

'Right Attitude' Propelled Tkach Into Leadership of Church of God

By JOHN DART, *Times Religion Writer*

Joseph K. Tkach, the 59-year-old administrator suddenly thrust into leadership of the Pasadena-based Worldwide Church of God, was chosen only days earlier as founder Herbert W. Armstrong's successor because "he demonstrated the right attitude," a church official said Thursday.

Tkach, a World War II Navy veteran who was a Chicago-area businessman when he joined the church at age 31, was apparently not a well-known figure outside the ministerial circles of the church.

An associate of Tkach said he came into the forefront of church leadership in 1979 and 1980, when the state of California placed the church under receivership over charges, never proved and later dismissed, of financial irregularity.

"He displayed his mettle with hard work, patience and sincerity during that state-church controversy," said the associate, who did not want to be identified.

It was announced Tuesday that Armstrong had told church members only last week that upon his death, Tkach was to succeed him as pastor general of the 80,000-member church and its affiliated organi-

zations. The 93-year-old patriarch died Thursday.

Garner Ted Armstrong, the church's one-time television spokesman and the man considered the senior Armstrong's most likely successor until his father broke with him in 1978, said in a telephone interview that he barely knew Tkach.

"It was surprising that he should have been my father's choice, rather than some of the pioneers and old guard faithful who were instrumental in building that organization," the younger Armstrong said from Tyler, Tex.

At a news conference Thursday, David Hulme, spokesman for the church, gave three reasons for Tkach's appointment.

Hulme noted that since 1980, Tkach had been director of church administration, the senior position under Armstrong. In addition, he had demonstrated leadership abilities to Armstrong "and, most importantly, demonstrated the right attitude, which comes from the spirit of God."

In a talk to Ambassador College students and church employees Thursday, Tkach urged listeners

"to carry on as Mr. Armstrong admonished us. . . ."

"The greatest work lies yet ahead," he said. Tkach did not attend the news conference.

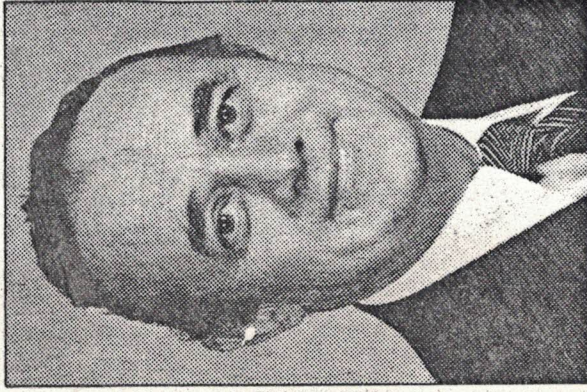
The choice of Tkach as church leader was criticized by John Trechak, editor of Ambassador Report, a newsletter founded nine years ago by a handful of former Armstrong employees disgruntled with the organization's operation, which is said by church officials to have an annual income of \$100 million.

"Herbert W. Armstrong has left his empire to a man who is least qualified to run it," Trechak charged. "He's never been in a real leadership position, he's non-creative and he is not respected for his knowledge of the Bible."

Hulme told reporters there was "no disharmony" at present in the leadership of the church.

"Whenever there is a transition stage you are going to have people upset. There is always potential for competition in any organization," Hulme said.

Hulme also indicated that there were no plans to seek a reconciliation with Garner Ted Armstrong, who founded his own Church of



Joseph K. Tkach

God International made up mostly of former Worldwide Church members.

The younger Armstrong said he would attend his father's funeral. He said he had not seen his father face-to-face since May, 1978, and failed as late as two weeks ago in Pasadena to contact him and mend their relationship.

"There will be no attempt on my part to become a threat to the Worldwide Church. There is no animosity in my heart toward any of those people. We are both about the same thing, preaching to the world," he said.

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 the church, which claims a worldwide membership of 80,000 and an annual income of about \$150 million.

He was once widowed and once divorced.

The Worldwide Church teaches a blend of Christian fundamentalism with non-Trinitarian and Seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday worship) doctrine. Although it is among the smallest of the national and internationally recognized religious bodies, it boasts media and financial power well beyond that of many larger church groups. Members are expected to contribute up to 30% of their income to the work of the church.

Armstrong, proclaiming himself the only "chosen Apostle of Christ," flew extensive "good-will" missions in his private jet, extending church recognition and currying favor. He frequently lectured on world peace and presented expensive gifts to dignitaries and heads of state. His travels brought him personal audiences with such diverse leaders as Emperor Hirohito of Japan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain.

Armstrong also spoke on weekly radio and television broadcasts and was overseer of numerous worldwide publications, including the popular 8-million free-circulation magazine, *The Plain Truth*.

Over the years the church was tinged with apparent scandals and plagued by lawsuits and squabbles in the Armstrong family. These seemed only momentarily to slow the growth of the church, however, and to only temporarily impede the power of its founder-patriarch.

In 1984, the Worldwide Church lost a \$1.26-million libel and slander suit (later appealed) that had been filed by the former wife of a Worldwide Church executive. She claimed in the suit that Armstrong and other church leaders had tried to smear her reputation after her 1976 divorce.

That same year Armstrong divorced his second wife, Ramona, then 45, after seven years of marriage. That bitter litigation reportedly cost the church more than \$5 million in legal fees.

The church was racked during the late 1970s and early 1980s by sweeping defections, personnel shake-ups and continued allegations by several former members that Armstrong and other church leaders had siphoned off millions of dollars for personal use.

Backed by the state attorney general's office, the dissidents succeeded in having the church placed under the control of a court-appointed receiver in 1979. The allegations were never proved, however, and the charges were dismissed after a 1980 law stripped the attorney general of power to investigate religious organizations in such cases.

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