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Church Sells Armstrong's Works

Nineteen books by founder sold to Worldwide Church of God splinter group

MARSHALL ALLEN JULY 1, 2003



NORTH AMERICAN REPORT

Doctrinal aftershocks

Worldwide Church of God seeks a new start in the face of fresh opposition.

Thirteen top leaders in the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) began discussing the biggie beliefs of their founder and transferring their church into an evangelical denomination. This revolutionary theological shift caused congregations and families to splinter. It also opened a financial Armageddon in the highly visible movement of 150,000 people.

New church leaders propose a physical shift that they say will differentiate the church's future. They want to turn their valuable 16-acre Ambassador College campus in upscale Pasadena into about 1,000 residential units. Church officials are selling the headquarters will secure the church's financial foundation, provide pensions for its pastors, and create much-needed housing for city residents.

"We've got to sell it, we are concerned about the next 10 years," said Bernard Schuppert, the church's director of finance and development. "When we leave Pasadena we want to be proud of our legacy."

But local residents are not ready to let the group leave on those terms.

Armstrong's kingdom
The campus, with its British gardens, stately mission, and world-renowned Ambassador Auditorium, has been the church's home since 1956. At its peak, it housed up to 1,200 students and 1,000 church employees. It was the seat of founder Herbert W. Armstrong's church, Kingdom of the Gods, in the late Walter Martin, devoted 34 pages to the 1970s.

The church preached what has been dubbed "Armstrongism" or British Israelism through its World Emergency radio and television programs and The Plain Truth magazine. Basic beliefs included adherence to Old Testament dietary laws and festivals, a biblical Sabbath, and a missionary duty to 30 percent of the world.

pastor general and son of Joseph Tkach Sr., the man who led the movement to orthodox Christianity. "I didn't have any complete grasp of how the changes would rock my world," the younger Tkach told Christianity Today.

Schuppert began scheming, as many pastors and members left the church, forming dozens of spin-off groups. Tkach's own pastor and brother-in-law belongs to one of the groups.

"It's something I never got any chance on," Tkach said.

"Some people went to high school and college with thick glasses by no less than the devil."

The declining membership, currently 62,000, combined with the denouncing of Armstrong's mandatory tithing, caused annual revenue to plunge from \$270 million to \$25 million.

They'd the campus in an immediate neighborhood of about 100 homes. With its rolling lawns and manicured concrete walkways, the site could be sold for \$2 million annually.



EST. STATES: WCG's Bernard Schuppert says, "When we leave Pasadena, we want to be proud of our legacy."

early next year, according to Schuppert. Before departing the site, pastor Dan Lawson, via a series of handwritten letters who is depending on the sale to provide for their retirement. Lawson, who lives in Tulsa, Okla., is partially disabled from a failed hip replacement.

A retirement fund to meet our needs should be part of the church," said Lawson, who has been with the WCG for 42 years.

Schuppert said he expects the city to approve the plan, but the West Pasadena Neighborhood Association, which represents more than 400 nearby neighbors, hopes it won't. The neighbors say 1,000 units would be too dense, would create too much traffic, and would ruin the character of the neighborhood. The group has retained lawyers and demands more traffic studies and further density reduction.

"We're going to fight it hard," said attorney Charles McKinney, vice president of the neighborhood association.

Many former church members also oppose the development. They say Tkach and company now stand to profit from the sales of Armstrong's followers.

Some of Armstrong's followers believe God will reward the company to those who have held true to the leader's teachings. Kathleen Pratts, a member of the spin-off Living Church of God, said she is following the development. "It's going to be a big altar stone around their necks," Pratts said.

"That's what happens when you take on a power that's larger than yourself."

Tkach has rejected church divestment and has told some former members related to the initial theological changes. "They're bitter because they feel betrayed," he said.

Schuppert, an Ambassador College graduate, said the church will likely move out of Pasadena, where a law military personality with Anne Pacific University.

Schuppert said he is hopeful. "The way to make a transition is not faith-based care, and the last way either," he said. "But finally, the hard realities was the one in our hands."

Marked A line in Pasadena

Church sells Armstrong's works

Turning course, the financially ailing Worldwide Church of God has agreed to sell the rights to 19 books by church founder Herbert W. Armstrong to a splinter group. Arranged on March 12, the 32 critics settlement with a costly court of litigation. It also allows the Philadelphia Church of God (PCG) to reproduce Armstrong's teachings.

The sale, which covered the copyrights to Armstrong's works, includes that suit in 1997 against the PCG for publishing Armstrong's magazine *Plain Truth*, *Mystery of the Ages*, without permission. The WCG won the initial lawsuit, but the Philadelphia Church then a court order for the right to reproduce 18 other Armstrong works. At one point, the WCG said it was fighting the court order because it didn't want to see the heretical works republished.

But here at Westmonte Fellowship, a Christian research and apologetics ministry, said the deal makes an ethical question about the WCG.

"There are heretical doctrines that are destructive to the eternal life of anyone who comes under their influence," Allen said. "To have profited from the release of the copyrights is a matter that would have caused me very troubling to the conscience."

Some former WCG members criticized the church's leaders. "They're willing in effect, to support what they condemn—to permit the perpetuation and promotion of money for the sake of money," said Ingrid Kitzinger, a former Westmonte Church pastor.

Bernard Schuppert, the WCG's chief financial officer, said it would be impossible to enforce the religious copyright violations by Armstrong turn-off groups. Selling the copyrights was a matter of expediency, he said.

"The church has found a hope which willing to pay for material which they think is valuable," Schuppert said. "We'd be surprised not to participate in that kind of transaction."

Marshall Allen

Yankee Stadium strike out

Latest Benke railing reveals deep fissures among Missouri Synod Lutherans

A split panel of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) has overturned the suspension of pastor David Benke for preaching on Sept. 16, 2002, at a 30-year-old event in St. Louis. The panel, which included Benke's pastor, said Benke's sermon was not a violation of the LCMS's 1957 resolution on homosexuality, and it was not a violation of the LCMS's 1997 resolution on the ordination of homosexuals.

Benke's sermon, which was broadcast on radio, was a critique of the LCMS's stance on homosexuality. He said that the LCMS's stance was "unbiblical" and "unscriptural." He also said that the LCMS's stance was "unloving" and "uncompassionate." Benke's sermon was widely criticized by other LCMS leaders and members.

The LCMS's stance on homosexuality has been a source of controversy for many years. In 1997, the LCMS's 20th general assembly adopted a resolution that stated that the LCMS "opposes the ordination of homosexuals to the ministry of the church."

The LCMS's stance on homosexuality has also been a source of controversy in the United States. In 2002, the LCMS's 21st general assembly adopted a resolution that stated that the LCMS "opposes the ordination of homosexuals to the ministry of the church."

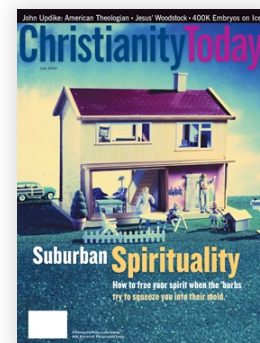
David Benke

Reversing course, the financially struggling Worldwide Church of God has agreed to sell the rights to 19 books by church founder Herbert W. Armstrong to a splinter group. Announced March 12, the \$3 million settlement ends a costly round of litigation. It also allows the Philadelphia Church of God (PCG) to reproduce Armstrong's teachings.

The WCG, which owned the copyrights to Armstrong's works, initially filed suit in 1997 against the PCG for publishing Armstrong's magnum opus, *Mystery of the Ages*, without permission. The WCG won the initial lawsuit, but the Philadelphia Church filed a countersuit for the right to reproduce 18 other Armstrong works. At one point, the WCG said it was fighting the countersuit because it didn't want to see the heretical works republished.

Phil Arnn of Watchman Fellowship, a Christian research and apologetics ministry, said the deal raises an ethical question about the WCG.

"These are heretical doctrines that are destructive to the eternal life of



This article is from the [July 2003 issue](#).

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