

A Personal View from Ground Zero

By Victor Kubik

Chapter 1 - The Genesis of the United Church of God

At its peak, it was a vibrant, global church. It counted more than 120,000 members meeting collectively each Sabbath on every inhabited continent. Its television program was ranked No. 1 by Nielsen and aired weekly on more than 100 satellite and terrestrial stations, leveraging a media budget of \$57 million (in 2023 dollars). It published a monthly flagship magazine with more than six million copies distributed in seven languages. Attendance at its annual festival sites was regularly measured in the multiple thousands. Annual contributions neared the quarter of a billion dollars mark. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God was powerfully thundered across every available media.



Then, one day, it was all but gone.

This once was the Work of the Worldwide Church of God.

Stunned, even horrified, many ministers, members and families in the early 1990s watched in alarm and shock as cherished and solid beliefs were inexplicably reversed, abandoned, even mocked. Once a literal “City on a Hill,” a marvelous hub of high energy that was transformed from slums and dilapidated old buildings into the church’s magnificent headquarters and college campus was sold off piecemeal, together with remaining properties across the United States.

Even the high-profile bold declaration in the lobby of the Ambassador Auditorium, the church’s physical capstone – a prominent phrase displayed for many thousands of people to openly see in public: “Dedicated to the glory of the Great God – made possible by gifts from the Worldwide Church of God” – was stripped out.

Lost faith

Disillusioned and betrayed, many lost their precious faith, becoming agnostics, even atheists. Many were resentful, some even angry at God Himself. A sad legacy was emerging.

As multiple thousands of people grappled with wholesale upheaval, many tried to uphold the established belief structure. As the Worldwide Church collapsed into what one WCG administrator described as “the holocaust years” (when the former organization fell apart and splintered, down-sizing as finances shrank), new organizations were formed.

Act of betrayal

One of the chief reasons that the demolition of the prior organization was even possible was attributable to one factor: the intense concentration of legal power and physical authority in a single person. As one of the organizers and leaders of the dramatic theological and organizational turmoil later admitted in print, the very autocratic – and previously criticized – power that had ostensibly led to the changes was now deployed again. But this time to foment broad upheaval, an act of betrayal that was mercilessly pursued at great cost to families and friends.

One last-try effort was made by a group of ministers, who appealed for fairness and peace, together with the opportunity to continue prior beliefs and structure. When the current administration vehemently denied this option, adherents to biblical truth were left with no choice. At that time the first steps began to explore how to create a new organization. There was no framework or plans laid in advance.

Within this group, all agreed on one element: whatever this new organization looked like, there would never again be an opportunity for the concentration of power – especially that of a doctrinal nature – within the hands of a single man, unanswerable to anyone but himself.

And thus was born the United Church of God, an International Association.

Why this narrative history?

Having served in the ministry of the Worldwide Church of God for many years and subsequently assigned to the Church Administration department in Pasadena, my wife Bev and I were unique eyewitnesses of the before, during and after of this crisis. As an active pastor in the field, I had never sought an administrative position.

As is a fact of history, I personally served as Assistant Director of Church Administration, meeting frequently with senior administrators from the early 1990s who would later trainwreck established beliefs and wreak havoc in people’s lives with a barrage of changes.

In the second decade of the 21st century, why would any of this be relevant?

Now that more than a quarter of a century has passed and the now-established United Church of God is moving into a new generation of members and leaders, important lessons need to be preserved. I have had numerous people asking me to recount what had happened that led to the formation of the United Church of God. Included in this number are curious young people who want to know why and how we began.

An unbreakable promise

We hold this unbreakable promise from the living Head of the Church, Jesus Christ: “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). No matter what happens, the spiritual Church of God will always exist through the ages.

All of us who attended Ambassador College or who were trained locally in the ministry knew that the original first century Church of God had been rent by division following the fall of the Jerusalem temple.

We just never thought it would happen to our 20th century church organization.

What does this mean for today? A true saying, cited by many, reads: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Thus the rationale for preserving the history of the events and focus that led up to the founding and creation of the United Church of God, an International Association.

An important caveat

Originally coined to describe the focal point of a devastating nuclear explosion, the phrase “Ground Zero” has also come to define a point of origin of a momentous event. The place of the 9/11 Memorial in New York City is also described and known as “Ground Zero” of the events of that terrible terrorist attack in 2001.

In many respects, my wife Bev and I have a “ground zero” view of the unique events where a global church willingly collapsed and a new organization – firmly guided and governed by a General Council of Elders, whose directives were carried out by a 12-person Council of Elders and a President – emerged to continue the biblical mission of preaching the Gospel and preparing a people.

As I write this, I will obviously reflect my own memories and recorded narratives of this time. Many people, including Bev, have already contributed to this “ground zero” narrative, which has been greatly helpful. This helps to reduce the potential subjective nature of writing a memoir of past events.

It is important to note upfront that I have no personal axe to grind or hidden agenda. In many respects, the 1990s were intensely painful for Bev and me, as for thousands of others. We certainly did not profit financially from any of it. In fact, our stories mirror those of many who subsequently met in Indianapolis in 1995. Apart from the Bible, there was no framework. There was no established pathway. And certainly no promise of any financial compensation. We were prepared to do what it took to preserve and practice the revealed truth of God.

During time there was a great deal of prayer, fasting and study into the Word of God, beseeching Almighty God to show us the way and reveal His divine will to us. As many will attest, what emerged wasn’t perfect. But the leaders, ministers and people of the United Church of God, an International Association have never given up.

As you read this narrative, I invite you to remember that many of the administrators mentioned in this account were once close friends. I am not “at war” with any of them today. If and when they read this account, they may disagree with my perspective and perceptions. The fact remains, I was there. I was in many meetings where changes were being introduced, then enforced.

I would not be honest if I didn’t say that many actions, comments and assertions of the time were not hurtful. When Bev and I stood in the office of the then-Pastor General to resign, that was not a pleasant experience.

The outcome of those experiences is that I may sound direct or forceful. That is not my intent. I am certainly not a victim or hold a victim mentality, nor am I resentful. I believe the Bible and its unbreakable promises. We will all one day stand before God and Jesus Christ and give account of ourselves. And as Jesus Himself promised, the Church of God will stand.

If you've read this far, I thank you. Many who witnessed these events now sleep and await the resurrection, and several people have encouraged me to put this history into written form before it is lost.

Our focus? The future of the Church of God is bright. As members of the Body of Christ, let us "be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall" (2 Peter 1:10, English Standard Version).

Let us now turn to an eventful saga...

Chapter 2 – Crossing the Rubicon on March 3, 1995

Chapter One concluded with an invitation to delve into an eventful saga, recounting how the United Church of God came into existence. Over the years I have been asked, "What happened?" Here is Chapter Two.



Ambassador College Hall of Administration, my work home from 1990 to 1995.

As the Hall of Administration elevator lifted us to the fourth floor, I was filled with a cacophony of emotions. The night before, my wife Bev and I had made final edits to possibly the most important letter I had ever written.

Together, we were walking away from decades of service to a church that we loved. We had no plan, no premediated intent, no fallback next step. We simply could not in good faith continue on the path that we were on.

As the elevator rose, I wondered what the Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God—a man I had supported, worked with, and counted as a close friend—would say when I resigned.

Bev and I were accompanied by Doug Horchak, a long-time minister who had also resigned three days earlier. Doug was the son-in-law of Joseph W. Tkach Sr. Doug would support us as we crossed our personal Rubicon. After today there would be no turning back.

The waiting area of the executive offices was quiet and unoccupied when we arrived, the calm before the storm. From many previous meetings, I knew that the senior Tkach liked to get to the office early.

We walked into his office unannounced. The windows lining the office framed the marble pillars of the Ambassador Auditorium, an expansive view that Mr. Herbert Armstrong had enjoyed in the many years he worked in the same office. I had sat in meetings in this office many, many times with leaders of the church and Ambassador College. Today's meeting would be quite different.

Mr. Tkach looked up as we entered. Seeing Doug, he sensed this was no ordinary meeting. My heart racing, I told him that we needed to talk.

The three of us sat down in front of his desk, papers, books and mementos piled high. He looked uncomfortably at the three of us.

I stated directly but respectfully, “Mr. Tkach, I am resigning as Assistant Director of Church of Administration. Here are my reasons.”

I handed over the first of two letters. Putting on his trademark half-high reading glasses, he began to read silently.

Without preamble, the letter began simply:

“Dear Mr. Tkach,

“This is the most difficult letter I have ever had to write. After serving in the employed ministry of Jesus Christ for almost 26 years I am forced to resign my position in Church Administration due to issues of personal faith and conviction.”

I, together with my wife Bev, felt “forced” because for years I witnessed and lived through the dramatic dismantling of a Church that I loved and dedicated my life to. This effort, now shamelessly overturning cherished beliefs and doctrines, ran totally counter to my commitment as a minister. Two decades earlier I had committed and accepted the responsibility to nurture, care for, and protect those people who had turned their lives to God.

The letter continued, as Mr. Tkach read silently:

“At issue are the doctrinal changes involving the new teaching on the subject of the covenants, Sabbath and Holy Days. While I have always believed that we cannot earn salvation, that salvation is by grace through Jesus Christ only, and that we are ministers of the New Covenant, I do not believe that the Sabbath and Holy Days are mere shadows whose purpose for Christians ended at the death of Christ. I believe that the Sabbath is holy, and that the annual Holy Days have the divine purpose of revealing to Christians the wonderful plan of salvation for mankind.”

After Mr. Armstrong’s death, the Worldwide Church of God enjoyed a burst of growth and influence. Monthly baptisms numbered in the hundreds. Annual donations topped a quarter of a billion dollars (nearly half a billion in 2023 dollars). The television media budget alone came in over \$25 million, reaching the No. 1 spot in religious programming (as measured by Nielsen). Millions of publications, including multiple language issues of *The Plain Truth* magazine, were mailed every month.

We seemed to be on a winning streak, with God blessing our efforts.

Then a contrary spirit moved into the midst of senior leadership. Unchecked, but with broad powers, a small group masterminded a massive shift of doctrinal change for the entire Church. This was not done with broad approval or a meeting of minds. Nor were changes merely small refinement, improvements or updates.

These changes ripped apart and mercilessly tore at the very foundations of our biblical understanding. There was no review process or discussion or “come let us reason together” approach. Longtime beliefs were quickly replaced it with new theology and philosophy. Swept out was our understanding of the Nature of God, the coming Kingdom of God and our days of worship for starters. This was an invasion, a revolution. It was a war on a community of people who were taught to be compliant, submissive, humble. These traits were now exploited.

Not uttering a word, Mr. Tkach continued reading my letter:

“I cannot preach this new teaching in good faith. And as you yourself commented recently, in quoting from Romans 14: whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

“As Assistant Director of Church Administration, I have also come to a point where I can no longer support or have a part in the treatment that long-time loyal ministers have received. To date, several ministers who could not, in good conscience, preach this new material are being treated without the respect and dignity that I feel they deserve--often resulting in their termination from employ by the church after 20 or 30 years.”

Tragically, these enforced changes led to an identity crisis among faithful believers who trusted in their leaders who were there to protect, guide, instruct and encourage. Now, people were reaching and scrambling for safety as they sensed the church turning on them. This was unsettling at the least and frightening at most.

Those like me who had studied and proven their theological footing over decades now had to fight to keep it. Little did these revolutionaries realize the power of conviction and commitment.

Many of us lost the spiritual home where we felt protected, educated and nourished. The Church was our community, but now we became displaced amidst confusion, damaged lives, separated families and destroyed relationships.

Reading toward the end of the first letter, the WCG Pastor General read:

“Mr. Tkach, it is with great sorrow and regret that I take this step, but my personal faith and conscience before God requires it of me. I will continue to pray for the healing of this terrible breach in God's Church--and for you personally.”

Those of us who believed and were convicted of by what we were taught by our Church for decades were now thrust out by that very Church! The year 1995 was an extremely difficult year as our minds and emotions were stretched to their limits of endurance. We reeled in disbelief of “how can this be?” Our hope was that God would deliver us and provide a new home. We did not know how or when it would come to be.

As Mr. Tkach finished the first letter, I waited for his comments. I had thought of the many reactions he might have. But the one he made was not the one I would have expected.

As he put down the first letter, he seemed to be oblivious to all the turmoil in the Church over the past few months, a time of disorder with outrage and resignations. He then sighed and said, “Vic, you do this after all we have done for you?”

Even in the tenseness of the moment, I thought that this was a strange and irrelevant thing to say as I am bringing forward the hottest issues in the Church at that very moment. Even today, as I write this, I am struck at the foreignness of the moment.

The story continues, with the reading of the second letter and the unannounced appearance and reaction of Joe Jr., Mr. Tkach's son and then the Director of Church Administration (and my direct report).

I will continue this experience in Chapter three, but I would like to leave this chapter with this thought:

Jesus Christ set a high bar for dealing with difficult people and events. He prayed in the last moments of human life: Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). The actions of leaders leading to our parting in 1995 were often harsh, hurtful and unjust to

me personally. Today I have a spirit of forgiveness and hope we can all forgive, while at the same time understanding the consequences of what took place. I hope to lay out and preserve this important story without rancor or animosity.

But I hope we will remember the lessons of this time, especially in always contending for the faith once delivered (Jude 3).

Chapter 3 – Conflict Erupts

Chapter two concluded with the first part of a tense, soon-to-be tumultuous meeting with then-Pastor General Joseph Tkach, Sr. in his fourth-floor Pasadena office (the Senior Joseph Tkach is now deceased). Our account picks up as he begins reading the second of my two letters outlining my resignation. As previously noted, with me was my wife Beverly and pastor Doug Horchak, Mr. Tkach's son-in-law, who resigned a few days prior to this event. I had asked Doug to accompany us at this critical meeting. Shortly after Joe Sr. read the first two letters, we were unexpectedly joined by Joseph Tkach Jr., whom I directly reported to in his then-role as director of Church Administration.



Bev and I in front of the Hall of Administration in October 2013

As this chapter will recount, emotions quickly ran hot.

As a backdrop, consider that in late 1994 and into 1995, many ministers and wives – as well as long-time members – had become increasingly puzzled, alarmed, and finally, outraged. No plans existed to create any new organization. But from a personal standpoint, Bev and I – like many others – had to follow our spiritual conscience.

As he unfolded the second letter and I sat before Mr. Tkach's desk, my mind raced. I had sat in this same executive office many times with other leaders of the Worldwide Church of God and Ambassador College. Almost every Friday morning Joe Sr. assembled key leaders and department heads to review and discuss key events and plans. While often serious, those meetings were also often punctuated with good-natured humor. Previously there was a lot of camaraderie and a feeling that we were collectively seeking to advance the Work of God.

There was none of that on this day. The early morning mood was somber and tense.

These letters presented here preserve a vibrant snapshot of what many people experienced in the spring of 1995. Within a few short months, thousands of lives had been upended as cherished truths were attacked and unraveled, spawning a painful crisis of faith. The magnitude of this spiritual betrayal took place at a level that no one could imagine could actually occur.

In early 1995, it was just unfathomable that we were living a time of heresy and division, one of those times warned of by the Bible.

As previously related, my first letter announced and confirmed my resignation. The second documented crucial details.

The Second Letter

As Doug, Bev and I waited, Mr. Tkach picked up my second letter and started reading it. Here is how it opened:

March 3, 1995

Dear Mr. Tkach,

"In addition to my letter of resignation, I want to share the following thoughts.

"First, I want to say that I love the ministry and serving God's people. I served in the field ministry for 21 years and have now assisted your son Joe Jr. since June 1, 1990, in a most interesting and challenging job.

"I felt that I did make a positive contribution in helping Joe deal with day-to-day tasks. On a personal level we relate extremely well. We conscientiously helped the ministry move towards becoming Christ-like shepherds.

"In the international areas I contributed to doing the Work in Eastern Europe, particularly with the Ukrainian Sabbatarians."

One ironic element in all of this was that I never had any aspirations to work in Pasadena at the church's physical headquarters. Bev and I had happily served in congregations in Minnesota and elsewhere, including often working extensively with the Youth Opportunities United (YOU) groups. A longtime photographer and writer, I had traveled with Herman Hoeh, the editor of the *Plain Truth* magazine, and written for that publication. During that time, I began contributing bylined articles to the church's *Youth* publication before the death of Mr. Armstrong.

Between 1990 and 1995, my relationship with Joe Tkach Jr. in the Church Administration department for the most part was excellent. Joe Jr. had originally been a ministerial trainee in the 1970s. When there were financial cutbacks in the church, he began working in a state agency and then transitioned to a business career in Arizona, gaining experience in human resources, corporate training, and other areas. He was ordained into the ministry in 1976 and served in an unpaid position as what was once called a local church elder.

After becoming pastor general in 1986 Joe Sr. brought his son from Arizona out to Pasadena to work in church administration, eventually replacing Larry Salyer as director. Joe Jr. had asked me to be his assistant in early 1990.

From my perspective, I thought we had a great working relationship. The Worldwide Church of God was a complex and multi-layered institution, having grown from a handful of members to well over 120,000 baptized brethren, and multiple thousands more attending each Sabbath.

In our short years together, Joe Jr. and I jointly oversaw more than 1,000 elders that included nearly four hundred full-time ministers. He and I often transparently discussed many subjects relating to our work. He was hard-working and personable. We both enjoyed being with people. My work involved making many visits to our field ministry in the United States as well as overseas conferences.

There was a lot of organizational energy in those early days of the Tkach administration, as the WCG was then a rapidly growing church. To help plan for and serve this growth, Joe Jr. and I travelled each spring to Ambassador College in Big Sandy, Texas, where we interviewed graduating seniors as potential hires into the ministry. New congregations were continually being planted across the globe.

On a personal level in those days, Joe Jr. was a friend with whom I communicated well as far as managing Church Administration. In my experience he was kind, merciful, compassionate, and well-liked generally.

But as the 1990s advanced, cracks and fissures appeared. Astonishing and divisive changes started being force fed to minister and member alike.

After his surprising outburst in reading my first letter that documented my resignation, Mr. Tkach Sr. continued to read my second letter. I had written:

"One of the highlights of working with Joe Jr. was establishing the regional pastor structure. These competent and converted men along with their wives devoted themselves above and beyond the call of duty to serving not only a congregation but several dozen ministers as well. They are highly respected by the ministry."

To understand the context of what happened over a quarter of a century ago, it's important to remember that Mr. Tkach Sr. first came to organizational power during the 1979 Receivership crisis in Pasadena.

As many will recall, in January 1979, without warning, the organizational and accounting functions of the Worldwide Church of God were invaded and brazenly taken over in a receivership by lawyers appointed by a local California administrative court judge. Mr. Tkach Sr. and others were on hand in Pasadena and stood in the breach, organizing, conducting, and supporting activities to counter the abusive legal action. That major crisis would stretch out more than a year.

These acts elevated Joe Sr.'s stature. He previously was a low-key minister from Chicago who had been serving in a church department that provided organizational services for the ministry. In the half decade following, Joe Sr. became known as a loyal follower of Mr. Herbert Armstrong. Joe Sr.'s reputation and performance aided his selection as head of the church's ministry, replacing Roderick C. Meredith (who later formed two church Sabbath-based organizations and is also now deceased).

Joe Sr. was appointed deputy Pastor General shortly before Mr. Armstrong's death in January 1986. He then became the legal successor to Mr. Armstrong, together with all of the sweeping powers that Mr. Armstrong had held to protect the church from the receivership. As Michael Feazell, a long-time assistant to Joe Sr. would later publicly admit, those sweeping legal powers were ultimately leveraged to foist broad harsh doctrinal and administrative changes on the church.

At the time Bev and I were serving local congregations in the upper Midwest. We had no idea of what would soon come.

After being appointed the director of Church Administration by his father, Joe Jr. had held off on creating any kind of mid-structure in administration. This hesitancy existed because two former mid-structures efforts had resulted in the creation of organizational-sapping problematic power bases.

Before it is lost to history, allow me to present some important background: one early streamlined structure of regional pastors organized by David Antion (a senior Pasadena ministerial administrator and brother-in-law to Garner Ted Armstrong, son of Herbert Armstrong) replaced sixteen District Superintendents in the early 1970s. That structure lasted only a brief time because of an attempted organizational revolt against the administration of Mr. Armstrong (the years 1972-74 included times of momentous change and difficult organizational upheaval).

That system conceived by David Antion was done away with, but replaced with a two-tier Area Coordinator structure that suffered a similar fate. Now with two failed mid-structures, there was no organizational appetite for yet another structure.

When I came to work for Joe Tkach Jr., we interfaced directly with the entire pastoral workforce, similar to what Joe Sr. had done when he was head of Church Administration. That had its own set of challenges in creating a form of a managerial bottleneck.

But events in 1993 showed the need for a new organizational structure. Joe Tkach Jr. was now wanting again to install a mid-management structure to oversee the ministry more closely (this act and its consequences will be explained more fully in a future chapter). Accordingly, in 1993 fourteen regional pastors were appointed in part to serve as “cheerleaders” and promote the sweeping doctrinal changes to the ministry.

Back to my second letter:

"Over the last few years, the church has undergone massive doctrinal changes. Some of these changes have been well-accepted and have added to our understanding of doctrine. Some of the changes, particularly those relating to the New Covenant, the Sabbath and Holy Days are not being accepted well by the ministry and members. I personally do not agree with what is taught about the Sabbath and the Holy Days.

"What has happened is that the teaching about the latest changes in particular has brought a crisis of conscience to our ministry. It has for me. Many ministers cannot and won't preach what you espouse. Congregations are divided in how they view the latest teachings.

"The way the changes have come about has been insensitive and uncaring to our people's faith. Mr. Tkach, I think it would be good to have a broader consensus of ministers in the decision-making process. In the Statement of Beliefs booklet under the section "Church Leadership" it states:

"...the decision-making process under Christ involves councils of ministers who report to the Pastor General."

"Yet, these most recent major doctrinal changes have come about with no input in the decision-making process from the ministry on either the administrative or the field levels. What ever happened to the Council of Elders?"

We loved our church and its people, so Bev and I wanted to be problem-solvers. We had no intention of launching a personal attack. So, I proposed a solution in the second letter.

"Wouldn't it be honorable to set up a board that would represent a broad spectrum of our leadership from both the local administrative ministers and representation from the field ministry? I sincerely feel that if the regional pastors and regional directors had been able to be involved in the process of considering these most recent subjects of change in doctrine, that we would have avoided much of the trauma and crisis we now face in the church. These

major changes in belief have come about as a result of input and opinion of only a very few people that surround you."

I thought it possible that Joe Sr. was being insulated from the alarm and outrage that was fissuring the church. How could a man who championed the church at great personal risk in 1979 now lead an abusive campaign to literally destroy the very foundations of that same church?

So, I was determined to lay out the tension and pain that was rocking the ministry, the church, and me personally.

It is important to consider that these were not administrative or cosmetic changes. These changes touched the depths of our faith. The church's human administration was now figuratively treading with hobnailed boots on our minds and hearts – and on our relationship with God.

In foisting these sweeping changes, some purported a red herring fallacy of ministers somehow teaching that righteousness (and salvation) was a result of keeping the law. Like others trained at Ambassador College, I knew full well and accepted that my eternal salvation would come through grace, a gift from God. Salvation could not be "earned" by law-keeping, although God's law would serve faithfully to set high and powerful standards for Christian living.

Now, I'm essentially being told that was not my thinking. The truth? Administrators were tampering with the inner identity of the Church and its doctrine in a classic gaslighting campaign.

I wanted to document what was happening. Perhaps reason and fact could be restored. In my second letter to Joe Sr. I continued to talk about the most recent environment that had been created, a boiling over with fear and terror upon our ministry, members, and families.

"An administration that wants to be known for its love is now feared for its abusiveness and control. The ministry is told what to believe and teach or get out. It seems that a minister's worth and value now is his ability to promote the latest teachings which come in the Pastor General's Report and the study papers. If he doesn't actively promote them or shows reluctance to teach them he is often reported to Church Administration.

"It has been extremely painful for me to watch our ministers, my peers, and friends, be called on the phone one by one, questioned and then terminated for the very beliefs they came into this church for. This last month and a half has been traumatic for our ministry as they wonder whether they will be next on the list to be called. These are fine men who served us well for decades.

"There seems to be little regard for anything but their stand on new doctrine and how quickly they teach it to their congregations. On the other hand, we have a minister who is asking a settlement from the church for over three million dollars who has a poor record of insubordination and other problems who continues to pastor because he is a supporter of current doctrinal changes."

Those of us on the inside were seeing a Church quickly reeling out of control. Alarm sirens – in the form of upset members and ministers – were howling as organizational dark storm clouds appeared above us all. This was happening at breakneck speed, and despite fractures cracking all over the organization, the administration didn't seem to care. Even now it is too bizarre for words to convey.

Mr. Tkach continued to the final paragraphs of my letter:

"Yesterday afternoon a regional pastor, a highly respected minister, was terminated in part because he said he believes in the Sabbath and the Holy days and how they picture the plan of God. Others have been terminated, pushed out or questioned by phone for their very basic beliefs that brought them into this church.

"Mr. Tkach, I hope you realize how much the church is hurting at this time. I know that perhaps two-thirds of the ministry cannot teach what is being said about the Sabbath and Holy Days. Will they be terminated one by one? Why shouldn't those who do not believe in the Sabbath and Holydays go to some other church; there are plenty of other churches out there to go to.

"The fruits of the latest changes have not been good. In Matthew we are told that we will be known by our fruits. It is grievous to see the results in the torn families and friendships in the Church.

"We have all had to make choices. My religious convictions continue to rest in Jesus Christ, His example, the New Covenant, the Sabbath, Holy Days, and other teachings.

"You have written that we should not judge one another, that doctrinal differences are not important and that what is important is love. I don't see that in practice. We are tearing one another apart through doctrinal division and I don't see love in how Church Administration in how we treat our people. Those who cannot comply to the new teachings are being terminated.

" Mr. Tkach, I will continue to pray for you. This is a sad day for me. I pray for a time of peace and a time when we can all be unified.

Respectfully,

Victor Kubik

Conflict erupts

Then, without warning, my immediate boss Joe Tkach Jr. suddenly walked into Joe Sr.'s corner office. He often started the day with a visit to his father. He appeared surprised to see this particular group.

The senior Tkach gruffly announced: "Joe, Vic is quitting." Joe appeared to be trying to hide his surprise. Perhaps he wondered why I didn't come to him first.

An animated exchange ensued. The big issues and the big upcoming changes swiftly came to the forefront.

I challenged Joe Jr.: "So, it seems that we *are* changing the Sabbath to Sunday. You've been denying that for months!" He dismissed the portent of this statement, coming back with the comment: "Well, we changed our mind!"

Bev and I were astonished, to put it mildly.

I reminded both men that we in Church Administration were daily trying to put out organizational fires of rumors that the Sabbath was going to be changed from Saturday to

Sunday. There was real concern. We told ministers and members alike that this was simply a false allegation.

And now, sitting in the executive office of the then-Pastor General, we're being emphatically told that this here-to-fore denied rumor is actually true. We were shocked and aghast at the apparent duplicity.

I had already suspected that all that the rumors did not emanate from the church. They were leaked right from Headquarters from advisers to Joe Sr.

At the time, I wasn't sure how much Mr. Tkach Sr. really grasped the fearsome impact of this.

In public and to me personally Joe Sr. sincerely seemed to be assuring our people that that some of the feared changes were just rumors.

He publicly said as much in many church visits. Mr. Armstrong had set a long-time precedent in traveling to field churches and personally meeting with the combined crowds of people. Congregations generally loved visits from the Pastor General, and Joe Sr. truly enjoyed continuing this tradition. Mr. Tkach was an effusive man who connected well with church crowds. They looked to him for leadership. He was bright, enthusiastic, filled with enthusiasm.

But as time passed, he was increasingly bringing up rumors of coming changes. There were rumbles of church leaders literally throwing out much of our understanding of the Law of God, the Sabbath, the Holy Days, clean and unclean meats and much more. The inconsistency puzzled members.

As will be discussed later, these changes had their origins in a variety of settings. Allow me to interject this essential information: in the late 1980s and 1990s, many church leaders and Ambassador College faculty had attended a number of colleges and universities – including non-church theological institutions – as part of a fast-paced effort to achieve accreditation for Ambassador College in Texas.

Where advanced degrees were once frowned on, even openly discouraged, the church now encouraged (and subsidized financially) many administrators, faculty, and employees to obtain masters and other degrees as quickly as possible. This ranged from the University of Southern California (USC) to the University of Texas in Tyler to Southern Methodist University (SMU) and several more.

That also included Azusa Pacific University, a small private evangelical religious institution near Pasadena (which holds to Methodist theology), where several Pasadena-area administrators and employees obtained masters and other degrees in theology or pastoral administration (Joe Jr. himself received a Doctor of Ministry degree in 2000 from Azusa). After the Big Sandy campus closed in 1997, the church and Azusa Pacific jointly established the Ambassador Center at Azusa Pacific University for the continuation of classes for former Ambassador College students. (It is now defunct).

The point? In many situations, contrary doctrinal thought entered from these outside influences, and in several cases was outright adopted, then enforced. For example, even though it is well established that the early disciples of Jesus Christ taught and kept the seventh day Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, opposing non-biblical views from authors writing much later now increasingly supplanted long-proved and long-held doctrines.

Back to my role in the 1990s, I helped schedule Mr. Tkach Sr.'s travels. After becoming pastor general, Joe Sr. had paid off and then sold the church's Gulfstream IV jet, which could only accommodate a limited number of people. He then commissioned the purchase of a less-expensive older British-built BAC 1-11 jet that could fly a much larger entourage. As a commercial airliner it was originally designed to seat 99 passengers. He and Joe Jr. and I consulted about what areas around the country would be best served by a personal appearance about every three weeks.

As the 1990s advanced, the tone of Joe Sr.'s messages changed. He appeared to be becoming more and angrier as he would lash out at unnamed people who allegedly spread rumors of doctrinal changes. People left these services puzzled. What was he talking about?

All of this led to this epochal personal moment in Joe Sr.'s office. Bev and I were done. We were much saddened.

The tense meeting ended, and we made our way out of the ornate office through a paneled corridor. Walking through the open interior hallway architecture of the Hall of Administration, we headed toward the elevators.

A few minutes later, as Bev, Doug and I left the building, we ran into Norva Kelly, wife of senior minister (and *World Tomorrow* host) Ronald Kelly, walking towards us.

I told her that I had just resigned in the past hour. She expressed dismay and sorrow. We talked a bit and then continued on. In a few hours, Bev and I were surprised by flowers that arrived first from Church Treasurer Leroy Neff and then from Tina Kuo (now Tina Graham), an extraordinarily bright and accomplished co-worker from Church Administration.

March 3, 1995 was a hard day.

The Bible not only gives us instructions about how to worship God; it also presents a vital history of those who had to prove their faith in the face of persecution and even martyrdom. As the Bible plainly chronicles, the history of the Church has not always been pretty. Tumult, discord, and division within the human assembly were biblically predicted and came to pass.

Bev and I were now at a juncture in our life where we had to make some hard choices of what to do next. Ironically, forming a new organization was nowhere near our minds at the time.

Many would soon share our act of resignation. Unforeseen events would begin to quickly pick up speed.

In the next chapter I will share more details about how this unraveling process started and developed.

Chapter 4 – Tragedy Unfolds – The Church Begins to Implode

What happened to a once-thriving church with more than 150,000 members nearly 30 years ago? As this narrative history continues, I plan to share more details of my personal experiences about the unraveling process of the once-vibrant Worldwide Church of God. As we advance toward what led to the rise of the United Church of God, I will occasionally provide back stories of the deliberate dismantling of long-established teachings and policies of the prior fellowship. These will offer important context looking back some nearly three decades ago and the relevance for today.



Here I provide a postscript detailing what followed my resignation on March 3, 1995. What were some of our reactions and feelings that followed in the immediate days and weeks? What did Bev, I and others experience?

What would we do?

After leaving Mr. Tkach's office on the fourth floor of the Hall of Administration, Bev and I walked up the hill to our apartment on the beautiful former campus of Ambassador College (the church's college operations and students moved to East Texas in 1990). Our apartment was part of the former 360 Grove Street dormitory.

We had to make some swift decisions about what to do next. This of course included the fact that we needed to move out from the Church apartment that had previously been graciously provided for us. There was a surreal feeling as a new reality gripped us of what we had to do next.

As we neared our residence, we unexpectedly met Randal Dick. He was my counterpart in Church Administration, assisting Joe Tkach Jr. in overseeing international areas of the Church. We spoke often because our two Church Administration divisions had much in common with management and personnel. We had a good working relationship. Bev and I attended the annual European conferences, usually held in France or Austria each spring and Randal participated in domestic activities and events.

A few months earlier, Randal and I traveled together to Uruguay in South America to jointly explore how the Church could fulfill its expanding pastoral needs through training local men as pastors and move away from the costly practice of sending expatriate families from the United States. Our mission was extraordinarily positive as we explored how growing

congregations in South America could develop through local talent. While in Salto, Uruguay, we held a combined service with an independent Church of God group on the Sabbath. Randal, Mike Medina, pastor of Uruguay, and I gave messages in English, Spanish, and Ukrainian. The congregation had many Ukrainian immigrants who settled over a few generations. Exciting things were afoot in the then-forward movement of the church.

But now as I met Randal, I immediately told him about my resignation earlier in the morning. His initial response was regret. But he quickly added: "Please don't start something new."

Here's some background, which I disclose respectfully: for some time, Randal and I had been discussing our common concerns about the mounting controversial doctrinal tensions and how they were affecting ministers and members. We both privately decried what we both saw as the callousness of the few who held an iron grip on the church worldwide.

The infamous Manuscript Review Team

Randal and I both served on the Manuscript Review Team (MRT), which reviewed key doctrinal and stylistic messaging in our literature. The team was tasked initially with updating and improving our published media content, primarily in style. But, as the meetings progressed, a gathering storm was building as the changes expanded well beyond mere style. The proposed changes now cut deeply into our practice and belief that identified what we believed, such as the nature of God, the Sabbath, and the entire Law of God.

At first, Randal, along with other ministers on the review team, bravely stood up for our established beliefs. In one instance, I remember how strongly he defended the Sabbath and how he recounted how, for years, his children would not participate in school sports and activities on the Sabbath. Now, that lifelong commitment and practice was being summarily overturned. His passion was dismissed. This MRT process was not collaborative at all. It was shamelessly controlled and manipulated.

But, on this date we had come to a flash decision point. I left. Randal went on to stay.

No prior intent to start a new organization

"Starting something new" never was on my mind. The choice that Bev and I made was a personal one to reflect, defend, and uphold our understanding of revealed biblical truth. It was not one to deliberately lay a foundation for a new organization. Those who know me understand that I'm not a person who indulges in politics or the inordinate wielding of power to erect something for the purpose of opposition for personal gain. Throughout my more than half century of service as a minister, I have always enjoyed working on projects in a respectful team environment, seeking positive and healthy outcomes. What was happening in March 1995 was not one of those.

I'm very much about people and relationships. At that time of crisis, I thought about the 150,000 members of the Worldwide Church of God, our Vision and Mission, and what we would be passing on to our children. Working on the Manuscript Review and Doctrinal Committees, I felt a responsibility for the environment in which either excellent good or great damage to the Church would result. Unfortunately, the unfolding events led to catastrophic results that smashed the heart of a people and a potential future generation. I pleaded with one of the ideologues, warning that if we stay on this path of deconstruction, we will lose half the church. The response was a shrug and a comment: "So be it." They honestly did not care and were tragically clueless about what was about to happen to their brethren and the Church. By the way, I was wrong about half the people leaving. It was more like 80 to 90 percent who

left and fractured into a bewildered shipwreck of confused, betrayed, and even desperate people trying to grab a lifeboat or floating log in this heaving sea and salvage their internalized beliefs. Tragically, I personally grieve over the fact that the annihilation of the Worldwide Church of God also annihilated the once-firm faith of many, leading more than a few to become agnostic. That is indeed a sobering consideration, for in Luke 17:1-3 Jesus Himself solemnly warns “It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!”

Post Mortem

In the hours after resigning, I felt relief, not unlike the feeling when someone dies after a lengthy disease, where there is temporary solace. But, it doesn’t take long for the sting of grief and loss to roar back.

Here I relate the following events respectfully, simply relating what I experienced at the point of Ground Zero.

That evening following the resignation events of the morning, Bev and I were invited to a friend’s home in Pasadena. There we talked optimistically and positively even though we wished that things would have turned out differently. We detailed our faith and looked to God, Who called us and to Whom we committed our lives, to now guide our next steps. We had no idea what we would do and what might follow.

The next day was the Sabbath, and we walked down the hill from our apartment to Ambassador Auditorium and attended Church services as was our custom. People began asking us about my resignation and came up to express their sadness more than anything else. Today the sermon was delivered by Bernie Schnippert, an eloquent speaker with bright thoughts. But, today, his smoothly-delivered words grated on me. Somber resolve was setting in on my mind.

That particular weekend, Joe Jr. and the Church Administration team were heading for Portland, Oregon, for a regional conference. I had been scheduled to take part, but now all that was history to me. Ministers and wives at the conference learned of my resignation. But Joe and company assured them that “we are working with Vic.”

When Joe returned from Oregon, he called me and asked me to come and talk to him. From personal experience, I knew what THAT meant!

Here’s what this meeting would likely portend: Joe Tkach Jr. and Mike Feazell (Joe Tkach Sr’s assistant), as the chief architects of the doctrinal revolution, often called ministers who became too vocal in defending their lifelong beliefs and who were becoming a menace to the drastic changes that were now out of the closet. Joe Jr. and Mike would talk in tandem with the interrogated party. I was well aware that at times, the session would go on for hours. In this two-on-one “talk,” the interrogated was at a significant disadvantage, knowing that the two held significant autocratic power over them, their life and their vocation. In this phase of the “changes,” a previously expressed “pseudo tolerance” was now giving way to brute force.

Without deliberately eavesdropping, I sometimes overheard some of these heated discussions. My office was right next to Joe Jr’s, and as the temperature of the exchange grew hot, I could not help but hear bits and pieces of the conversations. There was no give, concession, or even hope offered by the two. It was disruptive to me personally. What was once an environment of love and truth and standing up for our beliefs, now became a dark dystopia of despair with people left wondering “how in the world did we get here!?”

In the tag team “talk,” what would be recounted against the minister in question would be the behavioral mistakes of people in the past, logical conundrums, historical contradictions, theological jargon, all mixed together with some smoke and mirrors. During this show, some of our core beliefs that we accepted at the time of our commitment to Jesus Christ at baptism would be finessed away. Some succumbed to this. Others would turn to clear scriptural support to support everything from the biblical understanding, including which day was the Sabbath to the critical Nature of God. It got ugly, particularly with the spreading chatter among the ministry. Core ministerial leadership was fracturing.

Those who chose to stay in the Worldwide Church of God had various reasons for doing so, reflecting a broad spectrum. Some expressed anxiety about an abrupt end of their ministerial career. Others said that God had called them into this organization, and this is where they will stay for better or worse. They would go down with the ship if the worst should happen.

Surprisingly, a number of ministers made immediate 180-degree turns. One, after hearing a sermon abolishing the food laws of Leviticus 11, would deliberately order and consume a pepperoni (pork) pizza that evening. Quick studies? No problem. But not very deep, compared to the many years of biblical study. Other people who stayed back felt that God had a purpose for them to stay even though they deplored and disagreed with the new teachings. A new “cognitive dissonance” was tolerated. As subsequent external research later showed, some people stayed simply because they wanted to maintain friendships and family relationships.

Still others whose livelihood was at the whim and discretion of Worldwide Church of God leadership became hostages. In mid-March it was interesting to see how people drew their personal lines.

I saw many who I believed were afflicted with the “Stockholm syndrome,” a condition which describes the psychological condition of a victim who subsequently identifies with and empathizes with their captor or abuser and captor’s goals. It is also called “trauma bonding” as an emotional response to an unhealthy workplace dynamic. That may be viewed as a harsh statement, but I am certainly not alone in seeing it or concluding same.

An offer was extended to me to go to a tropical location and reconsider my decision to resign. This was personally repulsive. Going to an isolated tropical paradise would not relieve or fix the doctrinal and emotional hell that I was living through. I would not be Faust.

What was that “hell” like? Consider that a few weeks before my resignation, after one of those “tag-team sessions” where the pastor would not recant his beliefs, Joe Jr. asked me to terminate one minister, essentially serving as Joe Jr.’s proxy. But, after seeing others quit or be fired for their beliefs, I decided not to be part of this ministerial death squad. I was particularly outraged at the summary firing of my friend Bill Jahns, then-pastor of the Salt Lake City congregation. He had been one of the victims of the “tag-team talk.” Bill had evidently openly and heatedly objected to the abuse of doctrinal power, giving his boss an opening to fire him for alleged insubordination. As we walked down a hallway, Joe Jr. told me about firing Bill in a detached matter-of-fact way. I silently seethed as he brushed off the sacking with a shallow comment: “I’m sure Bill will survive and do well in another job.”

So, when the invitation to “talk” came from Joe, I declined. I wasn’t going to subject myself to what I knew would be coming.

Then Joe proceeded to ask the question of questions. He cut to the chase: “Vic, do you support the new teachings of the Church?”

Incredulous, I replied, “I can’t believe you’re asking this! Of course not!”

Joe's response was then telling me that I was now removed from the ministry.

That was my last contact with Joe Jr. We have never spoken to one another since.

We then called Doug Horchak in Denver to tell him the news. As I mentioned in prior chapters, he had been with me when I resigned. His wife Tanya (who is Joe’s sister) answered the phone. I told her what happened. She laughed and related that her husband Doug had gotten the same quiz from Joe earlier that day, and that he flunked too! In this inquisition there was no favoritism to family or friends!

Tanya proved to be a source of encouragement over the next few weeks. She would cheer me up by playing a musical riff from a recently released album by the Eagles called *When Hell Freezes Over* titled “Get Over It.” She would occasionally call me in the mornings and tell me it was time for my song. It was dark humor, but those were dark times.

The Well

Here I would like to respectfully relate another incident. A few days later Richard Rice and his wife Virginia invited Bev and me to come to their home for dinner and for a Bible Study. Mr. Rice was a respected and responsible minister as well as the manager of the massive mail processing department of the Worldwide Church of God. He was previously our neighbor when we lived in the hilly neighborhood above the Rose Bowl stadium in Pasadena. We always maintained a cordial relationship. When some of tremors of the changes started shaking doctrinal ground we would discuss its effect on the Church he seemed sympathetic to the alien assault on Church doctrine.

But now he wanted to tell me something important. As dinner progressed, he started telling me how he was coming around to embracing the new understanding. He told me how it was not easy to believe this, but he told me what he did and how I might follow.

While I deeply respected Mr. Rice, who had once been ordained an evangelist, the subsequent discussion grew unusual, even peculiar. Mr. Rice said it’s not always easy to see Jesus. He indicated that I had not understood who Jesus was and that I needed to find Him. He then told Bev and me that we I needed to look into a deep dark well. Keep looking, keep staring, he said. If we did this, “You will then begin to see Jesus appear.”

We felt very awkward upon hearing this. Mr. Rice was a person of reason and decency. And now this? It was frightening to hear people that we had respected over the years start talking in such a manner.

What had unraveled first were cracks, tremors, leaks combined with an invasion of strange thought. But now emerged a binary decision: remain or exit.

Chapter 5 – The Crisis Deepens – A Dark Time of Hard Decisions

As we advance toward what led to the rise of the United Church of God, I will occasionally provide back stories of the deliberate dismantling of long-established teachings and policies of the prior fellowship. These will offer important context looking back some nearly three decades ago and the relevance for today.

Here I continue to provide a postscript detailing what followed my resignation on March 3, 1995. What were some of our reactions and feelings that followed in the immediate days and weeks? What did Bev, I and others experience? Then in the next chapters, I plan to return to the developments leading to the biggest split in the history of the Worldwide Church of God as witnessed from my firsthand perspective at the Ground Zero of events.

The Nature of God controversy

Here is a critical sequence. The ministry had been prepped for dramatic change during conferences held in 1993 and 1994. Kyriakos J. Stavrinides, a church theologian and classics professor previously teaching at Ambassador College, played a pivotal role. I first became acquainted with him when I was a student at Ambassador College in Bricket Wood, England.

A person of Greek descent, his cognitive and cultural roots were embedded in Orthodox theological thought. During these ministerial seminars, he made presentations lasting several days – some even all day long – about the Nature of God, together with a series of illustrations and charts.

As many could attest, “Dr. Stav,” as he was informally known, was very forceful and dogmatic in his presentations. The upshot? Ministers were being indoctrinated for the very first time about concepts opposing the bedrock of biblical understanding. These included new introductions about the non-biblical Trinity, heaven and many other protestant doctrines taught by mainstream Christianity.

While Dr. Stav initially stopped short of actually stating that church doctrine would now require us to “believe” in the Trinity, he did shove ministers half-way there. He described God as a hypostasis, a definition introducing God as an “underlying reality or substance.” God was not a “person.”

He drew blackboard depictions of thought above a line defining what was stated in the Bible and what was below the line, which was not explicitly biblically stated. The Trinity obviously fit here in the latter category. For many, Dr. Stav was intimidating in his teaching. We all knew that he could not be so relentlessly forthright without the backing of the church’s highest leadership. While he fielded questions, he brusquely told the ministry that he knew all the scriptural arguments and that there was nothing he couldn’t answer, so beware! If the comment was meant to be humorous, it certainly fell short.

I would like to acknowledge one person who openly posed many questions to Dr. Stav during this time: my wife Bev. This of course long predated my resignation from Church Administration. As many could recall, Bev would ask question after question. These repeated lines of questioning once resulted in Joe Jr. writing to her directly, alleging that her problem was that she was indulging in the logical fallacy of “arguing from silence” (*argumentum ex silentio*), where a conclusion is based on “silence,” that is, lack of evidence. Of course, “arguing from silence” apparently was perfectly all right if once needed such a tool to fit

one's purported thesis for dramatic doctrinal change like the Trinity. This sort of illogical doublespeak was served up daily.

When the Church began hearing about God somehow being a "hypostasis," many were uneasy and troubled. When we pray, we often imagine God with human-like features as described in the Bible. After all, we are created in his image. Now, according to the "hypostasis" quasi-teaching, God is some kind of shapeless ethereal "blob." This disturbed minister and member alike. But, no worries, there was, according to the ever-shifting doctrinal fuzziness, a quick fix. There was a "spiritual workaround." To make things more doctrinally palpable, if one really "needed" to have a person to be prayed to, then "go for it!" It was a hopeless muddle.

What made things worse was the fact that Joe Jr. and Mike and never really wanted the hypostasis concept as the final teaching on the Nature of God. A "hypostasis" proposition represented old, outdated theology and wouldn't really fly in the mainstream world. But it served as a stepping stone to the Trinity doctrine where three persons "appear" in one where God does ironically somehow appear as a "person." In the official WCG Statement of Beliefs brochure in 1994, God was described as a hypostasis. After all this, it was no surprise that in the next year's revision it was blatantly stated that God *was* a Trinity.

Drawing fire

Earlier, pre-resignation, after one of the MRT meetings, Joe Jr. was exasperated with me. I wasn't playing ball with the proposed changes. Joe. Jr. snapped at me: "Vic, we need your help to help the Church cross the river. We're halfway there and you're not helping." I sure wasn't. An unnecessary and manmade spiritual crisis was on the rise.

I knew we were treading through water, but I felt more like we were drowning rather than reaching the other side. I was never in a meeting where any plan for sweeping doctrinal change was openly discussed or evaluated. No one openly gave assignments about who does what to throw cherished beliefs under the bus. That would have resulted in open conflict that would have engulfed the then-present administration. Instead, it was more subtle, especially at the beginning. The sweeping changes were fomented and tightly controlled by a few, who only doled out pieces of the plan for change as it unfolded. Mr. Tkach Sr. commented to us that what we were doing was tantamount boiling a frog in hot water by putting the frog into room temperature water and slowly turning up the heat little by little until the frog got comfortable and then proceeded to be boiled. However, if we threw the frog into boiling water, it would jump out. He illustrated what is normally shown to be a devious action to one now that revealed their strategy!

So here we've come to the end of the story of what these changes represented. The so-called "new teaching" really consisted of theological principles that evolved over the centuries, long-distanced from the early days of the first century and the inspired teachings of Jesus and the Apostles. The "new teachings" were heavily borrowed from what previously had become nonbiblical mainstream tenets, which were often transitioned from paganism and metaphysics. Obvious biblical statements about the day of worship, heaven, hell, the Holy Spirit and much more were redefined and recast. Some of the teaching is seminary level; other is imagination and speculation.

Meanwhile in 1995, the time of the biblical Passover was drawing nigh. Bev and I wondered, where would we be keeping it? In the future, where would we even go to Church? Ironically, apart from the "new teachings," a "new exodus" was indeed beginning to

manifest itself at this time of year. There was no pathway defined out this confusion, except to continue to hold fast to biblical teachings and trust God. The coming chapters will tell more of this story.

I conclude this installment with one personally painful incident. In the weeks following, many more ministers elected to follow biblical truths and eschew the “new teachings.” Some were fired from employment, some forced to “retire,” many who outright resigned. Efforts at a “peaceful” transition were spurned. Most were “disfellowshipped,” heightening tensions and turmoil even further. Then, unexpectedly, a list of disfellowshipped ministers (that included me) was distributed and directed to be read in all churches around the world. Whether this was a futile effort at damage control I know not. But what I do know was that my son Michael was sitting in service in Minneapolis when he heard his Dad’s name read and marked. Shocked and disillusioned, he left before the final song. He was not to return to Church for quite some time. The spiritual damage was literally ripping people’s lives apart, including friends and families. It was an unforeseen tragedy of a high order.

To conclude this chapter, here is the casualty list of disfellowshipped ministers in 1995 as reported in the *In*



Transition newspaper:

List of ministers fired and retired from Worldwide Church of God

Adair, Colin--Regional Director, Caribbean	Clark, Tom--Big Sandy (A.M.), Texas
Anderson, John	Crow, Richard--Dayton, Ohio
Antion, Gary	D'Alessandro, Randy--Marietta, Ohio
Apartian, Dibar--Pasadena (P.M.), Calif.	Damour, Tom--Champaign, Ill.
Bald, John--Corpus Christi, Texas	Davis, Howard--Portland, Ore.
Beam, Rick	Delap, George--Scotland
Berg, Wilbur--Blackfoot, Idaho	Demarest, Roy--Port Orange, Fla.
Beyersdorfer, Karl--Joplin, Mo.	Dick, Bob--Seattle, Wash.
Billingsley, Alton--Stockton, Calif.	Dove, Roy--Durango, Colo.
Bosserman, Tony--Sacramento (North), Calif.	Duncan, Richard--Salem, Ore.
Bradford, Bill	Dunlap, Richard--Lawton, Okla.
Bryce, Charles--Charleston, S.C.	Dunlap, Wayne--Eureka, Calif.
Buchanan, Steve--Tucson, Ariz.	Elliott, John--Cincinnati (Central), Ohio
Budge, Ted	Elliott, Rob--Big Sandy (P.M.), Texas
Burson, David--Kansas City (East P.M.), Mo.	Engelbart, Ozzie
Butler, Bill	Evans, Dave
Cafourek, John--Olympia, Wash.	Fenchel, Matt--Germany
Carey, Todd--Indianapolis (South), Ind.	Foster, Roger--Phoenix (North), Ariz.
Chapman, Jim--Chico, Calif.	Franks, Jim--Houston (North), Texas
Cisneros, Herbert--El Salvador	Giese, Ken--Big Sandy (P.M.), Texas
	Gore, Bruce--San Diego, Calif.
	Greer, Lambert--Louisville, Ky.
	Greider, Larry--Belleville, Ill.

Gully, Mark--Waco, Texas
 Hall, Dan
 Hampton, Arnold--Baltimore, Md.
 Hanisko, Mike--Sarasota, Fla.
 Hargrove, Vernon--Hammond, Ind.
 Havir, Dave--Big Sandy (A.M.), Texas
 Hogberg, Gene--Pasadena (P.M.), Calif.
 Holladay, Roy--Fort Myers, Fla.
 Hooser, Don--Dallas (South), Texas
 Horchak, Doug--Fort Collins, Colo.
 Hornor, Noel--Portland (West), Ore.
 Hulme, David--Pasadena (P.M.), Calif.
 Jacobs, Bill--National YOU Coordinator
 Jahns, Bill--Salt Lake City, Utah
 Johnson, Doug
 Johnson, Greg--Cleveland (West), Ohio
 Jones, Bob--Jacksonville, Fla.
 Kaplan, Mark D.
 Kilough, Clyde--Akron, Ohio
 Knapp, Mitch--St. Paul, Minn.
 Kobernat, Randy--Tallahassee, Fla.
 Kubik, Vic--Church Administration
 Langarica, Saul--Guatemala
 Laughlin, Ron
 League, Bob
 LeBlanc, Steve--Modesto, Calif.
 Lochner, Otto--Columbia, S.C.
 Luecke, Paul--Bismarck, N.D.
 Luker, Dennis--Garden Grove, Calif.
 Marshall, Graemme
 Martin, Ken--Macon, Ga.
 Masterson, Mark
 McCrady III, Frank
 McNair, Burk--San Antonio (West),
 Texas
 McNeely, Darris--Indianapolis (South),
 Ind.
 Mickelson, Mark--Lubbock, Texas
 Millich, Rand--Hattiesburg, Miss.
 Mills, David--Charleston, W.Va.
 Moody, Steve--San Antonio (East), Texas
 Myers, Dave--Houston (Southwest),
 Texas
 Myers, Norm--Kenosha, Wis.
 Myers, Steve--New Orleans, La.
 Neff, Larry
 Noel, Eugene--Columbus (East), Ohio
 Nutzman, Steve
 Orchard, Brian--Pasadena (AM), Calif.
 Parks, Cliff--San Antonio (West), Texas
 Peoples, Bob--Abilene, Texas
 Petty, Gary--Janesville, Wis.
 Pinelli, Richard--Indianapolis (North),
 Ind.
 Rand, Dick--Midland, Texas
 Register, David--Boston, Mass.
 Reyes, Camilo--Albany, Ore.
 Rhodes, Harold--Pensacola, Fla.
 Rhodes, Melvin--Lansing, Mich.
 Rodzaj, Robert--Cleveland (East), Ohio
 Roybal, Larry--Mexico City
 Schreiber, Randy--Reno, Nev.
 Schurter, Dale
 Seelig, Gerald
 Segall, Stuart--Sedro-Woolley, Wash.
 Seigle, Mario--Chile
 Servidio, Jim--Minneapolis (North),
 Minn.
 Sexton, Rex--Soldotna, Alaska
 Shafer, Steve--Flint, Mich.
 Sheppherd, Steve--Elkhart, Ind.
 Sidars, Steve
 Smith, Carlton--Visalia, Calif.
 Smith, Gary--Chillicothe, Ohio
 Smith, Harold--Pasco, Wash.
 Smith, Ron--West Palm Beach, Fla.
 Stiver, Randy--Roseburg, Ore.
 Swenson, Guy--Church administration
 Taylor, Brit
 Teitgen, Herb--Sioux Falls, S.D.
 Thompson, Dick--Buford, Ga.
 Treybig, David--Spokane, Wash.
 Treybig, Ken
 Tuck, Jim--Phoenix (East), Ariz.
 Turk, Tom--Denver (South), Colo.
 Veal, Cliff--St. Cloud, Minn.
 Walden, Keith--Austin, Texas
 Walker, Larry--El Paso, Texas
 Walker, Leon--Regional Director, Spanish
 Wallen, Ron--Jackson, Miss.
 Waterhouse, Don--Tampa, Fla.
 Waterhouse, Gerald--Port St. Lucie, Fla.
 Webber, Robin--Garden Grove, Calif.
 Weinland, Ron--Toledo, Ohio
 Welch, Mark
 Welty, Lyle--Cleveland (East), Ohio
 West, Roger--Cape Girardeau, Mo.

Weston, Gerald--Kansas City (East P.M.),
Mo.
Williams, Earl--Atlanta (East), Ga.
White, Glen--Clarkston, Wash.
Williams, Jack--Bend, Ore.

Winnail, Doug--Ambassador University
Wooten, Ray--Birmingham, Ala.
Zehrunge, Warren--Little Rock, Ark.
Zimmerman, Chuck--Phoenix (West),
Ariz.

Chapter 6 – In the Beginning It Was Very Good

In this chapter, I would like to rewind the clock by five years to 1990. Many people associated with the Church of God community today perhaps have less familiarity with what life was like serving in Pasadena and other areas of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG).



Ironically, California is known for earthquakes. The events of 1995 could be likened like a massively destructive 8.0 quake that shook the Church and its multiple thousands of believing brethren, with multiple aftershocks felt around the world!

So, let's now go back to where I entered Ground Zero. In the beginning, as can be said, it was very good.

The Phone Call

The phone rang as snow flurries were flying on a wintry February 1990 day. As I gazed out my office window from our Anoka, Minnesota home, I heard the familiar ring. There were, of course, no cell phones in those days. Little did I know that the call ringing in on our landline would change my life.

“Hello, this is Joe Tkach, Jr. calling for Victor Kubik.”

“Hello. This is he,” I replied. Joe Tkach Jr. was the Director of Church Administration for the Worldwide Church of God. Shortly after his dad became Pastor General (after the death of Herbert Armstrong), Joseph Tkach Sr. called his son from Arizona to first work under Larry Salyer in Pasadena, then to be elevated as head of Church Administration. He oversaw the ministry in those days, so he was my boss.

“Why is he calling?” The question quickly flashed through my mind. After exchanging a few pleasantries, he stated his purpose for the call: “Vic, I'd like you to come to Pasadena and work for me as my assistant.”

I did not know what to say. I was already pastor of three solid congregations, Minneapolis North, St. Cloud, and Brainerd, Minnesota. The state of Minnesota was the original home to both Bev and me. Much of our family lived nearby. We were very satisfied with where we were in our work and in our lives.

It may be interesting to know that I already had perhaps an atypical career with the Church. Given a unique opportunity as an undergraduate, I had eagerly transferred from Pasadena to the Ambassador College campus in Bricket Wood, England. Being in England offered many

opportunities to travel on the European Continent and even on to Israel. While at Bricket Wood, I learned a great deal about the international work of the Church and the various offices that served thousands of members in England, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and elsewhere, including Africa. I soaked in the experiences, perhaps not realizing how that was equipping me for later service.

Fluent in Ukrainian and Russian languages, I traveled throughout the Soviet Union with *Plain Truth* editor and Church scholar Herman Hoeh during the 50th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. I served as both photographer and translator for the six-week tour. Dr. Hoeh became very influential on me personally, and we formed a lifelong friendship.

When Joe Tkach Sr. rose to power, we became acquainted because of our shared interest in Russian culture and related backgrounds. My language skills later opened doors for me to travel to Eastern Europe, which at the time was confined by the Soviets in the Communist Eastern Bloc. Bev and I were chaperons and organizers of three Youth Opportunities United trips to the U.S.S.R. We also attended the Feast of Tabernacles three times in Czechoslovakia.

Two years before the call from Joe Jr., Mr. Tkach Sr. sent me on a mission to meet with the directors of Radio Leningrad in Russia to investigate the possibilities of putting *The World Tomorrow* program on radio. We were also to explore the possible opening of a Feast of Tabernacles site in Russia. Bev and I went to Leningrad while it was still part of the U.S.S.R. Some promising possibilities turned up, but it was decided not to proceed at that time.

In another instance, Mr. Tkach asked me to stay another week after a scheduled Ministerial Refresher Program at Headquarters to serve as a translator. The legendary Russian Kirov Ballet was performing at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, sponsored in part by the Ambassador Foundation. My job was to work backstage with the cast and company translating from English to Russian and vice versa. And in 1978 I helped Mr. Tkach at a specialty Feast site in Pasadena. Back then the Pasadena campus was not designated an official Festival site. Services were conducted for essential workers who had to stay in Pasadena to keep church functions running during the Feast and also to serve the large local elderly population who could not travel to a regular Feast site. As some may recall, back then Mr. Tkach Sr. had the reputation for being the “widow’s minister,” one who excelled at watching out for the elderly in the Church.

As a result, Bev and I were known quantities to that level of administration. But Bev and I were happy serving in Minnesota, very active in the Youth Opportunities United (YOU) teen activities and church life in general. We had no aspirations. We certainly never anticipated moving to and serving in Pasadena.

But this phone call represented something quite different.

Joe Jr. elaborated that the job would be to help him interface with the ministry and answer questions. This would include visiting the ministry regularly and responding to their needs. At that time, there was no administrative platform in the field to supervise and support nearly 1,000 ministers, 400 of whom were full-time (a number of different models had been tried over the years). I was then 42 years old with 20 years of experience in the field ministry.

Bev and I were stunned. What an offer from Joe Jr.!

I accepted Joe Tkach Jr.’s offer, but I was still reeling. Why would he choose me for this position? I was not well acquainted with the extended Tkach family but did trace familiarity

from the time Mr. Tkach Sr. and his wife Elaine were serving in Chicago. Chicago was the center of the church district that included Minnesota. They were both transferred with their family to Pasadena in 1966, the first year I began attending Ambassador College in Pasadena.

While I was gratified with this unusual offer, I felt unsure of myself. Was I up to this task? Could I do this job at the headquarters of the Worldwide Church of God both for my immediate boss, the Church, and for God? Bev and I knew it would change our lives.

I never was what some might have called a “superstar” minister, as some regarded those then serving at an evangelist rank (a ministerial designation not used in the United Church of God). I wondered if I truly had the skills to deal with so many people and in so many circumstances. There were many notable personalities in the ministry who were great speakers, writers, and scholars. Bev and I looked up to people like that as strong examples.

I did have several experiences and a track record that, again, was somewhat atypical. Besides my pastoral duties, I wrote for the Worldwide Church of God’s *Good News* magazine and regularly for *Youth* and an article for *The Plain Truth*. The *PT*, as it was sometimes called, then had a monthly circulation in the millions and several different international versions were produced in French, German, Spanish and other languages. For *Youth* (which included the year of publication in its title – *Youth 81*, for example) the editorial staff asked me to write a monthly question-and-answer section on then-key issues of young people. I provided that service for three years.

So evidently Bev and I had a sufficient reputation to be considered for this all-new position.

The Move to Pasadena

A few months later, Bev and I moved to Pasadena in late May 1990. Little did we know where life would take us. But at the time we were excited and ready to take on this challenge. This was an idyllic moment in our life. Immediately, we saw that Joe Tkach Jr. and the Church Administration staff were very personable and functioned like a family.

We thought we were all on the same page, fulfilling the Mission of the Church, which included every aspect of our life: spiritual, personal, and vocational. We felt safe and secure as we enjoyed being in each other’s company.

Most importantly, my relationship with Joe Jr. at that time was excellent. We had adjoining offices on the third floor of the Hall of Administration with an impressive view of the Auditorium and egret fountain. The campus we worked on was beautiful and so was the weather, especially compared to Minnesota.

From the very beginning, I found that Joe and I could openly and freely talk at length about what needed to be done. He always seemed to have time to discuss matters thoroughly in answer to my questions. I found that he genuinely cared about the ministry and treated them with dignity and was generous towards them in his words and actions.

Joe Jr. was a hard worker. Other executives and staff remarked on his incredible stamina. He was in the office every day by 7:30 am and was busy on the phone or writing. He was an avid reader. He would often tell me about a book (or two) that he had read the night before. He took time to answer letters from ministers and sometimes members with boldly astute reasoning. We would comment that he inherited that ability from his mother, who was of Greek descent, her maiden name being Apostolis.

Immediately in the Headquarters environment, I became better acquainted with the then-luminaries of the time, such as Dean Blackwell, a long-time minister of evangelist rank. We worked side by side in Church Administration, and he and his wife Maxine traveled what seemed almost every Sabbath to visit pastors around the country. At that time, more than 120,000 people were attending Worldwide Church of God services each Sabbath at many, many congregations around the world.

Mr. Blackwell had been on the faculty at Ambassador College in Big Sandy, Texas, and often referred to visits in the field to former Ambassador students whom he called “my Texas sons.” Mr. Blackwell and I spoke often, and with his deep experience he was par excellence in pumping energy, wisdom, and common sense into the field ministry. He loved being in the vicinity of our work group, which included Debbie Nickel, Elana Sargent, Guy Swenson, Randy McGowen, Joe Jr., and me.

There were many others who we were in regular personal contact: Dr. Herman Hoeh, Mike Snyder, Larry Salyer to name a few.

The Church Administration Department had about 20-25 employees. The Festival Office, with its five employees, and a Department who served people who were deaf were part of our oversight.

I never had the slightest questions about what we believed regarding our core doctrines. We were on the same page.

Humbled but invigorated, I took to my work with great relish.

From the outset, Beverly became part of much of what I did and most always traveled with me. Bev has been a great asset and companion throughout my entire career to this day. I credit her for her deep care and follow-up with the pastor’s wives, especially after difficult meetings. Our aim was always restoration and reconciliation, and that often took intense discussion and effort.

Joe Jr. immediately assigned me on trips to pastors and their families. Sometimes, the purpose of the visit was to encourage and support the pastor and their families in matters relating to their work, their family, or health. Those were the best visits. But sometimes the issues revolved around the overwhelming gravity and stress of what ministers are called upon to do: weekly speaking, counseling, managing events, and much, much more. Many of our ministers had teen children and they needed support and encouragement. Pastoral assignments rarely lasted more than five years before a transfer to another assignment was in order. That added to the stress of serving.

At the time, the average age of our pastors was in the mid-forties. When I graduated from Ambassador College in 1969, the announcements in the weekly ministerial newsletter focused on ministerial marriage, babies, and ordinations. Now, it was the marriages of their children. As the average age of some of our pastors has crept towards age 70, the announcements have changed to prayer requests for health, retirement gatherings, and obituaries.

Bev and I have had the privilege of experiencing and serving in this entire spectrum.

On occasion relationship impasses broke open between the elders and their flock. Bev and I were often tasked to intervene and work to heal. We found that these situations were often best resolved within the presence and involvement of pastoral spouses. Involving the feminine element was crucial to solving many challenges, and Bev was most kind and helpful

in this. We worked to improve communication in sometimes subjective situations and sought out mutually agreeable plans for genuine reconciliation. It was both humbling and gratifying that these challenging tasks produced lasting understanding, a change of mind, and reconciliation.

Bev's and my guiding scripture was always: "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy" (2 Corinthians 1:24 KJV).

We wanted our pastors to focus on being helpers of people's joy in the Holy Spirit, rather than be sheriffs (having harsh dominion over others faith and behavior). On occasion, "Sheriffs to Shepherds" actually became our mantra. This was a healthy change and we both informally talked and spoke in forums about it constantly in ministerial conferences. It was quite an admission and change from some previous times in the church back then.

But to achieve reconciliation in some cases took more than lecturing. It required a loving approach to those who had overstepped the boundaries of service to help them understand how they negatively affected people, and then embrace change. For those who had become harsh and viewed as domineering, we did not want to come down on them with the same approach that they used on others. I felt that we had good success as we built lasting goodwill that has lasted to this day.

Those were often tough assignments. But there was a balance to those that were easier. In those early days, working in Church Administration was a humbling privilege.

Manuscript Review

After about a year on the job in Pasadena, Joe Jr. invited me to become part of the Manuscript Review Team, often referred to as the MRT. Its purpose was to review the literature that was publicly distributed and bring it up to date. The Worldwide Church of God had multiple dozens of booklets and reprint articles sent out by the multiple thousands.

The initial intent was to make stylistic changes to sound more contemporary. It was a great project! I was very enthusiastic to have an opportunity to serve on the MRT committee.

Some of our literature was replete with ALL CAPS and exclamation marks, a style that was somewhat common in inspirational literature and advertising in the first half of the 20th century. With advancements in printing and communication, that style was no longer as productive and effective as it once was. Also, some of the examples used in church literature were dated. Fresh content reflecting current times needed to be created.

Our committee were given assignments, which were worked on throughout the week. We then convened weekly for collaboration. The committee included Joe Tkach, Jr., Mike Fezell, Dr. Kyriacos Stavrinides, Ronald Kelly, Greg Albrecht, Larry Salyer, Randal Dick, and a few others, some linked from Big Sandy by phone.

One of the first projects was a review of *Why Were You Born?*

Over the years this booklet has been an influential and highly requested piece of literature. Herbert W. Armstrong originally wrote it. When we first started working on this review, there was no aspersion about the content; mostly it was the style that all of us agreed needed updating.

Doctrinal Committee

As I was serving on the Manuscript Review Team, I was subsequently asked to participate on the Doctrinal Committee. This was a more of an intensely detailed review of what we taught. Often, the discussion revolved around biblical details, such as details about the ride of the Horsemen in the Book of Revelation. At the time, all this was good. It's always good to review what you believe and should be able to defend.

I came on the Committee shortly after the Worldwide Church of God had produced its first comprehensive *Statement of Beliefs* booklet. In all the years of the Church, there had not been such a comprehensive document published. This was 1992. The Church had always explained what we believe in an expository sense, but not in the form of an official doctrinal summary. Ironically, this first edition of *Statement of Beliefs* eventually became the foundation for the *Fundamentals of Belief* document in the United Church of God, which also followed the original format.

It was all good...back then

Working at Headquarters starting in 1990 was exciting, joyful, meaningful, and forward-looking. With all of the challenging but satisfying work, life for Bev and me couldn't get any better. One of our family's personal blessings was that my son Michael was able to attend Imperial Schools, a church-sponsored K-12 private school. He still praises his Imperial School experience to this day. Also, both my brothers Oleh and Eugene were then serving among the 400 full-time pastors in the Worldwide Church of God field ministry. The three of us talked often, sometimes a few times a week. What a joy it was then to have three brothers in the same ministry!

But then, unknown to Bev and me, the dream was quietly moving toward an unexpected end.

In my next chapter, I'm going to talk about how, in this beautiful environment, tremors started, and cracks appeared.

Chapter 7 – Tremors

Humbling and exciting was a personal tenor for me in the early 1990s. The wide-reaching organization that I considered a privilege to be a part of was growing. It had not only survived the death of its human founder a few years earlier, it was thriving. I counted myself fortunate for the humbling opportunity to serve, having experienced a broad spectrum – from ministerial trainee to a pastor serving multiple congregations to senior administrator, the latter a position I had never sought.



But no one could have predicted what was about to unfold. A spiritual and organizational catastrophe was rumbling under the surface, concealed out of sight to more than 120,000 members.

In retrospect, one might draw a comparison to the beautiful Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in A.D. 79. Some 20,000 people living the idyllic cities on the Gulf of Naples in Italy were caught off guard, even though unusual and alarming tremors were increasing in tempo and magnitude. The two cities suffered unexpected devastation by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which 4,200 ft. peak loomed over the region.

The shock to the populace was terrifying. The eruption unleashed a cataclysmic force, ejecting a roaring cloud of volcanic superheated gas and smoke nearly 12 miles into the sky. Spewed out of the erupting volcano, deadly waves of gas, ash, and rock tore mercilessly towards Pompeii and Herculaneum at speeds exceeding 400 miles per hour.

Within moments, the cities were buried under relentless layers of hot volcanic ash and pumice, preserving the forms of the victims and their environs for almost 2,000 years, serving today as a haunting memorial. It wasn't until the 18th century that archaeologists began to unearth the Pompeii site, revealing a society that truly had been caught off guard by overwhelming seismic forces.

Looking back some 30 years ago, these sobering details seem familiar. In those days, our former fellowship was crippled by a spiritual catastrophe of Pompeii-like devastation. Thousands of lives were unended, once-solid faith shattered, vital trust annihilated, relationships vaporized.

The once-vibrant work, reflected in broad scope and impact on national and international media -- together with many hundreds of congregations and multiple thousands of brethren gathering for worship each Sabbath, was all but buried, with little remnants working to pull themselves out of the devastation, to try and reorganize, and survive.

Today we can do a little spiritual archaeology and review somberly what happened.

Like Pompeii, the looming devastation was signaled in advance by a series of tremors and earthquakes. The same was true for the once-vibrant Worldwide Church of God. In this chapter of Ground Zero, let's review the spiritual and organizational seismic activity that preceded the blowup and collapse of our former fellowship.

Tremors

Few, if any, truly anticipated the scope and rapid downfall and disintegration of the Worldwide Church of God. We were after all an organization with a substantial following, outreach, and a caring pastoral support system. We lived in a country whose Constitution protected our right to freely preach the Bible without incrimination.

As I have previously noted, at age 18 and newly converted from the Ukrainian Orthodox faith, I went to Ambassador College in Pasadena California, transferring to the Ambassador College campus in Bricket Wood, England. Fortunate to become part of the ministry of Jesus Christ in 1969, in 1990, I found myself and my wife Beverly at the physical international Headquarters of our Church, playing an unexpected role in the management team of the Church Administration department.

As has been covered earlier (see former chapters for details) the person serving as head of the ministry under his father, Joe Tkach Jr., appointed me to the Manuscript Review Team (MRT). This team was responsible for reviewing literature that we provided to the public to ensure accuracy, style, and relevance.

After a year of service there, Joe Jr. added me to the Church's doctrinal team. That was a humbling appointment.

Members of this group included a number of then-senior ministers, many of whom held evangelist rank (as the church once demarcated ministerial ordination levels) and were considered "A-listers" in the organization.

Here are the names of the senior ministers, all very familiar to me, but perhaps not so much to others today in the second decade of the 21st century: Joe Tkach, Jr., Mike Feazell, Greg Albrecht, Bernie Schnippert, Herman Hoeh, Randall Dick, Ron Kelly, Larry Salyer, Kyriacos Stavrinides and by teleconference from the Ambassador Big Sandy campus: Donald Ward and Leon Walker. This is the senior group that was mostly in attendance in the weekly meetings. There were others, as well.

The MRT and the doctrinal group worked together. Manuscript review often led to doctrinal inquiry. The leader of both these groups was Mike Feazell, Joe Tkach Sr's assistant.

I think it is important to note that despite the magnitude of what was being discussed in these groups, Mr. Tkach himself never came personally to any of the meetings. That was an important, but perhaps underappreciated, first tremor.

A second tremor rumbled as the highly influential Mike Feazell began studying theology at Azusa Pacific University, a conservative evangelical college some 15 miles from Pasadena.

Azusa Pacific's seminary focuses on Wesleyan-Arminian doctrinal theology and is thoroughly trinitarian. Soon, what Mike was learning was finding its way into our formal discussions.

When these groups met, we at first found ourselves reinvigorated as we delved into familiar doctrines. My hope was that we could strengthen our explanation. In this process we faced probing and insightful questions.

Our team reviewed hermeneutics which are the principles guiding our study, research, and interpretation of the Bible. This aspect of our investigation proved enlightening and reaffirmed our dedication to understanding and applying biblical teachings accurately.

I was secure that the beliefs that the church had researched, tested, and taught over decades could and would be further biblically buttressed. Certainly, we were in good hands at Headquarters with all of these theological all-stars. I thought and earnestly believed that this process was critically important for a number of reasons.

Like many others, I didn't notice or fully appreciate the mild organizational tremors that were occasionally rumbling through these meetings.

One of the first projects we worked on was to draw up a synopsis of our Church's doctrines. In our recent history, there was not one single document that summarized the main tenets of our faith. By 1993 we did produce a booklet entitled *Statement of Beliefs*. Later when the United Church of God was founded, this edition of the booklet became the guide for the *Fundamentals of Belief* publication. The first doctrine summary was "God" as revealed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is how United Church of God's *Fundamentals* begins as well.

Shortly after the publication of the *Statement of Beliefs* I travelled to Sabbath-keepers in Ukraine on one of my visits. We had many beliefs and practices in common notably the seventh day Sabbath. On our visits we always spent time discussing our common beliefs. This time I presented them with the newly published *Statements* booklet which they enthusiastically reviewed.

They made an observation about our first doctrine which was about the nature of God. They had some helpful insights. They remarked that as far as biblical teachings went, we could improve our understanding and expressions of the work of the spirit and its role in our lives.

While God uses personages to reveal the Father and the Son, He does not do so with the Holy Spirit. We try to define an omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God with unlimited dimension that we do not grasp with our limited human capacity.

Soon afterwards, I returned to Pasadena. Usually, in our meetings, as a junior member, I did not say much that caused much reaction or stir, but this report to some members of the doctrinal members team did. It triggered some unexpected reactions. Some of them latched on to the idea that we did not do enough with the Spirit of God.

I related that to understand the context of the Ukrainian Sabbath-keepers, we needed to understand that these people had gone through decades of extreme religious persecution from oppressive godless Communism. They spoke of how God, through the workings of the Holy Spirit, protected them from the KGB and the police, allowing them safety. They experienced miracles to be able to worship Him where it was forbidden to meet. Those experiences were a far cry from what the doctrinal team experienced personally in Pasadena.

In our doctrinal discussions in the beginning, I felt that we all were committed to be honest about our inquiries. We agreed that if we found compelling evidence and reached a respectful consensus, we should be open to elevating our beliefs and teachings. That was not without then-recent precedent in the history of the Worldwide Church of God.

For example, in 1974 and later, the Church arrived at biblical understanding that led to changes in the observance of Pentecost, certain doctrines regarding remarriage, and the position of seeking professional medical resources within the scope of the church's healing doctrine..

We didn't appreciate it at the time, given the vast respect then for our current body of theological knowledge and belief, but a deep spiritual tremor was starting to rumble in a now-recognized ominous way.

Here's how that played out. Our discussions as a doctrinal team were at first collegial and respectful. Voices of scholarship and experience were valued. But as the weeks of meetings continued, our talks now were moving beyond making technical corrections and adjustments based on incomplete or flawed evidence.

A new tremor magnified into a small earthquake: we were now moving into the spiritual muscle, bone, and DNA of who we were as a Church.

Mike Feazell would bring up various subjects, discuss them, and set them aside and then circle back to them later. Several topics came up including the keeping of the Sabbath, the Law of God, and the greatest topic of all – The Nature of God.

Seismic Shift

Prior discussions on the subject of the Sabbath shifted dramatically. Topical review steered away from how Christians can better respect and keep the Sabbath day.

Then, the first real temblor hit hard: the discussion about the Sabbath veered off. Open comments appeared about the spiritual validity of the Sabbath and its applicability to us in the first place. This was a seismic shift and caused us to seek stability to hang on to keep from losing our balance.

While I was a junior member of that team, I firmly thought and held that for all intents and purposes we were correctly keeping the Sabbath as Christ and the apostles, and the early church kept it. And I believed that was the right thing to do! There was nothing new in these counterarguments.

Another spiritual temblor rocked the team when the writings of liberal scholars such as Australian Seventh Day Adventist Robert Brinsmead were presented. Brinsmead was founder and editor of *Present Truth* magazine. In the late 1970s, Brinsmead questioned and discarded many of the doctrines that he previously believed in. He concluded that the Sabbath was given for Israel as a "shadow of things to come," but that it was fulfilled by Christ, the substance. The spiritual earth rolled under our feet. A direct path to abolishing the Sabbath was clearly emerging.

One minister I spoke to who at first was enamored by Brinsmead's writings told me that reading his material was like going down a river where the water was turning to rapids with a waterfall ahead. He told himself: "I better head for shore now before I go over the falls."

Randall Dick, in our discussion group loudly defended our keeping the Sabbath and spoke passionately about how it was observed in their family and the sacrifices their children made to obey God and dispense with Friday night and Saturday school sports. I remember the reaction of Greg Albrecht in the meeting which was an uncaring shrug of the shoulders and a few meaningless words.

In addition to multiple tremors, hot sparks were beginning to eject out of the Pasadena Vesuvius. As they landed and smoked in the increasingly open theological landscape, people started to notice. They were alarmed at the theological brush fires that started flaring up.

Soon, rumors started to fly that the Church was “doing away with the Sabbath.” Joseph Tkach’s office denied these rumors. As then-Pastor General, what Mr. Tkach did not know was that these rumors were true! They originated from people at HQ who shared this information with ministers in the field.

As news of some of our discussion agendas leaking into the field ministry, alarm bells went off: "They're planning to do away with the Sabbath!" We had a good idea that this leak was deliberately planted by the doctrinal discussion group leaders themselves. Once out, this change would force the hand of the administration.

In later post-crisis commentary, some of the group leaders have tried to characterize the doctrinal changes as some kind of “change management initiative.” If it was, it was deeply flawed by the subversive and deliberate “leaking” of confidential information to politically position and force costly change. Such actions violated the critical collaborative principles of professional change management and doomed the initiative to abject failure

When Mr. Tkach Sr, was getting wind of the rumors he would lash out at those who were spreading such information. He would refer to it regularly on his field visits to churches in the United States. Spiritual tremors and escalating earthquakes were increasingly in frequency and magnitude. The Church environment was becoming unsettled. We were moving from construction to deconstruction fast. From revelation to revolution.

One day Mr. Tkach came down to my third-floor office in the Hall of Administration and sat down to chat. Both Joe Jr. and Mike Fezell were out of the country for a ministerial conference in Australia. Mr. Tkach and I had a good relationship and now he felt free to just talk.

As we talked, Mr. Tkach remarked how he was disturbed about many things. Recent unsavory trends included a sharp drop in the Church’s income and a decrease of membership and Sabbath attendance. The *Plain Truth* magazine had now taken on a less interesting format. As income flattened, The *World Tomorrow* television program – once the top-Nielsen ranked religious program – had been cancelled. The decision was essentially unilateral. Church members were puzzled, even increasingly alarmed.

The once-powerful global voice of the Gospel was being silenced.

I tried to respectfully tell him about the factors that were contributing to this disturbing malaise from my point of view. We discussed the rumors of major doctrinal change that were circulating around the country.

He knew about the rumors but didn’t seem to know the source. I decided to take a major risk. I point blank told him that the rumors were emanating right from the building we were sitting in. He seemed shocked.

I was personally incredulous that he was so far out of the loop. At the time, I really felt bad for him and the Church.

As he rose to leave, Mr. Tkach emphasized that he would personally address all this directly with Mike and his son Joe right after they returned.

I never heard another word about this again. It was as if our conversation had never happened.

Meanwhile, the tremors continues to magnify in force, shaking the spiritual ground around us. Our discussion meetings continued and the bias towards deconstructing our doctrines was in full force. Now, shocking mockery and sarcasm of who we were emerged.

I couldn't stomach this. My attendance to these once-exciting meetings became irregular.

The truth? My mindset of defending the faith once delivered was not welcome. One of the group, Larry Salyer, actually asked to be reassigned from Pasadena to a church in the field. He had had enough.

One day I asked Mike Feazell directly: "Mike, where is the bottom to all this?" His sharp retort with piercing eyes to me was "There IS no bottom!"

This was a change from the collegial brotherly atmosphere to a vast and toxic gulf opening between those who had no idea about where this was going and with those who knew exactly where this was going.

I told him another time sometime in the future, maybe fifteen years from now, people will mock us as we are mocking them. His response was angry: "And I hope they do!" More than twice that time has passed. What has occurred is a kind spiritual Holocaust or the *Holodomor* engineered by leaders who couldn't care less about the humanity that perished.

I honestly warned them that this would happen. The tremor that almost knocked me off my feet was the fact that doctrinal leaders savaging established belief couldn't care less what it was doing to the many, many thousands of people whose lives were being turned upside down by the very people whom they trusted.

There is a saying circulating attributed to a Communist demagogue: "One death is a tragedy; one million deaths are a statistic." I felt that the betrayed and buried in WCG were swiftly becoming the latter.

The spiritual tremors were now temblors, knocking over everything in their path.

The path of spiritual deconstruction widens in the next chapter of Ground Zero.

Chapter 8 – Open Assault on Core Doctrines Begins

As I write some of the last preamble reflecting the final days of the Worldwide Church of God before the establishment of the United Church of God, I think it is worthy to briefly reflect on the purpose of this history. As I sit and recall these often-painful experiences, I sometimes ask myself: “why am I even writing these recollections?” Wouldn’t it just be easier and cleaner to just dismiss what happened 30 years ago and move on? If there was injustice – and from many perspectives, indeed there was – can we not simply forgive as Christians and let it go?



Of course, we have experienced forgiveness and the healing that can only come from God. Also, many years have passed with new experiences. For those who may be reading this history for the first time, it is important for me to convey that there is no rancor or any mindset of settling of accounts from the days of the 1990s.

But I do want to set the record straight and preserve an understanding of the turmoil and needless uncertainty that engulfed those days. To be sure, there was no preconceived roadmap or strategic plan toward establishing the United Church of God as a human organization. Many people – including myself and my wife Beverly – simply laid the cacophony of emotions and spiritual turbulence before God and Jesus Christ, and committed ourselves to doing the best that we could to preserve the truth. There were many hours of prayers and many days of fasting and supplication by many people in those days.

Even as things were dramatically unraveling in what some remaining WCG leaders later called the “apocalypse years” with thousands of previously faithful members heading for the exits, those who found “freedom” in their new spiritual mindset stated that this draconian action was somehow “worth it.” Looking back, it’s hard to imagine it even took place.

I often felt then that some of the leadership was of a mind that while spiritually bulldozing over tens of thousands of people was “unfortunate,” the end somehow justified the means.

Allow me to share a personal story. As many readers know, I am of direct Ukrainian descent. The time of World War II and its atrocities may be faint words of irrelevant history to some, but to me and my family they remain real and painfully vibrant.

This pernicious glossing over precious people’s lives brings to mind the Holodomor, the artificial famine imposed on Ukrainians in 1933. That famine – where people were deliberately starved to death -- killed as many people as the terrible Jewish holocaust did a decade later.

For decades, the perpetrators denied it ever happened. Even in 1983 when Canada wanted to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Holodomor and asked for cooperation from the

Soviet government to support a remembrance of this heinous atrocity, the response from the Russians literally was: “what famine?”

But several years after that, the truth did come out about what happened. My mother, who came from near Kharkiv – a war-torn place you’ve probably read a great deal about recently – was a survivor of the Holodomor. As an eight-year-old girl, she remembered and recounted well the horror and frightening death in her community.

For Stalin, starving six million Ukrainians by selling off their food for capital to force submission and industrialize the Soviet Union was “worth it.” But, for six million people it certainly was not.

Clearly the physical horrific magnitude of the Holodomor greatly exceeded that what happened to the Worldwide Church of God.

But there were similarities.

To spell it out, the heavy-handed eviscerating and disemboweling of a Church for the misguided satisfaction of a small minority is essentially what happened in the meltdown of the Worldwide Church of God. While this forceful action brought what appeared to be giddy excitement and perceived “freedom” for some, for others, tens of thousands whose lives, spirit, and faith were violated – even annihilated – it spawned raw tragedy that has taken decades from which to recover. The wholesale betrayal of leadership back then left in its wake lasting distrust, broken families, lost friends, disrupted careers, smoldering resentment, and even burning hatred among some.

To go from tragedy to healing requires emotional acknowledgment of loss, admission for what happened to people, active forgiveness, and reconciliation, as Jesus Christ preached. Our Savior died for us so that we could be reconciled to God. It’s the Truth that will set us free.

Forcing New Thoughts

That was a complex ramp-up to our continuing story, but an important one. We now pick up from the previous chapter, where tremors shook the church, leading to the 1995 explosion.

As the weeks rolled by at Headquarters, the tremors mentioned in the last chapter became a regular occurrence. Almost any statement from Mr. Tkach’s office in the *Pastor General’s Report*, a bi-monthly newsletter to the ministry, contained content that either seemed to tamper with our established beliefs or evoked suspicion. Our ministry did not know whether Mr. Tkach wrote his column, provided an outline for what he wanted written, or simply handed it over to others to write, sometimes without his complete understanding. This content was then republished under his name in the *Worldwide News*, the Church’s newspaper. The style of the material was dense and ponderous. Some of the content was what we discussed in the Manuscript Review Team and Doctrinal meetings, but not all. Some of it was strikingly new to us, who were also on the committees.

Theological training at Ambassador College often did not follow the methodologies or nomenclature of traditional seminaries. We had our own speaking style and interpreting what we read in the Bible. Theological courses were organized to drink in the Word of God, not long manmade philosophies or syncretic ponderings. From a general perspective, we believed the Word of God and its applied understanding. While we always wanted to be open to new knowledge, much of our doctrine was distilled from narrative discourse as opposed to a systematic process.

That approach left us unprepared in a major way for what transpired. A corpus of unfamiliar knowledge rose up that assaulted rather than lifted up. Worse, there was an absence of kindness and understanding to faithful Christians who were now openly mocked and marginalized for not immediately jettisoning decades of devotion. It didn't matter what they had been instructed as truth. There was an expectation of instantaneous adoption, and questioning was not encouraged.

Tension erupted everywhere. There was little "buy-in." Resistance to the new material was strong. The promoters of the new "knowledge" and instructional material imagined widespread acceptance of new teachings. The rising volume of chatter in the ministry confirmed otherwise.

One day, after one of our MRT meetings in Pasadena, I walked down the steps of Ambassador Hall back to the Hall of Administration with Mike Feazell, Mr. Tkach Sr.'s chief assistant and a person who held deep power and influence in those days. Mike expressed to me triumphantly, "I think we're ready now to look at what we have taught about the three days and three nights of Christ's death and resurrection."

I was shocked yet again. The question: "What is *this*?" exploded in my mind. We were still recoiling from a list of theological changes and now this one?

Back then, as the United Church of God biblically holds today, we firmly believed that Christ was crucified on a Wednesday and that He spent a full three days and three nights in the grave. That's the only way the biblical sequence of three days and three nights fit into the week of the crucifixion. More importantly, Christ said it was the only sign of His Messiahship.

I thought we were absolutely sure about this biblical tenet. But not now. Evidently, we were sliding backward to a popular error of the Friday crucifixion, one that was categorically unbiblical. One had to suspend belief in the literal Word of God to mash up a way to embrace it.

This was personally jarring. Years of trust and confidence in prior relationships evaporated. This was a direct assault on one of our key understandings about the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. But it also brought home how deeply we were being played on the doctrinal team. Rather than the collaborative process of establishing a firm spiritual foundation – while drawing on many experienced ministers and college faculty – we were being handed a predetermined outcome and expected to play ball. Nothing— doctrine and people – was sacred or respected.

Sadly, it got worse. In one meeting of MRT Mike Feazell stated that we needed to "clean up" the Youth Bible lessons and remove references to the Holy Days and other doctrines. People might notice that formerly immutable doctrines were quietly dissolving and vanishing in our core literature, but that "could still get it in the Youth lessons." That had to go.

United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy

One of the Church's core teachings concerns the promises to Abraham and the biblical identity of English-speaking peoples, primarily the United States and Great Britain. All human footsteps lead from and back to the Middle East. The Old Testament prophesies the future of major nations in the end times. As could be expected, powerful modern nations would be on that list.

In doctrinal meetings, the topic of US and BC – as this belief was colloquially and commonly referred to – arose with the thought of buttressing and refining it with more evidence than we had previously published. However, it quickly became clear in discussion that there was little desire to find supportive evidence historically, anthropologically, or archaeologically.

Some committee members called for a study to solidify the evidence as significant advances occurred in archaeology and DNA research. We needed a thorough and honest assessment before declaring a major change.

Dr. Rick Sherrod, a faculty member at our Big Sandy, Texas Ambassador campus who now lived in Pasadena, was a chief proponent and lecturer about the United States and British Commonwealth being nations descended from ancient Israel. He had conducted considerable research on the topic.

He and John Halford, one of our primary writers and researchers, set out to the United Kingdom to discover and evaluate fresh evidence linking English-speaking areas and migrations to Israel of old. Of course, in the pre-Internet and pre-Google days, they searched in libraries and reputable collections of books and manuscripts across the United Kingdom. Halford was granted research access to the library within the esteemed British Museum in London. That library collection contains more than 300,000 volumes for researching human cultures.

They returned excitedly to Pasadena and shared with me what they found. They compiled a 200-page annotated bibliography of material consisting of about 400 items to review for evidence of links to the Middle East. They were hopeful that their findings would prove fruitful, separating myth and mysticism from biblical and physical truth, thus strengthening spiritual and historical foundations.

They composed a letter to Pastor General Tkach outlining a proposal for further research and analysis based on what they had already assembled. They asked me to deliver the letter to Mr. Tkach to ensure its unbiased transmission. I did, and he read it in my presence.

From my perspective, Mr. Tkach seemed pleased and impressed! He was excited that we might now be able to better and honestly support and refine a teaching of the Church that had been a staple for many decades, but one that had suffered regular external attack and derision. He sounded hopeful about taking the next steps to implement this project with Sherrod and Halford.

The outcome of this hopeful start? Nothing happened.

Sadly, the research project was killed before it got off the ground. And when the subject of The US and BC in prophecy came up in meetings of the manuscript review team, it was met with negative reaction. Greg Albrecht more than once described our entire teaching on US and BC with a sharp: “Bogus!” That was his contribution to any further discussion about US and BC.

At the same time, the church’s belief in connectivity between the modern-day nations of the United States and the British Commonwealth was, on occasion, publicly and mistakenly lumped in with extremely radical groups, some with racist beliefs. The Worldwide Church of God, of course, had no connection with such groups and their racist beliefs and worked to publicly ensure that any misperceptions were corrected. Based on Sherrod and Halford's prior expectation of a lengthy review and analysis, a public statement was assembled that stated the church was “conducting a two-year study” about the US and BC matter.

Michael Snyder, then a primary spokesperson for the church and assistant director of the Church's Communications and Public Affairs department, was often queried about the US and BC teaching, as well as other non-mainstream church doctrines. In answer, he would reference the proposed "two-year study" statement in formal communications and answers.

The fact is, the proposed Sherrod and Halford research was shelved. Nothing was ever done. There *was* no "two-year study." One time Mike Fezell compared the teaching of US and BC to a rotten piece of fruit on a tree that would eventually fall off on its own and die.

God Is...

In 1992, a new church booklet titled "God Is..." was published. It delved into God's nature, character, and attributes. This booklet would have a far-reaching impact, fracturing deeply within the church's spiritual infrastructure.

From the outset, the booklet invited readers to ponder profound questions about God, asking: "Who Are You? What Are You?" It explored how God revealed Himself to and interacted with humanity, showcasing His expressions of love and justice, and examining how these traits affected the lives of believers.

The booklet aimed to provide a thorough understanding of God's identity and role both in the cosmos and in individuals' personal experiences. It attempted to explain God's many dimensions, transcending our limited human understanding confined to four dimensions.

However, new and contrary content emerged within the new booklet. Chapter five, titled "Is God a Trinity?" personified the Holy Spirit, openly suggesting it might be a distinct entity like the Father and Son.

There are moments when the Holy Spirit speaks, but we have accepted that inanimate objects speaking like this can be metaphoric. The Church has never taught that the Holy Spirit is a personal entity.

Before all this discussion, the argument of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit and God's composition was not an issue within the Church. Among other descriptions, the Holy Spirit could metaphorically be considered a type of God's DNA, so to speak. It was who and what He was. It was how He could be infinite, all-powerful, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and self-existent.

God is Spirit (John 4:24). That spiritual composition makes the Holy Spirit Divine. But that basic understanding took a sharp turn. Error was introduced. The purpose of the booklet as many of us understood it was highjacked.

What was added in our doctrinal discussions was that if we believe that God is "composed of Spirit," then the Holy Spirit is greater than God and God is lesser because God needs the Holy Spirit to be God. All kinds of circular reasoning began to be introduced, and so the discussion rolled on to new levels of fallacy and intensified.

Now the argument shifted. Instead of being a spiritual essence reflecting and directing power, the Holy Spirit began to be espoused as a personality with a persona similar to the Father and Son. This was a core premise of standard form Trinitarianism, a non-biblical teaching long rejected by the Church.

It is this aspect of the Nature of God that led to the monumental change. Within two years of the publishing of the introductory *God Is* booklet, the top leadership of the Worldwide Church of God proclaimed the church to be Trinitarian.

That move crossed a major line, and the fallout was instant and profound. As far as organizational change management initiatives are concerned, this one was a full-on disaster. The release of the booklet *God Is...* triggered a swift and negative response from a ministry alert that something was not right within the administration. What was not right was that major changes in direction were deviously disclosed to an unknown or too well-known theology.

In my role as a primary liaison between Church Administration and the U.S. field ministry, I was inundated with urgent inquiries: “Stop shaking the ground! Enough!” We had faced rumors and actual changes, and now this booklet was introducing, albeit without a final verdict, a new perspective on the Trinity.

Every month, our ministry sent a report to the Church Administration in which they could freely comment about matters on their minds. One of my duties was to read all these reports and take a sampling of about 30 of them. I would summarize the general comments and pass them to department managers. This provided insight into what was on the minds of our ministry, those entrusted to care for our spiritual flock.

The biggest and most vocal reaction I had ever gotten to anything was about the *God Is...* booklet, which became universally negative, fearful, and suspicious. Many in the ministry now felt that an elite at Headquarters was manipulating them. Ministers rightly demanded: Where were some of our senior and trusted long-time ministers? Their voices were not valued and subsequently not heard.

One particular month I took many of those reports and sent them out in a separate stack—just the *God Is...* responses. There were about 60 of them. I wanted Joe Jr, to see to the growing level of unrest in the ministry. But he quickly dismissed the sources as mere troublemakers and ignorant. “We need to teach them,” he added. I was stunned.

Tensions continued to flare. Looking back, I marvel at the instability of the day as theological tremors violently shook ministers and members alike. A catastrophe was unfolding right before the Church's seemingly clueless leadership.

On one occasion, when I was doing a week's visit to the church's Summer Camp in Orr, Minnesota, I decided to write Joe Jr, to whom I reported directly. I told him that if I was going to be his assistant and, in effect, his eyes and ears, he needed to know what was going on and what I was seeing and hearing. I told him straight out about the unrest in the Church because of the insensitive way in which the new theology was being rolled out. In the letter, I told him that if I was going to be honest, he needed to know the truth. The letter was lengthy in which I cited the various events, some of which I have recounted here.

Within 24 hours I received a letter from Joe that was longer than the one I sent him. He pointed out all the ways in which I didn't understand the things that they were teaching the Church. He pointed out my shortcomings, yet he was kind as he always was. Joe assured me that I would be all right. Be patient, try to “understand” it. Be open-minded. Those who were upset and vocal about what was going on were just “emotional.”

Objections and complaints were arrogantly dismissed, attributed mostly as people simply being ignorant, no matter who they were. It could have been the original graduates of

Ambassador College going back to 1951 who were taught personally by Herbert Armstrong. No one was exempt.

Church leadership under Mr. Tkach was determined to remake the Church against all odds. They thought that if they just kept after everyone with a barrage of papers, articles sermons, and endless cajoling, they would eventually break through and prevail.

The End of the Doctrinal Team

Agenda items for the doctrinal committee were continually being introduced. As I have written previously, it was good to examine what we believed and why.

But, then came a highly confidential paper to our doctrinal committee. The paper took further bolder steps to bring personhood to the Holy Spirit and align it as co-equal with God the Father and the Son. Conversations in the doctrinal meetings were uncomfortable. It was becoming evident that there was a trajectory for this discussion with a landing zone and impact not certain. The momentum was unstoppable.

Dr. Don Ward, Ambassador College President, was assigned to research and author a short paper on John 17 explaining what Christ meant when He said, "The Father and I are one." The passage was: "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (John 17:22-23)

Dr. Ward responded quickly with the answer we had known and believed: While being separate entities, the Father and Jesus were unified in purpose and thought.

That's not the answer that Mike Feazell wanted! He reacted sharply, stating that this was unacceptable. Furthermore, he said that it was no longer necessary for the doctrinal committee to hold in-person meetings.

Email was a new process back then and not as common as it is today. However, face-to-face meetings were eliminated, and all communication would be done through this new form of electronic mail. That, in effect, disbanded the doctrinal committee as we knew it. There were no further meetings, and whatever other written communications there were, I was not part of them.

Sabbatarian video

Here is a story that is not commonly known. A very telling event occurred in the summer of 1994 when we sent Ambassador College students to Ukraine to work with Sabbath-keepers to teach English as a Second Language.

In the pre-Internet days, we learned of and communicated with Eastern European Sabbath-keepers. Here was a religious community of more than 10,000 people spanning Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania. We shared a similar understanding of the Sabbath Day, life after death, the Nature of God, and many other teachings. It was amazing.

At first, there was a sense of joy that we had found people of like faith in society just coming out of secretive, oppressive, godless Communism who could now practice their faith as freely as we could.

Ambassador Foundation, along with Ambassador College, initiated a major project in 1994: sending seven students on a summer Mission to teach English to these people. The students would live among them for a summer, learn their culture, and teach them English.

Ambassador Television also sent a video crew to produce a video showing our work with our Sabbatarian Christians.

The video was produced, and we viewed it in a staff meeting. It was very interesting because it showed people of diverse cultures working together and sharing their faith. The video would be made available to the entire church as part of a news release about church happenings.

After watching the video, Mike Feazell summarily and cavalierly announced that we were going to scrap it. He didn't want the Church to see it; this is not where he wanted the Church to go.

Mike had a manner about him that didn't allow anyone to challenge him, and no one did. It was obvious that he didn't want public exposure to what we believed and practiced. The entire project involving travel and the filming production was unceremoniously killed in moments. I was appalled about how much power a few wielded, with everyone helplessly standing by. Here, we buried a story about people whose faith was repressed by Communism for decades, and now our faith was repressed in yet another manner.

In retrospect, it seems clear that the church left itself open to attack through the narrative style where theology was researched, fashioned, and formulated and the teaching style at Ambassador College. There was no statement of beliefs that formed a theological charter. That is core to why things were so vulnerable and crumbled so quickly. Toward the end, we developed and published a formal Statement of Beliefs that later became the foundation for the United Church of God Fundamental Beliefs, but it was too late back then. The doctrinal barn had been forcibly swept out.

As I look back, astonishingly, someone like Feazell and other once-second-tier managers could attend a nearby small theological Methodist (Wesleyan) institution with then-limited impact and scholarship (it was roughly the same size as Ambassador College in the 1970s and only began offering doctorate degrees in the 1990s), take a few survey courses toward a master's degree, and subsequently use them as a framework for systemic annihilation of core beliefs. Had the church not reorganized its legal structure a few years earlier to protect itself from external attack, concentrating legal power within the hands of one man, this story would likely be far different.

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, the purpose of recording this history for posterity is to help ensure that people will keep their eyes open and that it never happens again. God's truth must be preserved.

Coming in the next chapter

Events were building to a flash point and confrontation. Also, as it became clear that broad reconciliation or co-existence of theological teachings would not be possible, thoughts were coming to mind about what to do. The next chapter speaks of a number of momentous events that led directly to the formation to the United Church of God.