor compel me to act rashly to recruit other speakers. It has never been our intention to rush others into given responsibilities for the mere sake of filling offices. God has blessed us greatly these last two and one-half years with the compliment of ministers we have had worldwide, and with hard work we have been able to maintain critical services to all of the brethren. But God has also guided me to understand the time has come to begin developing the capabilities of additional helpers in the U.S., and He has made it possible to begin this process slowly and judiciously.

Two of the elders listed above—Mr. Leon Whitaker and Mr. John Byrd—having been strong members of good standing in our fellowship for decades, are wellknown to most of you. Mr. Byrd was originally ordained as a deacon in our parent organization and has proven his character over many years. Mr. Whitaker was recently installed as legal successor to Church of God, The Eternal, should anything befall the current pastor/director. This appointment was made because of his consistent fruits of faithfulness and stability in the faith once delivered. Although these two have been strong local leaders in the church for many years, and were both ordained as elders in 2001, neither of them has ever given a sermon or sermonette. So this new responsibility will certainly stretch them into new territory.

Mr. Richard Litz and Mr. Robert Litz have both been part of our fellowship for just over one year. Like many of God's children today, they were unaware of the pivotal principles of divine revelation until ultimately coming into contact with Mr. Raymond Cole's writings. For some of you this understanding came years ago—because of a personal relationship with Mr. Cole—and for others of us, that first opportunity to put these critical pieces together came later. My own family was one who remained in the apostate body for several years after 1974 because we did not know where else to go at the time. But once God allowed us to see it, we acted with determination to get back to the faith once delivered. Even though the Litz families did not put all of these pieces together until a year ago, since being shown the imperative nature of divine revelation of Truth through a chosen servant, they have embraced those original teachings and are overjoyed to be part of this faithful remnant now.

Both Richard and Robert Litz were baptized in our parent affiliation in the late 1960s, and were ordained as deacons in the early 1980s. After the final rejection of fundamental doctrines by that organization in the early 1990s, they affiliated with one of the splinter groups which emerged during that time, which they hoped and expected would maintain a respect for the teachings of Mr. Armstrong. The leader of this prominent splinter group ordained both Richard and Robert unexpectedly into the ministry several years ago, much against their personal wishes. They worked to support the brethren of that group as best they could, until nagging concerns about doctrinal and administrative issues ultimately led to their separation. Once God finally showed them the true nature of the apostasy—which had occurred twenty years prior to their having realized it—they aggressively acted to embrace the original doctrines, even though it created significant personal upheaval for their families.

Some may not be aware of Mr. Raymond Cole's administrative policy concerning ministerial ordinations, so it bears repeating here. Over the course of years after the apostasy of the 1970s, Mr. Cole accepted the ministerial credentials of a number of men who came to us, having been ordained either in the apostate parent body, or one of its apostate daughters. Mr. Cole believed strongly that even though these ministers—originally put in office by Mr. Armstrong—had departed from the Truth, they still held a legitimate office before God.

They had corrupted the use of that office and were not to be followed in opposition to the Truth, but it was a legitimate office nonetheless. This premise is supported by Jesus Christ's own instructions:

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not (Matthew 23:1–3).

Christ was confirming that these men held a legitimate office before God, but that they were abusing that office by their personal practices. In like manner, Raymond Cole believed these men who were ordained under Mr. Armstrong's auspices carried the authority to baptize and to ordain, even if they had become rebels against the truth of God. That is why we have never required most of those baptized in that parent organization after 1974, or even those baptized in one of the splinter groups in recent years, to be rebaptized once coming into our fellowship. In the same way those baptisms are binding, so too are the ordinations. This is why Mr. Cole accepted the ordinations of a number of men who came to him, even some who had been ordained as ministers in one of the apostate daughter churches.

Because Richard and Robert Litz were both ordained by the hand of one of those men legitimately ordained under Mr. Armstrong—even if it were in a condition of apostasy—we will recognize the legitimacy of those ordinations, even as Mr. Cole did by precedent.

That being said, the key condition for any man to be able to serve the people of God effectively in the ministry is a sincere love and devotion to the Truth. Unfortunately, every former minister who came to Mr. Cole and pledged devotion to those original teachings eventually failed, and proved they did not really love God's revelation at all. Some flaked out within months, while others went along for a number of years before manifesting their heretical flaws. But in either case, our track record with past ministers is certainly not a good one.

Given that history, I realize that accepting the credentials of new men for ministerial service to this body might naturally give some pause. But if God is sending faithful and devoted helpers who truly share our love of Christ's revealed doctrines, we must evaluate each one of those men upon his own personal fruits, and not upon the failures of past individuals. I do not believe I have acted rashly in installing these men to assist me in your service. Please recognize that even though many of you may not have heard much about them until recently, the Litz families have been members of Church of God, The Eternal for well over a year, and I have had much opportunity to spend time with them and get to know them. Neither of them joined us with the expectation or "condition" that I accept their ministerial credentials. In fact, they would probably prefer to be freed from that

responsibility, if God would allow. They became members of this body with no strings attached, and I certainly made no promises other than to support and serve them as members of the body of Christ. But because their fruits have been positive, and we have had more than a year to evaluate, I now feel very comfortable in accepting their ordinations among those of our other elders in the United States.

We now have five elders in this country: Mr. John Byrd, Mr. Bud Kidwell, Mr. Richard Litz, Mr. Robert Litz, and Mr. Leon Whitaker. I am now calling upon four of them to expand their service to all of you by preparing sermons and sermonettes for given occasions during the year. Please keep in mind these men are not paid salaries by the church. They each support their families through full-time employment or retirement income. Therefore, I do not want to burden them unnecessarily or take them for granted. I still intend to carry the lion's share of that responsibility as God has blessed me to do so. But I appreciate the significant help all five of these men have been in helping support the scattered brethren in this country.

Will all of these men remain absolutely faithful to God's Truth until death or the return of Jesus Christ? I certainly hope so, but I have no way of knowing that. But neither do you have any way of knowing whether I will hold fast to those priceless truths in coming years. Not one of us knows the details of things to come. Because of the track records of the past, it certainly cannot be ruled out that given ministers might yet depart from the faith as time grows shorter. I pray, however, that it will not happen. We have been incredibly blessed with ministers in Europe, the Philippines, and the United States who have set a wonderful example of unity and fearless defense of God's Truth. That oneness has fostered peace, harmony, and real unanimity in the whole body, and for that I am eternally thankful. But I have no false illusions that we will avoid further challenges in years to come. God is continuing to sift and purge His Church until the very end of this age. The truth is, there is no guarantee that any man will remain faithful in the future, no matter how good his history may have been until now. So whether it is one who has been part of a faithful remnant for many years, or only a few months, not one of us has any advantage in the final outcome. What matters is how we end, not how we begin.

When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby (Ezekiel 33:18–19).

I have every confidence in the men who have been called to serve you at this time. It is a pleasure to work with them and share this responsibility of service to the children of God. I hope that all of you will take the time to get to know them and support them in their desire to accomplish God's will. We are all weak and foolish according to the flesh, and therefore certainly make personal mistakes. But I hope you will be able to look past our

human failings and find value in the power of God as He moves us by His Holy Spirit for your spiritual edification. In the end, every legitimate servant of God can be identified by his devotion to the truths God revealed mightily through His chosen apostle. Not one of us need live in doubt or uncertainty. Concerning the identity of the true Shepherd and His legitimate ambassadors, Jesus said:

And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers (John 10:4–5).

If we have learned the lessons of the past, we are in the perfect position to evaluate future circumstances and avoid deception. Your ministers have an obligation to hold fast to Christ's words and not corrupt those original teachings with personalized concepts. If we are preserving that truth faithfully, I know I can count on all of you to support our efforts as the very work of God. At the same time, should we ever begin to change and reject God's revelation, you will know it and be able to avoid falling into that trap. How great and loving is our God who has prepared us all for the difficult times ahead. If we have truly internalized these lessons, we need not fear whatever is waiting in the future, before the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

Office

According to income tax regulations, contributions you wish to have included in your 2003 statement must be checks written in December 2003 and deposited in the mail and postmarked in December 2003, even if they are not received by the church until January 2004. Please keep this in mind for any payments made in December that you would like to apply to your 2003 statement.

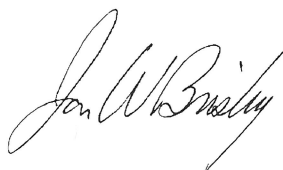
Trip Schedule

February 14	Spring Hill, Florida
March 13	Penrith, Cumbria, United Kingdom

Tape Schedule

Tape #	Mailed	Played	Title
WSE-JB 58-3	12-11-03	01-10-04	Signs and Wonders—What Must We Know? #3
WSP-RC 4-2	12-24-03	01-17-04	Satisfaction: What Is the Premise? #2
WSE-JB 58-4	12-24-03	01-24-04	Signs and Wonders—What Must We Know? #4
WSE-JB 58-5	01-08-04	01-31-04	Signs and Wonders—What Must We Know? #5
WSP-RC 4-3	01-08-04	02-07-04	Satisfaction: What Is the Premise? #3
HFT-RC 9-30-77	01-22-04	02-14-04	Marriage According to the Laws of God #1.

In Christ's service,



Jon W. Brisby