

Aaron Dean Remembers Herbert W. Armstrong

Aaron Dean, aide to Herbert Armstrong

By Aaron Dean

[When this was written years ago, the following information was current]

Mr. Dean, assistant professor of business administration at Ambassador University, worked closely with Herbert W. Armstrong from 1974 to 1986, first as a steward then as aide, flying with the late pastor general on the private jet owned by the Worldwide Church of God, accompanying him on many trips to visit officials of various nations.

Mr. Dean also worked with Mr. Armstrong's successor, Joseph Tkach Sr., from Mr. Armstrong's death, in January 1986 until late 1986. This article is a lightly edited and condensed version of a sermon Mr. Dean delivered to the Big Sandy congregation of the United Church of God July 20.

Mr. Dean lives with his wife and two children in Gladewater, Texas.

I have a long history in the Big Sandy area with the Church of God in that I was one of the few privileged people to go through 12 years of Imperial Schools with somewhat different feelings from it than some other people who went through Imperial Schools for a few years.

I enjoyed my stay there. I started Imperial Schools in Big Sandy, Texas, because my father, my real father, had died when I was about 3 1/2 in a construction accident, and Mr. [Dean] Blackwell did the funeral and told my mom that, because she was a widow with children, she should move to Big Sandy.

But I didn't stay in Big Sandy. In 1960 we moved to Pasadena, and I finished Imperial Schools in Pasadena.

I came back to Big Sandy in 1970 for [Ambassador] college and stayed here long enough to get called in a few times by Mr. [Les] McCullough [the on-site administrator at AC] and others.

Then I graduated from the Pasadena campus, and I was supposed to go out as a trainee in the field at Salt Lake City when on graduation day at brunch Mr. [Herbert] Armstrong called me.

Of course, in those days it was a formal brunch, and nobody got paged during brunch. When I got paged I thought I'd really done something major. Then, when Mr. Armstrong was on the phone, he said was, "Do you know who this is?"

It wasn't hard to know who that was.

"Aaron, I want you to fly with me."

I said, "Well, okay. Uh, when?"

He said, "Well, we leave Monday morning at 8 o'clock."

I said, "But I was supposed to go for training in Salt Lake City, but if that's what you want me to do I'm sure that'll be okay."

And he said, "Yes, I'm sure that will be okay."

Serving from scratch

I was probably one of the last people that many expected to be working with him [as airplane steward], although I had learned to cook. I did all the special dinners for clubs, and the clubs always ate well.

Being the steward meant you cooked the food and served it. You served everything on china, and of course everything was cooked from scratch.

I also ended up doing some setup, hotel arrangements, customs-basically I was the embassy for the work. You could also say I was the gofer, because I was the one everybody always said go for this, go for that.

It was an interesting time in my life and provided me with a lot of stories, which I tell now because they tend to keep you people awake, which is something a minister always tries to do when he's speaking.

It was fascinating also to witness what happened during those years and to see why Mr. Armstrong made a lot of the decisions he did. I'd grown up in the church and known virtually all of the players during those years, from various aspects, some very well.

I'm going to be 44 next month, so look how old that makes them. But it's a matter of older is wiser.

As a child you're always told to tell the truth and be honest and God will work everything out. Then all of a sudden you tell the truth and you're honest and you get thrown out of the church.

Yes, I've probably been thrown out of the church more than anyone else and with just cause sometimes I suppose, if what Mr. Armstrong thought I did was true.

I have a kindred spirit with Mr. [Dave] Havis [pastor of United Church of God, Big Sandy] in that I'm not going to be the first one to stand up and raise my hand for persecution or stoning or martyrdom. I'm willing to take my share when it comes, but I'm not going to stand up and ask for it because it's no fun. I've always prayed, when I go through one of these trials, "God, please let this be my trial and not my preparation for one."

Because the trials get worse. They always get worse. Trial and testing builds faith, and faith has to be tried and tested a little harder and further, although it's nice to get a respite once in a while.

I feel like the last few years in some ways for me have been a respite, having traveled for 12 years while being married.

Seven-year honeymoon

Michelle and I were on honeymoon for seven years because I was home only a little of the time. We didn't have children during that time, even though we had always wanted children. People in the congregation were praying for my wife to get pregnant, and we were praying that she wouldn't. God heard us and not you, thankfully.

A lot of people thought we were barren, but, no, we were just very careful, and part of being careful is just never being there.

So now I have little kids, which makes people think I'm a lot younger than I am. I have friends with whom I went to college who themselves have kids in college.

After being the steward on the plane for a while and being there during the '70s when Mr. Armstrong was traveling quite extensively, we were kept overseas at times for various persons' reasons and agendas that weren't necessarily good reasons, but that wasn't my choice.

We also made a lot of visits [to many countries and government leaders] that were very good. We would spend as much as six or eight weeks overseas and then come home for a week and then leave again.

In 1975 the airplane was in the United States only 51 days. The rest of the time we were overseas. That's not any way to run a marriage, I can assure you. During that time we were allowed basically one 10-minute phone call home a week.

A 10-minute phone call a week to your wife isn't exactly the most pleasant thing. This was back in the old days. There was no Sprint. A 10-minute phone call could cost you \$100.

If your wife was there, was she awake? And which one of you wants to be awake at 3 in the morning so the other can call in the daytime?

You'd call the operator and say, "I'd like to place a call."

And she'd say, "Yes, sir, that'll take about 10 hours."

Great. By then you've left, gone somewhere else.

I remember getting calls at 4 o'clock in the morning: "Sir, your call's ready."

And then by that time, of course, my wife had gone to work, and I didn't get to talk to her.

When you finally got through you had the problem of all the warbles and buzzes in the line as well as the delay because of the wiring and the satellites. Sometimes you'd say hello and hear yourself three times, and then you'd both talk at the same time and the echo would come back, and then you'd start screaming because you couldn't hear each other.

Usually I was mad after a 10-minute phone call. I actually was more in love with her before I started the call than I was afterwards.

God will help

I've always told people that, if God asks you to do something and calls you to it, He helps you through it.

People would ask me, "How do you get this job? How do you do this? How do you do that?"

I would say, "Well, don't ask for it. If God wants you to do it, He'll make you do it. And, if He makes you do it, He'll help you do it."

If He doesn't help you, you'll end up divorced. You'll end up with a broken family. You'll end up with children who raise themselves. You can do things that you choose to do for God that end up taking a toll on your family.

Seeing some of that at the time, one thing I could control was whether we had children, so my wife and I controlled that.

Michelle wanted me to quit a couple of times, but I couldn't. I had promised Mr. Armstrong I wouldn't quit, but there were times when it was very difficult.

I took a trip once and came back after 3 1/2 weeks, which was early for us, and left a note on the refrigerator, because two hours later I got a call and had to leave again.

Not in the market

After the receivership [imposed by a California court in 1979 on the WCG] and after Mr. [Stanley] Rader [a church attorney and treasurer and assistant to Mr. Armstrong] was gone and various things happened, I became Mr. Armstrong's aide.

I didn't want that job, either. Mr. Armstrong asked me to be his aide, but I told him I didn't want the job. I told him I'd seen the job, I knew what it was, and I didn't want it. I told him I wasn't sure it could be done.

So he let me off. He asked me a couple of weeks later to do it again.

So I turned him down the second time, and he let me off.

Then, finally, about a month after he asked me the first time, he said, "I want you to be my aide."

"Mr. Armstrong," I said, "you know I don't want the job. I'm already traveling anyway. I'm already the steward on the plane, I'll do whatever you want, but to be your aide as well is more than I want to do, and I'm not sure that's who God wants."

"Well, Aaron," he said, "you're going to have to do it anyway."

I said, "Mr. Armstrong, if you're going to order me to do it I will do it."

Then he said, "Well, I don't even know if you can do it."

I said, "Well, thanks a lot. Why do you keep asking me, then? But if you want me I'll do it."

I said I saw one advantage to my taking the job, because at this time I was only in my late 20s.

"At least people won't have to worry about who the second witness is," I told him.

He said, "What do you mean?"

"The problem with the church over the years has been that everybody's tried to come up with the second witness."

"Who's the first witness?" he said.

"Everybody thinks you are," I said.

"I've never said that. Who said that?"

"Well, Mr. Armstrong, you know it's in the Bible that there are two of them, and obviously you're doing the work, and it's kind of a logical assumption. Most of the time we've always made whoever happened to be your assistant or lead evangelist the second witness."

Actually, we were only trying to get Christ to come back because this is a mess down here. The way to get Christ back was to come up with the two witnesses and get the 3½ years over with and get on with it.

But, Mr. Armstrong said, "God will point out who they are."

Didn't believe in vacations

I never had a vacation when I worked for Mr. Armstrong because he didn't believe in vacations, at least for himself, although he let other people have time off, and he knew there was a need for family. He would address the work in such urgent terms that it seemed like you should always be doing the work.

In fact, there were times when he asked, "Why isn't anyone working on Sundays?"

"Mr. Armstrong, when are people supposed to be with their families? You teach families?"

"Yes."

"When are they supposed to go camping. When are they supposed to go fishing? When are they supposed to take their kids out?"

"Well, okay. Well, you and I can work, though. You don't have any kids."

"Yeah. Thanks a lot. I do have a wife, you know."

When I became the aide I did not get another steward on the plane. I was still the gofer as well as his aide, which meant that I did all the work that everybody else did before plus mine.

"In the past people have had control of the money, control of the schedule, and they have been able to lie to you," I said to Mr. Armstrong, "but I'm not going to do any of those. So I'm not sure I can do the job."

I'd seen over the years a number of people who had lied to Mr. Armstrong and the actions he had taken based on some of that misinformation, which was unfortunate. He realized some of these things later on when he would find out the truth. But some things are hard to undo.

I was always trying to be honest with him, totally open. I just told him I could do only what God wants done. I said I'm not going to do some of the things the way they were done before, and he didn't even know how a lot of things had been done in the past.

I find this fascinating because people who write about him now talk about things he supposedly knew and did and said.

I've read so much stuff. I've received literature from every splinter group and from people for

us, people against us, people whatever, because they send it to me for whatever reason.

But things didn't happen the way other people perceived them.

Now, like in every rumor, every story you read, there is a certain element of truth to them. It's just a matter of what is the truth?

Yacht in Monte Carlo

One of the stories that I was reading the other night was about the yacht in Monte Carlo. This was presented in the light that Mr. Armstrong was having this gay lifestyle, running around, enjoying life and partying and had this big yacht and was just spending all your tithe money irreverently.

I'm looking at this and I think: This is incredible. I was there and know exactly what happened and how it happened. In fact, I have a picture of the boat, the Jolly Roger.

We went down to Monte Carlo because we had to sit and wait for a meeting and because the hotel was actually cheaper there than it was in Paris.

Mr. Armstrong's wife [Ramona] was there; this was '77 or '78. The arrangements for the boat had been made by someone who had had my position formerly, who is no longer with any of the churches as far as I know. He made arrangements for the boat, and Mr. Armstrong didn't know anything about it.

Ramona [Mr. Armstrong's second wife, whom he married in 1976 and divorced in 1982] had taken her son with her on this trip. He was 16 at the time. This son was from her first marriage, the stepson of Mr. Armstrong. She wanted to go out on the water, because you sit in a hotel room, and hotel rooms are hotel rooms.

Hotel rooms are like prisons. It's not a game-show prize when you sit in a hotel room and work all day long. It's more comfortable than being in jail, but still you're pretty much locked up where you are.

The person wrote about this boat and all this stuff Mr. Armstrong supposedly knew about. I remember he [Mr. Armstrong] was sitting in the hotel room typing all the time and was asked every day, "Would you like to go out?"

"No, he said, "I'm busy. I'm working."

Finally he was told, "There's power on the boat. You can plug in your typewriter and type."

So finally he agreed to go have lunch on the boat.

He went out to have lunch, took his typewriter with him and worked, then came back and typed.

He had the boat for several days, that's true.

But later on when I talked to Mr. Armstrong I learned that he was told that this was a friend's boat and that the friends were letting us use it in their absence. When he found out we were paying for it, he hit the ceiling. He was very upset, but what do you do at that point?

What's always funny to me about some of these stories is that the man was at that time 84 or 85 years old. Some of you are that old. Now, how much do you go out and party? Do you go

out and water-ski behind a boat? You just don't do things like that at that age.

Yet there's always some kind of truth behind some of it. Was there a boat? Yes, there was. Was it used? Yes, it was. Did he use it? He went out once for lunch and then typed part of an article on it and came back to the hotel. Did he know about it? He knew there was a boat; he didn't know he was paying for it.

When he found out he was paying for it, what did he think about it? He was disgusted. Did he write about it in *The Worldwide News*? No. Did he advertise it? No. Usually when something like that happens you don't go around trying to make a big scene about a problem. He just made sure it didn't happen again.

Did we ever have another yacht after that? No. You correct things as they come.

There are a lot of stories that have some basis in truth yet are totally wrong in the message they convey.

Certificates of deposit

Another story you read about is that Mr. Armstrong carried a couple of certificates of deposit in the six figures, they always say. That's exactly what they were: They were \$100,000 each. And he carried two of them.

The story says they were made out to him so that if the attorney general [of California] came after him he would be able to flee the country or whatever, and there's an element of truth to that.

When the receivership came in '79 and the state took over the church for a time, the church had a certain vulnerability. We set up an office in Tucson at that time, and it cost quite a bit.

Similarly, United right now is deciding whether to move headquarters. And what's the big concern? Dollars, the cost.

If you move a little way, it'll cost you half a million dollars. If you move to another state, it'll cost you a million dollars for all of the costs involved in the transfer.

Since then California has passed laws that make it a little harder for them to do what they did in '79, but Mr. Armstrong carried those CDs. They were an investment; they were making money; they belonged to the church; they didn't belong to him. Yet he could cash them. Yes, if the state came and tried to shut down the church he could go set up an office, and that's what they were for—not for him personally, not for his own use.

Mr. Armstrong's salary was separate from that, but a lot of things were done that people didn't understand the reasons for, and they'd write their own reasons for them.

Mr. Armstrong would no more take the money and use it for himself than anything because he was not a thief, and he was very careful with the money.

Now, there were times he spent money, and he had grown up in an era when if you paid more for something it was worth more. I'd talk about sales, but he always thought that at sales you were getting seconds or something, and I suppose that back in 1905 and 1910 if you bought something on sale it probably was a second. Some of the things that he went through with poverty in the Depression and 30 years of the church left certain marks on him.

I had his last years

He could buy crystalabra lanterns for the [Ambassador] Auditorium, yet when he wrote a note on a half sheet of paper he'd tear the other half off and put it in his pocket. He'd write on a corner of that, and he'd tear that in half, and he'd keep the quarter. So he had all these pieces of paper around. There were things that were unusual about him that others probably knew as well, although I knew a lot of them because I had the last years of his life.

I had more job security than others who had been fired before me because when I was with him I was his eyes and ears. When he fired me he couldn't read, and he couldn't see, and he couldn't hear. It doesn't take very long to realize, when you're sitting there twiddling your thumbs, that maybe that wasn't such a good idea firing the kid.

So I'd get asked back.

Then I'd get to talk to him and explain what had happened.

Offentimes he would forget things a lot quicker than I would, and that's naturally the way it goes when you're the one on the other end of the knife. You tend to bleed a little more.

Everybody knows

People say, "Well, everybody knows Mr. Armstrong made mistakes."

What's so special about that statement? I don't like hearing it because it means something different to different people. Some people say it so they can talk about what his mistakes were. Other people say it so they can maybe appear better themselves. Others say it because they want to say that God wasn't leading him or whatever.

What I would say is that Mr. Armstrong wanted to do what God wanted. There were times when it was unclear, and all of you are a witness to that. There are times when it is unclear exactly what you're supposed to do. Why did some people leave [the Worldwide Church of God] early in this latest escapade? Why did some leave in the middle? Why are some leaving now? Why are some people still sitting where they're sitting?

Half and half

Because it's not always obvious what God wants you to do. There are choices that have to be made. Why and when do you make those choices? God leads each of us individually in that. It is difficult because we'd like for all of us to do it en masse, because there's comfort in numbers.

This leads us to judge other people in what they say and what they do, which is something we shouldn't do.

God is teaching us a lot of lessons right now. Mr. Armstrong always said, "Half you people don't get it."

Now we know which half.

I didn't know it; I didn't understand it; I heard him say it. I said, "Mr. Armstrong, when you die half the church is going to leave? Why? We have the truths. They're so solid. The Bible is so obvious."

Well, I was sitting next to some people to whom it wasn't so obvious. I made the assumption like many of you that the person I sat next to believed what I did when they didn't.

Each person meets their Waterloo-their time and their test-at different times.

When you see something's wrong, what are you supposed to do, and when are you supposed to do something about it?

The reason I'm telling some of these things now is that enough water's gone under the bridge.

Death-bed promises

I made a lot of promises to Mr. Armstrong on his death bed that I kept as faithfully as I could. There are others who made promises who didn't do so, which is unfortunate, unfortunate for them.

I've gotten calls from members for the last 10 years, hundreds of them from all different countries in different languages, with interpreters at times, asking questions about various things and telling people hold onto what's true, yet at the same time trying to be loyal, because we were taught loyalty in government for so many years.

When did it start for me? It started the day after Mr. Armstrong died [on Jan. 16, 1986]. One of the promises that was made [by someone else] to Mr. Armstrong was broken the day after he died. I fought a battle from that point on. My wife and I knew a lot of things and saw a lot of things that we had to live with, things that you felt like standing up and shouting and saying something about.

I did say a lot of things, but I said them to Mr. [Joseph] Tkach [Sr.].

I made the promise to Mr. Armstrong that I would help Mr. Tkach as much as I could, and I would tell him if I felt he was doing something wrong or something that would cause the work trouble.

So I did. I said them respectfully and positively as much as I could.

Mr. Tkach would get mad at me, but the points I would make would be logical, so he would calm down a little bit, but at the same time he didn't want to hear it.

Each time something like this would happen I would lose another one of the titles that had been given to me over the years, which I didn't care about. I have a whole stack of cards that say I'm everything from a gofer to a vice president and the vice president of different corporations.

Mr. Armstrong would joke with me, "What are you supposed to be today when we go on this visit?"

We'd pull out one of the cards and decide who I should be.

I ended up being on most of the boards worldwide. As I would bring things up to Mr. Tkach, I would find myself removed from the board and removed from the council of elders and removed as vice president of the foundation, and usually rather unceremoniously.

I found out I wasn't vice president of the foundation from a student on the elevator, which I thought was rather unusual, but things like that would happen.

Why Mr. Tkach?

A lot of you are probably asking: Why did Mr. Armstrong appoint Mr. Tkach, and how did it happen?

Mr. Armstrong and I had argued for a couple or three years about whether he could appoint his successor or not. It was a valid question.

I told Mr. Armstrong, "If God tells you who you should appoint, then I think yes. But, if He doesn't tell you who to appoint, then I don't think you can."

We didn't see Elijah's chariot coming down and the mantle falling off of it, and there was nothing really obvious to anyone concerning who or what should be done.

I would say, "Mr. Armstrong, God can keep you alive if He wants to, and if He doesn't He'll sort it out."

That went on until he finally, about the last six months of his life, became ill. He'd been ill for a long time, although we really didn't know it. His blood count had been going down; he'd quit producing red blood cells. At least he was losing more than he was gaining.

In fact, his doctors were amazed because in the last couple of months of his life he was operating at a level of red blood cells at which most people would be unconscious. Yet he was still writing and working.

Dr. Martin, the old gentlemen, was amazed at Mr. Armstrong's clarity of thought and what he could do. He'd come up and sit with him and watch the telecast on his medical visits.

Guinea pig for remedies

Mr. Armstrong's blood count was really low and had been dropping for some time. Part of the angina pain he had was actually a low blood count.

Of course, we had 20,000 home remedies from all the members in the church telling us what he could do, and I became the guinea pig for most of those remedies.

Some of those things do make you feel different. I had bee's pollen from the Arctic Circle, and I had all sorts of funny things. As long as it was natural, I wouldn't mind taking it.

Wanted to appoint someone

He felt the council of elders would have difficulty in choosing someone, that there would be lobbying by certain individuals and that there would be a lot of trouble, so he felt he had to appoint someone.

So he began looking at all the people around him, and he would pick somebody. But they'd do something that he didn't think was right, and then he'd change his mind.

Then he'd pick somebody else. Then they'd do something, and he'd think, no, they can't be it. And he'd pick somebody else.

Mr. Tkach was in the hat only because he was over church administration. Otherwise Mr. Armstrong realized he wasn't a very polished man. He was a kind man in a lot of ways. He liked people. It was legendary what he did with some of the widows and other people in Pasadena, and to his credit in that area he was very good.

But that didn't mean he was first choice or primary choice or the only choice. He wasn't trained for years and years like some people want to make it look like, only generically in the sense that all of you were trained by Mr. Armstrong. You had the booklets too, you got baptized, and we're all part of the fruits of his labor.

Request from Mr. Tkach

Mr. Tkach once asked me to give a sermon about his training. I said, "Mr. Tkach, I can't go up there and say that. That's a lie, because it didn't happen that way."

Now, Mr. Tkach had never traveled with us overseas. If you're training someone, you'd think you'd take him overseas.

We had all these special functions, [such as an official visit by Queen Sirikit of Thailand], but Mr. Tkach was not invited to any of them because it wasn't his job function.

I told Mr. Tkach, "If you were being trained for all these years, then why weren't you invited to these things? I could say God did appoint you in the sense that you were the one appointed when Mr. Armstrong died."

Mr. Tkach was not the one on the list two or three months before Mr. Armstrong died.

Unpublicized stroke

Mr. Armstrong had a stroke, which wasn't publicized, that most of you don't know about. I thought he was going to die then. If he had, it would have been somebody else. It wouldn't have been Mr. Tkach.

I began to realize at this point in my life that God was going to appoint someone based on what He wanted to happen. So it came Mr. Tkach's turn, and Mr. Armstrong died during that appointment.

Now, he'd talked to a number of people-some of the men sitting in this room-about Mr. Tkach and about others. Most of them were like me: "I'm not going to tell you [Mr. Armstrong] who you should name, because I don't know."

Mr. McCullough didn't know. Mr. [Leon] Walker didn't know. None of us knew.

Who are we to say who God wants unless God tells us? God didn't tell me. Did He tell you? No, he didn't tell any of us.

So it happened that way.

Mr. Armstrong on the true church

Here is one of the things on Mr. Armstrong's mind more than anything else at the very end of his life. Every time Mr. [Ralph] Helge [a WCG lawyer] would talk about the Worldwide Church of God, Mr. Armstrong would pound his fist on the table and say, "The Worldwide Church of God, Inc., is not the church. The Worldwide Church of God, Inc., is a corporation made up of seven board members; the church is the spiritual organism. Get that straight."

I've not lost any faith in God over the things that have happened in the body known as His church, because God has been in charge the whole time, and He's done this because, frankly, when I look at it now, there was a complacency we had 10 years ago, 12 years ago.

We all knew what the truth was. We knew the Sabbath day. We knew the Holy Days. We knew the plan of God. We knew the basic things. A new booklet would come out, and we'd kind of read it: "Oh, yeah, I know that."

How many of you now have gone back through and can really prove why you are here today, as opposed to when you proved it when you first came into the church?

Endorsement by association

This is my first sermon in about three years, because I chose not to speak a couple of years ago because I said I cannot endorse what's being said, and I won't do so by coming up to the pulpit.

It was a matter of looking at what was being said and understanding that the church is a spiritual organism and that God does what He does for His purpose.

Mr. Armstrong's concern was that the bride make herself ready, because when you go to Revelation 19, about verse 7, 8, 9, somewhere in there, it talks about the bride being ready. Mr. Armstrong knew that Christ was going to come fairly soon. He thought He was going to come in his lifetime; he lived his life that way.

But the last few months he realized, and he'd tell me: "I thought I'd be alive when Christ returned. Obviously God's time frame is not the same as ours, and so I'm going to die, but Christ is still going to come."

I don't think the apostles-the early church-would have been quite as dynamic if they knew Christ wasn't coming for 2,000 years. Most of us need some kind of a prompt.

Satan knows what he's doing; he knows when to step in; he knows when to say things, when to do things, what to do and how to do it.

Yet God does help us; He promises us that. Satan's been masterful in the way he did what he did, unfortunately for us. But if God is behind something that's purifying you, that's making you better than you were before, how can you say unfortunately in that sense?

Korah and Phineas

We were taught government. We were taught this is the true Church of God. We were taught to be obedient. We were told about Korah.

But we were also told about Phineas. What's the difference? When are you supposed to be Korah and you're rebellious, and when are you supposed to be Phineas and stop the plague?

It's difficult to see the fine line between some of these things when you see things going wrong. With me I thought about saying things early on more publicly.

I could see back in 1986 that this was of God and that there's really nothing you can do, and, if you try to stand up and do something on your own, then you're shot down.

One of the things I saw in our past, with different people who had different problems at various times, wasn't that their motivation was wrong. It wasn't necessarily that their facts were wrong. Most of the time it was because their timing was wrong.

It's very, very hard to know when and what you're supposed to do. The one thing that Mr.

Armstrong and I talked about was that God runs it His way, and we seek our own way.

Back to the Bible

You've proved the Bible for yourselves over the last couple of years. I'm no different; I've gone back through things I'd proved before.

I'm amazed at the number of papers that people have written. I'm astonished at how much research some of you in here and others scattered around the world have written.

Some have written to me because they want to see what I think of their writing. Others were writing to me because I'm still on the cc:Mail [private electronic-mail] list [as a faculty member at Ambassador University], and they assume I agree with all the things that the Worldwide Church believes.

Purification of the bride

Mr. Armstrong's thought was the purification of the bride. I firmly believe that that is exactly what is taking place right now, the purification, because you cannot purify a group; you've got to purify individuals. Each of us individually has to be tested; each of us individually has to say this is what I believe; this is what I am willing to die for.

When you decide what you're willing to die for, God knows where you stand. It takes patience, and it takes faith. God told Abraham he was going to father a multitude of nations.

What did he get? He got one son 25 years later.

Why would God do this?

You have to wonder why and what: Why did You do this, God? You're in control. Why did You appoint someone who would let others change the doctrines of the church?

It's difficult to see when you're going through pain. But it's not so difficult when you realize that God is purifying you; He's testing you.

We know about the patience of Job, yet he didn't want to go through his trial; he was a bit impatient at times too. Abraham was patient, yet he tried to do it his own way. Elijah called down fire from heaven, then he ran out into the desert and wanted to die.

There were times when, if I had done certain things differently, I wouldn't be here, because that's not the way that God intended for it to happen. It's a matter of believing God, trusting Him.

I told Mr. Tkach, "I get pretty tired when every time you quote Mr. Armstrong from the pulpit you misquote him. It's difficult for me when people come up and ask me: Did Mr. Armstrong say that? Did he do this?"

"I'm not going to lie," I said.

He said, "Why don't you just tell them you weren't there?"

That's a joke. I wasn't there?

I said, "I can't say that."

Mr. Tkach promised

Again, you've got to live and die by what you do and what you say and what you believe. I know what happened. I know what was said. I know that promises were made. I know what Mr. Armstrong expected of Mr. Tkach. I know what Mr. Tkach told Mr. Armstrong he would do and what he wouldn't do.

I know that Mr. Armstrong told him not to bring his staff with him when he moved into the office [after Mr. Armstrong's death].

The reason I know is because Mr. Armstrong told me I had to take the job as Mr. Tkach's assistant, and I told Mr. Armstrong I did not want that job.

I said, "Mr. Tkach has his own staff."

Mr. Armstrong said: "His staff has caused him problems. His staff is not coming into the job; he is. The council of elders will be there to help him, and you need to be there to help him. You're the only one who knows, because you're the only one that traveled."

I said, "Mr. Armstrong, if you make me do it I will do it, but I don't want to."

He said, "Well, you'll have to."

So that was one of the promises that was made.

Weeded away

One of the catch phrases of the day, after Mr. Armstrong died, was, "Mr. Armstrong was Mr. Armstrong, and you have to answer to God, not Mr. Armstrong."

So [the reasoning went] I have to answer to God, not Mr. Armstrong. Therefore I can do anything I want.

Things changed. A lot of things changed, some slowly, some quickly. But what do you say? What do you do?

I went and talked with Mr. Tkach.

I was one of many aides for a few months and then finally got weeded away. Frankly, I ended up exactly where I wanted to be. I wanted to be with my wife. I'd missed some of that marriage, so I wanted to be with her. I wanted to have kids.

When Michelle got pregnant, we were still trying not to have children, so I'm not really sure exactly how she got pregnant. I should have recognized then that Mr. Armstrong was going to die and that it was just a matter of time. God gave us something to replace him, because he'd been the center of our life for years.

History distorted

There wasn't anybody in the church during Mr. Armstrong's lifetime who didn't know that the mission of the church was to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God, which was the soon-coming return of Jesus Christ to this earth and the setting up of the millennial reign and finally our being spirit beings and born into the God family.

However, there are those who wish to distort what he said and what he did. I read one of

them in the latest coworker letter from a different church that said that our mission at that time was to preach that the beast was going to rise in Europe and attack the U.S.

I would hardly call that the mission of the church or what the gospel was.

I didn't buy any meetings, but those stories go around. There were meetings bought in the past, yes. Mr. Armstrong didn't know about them. When I later told him about some of them, he got very frustrated. He'd say, "Why?"

I said, "Well, there were people around you who wanted to aggrandize themselves, so they did things a certain way."

In fact, he almost quit traveling in 1981 when he found out some of the things, because, "if that's the way it was done, then I'm not going to do it."

I said, "Mr. Armstrong, for one thing it wasn't the way it was done all the time."

At one meeting in China, the ambassador from Zambia was there. He had been raised by missionaries, and he was telling me how he hated Christian missionaries.

After he'd finished saying that, he asked, "What's Mr. Armstrong going to talk about? He's a minister isn't he?"

"Well, yes, he's going to talk about peace and world government and-"

"Well, I don't know about that stuff."

We finished the meal, and Mr. Armstrong got up to talk, talked for about an hour, talked about the Kingdom of God that was coming, that God was going to bring peace to mankind and that we should try to do what we could now, but we wouldn't solve this world's problems, and talked about the way of give and get, some of the things you've seen in films in the past.

After Mr. Armstrong finished speaking, the ambassador leaned across the table to me and said: "I want Mr. Armstrong to visit my country. That's what they need."

We didn't buy any meetings after that, period. I said, "Mr. Armstrong, if God wants you to see [a certain government official], you'll see him. If He doesn't, you won't." I said, "I'll do the work. I'll call. I'll make the arrangements. I'll set things up. But," I said, "don't blame me if it doesn't happen. It's not my problem."

Now, he would blame me. I knew I'd probably get chewed out, but that was part of his nervousness.

Sometimes he was weak in that he would be nervous, although if you told him he was nervous he would get mad at you. I would just try to relax around him or pretend that everything was just wonderful, even though I was nervous too because I had no idea what was going on half the time.

Before a meeting he would ask me, "Is the meeting set up?"

I'd say, "Sure, if God wants it, it's going to happen."

I would have no idea because we wouldn't have confirmations yet.

On our last trip we did nine countries in 24 days. Now, for someone who was at that time 91

or 92 years old, that's a lot of work. It was a lot of work for me, and I was only 32.

Because of his heart condition, we couldn't see anybody in the morning, and we couldn't see anybody at night. So basically we would call up the prime minister's office and say, "Hey, we need to come visit between 1 and 5 o'clock on Thursday."

I remember talking with the chairman of Union Oil, who visited different countries because he had a charity, and he would say: "How do you do that? We have to give them a month and wait until they call us."

I'd say, "Well, we've gone around the world on two hours' notice. We overflew Syria the day after another prop jet got forced down. We took off without permits. We got our permits while we were in the air. The other plane that got forced down had a permit. So we flew down the Red Sea with MiGs on one side and Phantoms on the other during the war."

We did a lot of stupid things. But it was just a matter if God wants you to do it you do it and it works. And, if He doesn't want you to do it, it doesn't work. That doesn't mean that you don't do your part. Sometimes you cry over it and ask why, and you think: I need some sleep once in a while.

I know I can

I remember one trip where I didn't do as much as I should have because I was just tired, and I prayed, "I'm tired. Why don't You do it for a while?"

But He didn't. So your realize if you don't do 100 percent He doesn't add to your efforts.

It's kind of like the story I tell about my son. This was a couple or three years ago when he was smaller. I'd cut some logs up, and he was trying to move a log. It was well beyond his capability; it weighed more than he did. He was pushing it because I'd taught him about the little train that thought it could, and so my son thought he could.

He believed he could move this log, and he couldn't.

I went down there just to help him; I helped him move it without his knowing it. "Boy, that was great. I did it."

He had skinny little arms, but he learned a valuable lesson, to keep trying, perseverance and diligence.

That was wonderful until later that day when I looked out the window and saw him out there trying to push it again. He was sweating and pushing, and his face was red, and he couldn't move this stupid thing.

"I knew I did it this morning, so I can move it again now."

He'd have sat there all day trying to move that crazy log.

So I realized that I'd better do something because he was going to get discouraged and think I can't rather than I can. So I went down there and did the same trick again.

And then I cut up the log.

That's kind of the way God works with us. We grow, we persevere, and we progress a little farther. And the next test we get is a bigger log.

Now we have the comfort of a group to meet with and fellowship with, and it is wonderful to have support. Yet each of us has had to decide ourselves.

I don't feel comfortable because I'm with United Church of God any more than I would with Global Church of God or Church of God International or Worldwide Church of God or the Baptists or anybody.

I feel comfortable only because I know what this book says. I've proved it for myself, and I know that I have to do what it says. And, if there are other people who want to, I thank God for them. If there are not, I'll do it alone. It doesn't mean I can't talk to others.

We never have been isolationists, as much as people like to say we've never helped anybody else. We've helped a lot of people in the past who were not members of the church, quote unquote. Everybody who Christ helped wasn't a member of the church, because there was no church when He was here.

The two trees

Where did we go wrong? Where did things happen?

I intended to start my sermon with this, but I didn't. Instead of beginning with this, I guess I'll end with it.

God planted a garden in Eden, and He put the man whom He had formed there. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, as was the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The two trees: In some ways we got tired of them, and Mr. Armstrong would say we don't get it. What is there not to get about two trees?

There's the good tree and the bad tree, I think we saw it that way: the tree of life and the tree of death. One thing I have learned from those two trees is that the one tree is the tree of life. It's the tree of the knowledge of God; it's the tree of a lot of things.

But the other tree is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Part of the problem with what has happened with Mr. Tkach and others is that they began to look at the, quote unquote, good people and say, "Well, those people have to be Christians because they're good people."

You can be good only because of God. There's only one name you can be saved by: Jesus Christ. Therefore we can't be alone. Therefore we've got to be wrong about everything we thought before. And, yes, Mr. Armstrong was a wonderful person, but everything he believed was wrong-except for church government, of course.

I began to look at the two trees again from the standpoint of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because I have met some very, very, very good Buddhists and some very, very, very good Muslims and some very, very, very good Hindus and whatever religion you want to name.

Sawasdi Yingyuad, who worked for us, a Buddhist from Thailand, put flowers on Mr. Armstrong's grave every week without fail till he was killed in a car accident. He believed everything Mr. Armstrong said, even though he was still a Buddhist.

What did God do with those two trees? Did He desert mankind when He closed off the

garden? God didn't desert man in the sense that mankind, with the human spirit, was able to give and develop a set of codes and ethics and laws that allowed for society.

Why is it that every religion, every people on earth, has somewhat of the same basic moral code? Because without God you could set up those codes, and if you live by those particular codes you are a good person; you're a good neighbor.

I'd love having a good Buddhist neighbor, because he's not going to steal from me, he's not going to kill me, he's not going to commit adultery with my wife, because that's the moral code you're allowed to create off the tree of the knowledge of good-and evil.

As I look at those trees, and I've thought a lot about them the last few years, I realize, yes, some of these people are very good.

But even mother love, as good as it is, is selfish. As I look at the two trees now, I see that the tree of life really is totally unselfish love: giving totally for the sake of giving, giving as Christ did. He gave everything, devoided Himself of His power that He had before with God, to come down and be human, to die for you and to die for me.

That's totally unselfish giving; that's the tree of life. Yes, if you live off the tree of life, you are very good in the way you act, in your moral codes.

Good and selfish

We tend to look at the second tree as the tree of evil, and in the long run it is evil because selfishness is an evil thing, but better than no love at all. But in reality what is selfish love? If I don't kill you, you don't kill me. If I don't steal from you, you don't steal from me.

I think the church got confused. Some people who were associated with us started to think people have to be Christian because they're good. No, I think you can be good off the knowledge of the tree of good and evil, good to a human extent.

Just as you can have some very, very evil people off of that tree, your Hitlers and your Genghis Khans and your people throughout history and your Cains, you can have people who are very good off that tree, but it's not eternal life. It's not the tree of life, and it's not unselfishly good.

When those people do have God's Spirit and do understand the truth, I think it will be very easy for them to change: the Mother Teresas of this world. At the same time, God is the one who decides; God is the one who judges; God didn't desert us in the Garden of Eden, and He still hasn't deserted His church and His people.

But He's tested us individually; He's making us understand what it is we have to believe; He's purifying His bride as only He can do it.

That is something we should be thankful for, something we should know and understand and be aware of, no matter what the test is in the future. You can pray as I do now that this has been your test and not your preparation for one, because it has been tough, and each of us has had to make difficult choices. Unfortunately, it probably won't get easier.

But the reward is worth it, and what we have to look forward to is very, very special. Each of us can be thankful for that.

The font of the Word

I never did get around to saying what these books were up here for. I guess I can close if you'll give me one more minute.

I brought these books up here because these were Mr. Armstrong's books. I went through 20 boxes that I had in the convention center for my move to Texas that I'd never opened, and I found some Bibles of his that have very big type. Some of you can probably read it from out there.

I don't need these yet. In fact, I hope that I'm a few years away from needing them.

But I'm going to give these to Mr. Havis so that he can give these to someone out there who needs the big type.

The last few months of his life I read incessantly to Mr. Armstrong in the dark; that's why I lost my eyesight. I went in that six months 20-20 and came out 20-400. I could hardly see.

He said the thing he missed more than anything was reading this book. So he'd make up excuses for me to read the book to him, such as, "Christ said something to someone somewhere. Can you find it for me?"

Well, you need a little more than that and a concordance to find it, so I read the whole of the Gospels. Then he said maybe Paul said it, so I read all of Paul's writings. Maybe Peter said it, so I read Peter and James. And while we were there we may as well finish the book, so we did the whole New Testament.

I appreciate being able to speak to you. I hope that we can encourage one another as we go through life and know that God is there and have that simple faith that's required to know that He is in charge. No matter what the trauma is, He's always there.