

**TOWARD THE TRINITY:
TRANSFORMING THEOLOGY AND LIVES OF THE MINISTERS IN THE
WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD/GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL**

by

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ABSTRACT

The Worldwide Church of God (WCG) was a sect founded by Herbert W. Armstrong. It held a wide array of heterodox doctrines and practices. This started to change in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Among the key changes was the shift from a bitheistic theology to a trinitarian theology. This dissertation explores the effects of this shift on the lives of twelve ministers in the WCG, which is now called Grace Communion International. Specifically it examines the impact that the doctrinal change had on their understanding of and relationship with God, self and congregation.

Chapter one gives an introduction the research. It presents a historical, theological, theoretical, biographical and ministerial context for the study. It also gives a general introduction to the participants in the research.

Chapter two provides an analysis and integration of the historical context of Herbert W. Armstrong, the founder of the WCG, and the denomination. It sets the context in which Armstrong's religious beliefs grew and were transformed. It also traces the movement in the WCG away from orthodoxy toward heterodoxy and later back toward orthodoxy again. It examines the context and influences of the doctrinal changes and developments regarding the nature of God in the WCG/GCI.

Chapter three discusses the ministry-in-action portion of the dissertation. This includes research methodologies and the process of the research.

Chapters four through seven present the research concerning twelve ministers in the WCG/GCI who have been in the WCG/GCI from the Armstrong years, through the changes and remain in the GCI. It offers their experience concerning the doctrine of God in their understanding of and relationship to Him, themselves and their congregations. Specifically the research inquires how the understanding of and relationship with each Person in the Godhead has developed and impacted the participants' ministries and lives.

Chapter eight gives the contributions of the research and the conclusions. The dissertation ends with some issues for consideration in GCI and the larger body of Christ.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Eric Tracy Wilding was ordained by Grace Communion International (GCI) in 2009. Since then, he has served as a local elder in the Toronto East congregation of this denomination. He has spoken to GCI and inter-denominational congregations and conferences in the Canada and the United States. He has also published articles in both countries in Christian publications. Since 2010, he has had a community/market place ministry, reaching out to people with the love of the Father, Son and Spirit.

Eric is a graduate from Toronto School of Theology (MA Theology), the University of Ottawa (MEd Philosophical Foundations, BEd Teaching) and Ambassador University (BA English, BA Theology). He has taught at Centennial College in Toronto since 1995 and at Grace Communion Seminary since 2011.

Eric is married to Kareena Ruth Wilding, his beloved friend and partner. They share life and love with two children, Lily Maria Kristiana and Evangeline Hope.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Abba, Jesus and Holy Spirit. Thank you for including all humanity in your love. All glory, praise and honour to You, our Triune God.

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves....On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you....[T]he Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. (John 14: 10-11, 20, 26)

But, as it is written,

‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2: 9-11)

And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ (Galatians 4:6)

But now the swarm of testimonies shall burst upon you from which the Deity of the Holy Ghost shall be shewn to all who are not excessively stupid, or else altogether enemies to the Spirit, to be most clearly recognized in Scripture. Look at these

facts:—Christ is born; the Spirit is His Forerunner. He is baptized; the Spirit bears witness. He is tempted; the Spirit leads Him up. He works miracles; the Spirit accompanies them. He ascends; the Spirit takes His place. What great things are there in the idea of God which are not in His power? What titles which belong to God are not applied to Him, except only Unbegotten and Begotten? For it was needful that the distinctive properties of the Father and the Son should remain peculiar to Them, lest there should be confusion in the Godhead Which brings all things, even disorder Yea, even disorder itself, into due arrangement and good order. Indeed I tremble when I think of the abundance of the titles, and how many Names they outrage who fall foul of the Spirit. (Gregory Nazianzen)¹

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. (A.W. Tozer)²

¹ Gregory Nazianzen, *The Fifth Oration on the Holy Spirit*, 29.
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf207.iii.xvii.html> (accessed January 13, 2012).

² A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (London: James Clarke, 1965), 9.

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I would like to acknowledge my parents, Richard and Janet Wilding, and their decades of service to God and the Worldwide Church of God/Grace Communion International. They are a great inspiration to me.

Finally, I am grateful to the participants in this research, which would not have been possible without their cooperation. I also would like to express my thanks to the leadership of Grace Communion International, and especially the ministers in my Ministerial Base Group and the people in my local congregation. They have been of great assistance and inspiration to me. My hope is that this dissertation will be of encouragement and service to these people and others, who may learn from the experiences recounted here.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1. Introduction

In the history of the Christianity, there are few examples of doctrinal change that have been as rapid and extensive as those that occurred in the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) in the 1990s. During this decade, the WCG moved from being a heterodox sect into an orthodox evangelical denomination. This thesis primarily explores the central doctrinal change, regarding the nature of God, along with some concomitant issues. It provides a diachronic study of the development of the doctrine through the experience of the founder of the WCG, Herbert W. Armstrong, and his church, during and after his life time. The research examines the effect of the doctrine and its change through the experiences of twelve ministers in the denomination. The central assertion to this study is that their understanding of and relationship with God, self and congregation has been transformed through various key phases in their lives. First, it is essential that a brief historical introduction be given, which will be developed in full in chapter two.

1.1 The Legacy of Herbert W. Armstrong

Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986) founded the Radio Church of God in the 1934³ and held a wide array of esoteric, heterodox doctrines, including some key beliefs such as the

³ In 1968, the name of the denomination changed its name from the Radio Church of God to the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) in order to reflect its global membership and its being the true Church of God. In 2009, the denomination changed its name again to Grace Communion International (GCI) in order to reflect its emphasis on the triune gospel of grace, its communion in the larger body of Christ, and its outreach to all people. Although GCI became the legal name of the denomination until 2009, the name change process officially started in 2005 and reflected a theological shift that had come prior to this date. Although there were many theological changes in the 1990s, a theological shift to the present beliefs of GCI started between 1997 and 2003. The leadership was coming to understand the implications of trinitarian theology during this time. The early inklings of the shift in the larger denomination started in 2003 but came into a

seventh-day Sabbath, Old Covenant holy days and dietary laws, works soteriology, and British-Israelism. For most of his ministry, the Trinity was one key orthodox doctrine that Armstrong rejected.⁴ At times he accepted what has been labeled as a binitarian theology:⁵ the Father and the Son were two distinct and separate persons or beings united by the Holy Spirit, an impersonal power. Armstrong did not label his theology. Therefore, it is an oversimplification to say Armstrong's theology was binitarian. It was more complex, evolving and contradictory than that. Mistakenly, it could be labeled as ditheistic, two god beings. However, ditheism often implies a dualistic opposition between two gods, like in Zoroastrianism. The issue with using ditheism as a descriptive label for Armstrong's theology is that it was also strongly oriented toward Old Testament monotheism, believing there is one God. Much of Armstrong's writing about God was almost unitarian in its approach. He referred for the most part to God, which implied the Father. Jesus Christ was deemphasized, except when it came to significant paschal and parousial references. He was also looked to as head of the church. Rather than binitarianism, perhaps a better term for Armstrong's belief is bitheism: one united God family with two God beings. Binitarianism suggests a kind of perichoretic unity found in trinitarianism, which Armstrong did not seem to embrace. The Father and the Son were united by the impersonal power of the Holy Spirit. It is true that at one point in his ministry Armstrong rejected the personhood of the Holy Spirit and this remains the case for the remainder of his ministry. Nevertheless, there was more ambiguity to the theology

full inauguration in 2007. For sake of simplicity throughout this thesis, it will use WCG to signify the denomination from 1934 to 2003 and GCI from 2003 to present (2011).

⁴ Today, GCI's understanding of the Trinity and trinitarian theology is "Trinitarian theology, then, does not simply refer to a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity (the Bible teaching that there is one God, who is eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit). It refers to a Christ-centered way of understanding who God is." Grace Communion International, *The God revealed in Jesus Christ: A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Theology*, gci.org, 2011, <http://www.gci.org/god/revealed> (accessed July 29, 2011). In the 2009 edition of the same book, simply titled *A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Theology*, the Trinity is presented as, "... the one God exists eternally in the union and communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

⁵ See Johannes Buchner "The Worldwide Church of God: A study of its transformation in terms of K. Helmut Reich's theory of Relational and Contextual Reasoning." PhD diss., University of Western Sydney, Australia, 2006. In chapter five, Buchner notes that WCG binitarianism is actually a duality.

of Armstrong than merely subtracting one person from the Trinity and calling the Godhead a binity. There were two remaining in the Godhead, but the two were called two beings—they did not share one being—that were united in one family. Again bitheism suggests this. The oneness of God was the primary emphasis in the writing of Armstrong. He did bring Jesus Christ into the discussion but incorporated a subordinationism, placing the Son under the Father in hierarchy and function. If the utilization of the term bitheism to describe Armstrong's theology seems like uncertainty, we must say from the outset, it undoubtedly is. For academic clarity, we are imposing conceptual structures into Armstrong's thinking, structures that were of no great importance to him. Armstrong was a practical business man, who was interested in what God was doing here below rather than discussing theology. This as we shall see is reflected in Armstrong's wavering, *ad hoc* theology. More important for him were the practical issues. He believed that he was divinely commissioned to warn the world, especially the lost tribes of Israel about the end of the age.⁶

To make things even more complicated, as the theology of Armstrong became heterodox so did his anthropology. The anthropology posited that the potential of humans will be to become Gods, equal to the Father and the Son. As with his theology, Armstrong did not give this anthropology a label. He used the Hebrew term Elohim for the God family as it is now (two Beings, Father and Son), but this family would not be limited to two. He held that the God family was reproducing itself and that in the Kingdom of God, this family, would be comprised of billions of God beings.⁷ This study

⁶ He believed these were the nations of Northern Europe, the United States and the British Commonwealth.

⁷ This shares some similarity with from Mormon eschatology, regarding the human potential to become gods. Although Armstrong appropriated many ideas from other sects, there is no specific evidence that he had studied Mormon literature. One critic of Armstrongism writes concerning the origins of this belief, "The followers of Armstrong's cult should consult the third chapter of Genesis where they will find that Satan first taught the 'God family' doctrine to Adam and Eve. Both Armstrong and the Mormons have received and believed the same perversion which ushered in the reign of sin and death upon the human race, for if Satan lied when he said 'you shall be as gods' so does Mr. Armstrong 'wrest the Scripture to his own destruction' and sadly to the destruction, spiritually speaking, of those who follow in his training." Walter Martin, *Herbert W Armstrong and the Radio Church of God in the Light of the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship Inc. Publishers, 1972), 23.

will call this belief Elohimism.⁸ The doctrine of the Trinity was the issue that obscured people understanding their potential. Armstrong came to believe it was a deception of the devil foisted on a pagan Christianity. Satan tried to convince people that the Godhead was closed to three members. Therefore, the implication was that to believe in the doctrine of the Trinity was to be fooled by Satan's greatest lie.

The family metaphor was strongly hierarchical in Armstrong's thinking. God was a family but also had a kingdom with a governmental structure. Armstrong held a descending heavenly hierarchy: Father, Son and ranks of archangels and angels. This was reflected for many decades in Armstrong's own earthly ecclesiological hierarchy: Armstrong, his son (Garner Ted Armstrong) and the ranks of ministers and members. The structure of the WCG upheld and built upon the teachings of Armstrong.

After the death of Armstrong in 1986, the leadership of the denomination started to re-examine and reject many of the doctrines that it held under the former leader; some of the changes in the 1990s were to reject many of the aforementioned heterodox doctrines. Of central importance to this study is the change from a bitheism to trinitarianism. Moreover, within the shift to trinitarianism there are two phases: evangelical and trinitarian.

1.2. The Background and Context of the Applied Research Thesis

1.2.1 Statement of Research Interest

Research Question:

What effects has the 1993 shift in the Worldwide Church of God's doctrine of the Triune God had on its ministers' understanding of and relationships with God, self and congregation?

⁸ This specific term was neither used by Armstrong nor his followers. Nevertheless, this thesis uses this term to express succinctly their central eschatological belief.

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this thesis will be to reflect on the beliefs and lives of ministers in the WCG/GCI, centering on the nature of God doctrinal issue. Although this theological doctrine is central, the concomitant anthropological and ecclesiological doctrines are explored through a hermeneutical circle.⁹ The changes in WCG doctrine happened in the span of several years, and each doctrinal change became part of a dialectic, influencing other doctrines so that they also changed, until Armstrongism¹⁰ was completely dismantled. Thus one particular change is not viewed merely in isolation but in the macro-context of the changes. Deconstruction was not the WCG leadership's goal from the outset or even during the process; it merely happened that as each doctrine was seen as unbiblical, Armstrongism became weaker and weaker until the house fell. It was replaced over time by an orthodox, evangelical theology and anthropology that transformed into a trinitarian theology and anthropology. Today, the ministers who remain in GCI have changed their worldviews several times and had to lead their congregations through the same process. This has been no small task, and it is quite possible that few people in Church history have experienced the scale and kinds of changes that the ministers in GCI have experienced. In this research, I test out my conviction that the ministers' knowledge of and relationship with God, self and

⁹ "Using the hermeneutic circle as a means of interpreting data means that the smallest statements must be understood in terms of the largest cultural contexts. It also means that all the contexts in between must be taken into consideration. . . ." Marlene Z. Cohen, David L. Kahn, and Richard H. Steeves, *Hermeneutical Phenomenological Research: A Practical Guide for Nurse Researchers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), 73.

¹⁰ The term Armstrongism is not used in a pejorative sense but merely in a descriptive sense. The term Armstrongism was never used in the WCG and is often used by cultwatch groups in a pejorative sense. This thesis neither attempts to dishonour Herbert W. Armstrong nor his followers. It uses the term Armstrongism to simply describe the system of thought developed in the WCG. Although he was the pastor general of the WCG, not all of the doctrines and teachings in the WCG can be attributed to him. Many ideas came from the leaders in the WCG, whom we may call Armstrongists. They took many of the basic premises and teachings of Armstrong and further developed them. They also introduced new ideas, which may have been accepted by Armstrong and implied to be attributed to him.

congregation have changed and been impacted in some profound ways. The question at issue is what difference did these changes make in their lives?

1.2.2 Outcomes, Limitations and Contributions of the Research

My belief has been that in assisting the ministry of the WCG/GCI reflect on these areas, it will have a further positive effect on their own theology, lives and relationships as well as those of their congregants. The effect of further transformation should only be organic to the process of prayer and reflection and was not superimposed, suggested or measured by this researcher.

There are limitations to the research group itself insofar as it represented only a portion of the original WCG—others went in different directions. Therefore, the research can only draw implications on this particular group of WCG/GCI ministers, participants in this study.

This research hopes to have three major contributions to the church:

First, for GCI it hopes to provide a narrative that will give some fair representation of the changes that both the ministry and laity have experienced. It will give occasion for them to compare and contrast their own experiences with those of the participants. Hopefully, it will be used as a story to help them further understand their own stories and how they fit into the grand narrative. It may also help them in strengthening and deepening their understanding of and relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, growing holistically in the trinitarian faith.

Second, for the larger body of Christ, there are some of the same factors that may come to the fore with them as well. Catholic theologian Karl Rahner once said, “[O]ne could dispense with the doctrine of the Trinity as false and the major part of religious

literature could well remain virtually unchanged.”¹¹ We may extend this to the life of the Church as well. Rahner’s colleague Yves Congar notes that at times in the Roman Church the Holy Spirit has often been replaced by the Pope, the Virgin Mary or the blessed Sacrament.¹² However, the eclipsing of one or more of the divine Persons is not merely a Catholic issue. In certain Protestant churches, this may be because the doctrine of the Trinity sounds “too Catholic.” In evangelical churches, the neglected Person is often the Holy Spirit because of a Pneumatiphobia—fear of the Spirit—not wanting to appear “too Pentecostal.” In many cases, the churches will just focus on Jesus, due to a latent Patriphobia—fear of the Father, due to his wrathfulness. One or more members of the Trinity get replaced by something or someone else in the practical life of the church. Some humourists have noted that evangelicals have their own Holy Trinity: the Holy Father, the Holy Son and the Holy Bible. There is however a great move of reform to see that the Trinity is not just another doctrine in the Church, but it is *the* doctrine of the Christian Church. Moreover, it is not merely a doctrine to give one’s assent. The Triune God is living and relational—no Person in the Trinity is irrelevant. All other doctrines have to be seen in light of who God is. My belief is in line with the Reformers axiom *ecclesia semper reformanda*, the Church must always be reforming. Reformation must always be relationally trinitarian, from the heart of the Father through His Son in the Spirit.

Third, this thesis may provide some insights for other sects going through doctrinal and spiritual renewal. Through the WCG/GCI’s story, there are models and limitations that may assist other churches through the process of change. This research does not take a naïve view that doctrinal and relational change is easy—it is one of the greatest challenges.

¹¹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1973), ix.

¹² Yves Congar, *I Believe in The Holy Spirit* (Saint Louis, MO: Herder & Herder, 1997), 160.

1.3 Theoretical and Practical Framework

The thesis' theory at work touches on what Albert Outler, in his introduction to the book *John Wesley*, called the Wesleyan quadrilateral: Scripture, tradition, reason and experience.¹³ However, like Wesley, Outler believed that all three other quadrants should be seen through the primary light of Scripture.¹⁴

In both Armstrongism and a post-Armstrongism, Scripture is the norm. For the WCG under Armstrong, the Old Testament—specifically the Law of Moses—was the hermeneutical lens for reading the New Testament. The Old Testament was the primary emphasis of the WCG.¹⁵ In the 1990s, the WCG saw that the New Testament—specifically Jesus Christ—is the hermeneutical lens for reading the Old Testament. Since the early-1990s, the focus of the WCG has been on the New Testament. The mid-2000s saw the addition of the Triune God to this Christ-centered, New Testament hermeneutic. Today, following Karl Barth, GCI has come to see that all things, especially in Scripture, need to be seen in the light of God's self-revelation.¹⁶ It is the Triune God who reveals himself through Scripture, primarily through the Incarnation.

¹³ John Wesley, *John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), iv.

¹⁴ Wesley remarked that doctrine cannot merely be founded on experience but it must be in concord with Scripture (ibid., 216).

¹⁵ This can simply be seen in the WCG's publication of children's books *The Bible Story*. This multi-volume series only covers the Old Testament. Growing up in Armstrongism, I knew many Old Testament stories, but very few New Testament ones. The exceptions might be some images from Revelation—the four horsemen—and a few parables, yet these came from non-WCG books.

¹⁶ “**God reveals Himself.** He reveals Himself *through Himself*. He reveals *Himself*. If we really want to understand revelation in terms of its subject, i.e., God, then the first thing we have to realize is that this subject, God, the Revealer, is identical with His act in revelation and also identical with its effect. It is from this fact, which in the first instance we are merely indicating, that we learn we must begin the doctrine of revelation with the doctrine of the triune God.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Volume I,1 (§§ 1-12)*. Trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 296.

1.3.1 Biblical Images of Theology of Ministry

The theory at work in this study regarding the shift to the doctrine of the Triune God is rooted in several key trinitarian texts from the New Testament. In John 13:12-17:26, Jesus gives his Last Supper Discourse. Here the implicit trinitarian theology is the most explicit as any place in the Gospels; the life of the Trinity is presented as overflowing and uniting the divine and human community. Paul also illuminates such a view of unity and love in Romans 8 and Ephesians 1.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28: 17-20 may work as a primer or introduction to my biblical theology of ministry in approaching WCG/GCI theology, old and new:

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’

Here Jesus gives the Great Commission to the disciples and the Triune name (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in the context of the baptismal formula. During the prophetically-focused Armstrong years, this was an often cited passage in the WCG. Moreover, there are certain images that are relevant to the transformation of the WCG.

First is the juxtaposition of doubt vs. worship. As we shall see, in the history of the WCG, there was some doubt toward the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, Jesus was never seen as the person—or ‘Being,’ to use the old WCG terminology—worthy of worship. The Father alone was worthy of worship. This changed in the mid-1990s when Jesus became a greater focus of evangelical style worship—at times to the exclusion of the Father. Today, however, in GCI there still tends to be some embedded,

Pneumatiphobia,¹⁷ especially when it comes to worship of the Holy Spirit and certain spiritual gifts.

Second is the element of authority. Armstrong did not have a problem with Jesus' authority nor with appropriating it for the purposes of his commission to make disciples of all nations. Armstrong's media programs were in charge of this. Ministers and members did not have the authority to evangelize. On radio, television, in print and in person, Armstrong ceaselessly preached "the soon-coming Kingdom of God." However, there was an advantage to glossing over Jesus' final statement in this passage, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." The Kingdom of God was seen as something in the future, when Jesus would return. Armstrong did not focus on the idea that the Kingdom is within the believer.¹⁸ Jesus was distant: temporally and spatially. God the Father was holy, transcendent and removed from human experience. The Holy Spirit was not the personal presence of God but an abstract force within in the believer. With the 'power' of the Holy Spirit, Armstrong acted as the Apostle in the place of Jesus until His return. To doubt Armstrong was tantamount to committing the unpardonable sin.¹⁹ Armstrong was the Elijah to come, given the authority and commission to give the message to the world. This was seen as teaching people to obey everything Jesus had taught, which Armstrong and the WCG leadership took to mean the keeping of the Old Covenant, especially the Sabbath and the Holy Days. Today in GCI, authority is not a major issue. There is still a hierarchical form of governance, but it has changed for the better. The hierarchy, especially at the top levels, tends to be very supportive to both ministers and members.

¹⁷ i.e. fear of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ Lk. 17:20-21.

¹⁹ Herbert W. Armstrong, "How You could commit the Unpardonable Sin!," *The Good News*, March 1960, 11-12. This teaching appears in *The Good News* magazine, which only was distributed to WCG members. The WCG's other major publication *The Plain Truth* went to the public and WCG members.

Third is the baptismal formula. Armstrong—even while studying with the sect the Church of God (Seventh Day)—was baptized by a Baptist minister “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This formula was carried over into his denomination, which seems to legitimize Armstrong’s own baptism. Initiate WCG members had this formula pronounced over them at their immersion: “You are baptized not into any denomination of men of this world, but into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”²⁰ The baptismal formula was often sung in one of the most popular WCG hymns, “Go Ye Therefore into all the World” written by Herbert Armstrong’s brother, Dwight. The lyrics state, “Baptize them into the Father’s name, in the Holy Spirit’s and the Son’s.”²¹ This was before the eyes, in the hearts and on the tongues of WCG members for many decades, and it often was one of the last songs sung at the Feast of Tabernacles on the Last Great Day. Ironically, this Scripture is one of the primary hermeneutical keys to the transformation of the WCG. Every WCG member had been baptized into the Triune name, even though they may have denied the Trinity. Most members had also been taught that at baptism they were begotten—not yet born again—sons and daughters of God. In the 1990s, scriptures like Mt. 28: 19 seen together with John 3:3-8 helped transform the WCG and its people, seeing that they were already born again and in relationship with the Triune God. There is but one divine name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is equally God with the Father and Son. Mt. 28:19, along with other scriptures from the New Testament, implies the Personhood of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it stresses the Triunity of the

²⁰ Armstrong writes in the July 1949 edition of his magazine *The Plain Truth*, “Notice carefully, too---we are ‘BAPTISED INTO JESUS CHRIST’ (Rom 6: 3), or, as Jesus expressed it in Mat. 28:19, into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—NOT INTO SOME CHURCH ORGANIZATION OR DENOMINATION.” Herbert W. Armstrong, “How to Be *Saved!* Water Baptism” *The Plain Truth*, July 1949, 15.

²¹ For the sake of rhyme scheme, the order of Father, Spirit and Son may have been changed. We may wonder about the meaning of “baptizing *into* the Father’s name” which is different from “in the Spirit’s and the Son’s.” This may not seem like one name, but two or three. Another interesting note in this song is that it is a conflation of the Great Commission of Matthew 28 and Mark 16. The section of Mark 16 which in the song says, “Then as for those who now do believe these signs shall surely follow” omits only two signs from the list: they will speak in new tongues and they will pick up snakes (v. 17-18). Herbert undoubtedly had some oversight of Dwight’s songs that were to be sung in his church, and these two signs of the five smacked of Pentecostalism, which, as we shall see, Armstrong was against.

name and identity of God, into which the believer is baptized. GCI now sees that the believer is baptized into Jesus' own baptism, which also has the Triune presence of the Father, Son and Spirit.²² The Great Commission also involves obedience to the Father, Son and Spirit. It also implies that the baptizing in and teaching of the Triune name is part of being obedient to everything that Jesus commands in this Great Commission, for all believers are to teach everyone of everything that Jesus has commanded in this passage.

Fourth is the Triune grace of baptism that must not only be received for oneself but it also must be extended toward others. The minister's purpose is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4: 12-13). Humans are called into a knowledge—a relational, intimate knowledge—of Christ, for we are in Him and He in us by the Holy Spirit and reconciled to the Father. As believers, we are to extend that ministry of reconciliation to others:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

(2 Cor. 5: 19-20).

This ministry of reconciliation entails reaching out to all with an understanding of and relating to God for who he truly is—Father, Son and Spirit—and understanding and relating to ourselves and to others for who we all truly are—beloved and accepted

²² Matthew 3:16-17; baptisms form an *inclusio* in the Gospel for Matthew.

children of the Father. The means of reconciliation is the ministry of the Word and the Spirit—love and power, signs and wonders.

1.3.2 Theology of Ministry and DMin Research

A theology of Christian ministry, I believe, must be trinitarian. The Trinity is not a mere doctrine; it is who God is—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Catherine Mowry LaCugna makes a foundational statement for this study:

The doctrine of the Trinity is orthodoxy, right perception of God, and it calls for orthopraxis, right response to the glory of God. Jesus Christ and the Spirit are the standard for both orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Jesus Christ's life and death, words and deeds, knowledge and love of God are normative for Christians. The power of God's Spirit to convert the hardened heart and make the blind see is essential both for right worship, right knowledge, and right love....The doctrine [of the Trinity] succeeds when it illuminates God's nearness to us in Christ and the Spirit. But it fails if the divine persons are imprisoned in an intradivine realm, or if the doctrine of the Trinity is relegated to a purely formal place in speculative theology. In the end God can only seem farther away than ever. Preaching and pastoral practice will have to fight a constant battle to convince us, to provide assurances, to make the case that God is indeed present among us, does indeed care for us, will indeed hear our prayer, and will be lovingly disposed to respond. If, on the other hand, we affirm that the very nature of God is to seek out the deepest possible communion and friendship with every last creature, and if through the doctrine of the Trinity we do our best to articulate the mystery of God for us, then preaching and pastoral practice will naturally fit with the particulars of the Christian life. Ecclesial life, sacramental life, ethical life, and sexual life will be seen clearly as forms of trinitarian life: living God's life with one another.²³

²³ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 410-411.

My theology of ministry is that living with and in the Triune God influences every aspect of life. It is essential for the Christian minister to live life in relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with self and with congregants. *Perichoresis* is a foundational term for the theology of ministry in this study, for as the divine life of the Father, Son and Spirit interpenetrate one another, so also does their life penetrate the human person (the minister) and others persons (the congregants—and all human persons) in this relational nexus.

Alistair McFadyen provides a social understanding of the Triune God as a model for Person and relation:

...a unique community of Persons in which Person and relation are interdependent moments in a process of mutuality. Each Person is a social unity with specific characteristics unique to Him or Her but whose uniqueness is not an asocial principle of being. The terms of personal identity within the Trinity identify not just unique individuals but the form of relation peculiar to them....The Father, Son and Spirit are neither modes of relation nor absolute discrete and independent individuals, but Persons in relation and Persons only through relation. Persons exist only as they exist for others, not merely as they exist in and of themselves....Three divine Persons are united by sharing uniquely in a common nature. By sharing in this common nature they are all equally divine; by doing so in an asymmetrical manner, each is uniquely divine.²⁴

Personhood always implies mutuality and dependence in relation to others; this is true for divine Persons as well as human persons. We gain our identity from personal relations,

²⁴ Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 27.

human and divine. McFadyen is concerned with both theology and praxis; in understanding the divine Persons particularity and relationship, we can understand how we, as human persons, are made in the *imago dei* and therefore our call and purpose in our personhood.²⁵ This thesis extends this claim to the minister. It is through a right understanding of the divine Persons that the minister can rightly understand the self and the congregation, as persons in the *imago dei*. Where there is heterodoxy in theology, specifically of the divine Persons, there is often a misunderstanding of human persons, and this leads to heteropraxis in the relationship of the minister toward God, self and congregation. However, where there is correct understanding, it should lead to orthopraxis of communal Godly love.

1.3.3 Theory at Work in DMin Research

The theory at work is that the ministers in GCI have been through the transformation from heterodoxy-heteropraxis to orthodoxy-orthopraxis. They have been through what is called a transformational learning experience: "...a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world."²⁶ The nexus of all relationships changes through the human person's understanding of and relating to God in a new way, as Triune being. This mutually conditions the way one relates to self and to others—for the focus of this thesis they are congregants. However, there are also shifts in relations to spouses, children, neighbours, people of other religions or of no religion, animals, and all creation. What we see in the course of this thesis are new stories being told about who God is, who the self is and who others are. As the characters change, so does the story, as in any work of literature. Our story of the transformation of the ministers in the WCG/GCI is character and theme driven.

²⁵ A qualification of terms must be made here, for the divine Persons are not of the same order as human persons.

²⁶ Edmund V. O'Sullivan, Amish Morrell and Mary Ann O'Connor, eds., *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning: Essays on Theory and Praxis* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 11.

Theological reasoning also plays an important role in the theory at work of this thesis. It will explore the theological influences on Armstrong's own theologizing and its development. Further, it will examine the influence of the evangelical church and important evangelical theologians—specifically Karl Barth, Thomas F. Torrance and James B. Torrance—on recent GCI theologizing. These modern theologians act as guides to the ancient theologians, traditions and Scriptures. They also help with the re-contextualization for WCG theology.

The underlying theory at work in this study is that theology (including Scripture, creeds and doctrines) is part of dynamic existential beliefs that inform and transform relationships. Reflecting on and practicing from the Triune God is essential for the Christian minister living life in relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with self and with congregants.

1.3.4 Assumptions Operative in the Study

John Creswell states that it is important for the researcher to clarify his or her own bias so that the reader will comprehend the researcher's position and any biases or assumptions that may have an effect on the study: "In this clarification, the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study."²⁷

My experience, as we shall see, has helped me formulate the focus to the research, yet I also have relied on some ministers in my DMin Ministerial Base Group to test concepts and questions and to give breadth and depth. My experience, I believe, has some degree of impartiality. I was freed by the WCG doctrinal changes of the 1990s to pursue studies in theology and philosophy at non-WCG institutions. I stopped attending

²⁷John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 202.

the WCG on a full-time basis for about a decade, and this has given me some critical and spiritual distance from the denomination. Further, this time period has given me an understanding of a larger Christian theology and practice beyond the WCG, having studied Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Anglicanism, Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. I hope that my experience in the WCG and in the larger Christian community will help interpret the responses of the participants in this thesis. Nevertheless, I have tried to be transparent with my biases and preconceptions, not seeking to guide the participants in the study into areas they neither have believed nor experienced. My goal is not to further transform GCI through its ministers but to have them reflect on their transformation: "...from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

I have been through the process of transformation in theological (bitheist to trinitarian) and soteriological (Old Covenant to New Covenant) beliefs. In each case, I stand firmly on the latter-side of the transformative experience; thus my point-of-view and assumptions are grounded there. I have moved from an embedded theology received from Armstrong and the WCG under his control toward a more deliberated theology.²⁸ However, I do not assume that there are not areas that are hidden to me that need to be exposed and examined. Throughout the process of this research, I have thankfully accepted correction and redirection from many different interlocutors. I assume that the participants in the study will have gone through an examination and transformation in their theology. They may also have hidden embedded theologies. It was not my goal to change these. Nevertheless, organic to the participants deliberating on and telling "their life stories," some have had new insights into their embedded beliefs.

I have some biases toward the present and past leadership in the WCG/GCI. Toward the present leadership, I have a positive bias. I thoroughly appreciate where they

²⁸ An operative definition for embedded theology for this thesis is, "the understanding of faith disseminated by the church and assimilated by its members in their daily lives" and deliberative theology is "a process of reflecting on multiple understandings of the faith implicit in the life and witness of Christians in order to identify and/or develop the most adequate understanding possible" Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 121, 122.

have been led to take the WCG/GCI. Nevertheless, I do not take a naïve view towards them, realizing they and the denomination have areas that need examination and reform.

At times, I had struggled with feelings of resentment and bitterness toward Armstrong and the WCG under his control. Nevertheless, I have a compassion for Armstrong and the WCG, for without his work and church I would not be alive. My mother (a poor young woman from Toronto, Ohio) and father (a poor young man from Manchester, England) would have never met if they did not follow Armstrong and go to Ambassador College in Texas, where my parents met. Armstrong promoted a faith in God and love for Scripture; this came through in the lives of my parents and, consequently, me. Thus, my bias is not personal against Armstrong.

1.4 Formation of Vocational Identity: My Personal Encounters

I was raised in the WCG; my father was a pastor in the denomination (now retired) and my mother was his faithful companion in the work. I followed my parents as they followed the teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong.

While growing up, I was interested in theological and prophetic issues. I remember having debates as a boy and a teenager with my friends from other denominations, sects and religions on a variety of doctrinal issues. Through my early years, I often had to defend my eccentric beliefs against my teachers and friends.

As a teenager, I wanted all this oddness to cease. I stopped attending church on a regular basis—only attending fun events. Despite this prodigal stage in my life, I was having some profound spiritual experiences. I was being pursued by the God, who I knew some things about but did not really know.

In January 1986, Herbert Armstrong died, and I started to think more seriously about my faith. I started to study the Bible and to think about going to the WCG's Ambassador College and possibly—if it was God's will—becoming a minister.²⁹

In my first semester at Ambassador College in 1988, the WCG started to change. Joseph Tkach Sr. (the new Apostle of the WCG) reversed Armstrong's teachings on the prohibitions of women wearing makeup and of members keeping birthdays. At Ambassador, I started to have theological questions. In my first year Bible class titled "The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ," the professor taught the old basic WCG theology: "God is not a trinity. He cannot be three persons; this limits the family of God." Although I did not accept the Trinity, I could not understand the professor's reasoning and asked him questions after class about this comment. The professor could not give me a coherent answer to my satisfaction and seemed to get disturbed by the question.

During my five years and two degrees at Ambassador (1988-1993), many key WCG doctrines were changing. It was an exciting time to be where the doctrinal revisions were first being introduced in our services and classes. This caused both a sense of liberation and reaction among my friends and classmates. I studied and accepted each doctrinal change.

After graduating and moving to Ottawa, where I married my wife, Kareena, I started attending teachers college at the University of Ottawa (1993-1994). At the same time, the WCG went through monumental changes, including accepting the Trinity. I had not had a close personal relationship with Jesus; this began to change. I also wanted to develop friendships with others who loved Jesus. I felt a calling to experience the larger body of Christ. Furthermore, I desired to challenge some of my theological assumptions. In response to these issues, as part of my Master's in Education at the University of Ottawa (1994-1995), I took a class, Religious Experience, at St. Paul's University. I was experiencing a new relationship based on love and freedom.

²⁹ The institution changed its name to Ambassador University in 1993.

Nevertheless, this relationship was largely a cognitive Christianity, book learning about Jesus. Although I had become a confessing trinitarian, I was a functional binitarian. The Father and the Son were more united than I had seen them in my youth and Ambassador experience; however, the Holy Spirit seemed peripheral to my life.

After graduating from the MEd, I moved to Toronto and began teaching at Centennial College. In 1997, I took a class in philosophy of theology at Wycliffe College. I enrolled for a MA in Theology at St. Michael College's the following year. At the Toronto School of Theology (TST), I left behind my former exclusivism and embraced ecumenism. I was a new evangelical writing my thesis on the Eastern Orthodox theology of Fyodor Dostoevsky at a Catholic institution. This was a time of further moving from an embedded theology of the old WCG into a more deliberative theology. Nevertheless, there were still embedded blindspots in my theology—the Holy Spirit again being a major one.

Although I was very positive toward most of the changes in the WCG, I did not attend the WCG on a regular basis, starting in 1996. I would talk with my father regularly about the changes and his experience as a pastor and would visit his congregation in northern Toronto several times a year. There were multiple factors for my hiatus from the WCG. I was in my thirties and my sense of identity was still shifting. It is ironic that although I spent time away from the WCG, my theology and identity was moving in the same direction as the denomination.

In 2005, I told my dad about what I believed was God calling me toward ministry; however, I was not sure which denomination I was being called to: Anglican, Baptist...? My dad was supportive of wherever I believed God was leading me. In 2005, I started attending the WCG on a regular basis. In 2006, my dad asked me to give some sermons to his congregation. My first sermons were on the divinity of Jesus. In 2007, I became a ministerial intern with the WCG/GCI and enrolled in the DMin program at Wycliffe College. I also went to my denomination's international conference in that summer and was inspired to see its focus: our inclusion in life and love of the Triune God. This was

the start of the movement away from the theory about the Trinity toward praxis of living in the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit. At this conference, I started to find the focus for this thesis. In January 2010, I became an ordained elder and believe my calling is to live, learn and teach life in the grace of the Triune God.

Until the mid-2000s, I remained a confessing trinitarian, but a functional binitarian. I had little understanding of who the Holy Spirit is. He had worked in and through me all my life, but, from my side, I had no relationship with him. This started to change in 2005. He saved the life of my infant daughter, Lily, from bacterial meningitis. This was a great blessing that caused me to turn toward him for a relationship.³⁰ In the summer of 2007, I gave a sermon to my congregation addressing old WCG beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit and why the Scriptures indicate he is a Person. This sermon was positively received by many people in the congregation—some of whom were well ahead of me in their understanding of the Holy Spirit. In fact, it has been some of the members in my congregation to whom I am most deeply grateful for helping lead me to a greater experience of my relationship with the Holy Spirit. However, there were a few people in the congregation who remained staunch in their belief that the Holy Spirit was merely the power of God, remaining bitheistic in their belief. As the ministers and other people in the congregation continued to work with these people, we have seen them start to believe that the Holy Spirit is a Person.

In the course of my preaching, teaching and studies, I moved towards being a full confessing and functional trinitarian. I started to understand God the Father in a deeper and more intimate way; old fears and suspicions doubting His goodness were stilled. This came through my relationship with Jesus, which also helped me to realize that there was much more about the Holy Spirit than mere propositions. The courses that I took on the Holy Spirit at Wycliffe, a reading course with Prof. Ephraim Radner and an audit with Prof. David Reed, opened me up to the history of the Holy Spirit throughout Scripture and church history. In 2010, I started to experience more intimacy with and gifts of the

³⁰ My second daughter, Evangeline Hope, was born in 1998 during the course of this degree.

Spirit, primarily in the area of healing ministry. Previously, I had dismissed them as phenomena of the early church or of hoaxes in the modern church. Over the past few years, my cognitive Christianity has been transformed into a thoroughly experiential one. The theory did not depart but it turned into a deeper praxis.

1.5 Current Contexts of Ministry

1.5.1 Toronto East GCI

I serve as an elder in the Toronto East congregation of the GCI. At present, I am part of a ministry team under the pastor. The people in the congregation are from multi-racial and multi-cultural backgrounds: the Philippines, China, the Caribbean, South America and Europe. Our motto is “We are a multicultural community of Jesus’ disciples. We long to love Jesus and gracefully reflect His Light & Love towards others.”³¹ Weekly services emphasize the identity of the Triune God and our identity sharing in the Triune life, the grace that God our Father has given us, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the hope we have in Christ Jesus. The message is based on understanding God’s identity and our personal identities—accepted, adopted and loved by the Triune God.

There are a variety of ministries in which I have functioned. I visit people, especially the elderly and sick; teach with the youth ministry; lead worship; play special music; provide counselling; participate in outreach; and guide people through discipling. However, among my primary duties are preaching and teaching and praying for release of the sick and oppressed. I have a community/marketplace ministry where I pray for people in public places, especially related to need for healing. The goal is to make theology focused toward praxis, practical life transformation in grace.

³¹ At present, the church council is revising this motto since the words “we long” do not express our full inclusion in Christ. This local congregation has been through many exciting changes in the past few years under the loving leadership of Pastor Alvaro Palacio.

1.5.2 The Ministry of the WCG/GCI

For this thesis research, my ministry base is the ministers of GCI. I am in discussion with the regional, national and international leadership of the denomination. They have given me support, comments and critiques regarding my research. The focus of the study is current GCI ministers. They all have been through the loss of having congregants, friends, family, colleagues, and/or leaders depart from our fellowship through the changes. They have had a reduced salary or workload due to the financial setbacks in the WCG. They have studied through the doctrinal changes and taught them to their congregation(s). I watched some WCG ministers, primarily my father and father-in-law, go through doctrinal and personal changes in the 1990s.

The participants in the research are people who were selected by my Ministerial Base Group and/or suggested by the denominational leadership or other Christian leaders familiar with the ministers in GCI. Eight WCG/GCI ministers have taken part as primary participants in the study. Each of the primary participants became ministers in the WCG under Armstrong, went through the doctrinal changes under Joseph Tkach Sr. and has been transformed toward a trinitarian theology under Joseph Tkach Jr.

In addition, four WCG/GCI ministers have taken part as secondary participants in the study. They are a generation younger than the primary participants. All became ministers after the death of Armstrong. All except for one became ministers after the major doctrinal changes took place in the WCG. They also have been transformed toward a trinitarian theology under Joseph Tkach Jr. Both primary and secondary participants provide life stories that inform the narration of the changes in theology and experience in the WCG/GCI. The primary participants provide the full time line from bitheism to trinitarianism. The secondary participants add some further details regarding what it was like growing up in the WCG under Armstrongism. They make a significant contribution to the story after the changes in the WCG, and they provide an important perspective toward the future of GCI.

CHAPTER TWO

ANALYSIS AND INTEGRATION: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE WCG

This chapter takes biographical, historical and theological approaches toward understanding Herbert W. Armstrong and the WCG. It sets the context in which Armstrong's religious beliefs grew and were transformed. It also traces the movement in the WCG away from orthodoxy toward heterodoxy and later back toward orthodoxy again. The final sections will examine the context and influences of the doctrinal changes and developments regarding the nature of God in the WCG/GCI.

2.1 Theological Context of Hebert W. Armstrong

2.1.1 Context: Sect, Primitivism and Restorationism

The WCG under Herbert W. Armstrong was a primitivist and restorationist sect. Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge define a sect as a schismatic religious movement that has broken away from another movement, which itself may have been a sect.³²

Restorationism and primitivism are often aspects of sects. They seek to restore the primitive truth of a faith, "Because sects are schismatic groups, they present themselves to the world as something old. They left the parent body not to form a new faith but to reestablish the old one, from which the parent body had 'drifted.' . . . Sects claim to be the authentic, purged, refurbished version of the faith from which they split."³³ Irving Hexham defines primitivism as a movement that seeks to go back to what is imagined to be "a lost ideal or golden age found in the past."³⁴ This is often marked by "a return to

³² Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 19, 25. Particularly, a sect breaks away from the dominant religion of the culture.

³³ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁴ Irving Hexham, *Concise Dictionary of Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 176.

the purity of the original Christianity as revealed in Scripture. Such movements often claim to be devoid of doctrine because they base their beliefs on ‘the Bible alone.’³⁵ These types of sects reject the creeds and other developments of ‘the old apostate denominations.’

The primitive-restorationist sect needs a leader, but this cannot just be anyone from the rank and file of an organization. According to Stark and Bainbridge, the potential leader of a sect has had previous experience in leadership, often as clergy, and is prepared for this role. This person usually claims to be motivated by theology; further, the potential leader has a subnetwork for support when leaving the parent organization.³⁶ It is in the light of the above we may view the experience of Herbert W. Armstrong, who in the course of his ministry came to believe that many in the early church had abandoned the truth and he was restoring that truth.³⁷

2.1.2 Quaker Influence on Herbert W. Armstrong

The sectarian spirit had been part of Armstrong’s heritage. Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986) was born and raised in Des Moines, Iowa, coming from “solid old Quaker stock.”³⁸

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Stark and Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, 105.

³⁷ Armstrong believed that in 33 A.D. Simon Magus or Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-25) proclaimed himself an apostle and began to present a false Christianity: “By the sixth decade of the first century, much of the Middle East had turned from the true gospel to a counterfeit (Gal. 1:6-7)” Herbert W. Armstrong, *Mystery of the Ages* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985), 52. Simon moved to Rome and formed the Roman Catholic Church, replaced Passover with Easter. This all culminates with Constantine accepting this form of Christianity and integrating a pagan form of God—Trinity—into its theology and worship. Thus, for Armstrong, all Church tradition was pagan and false. This research will present the roots of Armstrong’s sectarianism and will address the context of his teachings. It will also discuss how after the WCG rejected Armstrongism, it began to look for guidance from the historical Christian tradition.

³⁸ Herbert W. Armstrong, *The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Ambassador College Press, 1986), 91, <http://www.cogneo.org/literature/hwa/books/autobiol.pdf> (accessed July 27, 2011). All references in this thesis are to volume one of the *Autobiography*. Volume

Armstrong writes of his Quaker experience, “From earliest memory I was kept regularly in the Sunday school and church services of the First Friends Church in Des Moines. From earliest boyhood I was in a boys’ class in Sunday school”³⁹ Throughout the majority of his teen years he was worshipping and learning at First Friends. Then, he explains, “. . .at age 18 I strayed almost wholly away from all church interest or attendance, and devoted my whole energies to business.”⁴⁰ Although, at times, he claimed that his experience as a Quaker taught him nothing about spirituality and that he rejected Quaker belief, there still is something from his theological pedigree and tutelage that cannot be dismissed.

George Fox, the founder of the Religious Society of Friends (more commonly known as the Quakers), had left the state Church of England and became associated with sectarian groups of Dissenters. Fox eventually fell out with these groups and started his own restorationist-primitivist sect; he claimed to base his teachings on the Bible. From the earliest days of the movement, the Quaker leaders refused to use trinitarian language. George Fox and the early Friends presented that the terms ‘Trinity’ and ‘persons’ are not scriptural—i.e. the words were not in the Bible—rather they were inventions of human reason.⁴¹ Quaker theology lacked the specificity of terms of post-scriptural Christian tradition, which were Latin and considered papist innovations.⁴² The Quakers believed

one differs from volume two. The former has some very brief theological discussion, and the latter lacks any notable theological discussion.

³⁹ Ibid, 10.

⁴⁰ Herbert W. Armstrong, “NO! I NEVER WAS A ‘JEHOVAH WITNESS’ OR A 7TH DAY ADVENTIST,” *The Plain Truth*, July 1953, 6.

⁴¹ Thomas Evans, *An Exposition of The Faith of the Religious Society of Friends, Commonly called Quakers, in the Fundamental Doctrines of the Christian Religion, principally Selected from their Early Writings* (Philadelphia: Kimber & Sharpless, 1828) 1-21.
http://books.google.ca/books?id=7sorAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Thomas+Evans+An+Exposition&hl=en&ei=-2wxTqiHFK650AGjr_jvCw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCkQ6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=Section%20IV&f=false (accessed July 28, 2011).

⁴² Armstrong had this predilection not to use any non-scriptural theological terms. However, he used terms of his own and others’ creation.

that the Bible affirmed the divinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; moreover, Friend William Penn affirmed that these “Three are truly and properly One—of nature as well as will.”⁴³ Nevertheless, there was a significant issue with their theology. This is indicated by Catholic theologian Yves Congar, “...there is in fact no Quaker theology of the Holy Spirit as the third Person”⁴⁴ For example, early Friend Robert Barclay responded to a man with whom he was debating Scripture, “I desire to know of him, in what Scripture he finds these words, that the Spirit is a distinct person of the Trinity. For I freely acknowledge, according to the Scripture, that the Spirit of God proceedeth from the Father and the Son, and is God, &c.”⁴⁵ The early Friends longed to be faithful to Scripture, but with a wooden literalism, reacting against church tradition. This led them into all kinds of semantic arguments to self-differentiate their Society from other churches.

Armstrong was born into this tradition, and the Quaker Armstrong family would not have accepted the doctrine of the Trinity. However, some of the subtleties of Fox and the early Friends’ arguments against using trinitarian terms may not have been understood by the young Armstrong. A mistaken understanding of this argument may have been the foundation for his confusion regarding the nature of God. Specifically, Armstrong would not have a clear understanding of the Holy Spirit as a Person. In the development of Quaker writings, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, and at times there seems to be confusion between the Spirit and Christ. Both are discussed in terms of Truth and Light, which are encountered within the human person and enabling them toward perfect obedience of their leading, rather than Persons.⁴⁶ Ultimately, Quaker pneumatology and

⁴³ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁴ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Saint Louis, MO: Herder & Herder, 1997), 142-143.

⁴⁵ Thomas Evans, *An Exposition of The Faith of the Religious Society of Friends*, 5.

⁴⁶ The early Friends were often accused of being Socinians, which they denied. However, in the development of Quakerism, certain groups have a tended toward unitarianism, either theologically or functionally.

Christology is subsumed into a theological anthropology—a version of this is reflected in Armstrong’s later writing.

Armstrong adapted the Quaker absolute individualism and inner light in a search for the truth. In his thirties, he turned to the Bible (the other traditional source of Quaker truth) to analyze doctrines of various denominations and search for the true, primitive Church. Ironically, he came to use the Bible to reject the teachings of his Quaker past, especially the one eschewing water baptism. In the *Autobiography*, he states:

As this study of the Bible continued, I was forced to come out of the fog of religious Babylon a single doctrine at a time. It was years later before I came to see the WHOLE picture -- to understand God’s PURPOSE being worked out here below, and why, and how, He is working it out. Like a jigsaw puzzle, the many single doctrinal parts ultimately fit together, and then, for the first time, the WHOLE picture burst joyfully into view. It was like being so close to one tree at a time I could not see the forest. I had to examine every doctrinal tree in the religious forest. Many, as I had been brought up to believe them, were felled on close examination IN THE BIBLE. New doctrinal trees came into view. But finally, after years, I was able to see the whole forest of TRUTH, with dead doctrinal trees removed.⁴⁷

Much like Fox had done, Armstrong claims to use the Bible to challenge his old church and relies on his own experience as a ground for theologizing. It is significant that Armstrong questions some of his Quaker theological context and the contexts of other denominations. Nevertheless, while he develops the minutia of other personal details in the *Autobiography*, he neglects what the specifics are concerning the many doctrines of Babylon that he rejects and why he rejects these doctrines.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Herbert W. Armstrong, *Autobiography*, 158. *N.B.* Armstrong’s style of writing is maintained for his citations in this thesis.

⁴⁸ The prophetically corrective language of Armstrong was not dissimilar from that of Fox. Both were interested in bringing down the doctrinal confusion of Babylon, to restore true Christianity. For example,

Armstrong would have his readers think that he deliberated on all of his embedded Quaker theologies and those of other churches. As with any embedded theology, elements are “not necessarily stated and perhaps not at all clear.”⁴⁹ Although Armstrong rejects certain theological elements of Quakerism, some other predilections could have been part of hidden theological sediment underlying his search for the true church.⁵⁰ Most importantly, Armstrong never gives any specific, dedicated attention to doctrines of the Trinity or the Personhood of the Holy Spirit in any of his writing prior to the last decade of his life. Even his published materials during this last period of his life do not demonstrate a clear theological understanding regarding the Trinity; rather they dismiss it—like the writings of Fox and the early Friends—as a papal innovation.

2.1.3 Church of God (Seventh Day) Influence on Armstrong

In 1926, Armstrong started extensive personal study regarding biblical truth. He had been challenged by some people regarding two issues: Saturday vs. Sunday Sabbath and

Fox writes in his preface to the 1659 book *The Great Mystery of the Whore Unfolded; and Antichrist's Kingdom Revealed Unto Destruction* (Philadelphia: Marcus T.C. Gould, 1851), cover page, “In answer to many false doctrines and principles which Babylon's merchants have traded with, being held forth by the professed ministers, and teachers, and professors in England, Scotland, and Ireland, taken under their own hands, and from their own mouths, sent forth by them from time to time, against the despised people of the Lord, called Quakers, who are of the seed of that woman who hath been long fled into the wilderness. Also, an invasion upon the great city Babylon, with the spoiling of her golden cup, and delicate merchandise, whereby she hath deceived the world and nations; and herein is declared the spoiling of her prey, in this answer to the multitude of doctrines held forth by the many false sects, which have lost the key of knowledge, and been on foot since the apostles' days, called Anabaptists, Independents, Presbyters, Ranters, and many others; who out of their own mouths have manifested themselves not to be of a true descent from the true christian churches....” This language could be updated into a twentieth century form and interpolated directly into Armstrong's own writing.

⁴⁹ Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 15.

⁵⁰ See Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). McFadyen defines “sediment” in personal terms as “The personal identity which has ‘settled’, been ‘deposited’ or ‘laid down’ through a history of specific relations. It is temporary and dynamic because it may be transformed through subsequent interaction, the effects of which may ‘fall out’ and accumulate around the personal centre already deposited” (318). As we shall see, the theological issues sediment around Armstrong's personal identity and quest.

creation vs. evolution.⁵¹ He came to firmly ground his “biblical” faith in the Saturday Sabbath and creation; this was reflected in his stress on God as creator and on the Old Testament, especially the Pentateuch. He viewed all Sunday-keeping churches as false, and “The SOURCE of their beliefs and practice was not the Bible, but paganism!”⁵² He was now on the search for the true Church.

In 1927, Armstrong came to study with the Church of God (Seventh Day).⁵³ In 1931, he became an ordained minister in this denomination. The CG7 was a sect of the Adventist movement of the nineteenth century and was marked by certain aberrations from orthodox Christianity, which they took as distinctives of being the restored, primitive Church. Among these, the CG7 observed a Seventh Day Sabbath.

Throughout the first several decades of his ministry, Armstrong had a wavering theology. In the summer of 1931, Armstrong became friends with Robert L. Taylor, a CG7 minister, who had formerly been a Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) minister and most likely a trinitarian. In September 1931, Taylor and Armstrong published their own periodical, *The Messenger of Truth*, with the former as the editor and the latter as the associate editor. In this publication’s “Fundamentals of Belief of the Messenger Publishing Ass’n,” it states concerning the doctrine of God: “We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; a personal God of supreme mind, power, knowledge and authority, who created the Heavens and the Earth and all that in them is.”⁵⁴ This is clearly a trinitarian statement; however, the CG7—Armstrong and Taylor’s church—were binitarian or bitheistic, denying the Personhood of

⁵¹ Herbert W. Armstrong, *Autobiography*, 148, 159.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵³ Hereafter called CG7.

⁵⁴ Herbert W. Armstrong and Robert L. Taylor, eds., “Fundamentals of Belief of the Messenger Publishing Ass’n,” *The Messenger of Truth*, September 1931, 6, <http://www.herbert-armstrong.org/Bible%20Advocate%201928s/Messenger%20of%20Truth%201931.pdf> (accessed July 28, 2011).

the Spirit.⁵⁵ Thus, it seems that these two ministers were in public disagreement with their denomination.

Also, Armstrong's view of the doctrine of regeneration seems to change. The CG7 held regeneration to be a two-stage event, a believer is first begotten at baptism and second born at the resurrection.⁵⁶ It appears Armstrong may have held a two-stage belief at his own baptism: "There was a quiet, wonderful happiness of mind in the sure knowledge that now I was actually a begotten son of GOD!"⁵⁷ However, this view also changed; under "Fundamentals of Belief" in *The Messenger of Truth*, Taylor and Armstrong state that at baptism believers who, ". . . received the Holy Spirit are 'born again,' given a new nature, and are new creatures in Christ Jesus. . . ."⁵⁸

There appears only to be one published issue of the *Messenger of Truth*. In its "Fundamentals of Belief," all ten points are standard evangelical dispensationalist beliefs. There is little that points to heterodoxy. Furthermore, Armstrong and Taylor appear willing to back up their faith claims, "We invite any of our readers to ask questions

⁵⁵ In tracing the origins of binitarian theology in the Adventist movement, Jerry Moon, a Seventh Day Adventist scholar, states, "From about 1846 to 1888, the majority of Adventists rejected the concept of the Trinity—at least as they understood it. All the leading writers were anti-Trinitarian, although the literature contains occasional references to members who held Trinitarian views" <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/trinity/moon/moon-trinity1.htm> (accessed July 28, 2011). In the late 1850s and early 1860s groups broke away from the main Adventist group, which was then following the prophetess Ellen G. White. One of the breakaway groups came to be called the CG7, which rejected the teachings of White. The Trinity was one of the doctrines that started to emerge and develop in White's writing during the mid and late 1800s. This was a teaching that CG7 did not accept, remaining ensconced in its own binitarian or bitheistic theology. They would not have used these terms and the explanations of the Godhead varied in the denomination.

⁵⁶ See Richard C Nickles. *Bible Doctrine*, cited in "History of the Born Again Doctrine," <http://www.giveshare.org/churchhistory/born%20again.htm> (accessed July 28, 2011).

⁵⁷ Herbert W. Armstrong, *Autobiography*, 162. As we shall see, Armstrong took the word "begotten" to mean as the fetus stage in the womb. It is uncertain which view Armstrong held at his baptism, whether he was merely begotten or born again. He was studying with and baptized by a Baptist minister (see Joseph Tkach Jr., *Transformed by Truth*, 169). This minister probably would have used the term born again. At the same time, he attended church with CG7, which held the begotten view. There may have been some confusion for Armstrong concerning what to believe.

⁵⁸ Herbert W. Armstrong and Robert L. Taylor, eds., "Fundamentals of Belief of the Messenger Publishing Ass'n," *The Messenger of Truth*, 6.

regarding any of these ten points, which we will gladly answer, giving abundance of Scriptural proof.”⁵⁹ It could be that Armstrong did not really believe these things and was just going along with Taylor. Armstrong remarked, “Taylor had been my ‘ideal’ as a minister.”⁶⁰ Armstrong may have just been interested in writing the prophetic articles and leaving the theology to Taylor.

At some point in their brief association, Armstrong had a disagreement with Taylor, who starting promoting “wild-fire Pentecostal” emotionalism and people seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which Armstrong rejected.⁶¹ This was the start of a falling out that turn Armstrong away from Taylor and eventually may have turned Armstrong back toward the bitheism of the CG7, which he later imported to his own denomination.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Herbert W. Armstrong, *Autobiography*, 218. Armstrong notes regarding his early association with Taylor, starting with the first time he had heard him speak: “‘He’s a better preacher than any of the leading ministers from Stanberry (CG7 Headquarters),’ seemed to be the common exclamation. Indeed we were all rather ‘swept off our feet’ by his preaching. After a few weeks, the brethren of this ‘Oregon Conference,’ which had been formed the preceding November, wanted to team Elder Taylor with me to hold an evangelistic campaign. They were becoming anxious to see a little ‘life’ in the work of the Church....Elder Taylor said he would be glad to undertake this campaign with me, suggesting it be held in Eugene -- for reasons I was to learn later. We decided to speak on alternate nights, the one not speaking to lead in the song service. This made it necessary that the Oregon Conference ordain me to the ministry” Ibid., 214.

⁶¹ Ibid, 217-219. There were many points of contact Armstrong had in church meetings with Pentecostal people. He spends some time describing—at times mocking—what he saw as the Pentecostal phenomenon (laughing, tongues, rolling, etc.) happening at certain meetings and his great distaste for them. He believed the people were sincere in their belief that the Holy Spirit was causing these manifestations; however, they, like most people who call themselves Christians, were deceived (249). He also implies a contrast between himself and the Pentecostal types, “They were not interested in learning Biblical TRUTH, obeying God’s commands, and yielding their lives to be changed and transformed according to God’s Word by a living Christ who does His saving work within us” (274). The falling out with Taylor and later with another CG7 minister, Sam Oberg whom Armstrong also admired, over the same Pentecostal issues seemed to have turned Armstrong further against almost anything Pentecostal sounding, perhaps with an exception of healing—due to the healing of his wife in 1927. In his early writing, Armstrong attacks speaking in tongues and tarry meetings. Later in his ministry, he would speak of the Holy Spirit as merely a power. Perhaps this was some build up from the sedimentation of these relationships and experiences.

⁶² Armstrong has been accused by some critics of Arianism. However, there is little or no evidence to support this in the WCG literature. Armstrong’s belief lacks clarity, regarding the divinity of Jesus Christ in the first few decades of his ministry. In 1943, Armstrong does give certain Christological attributes, “DIVINITY, the MIGHT, and POWER of the Eternal Christ. . . HE is the ETERNAL!” (“What’s Prophesied about Russia!” *The Plain Truth*, November-December 1943, 12). And again in 1947, Christ is said to be Melchisedec, “. . . Melchisedec was ‘without father, without mother, without descent.’ He was

This wavering, however, demonstrates a significant uncertainty in theology of Armstrong. Although Armstrong mentions in his *Autobiography* his being a writer for *The Bible Advocate*, the CG7's magazine, he never mentioned his being a writer and associate editor for his own, first religious publication, *The Messenger of Truth*. Perhaps he was concerned that people would find out about his previously held beliefs.

In 1933, the CG7 was going through a schism over issues of governance and doctrine, and Armstrong started to break away from the CG7, forming his own sect. The

not born, as humans are. He had no descent from another, but is self-existent-‘having neither beginning of days, nor end of life;’ therefore He has always existed-from eternity to eternity! He was not even created, like angels, but **is** eternally self-existing! And that is true only of GOD! Yet Melchisedec cannot be God the Father. He is the ‘priest of the most high God.’ Scripture says no man has ever seen the Father, but Abraham saw Melchisedec. He cannot be God the Father, but rather, ‘made like unto the SON of God, abideth a priest continually’” (“Who was Melchisedec?” *The Plain Truth*, January-February 1947, 15). In these articles, the eternal, self-existent attributes of Christ are not the Arian view, which holds the Son, Jesus Christ, is a created being and has a beginning. We may wonder where the evidence is that the critics label Armstrong an Arian because the literature shows no overt sign of Arian theology. Buchner cites the previous critics of Armstrong without providing any of his own research on the issue. These critics may have assumed that Armstrong simply followed some in CG7, who may have held Arian views, or they may not have understood the theological terms clearly, distinguish between binitarianism/bitheism/Pneumatism (denying the divine hypostasis of the Spirit) and Arianism (denying homoousios of the Son with the Father). The wording used for Jesus Christ “true God and true man” (among other terms used) in the 1931 “Fundamentals of Belief of the Messenger Publishing Ass’n” (6) is exactly the same as the 1948 “Fundamentals of Belief, Radio Church of God” (1). Perhaps Armstrong held Arian views at some point in the late 1930s and early 1940s; however, the literature does not express this. If Armstrong did become an Arian, it was for a brief period that ended by 1943 when he expresses a vaguely orthodox Christology and most definitely evinced by the early 1950s. For the most part, Armstrong’s writing gives little attention to Jesus other than some of His teachings that supported Armstrong’s views and a theocratic eschatology where Jesus is soon coming king. The only evidence of Armstrong following Arius is that the former liked the latter’s resistance to the orthodox position. It appears that Armstrong’s knowledge of “Dr. Arius” came from the book *A History of the True Church* written by CG7 ministers Andrew N. Dugger and Clarence O. Dodd. The following is their approach to Arius: “Dr. Arius, the most talented, intellectual, and spiritual power of the fourth century was the central figure against which the evil and polluted minds of western Roman bishops were directed. He was indeed a man of God, in whom the truth found its most consecrated and able defender. Like the Apostle Paul, he traversed the then known world, propagating truth, and denouncing error. He was a staunch observer of the seventh day Sabbath; he held the Lord’s Supper once a year on the 14th of Abib, as did all the Jewish Christians, and most of the members and bishops of the Eastern churches. He believed in the one God, and Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, and contended that the Holy Spirit was a power sent forth from God, entering into hearts and lives of Christians, transforming them into servants of God, of which he himself was a living example” Andrew Dugger and Clarence Dodd, *A History of the True Church* (1935), chapter 5, <http://www.reformedreader.org/history/dugger/> (accessed July 29, 2011). There are certain things here attributed to Arius that seemed to appeal to Armstrong. There are only a half dozen references to Arius or Dr. Arius in the *Plain Truth* mostly from the later 1970s to early 1980s; then in Armstrong’s *Mystery of the Ages* there is a recycling of issues picked up from Dugger and Dodd’s book regarding “Dr. Arius” (54, 55).

sense of receiving the message from the Holy Spirit and restoring the whole biblical truth led Armstrong into conflict and separation with the CG7. Two of the main special revelations that he claimed were the restoration of Jewish Holy Days and the understanding of the peoples of North West Europe, the British Commonwealth nations and the United States of America to be the lost tribes of Israel.⁶³ These two issues through the years became closely interrelated. As Armstrong was going deeper into an Old Covenant soteriology—having one’s identity and salvation founded on one’s keeping the ten commandments, the Sabbath, Holy Days and a selection of other laws—the idea of British Israelism appealed to him even more. The laws were for Israel, and this people’s disobedience caused them to become “lost” to history. Armstrong’s mission became the restoration of the identity of the lost tribes to them, or at least a remnant, and they would be restored to their birthright by returning to Armstrong’s interpretation of the Old Covenant law keeping. The identity of Armstrong’s true Christian was not being in Christ, but following these ideas.

In 1934, Armstrong started a radio ministry called the Radio Church of God, which was changed to the Worldwide Church of God in 1968.⁶⁴ Armstrong denied being ordained by the CG7’s main body.⁶⁵ This was done to justify his authority. He deemed that the Holy Spirit was guiding his ministry. Armstrong believed that the CG7 had weak and ineffective leadership; he took this to be a sign of spiritual deadness.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it was this weakness that allowed Armstrong the relative autonomy and freedom to grow his ministry.

⁶³ However, some CG7 people claim that most of the special truths that Armstrong taught, including the Holy Days, were taken from the CG7 (<http://www.keithhunt.com/Hwa3.html>). Armstrong’s ideas regarding British-Israelism came from J.H. Allen *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright*. In fact, whole sections of this book appear in Armstrong’s book *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*. The supporters of Armstrong either ignore this or call it sifting—the critics call it plagiarism.

⁶⁴ N.B. For the sake of simplicity, the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) will be used to refer to the denomination.

⁶⁵ Herbert W. Armstrong, *Autobiography*, 210, 215.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 180, 207.

2.2 Bitheism in the WCG under Armstrong

2.2.1 Doctrines of the Human Person and of God

It may seem that these two doctrines should be categorized separately, but if we are to follow Armstrong's thought, they must be con-fused, especially in the sub-doctrines: regeneration, pneumatology and Christology. As we have seen, Armstrong disagreed with the CG7 on these issues—though they do not appear to be important reasons for the schism. Armstrong's one-stage of regeneration doctrine along with the Personhood of the Holy Spirit doctrine, both of which he shared with Taylor, were unchanged and carried over into his new sect.⁶⁷ The November 1934 edition of Armstrong's magazine, *The Plain Truth*, demonstrates this, "Salvation means, simply, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the very LIFE of God. Jesus said 'that which is born of the flesh IS FLESH.' 'Ye must be BORN AGAIN' ---born of God's Spirit!""⁶⁸ One may attempt to infer that Armstrong has the old CG7 belief of the Holy Spirit as the life essence of God. However, throughout this same article Armstrong consistently refers to the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost with the pronoun He: "He was WITH them (the disciples), in the person of Jesus, but He was after the day of Pentecost, to be IN them, in the person of the HOLY GHOST! And so, today, as the Scriptures say, 'Christ IN us, who [sic, is the] hope of glory.' ... O, what a blessed truth! Why pervert it? Jesus died for you and for me...He sent us the OTHER Comforter, the Holy Ghost."⁶⁹ Armstrong emphasizes the distinction between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The language of Personhood of the Holy Spirit—and of Jesus—is strong here, but afterwards the same language regarding the former Person falls silent in WCG literature.⁷⁰ In the 1934 article, the language of one-stage regeneration is displayed, "This baptism is not the end, but only the

⁶⁷ Ironically, Armstrong's belief regarding the deity of Jesus is obscure in these early years.

⁶⁸ Herbert W. Armstrong, "Tongues? Is the PENTECOST EXPERIENCE BEING Repeated Today?," *The Plain Truth*, November 1934, 1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁰ The Christological language in this article is not Arian.

BEGINNING of his Christian experience! He is merely a new-born BABE in Christ!”⁷¹
 The human person is born again and sanctified at baptism, yet there remains a process of growth in sanctification; the Spirit enables believers to keep the commandments.

In the late 1930s and through the 1940s, Armstrong’s pneumatology placed an emphasis on the character of the individual, providing information on how to endure to the end. When the Spirit is mentioned, it is in a general sense and in relation to the spirituality of the believer. In an issue of the 1941 *Plain Truth*, the Holy Spirit is described as “the LOVE that God gives us to fulfill and to keep His Commandments!”⁷² In a 1942 article “What is it to be Spiritual?”, Armstrong claims that the Spirit is the mind of Christ in the regenerated believer and goes on to explain, “These things are the expression of ‘the LOVE of God, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,’ (Rom. 5:5),--and this the Holy Spirit *in us* is simply GOD’S LAW *in action*, in our lives; for LOVE is the fulfilling of the Law. And that, and that alone, is true Christian spirituality” (8). The Holy Spirit seems simplified for the reader to understand, being the mind of Christ and the law of God in action and enabling believers to be spiritually minded and to fulfill the law.⁷³ For Armstrong, the emphasis became love of the law rather than the law of love. It was this ever growing love of the law in the WCG that constantly diminished and eventually replaced the Personhood of the Holy Spirit. The law gained a kind of divine personification that was worthy of one’s absolute obedience and worship, and the Holy Spirit was the energy a human person is given to obey.

By the early 1940s in *The Plain Truth*, the Holy Spirit appeared to be reduced to divine attributes; nonetheless, Armstrong was still maintaining the born again doctrine.

⁷¹ Ibid., 7. Again, in the June, 1938 edition of his publication *The Bulletin of the Churches of God*, Armstrong presents that believers are born again at baptism. See <http://www.giveshare.org/churchhistory/born%20again.htm> (accessed July 28, 2011).

⁷² Herbert W. Armstrong, “What *kind* of Faith is Required for salvation,” *The Plain Truth*, May-June 1941, 7.

⁷³ Armstrong had used the pronoun “He” to refer to the Holy Spirit in the 1930s. In the 1940s, there is an absence of use of pronouns to refer to the Holy Spirit—possibly indicating a transition in belief with some lingering uncertainty regarding what to do with John 15:26 and 16:13-14. In later decades, Armstrong and the WCG writers made dogmatic assertions that the pronoun “*it*” should be used to refer to the Holy Spirit.

In a December 28, 1945, coworker letter asking for money, he writes, “So, God's real born-again people GIVE of their tithes and offerings, freely, generous, even at SACRIFICE. . . .”⁷⁴ Until late 1945, Armstrong was teaching single-stage regeneration and not completely showing his hand whether he had any change in belief regarding the Personhood of the Holy Spirit.

However, within a year, Armstrong may have revisited and reused CG7 beliefs. For example, in the autumn of 1946, Armstrong argues that the Holy Spirit is “the very LIFE of God—the impregnating ‘germ,’ so to speak, of eternal life—the begetting of the life of GOD. We then compare to an unborn babe in its mother’s womb.”⁷⁵ The Christian must endure, work and grow until the resurrection: “Then, and not until then, shall we be FULLY BORN OF GOD. Then, and not until then, shall our CREATION be fully COMPLETED!”⁷⁶ Here it appears that Armstrong’s teaching on regeneration, which he had taught for over a decade, regresses: the new born babe in Christ re-entered the mother’s womb to become a fetus or an embryo.⁷⁷ Here the Spirit will decrease in status while the believer will eventually increase.

In 1948, the *Fundamentals of Belief, Radio Church of God* was presented, which states as the third article of faith, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of God and of Christ Jesus; the power of God with which all things were created and made; that thru the Holy Spirit, God is everywhere present; that the Holy Spirit is divine Love, Faith, Understanding, Power, Joy and all the attributes of God -- the Spirit of life eternal.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Herbert W. Armstrong, “S E R I O U S and U R G E N T,” Co-worker Letter, December 28, 1945, 3.

⁷⁵ Herbert W. Armstrong, “What is the PURPOSE being Worked out Here Below,” *The Plain Truth*, November-December 1946, 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ By extension of the metaphor, the unbeliever would then be an ovum.

⁷⁸ “Fundamentals of Belief, Radio Church of God” 1948, <http://www.giveshare.org/library/hwa/fundamentals.html>. (accessed July 28, 2011). We may contrast this de-Personalizing of the Holy Spirit with a one of the following statements in the same document: “We believe Satan is a personality.” There are many similarities between this document and the 1931 document “Fundamentals of Belief of the Messenger Publishing Association”—at times the 1948 document looks copied from the 1931 document; however, the greatest differences are the rescinding of the beliefs concerning the one God in three Persons and the Personhood of the Holy Spirit.

Some of the prior literature in the 1940s that mentioned the Holy Spirit hinted to what this dogmatic statement makes clear: the Holy Spirit is an attribute of God rather than a divine Person. This statement cleared the way for the later attack on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Essential to understanding the theology of Armstrong is the fact that he did an *ad hoc* theology from below, an anthropomorphic and anthropocentric theology. Armstrong was a very practical businessman, and he was not so much interested in who God is as what He is doing below. The present purpose of man was having a perfected character, and the means of achieving this was law keeping. The Holy Spirit's de-personalized role is making God's character in man. Armstrong's pneumatology does not develop beyond this understanding. What develops is this high anthropology of *The Incredible Human Potential*, the title of his penultimate book.

Armstrong had opened Ambassador College in 1947 to prepare people to serve in the WCG. The professors and students were eager to follow Armstrong's teachings. By the 1950s, these people, whom we will call Armstrongists, were becoming the ministers and leaders under Armstrong. They started to develop and systematize Armstrong's thinking into Armstrongism.⁷⁹ Armstrong was not interested in theology, but some of them were.⁸⁰ Everything that was published had to have his approval, and it seems that he must have agreed with how they further explained his basic ideas.

⁷⁹ "Fundamentals of Belief, Radio Church of God" 1948, <http://www.giveshare.org/library/hwa/fundamentals.html>. (accessed July 28, 2011). This document *Fundamentals of Belief, Radio Church of God* may suggest the influence of these Armstrongists to systematize Armstrong's beliefs. For close to twenty years, since his work with Taylor on "the Fundamentals of Belief of the Messenger Publishing Ass'n" in *The Messenger of Truth*, Armstrong had not published any systematic presentation of his fundamental beliefs. The two titles and much of the content suggest some congruity; however, we may speculate that the influence of others—as earlier with Taylor—helped craft an early Armstrongism here.

⁸⁰ Kyriacos J. Stavrinos was a professor of Classics and Philosophy at Ambassador College and a close friend and advisor to Herbert Armstrong; he recalls Armstrong's approach to theology, "Herbert W Armstrong did not profess any exposure to theology. He was a salesman with an interest in practical matters, leaving theological refinements to experts that enjoyed delving into them. For him, Christianity was 'a way of life.' The debates that shook the ante-Nicene church were unknown to him. Neither did he ever take the time (from activities he considered more important), to gain theological insight. One might be tempted to respond by saying that his views still can amount to the heretical kind of binitarianism, whether he realized it or not. In such a case, the charge must be based on his writings. But this is unacceptable,

In the late 1940s, Armstrong's Christology became clarified as more orthodox; ironically, around the same time, his anthropology and pneumatology became more heterodox. The Son is firmly solidified in the bitheistic Godhead with the Father, but the Holy Spirit is spiritualized, evaporated to make room for others. For example, the Armstrongists interpreted the Hebrew term Elohim as a "uniplural noun" that meant the family or kingdom of God. Elohim is composed of two members, at present, the Father and the Son; however, the Holy Spirit is "the LIFE, CHARACTER, AND POWER of God....Christ and God the Father are ONE God, *not two Gods*—one 'Elohim' said 'Let US make man in OUR image' (Gen. 1:26)."⁸¹ None of the Armstrongists were trained scholars of Hebrew, yet they appear to carry Armstrong's transforming premises, based on their understanding, toward a logical conclusion: if God is begetting in humans His character and nature, if humans are made in the image and likeness of God, and if Elohim is a God-family; then, at the resurrection, humans must be born as God, Elohim.

Over the next several decades, the Elohim doctrine gained central place in WCG teaching. In the April 1974 edition of *the Good News*, Robert L. Kuhn gives a quasi-scientific classification or definition of God, "... 'God' is the family *name* of the eternally creating class of beings who have designed, are sustaining and will forever rule *all reality* – spiritual and physical reality, known and unknown reality, reality that does exist and reality that does not yet exist."⁸² This teaching is in line with teachings since

because his writings were not a systematic presentation of anything in theology, neither were they intended for such a strange purpose. To ascribe the heresy of binitarianism to him is to create an artificial specter around the man, so as to attack him, and a Christian must not do this. His motive for writing was always some practical goal, never what a theologian might be interested in." Kyriacos J. Stavrinides, email message to author, June 28, 2011.

⁸¹ "IS Jesus God?" *The Plain Truth*, February 1950, 3. This article gives a fairly orthodox Christology, "He (Jesus) is EQUAL with God (Col. 2:6). He is *called* God, (Jude 24-25; Titus 2: 10, 13). Therefore, He is God" (3). There is no author listed in a by-line of this article; however, another article "Should Christians Tithe?" that appears in the same edition has Armstrong's name in the by-line. It may be safe to assume that the anonymous article on Christology was not written by Armstrong, who was interested in other matters.

⁸²Robert L. Kuhn, "The God Family," *The Good News*, April 1974, 10. Kuhn holds a doctorate in anatomy/brain research and, currently, is the host of the PBS program *Closer to Truth: Science, Meaning and the Future* (<http://www.pbs.org/kcet/closetotruth/about/kuhn.html>). In the above quotes, we briefly observe his scientific hermeneutic to theology, anthropology, ontology and epistemology.

the 1950s that in the primordial realm, God not only has a family but, more significantly, is a family: Father and Son, who are eternally self-existent beings. However, Kuhn—like other WCG writers—does not define what a divine family means; rather, as the article displays, he assumes that it is the same as a human family. Then Kuhn goes on to state that the believer has a place in that definition, “That’s what we are heir to. The family of God! *Everything! Forever!*”⁸³ Believers are heirs to everything: they are to become the same class of being as, thus equal to, God the Father and the Son. This was God’s *telos* for human beings at creation.

In Kuhn’s article, we see a high anthropology with some subtle distinctions between God and human beings:

We were born for the express purpose of literally becoming equal with the Creator of the universe—members in the same eternally ruling God-family Kingdom . . . We are *not* saying that human beings will *become* God the Father or *become* Jesus Christ. That would be utterly ridiculous. God the Father *is* God the Father and Jesus Christ *is* Jesus Christ. And nobody else can ‘become’ them. What we *are* saying is that human beings will become members of *the same God family* – composed of the same Spirit, doing the same Work and living the same level of life as are God the Father and Jesus Christ. But we will not lose our unique awareness and our individual personalities. . . . When mankind is promised to be made ‘equal with God,’ that, of course, means that individual human beings will eventually become *qualitatively* equal with God – and obviously does *not* mean that individual human beings will eventually become *quantitatively* equal with either God the Father or Jesus Christ. Being ‘equal with God’ only means that we will be in the same family as the Father and Christ are in -- and has nothing to do with the equality of power, authority, intelligence, etc., *within* the God family. In other words those people who will be changed ‘in the twinkling of an eye’ (I Cor.

⁸³ Ibid.

15:52) will share the same exact *qualities* of life which today are only possessed by God the Father and Jesus Christ. For example, one of God's *qualities* is that He has inherent life – He generates *eternal life intrinsically within Himself*. Because *God is life*. 'For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself...' (John 5:26). Consequently, since the two original Beings in the God family created all mankind to grow to become *qualitatively* like themselves, when we individual human beings are changed into new, individual *God-Beings*, we, too, will generate eternal life *intrinsically* within ourselves (John 7:39; 4:14; 3:16; 6:47; etc.). But, *quantitatively*, man will *never* equal God the Creator; just as surely as *God the Spokesman* (Jesus Christ) will Himself never, quantitatively, equal the Father (John 14:28). These two original Beings in the God family will always remain in overall command. Their absolute authority will never be in question – although they will delight in sharing progressively more of their responsibility with their offspring as the God family continues to expand throughout space and time.⁸⁴

This is perhaps the most nuanced position that the WCG took on the issue of the image of God and human potentiality. However, this distinction of qualitative and quantitative equality would surely have been lost on the WCG readers.⁸⁵ Kuhn, like Armstrong and

⁸⁴ Ibid., 10-11. This view is has some similarity to the Mormon view of humans becoming gods.

⁸⁵ It may be lost on Kuhn himself since he does not define quantitative equality other than a subordinationalist, apophatic presentation that the Son is not equal to the Father quantitatively in power and authority. There are, nevertheless, some parallels of Kuhn's views of human *telos* and the Eastern Church's view of *theosis*. There seems to be some core materials that Kuhn expresses that are not dissimilar with much of traditional Christian theological anthropology. Perhaps, he uses some different terms but there seems to be commonality in the concept of sonship. Karl Barth adopts and develops Søren Kierkegaard's idea of the infinite qualitative difference between God and man: "We must first be clear that there can be no question of a conformity which means equality, of anything in the nature of a deification of man, of making him a second Christ. The correspondence which alone can be considered in this connexion cannot and will not mean abolition of 'the infinite qualitative difference' between God and man. It is a question of responsibility and therefore of a correspondence in which God and man are in clear and inflexible antithesis. It is a question of displaying the image of God, and not of the creation of a second God in human form, or of a mixing or changing of the human form into the one divine form. It is a question of the eternal life of the creature as such. Whatever the action demanded of us may be, it will be our action, a human action. It will have to attest and confirm the great acts of God; but it will not be able to continue or repeat them. The covenant, the partnership remains, but there is no development of an identity between

the Armstrongists, calls the Father and Son two divine ‘Beings.’ Again, the term Beings implies a bitheistic separation: they are only united by their familial relationship, and they lack perichoretic unity of divine life. Kuhn believes that what the Father and Son share in common, the Spirit, will be shared with glorified human beings in the God family. To support this point, Kuhn lists four passages from the Gospel of John—along with an “etc.”—and without engaging in any exegesis. He claims each believer will have self-generating eternal life in and of him/herself. However, none of the stated passages confirm that the believer has or will have self-generating existence.⁸⁶ None of the passages make the believer the “I Am who I Am”—the self-existent God. Instead, the scriptures cited tend to refer to eternal life as a gift of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the glorified believer will still have a relationship of dependence on God. Since Kuhn, in true WCG form, assumes that the Holy Spirit is not a specific Person but an abstract life force or attribute of God, the believer can also freely partake of it. Again, none of these scriptures promise that *anthropos* can become *theos*.

God and man. In face of the action of man the great acts of God will always be what they and they alone are. Jesus Christ will reign and man will be subject to Him and they will always be different in and in spite of the closest fellowship between Him and His imitators. There will be no more Christs. No second or third person will be able to come with the promise and claim: ‘I am he!’ According to Mk. 13⁵ and Mt. 24⁵, only ‘deceivers’ will be able to say this of themselves. . . . Even in the kingdom of perfection this relationship will be maintained. Then we shall ‘see face to face.’ What constitutes the contradiction and the pain of this opposition will be taken away. Tears and suffering and crying and death will be no more. But even then we shall not be gods, let alone God Himself. There can certainly be no question of our being or becoming this now.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, trans. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 577-578.

⁸⁶ A distinction should be made between having eternal life as an extrinsic gift and having it as an intrinsic essence. To have it intrinsically would make the believer in some way an independent Being in the God family, no longer absolutely dependent on the Father and the Son for one’s life. If the Holy Spirit is a Person and not a mere possession or unifying force, then the idea of our having self-generating life becomes meaningless. In orthodox pneumatology, the Spirit gives life; the Holy Spirit possesses the believer not vice-versa. The glorified human being will never have life in and of him/herself. Life is always a gift of God. The often quoted proof text 2 Peter 1:4 cannot be read in isolation; human persons may be partakers of the divine nature, but this is a gift given from the glory and goodness of God. It is something that is inherited not something that is inherent. It is the privilege of sharing in the life of the true image of God, Jesus Christ.

2.2.2 The Pagan Trinity

The doctrine of the nature of God had not been addressed specifically in the WCG's early literature. The doctrine of the Trinity, however, was the central doctrine of 'Churchianity.' In a *Good News* magazine article of February 1939, Armstrong mentions the Trinity in passing while writing on the origins of the Roman church's government:

It came out of BABYLON! Spiritual BABYLON---that is, ROME! The same as nearly all other false doctrines of Satan. In the early 4th Century, Constantine, the Emperor, who officially started SUNDAY observance in the Western World, saw his Empire in danger of disintegrating. At the time a great controversy was raging among the leaders of Christianity, over Dr. Arius' doctrine concerning the origin of Christ, as opposed to the Trinity doctrine.⁸⁷

Here, as elsewhere in WCG literature, we see a deficit in understanding of Church history, specifically regarding the issues of Sunday observance and the theology of the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.). Armstrong, although at times a supporter of Arius, is more concerned with the idea of false church governance and Sunday worship than with the doctrine of the nature of God. One must infer from the context of the article that the doctrine of the Trinity is pagan. It is mentioned nowhere else in his discussion.

Although the early literature of Armstrong demonstrates that all these churches are wrong on a wide variety of other issues (Sunday, holidays, church governance, born again), he neglects one of the foundational issues of Christian doctrine: the Trinity. This omission could not have been easily passed over by the students of Armstrong as they start to work within the rubric of a bitheistic theology and later expand its margins.

In 1953, the writers started polemics regarding the doctrine by recycling the methods of Armstrong's earlier polemics against doctrines of other churches. Their

⁸⁷ Herbert W. Armstrong. "Did Christ Reorganize the Church?," *The Good News*, February 1939, 14. Available from [http://www.herbert-w-armstrong.org/Miscellaneous/HWA%20Letters%201934-1986%20\(searchable%20text\).pdf](http://www.herbert-w-armstrong.org/Miscellaneous/HWA%20Letters%201934-1986%20(searchable%20text).pdf) This is a synthesis of the teachings of the CG7 from Dugger and Dodd's 1935 book, *A History of the True Church*.

conclusion was grounded in the sediment of Armstrong's theologizing regarding paganism, which had been recycled from his Quaker and CG7 past. The writers' presuppositions revolved around what they were seeing as the apostolic identity of Armstrong, which they juxtaposed with pseudo-apostolicity of other churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church: Babylon. Since the conclusion of the pagan origins of the doctrine of the Trinity already had been inferred by Armstrong in the literature—and most likely addressed at Ambassador College—the writers appear to develop their arguments on this ground. The first direct attack on the Trinity comes in 1954, when Ambassador College Professor C. Paul Meredith posits, “Note now that the pagans made the Holy Spirit a *Being* such as the Father and Son. They wrongly *made a Trinity*. SATAN WAS CONFUSING MANKIND.”⁸⁸ In this and other WCG writings, the specific target of attack is not on the Personhood of the Father and of the Son but on the Personhood of the Holy Spirit. The Armstrongist WCG writers claim the reason for Satan was confusing man was that he had failed in his attempt to dethrone God; the Devil was aware of the plan to create humans in God's image so that they could become born into the God family. Satan jealously tried to confuse people to think that they do not have the potential to become part of the God family, Elohim; thus, Satan created the doctrine of the “closed Trinity,” which is limited to three in the Godhead and no more. The writers' method is literally to demonize the doctrine of the Trinity, especially the Personhood of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁹ Their method also quotes specious sources and misquoted or partially quoted credible sources to find the doctrine's pagan roots, attributing syncretism to Roman Catholic tradition. The Armstrongists dismiss the

⁸⁸ C. Paul Meredith, “Today's Religious Doctrines...how did They Begin,” *The Plain Truth*, February-March 1954, 11. This same article calls the Father and the Son “two beings with a common Spirit.” This demonstrates a confusion of the terms of the doctrine of the Trinity, which differentiates the terms ‘being’ and ‘Person.’ In the WCG literature—to add to this author's credibility—he was referred to as Dr. C. Paul Meredith, Ambassador College Professor, but he was a doctor of veterinary medicine; this latter fact was not widely publicized.

⁸⁹ The unpardonable sin was a major concern in for Armstrong and the Armstrongists. However, one must wonder whether they fully considered attributing the Personhood of the Holy Spirit to a work of the devil in this light.

doctrine as a false doctrine without looking at other sources and giving a full, fair reading to the whole issue.

One of the sources that the writers begin to use in the 1950s is *The Two Babylons: Papal Worship Revealed to be the Worship of Nimrod and His Wife*. This book was written in the 1850s by Alexander Hislop, a Free Church of Scotland minister. He was a resolute anti-papist—not unlike Luther and many other Protestants—and his book reflects that fact. Other than the Bible, this book is cited, whether overtly or covertly, in the WCG literature in the 1950s through 1980s more than any other non-WCG literature. The irony is that the WCG writers would use the argument “the Trinity is not in the Bible” and that one should “only believe what the Bible says,” and then in the same articles—and sometimes in the next paragraph or column—cite *The Two Babylons* as if it were as infallible as Scripture. The material contained in the book is almost completely extra-biblical, with some scriptures thrown in as proof-texts. The WCG appropriation of the book was consistent with its earlier claims, that the Babylonian religion is now the Roman Catholic Church along with her harlot Protestant daughters.⁹⁰ Hislop postulates that the Roman Catholic religion can be traced back to its ancient ancestor: Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-12). C. Paul Meredith continues to build his argument on Hislop’s foundation:

At that very early period, an important change took place in regard to the divinity: the Spirit of God, according to the harlot-queen Semiramis, became incarnate in a *human mother*, and the Divine Son became the fruit of that incarnation (*Hislop*, p. 18). ...Semiramis identified herself as this Spirit and ascribed to herself the power of deification, she taught her followers that *she*, in one of her forms, had been the *dove*—a symbol of the Spirit that moved or ‘fluttered’... ‘on the face of the waters’ (Gen. 1:2). *Hislop*, p. 303. She claimed to be one of the ‘Trinity’, she had

⁹⁰ Hislop may have believed this about the Roman Church but not all of the Protestant churches, since he was a Free Church of Scotland minister.

become ‘as the Gods.’ ... It is becoming clear, isn’t it, that there was a plan behind these pagan similarities!”⁹¹

At times the WCG writers trace the origins of the pagan doctrine of the Trinity through the Roman Catholic Church and at other times the Masons, depending on which group was being polemicized.⁹² What the Armstrongists purposefully neglect to quote is Hislop’s conclusion regarding the similarities between the Trinity and triads in other religions: “While overlaid with idolatry, the recognition of a Trinity was universal in all the ancient nations of the world, proving how deep-rooted in the human race was the primeval doctrine on this subject, which comes out so distinctly in Genesis”⁹³ Hislop does not present that the religions of Semiramis and of other pagans created the Trinity; rather they copied and perverted the original true faith. The unstated thinking of the Armstrongists must have been that Hislop was a minister who believed in the Trinity—thus his conclusion was invalid—nonetheless, the majority of his other findings were valid.⁹⁴

In the 1960s, there were many articles in the WCG literature developing the theory of pagan origins of other churches and their doctrines. The pedigrees of the false

⁹¹ C. Paul Meredith, “Today’s Religious Doctrines...how did They Begin,” *The Plain Truth*, February-March 1954, 12.

⁹² See Jack R. Elliot, “What Church Members should know about MASONRY,” *The Good News*, May 1959, 6-9.

⁹³ Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons or Papal Worship: Proved to be the Worship of Nimrod and His Wife* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1959), 18.

⁹⁴ Moreover, in these same articles the Armstrongists were fond attributing false doctrines to the “counterfeiter,” Satan. An Armstrongist writes, “... remember, Satan has a cheap COUNTERFEIT ... Don’t forget that a counterfeit appears to be genuine to an unskilled person. It usually takes a skilled counterfeit detector to discern the make-believe imitation.” Raymond F. McNair, “Can the Devil Heal?,” *The Plain Truth*, August 1953, 14. However, for a doctrine to be a counterfeit doctrine, it must be based on some genuine fact, and this is Hislop’s point that triads in other religions are based on the truth of the eternal Triune God. At the same time, we should note that much of Hislop’s book written in 1858 lacks credible historical scholarship. See Ralph Woodrow’s “THE TWO BABYLONS: A Case Study in Poor Methodology.” Available from <http://newprotestants.com/2babylons.htm>. Woodrow was an ardent supporter of Hislop’s theory and wrote his own book *Babylon Mystery Religion* in 1966 further developing those ideas. However, Woodrow came to see his and Hislop’s errors and has publicly redressed them.

church in the New Testament era were genetically traced back to Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24), who thought he could buy the power to give the Holy Spirit from the Apostles. This Simon was said to have moved to Rome, where he—not Simon Peter—founded the Roman Catholic Church. Further, Simon was the High Priest promoting the Babylonian religion of Semiramis. The doctrines of the Trinity and the Personhood of the Holy Spirit were just two doctrines in the panoply of ancient pagan beliefs.

The Armstrongists' methodology was to use what they deemed as being important from sources while ignoring what they judged as insignificant. This was a reflection of Armstrong's hermeneutic toward Scripture, "For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little" (Is. 28:10, NKJV). As Armstrong came to believe in his early months of Bible study in 1926-1927, Scripture is like a jigsaw puzzle to be taken apart and put back together. This could be said of the Armstrongists' reading of Hislop and other sources as well. In these cases, however, the puzzle was missing some major pieces.

By their proof-texting, the WCG writers position themselves in the camp of their fourth century ancestors the Pneumatomachi (enemies of the Spirit), attacking the divine hypostasis of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁵ The writers seemed oblivious to this particular antecedent of their reasoning; they had a very general knowledge of church history and used it

⁹⁵ I am indebted to my thesis advisor, David Reed, for the insight that ancient and modern heresies have both similarities and differences. This is true with the ancient Pneumatomachi and the Armstrongist neo-Pneumatomachi. The ancient Pneumatomachi "...believed that the Spirit was a power or an instrument of God that had been created in order to act in us and the world" (Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 74). The ancient Pneumatomachi, transferring Arius' methods regarding the Son onto the Spirit, allowed for the hypostatic status of the Holy Spirit but reduced it to a created being, an angel, or power. Conversely, the Armstrongist neo-Pneumatomachi attacked the Holy Spirit by reducing He to *it*, what theologians call the divine *ousia*. Both groups attacked the integrity of the Trinity, attempting to reduce it to two Persons: the Father and the Son. The ancient group tried to separate the hypostasis of Holy Spirit from the *ousia* of Christ and the Father whereas the modern group attempted to transform a distinct divine hypostasis, the Holy Spirit, into the *ousia*. Nevertheless, the bitheism of the Armstrongists had a separateness that the Trinity does not have. The Father and the Son were thought of as separate not just 'persons' but 'Beings' and this theology allowed that human beings may also become God beings, who are united in the family of God by the Holy Spirit. However, there is no *perichoresis* in the union. The Spirit flows through these separate, individual beings in the family—much like a source of electricity flowing into various outlets in a home.

carelessly. As the Armstrongists had done in the past, they gave a tendentious interpretation of the history of ‘the false Church,’ especially church councils linking them to the influence of pagan emperors and replacing this history with a new history of ‘the true Church.’⁹⁶

One of the Armstrongists’ methods of attacking the Trinity was used by other anti-trinitarian groups, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, stating that the word “Trinity” is not in the Bible.⁹⁷ The Armstrongists then cited various Catholic and Protestant writers who claimed the doctrine of the Trinity was ultimately impossible to understand: it was a “mystery.” This was interpreted to mean that these people do not know what they are talking about. Then the Armstrongists insert a proof text—the main one was “God is not the author of confusion” (I Cor. 14:13)—to demonstrate that the doctrine is confused and thus false. Moreover, the term Holy Ghost is lampooned: “To begin with, the word ‘Ghost’ should be translated ‘Spirit.’ When the King James Version of the Bible was translated in 1611, people firmly believed in ghosts. Due to this fact, the words which should have been translated ‘Holy Spirit’ were translated ‘Holy Ghost,’ thus giving this

⁹⁶ There was an ostensible contradiction between statements in the WCG. The denomination held a primitivist and restorationist ecclesiology. The main idea was that the primitive church of Acts was the ideal, but the Holy Spirit left the church somewhere between from the fifties to sixties A.D. (this was linked to the dating of when Galatians turned to a different gospel, Gal. 1:6-7) and only started a restored work again with Armstrong in at the start of his ministry: “From the year 1931, exactly 1,900 years (a century of time cycles) from the foundation of the Church, this small remnant of the original true Church of God began to take on new life as the Philadelphia era... This era of the Church was to produce fruit...” Herbert W. Armstrong, *Mystery of the Ages* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985), 289. Although the WCG was exclusivist in its ecclesiology toward other churches in the twentieth century, there was an attempt to show continuity in true Church history—the true Church had continual remnants; they were the Seven Churches in Revelation 2 and 3, with Armstrong’s Church being Philadelphia. Among these remnant churches were groups like the Paulicians, Bogomils, Cathars, Waldenses, Albigensians, Lollards and Anabaptists, Seventh Day Baptists, Adventists (i.e., what were thought to be Sabbath-keeping groups); see Herman L. Hoeh’s “Amazing 2000-Year History of the Church of God” *The Good News*, July 1953, 2-8. This information was taken from the CG7’s Dugger and Dodd in their 1935 book *A History of the True Church*.

⁹⁷ In *The Plain Truth* of July 1953, Armstrong wrote an article answering some readers’ questions titled: “NO! I NEVER [sic] WAS A “JEHOVAH WITNESS” OR A 7TH DAY ADVENTIST.” In this article he claims, “I did not learn any of God’s TRUTH from the ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses’ sect. I have, of course, read some of their writings and their books, and I have been glad to find that they have certain truths, as all sects and denominations have (though mixed with dangerous errors), but God had already revealed these truths to me long before I read of them in their literature” (6). It is interesting how Armstrong calls the Jehovah’s Witnesses a sect, but his movement the Church.

most sacred word a wrong connotation.”⁹⁸ There is no scholarly attempt to analyse the etymology of the term; rather, by association, the doctrine of the Personhood of the Holy Spirit is caricatured as a superstition, like believing in ghosts.

The straw-figure arguments were furthered by refuting the possible trinitarian interpretations of certain scriptures. The Armstrongists seemed oblivious to the fact that the Tropici (‘the trope mongers’) of the fourth century had made the argument that any reference to the Holy Spirit as a divine person was a mere trope or figure of speech.⁹⁹ Like their ancient predecessors, the Armstrongists utilized the figure of speech argument; however, they went further than the Tropici, preferring to interpret any Scripture that may contain literal personal actions of the Holy Spirit as being personification. Thus, the Holy Spirit was not even an angelic spirit but an impersonal spiritual force. This hermeneutic closed off any serious exegesis of the passages.¹⁰⁰ For example, Ted Armstrong and David John Hill’s article postulates that the Holy Spirit’s act of begetting Jesus (Matt. 1:18, 20) is a personification, for if the Holy Spirit were a person, he would be the Father

⁹⁸ Ted Armstrong and David John Hill, “Who-What-was Jesus before His Human Birth?,” *The Good News*, January 1953, 3. One of the authors of this article was Armstrong’s son Garner Ted. However, Herbert W. Armstrong used the term Holy Ghost some in his early writings (cf. Herbert W. Armstrong *The Plain Truth*, “Tongues? Is the PENTECOST EXPERIENCE BEING Repeated Today?,” November 1934, 1).

⁹⁹ Stanley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Tradition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 95. The Tropici were Pneumatomachi (enemies of the Spirit); they believed that the Holy Spirit was “the greatest of creatures, a ministering spirit, and differing from angels only in rank” (Ibid., 94-95).

¹⁰⁰ Such a study should have revealed the facts of the texts. Here are a few examples, the Holy Spirit has a Personal ego an “I” who speaks and sends (Acts 10: 19-20; 13:2-4). In Acts 15:28, there is an obvious parallelism between the Holy Spirit and the apostles: “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials.” Both make a decision—there does not appear to be a transition from one being figurative and the other literal. The whole form of the letter to the church in Antioch is simple prose. The personal parallelism continues in John 15:26–27 where the Spirit will bear witness to Christ just as the disciples will bear witness to Christ. In an article for the Christian Research Institute addressing a WCG splinter group’s claims of personification for the Holy Spirit, Leland Ryken writes, “Throughout these passages in John 15 and 16, Jesus ascribes the same or similar personal actions to the Holy Spirit as He does to the disciples or even Himself (e.g., I will go/He will come; I have things to say/He will speak). It would be very strange to ascribe these personal actions in the same way and in the same statement to real persons and to a personification.” Leland Ryken, “Is the Holy Spirit a Personification?” JAI009, Christian Research Institute (24 July 2009), <http://www.equip.org/articles/is-the-holy-spirit-a-personification-> (accessed August 1, 2011).

of Jesus.¹⁰¹ However, this reasoning assumes that divine begetting is the same as human begetting, which is yet another example of theologizing from below.¹⁰²

The Armstrongists method continues where scriptures expressing or implying Triunity of the Godhead are ignored while others that support the WCG cause are emphasized. Key scriptures that could not be ignored to support the Trinity had to be critiqued. Many articles critiquing the Personhood of the Holy Spirit in John 14-16 have a subsection heading “A Lesson in Greek Grammar.” Here the Armstrongists attempt to teach the reader a lesson on gender and pronoun reference. Sadly, the Armstrongists were not scholars of *Koine* Greek—they had merely been taught how to use lexicons and other general linguistic tools at Ambassador College—otherwise they would have known there is a problem with pronoun reference in the text of John 16:13-14.¹⁰³

The writers also quickly dismiss 1 John 5:7 (the so-called Johannine comma) as an interpolation by a trinitarian monk in the Middle Ages. The irony here is that one of the main groups through which the WCG traced its “true church” lineage—the Waldensians—had the Johannine comma in their translation of the Bible.¹⁰⁴

The key Scripture that could not be ignored was Matthew 28:19, especially since it had always had a central role in the WCG baptismal ceremony. However, this verse was dismissed as having a trinitarian interpretation by saying that the three are not necessarily three Persons: two definitely are beings, but the third is not necessarily so. The argument is made that believers are baptized into (εἰς, *eis*) the name of the Father and

¹⁰¹ Ted Armstrong and David John Hill, “Who-What-was Jesus before His Human Birth?” 3.

¹⁰² It is interesting to note that Muslims use an anthropomorphic reasoning—although coming from a different angle—related to the begetting of Jesus. They hold that begetting is an animal act that is beneath the transcendent dignity of Allah; therefore, Allah does not beget or have a son. Both the Muslim and the Armstrongists’ arguments regarding begetting work from anthropomorphic and anti-trinitarian presuppositions.

¹⁰³ In John 16:13-14, the evangelist appears to purposefully break grammatical rules by using ἐκεῖνος (masculine demonstrative pronoun) in apposition to refer to τὸ πνεῦμα (neuter noun: the Spirit). This linguistic irregularity has a semantic purpose: it is done to make a commentary about the nature of God. Earlier, in John 15:26 there may be a foreshadowing of this ostensible pronoun reference error.

¹⁰⁴ Russell Standish and Colin Standish, *Modern Bible Translations Unmasked* (Rapidan, VA: Hartland Publications, 1996), 123, 125.

the Son (two Persons) and the Holy Spirit (the nature or the family). This exegesis of the baptismal formula made a convenient transition to the explanation of what the Holy Spirit is (power, mind, substance, and essence of God) and what the incredible human potential is—to become God. The Holy Spirit is demoted in personal status and the believer is promoted in status. The reasoning behind the demotion of the Holy Spirit was based on the writers’ theological and anthropological presuppositions. The doctrine of the Trinity limited God to “a closed Trinity”¹⁰⁵—only three are in the Godhead. With the Holy Spirit made a non-Person but a power, the Godhead was opened up by using the *Elohim* argument. Baptism was when a human was begotten into the family. The human potential was to become equal to God—though there was some explanation that God is eternal and that humans had a beginning—but the key idea was that God was an increasing family that would grow into billions of Gods who were under the Father and slightly under the Son.¹⁰⁶ This semi-subordinationism undoubtedly appealed to the egos of those who subscribed to this doctrine. The articles against this “closed Trinity” provided a caricature of the doctrine of the Trinity and did not seriously engage in any critical, scholarly reflection on traditional Christian theology and soteriology. The Armstrongists were trained neither as exegetes nor as theologians. They did not engage the actual issues with any significant scholarship, and for the most part the intended audience of the articles were swayed by the writers’ reasoning.

From the 1950s until the late 1980s there was a recycling of old articles and arguments regarding the Trinity and the Person of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁷ It is important to note that Armstrong was not the author of the only lengthy publication in his

¹⁰⁵ This is a slogan used by most of the Armstrongist writers. It was sometimes accompanied by a graphic of an equilateral triangle, attempting to visually demonstrate the closed nature of this doctrine. See C. Paul Meredith, “Today’s Religious Doctrines...how did They Begin” *The Plain Truth*, February-March 1954, 12.

¹⁰⁶ This is one example of several similarities between Armstrongism and Mormonism.

¹⁰⁷ Armstrong carried over his experience as a marketing man into his work as a minister by repackaging, rebranding and reselling the same goods as if they were something new. The Armstrongists also mastered this method. Perhaps the most comprehensive and influential article was Herman Hoeh’s “What is the Holy Spirit?” *The Plain Truth*, June 1956, 20-24. It was expanded and republished in a booklet, *Just What is the Holy Spirit?* Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1983.

denomination that addressed the question given in the booklet's title: *Is God a TRINITY?* This booklet finally addresses one of the central beliefs of “so-called Christianity.” It was written in 1973—forty years after the start of the WCG—by George L. Johnson. The booklet is for the most part a WCG theological recycling—with some additional historical references—put under one author and heading. However, the authorship of this book raises some important questions: did Armstrong not have the time or health while in his eighties to write such a booklet? Did he not have the interest or experience to address this doctrine? Why is this important issue not addressed by his denomination solely in a dedicated article, booklet or book until so late in his ministry?¹⁰⁸ Armstrong had many staff writers and ghost writers for his publications. However, he liked to position himself as the final authority on matters of great importance. Did he not feel the doctrine of the Trinity important enough for him to address personally—or even to place his name on the booklet and make Johnson a ghost writer? Perhaps having George L. Johnson, who was neither a leading author nor an ordained minister in the WCG but only a minor staff-writer, address the issue may have further trivialized the doctrine of the Trinity in the minds of some WCG ministers and members who were often concerned with the who's-who in the denomination.

Of Armstrong's three major theological books, only *The Mystery of the Ages*, specifically develops a response to the doctrine of the Trinity and of the Personhood of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the book merely recycles the methods and arguments of Johnson and other WCG writers. Armstrong calls the Trinity the doctrine of Babylon the great (Rev. 17:5) and believes, “The Trinity doctrine *limits* God to a supposed three Persons. It DESTROYS the very gospel of Jesus Christ! His gospel is the good news of the now soon-coming KINGDOM OF GOD—the only hope for this world and its mixed

¹⁰⁸ As we have seen, the doctrine of the Trinity is briefly mentioned in earlier literature but only in a fragmentary manner and in the context of other issues. It is important to reemphasize that Christmas, Easter and the Roman Catholic Church had been attacked in dedicated articles and booklets from early on in Armstrong's ministry.

¹⁰⁹ This book was published in 1985. Armstrong died in January 1986.

up mankind!”¹¹⁰ The gospel was not about the Person of Jesus.¹¹¹ It was about the true *Mystery of the Ages*—the title of Armstrong’s final book—humans becoming and ruling with God in His Kingdom. The potential of becoming a divine Being was of paramount importance, and the Holy Spirit being a divine Person was seen as a threat to this belief, especially one that was taken as a distinctive restored truth given to Herbert W. Armstrong. The argument against the Personhood of the Holy Spirit was based on Armstrong and the Armstrongists’ anthropomorphic and bitheistic presuppositions: the Holy Spirit cannot be God because *it* does not have an assigned role in the family of God like the Father and the Son.

The Systematic Theology Project (STP) was published in 1978, seven years prior to the publication of the *Mystery of the Ages*. The STP was the most succinct statement of the WCG’s consistent beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit and the Trinity:

- Holy Spirit (in Section I – Primary Doctrines)

It is the power of God, the mind of God and the extended means by which God accomplishes His work throughout the universe. As such, the Holy Spirit is not a separate being; it has no independent existence as an individual entity or person within the Godhead ... Yet God the Father and Jesus Christ are separate beings: each maintains His own distinct identity and independent existence; and each, therefore, utilizes His own ‘Spirit,’ though both the Father’s Spirit and Christ’s Spirit are an integral part of the common Holy Spirit” (STP p.1).

- Trinity (in Section VII - Traditional Christian Doctrines).

The concept of a closed or restricted Godhead composed of three persons – the

¹¹⁰ Herbert W. Armstrong, *Mystery of the Ages* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985), 51.

¹¹¹ Early in his ministry Armstrong—in an attempt to self-differentiate his church from others—makes the classic sectarian move by denouncing the ministers, message and power of other churches: “His [Satan’s] ministers are transformed *as* the ministers of righteousness, appearing AS the apostles of Christ! (II Cor. 11:13, 15). But they are preaching *another* Jesus, in the power of *another* spirit, and deceiving men with *another* Gospel than the true Gospel of the Kingdom which Christ brought and Paul and all the apostles preached.” Herbert W. Armstrong, “Why does God Permit this War?” *The Plain Truth*, September-October 1941, 3.

Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – is nonbiblical. The Godhead is a Family, presently revealed as composed of only the Father and the Son, which will eventually include all those who have been given salvation through Christ. The Holy Spirit is not a distinct person or individual entity but the power, mind and essence of God (p.5).¹¹²

The STP holds that the Father and the Son are separate beings that have distinct and independent Personal existences, which the Holy Spirit does not have. What is given here is a kind of polytheism not unlike the divine family of pagan gods, joined by some godlike essence or substance, in this case the non-personal Holy Spirit. There is also an apotheosis of believers given at the resurrection.

The Systematic Theology Project was produced by Garner Ted Armstrong and some other leading ministers at the WCG headquarters, including Lawrence Kuhn. However, after the document's release, Herbert W. Armstrong denounced it as “changing and watering down—making more liberal—many doctrines Christ had put into God's Church.”¹¹³ Nevertheless, this document aptly summarized or clarified these doctrines of the WCG, which it had held for over twenty years without changing or watering them down. Herbert Armstrong seems to react against his authority being threatened. His theology had always been an *ad hoc* construct, founded on his works-based soteriology.

¹¹² Quoted in Johannes Buchner, “The Worldwide Church of God: A study of its transformation in terms of K. Helmut Reich's theory of Relational and Contextual Reasoning” (PhD diss., University of Western Sydney, Australia, 2006), 5.3.

¹¹³ Herbert W. Armstrong, “And Now Christ Sets Church Back on Track Doctrinally.” *The Good News*. April 1979, 5. Joseph Tkach Jr., current president of Grace Communion International, addresses the issues between the Armstrongs, “The Systematic Theology Project (STP) was actually one of the most positive steps the WCG had ever taken. By this time several ministers in Pasadena were engaged in studying and systematically recording church doctrine under Garner Ted Armstrong's authority. Ted claims he had his father's blessing; Herbert Armstrong later said this was all done behind his back and while he was ‘out of town.’ The STP later became the target of those who were ‘loyal’ to Herbert W. Armstrong. Copies of the STP were trashed and destroyed. Ministers loyal to Herbert Armstrong claimed that the STP was a conspiratorial plot to change ‘everything’ Mr. Armstrong taught. Of course any examination and detailed study will raise questions. For a brief period of time in the midseventies, we (WCG) began to liberalize a number of prohibitions regarding dress, use of cosmetics, and several other minor issues. But the charges against the STP were effective, with some ministers claiming that the Systematic Theology Project in fact more accurately stood for Slowly Turning Protestant.” Joseph Tkach Jr., *Transformed by Truth* (Colorado Springs, Co: Multnomah: 1997), 175.

A move at systematizing could reveal flaws, but more importantly, it implied that he was unsystematic in his thinking. He assumed that this meant the STP writers believed that Christ and the Holy Spirit were not completely guiding Armstrong in revelation of truth. He had been threatened by these “liberals,” especially his son who shortly thereafter was disfellowshipped.¹¹⁴ From 1978, the father Armstrong reigned alone over his WCG.

2.2.3 Doctrine of the Church

Early in administering his own church, Armstrong claimed to follow the congregational form of governance, an import from CG7. In the February-April 1939 edition of *The Good News Magazine*, Armstrong wrote an article “Did Christ Reorganize the Church” that gives his beliefs on the church being a spiritual organism comprised of saints led by the Holy Spirit. The article presents the marks of true versus false church governance:

All authority and power to rule is limited solely to each LOCAL congregation. But there is NO BIBLE AUTHORITY for any super-government, or organization with authority over the local congregations!... Thus was CHURCH GOVERNMENT introduced into the Western world a century after Constantine (the ‘BEAST’) injected the idea of church BOARDS to decide what doctrines the rest of the church must believe. And thus the very PRINCIPLE of CHURCH GOVERNMENT becomes THE IMAGE TO THE BEAST!¹¹⁵

Here we may see some sediment of Armstrong’s Quaker past, which looked to the church as a society rather than a pagan institution.

¹¹⁴ There seems to be some parallel here: Herbert Armstrong lost his ministerial credentials in the CG7 apparently over doctrinal disagreements and his son Garner Ted was disfellowshipped from the WCG apparently over perceived doctrinal disagreements. However, in either case, there was an underlying issue of governance causing schism.

¹¹⁵ Herbert W. Armstrong, “Did Christ Reorganize the Church?,” *The Good News*, February 1939, 6, <http://www.servantsnews.com/PDF/hwa39g02.pdf> (accessed July 29, 2011).

However, as possibly an attempt to separate his sect from the weak CG7, Armstrong's view of governance changed in the following decade. The structure of Armstrong's governance started to reflect the Roman Catholic Church, "THE IMAGE OF THE BEAST." In 1957 Garner Ted Armstrong, Herbert's son, described the chain of command; at the top was "The one whom God has placed as the Apostle and General Pastor: Herbert W. Armstrong" and underneath him were, in descending order of rank: evangelists (Garner Ted Armstrong was among this small group), pastors, preaching elders, local elders, deacons, deaconesses and laity.¹¹⁶ Herbert Armstrong's gospel becomes one of governance and law: "The Gospel of Christ is CHRIST'S OWN GOSPEL—not a story *about* His Person!...But there can be no GOVERNMENT without LAWS, and so the TRUE GOSPEL also must proclaim the LAW of God, which alone can bring peace to the world and success, happiness and joy to the individual."¹¹⁷ WCG members were forbidden to evangelize; this was the role of Armstrong, a few evangelists and the WCG media. Also members were forbidden to hold church meetings or Bible studies; this was the role of an ordained WCG minister. There was often an impersonal distance between each level of people in the WCG hierarchy.

Armstrong's control of the WCG went largely unchallenged until 1970, when some WCG ministers began to leave the denomination. Armstrong felt his power was threatened by his son Garner Ted and other "liberal" ministers, who had published the STP. Armstrong disfellowshipped many of these men, including his son. Armstrong tried to "get the church back on track" by further asserting his autocratic control. The earthly parallel of bitheist subordinationalism in governance had been broken as the Armstrongs, father and son, each were heading up their own churches.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Garner Ted Armstrong, "How God calls His Ministers," *The Good News*, September 1957, 11. Garner Ted's role became increasingly more important in the WCG in the 1960s and 1970s, replacing his father on the World Tomorrow broadcasts.

¹¹⁷ Herbert W. Armstrong, "The SEVEN KEYS to *understanding* the Bible," *The Plain Truth*, July 1949, 3.

¹¹⁸ In 1978, Garner Ted Armstrong founded Church of God International in Tyler, Texas.

After these events, Armstrong felt that he could trust very few people in the WCG leadership; the most notable exception was Joseph W. Tkach. Tkach rose through the ranks of the WCG: member, deacon, local elder and preaching elder. Armstrong ordained Tkach as an evangelist in 1981, appointed him the advisory council of elders and made him Director of Church Administration. Just nine days before Armstrong died in 1986, he named Tkach as his successor, thus the next Apostle. The death of the 93 year old Armstrong was a great shock for many in the WCG because a few top ministers had led them to believe that “God’s End-Time Apostle” would remain until the return of Jesus Christ. However, Tkach said that he aimed to walk in the footsteps of Armstrong and to prepare the church for the return of Christ. Tkach was now God’s End-Time Apostle, invested with the same autocratic authority and power as Armstrong. Ironically, it was through this control that Tkach was enabled to transform the doctrines and practices of the WCG.

2.3 Biblical, Theological and Evangelical Context of the WCG under the Leadership of Joseph Tkach Sr. and Joseph Tkach Jr.

2.3.1 Biblical influence

After Joseph Tkach Sr. was appointed the Apostle, he followed Armstrong’s dedication to Bible. As a sect, the WCG had neither a particular doctrine of Scripture nor specific approaches to hermeneutics and exegesis. Armstrong claimed that the Bible interpreted itself. His hermeneutical jigsaw approach to exegesis was the norm in the WCG.¹¹⁹ The interpreters could pick and choose the scriptures that put forward their agenda. In public speaking classes at Ambassador College, potential ministers of the WCG were trained to address “difficult scriptures” that did not fit into and could undermine the Armstrongist Old Covenant paradigm. WCG evangelist David Albert explains, “We had all kinds of clever and convoluted ways that we carefully learned and rehearsed in order to handle

¹¹⁹ See Is. 28: 10.

these *many* difficult—to us!—scriptures. . . . We *made* them conform to our doctrinal perspective. But we always said it was the *other* people who were guilty of ‘twisting the scriptures’ (II Peter. 3:16).”¹²⁰

In *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God*, Michael Feazell, the recently retired vice president of GCI, describes the biblically founded process transformation in the denomination. Armstrong had alleged absolute exegetical and hermeneutical control on the scriptures, but he had no higher education in biblical scholarship or languages and railed against those who had this background. Questioning the authority of Armstrong was equivalent to questioning God, for he was God’s man who had restored God’s truth. The journey of transformation in the WCG begins with Exodus. Within a matter of a few weeks of Armstrong’s death, Mark Kaplan, professor of Hebrew at Ambassador College, raised a question one of the dogmas of Armstrong. The latter held that that the Israelites started their exodus from Egypt the night after the Passover meal; the former held the traditional Jewish view that the Israelites departed on the same night as the Passover meal.¹²¹ A paper was circulated around the Council of Elders, which read and agreed with Kaplan’s view.¹²² The new Pastor General, Tkach, set to change the WCG’s booklet on the annual holy days to remove the error and to tell the pastors that the error was

¹²⁰ David Albert, “*Difficult Scriptures*”: *Coming to Grips with the Law of Moses in the Worldwide Church of God* (Tyler, TX: Tyler House, 1997), 27.

¹²¹ This was important in the WCG, for it was essential to have to correct day on which to worship, for example, the Seventh Day Sabbath. Nevertheless, Herbert W. Armstrong did admit technical errors in his understanding on a variety of issues. In the early 1970s, he consulted non-WCG linguistic experts regarding the correct day for Pentecost. For many years he had taught Pentecost always fell on a Monday, never on a Sunday, as false churches observed it. Having the correct day for Pentecost was even listed in articles as one of the proofs of the True Church. However, Armstrong was challenged on his understanding by a leading WCG minister, and so he consulted outside experts regarding the meaning of the Hebrew word that lay behind the English word translated “from.” He discovered his understanding was in error and changed. This was a radical shift since it meant changing the day on which one of ‘God’s Annual Festivals’ was observed and even keeping a Sunday as sacred—a day that was seen as being for pagan worship. Some were deeply troubled by this change. Raymond C. Cole, one of the pioneer and leading evangelists in the WCG, left the denomination in 1974 due to the change, coupled with the another change allowing for divorce and remarriage in certain circumstances. Cole believed that Armstrong had departed from the faith once given and started his own church to maintain God’s Truth.

¹²² J. Michael Feazell, *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 22.

historical rather than doctrinal. However, Tkach now sitting in the office of “God’s Apostle” had expunged a dogmatic teaching of Armstrong. This raised all kinds of questions. From this one seemingly small, ironically “Jewish” corrective, a gradual exodus from Old Covenant Armstrongism had begun.

Between 1987 and 1990, Armstrong’s prohibitions were reversed regarding use of pharmaceuticals and of cosmetics,¹²³ the observance of birthdays and the allowance of interracial marriage—all on the grounds of lack of scriptural support.

As we have seen, the born again doctrine was something upon which Armstrong had waived. A question had arisen in 1969, in Australia, regarding the accuracy of the booklet, "Just What Do You Mean Born Again?," and Armstrong consulted with Dr. Kyriacos J. Stavrinos, Professor of New Testament Greek at Ambassador College, hoping to obtain the needed support. Stavrinos disagreed with the claims of the booklet, but his opinion was set aside since he was not involved in the theological area. In 1987, the same booklet came under fire once again, this time in the United States, and Dr. Stavrinos was consulted anew. His explanation was that the verb “gennaō” (in literal contexts, like "Abraham begat Isaac") referred to bringing a child into the world, while, in John 3:3 (a figurative context), it referred exclusively to water baptism, not to repentance or even to accepting Jesus.

It took until 1991, for this doctrine to be officially taught; however, Feazell does not explain why this was the case. It may be that the revelation of this doctrinal change had greater ramifications, specifically contradicting Armstrong’s key restored truth regarding human potential. If one is already born again, is one already a God-being? The revised WCG doctrine regarding the human person taught: “The reward of the saved is to become children of God now and to receive glorified bodies like that of Jesus at the resurrection; it is not to become Gods in a family of Gods.”¹²⁴

¹²³ In the 1970s, cosmetics were allowed a period of years, only to be disallowed again in the early 1980s.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

In 1989, Tkach and Feazell set up a doctrinal discussion team for the WCG in order to lead the church into all truth and not merely keep traditional teachings for their own sake. However, the openness and reform was often painful, especially when certain church leaders did not want these things to happen—or when they did not understand even basic exegetical and hermeneutical principles. In response to this committee’s findings, gradually, Armstrong’s writings were revised and/or taken out of print.

A personal email from Joseph Tkach Jr. to one of this thesis’ participants outlines the genesis of the doctrinal changes in the WCG:

It was in the late 1980’s when we received a letter from a Roman Catholic Monsignor who, as I recall, generally liked our PT (Plain Truth) magazine but was appalled and outraged when he read one of our anti-trinitarian articles. It was one of our typical one page articles that pointed out the problems of believing the Trinity as we saw it....¹²⁵ His letter was somewhat of a rant about the foolishness and ignorance of our position. He said that we did not even understand the doctrine of the Trinity. I don’t recall why Carol Miller brought it to my dad. Normally we would have ignored it; but, my dad asked that we (Mike Feazell and I) draft a reply.

The letter from the Monsignor was written in French and the reply that came was in that language. It appears that the only correspondence that the Monsignor received was from Dibar Apartian, who had oversight of the French speaking WCG and media. Apartian sent the Monsignor a reply that did not support the trinitarian teaching.

¹²⁵ Michael Feazell corrected the above information in this author’s personal interview with him. Rather than *The Plain Truth* it was the *Good News* magazine in which the “Personal” article appeared, and it was Feazell who wrote the “Personal” for Tkach Sr. (Joseph Tkach Jr. and Michael Feazell, interview with author, Orlando, FL, July 22, 2010). We may find some further irony here, since it was a response to a “Personal” article, which denied the Personhood of the Holy Spirit, that initiated the WCG to study and later accept the Personhood of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the author of the response letter was a Roman Catholic Monseigneur; thus he would be part of what the WCG called the Whore of Babylon.

Nevertheless, the topic of the Trinity began to take new dimensions, causing a division between those that favored a trinitarian position and those that opposed it.

Joseph Tkach continues in the email message that through the process of trying to understand the Trinity, he and Michael Fezell entered a dialogue with Kyriacos Stavrinides:

Mike Fezell talked with Stavrinides about the issues, more than me and eventually told me that he thought Stavrinides was going off the deep end and accepting the Trinity as an accurate explanation. As Mike continued to study the issue, it appeared to me that he was agreeing that the Trinity was the correct explanation.¹²⁶ As I talked to Stavrinides, and as he gave me things to read, I also eventually saw that the Trinity was the only biblical and rational explanation. When we compared what we had often written on the topic with the facts of church history, it was clear that we were wrong.¹²⁷

I do recall that when Mike and I were reporting the answer to my dad, his reply was: ‘Well, I’ll be, Grandpa was right!’ My grandfather was a church

¹²⁶ Michael Fezell describes his process of studying the doctrine of the Trinity: “I got church history books out and encyclopaedias and whatever we had at hand and started reading. I found that there was way more to it (the doctrine of the Trinity) than I had ever heard in the WCG. Herbert Armstrong’s contention was that it came directly out of Greek philosophical thought. When I read about the doctrine, it was about people who were using entirely the Bible about the questions about how God could be one and Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It originated out of the questions: Who is Jesus Christ? How do we understand him? Arius brought that to a head in the 300s. If Jesus is God, then that’s one thing. If he is not God, that is another and there are implications. It became clear to me that we were dealing with people who were not swallowing Greek mythology but studying scriptures. It was very simple stuff to see how they were trying to reason it out. That told me that everything that we had said was not only suspect but it was nonsense. It was assumptions and complete ignorance.... We just didn’t have any reason not to accept the doctrine, so we did. Joe’s dad (Joseph Tkach Sr.) went through what was presented, and he felt the same way.... At that point, it was a matter of us recognizing that the Holy Spirit had led the church in some ways.... For lack of any ground to stand against it and that Scripture upheld it, we had to accept it. But we were still a long way from understanding the implications of it and what it matters.” Michael Fezell and Joseph Tkach Jr., interview with author, Orlando, FL, July 22, 2010.

¹²⁷ Here we see that with the leaders of the WCG, the transformation starts cognitively. They study the issue through rationally and then give their assent. This has been the usual method in the WCG, stretching back to Armstrong who began his search for the “TRUTH” about the Christian Sabbath and evolution by an intensive six-month study in a public library.

member and had only one disagreement with what WCG taught. He believed that the Trinity was correct although he never caused any division about it. And he never talked with anyone about it except my dad and Dean Blackwell (his minister).

This information was confirmed in a personal interview both by Joe Tkach Jr. and Michael Feazell.¹²⁸ The Tkach family was in the Orthodox Church before coming into the WCG. In making this transition, the Trinity appears to be the only doctrine with which Joseph Tkach Sr.'s parents had a disagreement. Joseph Tkach Jr. recalls his Trinity experience with his grandparents:

I remember as a child they would pray at night, especially when we would stay at their house, and when they would pray in Russian, in their heart language, and when they were done, they would cross themselves. I was the oldest of the three kids, and I would ask them, 'Why are you doing that? We don't do that in our church.' He explained that he is crossing himself because he is honoring the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And it reminds that he lives with this awareness of them—a fair enough answer. He never caused division in the church with this. I remember Dean Blackwell and my dad discussing this with him; I imagine there were a few other ministers that discussed this with him privately in the home. They saw that they were not going to get anywhere with him. I would always tell them, 'You guys just don't know what you are talking about.' And I think he was intimidating to them because my grandfather was fluent in several languages, so he would have a Russian Bible, Polish, and three or four English Bibles, a Bohemian Bible. This was clearly intimidating to them because they could only read the English ones and he could read all these foreign languages. They got nowhere with him. He never caused division; he never brought it up. No one even knew that except my parents, and my sisters might recall it.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

This may seem like an interesting piece of Tkach family trivia; however, it reveals some important details. First, it was the parents of Joseph Tkach Sr. and grandparents of Joseph Tkach Jr. who were the believers in the Trinity; their son and grandson did not accept the Trinity and tried to talk them out of the belief. Neither those for or against the doctrine of the Trinity were willing to move in their positions. However, what is also important, as we shall see later in this thesis with the participants in the study, having some background and favourable exposure to trinitarian belief may have helped Joseph Tkach Sr. and Joseph Tkach Jr. make a transition toward a belief in the Trinity. When Tkach Sr. is presented with the evidence from the WCG research team, he admits that his father had been right all the time.

In the December 1991 issue of the WCG's member newsletter, *The Worldwide News*, Joseph Tkach Sr. presented an upcoming doctrinal change, "The Church affirms the oneness of God and the full divinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."¹³⁰ The article reflects an attempt not only to understand the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity but also to refute it. The article denies acceptance of the Trinity by specifically stating, ". . . we believe that the word *Person* is inaccurate when referring to the Holy Spirit. . . ."¹³¹ The article goes on to say, "The Holy Spirit is not created. It is eternally of God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit cannot be less than divine. . . .[W]e speak of the Holy

¹³⁰ Joseph Tkach Sr., "Personal from: Joseph W. Tkach," *The Worldwide News*, December 23, 1991, 1. This was, like previously, in another "Personal" letter. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit kept moving toward Personhood in the WCG through these "Personal" letters. This 1991 "Personal" also introduces the members to an upcoming document *The Statement of Beliefs of the Worldwide Church of God*, which was an attempt to systematize WCG beliefs. The "Personal" also expresses an openness to reform in *The Statement of Beliefs*, "...as we look to God to guide us, of and when we discover that changes need to be made to our Statement, those changes will be made" (Ibid.). Another interesting note is that this was published on December 23, the day before Christmas Eve, 1991. Three years and a day later, December 24, 1994, came the initiation of another major doctrinal change, the abolition of obligatory Sabbath and Holy Day observance. This came through a sermon "New Covenant/Old Covenant" given by Joseph Tkach Sr. at Ambassador University. It is further ironic that Christmas season, which the WCG rejected as pagan—like it had with the Trinity—was a renaissance for the WCG in two major doctrines. Some might say this was a conspiracy of men, bringing the WCG into paganism; others might say it was a conspiracy of the Father, Son and Spirit, giving awesome Christmas gifts of knowing the truth and the truth setting people free.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Spirit in terms of the ‘power’ of God, but not as ‘only’ or ‘merely’ the power of God.”¹³² Tkach revises the WCG’s old position that the Holy Spirit is something external to God; “*it*” is now seen as divine part of God, but still remains the power of God: “It is the teaching of the Church, based on the Holy Scriptures, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God in two divine Persons, and that the Holy Spirit is not a Person as the Father, and the Son, but is the promised Comforter and the power through which God works in the Church.”¹³³ This is not a trinitarian position; nonetheless, it is an initial attempt to struggle with the concepts concerning the Trinity. The 1991 statement of beliefs gives scriptures to back up the new WCG belief concerning the Holy Spirit. This is a transition toward a belief in the Trinity and away from the former simplistic, uninformed refutations of the doctrine.

Some WCG dissidents claimed that they knew the change to a belief in the Trinity was going to happen and was being hidden from the ministers and members by the top-levels of the WCG leadership. As evidence, the dissidents looked to the title of a 1992 WCG booklet *God IS...* that had the ellipsis (three periods) after the word, God, betraying the three Persons in the Godhead. Nevertheless, this edition of the book remained consistent with the WCG’s earlier teaching that the Holy Spirit was the impersonal power of God. The leadership fully denied that they were hiding a change. They claimed that the change happened over a period of time after the booklet’s publication; as they reflected on certain scriptures, God opened their eyes to see that they had been wrong about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It does not appear that the leadership was hiding the changes; rather they were struggling with the issues and taking time and care to make sure they understood these complex concepts before publishing them. The 1993 republication of the same booklet *God IS...* was indeed presenting an orthodox theology of the Trinity with the Holy Spirit as a “hypostasis” along with the Father and the Son.¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid. Note here that the impersonal pronoun “*it*” continues to be used for the Holy Spirit.

¹³³ Ibid., 5.

¹³⁴ Worldwide Church of God, *God IS...* (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1993), 43.

The booklet struggles with the term Person to refer to the Three-in-One-God due to possible anthropomorphisms.¹³⁵ Were the critics correct about the leadership's obfuscation? Or did the critics' questions and critiques, ironically, further provide the impetus for the leadership to re-examine the WCG's theology?

As *God IS...* (1993) demonstrates that Scripture was the norm driving the changes regarding the nature of God and the Personhood of the Holy Spirit. In reflecting on Scripture, the baptismal formula of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) was of great significance for this change. In the transforming doctrinal writings of WCG literature, passages from John and Acts were used to examine how the Holy Spirit was acting personally in a parallel manner to Jesus and the Apostles. Joseph Tkach Jr., the current president of GCI, writes about the denomination's former teachings regarding the Triune God and the Holy Spirit:

As we studied the Bible and honestly tried to come to grips with its teaching, we saw this [previous understanding] was wrong. The Bible insists there is but one God but makes it equally clear that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are God. That means the Trinity must be true. The more we studied the Scriptures, the more we saw that we had misunderstood. The ancient creeds were right after all; the Trinity was fully biblical. We officially admitted we were Trinitarians by 1993. This proclamation was the last straw for some people. They started to leave our church in greater numbers.¹³⁶

The people who left WCG for this reason seemed to think that the denomination had embraced the pagan doctrine of the Trinity.

¹³⁵ This is not unlike Karl Barth who preferred to use the term 'modes of being' rather than Persons (*Church Dogmatics I/1*, 439, 468). A caution is wise in using the term Person: there can be a tendency toward an ascending theology (making God in man's image) rather than a descending theology and theological anthropology (God coming and making man in His image). Divine Personhood is the referent for human personhood.

¹³⁶ Joseph Tkach Jr., *Transformed by Truth* (Colorado Springs, Co: Multnomah: 1997), 147-148.

In 1993, the WCG leadership asked Kyriacos Stavrinos to give a series of lectures, which he titled “Understanding the Nature of God.” These were recorded and given to the ministers of the WCG. Stavrinos gives a summary and analysis of the events:

(WCG) Administrators saw an urgent need to move into fundamentalism. This move called for theology, even for people who, until then, had only a practical outlook on Christianity. This explains the reluctance of many to go along, and the decision of others to part ways. In my lectures, people frequently wished I had stood up to proclaim God as the Supreme Being that commands obedience.

Even though this was not in question, it would have soothed troubled spirits (but it would have changed nothing). In the eyes of the administration, conferences were organized for theological insight, as a prelude to fundamentalism. I was happy to help, by showing the ‘nature’ of God. I used ‘nature’ as a term that would ‘do,’ because it allowed me to introduce, later, the two natures of Christ. Seeing that the Book of Hebrews uses the term ‘hypostasis,’ which Origen had employed, at the beginning of the third century, and later the Cappadocian Fathers gave it new impetus, I deemed it preferable to Tertullian's ‘persona’ (corresponding to the Greek πρόσωπον) and more helpful than the Latin ‘substantia’ (look at the way Jerome uses it in ‘figura substantiae eius’ in Hebrews 1:3), and let us not forget the mess that this term generated in the scholastic period. Mine was a simpler approach, and, at all times, respectful of the Bible.

What was achieved: Essentially, I went through the Old and New Testaments, examining key passages on divinity leading to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan theology, to the Council of Chalcedon, to the Roman Catholic and Protestant positions, analyzing the pronominal constructions in the New Testament, the use of analogical and spatiotemporal terms, paying long-overdue attention to the literary figures, constantly guarding against a literalist approach.

The goal was to show that the Holy Trinity is biblically defensible. That goal was achieved.

What was not achieved: The Holy Trinity is not the kind of doctrine that can simply be added to one's statement of faith. Once you introduce it, it begins to override others. It demands changes in what lies around it, otherwise you will have contradictions in your theology. It calls for general house cleaning, and this was not done and could not be done...¹³⁷ My lectures were limited to the doctrine itself, and rightly so, given the constraints of time and the extremely high demands of an all-out reform.¹³⁸

The reactions to Stavrinides' lectures were mixed among the ministry. Many appreciated the approach he had given and learned about the nature of God. Others left the denomination due to the issues surrounding this teaching. Still others remained in the denomination even though they did not understand and/or agree with this teaching on the nature of God.

The issue that caused this group to leave the WCG was the 1994-1995 change in the Sabbath and Holy Days observance being no longer mandatory. This goes to prove Stavrinides' point that this group had merely a practical view of Christianity. The change in the nature of God doctrine did not affect how they lived their lives; thus they could

¹³⁷ In this document, Stavrinides goes on to cite some examples of doctrines that would need further examination in light of the Trinity: "To know what God is, impacts one's view of what man is (if one continues to hold that man is in the image of God). It introduces theosis — which the Fathers proclaimed, on the strength of the Trinity doctrine. It impacts Christ's incarnation: Did the Virgin Mary become the Mother of God? If yes, you agree with the Third Ecumenical Synod, and you are on the road to discuss the Fourth (the two natures of Christ), otherwise you are on a different path, away from canonicity. If you accept the Trinity, you must declare yourself on the filioque, on what happened at the Council of Toledo, the later Council of Gentilly, and the Jerusalem confrontation that involved Pope Leo III. The questions begin to mushroom into something far more serious than the trivial requirements for fundamentalism. This work was not done, at that time or subsequently." Surely, Stavrinides has an important commentary here that WCG/GCI theology needs further examination and development in light of the Trinity.

¹³⁸ Kyracos J. Stavrinides, email message to author, June 28, 2010.

remain in the WCG, despite being confused or upset. However, the change in approach to the Sabbath and Holy days challenged their very identities.

The law that had almost been personified in the WCG as worthy of absolute obedience and worship was replaced by the Person who was ‘depersonalized’ and replaced, the Holy Spirit.¹³⁹ Through reintroduction of the born again and Personhood of the Holy Spirit doctrines, the Holy Spirit started monumental reform and renewal in the WCG, which destroyed many of its idols. This had no small effect in the denomination.

The change in nature of God doctrine and the other doctrines that followed as well as the attempt to teach them at Ambassador University caused problems at that institution. Michael Feazell recalls, “The board of the university staged an attempt to overtake it and separate it from the church, which they believed had gone apostate. That attempt failed.”¹⁴⁰

With the change in the teaching on the nature of God, there was a concomitant focus on Jesus. He had never been in central focus in WCG theology. Armstrong had consistently and clearly stated that the gospel was not about Jesus but the Kingdom of God. The main focus regarding Jesus was his role as soon-coming King of that Kingdom. In his later ministry, it appears that Armstrong held that Jesus had only a divine nature after the ascension. In a sermon given in the early 1980s, Armstrong says regarding the risen Jesus Christ, “He is not only the head of the Church; He is not human. He is divine; He is God.”¹⁴¹ Jesus condescended to take on humanity but shed at his ascension. The WCG held this belief even in 1993 when Stavrinides introduced the concept of the two

¹³⁹ The status of the law in the WCG may be evinced by one of its most popular hymns written by Dwight Armstrong “Oh, How I Love Thy Law” taken from Psalm 119. The initial words are “O, how love I Thy law! It is ever with me...” In the WCG, one would not sing or speak these same words replacing the law with either the Holy Spirit or Jesus.

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Tkach Jr. and Michael Feazell, interview with author, Orlando, FL, July 22, 2010. The attempted takeover happened in 1995.

¹⁴¹ Herbert W. Armstrong, “Holy Spirit, Part I” (Sermon), n.d. <http://www.cogneo.org/sermonshwa.html#sermons> (retrieved March 20, 2010).

natures of Christ in his lectures.¹⁴² Unlike other beliefs, this belief did not go through an extensive doctrinal change. In 1998, the WCG explicitly conveyed its agreement with Chalcedonian Christology: the full humanity and full divinity of the glorified Christ.¹⁴³

Under Armstrong's teachings, even though Jesus Christ was completely divine, He was not really the center of the WCG's faith and certainly not of worship. Jesus was only the messenger of the Gospel not the message of the Gospel. He was not the object of prayer and worship—only the Father was. In the mid-1990s, the Father and Son were both worshipped. There continued to be some ambiguity regarding prayer to and worship of the Holy Spirit, who although accepted as a divine Person, remained on the margins of the WCG discussion of theology and praxis.

By 1995, when the last and largest groups left the WCG, there was approximately half of the number of laity and ministers that there was before the changes.¹⁴⁴ The changes were costly and traumatic in the separation of friends, family, and colleagues. Nevertheless, for many of those who remained there was a great sense of liberation and relationship in their new understanding of God and His grace.

Armstrong's project of examining doctrines had been further carried out by those who had succeeded him. Armstrong had written in his *Autobiography*, "I knew of no church or sect or denomination that had ever publicly confessed error or embraced new truth. Yet, plainly, this would be a test of the true Church."¹⁴⁵ The leaders of the WCG did exactly what Armstrong stated—while no longer believing they were the one and only true Church. Seeking reconciliation with Christians in other denominations, the WCG

¹⁴² This is confirmed in Johannes Buchner, "The Worldwide Church of God: A study...", 5.9.

¹⁴³ Ted Johnston, "The dual nature of Jesus Christ," Worldwide Church of God, 1998, <http://www.gci.org/Jesus/dualnature> (accessed July 29, 2011). Buchner also comments on this clarification in his thesis (5.9).

¹⁴⁴ About 40,000 left the denomination in the United States in the early to mid-1990s. See Ruth Tucker, "'From the Fringe to the Fold,'" *Christianity Today*, July 15, 1996, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1996/july15/6t826b.html> (accessed April 20, 2010).

¹⁴⁵ Herbert W. Armstrong, *Autobiography*, 182.

leadership publically confessed where the denomination was in error in the past.¹⁴⁶ This was part of the greater longing to be faithful to what Armstrong had as a maxim for his church: “Don’t believe me—believe your Bible!” This became the hermeneutical turning point for the denomination. These leaders were led to bring the WCG into mainstream biblical orthodoxy, ultimately rejecting many of the core doctrines that Armstrong had established. In September 1995, Joseph Tkach Sr. died of cancer—some of his opponents saw it as God’s judgment. However, his son Joseph Tkach Jr., who was chosen to replace his father, accredits the Holy Spirit with causing the doctrinal reform and his father with “subjected himself to the truth of Holy Scripture.”¹⁴⁷

2.3.2 Evangelical influence

In the early 1990s, some of the WCG leaders and senior ministers began graduate degree course work at C.P. Haggard School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University (APU) and Fuller Seminary. In 1990, Michael Fezell, then the executive assistant to Joseph Tkach Sr., started attending APU. Fezell describes the gracious reception he received from the associate dean of the graduate school, Dr. Earl Grant. The faculty and administration were also friendly; however, Fezell expresses, “They never interfered. They never pushed. They never tried to change us or ‘convert’ us. They simply taught the Bible in all the joy and enthusiasm the Lord provides those who love him, and they did it at a time

¹⁴⁶ Seen Joseph Tkach Jr., “Forgive Us Our Trespasses,” *The Plain Truth*, March/April 1996, <http://www.gci.org/aboutus/forgiveus> (accessed July 29, 2011). In this article, the president of the WCG expresses the denomination’s public admission of previous errors and asks for forgiveness for wrongs committed. It is of interest to note that the article makes no reference to the Trinity and specifically to the Holy Spirit—the Person that the WCG denied. This article is a wonderful example of seeking reconciliation between the WCG and the larger body of Christ. However, we may wonder how many in the WCG prayed to the Holy Spirit asking for His forgiveness, which He undoubtedly had already given, for denying His Personhood.

¹⁴⁷ Joseph Tkach Jr., “A Church Reborn,” *Christian Research Journal*, Winter 1996, <http://www.gci.org/aboutus/reborn> (accessed July 29, 2011).

when no other Christian graduate school would even consider admitting us.”¹⁴⁸ Undoubtedly, APU had an influence on the leaders who took classes there. Nevertheless, it is not as significant as some former members of the WCG have claimed: the Azusa leaders rewrote the WCG’s doctrines and constitution. Joseph Tkach Jr. responds directly to such claims, “The staff and faculty at Azusa emphatically *did not* do any such thing. At no time did we ever formally consult with them on doctrinal issues. They refused to meddle with what we were doing, nor did we ask them to do so. But they did offer friendship. They did come alongside us. They did offer prayers—and for that we will always be thankful.”¹⁴⁹ The biblical and theological education that the leaders received allowed them to gain some critical and spiritual distance from Armstrongism. This appears to have provided them with certain exegetical, hermeneutical and theological tools to address doctrinal errors as they arose.

Other responses in evangelical America to the WCG changes were mixed. The initial response by some in “cult-watch” organizations was one of suspicion. At first, they thought that this was some clever trick. Eventually, this perspective changed as the mass of support grew for the WCG from notable names and publications. For example, Hank Hanegraff in an article in the winter 1996 edition of *Christian Research Journal* writes regarding the changes in the WCG, “This is unprecedented in church history. It’s the very kind of thing that those who have given their lives in ministry to the kingdom of the cults hope for.”¹⁵⁰ Also in 1996, church historian Ruth Tucker wrote an article “From the Fringe to the Fold” for *Christianity Today*. She had started to develop a relationship with the WCG before the doctrinal changes; thus in her article, she had some persuasive insights to provide for evangelicals that the transformations happening in the WCG were real. Further, Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Seminary, declared, “I have met with

¹⁴⁸ J. Michael Fezell, *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 58.

¹⁴⁹ Joseph Tkach Jr., *Transformed by Truth*, 58.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

the leadership of the church and without reservation consider them brothers in Christ. I am profoundly moved by their testimonies of what God has done for them personally and in the movement. These people have led the most courageous, inspiring, and Christ-centered movement into biblical Christianity that I have ever seen.”¹⁵¹ Similar responses were given by various high-placed American evangelicals and Pentecostals such as: Rev. D. James Kennedy, senior minister of Coral Ridge Presbyterian; Dr. Kevin W. Mannoia, bishop of Free Methodist Church of North America; Steve Brown, professor of preaching at Reformed Theological Seminary; Dr. Jack Hayford, pastor of The Church on the Way Van Nuys; and John R. Holland, president of International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. Many of these people have become friends of the WCG, and some have spoken at WCG congregations and/or ministerial conferences. Having support from influential people like these helped the WCG gain acceptance in May 1997 as a member of the National Association of Evangelicals in the United States.¹⁵² This acceptance—from both sides—demonstrates how the beliefs of the WCG have dovetailed into the mainstream of American evangelicalism.

Perhaps one of the most important evangelical influences on the WCG/GCI is John Emory McKenna. Johannes Buchner’s dissertation on the WCG provides a detailed published background of McKenna.¹⁵³ He was an ordained minister with the American Baptist Churches in Pasadena. He studied physical chemistry at Princeton University, and has a Master in Divinity and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Fuller Theological Seminary. He taught at Fuller and at Azusa Pacific University. In 1996, he became a WCG member and was ordained as a minister and appointed chairperson of the theology department at Ambassador University in Texas. Since 1997, he has worked as senior editor of WCG/GCI publications and doctrinal advisor to Joseph Tkach Jr. He also

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 58-59.

¹⁵² The WCG endorses the NAE Statement of Faith; see <http://www.nae.net/about-us/statement-of-faith>. In 1997, the WCG in Canada became a member of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. See its statement of faith: <http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=265>.

¹⁵³ Johannes Buchner, “The Worldwide Church of God: A study...,” 5.8.3.

teaches at the denominations seminary, Grace Communion Seminary. McKenna was a student of Thomas Torrance, a student of Karl Barth. McKenna seems to have further introduced the ideas of these theologians to his students, Tkach Jr. and Feazell.

In the mid to late 2000s, the WCG made a significant shift away from certain theologies and practices of American evangelicalism toward the trinitarian theology of Barth and the Torrances. When John McKenna came to teach and work for Ambassador University and the WCG, he brought with him an interest in trinitarian theology. In the mid-1990s, McKenna taught theology courses at Ambassador, especially teaching on the doctrine of the Trinity. However, neither in teaching at Ambassador nor in later working for the WCG did McKenna push trinitarian theology. When Tkach and Feazell came to McKenna with some questions, he directed them to read Thomas F. Torrance. In 1997, Feazell started to drift further toward trinitarian theology after reading T.F. Torrance's *The Mediation of Christ*. Feazell describes the transition, "We all began moving that direction as we all discussed it more with John McKenna and did more reading. We started more with an Incarnational focus that naturally migrated into a Trinitarian one. That is, the concept that God has already done everything necessary for human salvation in Jesus Christ came first, and then came the implications of that -- that humanity is drawn into Christ and thereby into his relationship with the Father through the Spirit."¹⁵⁴ The WCG's movement into New Covenant grace in 1995 opened another door for the leaderships' movement toward of incarnational and trinitarian theology from 1997 until 2003.¹⁵⁵ Thomas and James Torrance and Karl Barth became continuously more influential in Feazell and other leaders' writings. In 2005, WCG ministers were recommended to read Thomas Torrance's *The Mediation of Christ* and Michael Jenkins' *An Introduction to Theology*. However, the consolidation of the trinitarian message took center stage in the summer of 2007 at the WCG/GCI international ministers' conference

¹⁵⁴ Michael Feazell, email message to author, July 31, 2011.

¹⁵⁵ As a reminder, I will be using the new name of the denomination, Grace Communion International (GCI), to refer to this church from 2003 to the present, marking its shift into a trinitarian theology in the denominations' ministry.

in Palm Springs, California. There one of the keynote speakers was the trinitarian theologian C. Baxter Kruger, who had been a doctoral student of James B. Torrance. At and after this conference, many GCI ministers have said that this event was their full initiation into trinitarian theology. The nature of God lectures of 1994 were foundational for an academic understanding of the Trinity, but something was missing. In 2007, the ministers began to see the relational aspect of the Trinity.¹⁵⁶

2.4 Trinitarian Theology in the WCG/GCI under Joseph Tkach Jr.: the Influence of Karl Barth, Thomas F. Torrance and James B. Torrance

The following section of thesis will not take a systematic approach to the doctrines of God, human beings and church in Barth as well as the Torrance brothers, Thomas and James. This is due to the fact that the WCG/GCI's approach to Barth and the Torrances has not been completely systematic. It has mostly been organic: the leaders would write and speak on certain new understandings as they were revealed through these theologians. We will examine the discussion of these theologians' works in WCG/GCI literature regarding these doctrines.

Although some leaders, like Tkach Jr. and Feazell, had some exposure to Barth and the Torrances in their studies in the early and mid-1990s; these theologians were not significantly influential in the early changes. The early and mid-1990s saw the WCG's shift in the doctrines of God and of salvation; the rest of that decade primarily was spent focusing on helping WCG people understand what it means to no longer be under Old Covenant law but under the New Covenant grace. The mid and late 2000s saw GCI's return to a focus on the doctrine of God, and this was done primarily through Scripture, Barth and the Torrances. Tkach Jr. describes the foundations and influences of the process of change in GCI:

¹⁵⁶ We may wonder whether the old Armstrong teaching of a plurality of 'Gods' is some sedimentation affecting GCI's move toward the social approach to the Trinity of the Torrances.

...our theology is what gives cohesion and structure to our beliefs and establishes priority for our doctrines. It has developed over the years as we have worked through various doctrinal issues, all the while being careful to maintain a Bible-based understanding of who God is and how he relates to humanity.... As our theology developed, we found the writings of Thomas and James Torrance and Karl Barth to be especially helpful because of their intense focus on the biblical revelation of God through Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁷

In looking to these theologians for theological assistance, it appears the denomination is being careful not to fall once again into the trap of deferring their critical thinking skills to a theological authority, as it had done with Armstrong.¹⁵⁸ It has taken some time to reorient an *ad hoc* approach to theology; GCI's statement of beliefs is a continuous move towards this.¹⁵⁹ The leaders of the denomination came to realize that their new belief system needed an interpretive structure. The trinitarian theologies of Barth and the Torrances have further aided with this process of clarification of beliefs.

2.4.1 Karl Barth

The writings of Karl Barth have been difficult to read for many ministers in GCI.¹⁶⁰ However, his methodology is central to GCI theologizing and is observed, for example, in

¹⁵⁷ Joseph Tkach Jr., video interview with Joseph Tkach and other GCI leaders, "Foundations of Theology for Grace Communion International," 2007, <http://www.gci.org/av/theology> (accessed July 29, 2011).

¹⁵⁸ A GCI blog states that the denomination is not "... embracing a theology of one man ([C. Baxter] Kruger, Torrance, Barth or anyone else). Rather we continue with a dialog that began several years ago in our midst as the outgrowth of our grace-awakening with its doctrinal reformation" Ted Johnston, "Making an invitation to Personal Commitment," The WCG's *The Surprising God Blog*, September 25, 2007, <http://thesurprisinggodblog.wcg.org/search?q=making+an+invitation+to+personal+commitment> (accessed July 29, 2010) .

¹⁵⁹ The Statement of Beliefs is available <http://www.gci.org/aboutus/beliefs> (accessed July 29, 2011).

¹⁶⁰ This was stated by some ministers and leaders at the 2009 GCI Canadian ministerial conference. For some other GCI ministers, not only in Canada, there is still a general suspicion toward theology. They, like

his apophatic first principle of the theology: “If we get God wrong, we get everything wrong.”¹⁶¹ The theological starting point must be in God’s self-revelation in Scripture, rather than in some anthropomorphism.¹⁶² Barth’s view of religion follows as “...humanity’s confusing the Creator with the creature, or the human tendency to make God into its own image”¹⁶³ For Barth all understanding of God starts with God’s self-revelation in the theology of the Word. This always reveals God’s Trinity.¹⁶⁴

Barth’s presentation of the doctrine of election is accepted by GCI. Barth calls this doctrine the “the sum of the gospel” and is perhaps the central doctrine in his understanding of the nature of God. Election is offered in a trinitarian, Creator Redeemer context, from eternity Jesus Christ is both the electing God—with the Father and Spirit—and the elected Man: “Jesus Christ is both the Elected and the Rejected for our sakes, and individual election and rejection can be understood as real only in him”¹⁶⁵ From this

Armstrong, are of the “Bible only” predilection and do not see how Barth or other theologians can deepen their understanding of Scripture.

¹⁶¹ Terry Akers, “Review: Dogmatics in Outline by Karl Barth,” gci.org, 2005, <http://www.gci.org/book/barth> (accessed July 29, 2011).

¹⁶² Barth came to this insight after undergoing some personal theological reformations. His early theology followed the 19th century liberal anthropomorphic theology of his teachers. Barth broke with this theological perspective in 1914 for a transcendent theology of God as wholly other and there being an infinite qualitative distinction between God and man. Later, he changed this theology to a doctrine of the commerce and communion between God and man (see Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1960). There are some interesting similarities between Barth and the WCG/GCI in their theological transformations: from anthropomorphic, to transcendent theo-centric, to incarnational participatory.

¹⁶³ Terry Akers, “Review: Repenting of Religion by Gregory Boyd,” gci.org, <http://www.gci.org/book/boyd> (accessed July 29, 2011)

¹⁶⁴ Barth writes, “There is no hiddenness, no abyss, in God's being which could be deeper than his being as the Three-in-One. There is no truth in him which is not this truth. It is God's innermost being which he reveals to us in Jesus Christ. God the Father is the Father of Jesus Christ. And God the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Therefore there can also be no question about God's existence which is not already answered by his self-revelation in his Word and work, no confession of faith which first and last can mean anything but him only” Karl Barth, *Learning Jesus Christ through the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. Shirley Guthrie Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 56-57.

¹⁶⁵ Michael Feazell, “Theology: What Difference Does It Make?,” gci.org, 2005, <http://www.gci.org/God/theology> (accessed July 29, 2011).

doctrine flows all knowledge humans have about the God of the Bible—the God of love—and every person who has ever lived, being elect and included in the Incarnation—the true image of God.¹⁶⁶ Humans—male and female—are made in the image of God (following Gen. 1:26-27).¹⁶⁷ Humans are made to be in relationship with their Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. On the GCI internet interview program *You're Included*, theologian Ray Anderson presents Barth's theology of relationship: "... God loves the whole world – God is not willing that any should perish. All are included in God's love. No one stands outside of God's mercy and love. . . . [T]he Holy Spirit is the Redeemer. The Holy Spirit is the one that is to transform us. Nobody gets into heaven without being redeemed."¹⁶⁸ This is a Triune action of the Son reconciling human beings and the Spirit redeeming them to the Father. Like Barth, GCI holds that this does not necessarily mean that everyone will accept this relationship—Universalism—for human beings have the gift of free will.¹⁶⁹ Barth desired for people to realize that they are already accepted and not forsaken by God.

¹⁶⁶ Barth states, "We have to see our own election in that of the man Jesus because His election includes ours within itself and because ours is grounded in His. We are elected together with Him in so far as we are elected 'in Him.'" Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, trans. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 120.

¹⁶⁷ "Karl Barth, noting that God is triune and that humans are male and female, argued that relationship is the divine image." Michael Morrison, "Humans Made in the Image of God." gci.org, 1994, <http://www.gci.org/humans/image> (accessed August 1, 2011). However, we may note that Barth has often been criticized for verging on binitarianism with this view: cf. Robert W. Jenson, "You were Wondering Where the Spirit Went," *Pro Ecclesia* 2, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 296-304.

¹⁶⁸ Ray Anderson, interviewed by Michael Feazell, *You're Included*, 2009, <http://www.gci.org/yi/anderson9> (accessed July 29, 2011).

¹⁶⁹ Barth presents both an uncertainty and a hope toward a universal reconciliation at the eschaton: "...there is no good reason why we should forbid ourselves, or be forbidden, openness to the possibility that in the reality of God and man in Jesus Christ there is contained much more than we might expect and therefore the supremely unexpected withdrawal of that final threat, i.e., that in the truth of this reality there might be contained the super-abundant promise of the final deliverance of all men. To be more explicit, there is no good reason why we should not be open to this possibility. If for a moment we accept the unfalsified truth of the reality which even now so forcefully limits the perverted human situation, does it not point plainly in the direction of the work of a truly eternal divine patience and deliverance and therefore of an *apokatastasis* or universal reconciliation? If we are certainly forbidden to count on this as though we had a claim to it, as though it were not supremely the work of God to which man can have no possible claim, we are surely commanded the more definitely to hope and pray for it as we may do already on this

2.4.2 Thomas F. and James B. Torrance

For the further development of Barthian theology in GCI, we turn to Thomas and James Torrance, students of Barth. GCI's doctrinal advisor John McKenna became a friend of Thomas Torrance, and through McKenna, GCI leadership has become friends with the students of James Torrance: Elmer Colyer, Gary Deddo,¹⁷⁰ and C. Baxter Kruger. These men have been speakers at various ministerial conferences and interviewees on the GCI internet program *You're Included*. These scholars form a bridge to make the Torrances' theology more accessible for pastors, and the Torrances—while making contributions in their own right—are bridges to make Barth's theology more accessible for GCI leadership.

In GCI literature, we find more references to Thomas F. Torrance than to his brother James, Karl Barth or any other theologian. This literature demonstrates a fair use of T.F. Torrance in the explanation and development of GCI Christology. Jesus is seen “. . . both the *ground* (foundation/origin) and the *grammar* (organizing principle/logic) of the Godhead and of the entire created order—all humanity included. So everything ought to be understood in relationship to him.”¹⁷¹ This ceaseless love of the Triune God

side of this final possibility, i.e., to hope and pray cautiously and yet distinctly that, in spite of everything which may seem quite conclusively to proclaim the opposite, His compassion should not fail, and that in accordance with His mercy which is ‘new every morning’ He ‘will not cast off for ever’ (La. 322f., 31).” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV,3*, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 477-478. Barth does not allow for the universalism of a natural theology or a liberal pluralism; for Barth, any universal reconciliation comes in and through the God-man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁷⁰ Dr. Deddo is senior editor for acquisitions at InterVarsity Press; he was ordained to his ministry with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship by the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. He recently has been a professor of theology at GCI's Grace Communion Seminary, and in 2012 is replacing the retiring J. Michael Feazell in many of his duties in GCI, especially serving as special assistant to the president. Along with John McKenna, Gary Deddo is now a leader in GCI that was not in the WCG during the Armstrong period.

¹⁷¹ Grace Communion International, *A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Theology*. wgc.org, 2009. www.wgc.org/lit/booklets/theology.htm (accessed April 22, 2010). To gain some further depth on these issues we turn to T.F. Torrance explanation regarding how the doctrine of the Incarnation relates to the Trinity and to all other doctrines of the church: “It is, then, the two-way relation between the Father and the Son illuminated for us in the Holy Spirit that we may share that provides the frame both for our knowledge of God in his inner trinitarian relations and our knowledge of the Son in his inner hypostatic relations as God and man in one person. The doctrines of the Trinity and of the incarnation thus form together a nucleus at the heart of the Christian conception of God and constitutes the ontological and epistemological

expressed in the Incarnation, who unites God and man for eternity, is the kerygma that GCI proclaims: “God and man can now no more be separated from one another in Christ than the person of Christ can be undone, or the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection be reversed.”¹⁷²

Of assistance, in GCI pneumatology is Torrance’s work on the Holy Spirit in *The Christian Doctrine of God – One Being Three Persons*. GCI’s Paul Kroll uses this book in an article, “The Holy Spirit Is the Personal Presence of God Himself.”¹⁷³ Kroll presents T.F. Torrance’s pneumatology, countering old WCG arguments against the Personhood of the Holy Spirit. The first objection is that the Holy Spirit is not prominently featured in the New Testament, when compared with the Father and the Son. However, T.F. Torrance clarifies what the role of the Holy Spirit is, “The Holy Spirit does not manifest himself or focus attention upon himself, for it is his mission from the Father to declare the Son and focus attention upon him. It is through the speaking of the

basis for the formulation of every Christian doctrine. It should now be evident why it is not possible to speak of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in isolation from the other doctrines of the Faith, not least the doctrine of redemption through the saving of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed to us in the Gospel, for the trinitarian conception of God is *the distinctively Christian conception of God* with which every Christian doctrine and every aspect of the Christian way of life are concerned. It is not just that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity must be accorded primacy over all the other doctrines, but properly understood it is the nerve centre of them all, configures them all, and is so deeply integrated with them that when they are held apart from the doctrine of the Trinity they are seriously defective in truth and become malformed. Moreover, if the Christian conception of God and of all his activity toward us in creation and redemption is essentially Trinitarian, then the Trinitarian perspective must be allowed to pervade all Christian worship and practice, all interpretation of Holy Scriptures, and all proclamation of the Gospel, and must be given a regulative role in the dynamic structure if all Christian thought and action. Then indeed we will live and move and have our being under the blessing of the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit” Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One being in Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 30-31. GCI leadership following Torrance sees that everything that the church says about God and does in His life must flow out of the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation.

¹⁷² From Robert Walker’s introduction to Thomas F. Torrance *Atonement: the Person and Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), xxxvii-xxxviii. This was quoted by GCI’s Ted Johnston, “The Relation between Incarnation and Atonement,” *The Surprising God Blog*, February 5, 2010, <http://thesurprisinggodblog.wcg.org/2010/02/relation-between-incarnation-and.html> (accessed July 29, 2010).

¹⁷³ Paul Kroll, “The Holy Spirit Is the Personal Presence of God Himself,” [gci.org](http://www.gci.org/disc/13spirit), 2004, <http://www.gci.org/disc/13spirit> (accessed July 29, 2011). All citations from Torrance in this paragraph and the next come from this document.

Spirit that the Word of God incarnate in Christ is communicated to us in words that are Spirit and Life and not flesh.” Here the Holy Spirit does not bear witness to “his distinctive personal Being.” Holy Spirit is another Paraclete of the same kind as Jesus, thus able to take the place of Jesus (John 15:26). As a Person, he hears and speaks and in so doing glorifies Jesus (16: 13-14).

Another objection to the Personhood is the one that the Spirit is only an external force, a power like electricity. Kroll expresses that this view of the Spirit being some external power of God is not found in the Bible. Kroll then uses T.F. Torrance to refute this argument first by demonstrating that Jesus is a divine Person, for if He were not truly God and truly man, as T.F. Torrance says, “What took place on the Cross would have been in vain.” In the same way, if the Holy Spirit is not a divine Person, then God does not live in us and does not make us his children. Since the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, we are indwelt by God and adopted as God’s children. Torrance states, “To *be* ‘in the Spirit’ is to *be* in God, for the Spirit is not external but internal to the Godhead.” Nevertheless, the Spirit carries out his own unique work in redemption by enlightening, transforming, guiding and sanctifying those who are Christ’s. It is only because He is a divine Person that He can do this.

For the church, the Torrances’ theology has remarkable consequences, especially regarding prayer and worship. As the human persons are united with Christ in His body, we are united with Him in His prayer for us. As humans pray in the Spirit, they are united with the Son in prayer to the Father. Citing James B. Torrance, Ray Anderson says, “Praying in his [Jesus’] name is to say that the Holy Spirit brings us in, so that Jesus takes our prayer and offers it up to the Father.”¹⁷⁴ Prayer is no longer viewed as something a person works up on his/her own strength and for his/her own merit. J.B. Torrance sees that worship is the Son worshipping the Father, and humans join in this worship and communion by the Spirit uniting us with Jesus Christ.

¹⁷⁴ Ray Anderson, interviewed by Michael Feazell, *You’re Included*, 2009, <http://www.gci.org/yi/anderson9> (accessed July 29, 2011).

The Torrances' trinitarian ecclesiology presents some further correctives for GCI: church services and structures are not to be based on one man. The Torrances call the focus on a singular human individual a unitarian style of worship. This unitarian approach can be seen all aspects of a church where one individual is the center of the community, “. . . he offers the prayers of the congregation; he it is who mediates ‘truth; through his personality, and he it is who mediates between the people and God through conducting the worship entirely on his own.”¹⁷⁵ Although many Protestant churches have not accepted the doctrines of Unitarianism, they have accepted unitarian practice. This was often the case in the old WCG, and may carry on to this day in a small number of congregations. J.B. Torrance gives some other aspects of this practical unitarian worship:

Worship is what *we* do before God. In theological language, this means that the only priesthood is our priesthood, the only offering is our offering, the only intercessions our intercessions. Indeed this view of worship is in practice unitarian, has no doctrine of the mediator or sole priesthood of Christ, is human-centered, has no proper doctrine of the Holy Spirit, is too often non-sacramental, and can engender weariness. We sit in the pew watching the minister ‘do his thing,’ exhorting us ‘to do our thing,’ until we go home thinking we have done our duty for another week! This kind of do-it-yourself-with the help-of-the-minister worship is what our forefathers would have called ‘legal worship’ and not ‘evangelical worship’—what the ancient church would have called Arian or Pelagian and not truly catholic. Not truly trinitarian. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin has commented that when the average Christian in this country (Scotland) hears the name of God, he or she does not think of the Trinity. After many years of

¹⁷⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, “The Radical Consequences of Justification,” *Christian Odyssey*, April 2005, <http://www.christianodyssey.com/gospel/torrance.htm> (accessed April 22, 2010).

missionary work in India among the eastern religions, he returned to find that much worship in the West is in practice, if not in theory, unitarian.”¹⁷⁶

It has taken some time for the practical unitarian approach to change in WCG/GCI congregations. Some congregations are moving deeper in a trinitarian approach to worship that includes everyone: young, old and everyone in between. One GCI minister has set up a blog specifically titled “Trinitarian Worship: a Blog for discussing the Application of Trinitarian Theology to the Worship of the Church.”¹⁷⁷ This blog is a resource for those hoping to follow its mandate. For other congregations, they may remain in either an Armstrongist or evangelical patterns of unitarian worship. T.F. Torrance provides a possible cause why trinitarian preaching and worship may not happen in congregations: “If there is no conviction that God enables worship to happen through participation in relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, preachers are likely to opt out of trinitarian language and exhort hearers ‘to do their thing.’ In some contemporary churches preaching does seem to offer moralizing sermons that concentrate on individual needs—giving good advice instead of Good News”¹⁷⁸ The new name for the denomination—Grace Communion International—hopefully speaks to the reality that all aspects of the church are communion with the Triune God of grace, who is for all people of all nations. This is good news.

¹⁷⁶ James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace. The 1994 Didsbury Lectures*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 20. This is a significant work for GCI praxis.

¹⁷⁷ See <http://trinitarianworship.blogspot.com/>
Two other blogs published by GCI ministers that are oriented toward trinitarian praxis are “The Surprising God Looking at God, Scripture and Christian ministry in the Light of Trinitarian, Incarnational Theology” (<http://thesurprisinggodblog.gci.org/>) and “The Adopted Life Trinity and Humanity, Together” (<http://theadoptedlife.org/>).

¹⁷⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, “The Radical Consequences of Justification,” [gci.org](http://www.gci.org/gospel/torrance), <http://www.gci.org/gospel/torrance> (accessed July 29, 2011).

2.4.3 Barth and the Torrances: Key Trinitarian Themes in GCI

The key themes in GCI theology are summed up in the theology that goes by several names: trinitarian, incarnational (Christ-centered), and adoption or participatory.¹⁷⁹ The GCI booklet *The God revealed in Jesus Christ: A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Theology*, expresses that the substance of the Christian life and faith are based in four kinds of personal relationships:

1. the internal relationships of holy love shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit from all eternity,
2. the relationship of the eternal Son with humanity in Jesus Christ incarnate,
3. the relationship of humanity with the Father through the Son and by the Spirit, and
4. the relationship of humans with one another as children of the Father redeemed by Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁰

These four relationships are the focus of the writings of Scripture and of Barth and the Torrances, and through them the writings of GCI. This thesis examines these relationships through the experiential lens of the participants in their relationship with God (Father, Son and Spirit), self and congregation (a microcosm of humanity, since all humanity is included in the Triune life). With this in mind, we now turn our attention to some of the significant issues concerning the theology of ministry for this research.

¹⁷⁹ For GCI theology, this thesis simply uses trinitarian theology, which will imply these other terms.

¹⁸⁰ Grace Communion International, *The God revealed in Jesus Christ: A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Theology*, gci.org, 2011, <http://www.gci.org/god/revealed> (accessed July 29, 2011).

CHAPTER THREE

MINISTRY-IN-ACTION

3.1 Methodology in Relation to the Participants

This thesis uses a mixed methodology: hermeneutic phenomenology and grounded theory. John Creswell states that the phenomenological approach has long interviews.¹⁸¹ Further, “the participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.”¹⁸² Hermeneutic phenomenology does not deviate from this pattern. There are two groups of participants in the study, consisting of eight primary participants and four secondary participants. The participants in both groups are pastors in GCI and have been through the changes in the denomination from Armstrongism to evangelicalism to trinitarianism. The primary participants were pastors during the Armstrong years and led people through the doctrinal changes in the 1990s. The secondary participants are of a younger generation and, for the most part, were not pastors during the early changes in the WCG. The secondary participants add a unique perspective toward the changes, especially toward trinitarian theology. Their stories contribute especially to the latter sections of the research.

The primary participants were chosen either by my ministerial base group, by GCI leadership, or a trinitarian theologian who is a friend of GCI according to the following criteria:

1. They were students at the denomination’s Ambassador College and/or members of the WCG during the Armstrong years; thus they were thoroughly indoctrinated in Armstrong’s teaching and will themselves have been part of spreading and, possibly, enforcing this teaching as ministers.

¹⁸¹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 65. I have exceeded this number, having twelve in total in order to saturate the data and gain a diversity of perspectives.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 55.

2. They deeply thought (intellectually and spiritually) through the changes and have studied a lot of biblical and scholarly texts on the doctrinal issues.
3. They had a significant transformation in their understanding and relationship with God, self and congregation.
4. They led a congregation through the WCG's doctrinal changes in the 1990s and remain GCI ministers.¹⁸³

Of the secondary participants, one was chosen by my Ministerial Base Group. He also met the above criteria, but was a ministerial trainee and then ordained minister in the WCG during time of the changes. The rest of the secondary participants in the study are GCI ministers suggested by the trinitarian theologian mentioned in the last paragraph. These secondary participants grew up in the WCG and met criteria two and three. Criterion four is not as particularly important for this group, as it is that they led congregations through from an evangelical phase to a trinitarian phase. Their narratives are significant and help to triangulate the data. They also serve to highlight where there were significant areas that needed further reflection in the group of primary participants, especially to ascertain whether the data has been saturated regarding the central phenomenon.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Ministers in the WCG/GCI were only men until 2007 when Debby Bailey of Pikeville, Kentucky was ordained. This came about due to a change in belief and practice. For the diachronic purpose of this research the ministers will be men—not out of any particular bias or lack of inclusivity on my part. The primary participants are in their fifties and sixties and are of European descent—once again, this is no intentional bias on my part but a predominant bias and reality under Armstrong. The secondary participants are in their forties and two of those participants give the study some ethnic and racial diversity.

¹⁸⁴ This will not be a systematic study to compare and contrast the two groups. Creswell provides a procedural method for conducting qualitative inquiry, “In *triangulation*, researchers make use of multiple different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence.... Typically, this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (202). The primary and secondary participants as well as my personal reflection notes helped triangulate the data.

3.2 Stages of the Study: Gathering, Coding and Interpreting the Data

This research was bounded from May to November 2010. The following methods were used in order to help triangulate the data:

Stage one: The participants were emailed, asking them to participate in the research. They were given the research question and some general details about the study. If they agreed, they were asked to complete a letter of consent.¹⁸⁵ Also they were asked to write an autobiographical narrative regarding their experience concerning the change in the doctrine of the nature of God. The story needed a coherent focus and shape to give it direction in breadth and depth. The participants were emailed the research question, a suggested outline and some supplemental questions to assist their writing.¹⁸⁶ They were asked to recount their personal history regarding their understanding of and relationship with God, self and congregation. They were requested to refer to scriptures, books and theologians that have helped them through this process.

Stage two: After the narratives were returned via email, I began some initial coding of the data. I read these responses, made notes, and developed further questions based on those responses.

Stage three: I involved the primary participants in further axial coding of the data from their and other participants' narratives by using grounded research. This was done in one to two hour face-to-face interviews in July 2010 at GCI International Conference in Orlando, Florida in a hotel room. For two participants, I held face-to-face interviews in other locations, and for another two participants I held telephone interviews. In each interview, I asked the participants to give a thick description, adding some depth to themes that have arisen in their narratives. The participants helped interpret some of the data and helped shape some categories; this allowed them further to tell stories. They helped me find the whole picture and generate the axial coding for the thesis.

¹⁸⁵ See Appendix C on page 269 for the letter of consent

¹⁸⁶ See Appendix D on page 271 for the information letter: narrative outline and questionnaire.

During the interviews, I took some notes and had an audio and/or a video recorder capturing the event. I also wrote a brief personal journal after the interviews and watched or listened to the recordings, giving my self-reflection and interpretation.

Stage four: In October 2010 when the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, I created and sent a short questionnaire to the participants via email based on some issues that needed some further clarification.¹⁸⁷ Their responses allowed for some further axial coding and demonstrated that the data was saturated.

Stage five: I took the data gathered, performed some further coding, interpreted the data by finding meaning statements, themes and units, and started writing the chapters. Throughout this process, I was making notes to analyze and integrate the key issues being brought forward in the participants' narratives, interviews and questionnaires.

3.3 Qualitative Research Methodology Operative in the Analysis of the Ministry-in-Action

I utilized two methodologies for the research. The major approach was hermeneutic phenomenology. This was used for the interpretation of the participants' written narratives. Grounded research was used only during the personal interviews with the participants. First, we should define and/or explain these methodologies in relation to the process of this research.

¹⁸⁷ See Appendix F on page 275 for this second questionnaire.

3.3.1 Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Creswell explains what phenomenology is, “. . . [it] looks to understand and interpret the ‘essences of experiences about a phenomenon’ through the data of ‘statements, meanings, meaning themes, [and] general description of the experience.’”¹⁸⁸ These issues are subsumed into the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, which conducts research into “. . . how people interpret their lives and make meaning of what they experience. Gadamer (1989) contended that hermeneutics is the study of *texts*. He used that term broadly to mean language.”¹⁸⁹ The texts of study in this research are the interpretations of the ministers’ lives.

This thesis’ approach to hermeneutical phenomenology is through Søren Kierkegaard and Fyodor Dostoevsky.¹⁹⁰ Steven Evans presents Kierkegaard’s methodology in a Christian context of understanding:

The observer has a critical contribution to make to the observation; her own skills, attitudes, values, and experiences heavily shape how she sees and what she sees. Kierkegaard perceived this very clearly and therefore emphasizes the role of the subjective participation of the observer. ‘What one sees depends on how one sees. This is because all observation is not merely a receiving, a discovery, but also a creation, and to the extent that it is this latter, the decisive factor becomes how the observer himself is. . . . To the extent that the object of the observation is part of the external world, the condition of the observer is a matter of indifference, or, rather,

¹⁸⁸ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 65.

¹⁸⁹ Marlene Z. Cohen, David L. Kahn, and Richard H. Steeves, *Hermeneutical Phenomenological Research: A Practical Guide for Nurse Researchers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), 448.

¹⁹⁰ Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky are considered precursors to existential, phenomenological and hermeneutic phenomenological thought. In the book *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), James Risser writes, “. . . there would be something insufficient in an accounting of hermeneutic phenomenology if the Kierkegaardian influence is denied by substituting Dilthey for Kierkegaard” (33). Risser goes on to add the great influence of Kierkegaard on both Gadamer and Heidegger’s methodological developments.

that which is essential to the observation does not concern his deeper being. On the other hand, the more the object of observation belongs to the world of the spirit, the more important is the state of the innermost being of the observer.’ This means that the condition of the observer must not be seen simply as a possible set of biases that will distort the observations. Such is indeed possible, but at times the condition of the observer is essential, enabling condition that allows the true meaning of the behavior to be revealed. . . . [T]he often unnoticed flip side of this is that just as some qualities may distort or bias observation, so others may be necessary to grasp them in their fullness or wholeness.¹⁹¹

Using the Kierkegaardian approach to hermeneutical phenomenology means that the researcher aims to comprehend meanings as the possibilities of human life. For the researcher:

...[T]he primary source for his insights are his introspective experience and reflections on his own life. . . . He uses introspection, not to discover what events are occurring right now inside his head, but to understand meanings, possible ways of being. His method is more properly described as recollection than introspection, since his focus is on understanding patterns of action that have a history and not on recording contemporaneous events. . . . Understanding of meanings is possible only through participation in human life; grasping of new meanings is possible only through reflection on that participation”¹⁹²

Kierkegaard desired to understand particular thoughts and actions in the context of the whole life story of the individual, often focused around particular phenomenon. What we see in this thesis’ research is life stories of the participants intersecting with life story of the researcher. The research can only effectively interpret another person’s life story

¹⁹¹ Stephen C. Evans, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Christian Psychology: Insight for Counseling and Pastoral Care* (Vancouver, Regent College Publishing, 1997), 36.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 37.

by being involved in that story—spiritually by involving the whole self—and by reflecting on that person’s life story in light of the researcher’s own experience.

A Kierkegaardian approach to hermeneutic phenomenology allows for the researcher to be an active interpreter of the phenomenon. My experience did not need to be bracketed, i.e. set aside for the sake of objectivity of the research. It did, nevertheless, need to be revealed and understood at every stage of the research. Since I have been through some of the same experiences—but not in exactly the same role or manner as the participants—I have empathetically engaged the participants in reflection on their lived experiences of the phenomenon.

My role is as a narrator who engages and interprets the experience the participants in the multiple realities in the process of transformation. To aid my own self-reflection and interpretation, I kept reflective notes. I needed to reflect on the different selves or roles (fellow minister, junior minister, researcher, etc.) that I might bring to or represent in the research. I kept an on-going questioning dialogue with myself in the midst of the research. I was constantly drawn back to the hermeneutical circle.¹⁹³ This required reflection concerning the texts in their constituent parts and in their wholeness. The work would flow from analysis to synthesis, from deconstruction to reconstruction, from reformation to transformation.

Dovetailing with a Kierkegaardian approach to hermeneutical phenomenology is a Dostoyevskian approach.¹⁹⁴ Dostoevsky wrote mostly fiction yet from a biblical

¹⁹³ The hermeneutical circle can be seen as “1. Action in the world leads to a jarring experience. 2. Our overall understandings are shattered, and we reflect on the need for new ones. 3. We turn to the Scriptures with new questions. 4. This leads to a new level of action. 5. The scope of the action widens.” Michael Jenkins, *Invitation to Theology: A Guide to Study, Conversation and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 65. Another interpretation of the hermeneutical circle appropriate for this research is the following, “Using the hermeneutic circle as a means of interpreting data means that the smallest statements must be understood in terms of the largest cultural contexts. It also means that all the contexts in between must be taken into consideration. . . .” Marlene Z. Cohen, David L. Kahn, and Richard H. Steeves, *Hermeneutical Phenomenological Research: A Practical Guide for Nurse Researchers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000), 73.

¹⁹⁴ In my MA degree, both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky were Christian writers that I studied and felt a great desire to approach one or the other for that degree’s thesis. In the end, I found wonderful thesis co-

worldview; this DMin thesis tries to avoid the former and maintain the latter. There is something of Dostoevsky's methodology that influences my own. This may be seen through Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*.

First is Dostoevsky's view that the self is unfinalizable: it is dynamic, changing and growing:

As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word....The genuine life of the personality is made available only through a *dialogic* penetration of that personality, during which it freely and reciprocally reveals itself. The truth about a man in the mouths of others, not directed to him dialogically and therefore a *secondhand* truth, becomes a *lie* degrading and deadening him, if it touches upon his 'holy of holies,' that is, 'the man in man.'¹⁹⁵

We may call this the human spirit, which may remain hidden at times to the human person. Nevertheless, we must assume that the person is speaking the truth about himself—unless there is sufficient reason to suspect otherwise.

Second is Dostoevsky's approach toward what Bakhtin labels polyphony in narration. Bakhtin writes,

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of full valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a

directors, Donna Orwin in the Slavic Studies department at the University of Toronto and T. Allan Smith in Orthodox Studies at St. Michael's University College. My Master's thesis was titled *Gospel, Apocalypse, and Eschatology: Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky's Theology of Imaginative Literature in "Cana of Galilee" from The Brothers Karamazov*. The heart of the thesis analyzed how Dostoevsky interweaves quotes, allusions, themes, and symbols from the Gospels and the book of Revelation to create a new work, "Cana of Galilee" in his novel.

¹⁹⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 59.

single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combined but are not merged in the unity of the event.... A character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighed as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author's word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters.... Furthermore, the very orientation of the narrative—and this is equally true of narration by the author, by a narrator, or by one of the characters—must necessarily be quite different that in novels of monologic type. The position from which a story is told, a portrayal built, or information provided must be oriented in a new way to this new world—a world of autonomous subjects, not objects.¹⁹⁶

Dostoevsky wanted characters that were free and that had their own voices distinct from the other characters, the narrator and even the author. Dostoevsky was not merely looking for consensus. Further, the quotations and references stand above the poetic system of narration, yet govern and organize it.

Dostoevsky looked at his tasks as, “With utter realism to find the man in man.... They call me a psychologist; this is not true. I am merely a realist in the higher sense, that is, I portray all the depths of the human soul.”¹⁹⁷ In the following analysis by Bakhtin, we see Dostoevsky as a definite precursor to hermeneutical phenomenology:

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 6-7. “From the viewpoint of a consistently monologic visualization and understanding of the represented world, from the viewpoint of some monologic canon for the proper construction of novels, Dostoevsky's world may seem a chaos, and the construction of his novels some sort of conglomerate of disparate materials and incomplete principles for shaping them. Only in light of Dostoevsky's fundamental artistic task... can one begin to understand the profound organic cohesion, consistency and wholeness of Dostoevsky's poetics.” Ibid, 8.

¹⁹⁷ Along with this Dostoevsky said, “and what most people regard as fantastic and exceptional is sometimes for me the very essence of reality.” W.J. Leatherbarrow, *Fyodor Dostoyevsky: The Brothers Karamazov* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 82.

Our point of view in no way assumes passivity on the part of the author, who would then merely assemble others' point of view, others' truths, completely denying his own point of view, his own truth. This is not the case at all; the case is rather a completely new and special interrelationship between the author's and the other's truth. The author is profoundly *active*, but his activity is of a special *dialogic* sort. It is one thing to be active in relation to a dead thing, to a voiceless material that can be molded and formed as one wishes, and another thing to be active *in relation to someone else's living, autonomous consciousness*. This is a questioning, provoking, answering, agreeing, objecting activity; that is, it is dialogic activity no less active than the activity that finalizes, materializes, explains, and kills causally, that drowns out the other's voice with nonsemantic arguments. Dostoevsky frequently interrupts, but he never drowns out the other's voice, never finishes it off 'from himself,' that is, out of his own alien consciousness. That is, so to speak, the activity of God in his relation to man, a relation allowing man to reveal himself utterly (in his immanent development), to judge himself, to refute himself.¹⁹⁸

Often, truth is conveyed polyphonically. Where there are many voices in harmony around a particular phenomenon, this is often revealing their fidelity and commitment to the issue. However, truth does not have to be maintained by the majority. Truth is not necessarily democratic demarcated. Like Dostoevsky, we are not using a quantitative methodology interested in statistics.¹⁹⁹ We are looking for where the voices unite chorally to sing the same song, while making allowance for solos, duos and trios in the narrative program. In the whole program there is unity and diversity; the unity and diversity flow into and out of one another. This reflects the dialogic and polyphonic nature of the Triune life. It is a life where each voice is heard, allowed full presence and is in dialogue, triologue or polylogue as more characters enter into the song-story program.

¹⁹⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 285.

¹⁹⁹ Even though Dostoevsky studied and was certified in military engineering, he disdained mathematics.

Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* is the story of fathers and sons, and their personal struggles and transformations toward understanding, relationship and identity. In this current research, these elements remain. The story of the ministers in the WCG/GCI is perhaps an even greater story of relational transformation than the story of *The Brothers' Karamazov*. Although I am not Dostoevsky—nor do I try to be—I am gratefully influenced by his writing, and as an instructor of language and literature at Centennial College for over a decade and a half, the literary approach to writing cannot help but influence my scholarly writing. Thus I will take a novel approach to thesis writing, which is a narrative theology. Dostoevsky's polyphonic approach to a narrative is maintained in this study, providing a hermeneutical circle of the context of life stories dialectically influencing other stories in the grand narrative. My narrative voice has a contribution in weaving the narrative together; this perspective tries to make sense of the polyphony of voices. Nevertheless, the narrator allows for the freedom of the characters/participants to tell their own stories, allowing them to contribute their diverse points of view. Although consensus may be sought, it is not to deny the importance of each individual's contribution. At times, one single person's perspective may add more insight than some or all of the other characters. There is a dialectic that must be carefully weighed in creating the grand narrative in the approach to existential and theological change. The stories are different parts of a multifaceted jewel being held up to the light and turned every which way so that all the general and particular beauty may be explored. Again, this is in some way a reflection of the Triune life and our life in the Trinity.

3.3.2 Grounded Theory

After I collected all of the narratives from the participants, I performed some initial coding of the data, looking for key themes in the narratives. Then I took these themes and presented them to the participants at the next stage of the research: interviewing the participants. Here I used grounded theory/research, allowing the participants to become active in the coding and interpretation of the data. The specific method of grounded

theory that I appropriated was axial coding, which explores the interrelationship of the categories/themes. Creswell states:

In this phase of analysis, the researcher creates a coding paradigm, or theoretical model that visually portrays the interrelationship of these axial categories of information. A theory is built or generated. At the broadest level of analysis, the researcher can create a conditional matrix. This matrix is an analytical aid—a diagram—that helps the researcher visualize the wide range of conditions and consequences related to the central phenomenon.²⁰⁰

The central phenomenon for this study was the doctrinal change on the nature of God in the WCG. At this stage, the participants also became grounded researchers, helping shape and interpret the categories and interconnections between them. I engaged the participant-researchers with vignettes from other participants' narratives and allowed them to retell or embellish their own narratives. Here I again engaged a Dostoyevskian perspective of polyphony, allowing for the narrators to engage in dialogue with one another's stories.

3.3.3 Hermeneutic Phenomenology Revisited

At the end of this process, I took the coded data gathered and started the final stage of coding and interpretation. This stage used the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, keeping in mind what I have previously mentioned. Here I interpreted the data and tried to present a coherent narrative regarding the ministers' experiences. In the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology:

The goal of the analysis is a thick description that accurately captures and communicates the meaning of the lived experience for the informants being studied. A thick description is one that captures the experience from the

²⁰⁰ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 151.

perspective of the informant in its fullest and richest complexity (Denzin, 1989; Geertz, 1973). The idea of a dialectic process often referred to as the hermeneutic circle underlies hermeneutic thinking and provides guidance for this interpretative effort (Gadamer, 1976; Kockelmans, 1975; Ricoeur, 1981). . . .²⁰¹

The challenge for the interpretation of the study was to integrate the particular theological, doctrinal and existential details of the particular narratives into a coherent collective narrative of the participants' experiences. This was a dialectic of bringing the particular and the general into a synopsis grouped around themes and in a relatively chronological format.

The challenge has been to tell the narratives of the particular participants while weaving them in overall grand narrative of the other participants and the WCG/GCI. I often let the participants enter the story-telling, letting them speak for themselves. They may, at times, be speaking as a representative of a larger group, or they may, at other times, be expressing something that is unique to their particular experiences, which adds a brilliant facet to the whole picture of the phenomenon. The experience of the individuals and participant groups will help to explore the effects of the change of the doctrine of God in the WCG on ministers understanding of and relationship with God, self and congregation.

3.4 Data Management

The ministers solicited for this research were asked to sign a letter of consent to participate in the study as they began the process.²⁰² They were informed that they were welcome to withdraw from the study at any time. However, they also were informed that any data that they have contributed to that point in will remain with the study but its

²⁰¹ Marlene Z. Cohen, David L. Kahn, and Richard H. Steeves, *Hermeneutical Phenomenological Research: A Practical Guide for Nurse Researchers*, 72-73.

²⁰² See Appendix C on page 269 for the letter of consent.

origins would remain anonymous. There were no participants who withdrew from the study.

The participants in the study either chose or were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. The data (electronic and paper) have been kept private at my home, on my laptop computer's hard drive or my email account.

Now, the information of the pseudonymous participants is shared with you, the readers.

Introduction to the primary participants:

There are eight primary participants in this research. They were born in Canada, United Kingdom and the United States in the 1940s. For the sake of anonymity, they have all chosen pseudonyms: Alexander, Barnabas, Eagleton, J.R., Martin, Patrick, Philip and Thomas.

CHAPTER FOUR**MINISTERS' FORMATIONS (1940s - EARLY 1990s)**

Through this chapter we trace the data regarding the participants' religious experience from childhood to their ministry in the WCG under Herbert W. Armstrong. The information that they provided in narratives and interviews reveals essential background details that influenced their commitments to the doctrinal change in the WCG and the relational change toward God, self and congregation.

4.1 Childhood Church and Family Relationships of the Participants

In this section, we seek to understand the childhood and youth experiences of the participants. As with any human phenomenon, the experiences of childhood and youth profoundly affect one's worldview. These foundational years can be when one acts to follow the worldview of one's family and culture and/or reacts against them. As we shall see, the participants' backgrounds affected their later choices and commitments.

4.1.1 Church Attendance

In their childhood experiences, the majority of the participants had some background in a Christian church. Most of these were mainline churches: Anglican/Episcopal, Methodist, Roman Catholic and Lutheran. One of the participants had a continuous grounding in a church community. Three of the participants were either regular or semi-regular churchgoers at some point in these early years. For the rest, the participants' experiences were varying degrees in cultural Christianity, attending a church or several different churches on occasion and/or on holidays. These were Christmas and Easter experience at best; there were few that had deep relationships in the church, but at least they had some exposure. For many of the participants, it was their mother or a female relative who took them to church. If the father went, he seemed disinterested.

4.1.2 Church Education

Children start to make their minds up about God from teachings that they receive or the lack of teachings that they receive. The participants had some general instruction in religion at church, Sunday school or grammar/high school. Their memories are about some of the general events of being in church and Sunday school. For example, Barnabas recalls, "I received some teaching about God from Sunday school in the Methodist Church. I remember very little from the Methodist Church, mostly Sunday school stuff with the flannel boards and some arts/crafts." For the most part, the participants had vague instruction on God and developed concepts about God from these teachings or other experiences. There was noticeably little solid biblical and theological teaching that the participants received during these years at church. They were taught some general concepts about God. Some were taught to fear and respect God.

Some other participants were taught profound basics. For example, as JR states, "All I remember is that at the local Methodist church I learned that 'Jesus loves me. This

I know. Because the Bible tells me so.”²⁰³ However, the important truth of the song was not more deeply expounded. Even being taught about God, the participants were not encouraged to have a relationship with God, other than saying prayers at night or meals.

Discussion of the Triune nature of God can be difficult for theologians, let alone children. There were only vague recollections for three of the participants regarding any discussion of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There was little instruction on and experience of the three divine Persons. There are some lingering memories among these three participants, being able to recite either the Doxology or the Apostles Creed from childhood memories. For example, Philip recalls, “I probably learned more about the Trinity in the Methodist church despite my church’s fairly liberal focus. Just the standard stuff that you do in the Methodist church; there was a lot of reference to the Trinity, but there was not a lot of unpacking as to what those references really meant. Every time we had a church service we sang the doxology and that stuck.” Some other participants confirm a similar experience, they knew about the Trinity. Eagleton explains, “I had heard the word *Trinity*. The expression *Holy Ghost* was known to me but I [knew] little about what it was.” The participants did not receive any teaching—that they can recall—on the particular Persons in the Godhead, with some exception to basic teachings on Jesus and His earthly ministry. However, the key issue is that some of the participants were at least exposed to the concept of the Trinity in a favourable manner during their childhood.

In spite of exposure to the concept of the Trinity, when the participants thought about God, they tended to function as unitarian deists. There are three types of functional unitarian deism that they exhibited.

The first view is a kind of benevolent deism. Thomas, recalls hearing very logical sermons at his Anglican church each Sunday, yet no one in his family, church or community seemed to discuss God very much: “I never worried about the nature of God.

²⁰³ Church legend has it that Karl Barth used these same lyrics when asked to summarize his *Church Dogmatics*.

I understood he was kind and good and always there, God was always there and not someone to be scared of.”

The second view is a classical deism of the disinterested God. For example, Eagleton had a vague view of God as “existing but being way off somewhere in space. There was no relationship at all.” Barnabas shares a similar view:

As best as I can recall, my conception of God at that point was as a very powerful, brightly shining Being, who, to keep from blinding people, had to live so far from the earth that he would only appear as a tiny point of light way off in the night sky. The stars were vividly visible at night on the farm—no ‘light pollution’ during those days—and I would look up and wonder which point of light was God. Where I got that idea, I do not know. Perhaps it came from my imagination.

Martin also had a version of this God, off in space.

The third is view is a malevolent deism. J.R. recalls:

I went to the Methodist church from time to time and one day went to the Sunday school class. The teacher started the class session; he or she (I don’t remember) shut the door and on the back of the classroom door was this very vivid detailed portrayal of what hell was like. And that filled me with a certain kind of terror about God that he was out to fry humans. I still see that. It was probably taken from some Dante type imagery. They wanted to scare us and they did it. That one event, which may have surrounded by teachings, but I don’t remember, helped frame a concept that at least God the Father being mean spirited.

Alexander, being taught by Roman Catholic priests, viewed his relationship with God as one of fear and placation:

As a child, I viewed God as a very stern father or an image of God that demanded penance for sins that demanded choices that would either result in hell or purgatory or heaven if you're really good. I could only grasp the need to pray to God and try to appease him by not doing bad things. When I failed, I dreaded going to the representative of God on this earth, the priest, to ask for forgiveness and to receive just penance once again be able to take communion and in essence to be in favour with God. I could only grasp the need to pray to God and try to appease him by not doing bad things.... My relationship to God was not a personal one—I believed in God as one being—but had very little ingrained thought given to a Saviour or to the Holy Spirit.

Later, Alexander went from one performance-based religion, Roman Catholicism, to another, the WCG.

In the participants' childhood understanding of God there were shifts between a functional unitarianism and a functional bitheism when Jesus was brought into the picture. In three participants' discussions, there appears to be a God/Jesus dualism. God was distant in His transcendence and Jesus was close in His immanence. For Alexander, God was cold and stern; in contrast, Jesus was warm and loving. The participants did not discuss having an awareness of the divine Father-Son relationship, especially as a relationship of love. Generally, God was not referred to as Father, and there seems to be little relationship with Him. Jesus was the Person to whom half of the participants could relate.

From many participants' experience, other than receiving some general details about Jesus Christ, He did not seem to be a central issue in their churches. Therefore, when the participants went to the WCG, they did not experience a lack of teaching on Jesus. The participants were not raised in Christ-centered families; thus they did not feel Jesus being pushed to the margins when they came into the WCG.

The Holy Spirit was absent from the discussion of the participants' childhood. Alexander went to a Roman Catholic church and school. When asked whether he received any teachings regarding the Holy Spirit, he responded:

None what-so-ever. The charismatic movement in the Catholic Church, as I came to find out later, was not really until the '60s. I don't recall any sense at all of the Holy Spirit, except doing the sign of the cross was always very clearly the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There was never any question that the Holy Spirit was God. There was never any explanation. I don't think kids' minds could grasp too much in the theological concepts of the things of God.

Patrick was only one participant who remembers any specific discussion of the Holy Spirit from his childhood church experience, which was for a brief time in the United Pentecostal church.²⁰⁴ From the perspective of the participants, the Holy Spirit was a non-issue in the churches that they attended. Therefore, the participants were not promoted to have a relationship with Him. Consequently, when the participants joined the WCG, it was not difficult to categorize the Holy Spirit as a non-personal force.

In summary, Philip's experience in his Methodist church may be generalized for the larger group of participants' childhood experience: "the view of God, the Bible and Christianity was woefully inadequate."

The vague or deficient teachings and experiences in these areas left the participants with a curiosity to discover more about God and matters of faith. This lack eventually was filled with Armstrongism. Nonetheless, this partial grounding in historic, orthodox Christianity from childhood was a blessing. This may have helped the participants make the transition in following the WCG through the doctrinal changes away from Armstrongism back into historic, orthodox Christianity. Thomas recounts that another WCG pastor told him during the doctrinal changes of the 1990s, "Those who had

²⁰⁴ For Patrick even a discussion in the United Pentecostal tradition would not have been trinitarian but modalist.

a previous church background were coping with all these changes much better.” Thomas agreed, “That was a major factor in my assent to the changes.”

4.1.3 Paternal Relationships

Human understanding of and relationship with God often grows out of a relationship with parents. If the parents do not teach their children about God, then the children will learn from others or make up ideas for themselves. J.R. states, “My parents had little impact on my understanding of God. At this point, I can’t think of anyone who taught me much about God.” This seems to be the case for the majority of the parents, especially for the fathers. The sons were not taught about God by their fathers. The sons had to learn about God from mothers, female relatives, churches and schools. This intercessory role of father as teacher, leading the son to a deeper understanding of and relationship with God was lacking. Moreover, the lack in relationship between the father and the son further made God as a father seem more distant.

The experiences of the participants in this study vary, and we cannot say that there is one common experience. However, there is a certain phenomenon that is significant and forms a ground for later experiences in the understanding of and relationship with God, self and congregation (others). This phenomenon is that the majority of the participants did not have positive, close relationships with fathers.²⁰⁵ The participants generally found some type of lack in their relationship with their fathers. For example, Martin, explains, “I knew that my parents deeply loved me and was especially close to my father. I was shattered by his sudden death when I was ten. I had no idea of any future hope; death seemed to be final and life empty. I just lived from day to day and tried to get through life.” With the loss of his father, Martin found little meaning in life. For Martin the loss of his father may have created the idea of a distant God. The rest of

²⁰⁵ There were two cases where the father led the son into the WCG. These were two of the closer relationships between participants and their fathers.

the participants did not lose their fathers at a young age; nevertheless, the majority of the fathers were absent emotionally and relationally from their sons. Moreover, these fathers did not take a leading role in teaching their sons about God.

The fathers were either nominally Christian or agnostics, and they rarely if ever mentioned God. They appeared to be focused on their other activities. Eagleton recalls, “My Dad had no interest in religion. My father was not a believer and though present in body was distant and uninvolved in my life. There was little relationship. This greatly affected me as I did not know what a close relationship was and all my life have had difficulty forming close friendships.” Not only did the fathers affect human-human relationships but human-divine relationships. Barnabas explains, “I think the lack of verbal communication from my dad parallels the ‘silence’ I feel from God in response to prayer. However, the fact that I could trust my dad 100% translates over to trust in God.” The key issue for many of the participants although the fathers were present physically for their children, the fathers were not there emotionally and spiritually for their children. It was not that the fathers were abusive or harsh, but there was a distance between most of the participants and their fathers. This seems to translate for some participants into a kind of deistic view toward God. The relationship between the human father and child is of great importance. From that relationship, people tend to project their human fathers’ image on to the face of God the Father. The participants’ general view of God was that He was somewhere off in space, busy doing other things. However, they did not relate to Him as their intimate Abba, Father.

The fathers neither appeared to have a close relationship with God nor with their children. The distance of that primary relationship between God (the Father) and the human father in some way impacted the relationship between the human fathers and children. The way for the participants to gain attention and approval and attention from their fathers was through performance, doing well in school and sports and living moral lives. This in turn may have impacted the way the participants viewed their relationship with God. Although none of the participants specifically state this, it is possible that there

was a void in their lives that was filled by Herbert W. Armstrong, whom the participants admired as a father figure. He gave them teachings about God that they were lacking.²⁰⁶ He provided guidance for a way—through morals and law keeping—to be acknowledged and approved by God. Armstrong also taught the participants when they became ministers to be father figures to their congregants.

4.1.4 Maternal Relationships

Early in the lives of some of the participants, the strong parental relationship was with either a mother or an aunt, who attended to the boys' physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Three of the participants noted that women most strongly influenced them in their spiritual training, especially through words and/or deeds providing an understanding of God as benevolent and loving. Eagleton's experience is a clear example of this phenomenon:

My mother was a fine Christian woman though she rarely talked about God. Her love gave me insight into God's love, even if I felt it was from a distance. My mother's teaching was limited due to her lack of formal education, time constraints of raising three children, a full-time job and little support from a non-believing husband. At least I knew Jesus loved me—though from a distance I thought and not involved in the daily struggles of life. (I now understand this to mean the *transcendence* of God.) Apart from that I knew nothing of biblical teaching.

²⁰⁶ The WCG viewed Armstrong as the Elijah to come, fulfilling Mal. 4:6 “He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.” Armstrong was seen as an intermediary, father-figure, restoring relationships with God and his children, and human fathers and their children. The irony is that Armstrong's teachings often divided families, WCG family members from non-WCG family members.

The participants who talked about mothers or aunts did so with great respect as moral, loving, hard-working women. It was their self-sacrifice and care that the participants admired. The lack of direct, specific teaching from the mothers on spiritual issues and a focus on lifestyle may have left the participants with the thought that Christianity was more about lifestyle than about relationship and understanding. Also the participants rarely discuss their prayer-life, especially at this young age; there are a few who mention the impact of mothers, aunts, grandmothers who gave examples and guidance with praying to God. Many of the female caregivers provided the participants with a positive view toward the parental aspect of God.

4.2 Religious Conversions

4.2.1 Early Conversions

Youth is often a time where people start searching for answers to the greater questions of meaning. In the lives of two participants, the loss of a loved one or people they admired marked a transition to quest for answers to the meaning of these events and of life. Others participants had transformative events through being given a Bible for high school graduation, attending a youth Bible camp or attending university. In several cases, a question started the participants on the search for meaning and God. These questions, asked by the participants or others, helped elicit a reflection on the ultimate question, regarding their existence and/or the identity of God. However, even through this period of questioning, God seemed abstract. For example, J.R. explains, “This God was rather indistinct in my thinking. What I needed was more information and direction as to who this God is and what He wants from me.” The participants, like J.R., were looking for some clarity about God that was not provided in their churches or homes.

Two of the participants heard the gospel presented for the first time in their mid-teen aged years.²⁰⁷ Philip had gone to church for many years, and through his church he attended a youth Bible camp run by a Pentecostal couple:

As far as I recollect, they gave me the first full presentation I heard of the actual gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ. It resonated in my soul. I had always had a yearning for God, and this was the first time I heard an accurate presentation concerning God's grace on my behalf. I was profoundly moved, even at that young age, fourteen. Because of that significant personal encounter with God and the message of his gospel, I committed my life to Christ. It was a serious, genuine commitment.

Philip received the standard gospel message, which was undoubtedly effective to transform his life. The presentation of the gospel to Philip was strong in the language of the Father and the Son, but lacking of the Holy Spirit.²⁰⁸ The challenge, however, was the lack of follow up in youth discipleship in his Methodist church when he returned home. In fact, he expressed that his youth leader was upset by his accepting Christ; she was more interested in talking about pacifism in approach to the Vietnam war, "That was the curriculum and Jesus was an afterthought to that." She also was not in favour of hearing what happened to Philip at the camp. After Philip returned home, he started to drift from church for a few years and then "took a detour," joining the WCG around the same time as his father.²⁰⁹ However, the encounter at the youth camp remained with him and may

²⁰⁷ The orthodox gospel is the traditional message of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and salvation through Him. This is made in contradistinction to the WCG gospel which was not about the Person of Jesus but about the church's eschatological message regarding the Kingdom of God and the identity of the lost tribes of Israel.

²⁰⁸ Perhaps this is ironic since Pentecostals gave the presentation.

²⁰⁹ One recent study suggests that the largest number of people leave churches because of feeling let down, betrayed or hurt by them. Also a lack of support and of relevance is among significant factors for cutting ties with churches. Conversely, among the top reasons for returning to church are a spiritual crisis, family and friends and finding a new Christian community [John Bowen, *Growing Up Christian* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2010), 165, 175]. The participants' experience in this thesis generally agrees with Bowen's findings. For example, Philip left due to feeling let down by the church due to a lack of support and relevance. He had a profound spiritual experience that was not nurtured in his church. His

have helped him in later years: “That event really planted a lot of seeds in terms of understanding about Jesus Christ, and then I did this little detour into the WCG for a variety of reasons. Nonetheless, some of the seeds that they had planted really stuck. In our transformation, doctrinally it was kind of like being reacquainted with an old friend (old not in a negative sense).”

Philip is not alone in an early transformative encounter with the gospel. Martin presents his own experience:

As a boy, I had no relationship with God and had really no concept of who he was. When I was fifteen, I developed a close friendship with a classmate who was a committed Christian.... He encouraged me to attend an evangelical service with him, and I was moved to give my life to Christ. After the service, I was given a little package of information, explaining I had been born again and encouraging me to attend a local church. So I started to attend the closest Anglican Church every Sunday. I had a passion to learn the Bible and to follow God and received instruction being confirmed around Pentecost, Whitsunday, 1960. Still my understanding of God was very minimal, with no real comprehension of the meaning of the Trinity.

In the cases of Martin and Philip what we see is that the gospel is presented in its basic form, with little or no follow up in discipling the teenagers. They both came to Christ through orthodox Christian groups; however, they were neither given any real teaching on the Triune God nor did they form close relationships with a minister or church members who would instruct them. They accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, but were not given much about the relational aspect of God. There were great gaps in their understanding of and relationship with God. These and other gaps left an opening for Armstrongism to fill.

return to church was largely due to his dad joining the new religious community, the WCG, and bringing Philip along. Also, Philip found the prophetic message of the WCG relevant to his situation in life.

4.2.2 Transformations to the WCG

4.2.2.1 The God of the Bible

With the exception of two participants, who came into the WCG through their fathers, the rest of the participants came into contact with the WCG through either the *Plain Truth Magazine* and/or *The World Tomorrow* radio broadcast in the 1960s. The media and evangelistic arm of the denomination was going at full speed in the 1960s, and the participants were drawn to its message through its use of the Bible and prophecy.

The 1960s saw a great rise in atheism and the death-of-God movement. This promoted a desire for some of the participants to prove that God exists. Alexander discusses his quest, “Having had very little connection with God on a personal basis, Armstrong offered a scientific answer to a common question as to the proof of the existence of God.” Armstrong’s booklet *Does God Exist?* and articles and broadcasts on this topic gave reasoned answers, which were not given by other radio evangelists or by churches.

Armstrong seemed to have the answers to the participants’ questions. Moreover, he gave the answers straight from the Bible. His use of the Bible greatly appealed to the participants, who did not see the Bible being held in such high regard in other Christian circles. The participants discuss how they were engaged by Armstrong’s challenges on *The World Tomorrow* radio program: “Don’t believe me, believe your Bible” and “blow the dust off your Bible.” They were impressed by Armstrong and his ministers when they constantly used of the Bible to support what they were saying. We may wonder how the participants were led into the errors of Armstrongism. Martin explains how he was drawn in by Armstrong’s teaching:

Since I had no grounding in the basics of Christianity, I was not able to see through the errors that Herbert Armstrong taught so dogmatically. A person (Armstrong) came along and fired a lot of scriptures at you and turned here and there in the Bible; this sounded very persuasive. If one wasn’t thoroughly grounded, then one could mistakenly feel that what he was teaching was correct,

because the Bible backs it up. If one had a strong background, one might have questioned seriously how he was using Scripture. But not having any at all, and turning to the scriptures he quoted and even looking at them in context and lining them up the way he lined them up, sounded very convincing—that this is what the Bible taught and was true. Religious people didn't even do that, which is a great pity; they didn't utilize the Bible a great deal. What Herbert Armstrong tried to do in his mistaken way was to prove from the Bible what he taught; he was sincerely in deep error, but he seemed convincing if you did not know the correct emphasis, especially if you dismiss all of Christian history (which he did, saying that the gospel had not been preached for 1900 years and God used him to preach it again).

Due to the participants not having a strong biblical education in their youth, they were easily led by the tactics of Armstrongism. Thomas also gives another example of Armstrong's use of rhetoric in order to gain people's assent:

Armstrong would ask a question, 'What does the word kingdom mean?' He would go to the Webster's dictionary and look up the term. It would not dawn on him that it was originally a Greek term. Herbert Armstrong saw in the dictionary that kingdom meant law, people, subjects and territory. This made sense for a lot of people. This is an anti-intellectual, anti-scholarly approach. The great strength of Armstrongism is the ability to connect and be relevant with the audience; Herbert Armstrong connected with the common person. The common person would agree with the statement: 'How can you make sense of all this three-in-one talk?'

Armstrong gave the plain truth to people, rather than following the theologians and biblical scholars. The paradox is that the WCG was both an anti-intellectual movement and a cognitive movement. It rejected what it looked on as uninspired Christian scholars who used reason and tradition, and it accepted Armstrong and the Armstrongists' own

simplistic reasoning from Scripture. The answers that the WCG provided resonated with the participants as young men.

The participants were open and searching for answers and guidance from the Bible about God. Once they found out that God exists, they continued to follow Armstrong's leadership. However, the initial discussion regarding the existence of God was not followed up in detail in the media, i.e. describing this God. The booklet *Does God Exist* does not give a Christian answer to the question regarding the ontology of God—it gives a functionally unitarian and deistic one regarding God being “THE MASTER CLOCKMAKER OF THE UNIVERSE.”²¹⁰ There is mention of God in a general sense and not a single mention of Jesus Christ in the whole booklet. Armstrong frames the questions and the answers for the audience. Armstrong does state that his God is the Creator; however, he does not ask the follow-up question, “Who is this Creator?” Since Armstrong seemed to be reliable about the ultimate question, the existence of God, this man therefore also seemed trustworthy about most other topics. Armstrong's audience, especially the participants, had insufficient training to prove him wrong or analyze his methods.

Armstrong, the advertising-business-man, did a bait and switch tactic. He gained the audience's interest regarding God, while only discussing God in a general sense. Then he switched the audience's attention to something else, once again drawing the reader back to the Bible to prove his point. Armstrong's WCG seldom focused on theology, and this was always *ad hoc*, based around the central issues of prophecy and Christian living.

²¹⁰ Early in the book, Armstrong attacks deism as “theophobia”, but later he uses arguments that seem deistic, acknowledging God mainly as creator. Ironically, this is not dissimilar to the deism of scholastic Protestantism, against which Armstrong may have been reacting.

4.2.2.2 The God of Prophecy

In the 1930s, Armstrong was one of the original radio evangelists who had the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other hand. After some thirty years of developing this method, he caught the attention of many of our participants. Half of the participants discuss a lack of interest in God and the Bible until they were woken up by current events in the 1960s. For example, J.R. recalls that his lack of interest in the things of God “continued until the Vietnam War came into my life. I was startled by it and by all the violence both domestic and abroad that it generated.” Events like Vietnam and other conflicts were enough to make the participants start questioning their meaning on a larger scale. Armstrong came forward with the answers—these are end time events—and he alone had been given the Truth about them. The great allure of Armstrongism was the prophetic focus of its gospel message. Sadly, the participants were not aware of the scores of Armstrong’s unfulfilled prophecies, because the WCG did not publicize these failures.²¹¹

Thomas recalls the focus of this message, “The kingdom is coming soon and you had better get ready. There is hope, God is there. It’s all going to be fine. What I call our belief, hyper pre-millennialism—this is going to all end in 1975 and start in 1972. This was a factor that dragged me in there (the WCG).” The participants started to drift toward the allure of this fear-hope based eschatological message: fear that the end is nigh and if you join our movement, you will be protected from the wrath to come.²¹² As always, Armstrong looked to the Bible for proof. Alexander explains, “Herbert Armstrong also encouraged searching the Bible for ‘all’ of the answers of life, what the

²¹¹ One anti-Armstrong website has some 209 failed prophecies listed: “The Painful Truth” <http://www.hwarmstrong.com/prophet-1.htm> (accessed August 3, 2011).

²¹² In a personal discussion in the summer of 2007 with the TST DMin director, Andrew Irvine, and assistant director, Richard Tanner, they both mentioned that they listened to Armstrong on the radio in the 1960s. They also found his message very appealing. Since it seemed like the course of the world was headed toward destruction and the other Christian churches did not really discuss these events in light of the Bible, they were drawn to the message that Armstrong gave: God is in charge and there is hope. However, Irvine and Tanner, through their families, were well rooted and instructed in historic, orthodox Christianity not to be drawn into the heresies of Armstrong. The participants, for the most part, did not seem to have this root and support structure.

future would behold and how I could be a part of that future. At the same time, he offered an opportunity to join in the work of God upon this earth in bringing this positive message to people in the world who just did not know these things.” Armstrong provided a package deal for those who would follow his message. The Bible became the answer book or manual for how to live a godly life now and for eternity. As we have seen in an earlier chapter, Armstrong was not so interested in who God is as what God would have a person do in these last days.

4.2.2.3 The God of Christian Living

For Armstrong, prophecy was always related to the present. He gave both a description of future events and a prescription for safety and peace. The prescription entailed right Christian living. This was appealing to the participants who saw the value systems in the world disintegrating. The key solution for Armstrong was a return to Sabbath keeping. This had been the message since his early ministry. Barnabas discusses his encounter with Armstrong’s central message: “In one of his programs he challenged the practice of keeping Sunday and then ‘proved’ that Saturday was the Sabbath that we should all observe.... Once I had ‘proved’ that to be true, then it was quite easy to believe that all these Sunday keeping churches were wrong.” Armstrong moved the participants away from any ties to other Christian churches and toward his own one, true Church of God.

To follow what Armstrong prescribed, keeping the Saturday Sabbath, many of the participants sacrificed jobs and other pursuits. Alexander describes his willingness to follow God and Scripture, “As such I quit a job due to the need to keep the Sabbath day from sunset to sunset, and the shift work I was involved with did not allow such flexibility. God became real to me in that there was a connection between what He said in His inspired word, and it had definite relevance to the way I lived on this earth.” For Alexander, the reality of God was mediated through the Sabbath and Christian living. There was a sense of being special, God’s elect people, being in the WCG.

Barnabas alludes to this in his experience at baptism: “I remember being somewhat disappointed with the words in the baptism ceremony. I wanted to be baptized into the Worldwide Church of God, but the pastor baptized me ‘into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,’ whatever that meant.²¹³ (Today) I am no longer disappointed in that but rather extremely grateful!” The baptismal formula was the name into which all the participants were baptized. Like Barnabas, others may have thought that they were being baptized into the one true Church of God; however, it seems God had other plans for them. Baptism seemed like an initiation rite to join the WCG, without which one could not get into the Kingdom. Patrick reflects on how he viewed himself, especially after his baptism during his first year at Ambassador College:

I saw myself as a son of God, and one whom God loved. However, that identity was tempered by our teaching that we were only God’s children in the embryonic sense. We weren’t really born again until our resurrection to a glorified body at the second coming of Christ. Hence, my status before God was ‘tentative.’ It would only be made permanent if I lived a life of overcoming sin, and stayed faithful until I died, or Christ returned. It wasn’t a fully secured position before God.

Other than these two brief reflections, the participants largely omit their baptism experience. There seems to have been little self or theological reflection regarding this event. This is not to say that there was none at the time. Three major issues of baptism were having one’s sins forgiven through the blood of Christ, the dying to the old self and the rising to a walk in a new way of life. Baptism was seen as important, and there was often a high value put on the person being prepared for baptism, being close to perfect. It was almost that the person had to be perfect by their own actions before they would be accepted by God. The WCG teaching of being begotten at baptism (becoming an egg in the ovum analogy) was perhaps far less exciting than the promise of the future

²¹³ The baptism ceremony stated that a person was not baptized into “any denomination of men, but into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

resurrection. For the majority of the participants, baptism led to a greater desire to know more about God and His way of life.

4.2.3 Ambassador College

4.2.3.1 The Doctrine of God

The participants' experience at Ambassador College was full indoctrination into Armstrongism.²¹⁴ They were rarely given alternative points of view on theological issues. Philip describes his Ambassador experience, "In short order, I mastered many of the details of Armstrong's doctrinal system—it continued to make sense to me in light of Scripture and the world situation.... I had little knowledge of the historic, orthodox Christian faith, so I had little to which I could compare WCG teachings. I was unprotected from heresy." At Ambassador, the method was to call the teachings of non-WCG churches "heresy." However, those teachings were never explored in detail; only a brief summary or caricature of the teachings was given.

As we have seen in a prior chapter, the nature of God was not explored theologically in the WCG. This was evinced in the curriculum at Ambassador. The participants do not remember having much teaching concerning the nature of God, except for the Elohim doctrine. They were given some handouts on the WCG's anti-Trinitarian

²¹⁴ All of the participants were well trained in Armstrongism either through Ambassador College or through a local congregation and WCG media. One of the participants, Barnabas, did not attend Ambassador, yet he desired to study there, "I did apply to Ambassador College when I was a senior in high school, but was not accepted. I don't know if I would have had the courage to go that far from home, but I remember being very sad and thinking that God had rejected me for my Sabbath breaking. In retrospect, as impressionable as I was, Ambassador College would've helped me become a very effective religious Nazi." Barnabas is among six of the participants who attended secular university or college before or while in the WCG. The participants' non-WCG education did not stop them from assenting what critical thinking skills that they had to Armstrongism; nevertheless, having some foundational research and critical thinking skills may have helped them in later years when Armstrongism started to deconstruct and doctrinal changes started to happen. It is interesting to note that one of the primary participants and one of the secondary participants were not students at Ambassador College; however, they are probably two of the most well versed participants in trinitarian theology. Another primary participant would also fit into this category, and he only attended Ambassador for one year.

stance. Philip recalls, “I do not recall thinking much about the doctrine of God. We probably had a class or two in which it was explained that the doctrine of the Trinity was unbiblical. In any case, I gave it little thought.” The bitheism—although this term was not used—was an under-current in Ambassador teaching. Martin recalls the content of bitheism given at Ambassador:

The Bible clearly teaches that God is One, yet it also teaches clearly the full divinity of the Father and the Son. Herbert Armstrong resolved this by saying that the word commonly used for God in the Old Testament was Elohim in Hebrew. He said this was a uni-plural word like church or school and when one looks at Genesis 1:26 God referred to himself in the plural as he stated, ‘Let us make man in our image.’ So supposedly when the Bible says God is one it means he (they) is one family composed of two entirely distinct and separate individuals, the Father and the Son. He further taught the Holy Spirit was only a divine force, though a very powerful one. All of this was matched up with biblical proof-texts.

With the faulty foundation regarding who God is, the errors continued concerning those made in His image. What was underlying this temporary bitheism was the plan for eternal Elohimism. Eagleton describes this belief, “At the resurrection we would become part of ‘God’s family.’ The Trinity limited God to three persons and was portrayed as a closed triangle. The believer’s destiny was to become a literal God in God’s family. God was literally reproducing himself through humanity. God’s children would be fully God.” Three participants remarked that it was an exciting idea to believe that one would become part of Elohim, the God family.

4.2.3.2 Principles of Living

One of the central aspects of an Ambassador education was to teach “the principles of living.”²¹⁵ One had to learn to live the Christian life so that one could “qualify for the Kingdom.” This Armstrongist alliterative catch phrase meant that a person had to qualify by living a good Christian life to meet the criteria to enter the Kingdom of God. This could be accomplished through certain practices to please God: keeping the Sabbath and holy days, tithing, trusting Armstrong, etc. J.R. discusses that Ambassador seemed to have all the answers as to how to live life, “do things God's way and blessings will come. Do things contrary to God's way and curses will come. This approach seemed logical and most surely based on the very words of the Bible, especially the words of Jesus as found in the Synoptic Gospels.” The ultimate blessing would come if the participants qualified for the Kingdom, then they could become God beings, joining the God family. The participants often saw their identities through the lens regarding how much they matched up to the Armstrongist ideal. The focus was on self-performance and the WCG's standards. It also meant comparing others with self and placing oneself as a judge of self and others. The participants recall often finding that they fell short of the high standards of the church.

The focus of the teaching about present Christian living and the future Kingdom of God took attention off the King, Jesus Christ. He was seen as being on His throne and acting as head of the church. However, the main thrust was the future kingly rule of Christ in the Kingdom of God. The King was part of the discussion, but more emphasis was on the subjects of the King, who themselves would be kings and priests. Certainly, Jesus Christ had to come back, and that was a focus of great speculation and expectation. Nevertheless, that event seemed to only be a gateway to the promise about the believer who could become a member of the God family. Jesus in the Gospels was seen as a role model, demonstrating that it was possible for a human to keep the law. In the present, the

²¹⁵ A first year mandatory course was given this name.

Holy Spirit was the power or tool that enabled the participants to keep the law like Jesus and work towards entering God's family.

These teachings did lead to a family type environment at Ambassador and in the congregations. Alexander notes, "I do recall the people being unified in their love of God and hospitality for each other and being excited when new people ever walked through their doors. Their lack of understanding of the Godhead did not seem to present a problem regarding their living the Christian life." This is often the selling point of certain sects and cults, since their members are often seen as clean, moral people with ideal families. This moral appeal may have been the case for people who started attending the WCG and Ambassador College.

Having been given the principles of living and Bible knowledge at Ambassador, it is significant that only a few of the participants give minimal details about having a close relationship with God during this period. The childhood view of God as distant continues with the majority of the participants as they came into the WCG, motivated by fear and performance-anxiety.

The participants' prayer life at Ambassador is only mentioned in general terms. The students were taught about God, and they were encouraged to pray. Martin remembers, "We were encouraged to pray, but never to use formal written prayers, to always pray from the heart. All our prayers were to be addressed to the Father. I followed this guideline. I felt at the time I had a deep relationship with the Father, who I viewed as a loving and compassionate God." As previously mentioned, Martin had a close relationship with his father, until his death. Other participants, who did not have intimate relationships with their fathers, do not discuss having an intimate prayer life. None of the participants discuss having a relationship with Jesus Christ, since they were awaiting his return. He was not seen as being within or even close to them. The Holy Spirit was something—a force—with which one does not have a relationship. Therefore, this left only God the Father, and the participants' relationship with Him remained elusive.

J.R. presents his experience at Ambassador, contrasting his spiritual life with his social life:

The principles of living approach at Ambassador gave easy answers to questions; however, it made God out to be a god of formulas, judgment, and oh so distant from the here and now. Also, meaningful—meaning intimately sensed, worship, prayer, and Bible Study—in retrospect eluded me. And as for fasting, that was a pointless endeavor that made no sense to me at all. So I did as little of that as possible. The only relational thing that made sense to me was fellowship with my peers, the church people, and my teachers. It was as if we were part of a neat group of folks who were on the inside with God—even though He was high above the inside.

Other participants felt that there was an aspect of worship and adoration at Ambassador; it may have been misinformed but it was sincere. There were very close relationships with fellow students gained at the college.²¹⁶ However, it does not appear that the same can be said for the majority of the participants with God.

Ambassador was a highly competitive environment, based on performance. If one had to qualify for the kingdom, one had to qualify to enter ministry.²¹⁷ At times, people were judged on externals—seeming rather than being. There was the sense that not only was God judging but the faculty, administration and other students were judging as well. There was a standard of perfection that one had to try to meet. There was also a theology of perfectionism that said a perfect God made people perfect through trials. Eagleton expresses his view, “God was interested in giving us trials, that’s mainly the type of God he was, so we could go through these trials and become more like him. That was very much a human approach. It certainly wasn’t a view of God as a loving God. That was what I was getting from Ambassador and the church, but on the other hand I had my

²¹⁶ This is where most of the participants met and married their wives.

²¹⁷ Armstrong believed that one grew in character and going forward toward perfection, but all humans have sin in their lives so ultimately being changed also involved God’s grace.

family and my mother who loved me deeply. So I had a little bit of both.” Several of the participants discuss having a bipolar type of God, loving and caring—harsh and judgmental. This God was one of grace and law. The grace came through the blood and forgiveness of Christ but was diluted with a great emphasis on works righteousness. The positive side came from those people who had a positive relationship with a parent, and the negative side from a negative relationship with a parent and from Ambassador teaching. The WCG and Ambassador taught a mixed message about God: He loves and wants to save everyone, but at the same time His love is conditional, based on law keeping and performance. It was based on this performance that the participants were judged to be qualifiers to take Armstrongism to a local congregation as ministers.

4.3 Ministry under Herbert W. Armstrong

This section follows the participants as they went into the ministry. For the primary participants who went to Ambassador, their views did not seem to change during this period. They seem to only deepen their following of Armstrongism. Further, this section introduces the four secondary participants: Gregory, John, Prokopto and Theophilus.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ When the secondary participants are being cited as individuals, they will be demarked as secondary participants by ^{sp} following their names, for example Prokopto^{sp}. This will distinguish them from the primary participants, which will simply be called the participants. All of the secondary participants were born in the United States, with the exception of one who was born in a Latin American country. This secondary participant came into the WCG of his own volition in the 1970s. He went to Ambassador just after the death of Armstrong. Three of the secondary participants grew up in the WCG, so their experience gives an added dimension to the experience of life in the denomination. The secondary participants were not in the churches of any of the primary participants; however, the phenomenon being discussed was common to most local churches. Therefore, the secondary participants give us a view toward the effects of Armstrongism on the lowest ranks in the WCG.

4.3.1 God

The WCG was officially anti-trinitarian. For the participants in their local congregations, however, the Trinity did not seem to be a topic of discussion. Philip recalls, “I don’t remember any sermons that were an exposé of the false Trinity doctrine. That does not mean that it didn’t happen in certain areas, certain ministers had different axes to grind. It just wasn’t something that was in my thinking pro or con much.” The other participants do not mention that they denounced this “false doctrine” during two decades of preaching. Further, they did not give sermons on the nature of God. It was something distilled from WCG writings then put on a back shelf.

In the Armstrong years, God was referred to in general terms, because the WCG tended to be functionally unitarian. The Father’s name was invoked often during prayer and often as “Father in heaven.” The only time Jesus may have been mentioned in prayer was in reference to His soon coming Kingdom—often while concluding the prayer in His name. However, before and after these prayers, God was the term used as a norm. This was largely due to the Armstrongist Old Covenant focus on monotheism. The denomination was ensconced in the Old Testament, so it became difficult to know what to do with Jesus. He was proven to be the God of the Old Testament in sermons, but functionally, it was the Father who was thought of as the God of the Old Testament and of the New Testament.

For the majority of the participants, they were functioning at times with a unitarian view of God. For example, Thomas states,

Under Herbert Armstrong my understanding of God grew into a tremendous respect for this awesome being who was big, big, big—an Isaiah 40 concept in some ways. Not ‘the gentle Jesus meek and mild,’ but the Supreme Ruler of the Universe who could be relied upon in times of need—a ‘very present help in trouble.’ So there it was for me—the Great God, formal, dignified, compassionate, merciful and all powerful. From the distant God of Anglicanism He now became,

after... Ambassador...., David's God, the God who is our Rock, our Fortress, our High Tower of Refuge.... The intricacies of the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit didn't worry me in the slightest—I was content to see him as ultimately unfathomable anyway.

Here the citations demonstrate an Old Testament view of God. There was also a reaction in the WCG, expressed in the above quote, against the perceived Protestant trivializing of Jesus. In response, the WCG tended to move toward the transcendent One God. For Thomas, this God was not completely disinterested as in classical deism, but was available in times of trouble as in benevolent deism. Thomas makes a move from a distant God that he had experienced in Anglicanism as a child and youth, to a powerful and merciful God. Nevertheless, this God was still removed from a close personal relationship. The metaphors that Thomas uses are not personal or relational: Rock, Fortress or High Tower.²¹⁹

For a few other participants, they were fixated on a bitheistic interpretation of God. For example, J.R. thought of God as “a committee in heaven rather than a one God concept. There were two Gods running around.... They were distinct and not unified or together. They were off doing their own thing or things.” There seems to be a tendency for the participants to function with either extreme: a bitheism of the two separate Gods or unitarianism of one God. The participants accepted the other perspective and would operate in it at times; nevertheless, one of the two views seemed to be a default setting due to certain predilections.

²¹⁹ This is a good place to contrast Thomas' views here with his during the changes: “The Old Testament shows us what God is like (a Rock, an eagle, etc.) but the New Testament shows us more definitely what God is—‘in Him we live and move and have our being.’ How can this be if God is static, in one place, just a bigger version of us?” This foreshadows the progression in Thomas' understanding.

4.3.1.1 The Father

For the majority of the participants their view of God the Father changed very little from what it was either in their childhood or in their Ambassador years. For example, Barnabas finds, “I had not thought it through very much, but had a vague belief of the Father being a person, shaped like a human but lit up so bright that he had to be far away and remote to keep from blinding us.” This is clearly sedimentation from his childhood. For Patrick and Martin, they had strong orientations to the Father since both of their human fathers were positive influences on their lives. Nevertheless this positive orientation had mixed feelings. Patrick recalls his experience:

I was clearly oriented to God the Father, and it was virtually always that I directed my prayers to him. I recognized the role of the Son, and appreciated the fact he became human and died for my sins. I on occasion would speak in prayer to the Son, but never to the Spirit.... There is no question I was a bi-theist.... Because I was close to my dad, if I closed my eyes and said father, I would almost see my father’s face.... To me a father was protective, cared a lot about you, would have laid down his life for you, provided, taught. I would go to my dad for help, so it was a very easy transition for me to go from the relationship I had with my earthly father—a natural transition when I became a Christian to seeing God in that light. Obviously my father isn’t perfect, God is—I recognize that—but I guess I truly feel for people who had an abusive father. I have counseled these people, and it is really hard for them to understand God at all. It is a case where this very failing and weak physical analogy of human fatherhood, but at least if one has had a positive experience it is a platform on which one can come to appreciate God more easily. So the idea of depending on God or trusting him, and that his character is what he says it was, was easier for me. I felt that I could trust God; he could not trust me a lot of the time but I could trust him....Further, though I knew the Father was merciful, I saw him as the law-giver. I saw him with a rather stern

‘face.’ He is the one I offended when I sinned, and I saw Jesus Christ as the one who had compassion, and the one to whom I could turn for mercy when I sinned.

Of all the participants, Patrick has among the most positive views of the Father. Nevertheless, we see that tinged with fear. Here we see the effect of the WCG’s penal substitutionary view toward the stern Father and merciful Jesus. If Patrick held this view—despite his positive relationship with his human father—we should not be surprised that the other participants used the language of unveiled fear and/or disguised ambivalence toward God the Father. J.R. is a representative of those who struggled with approaching the Father:

The Father was way off remote and was not too anxious to help us out anyway, even though we said that he was. I saw many, many, many cases where people turned to God and asked for help and nothing happened. When I finally got transferred (to another area), it hit hard that something was wrong with my view and the denomination’s view of God. I did not have a theory well-articulated. It was a feeling at first that there is something not right here. I saw that the God that I had taught and supported did not seem to function real well in this other culture.

For J.R. obedience to the Father meant personal sacrifice through law keeping, paying tithes, fasting, praying and many other activities.

At this point, the secondary participants have a valuable contribution to the story. Three of the secondary participants grew up in the WCG. It is through their experience we may see the effects Armstrongism had on the lives of congregants, especially youth and children. In relation to the view of God the Father, the secondary participants wavered between bitheistic/binitarian views and functionally unitarian, malevolent deistic views. John^{sp} emphasizes that his WCG experience of functional unitarianism came into conflict with his ideas on binitarianism:

I primarily talked to the Father. I always heard the term “Eternal.” That was the way I basically understood the nature of God. I kind of got the impression that

there were two Gods of the one God in two persons. I thought that Jesus and the Father were both God. I never heard that in church; I would have said that there is one God, but I was in conflict between the generic, nameless omnibeing. To say the name Jesus in any regular way was a no-no. I was taught that the name Jesus was sickening because the way that people would speak, “Oh, I love Jesus.” I stuck more with God the generic person.

Prokopto^{sp} expresses the unitarian and malevolent view he grew up with and how that was intensified after his dad died:

My view of God was that he was a disapproving omni-being... a sort of monad alone and self-serving, distant and almost playing hard to get. I envisioned God as a sort of mean kid on an ant hill amusing himself with a magnifying glass burning those of us not quick or lucky enough to escape his ill-willed attention. My theology was broken. It was broken in the sense that all of the mythologies taught to me in the warped theology of the WCG were reinforced by the whispered lies of the Evil One in the midst of my great sadness over losing my dad. I reckoned that had I been good enough, strong enough, or somehow mustered enough faith God would have spared my dad. In a sense the binitarian theology that I had learned from my youth and all that came with it as a denial of the Shared Life of the Father, Son, and Spirit—I was thrown back upon myself. Performance was the order of the day and I was lousy at performing when my life felt whole and normal and so I was far less able to ‘get it right’ in the dark night of the soul that had seemed to have swallowed me completely. The only ontological reference in binitarianism that I had was my own self-created worth born out of my ability to please the divine omni-being that so wanted to annihilate me. In binitarianism, I had no place solid on which to plant my spiritual or emotional feet. It was all ‘sinking sand.’

The Armstrongist view of the Father taught in the churches was intensified through the perspectives of young minds. Gregory ^{sp} discusses his view of the Father and the effect it had on him.

I viewed the Father as the author of that law, with its commands regarding ethical behavior, Sabbath observances, and food laws. I saw myself as a sinner whom the Father wanted to kill for not obeying this law. I viewed Christ as the one whom the Father killed in place of me so that I could be forgiven for having broken the law and I could now begin to work hard to try to obey the law perfectly.

The penal substitutionary view of atonement that Gregory heard in church negatively affected his view of the Father. The four secondary participants had strong relationships with the human fathers. Nevertheless, the teachings of Armstrongism strongly skewed them to see God not as Abba, Father but as an angry and vindictive holy Being.

4.3.1.2 Jesus Christ

The bitheism of the WCG was one of subordinationalism. Eagleton finds that the WCG message would focus on the *duality* of God, emphasizing a version of the Father-Son relationship, “The Father was the Senior Partner and the Son a very much junior partner. The Father loved the Son who obeyed the Father.” It was the obedience that made Jesus worthy of the Father’s love. The subordinate and submissive Jesus became the perfect moral example, demonstrating and teaching that it was possible to keep the law and also earn God’s love. Jesus lived fully as a human being—not using his divine powers—and then shed his humanity when he ascended to heaven. His deity was upheld and was not to be sullied by bringing it back down again to a human level. As such, the participants tended to avoid the language of intimacy with Christ. They would call Him by His title, Christ, rather than by His name, Jesus—or, if necessary, Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, there are a few exceptions to this generalization. The participants who had close relationships with their human fathers used the language of love toward Christ. Still there seemed to be some issues regarding a direct communicative relationship with Christ. For example, Martin states, “I deeply believed in Christ and loved Christ, but never prayed to Christ because we had always taught that we prayed to the Father in the name of Christ and through Christ. The Lord’s Prayer and the Gospel of John showed that you can talk to the Father directly. Even though Christ was fully God, all our prayers were oriented to the Father.” Martin only speaks through Christ as a messenger to the Father. This differs from Patrick’s experience:

I had read in Acts when people prayed and cried out to Jesus, so I didn’t feel it was wrong to. I would talk to him. I pictured him as next to his Father. At Passover season, when we took communion, I would thank Jesus for his sacrifice, really mean it with tears sometimes. I would do this in personal prayer. We were so down on emotion as a church and afraid of emotional expression. There was a fear that you do not want to push people too much that way. I bought into that in a public setting. It was more of a personal thank you to him where I would pour my whole heart into it.

Patrick felt that he could not share his personal relationship with Jesus with his congregation and lead them into such an encounter due to the WCG’s approach to Jesus. The intimate experiences with Jesus and expression of love toward Him were not conveyed by most of the other participants. They were grateful to Him for what he did, but the WCG used so many cautions and qualifiers in discussing Jesus—and in having emotional religious experiences—that they felt tentative in approaching Him both publically and privately.

Rather than focusing on Jesus, the participants followed Armstrong focusing on the soon coming Kingdom of God. Contrasted with the multitude of other doctrines and teachings of the WCG, Jesus was not of great importance. The exception may have been

the Passover service, but even then there was a great emphasis on God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

A summary of the general experience of the primary participants regarding Jesus can be seen through Theophilus^{sp}. He came into the WCG in the late 1970s from Roman Catholicism and discusses the Armstrongist view of Jesus that he received:

Somehow, Jesus only had a past and a future, he was God in the flesh and lived a perfect life in which his main emphasis was 'magnifying and fulfilling (keeping) the law' so we had no excuse to ignore it or break it. Jesus was also this future King, of the 'world tomorrow' who will come to make all transgressors pay, to smash down human governments and religions so that everyone would have to keep the law and follow what is in the Scriptures...that is, those scriptures we liked to emphasize. Jesus was somehow distant in the past and future. He was not in me or I in him, he was watching from the distance and waiting for his time to intervene. Maybe he was judging, approving or filtering my prayers but not much more. He did not want to get the attention; he wanted people to focus on the message, not on himself, the messenger, as Herbert W. Armstrong used to say.

The irony is that the participants may have looked at Jesus more favourably than the Father. However, Jesus was also distant from human experience in His transcendence. He was also distant in so far as He was not to be engaged in the conversation of prayer—unless one was engaging secretly in heretical practice.

4.3.1.3 The Holy Spirit

What can be said about the Holy Spirit in the participants experience was already stated in earlier chapters. Several of the participants discussed how they had difficulty with giving an explanation for baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Spirit in Matthew 28:19. In spite of the cognitive dissonance, they put the issue on the back

burner and deferred to the WCG teaching. The Holy Spirit was not for the most part a focus of thought or sermons—with two participants’ exceptions speaking on *it* as the power of God to get “the work” done. Jesus was the model to live the law and the Holy Spirit was the enabling energy to follow Jesus’ example.

Issues regarding gifts of the Spirit of 1 Corinthians 12: 8-10 were largely ignored due to Armstrong’s anti-Pentecostal bias. Alexander recalls the 1960s and following in the WCG “were so far removed from anything that was charismatic, in the sense of the Holy Spirit charismatic, . . . healing and of speaking in tongues.” The gifts of the Spirit in Romans 12: 6-8 and Ephesians 4: 11 were emphasized since they had to do with service and order in the church. In 1 Corinthians 12: 28, the spiritual gifts that could be seen as Pentecostal could be easily deemphasized (i.e. “deeds of power” and “various kinds of tongues”) whereas the rest of the list was over-emphasized, especially the primacy of the Apostle, since it supported the Armstrongist agenda. The mantra for the WCG leadership was “but let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14: 40). The materials that led up to this statement were completely glossed over, including the preceding clause, “So, my friends, be eager to prophesy and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (v. 39). The Holy Spirit and the ecstatic spiritual gifts discussed in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 were completely outside of the both the primary and secondary participants’ experience in the WCG. The one exception would be some healings that would come through anointing and prayer.

4.3.2 Self

Being under the law brought a variety of struggles for the participants. They knew that God loved them, but they also felt under His judgment as well as under the judgment of others when they sinned or fell short of meeting the requirements expected of them. God and Jesus were distant. The Holy Spirit was the power to help them. However, this

power was a nebulous concept and did not seem very effective. They often felt that they were struggling on their own. Martin expresses the challenges and conflicts that he faced:

Before self-understanding... was wrapped up in how you performed (physically, spiritually and mentally), which one was never able to measure up to. This tended to be guilt producing, and even then I understood that it was only through the mercy of God that I would make the resurrection. There was so much emphasis on qualifying for the Kingdom,... I could walk and talk with God, so obviously I didn't really have a personal relationship with Christ, but I did have one with the Father. I guess sometimes it was guilt inducing. You can never measure up. The strange thing is that I felt God always loves you, but to please Him you have to do this, that and the other.

There was a full list of things that the participants had to do to meet up to God's expectations. The list of do's and don'ts was exhausting. The participants would often feel guilty over not praying or fasting enough. Nevertheless, they were supposed to be models for their congregations and for their families. This undoubtedly put an intense burden on them.

Eagleton provides a brutally honest self-evaluation of his mind-set during this time. His own self-assessment was that he was part of an elite remnant discussed in Scripture and the elite-of-the-elite since he was one of only about five hundred ministers in the WCG. However, due to his performance focus, he also felt that he rarely lived up to the elite standard he was supposed to set. God was trying to test people through trials to build "holy, righteous character." The blessings and curses based on keeping or not keeping the law (Deuteronomy 28) were applicable to Eagleton. These views had some devastating consequences:

One's standing with God was measured by successful adherence to the selected set of 'right doctrines.' This led to an inward, exclusivist mindset incapable of freely and joyously obeying Christ's commands. I knew more about the latter

rather than the former of these two traits: “Consider therefore the *kindness* and *sternness* of God.” (Romans 11:22). On the one hand, I saw myself as a son of God. This was good and a tribute to the love of my mother for me. God loved me the way my mother loved me—unconditionally. On the other hand, I saw myself as someone who needed more self-discipline, more obedience, more character – always more, never enough; there was the need for more prayer, Bible study, fasting, serving, hospitality...the list was endless.... But there was never enough to please the hard-to-please God I served. Arrogant, self-serving and smugly self-righteous yet seeing these traits in others but not myself.... My identity was wrapped up in what I did and did not do from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset and in not keeping Christmas, Easter and birthdays.

At times, Eagleton found his performance-based identity soul-crippling. At a depth level, Eagleton was in not only cognitive but also spiritual dissonance. His positive understanding of God received through his experience with his loving mother was being dominated by the negative understanding received through his experiences in the WCG and with his distant human father.

In contrast to his peers, Philip gives an account of feeling accepted by God:

It is probably because a lot of my Methodist Sunday School teachers said that God loves you, I didn't understand why or how but that's okay; I am not sure a kid needs to know why or how. To me, (I still knew that God loved me) even when I was confused in all of that legalism stuff. I would feel for some of my friends, peers and parishioners who thought that God really does not love me. I sort of bought into an idea that you would qualify for the kingdom—intellectually that made sense to me, but emotionally I never had that sense, maybe it is because I was self-righteous. I can never think of a time that I thought that God had rejected me. But I know people who have felt that way; I can't imagine how that would feel, it would be awful. The funny thing about it, I embraced a theology that construed in a way in which God would reject you. There were a lot of things

about views that I held that were self-contradictory. I am grateful that even though my theology would not allow it, somehow in my own heart I felt, ‘I know God forgives me and loves me.’

Like Eagleton, Philip has a conflict between the experience of childhood and of adulthood. Philip, however, had explicit teachings about God’s love whereas Eagleton had his mother’s example without explicit teaching. At an intellectual level, Philip accepted the legalism of the WCG along with its consequences, but at a heart or spiritual level, he rejected this. Both Philip and Eagleton were in dissonance; however, the more solid childhood teachings Philip received may have helped him with his understanding of and relationship with God and self beyond the WCG legalism. Further, this dissonance between head and heart may have made the transition through the doctrinal changes easier for him than for others. Moreover, this basic feeling that God loves him gave him a great sympathy for others who struggle with feelings toward God and self.

Thomas had a similar view of self as loved by God because of a close relative’s example in his life. However, Thomas still felt “that God forgives upon repentance.” He wishes that he had known Charles Wesley’s “And Can It Be” about “no condemnation.”

Through Philip and Thomas, we see their childhood having a profound effect on counter-acting the condemning side of Armstrongism and reaffirming their positive identity before God. However, for the secondary participants raised in the WCG, they did not have this counter weight. For example, Prokopto^{sp} deliberates over his baptism experience:

Though my family had brought me to WCG, it was my choice to remain.... I was baptized into WCG as a full-blown member. It was a day of mixed emotions. I remember believing that to ‘qualify for the Kingdom of God’ I had to be utterly sinless and perfect. I also had been taught that just seconds after baptism I would be washed clean enough to get into the Kingdom. Based on this and just before I entered the water I looked at my best friend, who had come to share the ‘happy’ occasion, and

said, ‘I hope I drown on the way up.’ The sad thing is that I was serious. I had hoped that God would kill me at my baptism so that I could have a fast track ticket to the Kingdom of God.²²⁰ That was the sick product of cultish heresy to which I was exposed without my say in the matter and with my willing consent.²²¹

Gregory^{sp} had a similar view of self in relation to the God of the WCG:

In my spiritual life, the message I received on a weekly basis at church was that I was doing a terrible job, but if I worked just a little harder, I might do well enough to make the Father accept me and keep him from annihilating me. I also understood the WCG teaching that we human beings who believed in Christ would become members of that God family and be ‘God as God is God.’ However, growing up through my teenage years this seemingly distant and amorphous destiny did not influence my thinking much about my relationship with God. I was far more influenced by my

²²⁰ It is interesting to note some similarity between Prokopto’s view of baptism and those of people in the church in the third and fourth centuries: “There was also a trend... to delay baptism... Thus, it was believed that baptism washed away the new believer’s sins, and he was expected to live correctly thereafter. The church took a very dim view of those who sinned after they were baptized. The usual stance was that one major lapse after baptism was permitted and the sinner could be readmitted to communion after a suitable time of penance; after that they had ‘used up’ their chance. Many people, anxious that they might still have a lot of sinning to do, therefore chose to defer baptism, in order to minimize the chances of falling afterwards. It was not unusual to wait until death was near. Delayed baptism was especially common among those in professions thought intrinsically unchristian, such as soldiers, who might wish to wait until that had killed their last opponent or criminal before being baptized into a religion that condemned all killing” Jonathan Hill, *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Lion Publishing Plc., 2006), 47.

²²¹ Prokopto also shares when he was nine how he had questioned Armstrong’s doctrine of soul-sleep: “Herbert Armstrong stated that upon death the Spirit in Man went to God and not only did it go to God but that he kept it in his throne room because we were that important to him... I stated to my dad that I believed that when you die you go to heaven and you know that you are there with God. As a scientist my father always encouraged curiosity and critical thinking so his reaction was to inquire as to how I arrived at such a conclusion. I told him that Mr. Armstrong had recently in the past stated that the spirit in Man is what separates us from the animal kingdom and gives us our consciousness and awareness. I therefore reasoned that if the spirit in Man went to God at death and that is what gave us consciousness and awareness then we are in heaven and know we are there. My dad did not disagree, but he did advise me to keep this opinion to myself.” Prokopto and the two other secondary participants who were raised in the WCG had some quiet disagreements with Armstrongism. In general, they went along with the package deal of Armstrongism, but these apparently minor dissenting views may have been keys to getting out of Armstrongism. Unlike the vast majority of their peers they neither held on to Armstrongism nor did they abandon their belief in God or in His working in and through the WCG in the 1990s. The secondary participants, like the primary participants, demonstrate a dialectic between faith and reason.

perception of God as law giver, myself as law breaker, and Christ as my substitute in receiving punishment for my law breaking. I perceived the world as divided into two categories: those whom the Father was calling now to believe in Christ and obey the law and those who would be called after Christ's Second Coming. As a child of people who were 'called,' I perceived myself as also being called now. This meant that if I did not answer this calling now, obey the law and get baptized, then there would be no chance for me after Christ's Second Coming when all my relatives and friends who were not being called at this time would have their chance. If Christ returned after I was old enough to know what I was doing, but before I had been baptized, then I would be annihilated. Since the WCG told me that I would not be old enough to know what I was doing until I was 18, I did not worry too much about this possibility. At the same time, though, I wanted to be sure that I was learning what I needed to learn about obeying the law so that I would be ready as soon as possible and there would be little or no gap between the time I knew what I was doing and the time I was baptized.

In the WCG, children were not encouraged to have their own relationship with God. Moreover, teenagers were considered "carnal," and it might be difficult for them to see the truth at their age. For many children growing up the WCG, there was a further burden placed upon them. Certain pastors told them that God would give everyone a second chance at the final judgment if they had not heard or accepted God. However, for the children in the WCG, they had heard the message, and if they rejected it, they had the prospect of the Lake of Fire. Unlike their parents, the children did not have the opportunity to make a choice about the WCG message. They were indoctrinated in it, and either overt or subtle fear was used in an attempt to keep these children in line. These were some of the reasons that the secondary participants looked at their sins or shortcomings and cringed before this God. On the other hand, other pastors, especially many of the primary participants, did not hold or teach this particular guilt-inducing view of God.

The general sense of understanding of and relationship with self among the primary and secondary participants was one of fear, guilt and condemnation. This was the effect of the Old Covenant law system on the consciences of these men and boys. There were a few exceptions of participants who felt loved and accepted, yet at the same time they were struggling with dissonance with the WCG message that they were constantly hearing and teaching. There is a strong correlation between seeing God's identity as judge and one's identity as condemned. Moreover, it is difficult for ministers not to project those same ideas and feelings on to others, especially those receiving their ministry.

4.3.3 Congregation

If we could describe the WCG church service, it was as James Torrance called unitarian. The focus was on one man preaching the sermon. There were elders and deacons who gave sermonettes and some church members who led songs. However, the service focused on the sermon and God's servant who was preaching the message in line with Headquarters. The songs in the worship service were for the most part written by Armstrong's brother Dwight and were from the Psalms and the Old Testament. When people sang there was no movement and little expression—except for increased volume.

Movement and expression came through a social culture, where people would stay around hours after church had ended. The Christian living aspect of the WCG since its beginning has made it a hospitable church. There was a great collective cohesion around this exclusivist and elitist group. Alexander indicates that the congregants' lack of understanding of the Godhead did not seem to present a problem regarding their living the Christian life. For those in the WCG, it was more about Christian living, relating to yourself and other WCG people, than relating intimately to God. In general, the participants' congregants were caring people who sincerely believed in what they had been taught. Gregory^{sp} describes his experience growing up in a WCG congregation:

In many ways I felt more love and acceptance in the attitudes and words of the people I went to church with than in the sermons and bible studies I heard while attending that church. The people in my church loved me, encouraged me, and felt like an extended family to me. Though I did not feel that the Father accepted me, or that Christ was happy with me, I felt that my congregation did accept me and was happy with me.

There could be both a warm, accepting environment and a cold, distant hierarchy in the WCG. In their ministry, the primary participants were part of the super-elite, the leaders of God's "chosen people." These participants were overseers of local congregations, but they were also all lower level overseers under Armstrong and his pyramid hierarchy. This in turn was carried out of a hierarchy in local congregation: pastor, elders, deacons and congregants. Eagleton notes some of the issues surrounding the church structure: "Leaders on occasion treated those below them in a diametrically opposite fashion to the way they treated those over them. A pastor who dared to complain about a superintendent to a national director was met with incredulity and suspicion." This was also the case with members who tried to report problems with the leadership in their local churches. The general ethos was one of 'keep your head down and go along with the person(s) above.' From bottom to top, these were issues in the WCG. We may not see a lot of these negative aspects with the participants since most of the ministers who had a predilection for the Armstrongist approach to governance left the WCG with splinter groups. Nevertheless, Eagleton emphasizes regarding the Armstrong era:

Pride, fear, manipulation and a judgmental spirit was rampant. Fear of losing control was uppermost in the minds of many. The pastor was the local leader with total power over congregational decisions within denominational guidelines. Pastors were exhorted not to have close relationships with members as it would be difficult to correct them in such a situation. Small groups were not permitted

unless an ordained elder was present. Pastors had to be seen as in charge—hence a controlling mode predominated.

There was a great distance from the top to the bottom of the WCG. God was distant in heaven. Armstrong was distant from those under him. Usually there was not a friendship between someone who had authority over someone else. They may spend time together on occasion, but there was not a close bond. This was especially true in the lives of the pastors and congregants. The pastors were not supposed to have friendships with the congregants, and the congregants generally avoided getting too close to their pastors. Barnabas gives an example as he rose through the ranks from member to deacon to elder to pastor. To each level that he was appointed, the people under him became more distant from him. He wondered why this was the case and asked for comment:

...my father-in-law explained to me one time: it's like the ministers have the smart Holy Spirit and the rest of us have the dumb Holy Spirit. It's a very graphic way to put it but that was kind of the way people thought. If you're an elder or a deacon, well wow, you're just way up here and, you're just really God's favorite, favorite, and you certainly have it made into the kingdom, but the rest of us down here we don't know for sure. So people tended to alienate themselves from you and that hurt. I'm still the same person, you know.

This was the nature of the hierarchical power structure; intimate friendships were the rare exception rather than the norm. Quite often people feared having a visit from their minister since it could mean that they had done something wrong.

The nature of the relationship that most pastors had with their members was a shepherd-sheep relationship. Some pastors were harsh and legalistic toward their members; nevertheless, this did not necessarily mean that they did not care for them. For many pastors, especially the more personable ones, most of their time and energy was focused on serving their congregants. The participants along with their wives spent thousands of hours counseling people with personal problems, preparing people for

baptism, visiting people in hospital and anointing the sick—on occasion during the middle of the night. There was also a great joy of getting to know their people, and although they did not become close friends with the members, they had many friendly relationships.

On the negative side, guilt was a powerful weapon used by some ministers. J.R. explains how they used blame as method to gain submission; when people would fail, this could easily be explained “by saying that the person in question did not exercise enough faith, or that they did not give enough to the church, or that they must have done something wrong.” Pastors had the right to forbid people from attending church, sometimes for the smallest of reasons. This was essentially saying to the person, you are not going to make it into the Kingdom of God unless you improve yourself.

Thomas conveys a candid rationale for a strong approach to pastoring. “...I did develop a reputation for being a ‘tough’ pastor by the 1980s because I felt our church had a special mission to perform—to get the warning Witness out to the nations so Christ could return and save us. This sense of Mission was altruistic in principle but led to a practical impatience with people who did not seem to be ‘with it.’” Thomas, like many ministers in the WCG, believed that they had an important work that they needed to accomplish in order to further assist Armstrong and the flock.

Systems tend to replicate themselves, and the approach to leadership in the WCG tended to be the same as those of Armstrong—his approach reflected his name. Those pastors who did not follow this approach were often looked upon as “weak” or “soft” by some in the leadership and some in the membership. They would have less of an opportunity to rise through the hierarchical levels of ordained ministry. Nonetheless, some of these “soft” ministers, among our participants, may have been the graceful pastors, who were genuinely concerned about the people in their congregation.

Of all the issues the participants were asked to discuss, they tended to speak and write the least about relationships with members during this period. This may be due to

some lingering pain that they feel. It is difficult to comprehend the impact it must have on a person to realize that what he has believed and enforced for over three or four decades has been incorrect, especially when that person realizes that he has been teaching others these errors. This is further compounded by the fact that these ministers may have caused harm to people by the Armstrongist approach to leadership. We may safely assume that hundreds if not thousands of people were disfellowshipped from or left the WCG during the Armstrong years, concerning things that had little or nothing to do with the gospel. We may wonder how this impacted these people's relationship with God.

CHAPTER FIVE

DOCTRINAL REFORMATION (EARLY - MID 1990s)

The death of Herbert W. Armstrong in 1986 grieved the WCG. One influential evangelist had preached that Armstrong would remain until Christ's second coming, but many ministers silently disagreed with this dogmatic assertion. There was a relatively easy transition in leadership from Armstrong to his hand-picked replacement, Joseph W. Tkach Sr. He along with the ministers and the members of the WCG had no idea of the changes that they would experience over the next decade. This chapter follows the participants through the experience of theological and personal transformation.

5.1 The Methodology of Deconstruction

The WCG had always been a cognitive movement. When the changes began in the WCG, the participants started individual study. They would read the literature and listen to the audio/video tapes sent out from headquarters while searching the Scriptures to prove whether these things were correct. Eagleton contrasts his approach to the changes with of a fellow WCG minister,

A close pastoral colleague simply refused to watch the videos or read the material. He felt the material would be so deceptively presented and empowered by Satan that his faith may have been swayed. But to me the abandonment of unorthodox doctrines to the essentials of historical Christian doctrine was exciting. I cannot really explain how I so easily it seems accepted the changes except by the grace of God.²²²

²²² We may wonder whether the people who started or joined the Armstrongist sects actually studied the materials sent from WCG headquarters. They may have trusted Armstrong's interpretation of the Bible rather than going to the Bible to study things for themselves.

Philip gives an example of how he approached the changes:

I studied them carefully, and they all made sense, lining up with my growing understanding of the full story of Scripture (I was learning careful exegesis over against my background in proof-texting). As I process information, the information later becomes transformative. I sequestered myself in my basement office for about a month and began the most intense study of my life. After that month, I emerged from the basement convinced that our former doctrinal positions in WCG were largely erroneous and that the orthodox Christian faith that I had repudiated was, after all, faithful to the Scriptures I had long revered and sought to follow.

It was the methodology of Armstrongism that in the end became its own undoing. Armstrong had told people, “Do not believe me—believe your Bible.” When he died and his theology was in question, the participants had to go back to the Bible again. Armstrong had promoted the people of the WCG to be serious Bible students and study at least half an hour every day. However, this was sometimes done with the Bible in one hand and WCG literature in the other. Now, a third hand was needed for the new WCG literature to start a contrastive study with the Bible in the center. The participants express that the Holy Spirit was leading them through their Bible studies. They continued in their predilection to search the Scriptures and prove whether what they were seeing was true. Patrick may be a good representative for the cognitive, biblical methodology of the participants:

More often than not, I tend to be the type of person, when I can see the overall view of something or understand the theory behind it, then I can move to the practical. That tends to be the way I learn, with some exceptions in my life. I tend to be more conceptual. If when I understand something to be the case, then it can begin to flow into the practical day to day. The head knowledge penetrated,

but the church was going through so many adjustments during that time. We went from one change to the next; there wasn't a lot of processing time. But that went to the head first. I had to work through the theology before I ever got to practical implications.

This was the universal experience for the participants. They dove head first into the study of Scripture. The heart would react to the shock, at times with anger or with joy. Nevertheless, the theory preceded the praxis with the doctrinal changes—the nature of God was no exception. The participants did not blindly follow the authority of headquarters, with whom they disagreed at times. However, they came to agree while further studying and placing their previous vested interests aside. Among the participants there was a trust for the Pastor General, Joseph Tkach Sr., and the other leaders who were promoting the doctrinal changes. The participants believed the leaders were sincere and not trying to lead the WCG into error.

5.2 The Nature of God

The changes in the nature of God came over a process of time between late-1991 and mid-1993. Joseph Tkach Sr.'s "Personal" in the December 23, 1991 issue of *The Worldwide News* and the 1992 booklet *God IS...* demonstrated that the Father and Son were one and not merely a family. Thus, the WCG moved from bitheism to binitarianism. During the period of about a year and a half, it appears that the leaders were accepting the Holy Spirit as divine but not as a hypostasis or Person. The 1993 edition of *God IS...* marked a shift to the belief in the Trinity, accepting the Holy Spirit as a hypostasis. These changes were not immediate but incremental, and the participants studied and followed them through this period: from bitheism to binitarianism to trinitarianism.

As the changes in the doctrine of the nature of God happened in 1993, the participants received them with a different readiness. Those who had more exposure to

the Trinity had less difficulty with the changes than those who had less exposure. In their childhood experiences, Philip and Thomas had perhaps more exposure to the language concerning the Trinity than the other participants. This eased their way through the changes. For example, Philip states, "... [T]he concept about the Father, and the Son and the Spirit being God and one God, I was already comfortable with that concept at some kind of inner childhood level.... I had a little bit of background of that. Although I don't have overt memories of that teaching, it is still there at some visceral level or something." It is not as though Philip had emphatic and consistent teaching in the doctrine of the Trinity; however, it was that sedimentation of trinitarian language that had touched his heart from childhood. Relating to the Triune God was already part of his identity—although covered over by layers of heterodox beliefs. Once those were cleared away, it was a return rather than a complete departure to something new. Thus, although the transformation might have been cognitive, there was an underlying emotive and spiritual aspect from childhood.

Thomas had a similar reaction to the return to the Trinity. Before the change regarding the nature of God was announced, Thomas was informed by a deaconess of a rumour that one of Joseph Tkach Sr.'s assistants believed in the Trinity. Thomas' response to her was, "Well first of all, that is just hearsay...And, secondly, I am sure there is always much more to learn about God." The lady and Thomas were both surprised by this response. This immediate reaction reveals that Thomas was in his heart still holding on to a belief that God was more than the WCG teachings. He attributes his response to "15 years of regular Anglican worship, Sunday School, confirmation and choir singing...." In 1993, he enrolled in a seminary to study Systematic Theology. Through the coursework, Thomas was reconfirmed as a trinitarian:

...I vividly remember sitting on our front porch and explaining to my wife what Louis Berkhof said about the Trinity in his once standard text, *Systematic Theology*. It only took about fifteen minutes for my wife and me to be confirmed in our trinitarianism from the point of being able to more vigorously teach and

defend it. There is no question that being brought up a conservative, active Anglican from 1947 to 1963 had a big, big influence on my approach to theology. Thus, the 1990s were a matter for many of us of a ‘return to Orthodoxy’—a term I cherish—and which was much harder for me too than I am making it out to be.

With all of the participants there was a struggle—greater and longer for some than others—to understand why the doctrine of the Trinity was correct and the old WCG doctrine was incorrect. For the participants with more and favourable exposure to the Trinity, they found the change regarding the nature of God easier than those who had less or little exposure.

Theophilus^{sp} was a Roman Catholic as a child and came into the WCG as a young adult. After he attended Ambassador, he went into the field ministry as a trainee/associate. As the changes started happening in the WCG, his overseers treated them with suspicion or hostility. Theophilus, however, received the changes with a willingness to study them through. He shared his experience with colleagues of like mind:²²³

When the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was introduced for the first time, my first reaction was gladness but not without caution. I felt this was going to demolish our old doctrinal house. So along with my wife and another couple in the ministry we started a lengthy prayerful study about the identity and work of the Holy Spirit through all the books of the Bible. That took us one year or longer. Book after book in the Bible it was more evident that the Holy Spirit was as God as the Father is God, and alongside, Jesus the Son was gaining a ‘higher status’ in our limited understanding. He was not just past and future, Jesus became NOW and

²²³ Theophilus is the only one of the participants (primary or secondary) in this study who did not grow up in North America or the United Kingdom. He is also the only one who expressly mentions studying the changes communally. It is not that the other participants did not have meetings with other ministers and discuss the changes; however, their approach primarily was to analyze the changes individually. This latter approach remains consistent to this day in GCI in North America.

HERE. He ‘became’ Eternal not just my *coming* King; as much Eternal as the Father and now, the person of the Holy Spirit.

In the experience of this secondary participant, the cognitive approach of analytical study is consistent with all of the other participants. His study regarding the Holy Spirit also influences other issues; it heightens the Christology of Theophilus and his wife and colleagues. The new Personal, understanding of the Holy Spirit brings the distant Jesus in heaven and in the future to present immanence. The Holy Spirit was viewed both in the context of His unique Personhood and in the context of the other Persons in the Trinity.

The participants accepted certain changes easily and struggled with others. The born again and Trinity doctrines seemed fairly easy for the participants to give their assent. The Trinity, for many of the primary participants and Theophilus, was in some way a part of their positive sedimentation. For the three secondary participants raised in the WCG, they had only heard the Armstrongist “pagan Trinity” propaganda. This seems to have made their journey more difficult and their studies more intense, yet as we shall see this has been of great benefit.

The participants made the shift from bitheism to binitarianism to trinitarianism in two to three years with relative ease in comparison with many of their colleagues in the WCG. Notably, the majority of WCG ministers remained with the WCG through the changes concerning the nature of God and the Personhood of the Holy Spirit. There were many ministers who verbally or nonverbally expressed their confusion or antagonism toward these changes. Nevertheless, only one sect, the Global Church of God formed in 1993, appears to have left the WCG in reaction to these or other doctrinal issues. It appears that many dissenting ministers and members remained in the WCG, possibly refusing to study and accept these changes, hoping that things would eventually “get back on track” as they had in the liberal-era of the late 1970s. The major departure and formation of the United Church of God—the largest WCG splinter group—formed in 1995, specifically after the change in observance of the Sabbath, Holy Days and other Old Covenant laws. This may indicate that the key issue for these people was not who God is

but what they must do to please Him. This was the predilection of Armstrongism.

Barnabas provides his view regarding these issues:

The changes in '93-94, whatever, were primarily intellectual; it didn't change the way people actually lived their daily lives. I would say the majority of the people just didn't understand what was really going on. But when '95 happened (the change regarding the Old Covenant), it affected the dinner table. Now there was a ham in front of you, eat it. Oh my. Now, you can go to work on Saturday. Oh wow. You mean that we're going to start going to church on Sunday? But my schedule is all set for Saturday, and the Sabbath is this holy time. So the changes from '95 on affected actual daily practice.... It really made a difference.

The loss of these sacred days meant a loss of identity for many people in the WCG. They soon formed their own sects that maintained their identity based in Armstrongism.

Further, these people had remained more than one year in the trinitarian WCG. However, when they started or joined these sects, they began openly re-confessing their bitheism.²²⁴

The change in the WCG's doctrine of God from bitheism to binitarianism to trinitarianism was a monumental shift. Armstrong forcefully tried to differentiate the WCG from other churches. The acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity was tantamount to saying historic Christianity is right and Armstrong was wrong. Patrick explains the challenge, "Repudiating our past teaching was a real 'body blow' to our exclusivistic, and in hindsight, self-righteous view of ourselves." Many participants started to question that if Armstrong was wrong on the issue of the nature of God, on what other issues was he also wrong. Prokopto^{sp} states, "The most grotesque and heretical belief of the Worldwide Church of God was that of binitarianism."²²⁵ To deny the truth about who God is as revealed in Jesus Christ is to thwart the process of doctrinal discovery in any and all other matters." Once this Trinity was accepted, it allowed further doctrinal discovery. All of

²²⁴ Although they would not use this term, they held the old Armstrongist theology, which was bitheistic.

²²⁵ Some participants use binitarianism for the old nature of God teaching of the WCG, which this thesis refers to as bitheism.

the other participants express some cognitive dissonance that they had over the years concerning a variety of other Armstrongist doctrines. It may have been these lingering questions that the participants had that eased their transition through the doctrinal changes in the WCG.

The WCG leadership further attempted to ease the transition not only through the booklets *God Is...* but also by providing a series of video tape lectures concerning the nature of God. These lectures were presented by Dr. Kyriacos Stavriniades, a native Greek speaker and professor of Classics and Philosophy at Ambassador University. He had a systematic understanding of theology that moved the WCG well beyond Armstrong's *ad hoc* approach. Stavriniades gave a question and answer approach to the nature of God that the participants found of assistance. Martin recalls that Stavriniades' approach was very thoughtful, but difficult for certain ministers to understand. Further, it was not helpful to play the recordings for the majority of WCG members since it was difficult for them to grasp the concepts. The presentation tended to be academic introducing theological terms (like hypostasis and ousia); as Barnabas recalls, "Many of the words and concepts he (Stavriniades) was explaining were unfamiliar and difficult for me to understand." Barnabas was not alone in his struggle with learning materials, which were helpful but at the same time seemed esoteric to several participants. Martin, who had studied under Stavriniades at Ambassador, explains,

These recordings were clear and very informative. Their major down side at least for me was they left me with a very sterile concept of God. He seemed to be no longer real and personal, but rather a theoretical proposition. In the tapes, Dr. Stavriniades did stress how one technically defined God and how one prayed to him differs, but I did not find this concept too helpful. Thankfully, I was starting to do a lot of other reading to expand my understanding of God. The book that deeply impacted most was *The Crucified God* by Jürgen Moltmann. It brought into sharp focus the wonderful and passionate love for us all and the entire world. This helped me have a deeper understanding of God.

The contribution of Dr. Stavrinides to helping the participants cannot be devalued. He provided an introduction to theological concepts of which most had never heard. Moreover, Stavrinides was following the approach that the WCG leadership had requested, which was a kind of orthodox fundamentalism. Like Martin, many participants started to read evangelical theologians to find out more concerning the Trinity. This marks their movement into mainstream evangelicalism.

For the participants, the shift from bitheism to binitarianism to trinitarianism was largely an academic exercise. It did not, at first, seem to overly change the way that they related to God, especially the Holy Spirit. The intellectual aspect of the participants' conversion was secure; however, the unfolding of the relational aspect took some additional time. As other subsequent doctrines fell into an orthodox place, relational aspect began to change. Philip describes the process of his conversion through the changes, "I changed from being a (functional) binitarian to at least a professing trinitarian. Along with studying the doctrine of the nature of God, I examined all our long-held doctrinal positions. I came to believe that all the doctrinal distinctives of the WCG were wrong, and one by one, I abandoned them, and helped many in my congregations and elsewhere to do so." For Philip, the change in the doctrine of the Trinity was the first domino that felled the other Armstrongist doctrinal dominos. As these continued to bring down the house of Armstrongism, Philip continued to lift up the persons in his congregation through counsel and support and to lift up the Persons of the Trinity through sermons. The focus of the next section is the Triune Persons, discovering how the participants understood and related to them during this period.

5.2.1 The Father

During and after the Armstrong years, the ministers and members of the WCG had used the word Father in addressing God in their prayers. However, in sermons and discussions the word 'God' was used in a functionally unitarian sense. During the doctrinal changes

regarding the nature of God, there was very little specific discussion of the Father either by the participants or in WCG literature. There has been a great gap in the WCG regarding the Fatherhood of God. He was appealed to often in prayer as Father, but who was distant, “Our Father in Heaven.”²²⁶ The WCG’s focus was either on Jesus or on God, as general concepts.

5.2.2 The Son, Jesus

In 1991, there was a significant shift in the belief about Jesus. The Armstrongist view was that the gospel is the good news of the future Kingdom of God to be established when Christ returns. It was not the message about the Person of Christ. This changed in May of 1991 to the belief that the Kingdom of God is present as well as future and that the focus of the gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ.²²⁷ The Kingdom became present because the King was present within the believer’s life. The WCG had taught many things about Jesus’ earthly life and ministry and his future coming reign. However, the participants had not understood and experienced their lives in the presence of Jesus. There appeared to be a minimal relationship with Him, for He was far off in divine space and time. Some participants felt that they had no relationship with Jesus, while others because of their childhood experiences felt that they had some kind of relationship with Him. In other words, they knew many things about Jesus, but they did not know him personally and intimately.

Armstrong had never been clear in his Christology. During the doctrinal shifts, Armstrong’s glorified monophysitism—the ascended Christ is no longer human—was changed to a Chalcedonian two natures Christology. Most of the participants were either unaware of or unaffected by this shift. It did not receive as much publicity as the other

²²⁶ We must note here, these are the words of Jesus to address “our Father in heaven” (Mt. 6:9). It is noteworthy that Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer simply uses “Father” (Lk. 11:2) without reference to heaven.

²²⁷ Fezell, *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God*, 179-180

doctrinal changes. Gregory^{sp} who was a student at Ambassador at the time became fully aware of this change along with other subsequent changes in understanding:

I read every article and booklet that WCG published during this period. I studied every Bible verse referenced and I prayed about what I was reading. The first change that came in my thinking was in 1992, when I realized that the Bible describes Christ as fully God and fully human. This was the first time I had really studied and thought about the incarnation. I came to believe that the Father and Son had always existed and that the Son had become incarnate as the man Jesus. At that time I also began to realize that his name is ‘Jesus’, that ‘Christ’ is a title, and that there is nothing wrong with calling him ‘Jesus.’

With Gregory, we see several notable shifts. First, he accepts the reality of the incarnation. Second, he clarifies the vague Christology of Armstrong, which this participant appears to have understood as a kind of Arianism. Third, he moves toward a personal relationship with Jesus, feeling that he can call Him by name and not only by title. Thus, Gregory’s understanding moved toward a transformation in rationality.

The changes that came regarding Jesus seem to have been easily accepted by the participants. However, this was not always the case for their congregants. Alexander comments, “Many questions arose regarding the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus and this became stumbling blocks for a number of members. We had to first define our teaching about Jesus before we could go on to look at the Holy Spirit.” Jesus gradually became the central focus of the WCG in the 1990s. As the heterodox teachings fell one-by-one, Jesus took over the place that those beliefs held. The shift turned from self and one’s own works to Jesus and His works: the grace that He gives through his life, death, resurrection and ascension. The new Christocentric message put the WCG into mainstream evangelicalism.

5.2.3 The Holy Spirit

A couple of participants noted that Jesus took his rightful place in the center of the WCG in 1991; this was followed by the acceptance of the Holy Spirit as divine in 1992 and as a Person/hypostasis in 1993. However, the Personhood of Jesus was explored far more extensively than the Personhood of the Holy Spirit was. This was not a systematic attempt to deemphasize the Holy Spirit in WCG. However, it was a peripheral blind spot in its theology and practice. It was an embedded theology left over from Armstrongism, with its denial of the Personhood of the Holy Spirit and rejection of things related to charismata.

Before observing the participants' responses to these issues, the context of the acceptance of the Personhood of the Holy Spirit in the WCG needs to be set. In the book *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God* the author J. Michael Feazell, WCG/GCI vice president, gives a contrast between the denomination's old and new views regarding the Trinity:

- The Trinity is a pagan invention the devil foisted off on the deceived reprobate Roman Catholic Church. (old)
- The doctrine of the Trinity is true. (new, July 1993)²²⁸

The latter implies the acceptance of the Personhood of the Holy Spirit. Feazell indicates that the first key to renewal in the WCG is the “rediscovery of the Triune God and the person of the Holy Spirit.” Feazell gives the further development of some key issues regarding the Holy Spirit in the WCG, old and new:

Herbert Armstrong's church began with a strong emphasis on the Word without a corresponding emphasis on the Spirit. Due in part to his early experiences with members of a neighboring Pentecostal church, Armstrong strongly distrusted and

²²⁸ J. Michael Feazell, *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God*, 180.

vehemently opposed the entire Pentecostal movement, calling it ‘the devil’s counterfeit.’ The result of Armstrong’s intense overreaction to all things remotely Pentecostal was the formation of a highly legalistic sect.... The WCG renewal was bathed in a rediscovery of the doctrine of the Trinity, especially the personhood of the Holy Spirit. The renewal movement in the Worldwide Church of God remained firmly committed to Armstrong’s ideal of faithfulness to Scripture but welcomed the place for the movement and fellowship of the Spirit. This significant course correction led the church to fertile ground for the blossoming of the gospel in the hearts of WCG members.”²²⁹

Fezell is aware of the biases of the past and expresses a new openness to the Spirit and his work of renewal in the WCG. He expresses a desire for the WCG to move both in the Word and Spirit, which is a movement away from legalism and toward the gospel. He also implies a movement away from distrust of the Pentecostal movement.

These are all wonderful ideas; however, the reality during the transition years and those following are not strongly reflected in the majority of the participants’ experience. During the change in the nature of God, the emphasis was on the Triunity of God. This was of vital significance. The denomination had gone from decades of bitheism to a year of binitarianism and then into trinitarianism. The WCG needed to see both the oneness and the threeness of God. This was of vital importance for WCG ministers and members to understand. However, the concomitant issue was marginalized; i.e., the Holy Spirit, who had been depersonalized for at least four decades in the WCG. He was granted Personal status and briefly explained why he is a Person/hypostasis, through the use of Scripture, but then was ushered again out of focus. The participants did not seem overly concerned about this; a few gave brief discussions about their understanding of the Personhood of the Holy Spirit during this period, specifically related to the official change in position. For example, Thomas presented a point that he understood from the *God Is...* booklet, “... the Holy Spirit was more personal than we in WCG had ever

²²⁹ Ibid., 134.

imagined.” Yet there are no details regarding how this was experienced. Of all the major doctrinal changes, the Personhood of the Holy Spirit did not seem to be a significant issue. However, this partial-ellipsis of the Holy Spirit is significant. The issue is not *either* a focus on the doctrine of the Trinity *or* on the Personhood of the Holy Spirit. The word Trinity focuses both on the three Persons in the one God. We may wonder about the effect of the Pneumatiphobia²³⁰ of Armstrongism and American evangelicalism, of which the WCG was drifting toward.

For cognitively oriented people, it is difficult to know what to do with the Holy Spirit, who is beyond rational categories and does things that are out of rational people’s control. And what lies outside of these rational efforts is often ignored or ridiculed. What is not stated in the lives of the participants is as significant as what is stated. They state that they studied out the doctrine of the Holy Spirit; they did not say that they sought a deeper relationship with this divine Person, whom they had denied as having this status for decades. The participants tend to give the cognitive approach to the change in doctrine. For example, Alexander reasoned through how the Holy Spirit is God, “The Father is spirit and the Holy Spirit is spirit, so I had no difficulty in recognizing the Holy Spirit as being God.” The trouble came for a few participants regarding understanding the technical term of hypostasis and Person. The participants did not emphasize their understanding and mastery of the technical theological terms, rather they emphasized their agreement with what they had been taught. Several participants mentioned reading non-WCG theological books for assistance, but none cited any books specifically regarding the Holy Spirit.

The participants gained a new understanding that the Holy Spirit had a personal identity. Gregory^{sp} recalls, “...I came to believe in the personhood of the Holy Spirit. This change in my thinking was primarily driven by my WCG-directed study of the Bible passages in which the Holy Spirit behaves in a personal way: speaking, being grieved, being addressed personally, etc. I was simply unaware that the Bible made these

²³⁰ I.e., fear of the Spirit.

statements about the Holy Spirit.” Gregory’s own experience is the common and significant revelation of life in the WCG—it emphasized only what things supported its view and ignored other things. The change that Gregory experienced was a change in “thinking” more than a change in “relating.” The participants mention how they changed from the old way of talking about the Holy Spirit using the pronoun “it” to using the pronoun “He.” WCG articles were helpful in seeing that the Holy Spirit uses personal pronouns in Scripture to refer to Himself “I” and “me.” He has intellect, will, and emotions. He interacts and has relationship with the Father and Son and human beings. These were indeed great revelations for the participants. Nevertheless, it appears that much of this information remained exactly that. It remained head knowledge rather than transformative knowledge, holistically affecting every aspect of the participants’ lives.

The participants accepted the Personhood of the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of the Trinity. This however did not lead to a greater relationship with all of the Persons of the Triune God. What it did was open a greater relationship with Jesus Christ. It is true that in relating to Jesus one relates to the other two members of the Trinity. Nevertheless, the focus was on Jesus rather than the Holy Spirit and the Father. The irony is that in acknowledging the Holy Spirit as a Person, it led to other obstacles being removed that hindered the participants from having a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

All of the participants discuss this greater intimacy with Jesus, but very few of them, at this stage, discussed their profound new relationship with the Holy Spirit.

One participant, Philip, discusses the relational impact the change in doctrine had: “For me (and many of my congregants) the most profound aspect of this new understanding was new appreciation for the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Rather than seeing him as the mere ‘power of God,’ we became aware of his distinct personhood, which speaks to the personal presence of God indwelling us.” The change in doctrine led to a greater intimacy with God—perhaps in a general sense. The Person of the Holy Spirit living inside of a human person meant that God was not remote, but was living within them. This was an amazing revelation.

It does not appear that the participants—like the denomination—expressed sorrow or repentance toward the Holy Spirit or asked him to have a new, personal relationship with them. The participants continued not to speak or pray to the Holy Spirit. For the next decade or more, this relative silence regarding the Holy Spirit remained in WCG literature. He would be mentioned on occasion, especially explaining how God was working with the WCG, yet this was not considerably different than the method of Armstrongism. Only two participants discuss giving specific sermons on the Holy Spirit. Martin explains, “During the 1990s and early 2000s I would not use the term the Trinity or the Triune God; it was a hot issue. I would show the Holy Spirit is a person, but I would not really go into that. I don’t think even in our writings that we emphasized that concept of the Triune God in that period. The leadership would emphasize Jesus, and that it’s all about Jesus.” This is not necessarily a negative critique but merely a description of the reality of the issues of this time. Everything was converging around Jesus as the center of the WCG and participants’ faith.

5. 3 Self

As noted previously, Armstrongist theology and soteriology was self-focused: one’s own works and performance. Some of the initial changes in the WCG reflected this. The changes included rescinding bans on pharmaceuticals (March 1987), cosmetics (November 1988), birthdays (July 1989) and interracial marriage (July 1990).²³¹ More importantly, these changes were antecedents of the move away from legalism toward liberation. The participants do not go into detail discussing these initial changes. There is a general view that these changes were transitions, foreshadowing of the greater work the Holy Spirit was about to do in the denomination.

²³¹ J. Michael Feazell, *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God*, 179.

5.3.1 Born Again

The first major theological-soteriological change also was rooted in the self. This was the change in the born again doctrine. For most of his ministry, Armstrong held that the term “born again” refers to receiving the glorified body at the resurrection. However, in January 1991, this was changed to the belief that the term “born again” refers to conversion.²³² This doctrinal reform seems to have opened the way for another change five months later; the Armstrongist doctrine that the kingdom of God will not appear until Christ’s return was changed to the belief that the kingdom of God is present as well as future.²³³ Then two months later, the Armstrongist doctrine that the reward of the saved is to be literally born as a God into the God Family, to be Gods just as God is God, yet under his supreme authority was changed to the doctrine that the reward of the saved is to become children of God now and to receive glorified bodies like that of Jesus at the resurrection; it is not to become Gods in a family of Gods.²³⁴ All of these changes were refocusing the WCG’s vision. The overly eschatological focus of hope for the self in the kingdom was shifted to see that the kingdom is present now in the born again child of God. The born again and kingdom within doctrines toppled the Elohim doctrine of becoming gods as God is God.

Half of the participants contrasted the old teaching regarding being begotten and the new teaching being born again. Eagleton notes that the old teaching was based on a Armstrong’s misunderstanding, not of Hebrew or Greek words, but an English word. The English word “begotten” does not mean “conceived.” Rather it refers to live birth. The participants were helped by Dr. Stavrinides, who helped clarify the Greek terms. He explained that the word *gennaō anōthen* (Jn.3:3) means both born again and born from above. It relates to a live birth, not merely conception. Barnabas recalls this teaching,

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid., 180. Overall, the change in the Elohim doctrine seemed to be insignificant to the participants. Some of them stated that they had never agreed with or fully understood the Elohim doctrine, looking it as an impossibility that humans could become Gods as God is God.

“Begotten was only applied to a father after the baby was born. Until birth, a father could not say he had ‘begotten’ a child, just as a mother could not say that her child was ‘born’ until she had given birth.” Now God could really be called “Father” by the born again believer.

The participants believed that Armstrongist “begotten” doctrine was unclear. J.R. mentioned that the born again doctrine “was sort of a muddled doctrine in my mind. The begotten doctrine did not click really with me, so when it became born again that was more of a clarification. That was not a huge point for me.” None of the participants discuss that the change in doctrine impacted the way they understood or related to themselves or God. Eagleton recalls that he was happy to be born again as a new creation. However, it did not really affect him, “For me it was simply a doctrinal matter. It did not really affect my relationships, or my relationship with God. Begotten again to born again did not seem to be a big change in our denomination. Later, I understood the present aspects of the kingdom. We taught that we would be born again when the Lord returned; we then said we are born again now. To me that was not a major issue.” For some years, the change in doctrine seemed to be a cognitive issue, a matter for giving the participants to give their assent, rather than an existential issue, a realization of a deep personal and ontological transformation. It also did not seem to overtly impact their relationship with God. Martin said that initially that change in this doctrine seemed to be a technical point and did not make much of a difference to him: “We were very doctrinal focused, correct or incorrect. If you were incorrect you changed it, but it didn’t necessarily make that much of a difference emotionally on you; you just checked the box off.”

With some time and reflection as other doctrines regarding the nature of God and the grace of the New Covenant started to change, Martin started to see a “bigger picture” and how the born again doctrine mattered to him:

Whereas our old teaching was you are not quite born of God now; therefore, grace is very conditional.... The change in our understanding in regards to being born

again impacted greatly how I viewed myself. In our old understanding, a Christian was only begotten by God at conversion and would not be a fully-born child of God until the resurrection. Now I understood I was truly a full child of God when I accepted Christ.

When Martin understood the doctrine of grace, it was then that the born again doctrine transformed from being propositional to being existential. It is a great deliverance from believing that one is a fetus in the womb to one is a child of God in his Kingdom.

For Patrick it also took some time before the born again doctrine made a difference in his understanding of and relationship with himself:

It was a couple of years after I accepted the change in the born again doctrine technically as right. I struggled with it. I went to the theological seminary library and looked to see what *gennao* really meant. I finally agreed with it, but it was technical doctrinal head knowledge for me until after a few years. Then the doctrinal changes went into full gear. I was in a period of personal Bible study. I was working through the general Epistles. It was a cold winter day, but the sun was coming in the room. I was sitting next to the window with a cup of coffee. I remember reading 1 John 3:1-3 where John wrote, ‘behold what manner of love is bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God. Beloved now we are children of God.’ It was the *a-ha moment*; it was like neon lights were going around the scripture just about. Oh, that must be—that is what it is saying. I remember praying and talking to God about it, and it just felt really good. I am now a child of God. I can enjoy this relationship now; it is not insecure. If I died today because my trust is in Christ, I would receive a glorified body one way, or go to heaven.... I felt, and I am not a person who gets feeling a lot this way, maybe it was psychological, but I literally felt warm all over. I felt a tremendous feeling of peace and contentment. It felt physical but whatever it was, it was from reading that passage. The penny dropped. It went from head to heart. And I felt that I was no longer just tentatively or potentially or one day would hope to be a

son of God but that I was a child of God now. And if I died today, that is secure. The only way that would not be secure would be if I repudiated my faith in Christ. As long as my faith was in him—it wasn't anchored in quality of obedience day by day by day but anchored in what Christ has done for me, the love of God has given me this, which I accepted and said, 'Yes,' to God's gift. God has already said, 'Yes,' in Jesus Christ. There was this sense of peace. It is something that wasn't rooted in my obedience but in what God gave me. My obedience would come as a result of that. Now you are a child of God, now go live like one. There are many scriptures that discuss that. I did not see that as doing away with the need to resist evil and do what is good and follow all these New Testament instruction passages. Those passages weren't the ground upon which my identity with God was based but it was based on what he has already done in Jesus Christ and that I could relax in that and enjoy it. Now I could go live my life and act like a son of God.

In this experience, we see a foundationally transformative moment where the doctrine became not merely a proposition but the truth of Patrick's whole identity. Also, the doctrine of grace conditioned the understanding and experience of the doctrine of being born again. The change in the born again doctrine cleared obstacles for the WCG to move toward an orthodox theology, which in turn became the hermeneutical lens to revisit, understand and experience this same doctrine.²³⁵

5.3.2 The Law v. Grace

After the change in the doctrine of God, perhaps the most influential doctrinal change came in 1994. This change deeply impacted the participants' view of self. It started in March when the Armstrongist teaching that the New Covenant will not be in effect until

²³⁵ Armstrong had accepted this doctrine in his early ministry; later he rejected it and reacted dogmatically against it as his theology became increasingly more heterodox.

the return of Christ was changed to the new teaching that the church is now under the New Covenant.²³⁶ This of course had implications for further changes. Within a month the Armstrongist teaching that the Worldwide Church of God is the one and only true church of God, the faithful remnant was changed to the new teaching that all believers are true Christians.²³⁷ The old exclusivism and elitism was eliminated. WCG members were no longer the elect waiting to be changed into god beings. This was a difficult thing for some of the participants and their members to grasp. They had for decades defined themselves by the belief that they were God's only people. As they came to understand that the body of Christ was larger than they had thought, many participants started to join ministerial associations, some giving presentations on the changes in the WCG and asking for forgiveness of their Christian minister brothers and sisters. For the ministers, this was a great new freedom and a joy to realize that many of the Christians, whom they had previously rejected as apostates, now forgivingly embraced them.

The biggest change for understanding of self in relation to God and other Christians happened in December 1994. The distinctive Armstrongist teaching that the seventh-day Sabbath, along with the seven annual holy days, is obligatory on Christians and is the mark between God and his holy true and faithful church was changed to the new teaching that the new covenant does not require adherence to the weekly Sabbath.”²³⁸ Within two months another change came that the new covenant does not require observance of the seven annual Holy Days. Also taking the Lord's Supper is not restricted to once a year.²³⁹ These doctrinal changes demolished the foundation of Armstrongism in the WCG, for they were two of the key issues that gave the WCG its distinctives as God's true church. In the time that followed this major shift, there was a loss of about half of the number of ministers and members from the denomination.

²³⁶ Feazell, *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God*, 180.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Feazell, *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God*, 181.

²³⁹ Ibid.

The focus of this research is not to examine the effects of the change of these Old Covenant doctrines. However, we must note that the move away from law, especially Sabbath and Holy Day observance, was perhaps the most difficult change for the majority of the participants. They had invested so much time and effort in their own lives and teaching into congregants' lives that it was difficult to change without extensive study and strong emotional turmoil.²⁴⁰ Martin recalls his struggle:

Initially I found change in the church's *Sabbath* teaching extremely hard to accept. I still strongly feel that this great change was grossly mishandled. The ministry received no prior indication from headquarters that something so dramatic was even being contemplated. We were only sent a videotape from headquarters to play at our weekly services announcing the change and informing us of the reasons why it had to be made. I like many was stunned, not able to take it all in. One of my closest friends was on the leadership team in Pasadena, so I quickly telephoned him to talk things over. He sent me a thick package of material by Federal Express explaining the changes. I studied the material at times getting angry, then after further reflection saw some of it made sense and studied further.

In the case of the participants, their cognitive approach to studying previous doctrinal changes seems to have helped with this traumatic emotional change.

There were a few participants who had previously had questions regarding these foundational doctrinal issues. J.R. had been struggling with his relationship with God, especially concerning how he and others were supposed to be blessed for keeping the law, "This issue was trying to understand why God seemed so remote and not active in the things he supposedly was going to be active in. I finally got to the point that I was asking myself if the only reason I and the church existed was to keep the Sabbath and the Holy

²⁴⁰ Some participants and many people in their congregations had sacrificed jobs and family over these issues.

Days.” For J.R. and some other participants, keeping the law was a barrier for having an intimate relationship with God, due to their feelings of never meeting His demands. Three participants remember having some issues over law keeping contradicting the Pauline theology, but they had put these issues aside, accepting the package deal of Armstrongism and serving their congregations.²⁴¹

The participants discuss how their understanding of God greatly changed due to the movement away from law to grace. They started to focus less on themselves and their performance and more on God, especially on Christ and Him crucified. This led them back to a new understanding of being loved and accepted by God apart from works of the law. For the participants, the changes may have started out cognitively but were becoming more experiential. Alexander explains that certain aspects were perceived cognitively through reading Scripture at first and then a deeper understanding of God came by experience. The understanding of the grace of God moved many participants’ prayer life into a greater—or a first time—intimacy. They did not see their relationship with God based on their own performance, but based on what Jesus Christ had already done for them two thousand years previously. This was a great emancipation, and one that they could share with their congregations to help these people, many of whom were still struggling with the changes.

5.3.3 Pastoral Identity

During the doctrinal changes, the pressure was immense on the lives of the participants. As pastors, they were caught between WCG headquarters and congregations. There were congregants, family members and colleagues struggling with the changes. During this time many people, for whom the pastors deeply cared, started leaving the church. These were a great burden on the pastors. Patrick gives a glimpse of what this was like, “It was

²⁴¹ Other participants, from their reading of the New Testament, had some disagreement with other aspects of the old WCG soteriology.

a deluge change for about a three to four year period where we weren't sure what the church was teaching, and the field pastors were like the meat in the sandwich; we were between headquarters and the congregation. We had a tremendous stress on us to try to get on top of the next thing.” Their worldviews were going through a fundamental shift. Even when they were uncertain or confused, the participants were put in a very difficult situation of having to absorb the doctrinal changes, and then in the matter of a few days, they had to teach the changes—as if they believed the new teachings and knew what they were discussing. They had to teach and lead confused and resisting people through these shifts. All of this was only done with some literature for support.

There was some criticism over the methods that the headquarters leadership implemented in carrying out the changes. However, at the same time, there was also sympathy for the headquarters leadership, who had little experience in making such monumental paradigm shifts.²⁴² The WCG had an international gossip network that would quickly expose any change mentioned by the headquarters leadership. This was so insidious that in some cases the local elders, deacons and certain members knew of the change before the pastor did.²⁴³ The headquarters leadership had little choice but to release each doctrinal change rapidly after a decision was made in order to prevent rumours—whether true or false—being spread. The participants became aware of these facts; nevertheless, it did not make their lives any easier. They were on the frontlines.

²⁴² Eagleton gives his impression regarding how WCG headquarters handled the changes, “The honesty and courage of church leaders to address doctrinal issues (‘sacred cows’) was inspirational. Those at international headquarters brilliantly and patiently exposed and repudiated cultic teachings and key doctrinal errors including the truth about the Holy Spirit. Every aspect was documented with solid scriptures, lengthy commentary and crystal-clear explanations. Armstrong’s successor Joseph Tkach Sr. was a man of immense courage.”

²⁴³ We saw this earlier with Thomas being informed by a deaconess that she had heard through a phone call that one of the leaders in the WCG believed in the Trinity.

5.4 Congregation

Some of the earliest changes in the WCG came shortly after the death of Herbert W. Armstrong²⁴⁴ through the leadership of Joseph Tkach Sr.; these were in relation to church governance. Theophilus^{sp} recalls this change in approach:

The first change I welcomed was when Joseph W. Tkach, in one of his letters to the ministers, scolded pastors and ministers for their lack of love towards the congregations, actually for abusing and mistreating members in different ways. Spiritual bullying I call it. I had experienced some psychological mistreatment by one of my superiors and had a long struggle with loyalty towards this kind of ‘authority’ in the church.

The WCG had been an impersonal hierarchy for so long, that many pastors and the members welcomed this change. Patrick also gives a rationale for this shift in tone of governance, “As Mr. Tkach Senior had functioned at all levels in the church’s structure, including regular member, deacon, and non-salaried elder before being hired into the ministry, he seemed to have a genuine sensitivity toward the average member, and wanted each member treated with care and respect.” Joseph Tkach Sr. had empathy toward people at all levels in the church; this tended to trickle down to the pastors and members, touching their relationships with one another. When the doctrinal reformations happened, it was not coincidental that many of those who thrived on the old authoritarian, impersonal system left the WCG for Armstrongist sects. Most of the participants already displayed a dislike against this approach, even in the Armstrong years. A few participants, who may have been drawn into the Armstrongist approach to leadership through their Ambassador training, changed to follow the Tkach approach. This seemed more natural for them. For example, Thomas had a reputation for being a tough pastor, but Tkach Sr.’s “kinder, gentler church” had a greater appeal to both his personality and his congregations. Over the next decade, pastors began forming friendships with people

²⁴⁴ His death was on January 16, 1986.

in their congregations and delegating more authority and responsibility to these people in church services and administration.

In the mid-1990s, as the participants started to embrace the Trinity, their relationships with their congregations started to change. With the changes in the WCG, there became a greater openness and closeness both externally—toward other Christians—and internally—toward the members. Many ministers asked the members to call them by their first names. This may reflect the affection that the participants felt toward Jesus Christ, for now they could call him by name, Jesus, and not merely by title, Christ. Martin recollects the change in church governance:

Our old understanding of church governance was very authoritarian. It was based on a very clear cut descending chain of command: God the Father to Jesus Christ to Herbert Armstrong to the Ministerial Superintendents to the ministers to the congregation. As our understanding of God's nature changed and our relationship to him changed, so also our understanding of the ministry's relationship to the congregation changed. We strove to emphasize the minister was not an authoritarian figure and that all within the congregation were called to share in the ministry. This very positive change started to break down the artificial barrier between the ministry and the congregation.

The old subordinationalism in the Godhead and consequently in the church started to disappear. During the Armstrong years, the ministers were treated like priests. Now, with a move toward the priesthood of all believers, psychological and relational barriers were dismantled. Surely, it was difficult to change the culture of the church completely in a short period of time. The openness did not come without its challenges, since those who disagreed with the doctrinal reforms could challenge leaders and pastors, at times openly. In some cases for the sake of unity and order, the leaders and ministers had to re-exercise an authoritarian approach again, but this was the exception rather than norm.

Ministers added many new, closer friendships with their congregants. With the WCG's understanding of the nature of God as love and grace, the WCG became less law and performance focused. The participants focused on extending the love and grace that they had received from God toward their congregations. The congregants in turn tended to respond to this grace by extending it toward others. The judgmentalism that went hand-in-hand with the old legalism started losing its grip on many WCG people. Of course, this took some time and may not have completely changed, but this was the general movement in WCG congregations.

Some participants use war metaphors to describe how cataclysmic the effect of the changes was on the WCG and local congregations. The pastor had to try to stop elders, deacons and members deserting the church. They were in the midst of the competing interests of many divergent groups: headquarters making the changes, Armstrongist reactionary groups trying to take away members, progressive groups wanting to make changes more quickly and radically, seeking groups looking for churches closer to home or closer to their new liberated beliefs, confused groups trying to make sense of what was happening (some of these people abandoned the church and faith). Shellshock set in, at the same time, as the church income drastically dropped and the participants had to take large cuts to their benefits and salaries. This had an effect on some participants' families and marriages, with the wives having to look for work rather than continuing to assist their husbands in ministry and/or to look after their children. This information could have been further discouragement for congregants, so it was not readily shared with them.

In war there are tragedies and triumphs. Alexander finds, "... for a decade it was basically wars and battles and intense discussions and then trying to keep people as much as possible together and people not even knowing why they should be together and some going here and some going there...." The people in the congregations were forced to choose sides, for or against the changes. There were many who remained in the WCG, holding on to their old Armstrongist beliefs or accepting some changes and not accepting

others. Two key issues were regarding the Trinity and the Sabbath.²⁴⁵ Eagleton summarizes the effect of the changes on his congregation, “Mistrust and suspicion reigned. Rejection and separation was common. Families and life-long friends rejected each other.” All of this made it an emotionally tumultuous time in the WCG since many people were unsettled or departing.

During these battles, there was great joy and pain. For the participants and many in their congregations, the joy came from being freed from legalism and developing a new relationship with God and one another. Alexander presents that during the changes he and the members in the church were co-learners. The changes happened so quickly that he was always learning new things from the members and they were learning from him. For the participants, the pain came from the broken relationships. Congregations of 200-400 members were well under half to a quarter of those numbers by the late 1990s. In many cases, the participants were trying to manage the wounded remaining. Philip expresses the distress of trying to help some of his congregants.

Sadly, many of the members in my congregations did not accept our changes. I had many long, heartfelt conversations (often with tears) with many of them. However, many left our fellowship to be part of derivative groups that professed to ‘hold on to the faith once and for all delivered.’ It was a time of great joy in finding truth, but great sadness in losing fellowship with dear friends. It still hurts to think about it.

²⁴⁵ To this day, 2011, there are people in WCG/GCI congregations who still accept the Seventh-day Sabbath and reject the Trinity. There seems to be a negative correlation between these two doctrinal issues. There are rumours of some pastors and congregations that remain in the old Armstrongist beliefs. One GCI pastor posted this comment on a GCI blog: "Within the past year, two long-time members have relocated from other parts of the country to one of my congregations. Neither of these individuals believes in the deity of the Holy Spirit, believing instead our old teaching that the Holy Spirit is some kind of energy or power of God. Why is it necessary to believe in the deity of the Holy Spirit? Why isn't faith in Jesus Christ enough?" (The Surprising God, June 12, 2001, <http://thesurprisinggodblog.gci.org/2011/06/is-holy-spirit-god.html>). In a personal email from the person who wrote this post, he indicated that these people had a preference for the Sabbath and Holy Days.

In the storm and stress of these years, there were some positive effects. Patrick discusses some of these, “Thankfully, a growing core of members and fellow ministers over time were getting not just comfortable with ‘the changes’, but were getting excited about them. It was this core that gave me (and many others in the same boat) the support we needed to carry on.” As Jesus became more and more the center of the WCG, the participants and their congregations learned to take refuge in him. The participants’ and their congregants’ identities that had been bound for decades in fighting to keep the law was freed for being children of God.

5.5 Summary

It may seem it first glance that the acceptance of the changes came slowly in the WCG over the course of the post-Armstrong decade. However, through the course of Church history, it took many centuries for these doctrines to be confirmed and accepted.

Thankfully, the WCG began to look to and learn from Church history and tradition in its doctrinal reformation and renewal. Considering the magnitude of the changes in several years and its effects, it is a miracle that the WCG continued to be a denomination. Many other denominations have ceased to be due to one small change. In some significant ways, the decade of transition was painful for the participants, yet they would not trade the effects that it had on their lives for anything. They remained loyal to the direction they believed God was taking the WCG.

CHAPTER SIX

THE EVANGELICAL WCG (MID 1990s - MID 2000s)

Before starting the research of this thesis, certain distinct phases in WCG doctrine and history were evident. As this research began in 2007, there was a sense that the WCG was moving into a new phase with trinitarian theology. However, the factors that were not initially clear were the distinctions between this phase and the previous one, which we will discuss in this section. In their narratives and interviews, two primary and three secondary participants defined this particular phase as “an evangelical phase.” This chapter continues to follow the participants through their theological and personal changes in evangelicalism—to one degree or another.²⁴⁶ By using the descriptive term evangelical phase, the participants did not mean to imply that the WCG is no longer evangelical; they meant that the WCG was greatly affected by the mainstream evangelicalism that it was a part of during the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. These participants who noted this are all Americans.

Although the WCG was a worldwide movement, it has always primarily been American. Even in its heterodoxy, the WCG’s values and assumptions have been strongly American. In the early 1990s, the WCG had eradicated almost all of its distinctives. As it became re-rooted in historic Christianity, it needed a particular movement with which it could identify. Herbert Armstrong had been so anti-Catholic and anti-Pentecostal that those two movements were not readily considered by the WCG leadership—although they were accepted in 1993 as Christian movements.²⁴⁷ The WCG began to have more and more friends in evangelical churches and institutions. Armstrong had experience in evangelical churches before his full association with the Church of God

²⁴⁶ This and the following chapters will refer to both the primary and secondary participants as the participants, unless otherwise specifically noted. Three of the four secondary participants were ordained during the evangelical phase; thus they joined the primary participants as ministers in the WCG.

²⁴⁷ It is interesting to note that Jack Hayford, an influential Pentecostal minister of The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, was one of the WCG’s earliest and closest friends during the period of doctrinal reformation.

(Seventh Day), and some of Armstrong's theology and practice was from that evangelical training. Evangelicalism was the movement with which the reforming WCG shared the greatest commonality. During the mid-1990s, the WCG joined the National Association of Evangelicals (in USA) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. The acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity was one of the key doctrines that allowed this to happen.

This evangelical phase was marked by what the WCG and the participants knew they were against: Armstrongism and legalism. However, it was a struggle to understand what they were for. The WCG had been so exclusive before, now it was becoming very inclusive. Some participants felt that the WCG leadership was trying to discover where they fit in the big tent of American evangelicalism. Perceiving a lack of guidance from the WCG leadership, many pastors and members turned to Christian authors, television ministries and other local churches to find further direction. Some pastors and members became Five Point Calvinists, others charismatics, others liturgists. However, at the center of this diversity was the evangelical movement with a belief, "I am for Jesus and grace!" At the same time, these WCG people seemed to be unaware of the certain embedded legalistic tendencies of the evangelical movement that they were embracing. As the participants became evangelicals, they learned to think, talk and worship like them.

6.1 The Evangelical God

There is a divergence in the participants' understanding of God during this period, which seems for the most part to be along the lines of nationality. The Canadians appear to move away from American evangelicalism and are more influenced by the evangelical and trinitarian thinking of scholars at Regent College in Vancouver like Alister McGrath, J.I. Packer and Gordon Fee. Also of great assistance for some was the Terry Winter program on Vision TV in Canada, which had further grounded some of the Canadian participants in a practical yet intellectual approach to theology based on God's love and

outreach to all humanity through Jesus Christ. The Canadian participants were probably closer to Canadian and British Anglican evangelicals and trinitarian theologians in belief than to the American participants. For the Canadian participants, the transition to GCI's present trinitarian theology was perhaps not as dramatic as for the Americans. This does not mean that between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s the Canadians already understood this trinitarian theology; however, they were perhaps further ahead than most of their American counterparts.²⁴⁸ Further, this is not to say that the Canadians and Americans were completely different. Nevertheless, the national evangelical contexts were different and had an effect on the participants.

There are some common features of American evangelical theology that can be seen through Gregory's^{sp} experience:

I abandoned Armstrongism and became an evangelical. The word 'evangelical' has multiple meanings in the study of religion.... I am using the word to describe a theology that says:

1. God is holy, omnipotent, and just.
2. Humanity is sinful and justly condemned to hell by this holy God.
3. In his grace, God sent Jesus to provide a way for individuals to escape hell: anyone who has faith that Jesus died in their place will be forgiven and allowed into heaven.

These definitions mark the mission of fear-based evangelization into which Gregory was drawn.

Behind the holy, omnipotent and just attributes of God were often heterodox theologies of modalism and/or dualism. Three participants note that during this phase

²⁴⁸ By stating this there is not a national bias since this writer is Canadian. It should be stated here as a foreshadowing of the next section that when the American participants caught on to trinitarian theology in the mid-2000s, they quickly caught up to their Canadian colleagues, and in great enthusiasm, possibly overtook many of them in understanding and practice.

they became functional modalists or unitarians.²⁴⁹ The participants had been through all of the teachings on the nature of God. However, the former polytheistic heresies of Armstrong and the complexities of the WCG's explanations to correct those heresies regarding the nature of God may have driven these participants into the oversimplifications of other heresies, which can be found in some parts of evangelicalism.²⁵⁰ Barnabas exemplifies this phenomenon:

Although I did not understand words such as hypostasis, I began to see that the scriptural references to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all portrayed them as doing things that a 'person', not a power would do. Therefore, I realized that the Father is God, Jesus is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Just how they are One, I did not know. From that time on, I affirmed the Holy Trinity as being true, however undeveloped my understanding was. The way I sought to explain it after that time turned out to be 'modalism' (One God, three faces), but I did not recognize this as unbiblical until about 2007.

Barnabas displays the challenge for some participants—and the challenge for the universal Church throughout history—to maintain the tension between the threeness and the oneness of God. There was the need to maintain monotheism and not regress into another type of polytheism (tritheism). Thus some participants applied Ockham's razor to the nature of God and became functional modalists/unitarians. Prokopto^{sp} explains why he and others in the WCG fell into this error:

While we knew that God was three in one and one in three, it was totally academic for us. I had even developed my own metaphor (three parts of a car's drivetrain: engine, transmission and rear axle) for reconciling this seemingly difficult math of the Trinity. There were faint traces of practical application of

²⁴⁹ A few of the participants use the term functional unitarian. This does not mean that they are Unitarians, denying the deity of Jesus Christ. There are other participants who displayed a functional unitarian tendency without acknowledging or being aware of it.

²⁵⁰ This way of thinking has been observed in both Canadian and American ministers.

our doctrine of the Trinity at play in our lives but thoughts of the Trinity remained mostly academic. The truths about God as a relational being were all around us but had escaped our knowing. In truth, despite our academic confession of God as Triune, we were functional unitarians.

We may wonder whether the academic approach to the Trinity rather than a relational one led Prokopto and others toward a functional unitarianism. Gregory ^{sp} finds that many Americans, especially evangelicals, “have a unitarian image of God in their minds, they do not have a distinct image of the Father and the Son.” This type of embedded theology tends to think of God as an undifferentiated generic, omnibeing. Whether the participants received this view of God from being around evangelicals is uncertain. However, if this view was occurring in the minds of many evangelicals and some of the participants, we may safely assume that their congregants may have also become functional modalists/unitarians.²⁵¹

Some of the participants’ modalism/unitarianism was only functional and not always consistent with their theologizing. At times, the unitarian God was intellectually bifurcated into a kind of dualism. Here the Holy Spirit is still neglected, and God and Jesus are held in juxtaposition. God (i.e. the Father, although rarely called by this name/title in this theology) is seen as holy, omnipotent and just and offended by human sin. Jesus is the answer to satisfy God’s wrath. Many in the evangelical world hold the penal substitutionary view of atonement. This belief maintains that the wrath of an angry God was satisfied by pouring it out on our Substitute on the cross, Jesus Christ. Still the blood of Jesus is only a measure for keeping the wrathful God appeased. As the WCG drifted around evangelicalism, trying to find its beliefs, there were some participants who held the penal substitutionary view of atonement. Philip discusses this as a dualistic view:

²⁵¹ James Torrance writes, “Bishop Lesslie Newbigin has commented that when the average Christian in this country (Scotland) hears the name of God, he or she does not think of the Trinity” (*Worship Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 20). This is undoubtedly the case for many evangelicals in the Western world, including Canada and the U.S.A.

I held a view that many evangelicals do, that God has two natures. There's the nice friendly guy Jesus and the angry hostile Father guy, who needs to be held at bay by the nice guy Jesus. How awful that is. There was a lot of that in the background of my thinking. In fact, some of our teaching was overtly in that direction. The Father wants to beat the heck out of us, but Jesus takes the beating instead. I don't want to vilify Herbert Armstrong, but he embraced this view out of his (evangelical training) context. This goes back to the penal substitutionary view of the atonement—that God is one angry dude and he has to get that anger out of him by beating the heck out of his Son. I don't want to put a caricature on people who embrace that view, it is not quite fair, but at a gut level it can feel that way. That's not right. James Torrance says, 'There is no other God behind the back of Jesus.'

A few participants, to this day, hold or struggle with a version of this view of atonement. The danger of this doctrine is that the Father and Son are not seen in eternal unity and purpose; it theologically fragments the Trinity on the cross. This issue is rooted in the common evangelical view of God's attitude toward sin and sinners.

It is difficult to function with this view of God in the life of the church. A possible measure to get beyond the angry God is to turn to Jesus only. The good Jesus and the angry God dualism often morphs back into the functional modalism. The angry God does not have to be discussed, except at appropriate times to keep sinners in their place and in fear. The message can be mostly about the good Jesus. If one looks at many evangelical churches today, the focus of the songs, messages, prayers and images are mostly to Jesus Christ. "God" is used in a generic sense. Although these churches confess a belief in the Trinity, the Father and the Spirit are absorbed into Christ. Gregory^{sp} recalls the struggle that he had with trying to avoid discussion of the Trinity:

The Trinity was an underlying assumption in my thinking and teaching, but I also knew that people found the doctrine confusing. It seemed more 'practical' to mainly talk about Jesus, occasionally mention the Father (on Father's Day for

example) and talk about the Holy Spirit when necessary (such as when trying to explain why we do not need the law of Moses or when praying together as a church for direction in how to do ministry and make decisions.)... It is all about God and Jesus.

This is the case in many WCG and evangelical churches. The particular experiences and needs in the lives of the members and of the church may dictate their theology.

This is the danger of a Christ-centered theology not rooted in trinitarian theology. Christ may be the center or second person in the Trinity, but any reference to Jesus Christ is a reference to Jesus, the Son of the Father, and Christ, the one anointed with the Holy Spirit. Eagleton explains the deficiency of the evangelical phase: “One God revealed in three persons is what we did not understand in the 1990s and first part of the 2000s. It was enough to try and grasp the Triune God; we did not fully understand the way they get along, their relationships, their nature, the way they have been together for eternity. And their whole plan was to share it with us.” This problem in the evangelical phase may be traced back to the academic approach to the Trinity that the WCG took in the 1990s.

6.2 Jesus

During this period, the participants discuss their joy of not only getting to know more about Jesus but also developing a close personal relationship with Him. This was a totally new experience for some participants and a deeper experience for others. The old legalistic penchant toward the authoritarian language, especially the title Christ, was balanced with the development of further intimacy of using the name Jesus. Some participants would even go far to say “I love Jesus” and “Hallelujah”—these were censured or discouraged in the Armstrong years. John^{sp} presents his transformation toward Jesus,

I started to see the centrality of Jesus. For two to three years, I forced myself to say ‘Jesus’ and to raise my hands at church services, like promise keepers. Now I can say ‘Jesus’ without problem... [W]e in the WCG were taught not to speak like, ‘sweet Jesus.’ But now to me it is ‘sweet Jesus.’ That has changed my vocabulary and tone.

With John, we see the language and actions of personal intimacy. John had a personal encounter with the goodness of Jesus.

Further, Philip, who had given his life to Jesus in his mid-teens, said WCG’s new teaching on Jesus had a profound effect:

[It] was like meeting an old friend, it was very comforting. There is a growing intimacy because of that. When I call Jesus, Jesus, it is not like my buddy Jesus (a flippant thing). I don’t mind calling him Christ or Jesus Christ. I should probably do that more often to get my head screwed on straight. There is something about calling him Jesus because I love him. Somehow calling him Christ creates a distance. I don’t actually think theologically it does, but I am a recovering legalist.

The law had created a psychological distance between Philip and the participants and their Saviour. With what some call “the grace awakening,” they saw that there is no distance between them and their Jesus, especially due to their performance. The time in the evangelical phase was significantly needed for the participants in developing intimacy with Jesus. Jesus was the all-important focus in sorting through questions and in gaining greater clarity in both understanding and in relationship.

The evangelical phase cannot be deemphasized or undervalued. The WCG and the participants desperately needed to discover or rediscover Jesus. Jesus became far more real and present to the participants than ever before. The distance of space and time collapsed into their present experience, for Jesus was not only in heaven and awaiting his

future return but also close to the participants in their present circumstances. He was helping them in their lives and ministries.

6.3 The Father and The Holy Spirit

With many participants functioning as unitarians during this evangelical phase, there is little discussion of either the Father or the Holy Spirit. It should be true that to strengthen one's relationship with the Son means a strengthened relationship with the Father and Spirit. Nonetheless, if a human person has a distorted understanding of or relationship with any of the Triune Persons, that human person's relationship will also in some way be distorted with the other Triune Persons. This of course is not from the divine side of the relationship—where there is no distortion—but from the human side—where there is distortion and darkness. For example, a human person does not fully understand the Son or relate to Him in His fullness if he/she does not follow Him to the Father in the Spirit.

It does not appear that the participants deliberated on their relationships with the Father and the Spirit. Again, an obstacle to having a close relationship with the Father may have been due to some participants' image of Him as wrathful, coming from their penal view of atonement. The intimacy that was experienced with Jesus was not experienced with the other two divine Persons.

The greater understanding of the Holy Spirit in the 1990s did not lead to a deliberately close personal relationship with the majority of the participants. This is not to say that they did not have the Holy Spirit. However, during the decade of the evangelical phase, they were not intentional about this relationship. The key issue appears that they and their denomination were primarily cognitive in their orientation. Having the right set of beliefs was what was important. This was the methodology of Armstrong carried over

into a new context.²⁵² The propositions were taught and the ministers and members either went along with the changes or they did not. As we have seen, the change in the doctrine of the Trinity was not a change in heart, it was a change in head. It was, as many participants recall and repeat, mostly academic. It did not change the way they prayed or related to the Holy Spirit. However, even though the Holy Spirit was pushed to the back burner so quickly after he had been acknowledged as a Person, the Holy Spirit did not seem to be insulted by this—He had experienced far worse in the denomination. His focus was leading the participants and the WCG into the New Covenant relationship with Jesus Christ, opening the Scriptures to see new things that had always been there. The Holy Spirit moved more freely in His role in the participants' lives to reveal Jesus to them. The Holy Spirit's great gift to the WCG during this period was that Jesus became more intimate and glorified than ever before. This was a vital part of this phase: the Holy Spirit took attention off Himself and placed it on Jesus. Indeed this phase demonstrates a transformation of heart of all of the participants toward Jesus, and His grace gave the participants a new understanding of themselves.

6.4 Self

During the evangelical phase there was a movement away from understanding of oneself based on performance and Law keeping. This was in large part due to a greater comprehension of oneself as under the grace of Christ in the New Covenant. This message was the main focus in the participants' lives and ministries. Eagleton gives the effect of this on himself:

I began to feel better about myself. Moving from the prison of soul-crippling legalism to grace took the pressure off to perform. My journey had been paralyzed by legalism choking the love out of real relationships. I began to realize

²⁵² American evangelicalism tends to be cognitive and doctrinally focused. This may be another reason why, after the doctrinal changes, the WCG fit well into this movement.

God was not interested in producing an army of obedient robots. The changes affected my life in only positive ways. Light replaced darkness and my life brightened up. God accepted me as his son not because of my works but because of his love. The frustration of trying to live up to a never reachable standard and performance anxiety was gone. These were monumental changes in my relationship with God. The focus began to shift from me trying to please God to God being pleased with me because he loved me.

Eagleton gives a clear representation of what was experienced also by the other participants. The Law had bound the participants to a view of self that was based on performance and self-condemnation. This put them at a distance from the transcendent and holy God of high expectations. As the grace message moved to a depth level in the participants' lives, they moved toward a relationship with themselves based what God said about them. The evangelical view of "sinners saved by grace" became a motto throughout the WCG. This focus was not only on the mercy and love of God but also on human need for Him. Nevertheless, with the WCG still calling believers "sinners," it tended to have them focus both on grace and on their sins. For the participants, although there was still a tendency to examine their own sinfulness as sinners, self-acceptance and self-love became much easier than under the Law. They realized that they were first loved by God before they had done anything, and this transformed the way that they looked at themselves and, in turn, the way they related to God. For example, Martin felt liberated by the forgiveness of Christ, and this brought the great joy of experiencing the presence of Christ in his life and worship.

The various doctrines that were changed in the WCG some years earlier started coming together in the lives of the participants; this made a positive impact on them. The gospel about Jesus, the New Covenant of grace and the new birth of the believer (among others) seemed to mutually interpenetrate one other. Although the doctrine of the Trinity was largely put to the side, these other doctrines coalesced, giving rise to a greater

understanding and relationship with self and God. The relationship with self was mediated through the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Along with the WCG's focus on Christ and his grace, there was still a focus on resisting evil, doing what is good and following the New Testament instruction passages. With the move into an evangelical theology and anthropology, there became a reverse in the WCG's *ordo salutis*: "works lead to salvation" transformed into "salvation leads to works." However, the focus on works for some participants still caused them toward an embedded tendency in the WCG to focus on self and sin. In the new evangelical WCG, Christ forgave sins, but the person is still a sinner. It is a strongly soteriological message of one's unworthiness but of God's goodness; however, the tendency to remain in the unworthy state can again be soul crippling. The tendency was for some to try to overcome personal sins with following the words of Jesus in the synoptic gospels. In the 1990s, there was the popular movement in Christianity, especially evangelical Christianity, "What would Jesus Do (WWJD)," which was followed by the Red Letter Christian movement. With the WCG being immersed in this evangelicalism, J.R. examines the concomitant issues,

We still love to base our practices and preaching on the words (particularly the parables) of Jesus as found in the Synoptic Gospels. So what?! If we still find ourselves turning back onto ourselves trying to placate a remote God who only loves us when we do 'proper' things, then, to me, nothing has fundamentally changed. And that is how I felt after the changes came into being for WCG. Therefore, God still stayed far from me.

J.R. often discusses the problem with the replacing one set of doctrines for another. This was merely a cognitive approach that does not seek complete transformation of the individual. J.R. sees that there is an essential contradiction in adopting a New Covenant theology and soteriology and trying to follow the teachings of Jesus in the synoptic Gospels. This is because Jesus was keeping the Law perfectly and demonstrating to his Jewish audience that if they wanted to follow the Law, they would have to keep it

perfectly, like He did. J.R. presents that trying to follow these teachings will lead to further defeat and a feeling of remoteness from God. Ultimately, Jesus' goal was to point them to the cross—in order to see that they could not keep the Law. J.R. indicates that the New Covenant believer is not required to follow Jesus under the Law but to follow Jesus under the New Covenant.

In the rejection the legalism of Armstrongism, it may have been replaced by a new legalism of evangelicalism. As in Armstrongism, there is a pressure in American evangelicalism to conform—not only in theology but also in practice. Three of the secondary participants and three of the primary participants—all Americans—note that in this conformity that there is an underlying legalism: we have to do certain things to be accepted as evangelicals and, possibly, to be accepted by God. Gregory^{sp} considers many of the contradictions he experienced during this phase:

I would not have admitted it at the time, but I know now looking back, even when I was trying to speak in a grace filled way, I was still communicating in a thousand other ways and subtexts: 'you are not okay, you are not acceptable, but you can be if you will....' The 'If you will...' always changes. First, 'If you will move to Sunday...' Then 'If you will' is whatever it might be. Unfortunately, I feel like a lot of the training and policy things that our denomination did between 1996 and 2005 reinforced a lot of that. I would go to a conference thinking that we are not doing this or that and obviously there are things that we want to do as Christians.

Some of the contradictions of evangelicalism were not immediately apparent to the WCG as it was trying to fit into this movement. There was a lot of talk about grace, but in the practice of the pastors and many in the churches there was a lot of works based attempts to please other evangelicals and God.

6.5 Congregation and Evangelicalism

6.5.1 Challenges

There seem to be four significant effects of evangelical conformity on WCG church life and practice. First, there was strong movement in many WCG churches to change the meeting day from Saturday to Sunday. This was a great challenge for many congregants whose culture and life was based around having meetings on Saturday.

Second, evangelicals by definition should evangelize, so the participants and their congregants felt pressure to evangelize friends, colleagues and neighbours. This was not part of the old WCG culture since only Armstrong and the WCG media were allowed to evangelize.

Third, church growth in the 1990s and 2000s was a major issue in evangelicalism, so there was also added pressure of trying to have local congregations bring in new members. The WCG congregations were still losing members during this period and uncertain about the content of their beliefs.

Fourth, the worship wars during this period in evangelicalism bled into many WCG congregations. The participants and their congregants had to find their way with what music was appropriate for worship. The evangelical church culture war did not help the WCG, which was going through its own culture war. The result in many cases was confusion and disillusion. During the evangelical phase, the WCG continued to lose members who went to other churches or to no church, some continuing to abandon their faith.

The case was similar for issues regarding the Holy Spirit and charismata. Pneumatophobia had long been a tradition in the WCG and is also common in many evangelical churches. During 1994 and 1995, as the WCG was merging with mainstream evangelicalism, there were two major revivals in the charismatic and Pentecostal movements, commonly called the Toronto Blessing and the Brownsville Revival. Some

WCG members were swept up in this outpouring of charismatic renewal and tried to bring it back into their local congregations. Several participants note that in a WCG congregation there could be both charismatics, speaking in tongues and raising their hands in praise, and extreme cessationists, not believing tongues or other spiritual gifts were for today and keeping their hands to themselves. This may have added to some judgmentalism in congregations, thinking the other group was either unspiritual or demon possessed. Gregory^{sp} provides some further contrasts:

What I saw happen with us, as we went through this transition was that some people, based on personality and temperament and different spiritual experiences that they had, were very much embracing the Holy Spirit and seeking out the Holy Spirit's leadership, direction, inspiration and seeking gifts of the Holy Spirit, like speaking in tongues. Others in our movement, acknowledged the Holy Spirit's Personhood and then moved on. They still did not talk about the Holy Spirit.... [E]vangelicals tend to differentiate themselves from Pentecostals by distancing themselves from the Holy Spirit and the particular miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. What I would say is that on the average in the WCG/GCI is an almost conscious attempt to imitate evangelicalism and to immerse ourselves in evangelicalism.

The influence of charismatics and evangelicals was felt in the local congregation. However, the former's approach was quieted and the latter's approach amplified. In response to the revival movements, the issues around experience and worship regarding gifts and manifestations of the Spirit were addressed by WCG leadership. A contrast was shown that under Armstrong "Ecstatic experience [was] not permitted" and this was changed in the evangelical phase to "Ecstatic experience not forbidden, except in congregational worship service."²⁵³ The WCG made a departure from its former 90% cessationism.²⁵⁴ Now at least, a person was allowed to have ecstatic experiences, but

²⁵³ J. Michael Feazell, *The Liberation of the Worldwide Church of God*, 178.

²⁵⁴ Herbert W. Armstrong had allowed for healing through anointing and the laying on of hands.

there was a restriction to a move of the Holy Spirit in these people—‘not at our WCG church meeting.’ We may wonder how this would relate to Paul’s exhortations in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, most specifically 14:39.²⁵⁵ Surely, the Holy Spirit was accepted as a Person in the WCG, but there was still some trepidation of knowing what to do with Him. This may be correlated to the cognitive approach in the denomination toward focusing on studying things out and a lingering control on governance and practice. However, it is important to recall the context of the WCG after the revolutionary changes during the early and mid-1990s. With over half of the ministers and members leaving the denomination and some of the battles raging in certain areas, WCG governance had to be conservative in approach so as to maintain the denominations’ continuation.

A few participants discuss having Pentecostal or charismatic friends and being interested in charismata, but only one participant discusses giving a sermon on spiritual gifts; for the large part these were ignored. For example, Eagleton recalls at a regional pastors’ meeting with about twelve in attendance, one of the pastors “casually threw into the middle of a discussion that he spoke in tongues a lot. The main response seemed to be one of disinterest. There was neither a gasp of disbelief nor a rejoicing at a gift given.” The silence would seem to indicate that the others were ignoring the issue, wishing that it would go away, and that no one else in this meeting had this gift or had a desire to have this gift. There is a tendency to ignore or marginalize that which is outside of one’s experience and understanding. If silence was the reaction of the pastors toward another pastor, most likely their reactions toward charismatic congregants may have been the same. For the most part, those with a charismatic orientation who remained in the WCG went underground, staying silent, praying for further renewal in the WCG and practicing their gifts at home or suppressing their charismata. In its approach to the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts, the WCG was in concord with mainstream American evangelicalism.

²⁵⁵ “So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.”

6.5.2 Relationships and Governance

The first several years of working through the changes in the WCG put an extraordinarily high burden of pastoring a congregation. But by the late 1990s, Patrick notes, “As several pastors have told me, the joy of pastoring returned, at an even deeper level.” Many of the participants expressed that they also started to have deeper bonds with the people in their congregations. By the start of the new millennium, Alexander saw a steady growth in peaceful relationships between himself and the members of his congregation and the members among themselves. The general tone of the participants concerning this period tends to be positive. Relationships began to be restored and transformed between the participants and their congregants and among congregants. The Armstrongist WCG was often a friendly church among the congregants; however, that could be offset with judgmentalism, especially if some deemed that others were not keeping the Law properly. However, the evangelical WCG saw judgmentalism in steady decline. The congregants, who at times did not know whom to trust during the transition phase, slowly began to feel trust and loyalty among themselves and toward their pastors during the evangelical phase. The participants no longer felt the pressure to play policemen; in fact they had been discouraged from assuming this role. The old barriers that participants felt between themselves and members started to disappear. They would remain pastors, overseers, but not in an Orwellian sense, but in the sense of a good shepherds, looking out lovingly for the lambs of Jesus in his flock.

The approach to governance at WCG headquarters remained hierarchical but became ever more open to listening to the comments of pastors and congregants. In the local congregations, leadership became even less hierarchical and more participatory. The ministers in the Armstrongist WCG would not consult the congregation before making a decision. During the evangelical phase, many congregations started to have church advisory councils, comprised of members nominated by the whole congregation. There was a more inclusive approach to consensus building or decision making. Eagleton summarizes how he observed the shift to local church governance and its effect:

The inverted pyramid was helpful in changing congregational relationships. Rather than the omniscient (supposedly) pastor at the top of the hierarchy, now the pastor was underneath equipping and supporting the members who are on the front line of living and sharing the gospel in their daily lives. Pastoral leadership teams were formed to help with decision making. Small groups were started. I joined a men's small group learning to share the journey with others. The power of corporate prayer revealed itself. The denomination, congregations, pastors and members became more gracious. There was less criticism, less of the tendency to be judgmental, less striving for ordination and a generally more relaxed atmosphere. Joy returned. The church became *for* the gospel rather than simply being *against* sin.

The shift in theology, understanding God's grace centered in the good news of Jesus Christ, seemed to have a personal and corporate impact in every aspect of the church. There was some lingering Armstrongisms, but they became fewer and fewer.

The WCG churches used to be strongly based on uniformity and conformity so that a WCG member could go anywhere in the world and the WCG service would be exactly the same. This changed in the evangelical phase, allowing for more freedom of expression: diversity of cultural expression in worship and other communal practice.

The evangelical phase in the WCG was of further reformation of some of its embedded Armstrongism. The Holy Spirit was working with the WCG, the ministers and congregants through this phase. The glory of the evangelical phase is the growth of the WCG in understanding the gospel of grace and the centrality of Jesus Christ. During this period, it seems that Jesus truly became a present Lord to all of the participants and many of their congregants.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE TRINITARIAN GCI (MID 2000s AND BEYOND)

This final chapter of the research traces the movement of the participants from the evangelical WCG to the trinitarian GCI. It primarily examines the key doctrines that came forward during this period. The aspects of understanding of and relationship with self and congregation are seen through the lens of these doctrines regarding the Trinity and through the participants' relationships with the Triune God.

7.1 A New Name

By the early to mid-2000s, the WCG was a different church than it was twenty or even ten years earlier. The old name no longer seemed to fit the new denomination. The leadership also wanted to distance the denomination from links to Armstrongism, so a quest for a name change started.²⁵⁶ After an extensive search, Grace Communion International was selected as the new name; this was legally adopted in 2009 in the United States and 2010 in Canada.²⁵⁷ The name change implied a trinitarian belief, reflecting 2 Corinthians 13: 13 “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”²⁵⁸ Regarding the new name, Joseph Tkach, GCI president, said that it reflects three central aspects:

²⁵⁶ The WCG used as one of the proofs that it was the true church by having “Church of God” in its name. The vast majority of WCG dissident churches have continued this practice, for example, United Church of God, Living Church of God and Philadelphia Church of God.

²⁵⁷ For the sake of simplicity, this section will use GCI to refer to the denomination moving into a trinitarian theology. Any references to WCG will refer to the denomination in either the phases of Armstrongism, transition, or evangelicalism. There are some regions around the world where the national or local churches still use WCG. At a national level, this may be for legal reasons where switching the name may have been difficult and costly. However, at a local level, in some other cases, holding on to the old name may betray that there are lingering aspects of Armstrongism in that congregation.

²⁵⁸ NRSV lists the verse as 2 Corinthians 13:13; however, many other versions list it as 2 Corinthians 13:14.

Grace lies at the heart of our values and mission as a transformed church. Our spiritual unity with God and with one another is reflected in the word Communion. The word International identifies us as a unified body of believers who span the globe, sharing a common history and journey of faith.... We are a church that God radically transformed. Our new name is consistent with that transformation and aptly describes what God has made of our fellowship.... Grace Communion International has about 42,000 members worldwide, meeting in nearly 900 congregations.²⁵⁹

This seemingly symbolic name change was not only a change in form but also a change in substance. The issue of identity was part of the journey and arrival to the home of union and communion with the Father, Son and Spirit and with one another.

7.2 Revisiting the Trinity

It took some time before the doctrine of the Trinity started to come back into central focus in the WCG/GCI. The initial acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity came into WCG teaching in 1993. After that time, the participants do not record that they spoke very often about the doctrine in sermons. As we have emphasized, the participants agree that the doctrine of the Trinity that the WCG taught in the early 1990s was mostly propositional and academic rather than relational. The information given served an essential function to help people understand the details of a doctrine that were previously rejected and misunderstood, but this doctrinal change appeared to have little or no impact on the way the participants lived their lives. Martin shares the effect of the changes on his life and ministry during the evangelical phase:

²⁵⁹ “Worldwide Church of God Announces Name Change,” gci.org, 2009, <http://www.gci.org/aboutus/namechange> (accessed October 12, 2011).

There seemed to be a long lag between the doctrinal understanding of the nature of God and its practical implications, a gap of about 10 years. It seemed like it was almost left behind and then resurrected later. And in my own life, I think it left kind of a gap as far as understanding the nature of God in a practical relational atmosphere, which I filled in by reading extensively.... It seemed like that aspect (the relational) was lacking per se, instruction took us so far. For a long period of time, there was no follow up to instruction, which is understandable because I think they (the WCG leadership) were kind of groping around themselves. But it was a difficulty if you were in the ministry that you had the concept and the basic doctrine given to you that was correct, but as far as the relationship and how it affected many other things did not really come forth.

If the ministers were struggling with these issues, surely their congregants were even more so. Many participants tended to avoid using the word Trinity in their sermons because they knew it confused or offended some people in their congregations. The WCG fit in well with the parameters of much of American evangelicalism, which for the most part avoids talking about the Trinity.²⁶⁰ As we have seen, the participants' main focus, and that of the WCG, was the New Covenant teaching on Jesus Christ and grace. The evangelical phase was indispensable for a church that at its core was primarily focused on an Old Covenant soteriology. The discussion of the Trinity slowly started to move from the menu bar of the participants' radar screens to the center between 2003 and 2007. Of all the participants in this study, over half explicitly stated the greatest change in WCG/GCI doctrine and practice was its move to trinitarian theology, which is also

²⁶⁰ This was not unique to the WCG, in fact many scholars have noted that the Trinity has become an irrelevant and ignored doctrine in the church of Christ. In the article "The Trinity: Just a Doctrine?" (2007), GCI's Michael Feazell presents this issue through the views of two Catholic theologians: "As Catherine Mowry LaCugna explains in her introduction to *God For Us*, the Trinity is a doctrine that most people 'consent to in theory but have little need for in the practice of Christian faith.... 'On the one hand, the doctrine of the Trinity is supposed to be the center of faith. On the other hand, as Karl Rahner [one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century] once remarked, one could dispense with the doctrine of the Trinity as false and the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged'" (<http://www.gci.org/God/trinity>).

called incarnational, Christ-centered, participatory or adoption theology.²⁶¹ These terms interpenetrate one another in the lives of the participants. We will return to the Triune God after examining the doctrine that led to or grew with its resurgence.

7.3 The *inclusio* of Inclusion: Participation and Adoption

The grace message of the evangelical phase provided a ground for the transition and expansion of the trinitarian message of inclusion, participation and adoption in Christ. Neither evangelicalism nor grace was left behind; however, the message of inclusion grew further out of them. The exclusionary aspect of evangelicalism seemed to come into conflict with the WCG/GCI's understanding of God's grace in Christ for all of humanity. It was in and through the gospel message of inclusion of all humanity that many of the participants found a deeper sense of identity for themselves and helped their congregants find their own identities. John^{sp} is one of the forerunners among the participants in making this transition from a gospel of exclusion to one of inclusion. He provides his transformative experience:

In 2003, I was reading Mike Feazell, WCG vice president, about grace. I went to Hebrews and read it verse by verse and got a few commentaries. The scriptures have never looked the same since. I remember reading Hebrews 1-6, and I was embarrassed. Everything that I thought the Scriptures said was the opposite of what they were saying. I knew that the Lord was with me, even in my embarrassment. Everything that I was reading from Mike Feazell was starting to make sense. I called Mike and said, 'Why don't you write more clearly.' It was not clearly stated in writing, but it was a paradigm shift. In Christ, all humanity is saved in the most fundamental sense. But it is the special work of the Spirit to

²⁶¹For the most part, this thesis simply uses the term trinitarian theology, which implies these other terms. Half of the primary participants and all of the secondary participants explicitly stated that they believe the move to this theology has been the greatest change in the denomination.

open our eyes and let us see at our own individual pace. I began to see that if I am saved by grace, and I am a sinner, how is any other human any different than that. I was excited and on fire.

Mike Fezell, influenced by GCI's John McKenna, had come into this understanding through Barth and the Torrances. Through Fezell, the participants received this message that objectively Christ has saved every human person. Subjectively, each person accepts or does not accept this objective fact at different times in a response toward the revelatory work of the Holy Spirit.²⁶² As many of the participants came into this understanding, they express a similar passionate zeal as John^{sp}. This is a gospel that they want to share with everyone: all are loved and included in the life and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Through the writings and recommendations of Fezell, Joseph Tkach Jr. and some other GCI leaders, the participants were guided toward the trinitarian writings of Thomas and James Torrance and Karl Barth. The 2007 at GCI international ministers' conference in Palm Springs, California, was many of the participants' full immersion into participatory trinitarian theology. One of the keynote speakers at this conference was the trinitarian theologian C. Baxter Kruger, who had been a doctoral student of James B. Torrance. Four of the participants, three of these being secondary participants, were already familiar with Kruger, and the conference seemed to deepen their understanding of and passion for the gospel of inclusion in Christ and trinitarian theology. For the other participants, they gradually became swept deeper into the river of change. Having been

²⁶² Alistair McFadyen in *Call to Personhood* discusses the human being as a participating being made in the image of God as a call and response relationship: "Strictly speaking, the human being is always in the image of God because it is constituted by God's prevenient, creative communication as a being-in-response. But whilst there is freedom as to the form and content of this response, there is no freedom *not* to respond. We cannot abdicate our responsibility.... The image cannot, therefore, be lost, but it can be distorted by a refusal to reciprocate the intention of God's communication in response. Refusal to is a response, and so the ontological structure of freedom as being-in-response remains intact even when the intention of dialogue-partnership is maintained only on God's side and there is a distortion of the image on the human side. The implication of all this is that human beings cannot stand fully in the image of God by resting in themselves, but only by turning themselves outwards and upwards toward God" (22).

through previous changes, the participants easily flowed into these new changes. This good news was far too graceful to withstand any major resistance.

The evangelical phase's Christ-centered theology and soteriology was focused on grace, but this was tempered with some evangelical exclusivism, saved vs. unsaved. During this phase the participants came to a deeper understanding of and relationship with Jesus. They came to see how grace was extended to them. For certain participants, they had some dissonance with some evangelicals' bifurcation of humans into the categories of justified and condemned. Here they may have had an embedded resource that they never seem to have fully abandoned. Although Armstrongism was exclusive in its ecclesiology,²⁶³ it was also inclusive in its eschatology.²⁶⁴ This optimistic eschatological inclusivism was an embedded sedimentation that may have been stirred up by the inclusivism of trinitarian theology. This new inclusivism of trinitarian theology was seen not only as something for the future only but also for the present. Not all participants came to this understanding at the same time or in the same way. Nevertheless, there was a confluence of the streams of Christ-centered theology and grace-based soteriology with now the undammed stream of inclusivism; these tributaries flooded into the trinitarian ocean. The New Covenant message of grace in its Christ-centered focus affirmed the identity of the participants and their congregants as beloved and accepted by God. It also led them beyond themselves to extend this grace to all people as Jesus had done at the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.

The *inclusio* of inclusion demonstrated there were some aspects of Armstrongism that were not to be completely repudiated and made greater biblical sense than did mainstream evangelicalism. Thinking things through theologically meant not only inclusion in the Incarnation but inclusion in the Triune life, which is in essence love (1

²⁶³ In the present era, only those in the WCG who kept the Law were God's people.

²⁶⁴ In the Kingdom of God, almost everyone would have a chance to be included in the family of God. The only exception would be those who knew the truth given through the WCG, rejected it and lived contrary to it.

John 4: 8, 16). This in some way is a revision of Armstrong's message of the incredible human potential. However, trinitarian theology has a greater focus on the Godhead and not the message that all human beings become gods as God is God.²⁶⁵ All human beings are the adopted children of the Father in Christ by the Spirit. The potential is not merely a future potential but a present reality. There is no separation from God—except in humans' flawed perceptions. Every human being is included in Christ and is participating in the divine nature of love by being united with Him to the Father in the Spirit. This is the Triune plan given before the foundation of the world, fulfilled on the cross, and experienced in the present and for eternity as grace.

The participants see that salvation is not merely about me and Jesus to the exclusion of others—or against the world. There is a corporate aspect to salvation, because Jesus is not only *for* the individual, he is *for* His whole body and the whole of humanity. All humanity is drawn into the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ (John 12:32, 17: 20-26; Eph. 2:4-6; 2 Cor. 5:14-21). The ministry of reconciliation is also a strong theme in GCI participatory incarnational theology. This may be summarized in 2 Corinthians 5:19 (NASB), “namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” Jesus Christ reconciled the world, all humanity, to God by taking away their sins. Believers have experienced this and are given the ministry of reconciliation, sharing with people the relational truth that they have been reconciled to and have peace with God (Col. 1:20).

The question often rises in congregations: what is difference between believers and unbelievers? Several participants indicated that the answer lies in that believers accept a relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit whereas unbelievers do not. Unbelievers have not accepted the fact that they already have been reconciled to God in

²⁶⁵ In the 1990s, the WCG abandoned its old Elohim theology by saying God is not a family. The WCG turned strongly against the Elohim message of Armstrongism. Even though the denomination stated “God is not a family, but he has a family,” the latter clause of this corrective often was neglected in reaction against the former clause.

Christ. They remain separated from God not from God's side—therefore in reality—but from their side in the darkness and alienation of their own minds and consequent actions (Rom. 1: 21, Col. 1:21). The kerygma then is not separation; unbelievers either already believe this in their own minds or deny this through ignoring God or believing lies about Him. The proclamation to the poor, the blind and the captive is that they have been set free to see that any apparent separation between God and human beings was removed in Christ through His crucifixion and resurrection. Gregory^{sp} contrasts his GCI position with his former evangelical position:

I think the Son's incarnation as the man Jesus was the Father's eternal plan for adoption. The plan of the Trinity is a plan of adoption that includes salvation, not the other way around. Unlike most evangelicals, I do not think that we believe and then we are adopted and saved. I think the Father has adopted and saved humanity in Jesus and is now calling us, through his Holy Spirit, to believe this truth about ourselves.

A person's ontological status does not change by one's actions, believing, God has changed the person's ontological status, a son, and she/he then may believe it. This is how grace works: it is God's free gift, not a person's own doing (Eph. 2:8-9), and the person merely has faith to say "Yes" to the "Yes" of God's promises already said and done to him/her in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

This inclusion or adoption has radical implications in the approach to personal evangelism and discipleship. One shares the good news with oneself, Christians and non-Christians: the language of separation from God due to sin is dropped and is replaced by unity with God in Christ by the Spirit. The participants present that the person has already been forgiven (Col. 3:13). Repentance is changing one's mind (*metanoia*) about God and about self and believing the gospel: God loves and accepts the person. This reality will change the person's life.

The reaction of certain cult-watchers has been that GCI is drifting back into heresy, specifically universalism. Some participants express that GCI's position is not universalism. They understand the difference between the objective and subjective realities of the position of adoptionism or inclusivism. The Father through the Son in the Spirit has objectively saved, reconciled and adopted every human person who ever lived. This has implications that recall Armstrong's view that everyone would have a chance to accept or reject Jesus at the final resurrection from the dead. The eternal Trinity is not bound by time or death as to when a person can or cannot be saved. Of course, this is antithetical toward much of evangelicalism, which views this side of the grave as the only day of salvation. The position of GCI, like that of Barth, is an actual inclusivism and a hopeful universalism, everyone will have the freedom to choose to accept or reject the love and goodness of God in the end. It is not a pluralistic universalism. A person can only have salvation, reconciliation and adoption through Jesus. The message is thoroughly trinitarian: the Father unites human beings with Himself only through His Son in Their Spirit.

The relationality of this message has had a great effect on the participants. For example, Theophilus^{sp} remarks how the gospel message of inclusion has changed his life. He had previously found it a struggle to make the transition from the old works-based mentality during the evangelical stage. This transformed his prayer life from praying mostly for repentance, his basic needs and the kingdom to come.

Now for me, thanks to the theology of inclusion, the realization that we all are created to be participants of the joyful embrace of the Holy Trinity, prayer is more an attitude of my heart than a ritual or a required discipline; it is a continuous conversation with the One who lives in me and is able to contain me at the same time. 'In the name of Jesus' is not anymore the magic formula at the end of the request, rather 'in the name of Jesus' is the spiritual place where I belong, exist and act. I admit that prayer is one of the hardest parts of my relationship with God, because it reflects how real He is for me. You usually 'don't talk to strangers

or to concepts.’ However, this is becoming more ‘natural’ as this Wonderful Lover of our souls reveals Himself more and more to us and becomes more ‘tangible’ for me.

Theophilus has a greater understanding of and relationship with himself in this approach to theology. He found great restoration in his emotional health and his relationships with family due to his change in theology. He now sees glimpses of the presence of God in everyone and everything, which brings him great joy. Other participants mention their increased feelings of being loved and accepted by God due to the message of inclusion.

As the participants understand and experience their identity in Christ, they bring this message of inclusion to their congregations. There have been mixed reactions from congregants as they have heard the message of the gospel of inclusion. John^{sp} provides some examples through the first years that he taught this message:

To some audiences, half were happy to hear this message and half were sad or mad. I had never run into that before. I proclaimed this message in one congregation and an eighty year old woman came up to me bouncing up and down saying, ‘I am so glad I did not die before hearing this; it is so correct and true.’ I have got equal flack and enthusiasm. This is the same way Jesus preached, and it divided his audience down the middle. You cannot receive this message with neutrality, you are either going to hate it or love it. Some people say, ‘I will take this to thought.’ This gospel message contradicts the Western legal model (guilty or innocent, included or excluded)... Proclaiming this gospel of inclusion does not mean less of us, it means more of us. When we did not know this gospel, we could not give all; we were just trying to maintain: if we stopped doing all, God would stop loving us. When you know that you are included and in God, you can run with freedom and do lots more.

For many of those congregants who have caught the good news of inclusion, it has inspired them to see others in their churches, community and world in a new way.

Through Armstrongism and evangelicalism, there was an ‘us vs. them’ mentality. Now, the gospel of inclusion gives the participants and congregants new lenses to see that God is working in and through all people, who are made in His image and likeness, even though these people may not realize it. It allows these people to see themselves and others as the Father sees them, of infinite value worthy of giving His Son’s life for them so that they may become adopted children. They can live and share the gospel of love, inclusion and acceptance—even without mentioning God—in any private or public place. Their calling as participants in the divine nature of love is to be love at all times and in all places. This is seen at GCI church meetings. When new people come through the doors of a GCI church, they often remark about the warmth of the congregants. This happens also outside of church meetings. The warmth of the Spirit flows out into the public as many congregants are serving in a variety of community outreach programs. The deepening love in the participants and congregants’ lives and relationships should be viewed in direct proportion to their understanding and experience regarding the identity of God and of themselves in Him. John^{sp} created an antiphonal doxology that he chants with his congregations each Sunday:

“God is Triune, he sent Jesus to adopt us. Who is included?”

“EVERYONE!”

7.4 Into the Incarnation

Through the evangelical phase, the participants received a strong foundation in Jesus. During this period, Philip started to study and understand the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, and he traces the effect of this understanding:

My understanding of the doctrine of God followed the issue of the dual nature of Jesus. That may seem backwards, but for me and even for historic Christianity, wrestling with the divinity of Jesus helps you understand the issue of who God

actually is. And that makes sense because that is what God did. He says, ‘I will show you who I am by sending my Son who will take on your humanity and in your humanity actually reveal who God is.’

The humanity of Christ was recognized in the evangelical grace message, especially in Jesus’ earthly ministry. This becomes deepened as the participants come into a trinitarian understanding that the glorified Christ, our Intercessor, is still incarnate and seated on the throne in the Spirit next to our Father. The hypostatic union was not merely a temporary concession that God made to save humanity, but it is an on-going reality. Jesus is fully God and fully Man. As Philip explains, when the true identity of Jesus is affirmed, this can only lead to the identity of the Triune God. The Incarnate Son of God is always in relation with his Father in the Spirit.

Through the participants looking at Jesus, they see the identity of all human beings. Patrick provides his understanding of the purpose for the eternal Son coming in the flesh:

The life Jesus lived, he is the second Adam. He lived the life that the first Adam failed to live, a life of faithfulness to God under all the pressure of culture and Satan. He lived a life of obedience. Humanity had been bent away from God in the fall, and Jesus Christ in the Incarnation bent us back again. He became the only one who qualified for the kingdom. The Father has qualified us, we are told in Colossians, through Jesus Christ; it is his righteousness, obedience and faithfulness that qualifies us. I had a limited understanding of this before and a much richer understanding now. It makes God seem more caring; he came and is one of us. He understands our situation. It makes him more real. It helps people appreciate his love more. God loves us so much this is what he did.

The second Adam restores relationship back with the Father for all those who had run away into the far country due to sin. The Son goes and retrieves humans and brings them back to the Father to see Him for who he truly is, the prodigally loving and good Father.

Qualifying for the Kingdom is only a human effort insofar as it is completed by the man Jesus, who lived fully in submission to his Father.

Jesus is true and full humanity in its telos. It is out of the eternal Triune overflow of love that all things, including human beings were created and recreated. Jesus is the last Adam, and in Jesus humanity is remade in the image of God, a new creation. J.R. explains the future aspect of this image, “I now feel that Christ is just showing who he is at life, death and resurrection what will ultimately happen to us. The firstborn of many brethren is important for us on many levels: body, soul and mind.” The future aspect certainly is an important, and some participants add further present aspects through our participating in the Incarnation. Through the Incarnate Son, Jesus, each person is crowned with the Spirit of sonship as a son of the Father.²⁶⁶ These people also become one with Christ as His body. The understanding and experience of intimacy comes through literally being in Christ and He in human persons. Since the participants can see that they are in Christ—not merely in a figurative sense—they experience prayer to Jesus. They talk to him because they are united with Him, and through this they know that the Father hears and responds to their prayers. Many participants mention that in praying to the Father, that they are joining Jesus’ prayer. The participants express joy and thanks that Jesus remains human like other humans, knowing their challenges. Those who are in Christ are a new creation, made in Christ, who is the true image of God. These terms that the participants use demonstrate that they are coming into a deeper understanding and intimacy of being united in Christ.

In their Armstrongist past, the participants experienced a knowing about Jesus and relating to Him through the law or trying to follow Him. However, at present, they are experiencing a closeness to Jesus, an intimate relational knowing.²⁶⁷ He is no longer a distant role model to study and imitate, as one might learn about Martin Luther King or

²⁶⁶ Following Scripture, the gendered terms sons and sonship with all that entails are used, especially regarding inheritance. It is significant that a person can both be a son of the Father and a bride of Christ at the same time. Human gender presuppositions about these terms require a refocusing on doing a theology from above rather than below (see Mt. 22:30, Gal. 3:26-28)

²⁶⁷ *Yada* in Hebrew and *epignosis* in Greek.

John Wesley. The participants passionately know Jesus as Friend and even as Lover and Bridegroom. This may not always be easy language to use for these male participants, but in interviews several seemed to laugh with joyful abandon as they talked about Jesus in this manner and their old categories fell away. This is their mystically intimate loving union in the Incarnation and He in them—they are wed and one. The human person is a participant, sharer and partaker in the divine nature of the Father, Son and Spirit since that person is united with the humanity of Jesus that is united with the divinity of Jesus Christ, the hypostatic union. Jesus is no longer distant and in the future but is present and in the present.

7.5 The Triune God

The academic language about God lessened during the evangelical stage. The message of grace through faith in Christ was relational, and this language informed the discussion of the Trinity in the early to mid 2000s. When one speaks of God in the abstract, it leads away from the revelation of the Christian God. The Christian God is not merely an impersonal monad. The Christian God is essentially Tri-Personal and relational in both in the immanent and economic Trinity.²⁶⁸ We can only speak of the Christian God through the revelation of the Incarnation as Persons joined in relationship, or union in communion. The teaching that God is love (1 Jn. 4: 8, 16) had been used both in Armstrongism and the evangelical phase. However, love was often discussed in an abstract way and not in the context of 1 John 4, i.e. the incarnational, Triune economy of salvation.

²⁶⁸ Karl Barth states that when we are dealing with the Christian God “neither are we dealing with God in the abstract; not with the one who in His deity exists separated from man, distant and strange and this non-human if not indeed an inhuman God. In Jesus Christ there is no isolation of man from God or of God from man. Rather in Him we encounter the history, the dialogue, in which God and man meet together and are together, the reality of the covenant *mutually* contracted, preserved, and fulfilled by them Jesus Christ is in His one Person, as true *God*, *man’s* loyal partner, and as true *man*, *God’s*. He is the Lord humbled for communion with man and likewise the Servant exulted to communion with God.” *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1960), 46.

The evangelical issues of New Covenant grace and Christ-centeredness led back to a discussion of the Triune God who is working and living in these realities. The participants' relationship with Jesus led them into having a deeper relationship with His Father. This led some participants away from a type of modalism that they had during the evangelical phase. Barnabas describes his experience:

I went from non-Trinitarianism (of Armstrongism) to Modalism. I didn't realize that is what I did. And it wasn't until mid-2000s that it dawned on me, 'I have been believing in Modalism. I don't have three distinct persons here. I have one person who is wearing three masks.' And if you think of God as a single solitary being, or if you think of him as a single solitary person with three masks, the only kind of love that can exist, if he's all by himself before he creates anything, the only kind of love that can exist is narcissistic. So how can good love spring from bad love? Narcissism in itself isn't love—it's not an outgoing love. So the only thing that really makes sense is that God has to be a Trinity because within Father, Son and Spirit, the kind of love, the only kind of love that can exist there is a genuine from one to another reciprocal love, and it's not narcissistic. And so the genuine love has been there from all eternity; it doesn't somehow have to be made or created, it's already there. So then the creation becomes an outflow of what is already there, not a narcissistic god who suddenly wakes up one morning and says, 'dang it, I've been narcissistic all my life, I'm going to change that, I'm going to make some people, I'm going to make some angels, and I'm not going to be narcissistic anymore.'

Barnabas indicates that there is a problem with all unitarian movements: God cannot be love in his eternal being, because love is always other-focused rather than self-focused.

The Trinity is not merely the Father loving the Son and the Son loving the Father, but the Father and Son loving the third Person. It is that third Person sharing in that relationship and bringing others into that relationship as well. The whole focus of the

Triune life is not only a relationship *ad extra* (in the economy of salvation) but primarily and freely a relationship *ad intra* (within the Trinity).

Several participants express a distinction between their views of God during the evangelical phase and present. For example, Gregory^{sp} states,

I no longer believe that the first or most important thing we can say about God is that he is ‘holy’ or ‘omnipotent’ or ‘just.’ I think the most important thing we can say about God is that he is the loving relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Holiness, in the light of the Trinity, means far more than ‘not doing anything wrong.’ It means that the relational life of the Father, Son, and Spirit is a whole, healthy, functional life. I would call myself a ‘Trinitarian’ because I not only believe in God’s Triune nature I believe that his Triune nature is the most important and fundamental truth in the universe.

The Triune God is eternally in a perichoretic—interpenetrating—relationship with Himself. The phrase common in popular culture ‘unity in diversity’ is a reflection of the Triune life. Patrick expresses this truth, “Clearly, there are different ‘tasks’ that each (divine Person) may focus on, but there is a complete unity of purpose. There is no ego driven attempts to either take advantage of each other, increase power, or otherwise live in a selfish manner. There is mutual submission, service and mutual glorification. The Godhead models a life of love.” There is no separation in the Triune fellowship of the Persons—it is absolute union in communion. It is from the nature of the Triune life—love—that all life and relationships have their origin and purpose.

As Barth showed the Church, the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity are the lens through which we see all Scripture, doctrine and life. The Scripture and doctrines of the church are therefore no longer merely seen as stories and propositions to be understood but as relational aspects of sharing in the Triune life. This is revealed through the second Person of the Trinity. Jesus is the Way into the Triune God’s life and love. Through Jesus, as Eagleton states, we hear God telling human persons, “*You are*

my beloved beloved.” The Father’s words to Jesus are echoed to His other children. Jesus Christ is not spoken of in isolation or separation either from God or from human beings. Jesus is always God as Son of the Father and the one anointed with the Holy Spirit; moreover, Jesus is always a man with us and for us. In Jesus, God has chosen never to be apart from man and humanity. Trinitarian theology promotes this Christ-centered message—this indeed is the gospel. Nonetheless, it is not to the exclusion of the Father or the Holy Spirit. This is an inclusive message, not one Person should be deemphasized or marginalized. Every Person should be equally honoured, praised and worshipped. There is no place for any type of subordinationalism—there is only honouring, praising and glorifying in, through and toward the Other.

7.5.1 The Father

In the WCG both in the Armstrongist and the evangelical phases, the role of the Father was often seen as generic and abstract. For many participants, He seemed distant, transcendent, aloof, judgmental and punitive. This was due to some misunderstandings toward Jesus. For the most part, Armstrongism tried to go to the Father, bypassing Jesus, the Door. The evangelical phase seemed content to stay at the Door, fearing what or who was sitting behind it.

The participants have come to understand that the Triune life cannot be circumvented; the Father can only truly revealed by the Son anointed with the Spirit. The Father cannot be glorified except in the Spirit through Jesus, and Jesus cannot receive glory except for the Father in the Spirit. To bypass or remain with any single isolated member of the Trinity would be an attempt, whether consciously or unconsciously, to cause division in the Triune relationship. The participants are seeing this more deeply all the time. For example, John^{sp} believes:

You cannot be brought to the true Jesus and not be brought to his Father and to the Holy Spirit as a Person; that is impossible, because the only Jesus there is, is the

Jesus who is in relationship with his Father in the fellowship in the Person of the Holy Spirit. That is it. I could not foresee it at the time (during the evangelical phase), but we could not come to the real Jesus and not come to the Trinity. Jesus is going to take you to his Father; if you are Father centered, he is going to talk about his Son, and he cannot do that outside the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. You are coming to the Trinity, at some point, in the grace of God to pursue God and to see him more clearly.

People's theologies and experiences may be deficient or heterodox, but the reality is not. Focusing on one Person in reality is always focusing on the other two, because the one Person is always pointing to the other two—not Himself.

In the evangelical WCG, the decade of pointing at Jesus eventually led to His Father. Barnabas has defined his trinitarian renewal being initiated with the revelation of the heart of the Father.

As huge as our doctrinal changes were over the nature of God in 1993 and over the Old versus New Covenant in 1995, I believe the understanding we were given in 2007 concerning the heart of the Father and the love that's inherent in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit triune relationship is even bigger. What happened in 1993 and 1995 was necessary to stop a church that was headed the wrong way. What we received in 2007 took us from a dead stop to forward motion. It is from the heart of the Father that changes came in GCI, but more importantly it is eternally from the heart of the Father that he gave us the Incarnation and our inclusion in him. The changes in GCI were ordained to move it into the message of a Father who loves with unconditional grace and who gives his only begotten Son to bring his fallen children home to him.

Some of the participants who grasped this transformative revelation were led into a deeper relationship with the Father than they had experienced before. Gregory^{sp} expresses the joy of his renewed relationship with his Father:

I can truly say that my relationship with God is the best it has ever been in my life. I truly feel that I have a relationship with the Father. It is a relationship that Jesus is sharing with me, giving me his faith and his love of the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. There is not a doubt in my mind that I will be welcomed with open arms into the Father's house when I die, and I am truly passionate about joining Jesus, as I am able, to help others know that Jesus has also included them in his relationship with the Father.

These are liberating changes in understanding and relationship that have transformed Gregory and other participants' personal lives and ministries. Barnabas, Prokopto^{sp}, John^{sp} and Gregory^{sp} find this news is so good that they do not want to hold back from sharing it with everyone.

Chapter four presented that the primary participants had difficult relationships with their human fathers. Human fathers can have a profoundly negative or positive effect on ways that their children see God as their Father. This can come through these human father's actions or words, especially their teachings or lack of teachings about the Father. Over the past several years, the participants are seeing more than ever that their human fathers—no matter their good or bad qualities—are not the perfect image of God the Father—only Jesus is. It is not through human fathers or through other persons that one can come to understand the Father or to be in relationship with Him. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is the only revelation of the Father. As the participants changed their views of and relationships with Jesus, this eventually had an effect on their relationship with their heavenly Father. With a strengthened relationship with Jesus, the participants have been brought back to the Father and changed their minds about Him. This undoubtedly positively affects the participants' views of themselves and their congregants.

Some participants because of their troubled or distant relationship with their human fathers still struggle with their relationship with the Father, at times feeling that He remains distant.²⁶⁹ Having a distant human father and perceiving a distant divine Father may produce a distant pastor for those to whom he ministers and relates. However, through knowing and relating to Jesus, the relationship with the Father is becoming more intimate. Jesus breaks down the barriers of flawed human relationships to reveal the Father as He truly is, for in seeing Jesus correctly one sees the Father correctly (John 14:9). Further, in seeing the face of Jesus on the face of one's human father, that person will eventually see the face of the Father on him as well.²⁷⁰ This calls for a directional change in theology, seeing human beings in the image of God rather than the opposite. Jesus calls for people to be reconciled to God and destroy our fallen, idolatrous images of Him. Still, for a few of the participants, coming to a renewed understanding and relationship with the Father is a grace in progress.

From their trinitarian perspective, half of the participants also note the terrible picture of the Father in much of evangelicalism, which accepts a penal substitutionary view of atonement.²⁷¹ Moving in evangelical circles and trying to sort out their own beliefs, the participants came across and some accepted this view. Barnabas remarks that this view of atonement creates a dualistic view of the Father and Son. The Father is full of wrath and the Son absorbs the Father's wrath on the cross. This legal view demands that someone receive punishment for wrong doing. This often promotes a view of the Father who would destroy humans if he could; the only thing that stops Him is Jesus reminding Him of the sacrificial blood. The participants, for the most part, now neither hold this

²⁶⁹ The secondary participants all had closer relationships with their fathers, and their fathers all were involved in giving their sons some education about God. For three of the secondary participants, they were raised in the WCG, so their views on God matched the standard WCG teachings. For persons who came into the WCG on their own, they had made the choice to follow this religion. However, for the children, they did not. Furthermore, there was a threat hanging over them that if they left the WCG they would commit the unpardonable sin and go into the lake of fire. This may have led to a fear of the Father, who would be merciful to non-WCG people in the Kingdom but not to WCG people who left the denomination.

²⁷⁰ This could equally be said of human mothers.

²⁷¹ It is outside of the focus of this study to discuss this view in detail.

view of atonement nor of the Father; conversely, they see that the cross reveals the Father's heart. If the Father poured out any wrath at the crucifixion—for which there is negligible scriptural evidence—it would have been on sin that Jesus had taken into himself. It would not have been on His beloved Son Jesus, with whom he was eternally well pleased. On the cross, God was in Christ Jesus reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). Jesus as the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), pointed to the Father, who never leaves nor forsakes His children (Heb. 13: 5) and demonstrates His eternal self-giving love. The Trinity is eternal in its unity and could not be separated on the cross by the Father turning away from the Son. Jesus knew the Father would never leave Him (Jn.16: 32). The participants share the GCI view that the Father is in the Son and in the Spirit on the cross, sharing in the Son's suffering, pain and humiliation.

For some participants, the impact on them of coming out of the penal substitutionary view of atonement—along with some other concomitant issues—was a profound spiritual and emotional theophany. Prokopto^{sp} describes the effect that understanding this message on his life:

I wept so uncontrollably that I woke my wife and so together we wept as I repented and then apologized to the Father for all the things I had said to tar his name with brush of my own fallen angst. I kept saying over and over again, 'I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!' It was during these hours of crying and prayer that Holy Spirit said to me, 'Enough with the I'm sorries, now get to work!'²⁷² I did not and have not cried another tear over my past heretical teaching as a pastor since that moment. I then brought the message of the Father's love and our adoption to the elders and then the congregation. The following Friday I called my Associate Pastor and two Assistant Pastors together and without really knowing how to go about it...[O]ne of our pastors who leads our worship jumped to his feet and pounded his fist on the table. I braced for the worst. He pounded his fist and shouted, 'I knew it! I knew it had to be better news than what we've been

²⁷² This is one of only a two participants who felt or heard the Holy Spirit speaking to them directly. This is not to say that other participants did not have similar experiences, but they did not recount them.

saying!’ Everyone there felt the same way and so two days later on Sunday I repented to my congregation for what I’d said that was contrary to the gospel. I told them that much of what I’d said from the pulpit had been wrong—that it was the product of Augustinian Dualism that was really just a mishmash of fallen Greek Philosophy and the gospel. I asked if we could start over. I confessed to not knowing just how deep the rabbit hole went but assured them that I knew this is where the Holy Spirit was taking us and that I was determined to never say anything other than the Trinitarian Gospel even if it cost me my job or my life.

Prokopto and other participants express a passionate dedication to the Father’s love expressed in the teachings of trinitarian theology. Many in their congregations have caught the fire of this love as well. They have become strident in defending that the Father was, is and always will be absolutely good and faithful.

The Father has become a greater focus in GCI, but still at times remains seemingly distant in the discussion and lives of the denomination and some of the participants. We may wonder regarding the choice of GCI as the new name from 2 Corinthians 13: 13, “The *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the *communion* of the Holy Spirit be with *all of you*.” The missing aspect of this verse in the new name is “the love of God.” Undoubtedly, this was not a deliberate slight toward the Father. Nevertheless, the Father and His love should be the constant focus of GCI in its praxis. It is from the Father that the children receive life and identity; therefore, it is imperative for the children to truly know their Abba if they hope to understand and be who they truly are. The love of the Father is a message that has touched profoundly some streams of Christianity over the past few decades; hopefully, it will continue and grow in GCI as the communion of the Holy Spirit and the grace of Jesus Christ lead all back to the Father’s heart. This is the ultimate co-message that Jesus and the Holy Spirit reveal and that some of the participants are emphasizing in their lives and ministries.

7.5.2 Holy Spirit

The final subsection to this thesis returns to one of the Persons who carried out and is key to the changes in the WCG/GCI. The Holy Spirit had been grieved and quenched in so many ways in the Armstrongist WCG. He had been de-Personalized and His works in other churches ridiculed and demonized. Ironically, He did not stop blessing the WCG but turned the denomination completely around to see that He is living inside of them. In spite of this during the evangelical phase, many in the WCG, while becoming confessing trinitarians, functioned as binitarians or unitarians. The key issues were a lack in clear understanding of and an intimate relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The abstract nature of God discussion in 1993-1994 seemed to have an unintended adverse impact for at least a decade. In spite of these apparent limitations, the Holy Spirit continued to work with the WCG, putting Christ at its center. Today in GCI, through entering and participating in the relationship with the Father and the Son, the participants are deepening their relationship with the Holy Spirit. Sharing in the distinct aspects of the one Triune relationship is a reality; nevertheless, coming to understand and experience the depth of this reality is a growth process. This is the same with the understanding of and the relationship with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the observations made in this section are not a reproach; they are a description with some prescription of the issues concerning the Holy Spirit in the participants and GCI.

With the move into trinitarian theology, there is more discussion of the Holy Spirit today in the denomination than ever before. This tends to be in the context of the Triune name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, there is also a move to discuss the distinct Persons and not only Jesus. For example, in the 2011 GCI conference for Canadian ministers and international directors, trinitarian theologian and United Methodist minister Elmer Colyer gave a whole session on the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. At this same conference, there were more ministers talking about the Holy Spirit than this writer and some of the Canadian participants had heard before at a GCI meeting. GCI is making

strides toward understanding and relating to the Holy Spirit, but there remain some issues for consideration.

Much of GCI and the participants' theologizing follows Barth and the Torrances. These theologians look at the primary role of the Holy Spirit to shed light on the relationship of the Father and the Son. This is true. Nevertheless, an issue that may occur with a misunderstanding of Barth and the Torrances is that people may think that the Holy Spirit may be reduced in importance in this role, rather than exploring more fully the breadth and depth of what this role entails.²⁷³ They may not see Him in the

²⁷³ Cf. Robert W. Jenson, "You were Wondering Where the Spirit Went." *Pro Ecclesia* 2, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 296-304.vv. In this article, Jenson expresses some uncertainties toward certain aspects of Karl Barth's theology in *The Church Dogmatics*. Many members in the Karl Barth Society of North America had similar suspicions when they commissioned Jenson to write the article. The title of Jenson's article hints toward a question at issue: although the Son and the Father are represented in *Church Dogmatics*, the Holy Spirit is largely absent. However, in response to this suspicion, we may find that Barth neither desires to conceal the Spirit nor does he desire to treat him in isolation. John Webster responds to the critics of Barth's pneumatology that their critiques are not overly convincing nor do they provide alternatives; he reminds readers of Barth, "It may be that Barth is not so much deficient as simply different — less committed to a pluralist trinitarian theology, less anxious to identify demarcations between the actions of Christ and Spirit in the world" (Webster 138-1399). Barth is thoroughly committed to trinitarian theology and wants to move away from any possibility of modalism or tritheism, or for that matter binitarianism or bitheism. He is concerned, ultimately, with the unity of God in His three distinct hypostases, or "modes of being." Nonetheless, Barth, following the Western predilection, starts with unity before focusing on of each hypostasis in distinction. In discussion of each Person, Barth focuses on their *koinonia* and *perichoresis*. Jenson presents that this may be in part due to the following of the *filioque* position of the Western Church.

GCI does not appear to have a specific position on the *filioque* other than possibly by default following Barth and the Western church. It is not that the theologians in GCI do not know this issue. Perhaps they remain silent in order not to be seen as entering a discussion over 1,000 years after the fact. We may wonder how this theological issue may be of importance to practical issues. As we have seen, one's embedded and sedimented thoughts about God in His triunity affect how one lives and relates to Him and others. This is a central issue that affects not only how individuals but also how churches in the West relate to God, especially to the Holy Spirit. The great irony is that the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of unity and peace in the Godhead, has been the topic of greatest division in the church (East and West; evangelical and Pentecostal). There needs to be deliberation on the default Western position, which tends to subsume and subordinate the Holy Spirit into the relationship between the Father and the Son, and the Eastern position, which tends to separate the Holy Spirit from the Son. The Western position can tend toward a kind of functional binitarianism or subordinationalism and the Eastern position a kind of tritheism. With some further reflection and help from trinitarian theologian friends, GCI could follow its great teacher Thomas Torrance in working toward ecumenical dialogue and reconciliation between East and West on this key issue of schism. GCI has followed Torrance, who followed St. John of Damascus and the Cappadocia Fathers, regarding *perichoresis*, the divine dance of mutual interpenetration. This is a theological issue which may be fruitful to explore in having a position between East and West. This among other pneumatological issues may require some attention for theological and relational growth in GCI.

theodrama²⁷⁴ as a lead but merely a supporting character—ancillary to the story, working mostly on stage management.

There are some parallels between the WCG's old approach to Jesus and GCI's approach to the Holy Spirit. In the Armstrongism, the gospel was not *about* the Person Jesus Christ it was the message *of* Jesus Christ: the soon coming Kingdom of God. The focus was not on the King but on the Kingdom and not on the Messenger but on the message. However, during the doctrinal changes, the WCG came to see that the Messenger and King are the message. Today in GCI practice, although the Holy Spirit is accepted as a divine Person and Messenger as well, there is still an embedded tendency to treat Him somewhat like Jesus was treated in the old WCG. The Holy Spirit tends to be viewed as a Messenger but is a marginal focus of the GCI's gospel message.²⁷⁵

With only a few exceptions, the Holy Spirit seemed to enter the participants' writings or interview responses upon prompting or intervention. Even then most of the discussions were very brief and the topic changed. Surely, the participants are growing in their understanding of trinitarian theology and their relationship with the Triune God. In the past few years, some participants have started to see that their lack of intimacy with the Holy Spirit is an issue that needs attention in their relationship with God. For example, Barnabas stated, "During the 1990s, the reality of what the Holy Spirit's role was academic. I thought I understood this academically, but I haven't really gotten to the point how this plays out in real life, how this third person that I've become aware of interacts with me and with others and so on. And I would say that still has yet to be developed to a considerable degree." For the most part, the participants have an emerging relationship with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is objectively and fully living and working in and through them. However, the subjective aspect of having an intimate personal relationship with Him and a constant awareness of His presence has been lacking. The participants indicated that they are focusing more than they had before on

²⁷⁴ This term is appropriated from Hans Urs von Balthasar.

²⁷⁵ It appears that this focus may be gradually changing in GCI.

this relationship. This certainly is a point of growth in their lives, the lives of their congregations and the whole of GCI. Truly, the Holy Spirit desires to personally engage with these people.

The narrative and interview process gave the participants some moments of new insight into their relationship with the Holy Spirit. Patrick is perhaps the best example of this. He traces the progress in his understanding of the Holy Spirit:

Today, I would see a Person working with me. Before I thought of *it* as power, ‘God give me more of your Spirit as a boost to overcome a sin or whatever I needed to do.’ God was just upping the ampage and giving more juice. But that’s not the case. I picture the Holy Spirit, now, as thinking about me and molding me, only the way God does from within, transforming me into the image of Christ as I yield. The Spirit leads, I don’t believe drives me and beats me with a stick. He convicts, molds, teaches, counsels, uses the word, uses various forms of communication. He is in that process. I think of a teacher, a counselor. The Holy Spirit has definitely changed in my way of thinking. Before, I talked to God and the Holy Spirit was the power. Now, I see the Holy Spirit as a person who is working in our lives to mold us into the image of Jesus Christ and to help us to grow. I hadn’t thought of it until now: when I think of the Holy Spirit, I think of a Person now—I don’t think of the Spirit the way I used to.

Although Patrick had cognitively understood the Personhood of the Holy Spirit for over a decade and a half, it was this moment during our interview that he had this sudden revelation. Patrick’s objective knowledge became subjective and relational knowledge—a realization of a Person-to-person intimacy that he had been experiencing.

Of the Triune Persons, the majority of the participants stated that they had the least direct, personal relationship and communication with the Holy Spirit. Some participants suggested that to have a relationship with one member is to have a relationship with all three, for the Trinity cannot be divided. This is absolutely true in an

objective sense. Nevertheless, this suggestion can be used to obfuscate the fact that some participants may be struggling in their relationship with one or more Persons in the Trinity and are using their objective understanding to hide a subjective lack. Relating to the Trinity in its oneness does not remain only there, for the unity should lead perichoretically to the threeness and the experience of each Person. The great irony of the lack of experiential knowing of the Holy Spirit is that He is closer to them than they are to themselves. There is no absence or lack of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the participants and GCI. The challenge for GCI and the participants who, for the most part, are of the same mindset as the institution is to allow their cognitive orientation to be subordinated. This does not mean an irrationalism, but an openness to the Holy Spirit moving beyond the control of the rational mind and its categories and beyond ecclesial structures. The Holy Spirit desires for persons and churches to allow Him the freedom to move them where He wills, which also is the will of the Father and the Son.²⁷⁶

Having stated these limitations and recommendations, there is nonetheless a great excitement about the future and where the Holy Spirit is leading the participants and GCI. There is a desire on the part of many of the participants to experience a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit and experience more of the fruit and gifts that He has to give. Four participants specifically speak of a longing to move into things of the Spirit,

²⁷⁶ The issue is one of power and control. The history of Israel and the Church displays the antimony between the human structures of power and Spirit of power. The priestly cult denounced the prophets, Jesus and the apostles. Later, the church hierarchy then adopted the consciousness of its former oppressor as it looked with suspicion towards or acted to denounce various moves of the Holy Spirit. The pretext was a desire to make sure that things are done 'decently and in order,' but the subtext was anxiety and fear. The dangerous, unpredictable third Person of the Trinity is either replaced or eclipsed by something or someone safer. In *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Catholic theologian Yves Congar cites that Rome has not completely replaced the Holy Spirit but allowed him to be overshadowed by the Eucharist, the Virgin Mary and the Pope (160). These three factors are not in the Protestant predilection, but we may make the case that the Holy Spirit is overshadowed by the Bible, founders/prophets of denominations or the churches' hierarchies themselves. In no way, do we suggest that GCI leadership or the participants are taking part in such heteropraxy. Rather this is an occasion to deliberate on these historical examples in knowing what to avoid. Today, where churches have a vital, robust view the Father, Son and Spirit and cooperation with the work of the Spirit, these churches are growing. Where this is lacking, the general trend is that these churches are diminishing. Reformation should lead to renewal and both of these are works of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ.

for themselves, their congregations and denomination. These men provide a possible glimpse into the future of GCI.

Barnabas looks to the biblical witness of the Holy Spirit as a mysterious Person who does all kinds of unusual things, appearing like wind and tongues of fire and making people drunk and speak new languages. Barnabas also finds that we can expect the Holy Spirit to do the unexpected, especially when believers let Him do His work in and through them. He sees the church is run by the Holy Spirit and humans following him.

Thomas gives a description regarding how the Holy Spirit should be allowed to take control of the church and people:

No two church services are ever alike in all of Christendom. There is always the unexpected. The Holy Spirit is the unexpected, usually the blessing of a Person and situation. The Holy Spirit is this rubik's cube; you have to trust that it is always going to be there. But he is usually coming your way to meet you half way to help you out. Not in the tongues type area, but I would wake with the feeling that I was on fire, burning inside with an argument to help people. This burning was elation and it flows out. The Holy Spirit is the final editor of our sermons. Of course, the Holy Spirit is the leader of the Church; Jesus is the head but the Holy Spirit is the leader. The elders in our church suggested we do a church service at a seniors' home, it has worked for five years trusting the Holy Spirit where he leads us.

We may take Thomas' words as an important focusing for GCI's members and leadership at all levels. In the trinitarian theology of GCI, there is a greater trust for the Holy Spirit to lead the local churches. If there is anything that GCI needs, it is not to be a purpose driven church but to be a Spirit driven church. The Holy Spirit brings people to participate in the Triune life by uniting human persons together with and in Christ for the worship and glorification of the Father. The Holy Spirit is the mover. He can put all the doctrines in order and make sure all the details are worked out in every aspect. The

denomination does not have to worry but trust the leadership of the Holy Spirit and his guidance.

Gregory^{sp} provides a good indication of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in personal and corporate prayer and worship:

...in particular moments of stress, grief, or confusion I cry out to the Holy Spirit to help me see myself more clearly in Jesus. I also find that I am often moved in my personal prayer and worship to address all three persons of God and that in my leadership of public worship (such as communion). I always address all three persons. So, for example, I frequently offer prayers in my personal life and in public that follow a pattern of praying to the Father, thanking Jesus for the life I have in him, asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate my heart and mind, and closing in Jesus' name giving glory to him, and the Father, and the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps this is a foreshadowing of the direction of worship in GCI. Some participants, especially the secondary participants, are modeling the Triune aspect of prayer for the congregation. There has been a long embedded approach to prayer, grounded in Armstrongism, that was functionally unitarian, praying only to “God” or “Father.” Today, one can hear it still in the prayers of ministers and members, there is the constant repetition of “Father” or “God” but there has been a gradual growth in prayer toward Jesus—rather than merely the use of “in Jesus’ name” at the end of the prayer. At this point, there remains very little prayer in church services to the Holy Spirit. Prayer also tends to be formal rather than spontaneous. However, in Gregory’s example, we are seeing the move to inclusiveness in prayer. No person, divine or human, is excluded from communion. There is a realization that all Christian prayer is taking part in the prayers of Jesus in the Holy Spirit to the Father and also the being able to speak to each Person in this communion of grace and love.

Alexander sees the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit for recent past and the future in the life of his congregation and denomination:

In the last seven to ten years there has been a steady but definitive growth towards peace towards relationship, towards the appreciation of the depth of the Word of God, Christ, and the next step is now the Holy Spirit, seeing how that's going to manifest itself in the congregation. I, at this time, wonder if we will ever become more charismatic and empowered by the Holy Spirit in much the same way as the early Christians. I believe that as members continue to learn to 'pray in the Spirit,' there is no end as to how the Father and Son may choose to work his work in them. Ironically as we have come to know more of who God is as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we understand there is even more that we do not know of Him. Once you bring the Holy Spirit into the Trinitarian equation, you cannot put your finger on the wind, or air and have it clearly within your grasp.

Alexander clearly views the role of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead and in human experience. This participant has had some strong experiences of intimacy with God through praying in the Spirit, where he allows the Holy Spirit to speak for him. Alexander has had some what may be described as ecstatic experiences, in which he has lost the sense of his own physical presence and been intimately close to God. This is a radical closeness—mystical union—in experience of relationship beyond knowledge, and Alexander may provide a model for consideration. It is not necessarily a seeking out of the experience but allowing the experience flow out of one's intimate union with the Father, Son and Spirit.

Since the early 1990s, Eagleton has had a longing to see the Holy Spirit allowed to flow in a greater way in his life and the lives of those in WCG/GCI.

God has been patient with us. In all of this transformation, there was no one event that helped me change my views. The whole way along, it was a process. I liken this to the pebble-in-a-pool principle—a gradual expanding of my understanding of God and self. 'Who has despised the day of small things?' (Zechariah 4:10). I do not. I am constantly amazed at the ceaseless moving of the Holy Spirit to help, comfort, build relationships, produce fruit in my life and give spiritual gifts for the

service of others. I desire to experience his ways and see demonstrations of his power to refresh, renew and deepen passion for the Son of God in all his glory. Our denomination gives a lot of leeway and a lot of freedom and grace. Each congregation is free to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. I tried to introduce this to our members, trying to find and to discover our gifts. We have not seen a lot of movement in that direction. There is still a lot of suspicion toward the Pentecostal church; that goes back to Herbert Armstrong—it's in our DNA. I believe that this has to be the timing of the Holy Spirit and what he wants for our denomination and for each congregation in the times ahead. It seems that we are not yet ready; we are not yet through this transition by a number of years; we have a number of years to go before we get through that. And only then can we be ready for other open avenues. . . . I am very much in the Word (evangelical) camp, I am not about to leave, I love my denomination. . . . We don't have to lose our denominational identity, but there will be a lot more connection between the two camps. I do yearn for more connection and for more of the work of the Holy Spirit as you see it in the Pentecostal churches: the signs, the healings, the wonders. I want that for my denomination. That's for today and in the future.

Eagleton senses the need to move forward with the Holy Spirit, but at the same time finds there is resistance at various levels in the denomination. This movement may be a slow process, GCI's opening up to accepting more of the work of the Holy Spirit, but it is one that can only happen with His guidance and GCI people's cooperation.

Philip ties in the importance of learning from the Spirit and Pentecostal churches along with promoting personal and corporate growth in the Church:

I really do think that the Pentecostal movement is a gift to Christianity, and with its help people have rediscover the divinity, reality and the Personhood of the Holy Spirit. I know I have more work to do in my own life on that piece; even theologically, in understanding who the Spirit is, what he does and what His role is. I have been studying the book of Acts recently. You take the Spirit out of the

book of Acts and you have no book of Acts. And it's the Spirit of Christ as Scripture states. It is the Personhood that is created out of the relationship of the Son and the Father, and to understand what the Church is and the Church in its mission, the Holy Spirit is everything! I have spent a lot of time over the last 15 years trying to get my understanding of Jesus squared away and that leading to a much better understanding of the Father, and the issue of the Holy Spirit, not that I have ignored Him all this time, but this is an area that I need to think through. For me being cognitively oriented, not saying that following the Spirit means checking your brain at the door, there is something about having the freedom to follow the Spirit in a very personal sense in a sense of immediacy that is really big.

The Holy Spirit has led the WCG/GCI through great changes. There is a sense among the participants that there remains further change and growth. Here again the research may touch on the Wesleyan quadrilateral. The denomination has learned much from Scripture and from the theological reasoning in evangelicalism, especially Barth and the Torrances. GCI has also learned from the great tradition and teachers of the church, especially Irenaeus of Lyon, Athanasius and the Cappadocian fathers. Experience is the one quadrant of the Wesleyan quadrilateral that is under-represented in GCI. Nevertheless, there is a desire among certain participants to include personal spiritual experiences in their faith praxis. Learning from the moves of the Spirit in the history of the body of Christ (past and present) is essential to the Church's life and growth. Surely, any study calls for discernment intellectually but even more importantly spiritually. Two thirds of the participants expressed that they have discerned a movement of God in the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, and want to go deeper than a mere acknowledgement that they are our brothers and sisters—with whom we do not have much discussion. Two participants expressed a desire that the divorce and suspicion end between evangelicals and Pentecostals; they can learn from one another's strengths and limitations.²⁷⁷ This is

²⁷⁷ Richard J. Foster was one of the key note speakers at the seminal 2007 GCI international conference of ministers. In his presentation, he discussed the main idea from his book, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*. Foster called the church to learn from and embrace the contributions of the various streams of the Christian faith. This does not mean GCI has to accept

happening in some ecumenically oriented areas of the larger body of Christ. A participatory view of theology and ecclesiology does not deny others' experience of the work of God in their lives and hopes that we may learn and share common experiences.

In theory, GCI does not hold a cessationist view toward spiritual gifts but has not, for the most part, experienced many supernatural gifts—besides the greatest gift, love. Nevertheless, the *agape* of 1 Corinthians 13 flows back into the other gifts in the next chapter of that epistle. As the love and hospitality in GCI continues to grow flowing from a relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit, we may see more supernatural moves of the Spirit. The fruit and the gifts of the Spirit are not mutually exclusive but work perichoretically. “Grace” is the initial part of the name of Grace Communion International. With grace—*charis* in Greek—one should expect to see charismata, the manifestations of grace, through communion of and with the Holy Spirit. Living, sharing and participating in the Triune life is supernatural. When the gifts and fruit of grace are manifest in a person or church's life, others should see this as God's action, for it is otherwise impossible for these things to happen, relying on natural talents. It should be a revelation of a communion with divine grace—both in those manifesting the grace and those observing it. GCI should not be surprised to see healings, miracles and other manifestations of the love of God in and through the lives of its people. This is where trinitarian theology meets the water running. Trinitarian theology has to be praxis oriented, or it will be more information that will not lead to transformation. It could lead to a similar aridity, not unlike that of Armstrongism. Trinitarian theology can be lived

everything from the diverse movement of Pentecostals and charismatics, especially certain extremes and legalisms. The critical, reactionary tendency in the WCG/GCI—and larger evangelicalism—has been to stereotype, caricature, ridicule and/or demonize this movement rather than seek to more fully embrace the move of the Holy Spirit. Evangelicals cannot simply dismiss the Pentecostal and charismatic movements for many reasons, one being their amazing growth. V. Synan indicates, “By 1995 the global number of Pentecostals and charismatics had reached 463 million, making them the second largest family of Christians in the world after the Roman Catholic Church. The denominational Pentecostals, with 215 million members, continue to experience explosive worldwide growth. Thus the Pentecostal and charismatic movements have become the most vigorous and fastest-growing family of Christians in the world, a movement which Harvey Cox of Harvard University predicted would ‘reshape Christianity in the twenty-first century.’” “Pentecostalism”, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 201), 902.

out more fully, especially through power and love in going out into the community and the whole world. This is what the early church experienced and has been experienced by each generation as they have had a deep relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. GCI has experienced a supernatural transformation from bitheism to trinitarianism, from legalism to freedom. We may expect this transformation to continue as GCI learns and experiences more in the Holy Spirit, Jesus and Abba Father—the wonderful possibilities of abundant life for the persons in this denomination.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Many comments have been made over the past several decades about the magnitude of the changes in the WCG/GCI, journeying from Armstrongism to orthodoxy.²⁷⁸ Ché Ahn, a charismatic pastor who purchased the WCG's Ambassador Auditorium in Pasadena, California, speaking at a conference of Pentecostal and charismatics emphatically stated, "We saw the biggest miracle in my lifetime—perhaps the greatest miracle ever in my life time—of seeing a cult, the Worldwide Church of God, come to know Jesus Christ. Now they are part of the National Association of Evangelical Churches. It is amazing!"²⁷⁹ As some in the body of Christ look at the WCG/GCI, they marvel at the work of the Holy Spirit. The denomination has reformed so that it is not the same as it was twenty, fifteen, or even ten years ago.

8.1 Contributions of the Research

The reformation and renewal in the WCG/GCI may be a model for heterodox groups—to reexamine their doctrines in light of the Bible. In Church history, there have been few groups that have made such an exodus from heterodoxy to orthodoxy. Nonetheless, we will find that the WCG/GCI is a first, small contingent of the many persons and groups to make a similar journey. This thesis has provided some insight for such persons and groups, including some limitations and possibilities.

²⁷⁸ Some of these were referenced in chapter two.

²⁷⁹ Voice of the Apostles Conference, Friday, Oct. 21, 2011. This comment comes from a pastor who in ministry sees the miracles on a regular basis. We may argue that many people in the WCG did know Christ, but as this research has demonstrated, their relationship with Him may have been deficient in some key areas

Moreover, the changes in the WCG/GCI may also be a precursor for orthodox persons, groups and denominations that may desire to reexamine some of their doctrines in light of a new understanding of the Trinity and concomitant anthropological and soteriological issues. GCI has remained committed to allowing its doctrines to be revised in light of greater understanding of Scripture. The Reformation in the Church was not a one-time event in the sixteenth century; it continues in every age with the reformers axiom *ecclesia semper reformanda*, the Church must always be reforming.

8.2 Conclusions of the Research

The research question for this thesis is *what effects has the 1993 shift in the Worldwide Church of God's doctrine of the Triune God had on its ministers' understanding of and relationships with God, self and congregation?* The simple answer to this question is the participants' understanding of and relationship with God, self and congregation have been positively and profoundly transformed. It is true that throughout the process of doctrinal change in the WCG there were pains, hardships and sacrifices. These should not be overlooked. Nevertheless, the results of the research demonstrate that through the particular phases after the doctrinal changes, the participants have consistently been growing in their knowledge and experience of the love of God. The research has also presented that in the old WCG under Armstrong, the theological and spiritual shape of its faith was rational and had little or no depth dimension of personal engagement with God.

The research was limited to ministers who remained in the WCG/GCI through the doctrinal changes and drew implications only from their experience. Future research may examine whether ministers who went with Armstrongist splinter groups experienced change in their understanding of and relationship with God, self and congregation.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Some other future studies may focus on the following ideas: the specific effects of the WCG doctrinal changes from an old covenant to new covenant theology, the effects of the doctrinal changes on congregants and their families, and the effects of the changes on WCG sects.

Through the changes in the WCG/GCI, the participants in this research have discovered and are experiencing who their God is—love—and who they and others are in Him—beloved, accepted adopted children. They are developing a greater understanding of and relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit in Christ. Furthermore, they are continuing to grow in grace and knowledge. Even though the primary participants have either retired or are close to retirement age, they feel that there is much for them to learn and experience in relating to God, self and others. The secondary participants share this excitement and express perhaps a greater passion, as they see the decades ahead of them in life and ministry. Both groups of participants have new relationships—friendships—with the people in their congregations. They work more and more with a participatory style of leadership, which is a reflection of their theology. Furthermore, they are excited to share the different aspects concerning what they have learned and experienced with others in the body of Christ.

In all of the changes in the history of the WCG/GCI, trinitarian theology has been the greatest move. In orthodox Christian circles, some others are also moving in this direction. The research in this thesis reveals that trinitarian doctrinal renewal has transformed the lives of the participants in this study. At the same time, there can be a danger of a kind of esoteric elitism that was experienced during Armstrongism of having the truth and therefore a reticence to listen to some other Christians. Also there can be a tendency to look toward the past move of the Holy Spirit in the lives of persons and of the church. Analysis and reflection have their place. Nevertheless, more vital than this is a focus on the present and the future to see that even greater things may happen in the lives of persons and the Church—beyond human asking, reasoning or imagining.

A robust trinitarian theology cannot remain merely confessional or doctrinal, it must be experienced. It should truly allow for every aspect of the Wesleyan quadrilateral to have a voice: Scripture, reason, tradition and experience. GCI has looked to Scripture as its primary norm and used reason and Church tradition in moving to its present position. GCI has taken its name from 2 Corinthians 13: 13, “The grace of the Lord Jesus

Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” This gospel expresses a theology that is fully trinitarian, relational—not merely propositional. The WCG/GCI has since its founding has been primarily a cognitive movement. GCI leaders and people need to be aware of this cognitive predilection and the limitations that are inherent in this mindset. However, many of the participants of this research demonstrate that there is also a nascent move toward twinning the cognitive with the experiential—the head and the heart, the Word and the Spirit. The aspects of the Father’s love, Jesus Christ’s grace, the Holy Spirit’s communion in the midst of all are not only to be understood, they are to be experienced. In GCI, trinitarian theology is about participating and living in the Triune life. Trinitarian theology provides a way for the experiential dimension of faith to be developed in ways that the binitarian WCG did not: due to the perceived spatial and temporal distance of the Father and Son and the impersonal aspect of the Holy Spirit. The doctrines and practices of the old binitarian and even the evangelical WCG made the possibilities for charismatic experience remote. In the trinitarian GCI, however, the possibility for charismatic expressions of faith and life are emerging. Definitely, a person’s and denomination’s view of God can have significant influence on the practical aspects of faith.

Chapter one of this thesis presented an insight of Catherine Mowry LaCugna as foundational for the theology of ministry in the research:

The doctrine of the Trinity is orthodoxy, right perception of God, and it calls for orthopraxis, right response to the glory of God. Jesus Christ and the Spirit are the standard for both orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Jesus Christ’s life and death, words and deeds, knowledge and love of God are normative for Christians. The power of God’s Spirit to convert the hardened heart and make the blind see is essential both for right worship, right knowledge, and right love.²⁸¹

²⁸¹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 410

Paul's trinitarian blessing in 2 Corinthians 13: 13 is a reminder of the significant aspects of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the journey of from the WCG to GCI. Each Person in the Trinity is a part of the hermeneutical circle to interpret and relate to the other Persons as well as oneself and others. The Father is related to as love. He is the absolutely good Father, in whom there is no darkness. A strong relationship with Abba Father provides one's self-identity—both in divine and human relations. This is understood and experienced through the grace of His Son, Jesus Christ, who is perfect orthodoxy and orthopraxy. We look to Jesus as grace given to us—our lives and salvation are from Him and are in Him. In Christ, we are beloved adopted children and co-heirs of our Abba. He sees us in the same way He sees His Son. The knowledge of and experience of the communion of the Father and the Son comes through the communion of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of our adoption or sonship. We enter a personal relationship, union and communion, with the Father and the Son through their Spirit. We develop our intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit by letting Him take charge of our lives, communion and churches. The Holy Spirit is not a peripheral or optional Person in the Godhead or as a power for our manipulation. He is equally Lord and God, with Jesus and Abba, and therefore worthy of our adoration, worship and intimacy. When each divine Person is understood and experienced in His wholeness and Triunity, the effect is wholeness and unity of the self and the church, created in the *imago dei*.

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APPENDICES

**Appendix A
Thesis Proposal**

**From Binitarians to Trinitarians:
The Transformation of Ministers in the Worldwide Church of God**

A DMin Thesis Proposal
Submitted to the DMin Program Committee
Toronto School of Theology
April 30, 2010

by

Eric Wilding

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I. Context and Background of the Applied Research Thesis

a. Worldwide Church of God Context

Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986) founded the Radio Church of God in the 1934²⁸² and held a wide array of esoteric, non-orthodox doctrines, including some key beliefs such as the seventh-day Sabbath, old covenant holy days and dietary laws, works soteriology, and British-Israelism. The Trinity was one key orthodox doctrine that he rejected;²⁸³ he accepted a binitarian theology: the Father and the Son were two distinct and separate persons or beings united by the Holy Spirit, an impersonal power. In addition to this theology, Armstrong assumed a heterodox anthropology. The anthropology posited the potential of humans to become Gods, equal to the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, there was also a hierarchy to the government of God. Armstrong held a descending heavenly hierarchy: Father, Son and ranks of archangels and angels. This was reflected for many decades in Armstrong's own earthly ecclesiological hierarchy: Armstrong, his son (Garner Ted Armstrong) and the ranks of ministers and laity. These teachings and structures seemed to have remained consistent throughout much of the ministry of Armstrong. However, after his death, the leadership of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) started to re-examine and reject many of the doctrines that it held under the former leader; some of the changes in the 1990s were to reject many of the aforementioned heterodox doctrines. Of central importance, to this study is the change from a binitarian theology to a Trinitarian theology and its concomitant and anthropological and ecclesiological issues.

²⁸² In 1968, the name of the denomination changed its name from the Radio Church of God to the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) in order to reflect its global membership and its being the true Church of God. In 2009, the denomination changed its name again to Grace Communion International (GCI) in order to reflect its emphasis on the gospel of grace, its communion in the larger body of Christ, and its outreach to all people. Although GCI became the legal name of the denomination until 2009, the name change process officially started in 2005. For sake of simplicity throughout this thesis proposal, it will use WCG.

²⁸³ The WCG's definition of Trinity is “. . . the *one* God exists eternally in the union and communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Johnston, 2009, *A Brief*)

Before Armstrong died in 1986, he appointed his successor, Joseph Tkach Sr. to be the next Pastor General.²⁸⁴ Tkach was God’s new end-time apostle. Between 1986 and 1990 some seemingly minor changes were made by Tkach and his Advisory Council of Elders.²⁸⁵ Tkach allowed for his own *aggiornamento*; nonetheless, it followed Armstrong’s norm of *sola scriptura*. A favourite maxim of Armstrong was, “Don’t believe me—believe the Bible.” He had written in his *Autobiography*, “I knew of no church or sect or denomination that had ever publicly confessed error or embraced new truth. Yet, plainly, this would be a test of the true Church” (181-182). Throughout his ministry, Armstrong had made many changes in doctrine.²⁸⁶ Thus, there was a norm that doctrine could be changed if it did not match scripture. Tkach and some of the leaders who supported him did exactly what Armstrong stated: they followed the Bible, and when it proved that they were in error, they publically confessed this. However, in the late-1980s and early-1990s, there was a dialectical tension, regarding keeping the continuity with Armstrong’s teachings or following new understandings from the Bible. The Armstrongist conservative camp was still very strong, demanding for the WCG to be faithful to the norm of the teachings of the old Apostle.

Tkach remained firm to follow the Bible as the norm. In the December 1991 issue of the WCG’s member newsletter, *The Worldwide News*, Tkach presented an upcoming doctrinal change, “The Church affirms the oneness of God and the full divinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (1). The article reflects an attempt not only to understand Trinitarian theology, which was a first in the history of the WCG, but also to refute it. The article denies acceptance of the Trinity by specifically stating, “. . . we believe that the word *Person* is inaccurate when referring to the Holy Spirit” (ibid).

²⁸⁴ Armstrong’s son, Garner Ted, would have been the natural successor, but he was disfellowshipped in 1978 by his father.

²⁸⁵ These included correcting the night to keep the Passover and the lifting of prohibitions of members having surgery or using pharmaceuticals, wearing makeup and keeping birthdays.

²⁸⁶ The thesis will explore in detail some of the many doctrinal changes that Armstrong. He had a wavering theology and soteriology. Regarding the doctrine of God, Armstrong went from being an Arian, to a Trinitarian, back to an Arian, finally to a binitarian. Regarding the doctrine of regeneration, he went from a two-stage view, to a one-stage view, back to a one-stage view. These are two of the key doctrines that will be analyzed in the thesis.

Tkach revised the WCG's old position that the Holy Spirit was something external to God; *it* was changed to be a fully divine part of God, but remained the power of God.

A 1992 WCG booklet *God is . . .* remained consistent with this teaching. However, in the 1993, republication of the same booklet, *God is . . .* was indeed presenting a Trinitarian theology. Armstrong's project of examining doctrines through the Bible had been further carried out by those who had succeeded him. They brought the WCG into mainstream biblical orthodoxy, ultimately rejecting the many of the core doctrines that Armstrong had established. The doctrine regarding the nature of God was corrected in 1993, the soteriological doctrines were corrected shortly thereafter in 1994 and 1995.²⁸⁷

All of these changes caused about half of the ministers and of the laity to leave the denomination: many going to new Armstrongist sects, others going to no organization—abandoning their faith—and some going to traditional Christian groups.

However, the context of this research focuses on the lives of ministers who remained in the WCG through these doctrinal changes—particularly the doctrine of God.

b. Faith Journey and Ministry Context

I was raised in the Worldwide Church of God (WCG); my father was a pastor in the denomination and was my mother his faithful companion in the work.²⁸⁸ I followed my parents as they followed the teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong, the founder of the WCG. I remember having debates as a boy and teenager with my friends from other denominations on various doctrinal issues. However, as a teenager, I stopped attending church on a regular basis (from 1982-1986). In January 1986, Armstrong died. This shook the WCG, my parents and me.

²⁸⁷ These were the nature of salvation by grace [not by works—keeping the Sabbath, Jewish holy days and food laws]. In 1991, the doctrine of regeneration was changed back to a one-stage view, being born again at baptism [not at the resurrection]. Later in this same year other key doctrines were adopted: the kingdom of God is present now as well as future [not just in the future], the gospel is about Jesus Christ [not just about a future Kingdom], and believers are children of God now and will receive glorified bodies at the resurrection [they will not become God beings] (Fezell 179-181).

²⁸⁸ After over 41 years of service, he retired in February 2009.

In 1988, I started studies at Ambassador College, the WCG's school in Texas.²⁸⁹ In my first year bible class titled "The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ," the professor taught the old basic WCG binitarian theology: "God is not a trinity. He cannot be three persons; this limits the family of God." I could not understand his reasoning and asked him questions after class, "Why do three persons limit God and two persons do not?" The professor could not give me a coherent answer to my satisfaction. This question was the one that started a personal transformation in my theological understanding. As the doctrinal changes grew in number and intensity over the next five years at Ambassador, I studied and embraced them.

After graduating and moving to Ottawa, where I married my wife, Kareena, I started attending teachers college at the University of Ottawa (1993-1994). As the WCG went through monumental changes, I was coming to understand the freedom a Christian has in a personal, loving relationship with Jesus—something never emphasized under Armstrong. I needed to get to know Jesus better—turning my embedded theology into a deliberative theology—and to meet others who loved Him.²⁹⁰ I felt a calling to experience the larger body of Christ. As part of my Master's in Education at the University of Ottawa (1994-1995), I started by taking a class, Religious Experience, at St. Paul's University. In 1997, I started courses at TST, eventually taking an MA at St. Michael's. During this period I developed my ecumenism. I was a new evangelical writing my thesis on the Eastern Orthodox theology of Fyodor Dostoevsky at a Catholic institution. At this time, I stopped attending the WCG on a regular basis, feeling a calling away from my previous exclusivism. I would attend several times a year with my dad.

In 2005, I felt a calling back to the WCG to share what I had learned on my sojourn. My father asked me to give sermons in his congregation. In 2007, I became a

²⁸⁹ The institution changed its name to Ambassador University in 1993.

²⁹⁰ Howard Stone and James Duke define embedded theology as "the understanding of faith disseminated by the church and assimilated by its members in their daily lives" (122) and deliberative theology as "a process of reflecting on multiple understandings of the faith implicit in the life and witness of Christians in order to identify and/or develop the most adequate understanding possible" (121).

ministerial intern serving under my father, and I went to the denomination's international conference in that summer and was inspired to see its focus: the grace of the Triune God. I passionately believe my calling is to live, learn and teach in this focus. I hope a main part of my calling will be to serve Jesus Christ through teaching for a local congregation, the larger denomination, and, possibly, for the Grace Communion Seminary.²⁹¹

I was ordained as an elder in January 2010, and there are a variety of ministries in which I function to support the pastor, congregation and others. I visit people, especially the elderly and shut-ins; teach with the youth ministry; worship lead; play special music; provide support for the pastor when counselling people; and co-lead the outreach team to the Scott Mission. However, my primary duty is preaching. My goal is to make theology focused toward praxis, practical life transformation.

The people in my congregation, Toronto East WCG, are from multi-racial and multi-cultural backgrounds: the Philippines, China, the Caribbean, South America and Europe. Our motto is, "We are a multicultural community of Jesus' disciples. We long to love Jesus and gracefully reflect His Light & Love towards others." Weekly services emphasize the great grace that God our Father has given us, the precious gift of the Holy Spirit, and the marvellous hope we have in Christ Jesus. There are some people in the congregation who maintain a variety of embedded Armstrongist beliefs, which provides the ministry with a challenge.

For this thesis study, my ministry base is the ministers of the WCG. I am in discussion with the regional, national and international leadership of the denomination, and they are giving me support, comments and critiques regarding my research. I hope that I may have some service in helping ministers reflect on their beliefs and relationships.

As a minister's son, Ambassador University student and graduate and WCG member, I have known the WCG ministers in Canada (and many other countries), for decades. I have observed the transformation in some of their lives as well. I have life-long understanding of the life of ministry through my father and then my own ministerial

²⁹¹ This is the new name of the WCG's pastoral training seminary, in which people of other denominations may also enrol.

work. Ultimately, this study arose from his experience. I have observed my father minister through the changes in WCG doctrine and experienced some astounding effects. His transformation has helped influence my own, for which I am infinitely grateful.

II. Statement of Research Interest

a. Research Question

What effects has the 1993 shift in the Worldwide Church of God's doctrine of the Triune God had on its ministers' understanding of and relationships with God, self and congregation?

Subquestions:

- What differences did the change make?
- How did/does the minister understand and relate to God?
- How did/does the minister understand and relate to self?
- How did/does the minister understand and relate to people in the congregation?
- How did/do other doctrinal changes (e.g. born again, human potential, Christocentric gospel, and grace) influence the minister in relation to the above areas?

b. Purpose Statement

The purpose of this thesis will be to reflect on the beliefs and lives of ministers in the WCG, centring on this doctrinal issue. Although this theological doctrine is central, there will be concomitant anthropological and ecclesiological doctrines that will be explored.²⁹² The changes in WCG doctrine happened in the span of a few years, and each doctrinal

²⁹² The hermeneutical circle is significant for understanding the process of the WCG's doctrinal change. "Using the hermeneutic circle as a means of interpreting data means that the smallest statements must be understood in terms of the largest cultural contexts. It also means that all the contexts in between must be taken into consideration. . ." (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 73). The cultural context of change had begun in the WCG in the mid-1980s; and there was a dialectic where every new change began to be seen in light of the whole new focus of the changes and vice versa. Thus, one particular change is not viewed merely in isolation but in the larger context.

change became part of a dialectic, influencing other doctrines so that they also changed—until Armstrongism was completely dismantled. This was replaced over time by an orthodox, evangelical theology. The ministers who remain in the WCG have gone from one worldview to another and had to lead their congregations. In this study, I will test out my conviction that the ministers' knowledge of and relationship with God, self and congregation have changed and been impacted in some profound ways. The question at issue is what difference did these changes make in their lives?

My belief is that in assisting the ministry of the WCG reflect on these areas, it will have a further positive effect on their own theology, lives and relationships as well as those of their congregants. The effect of further transformation should only be organic to the process of reflection and prayer and not superimposed, suggested or measured by this researcher.

III. Theoretical Framework

a. Theory at Work in the Study

The thesis' theory at work touches on what Albert Outler, in his introduction to *John Wesley*, called the Wesleyan quadrilateral: Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. However, like Wesley, himself, all three other quadrants should be seen through the light of Scripture.²⁹³

In both an Armstrongist and a post-Armstrongist WCG context, Scripture is the norm of the church. Under Armstrong, the Old Testament—specifically the Law of Moses—was the hermeneutical lens for reading the New Testament. The Old Testament was the primary emphasis of the WCG.²⁹⁴ In the 1990s, the WCG saw that the New Testament—specifically Jesus Christ—is the hermeneutical lens for reading the Old Testament. Since the early-1990s the focus of the WCG has been on the New Testament. This study will show how Scripture has shaped the WCG, past and present.

²⁹³ Wesley remarked that doctrine cannot merely be founded on experience but it must be in concord with Scripture (216).

²⁹⁴ This can simply be seen in the WCG's publication of children's books *The Bible Story*. This multi-volume series only covers the Old Testament.

For the theory at work in this study regarding the shift to the doctrine of the Triune God, four of the central texts from the New Testament are significant. In Matthew 28: 18-20, Jesus gives the Great Commission to the disciples and the Triune name (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in the context of the baptismal formula. This formula was always part of the WCG; however, as the doctrinal change regarding the nature of God arose, this passage was seen in a new light. In John 13:12-17:26, Jesus gives his Last Supper Discourse. Here the implicit Trinitarian theology is the most explicit as any place in the Gospels; the Trinitarian life is presented as overflowing and uniting the divine and human community. Finally, Paul also illuminates such a view of unity and love in Rom. 8 and Eph. 1. In these two passages, the Trinitarian discussion is developed in the context of the economy of salvation and adoption. Although other scriptures will be important for this study, these four passages provide a directing light for this study.

Armstrong founded his sect on restorationist and primitivist principles. Church tradition was something that Armstrong dismissed and replaced with his own tradition, which is still extant in many WCG sub-sects. Armstrong believed that in 33 A.D. Simon Magus proclaimed himself an apostle and began to present a false Christianity: “By the sixth decade of the first century, much of the Middle East had turned from the true gospel to a counterfeit (Gal. 1:6-7)” (Armstrong, *Mystery* 52). Simon moved to Rome and formed the Roman Catholic Church, replaced Passover with Easter. This all culminates with Constantine accepting this form of Christianity and integrating a pagan form of God—Trinity—into its theology and worship. Thus, for Armstrong, all Church tradition was pagan and false. This research will present the roots of Armstrong’s sectarianism and will address the context of his teachings. It will also discuss the recovery of the WCG’s theoretical framework of Church tradition, specifically through Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers.

Theological reasoning also plays an important role in the theory at work of this thesis. It will explore the theological influences on Armstrong’s own theologizing and its development. Further, it will examine the influence of the evangelical church and

important evangelical theologians—specifically Karl Barth, Thomas F. Torrance and James B. Torrance—on recent WCG theologizing. These modern theologians act as guides to the ancient theologians, traditions and Scriptures. They also help with the re-contextualization for WCG theology.

The underlying theory at work in this study is that theology (including Scripture, creeds and doctrines) is part of dynamic existential beliefs that inform and transform relationships. Catherine Mowry LaCugna makes a foundational statement for this study:

The doctrine of the Trinity is orthodoxy, right perception of God, and it calls for orthopraxis, right response to the glory of God. Jesus Christ and the Spirit are the standard for both orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Jesus Christ's life and death, words and deeds, knowledge and love of God are normative for Christians. The power of God's Spirit to convert the hardened heart and make the blind see is essential both for right worship, right knowledge, and right love....The doctrine [of the Trinity] succeeds when it illuminates God's nearness to us in Christ and the Spirit. But it fails if the divine persons are imprisoned in an intradivine realm, or if the doctrine of the Trinity is relegated to a purely formal place in speculative theology. In the end God can only seem farther away than ever. Preaching and pastoral practice will have to fight a constant battle to convince us, to provide assurances, to make the case that God is indeed present among us, does indeed care for us, will indeed hear our prayer, and will be lovingly disposed to respond. If, on the other hand, we affirm that the very nature of God is to seek out the deepest possible communion and friendship with every last creature, and if through the doctrine of the Trinity we do our best to articulate the mystery of God for us, then preaching and pastoral practice will naturally fit with the particulars of the Christian life. Ecclesial life, sacramental life, ethical life, and sexual life will be seen clearly as forms of trinitarian life: living God's life with one another. (410-411).

Reflecting on and practicing from the Triune God is essential for the Christian minister living life in relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with self and with congregants. God is and gives life and love.

Perichoresis is an essential term for the theory at work in this study, for as the divine lives of the Father, Son and interpenetrate one another, so also do their lives penetrate the human person (the minister) and those persons (the congregants) in his relational nexus. Alistair McFadyen provides a social understanding of the Triune God as a model for Person and relation:

...a unique community of Persons in which Person and relation are interdependent moments in a process of mutuality. Each Person is a social unity with specific characteristics unique to Him or Her but whose uniqueness is not an asocial principle of being. The terms of personal identity within the Trinity identify not just unique individuals but the form of relation peculiar to them. (27)

McFadyen is concerned with both theology and praxis; in understanding the divine Persons particularity and relationship, we can understand how we, as human persons, are made in the *imago dei* and therefore our call and purpose in our personhood. This thesis extends this to the minister. It is through a right understanding of the divine Persons that the minister can rightly understand the self and the congregation, as persons in the *imago dei*. Where there is heterodoxy in theology, specifically of the divine Persons, there is often a misunderstanding of human persons, and this leads to heteropraxis in the relationship of the minister toward God, self and congregation. However, where there is correct understanding, it should lead to orthopraxis of communal Godly love. The theory at work is that the ministers in the WCG will have been through the transformation of heterodoxy-heteropraxis to orthodoxy-orthopraxis.

b. Assumptions Operative in the Study

John Creswell states that it is important for the researcher to clarify his or her own bias so that the reader will comprehend the researcher's position and any biases or assumptions

that may have an effect on the study: “In this clarification, the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study” (202).

My experience has helped me formulate the focus to the research, yet I also have relied on some ministers in my Ministerial Base Group to test concepts and questions and to give breadth and depth. My experience, I believe, has some degree of impartiality. I was freed by these WCG doctrinal changes to pursue studies in theology and philosophy at non-WCG institutions. I stopped attending the WCG on a full-time basis for about a decade and this has given me some critical and spiritual distance from the denomination. Further, this time period has given me an understanding of a larger Christian theology and practice beyond the WCG. I hope that my experience in the WCG and in the larger Christian community will help interpret the responses of the participants in this thesis. Nevertheless, I will be transparent with my biases and preconceptions, not seeking to guide the participants in the study into things they neither have believed nor experienced. My goal is not to further transform the WCG through its ministers but to have them reflect on their transformation.

I have been through the process of transformation in theological (binitarian to Trinitarian) and soteriological (works-based to grace-based) beliefs. I stand firmly on the later-side of the transformative experience; thus my point-of-view and assumptions are grounded here. I have deliberated on my much of embedded theology received from Armstrong and the WCG under his control. However, I will not assume that there are not areas that are hidden to me and which need to be exposed and examined. I will assume that the participants in the study will have gone through an examination and transformation in their theology.²⁹⁵ They may also have hidden embedded theologies. It is not my goal to expose or change these.

I have some biases toward the present and past leadership in the WCG. Toward the present leadership, I have a positive bias, for it was God working through them that

²⁹⁵ It may be interesting to observe what doctrines of Armstrong that the participants, and myself, may still maintain. These will be fascinating to explore, especially regarding the effect that they have on the lives and relationships of the ministers.

helped guide my liberation. I thoroughly appreciate where they have been led to take the WCG. Nevertheless, I realize they are imperfect and there are still areas that the denomination needs examination and reform.

At times, I have struggled with feelings of resentment and bitterness toward Armstrong and the WCG under his control. Nevertheless, I have sympathy for Armstrong, for without his work I would not be alive. My mother (a poor girl from Toronto, Ohio) and father (a poor boy from Manchester, England) would have never met if they did not follow Armstrong and go to Ambassador College in Texas, where my parents met. Selfishly, I have to thank God for allowing Armstrong to provide the circumstances to allow for my existence. I must acknowledge that Armstrong promoted a love for God and for Scripture; this came through in the lives of my parents and, consequently, me. Thus, my bias is not personal against Armstrong. Where he was correct, I can celebrate with joy in biblical truth; where he was incorrect, I can allow for correction and for God's grace.

IV. Ministry-in-Action Component

a. What will the Methodology consist of?

I will be using a mixed methodology: hermeneutic phenomenology and grounded theory (a rationale is given in Section V).

b. Who are the Research Participants?

John Creswell states that the phenomenological approach has “long interviews with up to 10 people” (65); further, “the participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon” (55). Hermeneutical phenomenology does not deviate from this pattern. The primary participants in this study will be between seven and nine pastors in the WCG. The numbers of participants should yield a sufficient amount of data. The primary participants have been chosen either by my ministerial base group or by WCG leadership according to the following criteria:

5. They will have been students at the denomination's Ambassador College during the Armstrong years; thus, they will have been thoroughly indoctrinated in Armstrong's teaching and will themselves have been part of spreading and, possibly, enforcing this teaching.
6. They have deeply thought (intellectually and spiritually) through the changes and have studied a lot of biblical and scholarly texts on the doctrinal issues.
7. The ministers have had a significant transformation in their understanding and relationship with God, self and congregation.
8. They had to lead a congregation through the WCG's doctrinal changes in the 1990s and remain WCG ministers.²⁹⁶

There are also secondary participants in the study; they are any ministers in the WCG who would like to tell their stories.²⁹⁷ They may be asked through GCI President Joseph Tkach Jr.'s weekly newsletter to join my study and email me for further details. Their narratives can help to triangulate the data and serve to highlight where there are significant areas that may need further reflection in the group of primary participants, especially to ascertain if the data has been saturated regarding the central phenomenon.²⁹⁸ The secondary participants' data will be footnoted.

c. How will the Research take place?

This thesis will use the following methods in order to help triangulate the data:

²⁹⁶ The ministry in the WCG, until several years ago, has been only men; thus, my study will be of ministers of this gender—not out of any particular bias or lack of inclusivity on my part. The primary participants are in their fifties and sixties and are, most likely, of European descent—once again, this is no intentional bias on my part but a predominant bias or reality under Armstrong.

²⁹⁷ I will allow some ministers who did not serve in the Armstrong era in this secondary group. This may add for some interesting contrasts regarding the phenomena of acceptance of doctrinal change. However, they also will have held a binitarian theology.

²⁹⁸ This will not be a systematic study to compare and contrast the two groups. Creswell provides a procedural method for conducting qualitative inquiry, “In *triangulation*, researchers make use of multiple different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence.... Typically, this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (202). The primary and secondary participants as well as my personal reflection journals should help triangulate the data and add some breadth and depth to the study. The secondary participants will not take part in the grounded research.

Stage one: The participants will be emailed, asking them to participate in the research. If they agree, they will be asked to write an autobiographical narrative regarding their experience concerning the change in the doctrine of the nature of God. The story needs a coherent focus and shape to give it direction in breadth and depth. First, the participants will be emailed the research question, a suggested outline and some supplemental questions to assist their writing (see Appendix A). They are recounting their personal history regarding their understanding of and relationship with God, self and congregation. They should refer to scriptures, books, theologians, that have helped them through this process.

Stage two: After the narratives are emailed to me, I will begin some initial coding of the data. I will read these responses, make notes, and develop further questions based on those responses.

Stage three: I will involve the primary participants in further axial coding of the data from their and other participants' narratives by using grounded research (see Section V). This will be done by 1-2 hour face-to-face interviews in July at the WCG International Conference in Florida in a hotel room. I will ask the participants to give a thick description, adding some depth to themes that have arisen in their narratives. The participants will interpret the data and help shape some categories; this may allow them further to tell stories. They may help me find the whole picture and will generate the axial coding for the thesis.

During the interview, I will take some notes, but will also have an audio and a video recorder capturing the event. I will also write a personal journal after each interview and watching the video recording, giving my self-reflection and interpretation.

When the interviews are completed, I will email an audio file of the interview to the participant, along with a transcript post-interview questionnaire and a short narrative activity. This will be a final opportunity for the participant to reflect on his story and answers and make additions and/or possibly deletions to any overly sensitive material. This may allow for some further axial coding.

Stage four: I will then take the data gathered, perform some further coding, interpret the data by finding meaning statements and units, and start writing the chapters.

d. Projected Time Line for Research:

1. Participants write the narratives: June 1- July 1, 2010
2. Participants send the narratives: by July 1
3. Researcher reads and codes narratives July 1-19
4. Researcher and primary participants interview at WCG international conference July 20-24, 2010
5. Researcher transcribes and interprets data: August - September 2010
6. Researcher writes thesis: autumn 2010 - winter 2011
7. Researcher completes thesis: spring - summer 2011

V. Qualitative Research Methodology Operative in the Analysis of the Ministry-in-Action

I will be using two methodologies for the research. The major approach is hermeneutic phenomenology. This will be used for the interpretation of the participants' written narratives. Grounded research will be used during the personal interviews with the participants. First, we should define and/or explain these methodologies in relation to the process of this research.

a-1. Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Creswell explains what phenomenology is: “. . .[it] looks to understand and interpret the ‘essences of experiences about a phenomenon’ through the data of ‘statements, meanings, meaning themes, [and] general description of the experience’” (65). These issues are subsumed into the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, which conducts research into “. . . how people interpret their lives and make meaning of what they experience. Gadamer (1989) contended that hermeneutics is the study of *texts*. He used that term

broadly to mean language” (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 448). The texts of study this study are the interpretations of the minister’s lives.

My approach to hermeneutical phenomenology will be primarily though Søren Kierkegaard.²⁹⁹ Steven Evans presents Kierkegaard’s methodology in a Christian context of understanding:

The observer has a critical contribution to make to the observation; her own skills, attitudes, values, and experiences heavily shape how she sees and what she sees. Kierkegaard perceived this very clearly and therefore emphasizes the role of the subjective participation of the observer. ‘What one sees depends on how one sees. This is because all observation is not merely a receiving, a discovery, but also a creation, and to the extent that it is this latter, the decisive factor becomes how the observer himself is....To the extent that the object of the observation is part of the external world, the condition of the observer is a matter of indifference, or, rather, that which is essential to the observation does not concern his deeper being. On the other hand, the more the object of observation belongs to the world of the spirit, the more important is the state of the innermost being of the observer’. This means that the condition of the observer must not be seen simply as a possible set of biases that will distort the observations. Such is indeed possible, but at times the condition of the observer is essential, enabling condition that allows the true meaning of the behavior to be revealed....[T]he often unnoticed flip side of this is that just as some qualities may distort or bias observation, so others may be necessary to grasp them in their fullness or wholeness” (Evans 36).³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ In the book *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), James Risser writes, “...there would be something insufficient in an accounting of hermeneutic phenomenology if the Kierkegaardian influence is denied by substituting Dilthey for Kierkegaard” (33). Risser goes on to add the great influence of Kierkegaard on both Gadamer and Heidegger’s methodological developments.

³⁰⁰ Evans, Stephen C. *Soren Kierkegaard’s Christian Psychology: Insight for Counseling and Pastoral Care*. Vancouver, Regent College Publishing, 1997.

Using the Kierkegaardian approach to hermeneutical phenomenology means that the researcher aims to comprehend meanings as the possibilities of human life. For the researcher:

...[T]he primary source for his insights are his introspective experience and reflections on his own life...He uses introspection, not to discover what events are occurring right now inside his head, but to understand meanings, possible ways of being. His method is more properly described as recollection than introspection, since his focus is on understanding patterns of action that have a history and not on recording contemporaneous events. . . . Understanding of meanings is possible only through participation in human life; grasping of new meanings is possible only through reflection on that participation” (Evans 37).

Kierkegaard desired to understand particular thoughts and actions in the context of the whole life story of the individual, often focused around particular phenomenon. What we see is life story of the participant intersecting with life story of the researcher. The research can only effectively interpret another person’s life story of a participant by being involved in that story—spiritually by involving the whole self—and by reflecting on that person’s life story in light of the researcher’s own experience.

A kierkegaardian approach to hermeneutic phenomenology allows for the researcher to be an active interpreter of the phenomenon. My experience does not need to be bracketed; it does, nevertheless, need to be reflected upon, understood and made explicit at every stage of the research. Since I have been through some of the same experiences—but not in exactly the same role or manner as the participants—I can empathetically engage the participants in reflection on their lived experiences of the phenomenon.

My role may be as a narrator who engages and interprets the experience the participants in the multiple realities in the process of transformation. To aid my own self-reflection and interpretation, I will need to keep a reflective journal. I will need to reflect on the different selves or roles (fellow minister, junior minister, son, researcher) that I might bring to or represent in the research. I will need to keep an on-going questioning

dialogue with myself in the midst of the research. I will need to be constantly drawn back to the hermeneutical circle, reflecting on the texts as a whole and in their constitutive parts, working from analysis to synthesis.

b. Grounded Theory

After I have collected all of the narratives from the participants, I will perform some initial coding of the data, looking for key themes in the narratives. Then I will take these themes and present them to the participants at the next stage of the research: interviewing the participants. Here I will use grounded theory/research, allowing the participants to become active in the coding and interpretation of the data. The specific method of grounded theory that I will be appropriating is axial coding, which explores the interrelationship of the categories/themes. Creswell states:

In this phase of analysis, the researcher creates a coding paradigm, or theoretical model that visually portrays the interrelationship of these axial categories of information. A theory is built or generated. At the broadest level of analysis, the researcher can create a conditional matrix. This matrix is an analytical aid—a diagram—that helps the researcher visualize the wide range of conditions and consequences related to the central phenomenon” (151).

The central phenomenon for this study is the 1993 doctrinal change on the nature of God. Thus, at this stage the participants also become grounded researchers, helping shape and interpret the categories and interconnections between them. I will engage the participant-researchers in the other people’s narratives and allow them to retell or embellish their own narratives.

a-2. Hermeneutic Phenomenology

At the end of this process, I will take the coded data gathered and start the final stage of coding and interpretation. This will use the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, keeping in mind what I have previously mentioned. Here I will interpret the data and try

to present a coherent narrative regarding the ministers' experiences. In the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology:

The goal of the analysis is a thick description that accurately captures and communicates the meaning of the lived experience for the informants being studied. A thick description is one that captures the experience from the perspective of the informant in its fullest and richest complexity (Denzin, 1989; Geertz, 1973). The idea of a dialectic process often referred to as the hermeneutic circle underlies hermeneutic thinking and provides guidance for this interpretative effort (Gadamer, 1976; Kockelmans, 1975; Ricoeur, 1981). . . . [A]n understanding of the hermeneutic circle requires the investigator to consider the meanings of the smallest units of data in terms of ever-increasing larger units of data and vice versa. (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 72-73)

The challenge for the interpretation of the study will be to integrate the particular doctrinal and existential details of the particular narratives into a coherent collective narrative of the participants' experiences. This will be a dialectic of bringing the particular and the general into a synopsis grouped around themes and in a relatively chronological format.

VI. Ethics Review for Research with Human Subjects

The only possible issue of ethical concern that could arise in this study is that the ministers may reveal information that they feel is personal. However, to remove this concern, all of the participants will remain anonymous. Each participant will be given a pseudonym.

Moreover, at the end of the study, I will send each participant the sections of the thesis where their pseudonymous data is discussed. I will allow each participant to make redactions to their information.

The ministers will be asked to sign a letter of consent to participate in the study as they begin the process. They will be informed that they are welcome to withdraw from

the study at any time. However, they will also be informed that any data that they have contributed to that point in will remain but its origins will remain anonymous.

Further, I will ask the participants whether they would allow me to keep their complete narrative for further publication—remaining pseudonymous—or whether they would rather for me to destroy or return their narrative. If they would prefer the latter, I will inform them that all their data will be destroyed or returned one year after the completion of the thesis.

VII. Risks and Limitations of the Study

The element of risk is very minimal in this study. Perhaps some personal information will be divulged by the participants, but, as I stated previously, I will erase any information from the record when so requested. Also, it may be that the tasks could be rather time consuming for the participants. Thus, I will give them time limit guidelines. For the writing stage, a suggested time limit should be approximately 4-6 hours, but no more than 10 hours. I will give this information upon initially requesting whether a participant would be interested in taking part in the research.

The participants have been chosen in a couple of stages. The leaders of the denomination have suggested names of ministers who would fit my criteria for the study. However, most of the ministers have been chosen and/or approved by my Ministerial Base Group. The leadership of the denomination are not aware of the seven to nine participants who will be in the study. The Ministerial Base Group has agreed to not give any information regarding who the participants of the study are. The Ministerial Base Group felt that the participants are appropriate representatives that fulfil the criteria for the study.

The obvious limitation in this study is that it does not engage congregants' understanding of and relationship with God, self, minister and other members. Also, it does not focus on the ministers' relationships with the family, neighbours and other Christians that may have been impacted by their transformation in theology. However, this will be more relevant to and sufficient for future studies that may look into these

sociological phenomena. The focus of this study is primarily theological along with the anthropological and ecclesiological (specifically the ministers) doctrines and effects. The questions asked in my study, although focused on the God-self-congregation dynamic, could be relevant to God-self-family *or* God-self-neighbour dynamics. Moreover, the issue is primarily examining the phenomenon of theological transformation in the WCG, yet the framework of this study could also be applied to other denominations experiencing other kinds of transformations: soteriological, ecclesiological, missiological, or ecological.

VIII. The Contribution of the Study

It is my hope that this study may be used to help local pastors further with their understanding and relationships with God, self and congregation. By understanding these issues, it will help pastors and their congregations see the pragmatic (life-lived) aspect of the human experience within the Trinity. As a primary focus, it is the body of ministers in the WCG that this research hopes to engage and study. The result may be a further, deepened transformation of lives within the congregation.

The hope of the research is that the findings of the transformations might serve as a model for other ministers in the WCG who struggle with seeing the relevance of the Triune God to their theologizing, living and ministering. However, this is not only a challenge for WCG ministers but also for some ministers from denominations within mainstream orthodox Christianity; thus, the research would hope to reach out to them. The research would also hope to serve ministers and/or denominations who are making a similar shift from a heterodox to orthodox theology and a heteropraxy to orthopraxy.

Appendix B

Invitation Letter to participants



Toronto School of Theology
federated with the University of Toronto

47 Queen's Park Crescent East • Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2C3
 Telephone: 416-978-4039 • Fax: 416-978-7821 • Website: www.tst.edu

June 1, 2010

Dear (name of participant):

I would like to invite you to become a participant in my Doctor of Ministry (DMin) research on ministers in the Worldwide Church of God (WCG): "From Binitarians to Trinitarians: The Transformation of Ministers in the Worldwide Church of God." This research is being conducted through the Toronto School of Theology, which is federated with the University of Toronto.

The purpose of this study is to answer the following research question:
What effects has the 1993 shift in the Worldwide Church of God's (WCG) doctrine to the Triune God had on its ministers' understanding of and relationships with God, self and congregation?

As a participant in the research, you are asked to construct a narrative of your life around the doctrine of God.

You were nominated to be a primary participant in the research *either* by my DMin Ministerial Base Group comprised of WCG ministers in the Toronto area or by another minister in the WCG according to specific criteria:

- They may have been students at the WCG's Ambassador College during the leadership of Herbert W. Armstrong (the founder of the WCG); thus, they may have been thoroughly indoctrinated in Armstrong's teaching and will themselves have been part of spreading and, possibly, enforcing this teaching.

- They will have been a minister under Armstrong and/or Joseph W. Tkach (prior to the doctrinal changes).
- They have deeply thought (intellectually and spiritually) through the changes and have studied a lot of biblical and scholarly texts on the doctrinal issues.
- They have had a significant transformation in their understanding and relationship with God, self and congregation.

There are nine ministers in this primary group, of which you would be a part. There is also a secondary group of WCG ministers in the study that may not meet all of the above criteria and have volunteered for the study. An important purpose of this secondary group is to see whether the data gathered from the primary group is saturated (developed fully) and provide some points of comparison and contrast.

Should you accept to participate, your commitment will be in three stages:

1. Writing a narrative of your experience of the doctrinal changes; this should take 4-6 hours (to a maximum of 10) in June 2010. This stage may be done at your home or office, and the narrative may be emailed to me by July 5, 2010.
2. Meeting with me for a face-to-face interview; this should take 1-2 hours at the denomination conference in Lake Buena Vista, Florida in July 2010. Or for those who cannot attend the conference, I will meet them at their homes or offices in August 2010 or conduct a video conference interview. These interviews will be to ask for some further questions, clarifications and coding of the data. The interviews will be recorded using audio and visual devices.
3. Responding to a short follow-up questionnaire and looking over your narrative and a transcript of your interview (from stage #2); this should take 1 hour in September 2010. This may be done at your home or office. At this stage, you may make any final revisions to your information and email them to me by September 30, 2010.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you may refuse to participate and/or decline to answer questions without any negative consequences. The data that you give in the research will be kept confidential and anonymous. You will be given a pseudonym so there will be no risk of you or your information being identified.

You may request to withdraw from the research at any time by emailing or calling me (see my contact details above). The request will be respected without any implications or hard feelings. However, due to the character of the study, the data that has already been coded and embedded in the research will not be removed from the study and will remain. However, rest assured that all data will be kept anonymous and secure.

In stage 2 of the research, the primary participants will be able to look at some details of the other participants' narratives. Once again, the data will be anonymous. After all the data is collected, I and a transcriber, who will have signed a confidentiality agreement and is not a WCG member, will be the only ones permitted to listen to or watch the audio-visual recordings.

Once the research is completed, I will send you a hard and/or soft copy of the thesis along with a summary of the findings regarding your data.

I will ask you approval to use your anonymous data for publication in a book, journal articles and web documents and for public presentations and teaching. I will also ask whether you would like the data stored by me or whether you would like it sent back to you or destroyed.

At the end of this letter you will find a consent form with some information and questions to which you are requested to respond so that I may have your approval to conduct the research. Please fill out this letter and email it to me by June 7. I also have enclosed an information letter with an outline and questions to help guide the writing of your narrative. Once again, the submission date for the narrative is July 5 or earlier.

Ultimately, my hope for this research is that it will contribute to other people's understanding of and relationships with God, self and congregation. These people may not only be ministers and members of the WCG but also those of other denominations—and those without affiliation. The research may also help denominations, ministers and congregants going through similar doctrinal transformations.

If you have any questions of desire clarification, please email me You may also email my thesis director, Dr. David Reed... should you have any issues regarding your participation in this research: If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

I appreciate your interest and possible participation in this research project.

Blessings in Christ,

Eric Wilding

Appendix C

Letter of Consent



Toronto School of Theology

federated with the University of Toronto

47 Queen's Park Crescent East • Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2C3
 Telephone: 416-978-4039 • Fax: 416-978-7821 • Website: www.tst.edu

Date: June 1, 2010

Research Participant: (Name)

Researcher: Eric Wilding

Research Project: From Binitarians to Trinitarians: The Transformation of Ministers in the Worldwide Church of God.

Research Period: June 2010 – September 2010.

I, (name) _____, have reviewed the information letter, dated _____ and have had the study explained and have had an opportunity to ask questions.

Please place an "x" on the appropriate line below

1. I give my consent to be a participant in this research project.

a. Yes _____

b. No _____

2. I give my consent to allow my information in written format to be used in this research concerning the change in doctrines in the Worldwide Church of God, and I understand that my information will remain anonymous.

a. Yes _____

b. No _____

3. I give my consent to allow my information recorded in audio-visual format to be used in this research concerning the change in doctrines in the Worldwide Church of God, and I understand that my information will remain anonymous.

a. Yes _____

b. No _____

4. I give my consent that I may withdraw from this study at any time. However, at the time of withdrawal, any data will remain as part of the study and will remain anonymous.

a. Yes _____

b. No _____

5. I give my consent that my data may be kept for further use after the thesis (possibly for books, articles, and web documents and for public presentations and teaching) by Eric Wilding, and I understand that the data will remain anonymous.

a. Yes _____

b. No _____

6. I give my consent to have the data (written and audio-visual) to be sent back to me or destroyed within one year after the completion of the thesis.

a. Yes____(sent back) or Yes____ (destroyed)

b. No____ (the data may be stored by Eric Wilding)

Participant's signature: _____

Appendix D

Information Letter: Narrative Outline and Questionnaire



Toronto School of Theology

federated with the University of Toronto

47 Queen's Park Crescent East • Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2C3
 Telephone: 416-978-4039 • Fax: 416-978-7821 • Website: www.tst.edu

NARRATIVE OUTLINE to help you construct your story

I. Pre-WCG years

- i. God: a. understanding of, b. relationship with
- ii. Self: a. understanding of, b. relationship with
- iii. Other people (Congregation): a. understanding of, b. relationship with

I. WCG years under Armstrong

- i. God: a. understanding of, b. relationship with
- ii. Self: a. understanding of, b. relationship with
- iii. Congregation: a. understanding of, b. relationship with

III. WCG in transition (1990s, specifically pre and post 1993)

- i. God: a. understanding of, b. relationship with
- ii. Self: a. understanding of, b. relationship with
- iii. Congregation: a. understanding of, b. relationship with

IV. WCG in post-transition years

- i. God: a. understanding of, b. relationship with
- ii. Self: a. understanding of, b. relationship with
- iii. Congregation: a. understanding of, b. relationship with

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Please make sure that the following questions are answered in the course of your narrative or separately as an appendix.

For simplicity sake here, all of the questions below use a past tense verb, but they are applicable to both past (across time periods) and present situations.

i. God: In that the WCG has changed its doctrine of God, please keep the following issues/questions in mind as you reflect on the change (before, during and after).

Issues: unitarianism (1 God, undifferentiated), binitarianism (2 God beings), or Trinitarianism (1 God in three Persons)

What was your understanding of who God is? (nature of God)

What was your understanding of the nature of the relationship in the Godhead?

How did you relate to God?

To whom did you address your prayers most frequently?

Why did the change happen?

How did the changes get enacted?

How did you understand the change?

How did the change affect you?

Was there one event that helped you change your view or was it a process?

What difference did the change make?

Why did you accept the change and remain with the WCG?

ii. Self: In that the WCG's doctrine of God was changing around the same as doctrines regarding the human person/believer, please keep the following issues/questions regarding Christian anthropology in mind as you reflect on the change (before, during and after).

Issues: image of God, personhood, human nature, baptism-begotten/born again, human potential.

How did you view yourself and your identity?

What is the content and focus of your prayers?

Was there one event that helped you change your view or was it a process?

What difference did the changes make in your life?

iii. Ministry and Congregation: In that the WCG has changed its doctrines regarding God and the human person, please keep the following issues/questions regarding ecclesiology in mind as you reflect on the change (before, during and after)

Issues: church governance, leadership styles, worship styles.

What was your identity as a minister in relation to the identities of the people in your congregation?

Was there one event that helped you change your view or was it a process?

When the changes happened, what was the most difficult change?

What challenges did you and/or your congregation face?

What difference did the change make in your ministry and congregation?

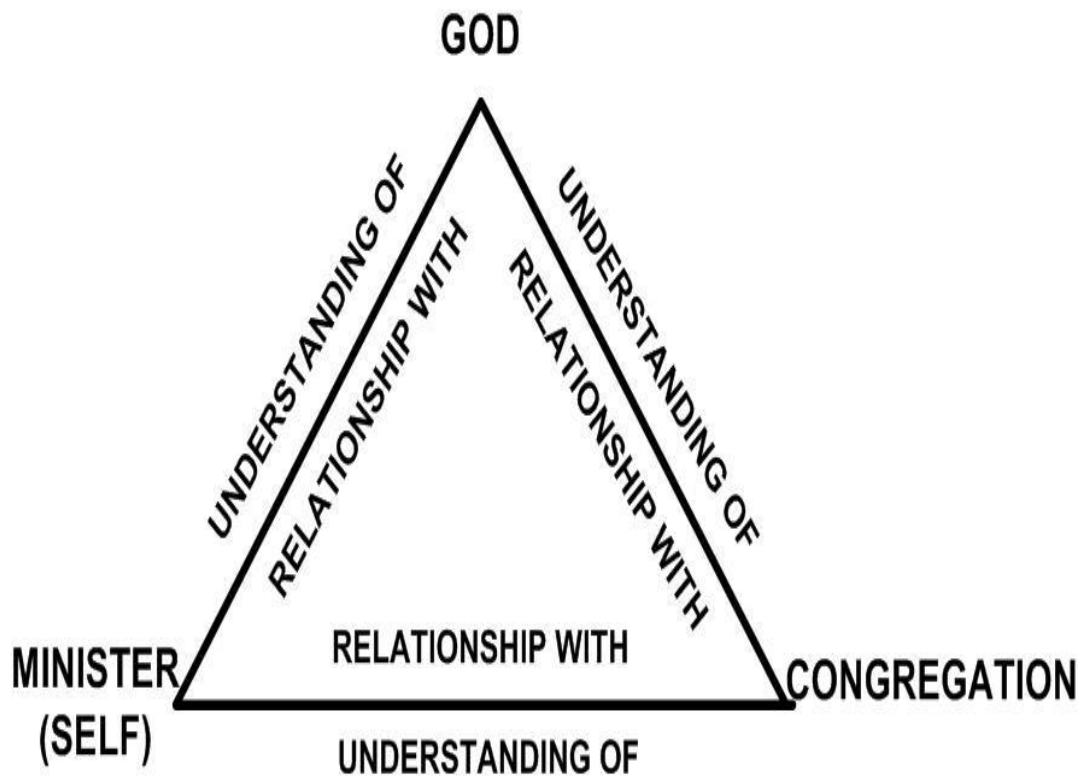
You may also want to reference any scriptures, books, writers or people who were important to you in this process at various stages in your life. However, if you should discuss congregants, please give them pseudonyms.

If you have sermon notes on any of the topics listed above from before, during and after the changes, I would appreciate a dated copy of those.

Also, you may find the triangle diagram (Figure 1, on the following page) helpful in visualizing the study. However, a limitation of the study is that it does not explore in detail the understanding and relationship aspect between God – congregation (portrayed on the right vertical side of the triangle). The minister is the point-of-view axis for the vertical and horizontal sides of the triangle. This is merely descriptive not evaluative.

Appendix E

Figure 1



Appendix F
Second (follow-up) Questionnaire

Dear research participants,

I hope you all are well.

Here are some brief questions for your response (if you feel you have already answered any of these questions in the narrative and/or interview, please feel free to state, "already answered"):

1. How did your relationship with your mother and father affect your understanding of and relationship with God?

2. Who taught you most about God when you were a child?

3. What was that teaching?

4. What would you describe your relationship with the Triune God as being like today?

5. At present, is there one of the three divine Persons to whom you relate to the most? (i.e. spend most of your time thinking about or talking to)

6. At present, is there one of the three divine Persons to whom you relate to the least?

7. If you respond positively to either #4 and/or #5, can you think of reasons why this may be the case?

I greatly appreciate your generosity and kindness.

Triune blessings,

Eric Wilding

Appendix G Research Ethics Approval Letter



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT, RESEARCH

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 25313

June 1, 2010

Dr. David Reed
Toronto School of Theology
Wycliffe College
5 Hoskin Ave.
Toronto, ON M5S 1H7

Mr. Eric Wilding
Toronto School of Theology
Wycliffe College
5 Hoskin Ave.
Toronto, ON M5S 1H7

Dear Dr. Reed and Mr. Wilding:

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "From Binitarians to Trinitarians: The Transformation of Ministers in the Worldwide Church of God (Grace Communion International)"

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: June 1, 2010

Expiry Date: May 31, 2011

Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that a member of the Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Research Ethics Board has granted approval to the above-named research study, for a period of **one year**. Ongoing projects must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

All your most recently submitted documents have been approved for use in this study.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your study. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry, as per federal and international policies.

If your research has funding attached, please contact the relevant Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

S. Lanthier
Research Ethics Coordinator