

Partial Transcripts of WCG Leadership Succession & Developments

Mr. Aaron Dean: “Accepting God’s Way” @ FT 10/96 Mt. Pocono, PA (Mr. Armstrong’s personal aide.)

I had 12 years of traveling with Mr. Armstrong. So many of us have heard so many things. Our history has been rewritten to a certain extent, been rewritten in a different way than it actually happened, and it’s unfortunate that we look at our past in that way, or that others have done that, ... Many people wondered why we had to go thru what we did. In this sermon I want to set some of the record straight, ...because there were so few people with Mr. Armstrong when he traveled, or around him at the various times he did all the different functions that he did, and he carried a lot of responsibility.

Today, I’m going to talk about the things we’ve gone thru. ... Some of the things we go thru, we wonder why we have to go thru these things the way that we do, It’s painful, ...If you could look at us emotionally, you’d probably see all of us beat up, bloodied and scarred a bit, badgered around, wondering why we were left out there to dry for about ten years, it seems... People wonder why someone didn’t stand up sooner and say something at a time when things started to change. (And, there were people standing up and saying things.) ... I never volunteered for any of my jobs because I saw those jobs for what they were. It was a lot of work. A lot of pain. A lot of suffering at times. You see mud thrown at you if you’re in a position of power, you see people assuming and wondering or judging what you do and why you do it. Those things are not fun! ... It’s amazing how many people we air-brushed out of pictures (due to being disfellowshipped!)...I tried to stay back out of the lights as much as possible.

But as we look back to what happened right before Mr. Armstrong’s death, and you hear so many things how the transition took place, and a lot of people have asked me, Why did Mr. Armstrong pick Mr. Tkach? , (because of what’s happened). Why didn’t he pick someone else?

Now, you’ve heard different things along the lines of: that Mr. Tkach had been **trained** all the years to do this, which **really didn’t happen!** If you really want to know why Mr. Armstrong picked the way he did, you have to go back to a long-running conversation that Mr. Armstrong and I had had for several years. About picking a successor. Because Mr. Armstrong would ask, Who should be in charge if I should die? And I would say, Mr. Armstrong, has God told you someone? And, he’d say NO. And I’d say, well if He hasn’t told you someone, then I don’t know that you have a right to pick a successor! And, that would go on, and he’d say, well, OK, and he’d let it go. He’d bring it up later, and we’d have the same conversation. Finally, as he was having more health problems and his blood count was going down, and he was getting weaker and weaker, and he realized... the Council of Elders had been formed to pick a successor, back in ’79 or ’80, I guess it was, it was appointed, but Mr. Armstrong started talking about the fact that the Council would not be able to decide on someone. That it’d be difficult for them to pick someone, there were ‘certain people’ on the Council who would lobby to be in charge. There were some people who WANTED to be in charge, and he knew that! And so at that point in time he decided that he needed to pick someone. And, of course, I still told him that I didn’t know that he had the right to, but if he wanted to, obviously he had the *legal* ability to do so.

So, he’d pick someone. For about a month. And then they’d give a sermon or do something, and he’d look at them and say, Naw, he can’t be it! And, he’d pick somebody else. Then he’d look at them and they’d give a sermon or something, and he’d sit there and...I’m one of the few people who’d get to watch Mr. Armstrong evaluate all the sermon speakers: I learned what to say and what not to say, from him, because he’d sit there with his TV and watch it, because it was piped-in from the Auditorium, and he’d sit there and say, “They don’t get it yet”, So, I always knew what to say when I got up and spoke, because I knew he’d be listening. But it was fascinating, because he would change about every month. And I began to realize that what God was going to do was to appoint the person He wanted for whatever reason that was! And, he would let him die.

Most of you don’t know that Mr. Armstrong had a stroke about two months before he actually died. Almost died that week. Thought he was going to. Had he died that week, someone else would be in charge! Not Mr. Tkach! But he got well. Well in the sense of getting better, not ‘well’. And so, another couple of months went by, and Mr. Tkach happened to be the one that was appointed at that time, when he did die. And it was interesting. The reason that Mr. Tkach’s name was ‘in the hat’ , because there wasn’t anyone Mr. Armstrong really thought was qualified, because

there was no-one that had all the aspects of the job, there were so many things Mr.Armstrong did, obviously, telecasting, publishing and the writing that he did, and the travel to see leaders, et cetera. No one else really understood his job and could do it, so he knew that. He knew Mr.Tkach was not qualified for it as well! But he knew that the Church was a parent organization. And that that would continue, and that Mr.Tkach was over Church Administration at the time, and that was the **only reason** he was even in the running, per se, or 'in the hat' to be drawn out.

And so, I saw what happened and how it came about. And it wasn't a matter of Mr.Tkach having been trained and chosen for all those years, et cetera. In fact, Mr.Tkach asked me to give a sermon about that, how he was picked and chosen and trained, and I told him I can't do that, Mr.Tkach because you weren't!! I said, To say you were trained for a number of years, would be for me **to lie!** Because, 9 months before he (Mr.Armstrong) died, Queen Sirikit came to visit the campus, and we had seven major functions on campus! Mr.Tkach wasn't even invited to any of them! I said, If you were trained for that, you'd have been there at all those meetings! I said, the reason you're there is because you were over Church Administration when Mr.Armstrong died, and he appointed you. It had nothing to do with any of the other training, or ability to manage, or borrow money, or any of the things I've been told at various times, the last ten years.

There were a lot of promises made to Mr.Armstrong by Mr.Tkach! **Promises** that, unfortunately, he **didn't keep!!** Yet, there's always ways around things, when you are put in a position. And, the catch word of the day became, "Well, you have to answer to God, not to Mr.Armstrong!" Which is true! However, when you make promises, in my book, you keep them! I also made a number of promises to Mr.Armstrong, during that time. He asked me to help out. He said, you need to be Mr.Tkach's aide. I said, Mr.Armstrong, I didn't want to be your aide! Which is true. I turned him down three times over a period of a month. Finally, he made me do it. ... And he asked me to be his (Mr.Tkach's) aide, and I said, Mr.Tkach has his own staff. And he said, Well, Mr.Tkach's staff is not coming up with him! His staff has caused him problems! Mr. Tkach needs the support of the Council and he needs you there to help him with all of the overseas things and the international things, and, of course, I was a member of the Council as well at that time. And he needs the help. But he is coming up into the office, his office staff is not coming up! Which is interesting, when you see where all the problems in the Church, where the new doctrines and ideas have come from! Mr.Armstrong could clearly see that. He could clearly see that, yet he couldn't see what would happen to the Church, because he wouldn't have liked what we've gone thru, obviously. He'd be totally against it. In fact, I'd probably get fired again for what's happened, for not doing more than I did!...

We're going thru what we're going thru for whatever reason God wants! ... And, I could see, Mr.Armstrong's greatest concern before he died was -- he talked about in the weeks before he died, the one commission that he gave to Mr.Tkach, the strongest one, was that the next step of his plan, (he didn't know if there'd be more travel, he didn't know if there was more work to do, he didn't know if that'd been done or not done), but he knew the next thing was the purification of the Bride. The Bride has to make herself ready! ... I'd wondered, How is God going to purify the Bride?

And, as things began to change, .. and it was interesting, because I **was** Mr.Tkach's aide for a time, along with the rest of his staff which came up, so he had a number of aides, and I would bring things to his attention, that in my view would cause damage to the Church, and I would talk to him respectfully, and he'd get mad at me, and chew me out, ...and each time I would bring something up that he didn't care for, I would lose one of my positions, ...

But, it was interesting, that I began to see that God was going to test His people! He was going to test each of you, individually, I sat, thinking that the persons sitting next to me believed what I believed. Well, they didn't! I was there because I **wanted** to be there. They were there because they thought they **had** to be there... We heard a lot about **legalism**, and the people that talked the most about legalism didn't understand legalism!...

I see a group of people who have been individually tested. And, I see that as what God wanted done. That, painful as it may be, and as battered and bruised as we may become, that's the only way really that God knows where you stand!... What do you really believe? What are you willing to die for? People in our history, back in the first century, had to die for what they believed. Hopefully, we won't have to...and, certainly, some of the things we've experienced in the last ten years have been even more painful than death! I know that in my career, I felt that dying would be the easier way out. There were times when things seemed to go so wrong, ... and I thought it would be easier if I just went now. But, God doesn't work that way. Because, the trials you go thru are to purify you, to test

you, and to make you stronger. And, every time I went thru a trial, I would pray and ask God to please make this my trial, and not my preparation for one! ... I unfortunately inherited Mr. Armstrong, who did so many things and who had so many people around him who had **lied** to him. ... When I look at the mistakes he made, it was because other people gave him bad information. I'd like to see you make good decisions with bad information. And, I sat in that airplane, listening to people tell him things, about various aspects of the work, that **were not true!** I couldn't say anything at the time, because I wasn't his aide when I heard a lot of these things, yet, he'd make decisions based on those.... He was kept away for many years in the '70's, for various reasons. People controlled the information that went to him. ... Mr. Armstrong tended to trust people... The problem we had in the '70's was that he was kept away so much... (After 1977) Mr. Armstrong said, I'm only here because God brought me back to put the Church **back on track**. Which is one of the same comments I made to Mr. Tkach. Why did God bring him back to put the Church back on track in the '70's when it was going the same direction it's going now? A lot of questions like that, all of us have asked, probably. But it was God's doing at the time.

I look at the Church at that time, I saw people that were fairly complacent. ... A complacency that has been replaced by a 'first love'! ... It's interesting that when all this struck, very few of us now can't prove what we believe... Now, we're excited about it again, because we're individually being tested and tried. We're finding that 'first love'. ... Each of us individually is making choices... The Church is a spiritual organism ... People can sit and be a member of an organization, and not be members of that organism. God knows who is His. There are certain criteria, a certain set of beliefs, that you have to have, because of your obedience to God and to Christ. But at the same time, God has chosen to test each one of us in certain ways. Some ministers were challenged very early on. Some members were. There are some members in other churches that have yet to be challenged. There are people who still attend in our previous association who still believe the same as you do, but feel that they shouldn't leave yet. And, maybe there'll come a time, soon enough, when they will be forced to do something against God's Law.

I did write to Mr. Tkach and complain about some of the things he was doing, to no avail...

We had to go thru something difficult, but yet something that's so rewarding! To realize that, YES, I am willing to die for something. ... You've chosen to follow what you can prove yourself in His Book. God doesn't want us following men. ... We'll never have the same comfort zone we had in previous times. ... You can't get into the Kingdom, unless you yourself have labored and travailed and know where you stand, and are willing to put up with the trouble the world may give you, and to **know what you're willing to die for!**

Mr. Larry Salyer: "Standing for Truth – A Personal History" @ Grand Junction, CO 12/2003
(Mr. Tkach's successor over Church Administration in Pasadena, after 3/1986.)

I don't know what you understand when you read, "*His commandments are not grievous*", but I remember a time in what is called the Church of God when it was said that His commandments WERE grievous!, on the pretense of promoting grace. Grace is a marvelous focal point of the entire Plan of God, without which we can't live and function. Grace is the dominant theme, in one sense, in the entire Bible... But grace, that is not grace, but is license, is not grace, it is not of God! ... The Church of God began to proclaim that we were short on grace and long on Law, instead of increasing the grace so that it was longer than the Law, we shortened the Law! Bad mistake! We come under the Law temporarily when we sin, and then we're relieved of that 'under the Law' position by the grace of Jesus Christ when we repent and ask for forgiveness...

God's people must focus their minds, their energies and their attitudes on a significant enough purpose, the central theme of God's work, which is to bring all of mankind ultimately into His Family. We must focus significantly enough on what God's purpose is, that our personal differences and our organizational differences ultimately disappear! Because, otherwise, we have divided the Body of Christ, unintentionally, but in reality!

In 1986 I was happily serving as the Dean of Students at Ambassador College in Big Sandy, Texas. ... (Best job I ever had!) But, then, Mr. Armstrong died, and I'd had an opportunity as Dean of Students, to work fairly closely with Mr. Armstrong, because he was always very much involved in the college. Up until then, I had worked with him and around him as pastor of the Church in Pasadena, in the Auditorium, ('80-'82) but the contact was some-what limited. But in becoming Dean of Students, I was actually ushered down to Big Sandy in the G-2, lectured all the way, on how the college was to be run. (*This continues, but is withheld presently on request of the speaker.*)

And then, all of a sudden, Mr. Armstrong died, and in March of 1986, I was arm-twisted into moving to Pasadena to take over the responsibilities of the Director of Church Administration. (The job Mr. Tkach had before Mr. Armstrong died.) So, Mr. Tkach moved into the Pastor General's office, and I moved into Mr. Tkach's office. I say 'arm-twisted' as I didn't think things in Pasadena would go as well as I would like to see them go. On the other hand, when you think there is a potential for 'problems', you don't shrink, you say, maybe I can help solve, or *prevent* those problems! That in a sense, made me second in command in the WCG from 1986 until 1992, with one exception, because only a year and a half later, that changed! But, I stayed until 1992.

Arriving in Pasadena, Mr. Tkach personally took our family to dinner, and we talked there for several hours about the Church, about the work, on following-up on what Mr. Armstrong had done, about what might need fixing and changing and so forth. And, when we left the meeting, I will confess, even though I had known Mr. Tkach since 1963, we left the meeting, and I said to my wife, I don't think he can do this job! But she, being more wise and more Spiritual than I am, said, He can if he lets God use him. I'm not in any way saying that Mr. Tkach was in any way an evil person, or that he had a wrong intent or motive at that point in time, I'm simply saying that, historically speaking, there were complexities at hand that were going to ultimately lead to tragedies within the Church.

Mr. Tkach was faced with a very traumatic situation. He didn't know what he was getting into. Now, some may ask, Why did Mr. Armstrong appoint Mr. Tkach to that job if he didn't have the capacity to do it? The answer might surprise you. Mr. Armstrong personally told me one time why he would probably appoint Mr. Tkach, and this was in the summer of 1985, ¹ not too long before he died, He said, Mr. Tkach is a street fighter. Mr. Tkach will not let somebody come in and take over the Church. He specifically had in mind, believe it or not, Mr. Garner Ted Armstrong! And he said, I am fearful of what would happen if, after my death, GTA came back and got control over the Church! I'm fearful of the Church becoming very liberal, and unidentifiable as the Church of God.

Now, I find that **terribly ironic** today, as Garner Ted Armstrong, who died just a couple of months ago, persisted in teaching most of the Truth, a great deal of the Truth, until the day of his death. But, there is no way his organization or congregation were in any sense, even a small percentage removed from the Truth as the Worldwide Church of God became, by the time even I left it, much less when some of you were able to leave after seeing what was happening!

So, ironically, Mr. Armstrong appointed Mr. Tkach in a sense to save the Church from outside influences that would undermine and destroy the Church. Mr. Tkach himself was vulnerable to all kinds of influences. He at some point lost track of the reality that he had to let God use him, and consequently, things began to go downhill. Now, there were some complexities, as I said, and some of you will remember. Mr. Tkach was surrounded with what had been considered in years before, 'big guns'! ... There were some of the 'old workhorses' of the Church, who were still around, and in pretty prominent places, and all of a sudden, Mr. Tkach is chosen to be the Pastor General, and he is dealing with all of these 'former generals' and he is a 'corporal' who has been moved into the position of managing the 'army'.

Now, that also explains why I also ended-up in Pasadena. I didn't end-up there because I was the best man for the job, necessarily. I had a relationship with most of the ministry because of my work in Big Sandy and because of my teaching in the refresher program, which I did in Pasadena for many years. But, I had no experience in that kind of supervision, and I wondered at the time. Why me? And, I asked Mr. Tkach, Why me? And I said, have you counseled with Dr. Hoeh and Mr. Blackwell and some of these other people about who you should put in this job? He said, No, and I don't need to!

Well, later, it occurred to me that I had just enough credibility for the ministry to not think it was weird for me to take that job, but I also was young enough and out of that rank of the 'generals of the army'. I didn't belong in the ranks of the Les McCulloughs, and the Rod Merediths and the Raymond McNairs, and so forth, who were surrounding Mr. Tkach. So, he could use me as a 'go-between' with the ministry, and I had just enough credibility to make it work, without having the influence to intimidate him.

Now, I also suspect, and in one sense, God put me there to both try me and to be a voice of dissent. Because, I was a voice of dissent from day one! A voice of dissent toward some of the things that were going wrong in the

¹ In June of 1985, a Special Edition of *the Worldwide News* said that in the event of his death, the Advisory Council of Elders would appoint one of themselves to become the new Pastor General. This was not the way it ultimately was done!

Church, specifically some of the administrative things that later became doctrinal things.

Another complexity! When Mr. Tkach appointed me as Director of Church Administration in 1986, he appointed my assistant also. He didn't let me appoint my assistant, he appointed my assistant, and my assistant was Doug Horchak. Again, close friend, but son-in-law of Mr. Tkach. Only later did both Doug and I come to understand that Mr. Tkach put Doug there to watch me! He did! He put Doug there to watch me, which both of us bitterly resented and within six months, Doug had resigned, and moved to Denver. (as WCG Pastor.) Doug came into my office and said, Larry, I can't do this anymore, there's a conflict between home and dad, and you, and the office, and the things he wants me to say and do, and the things I need to do to serve you. He said, I had to tell Mr. Tkach, Larry is my boss, I work for Larry! But, dad wants me to 'work for' him **around** you! He said, I'm not going to do that, and I'd like to have a field assignment, so I personally worked out the arrangements to send him to Denver.

So, Mr. Horchak left, and that left a big void in the office, and a few months later, as I was struggling with how do we fill this void in the office, I went into Mr. Tkach with a few names, thinking, well, out of the three or four I'm proposing, I'll surely get one of these. And, they were all people with history and credibility, and recognizable names in the Church, and I laid the paper in front of Mr. Tkach and I said, I'd like to have one of these guys, and I'd like you to consider them in this order. He looked at it briefly, threw it back in my lap and said, NO! No way! I said, Why not? He said, because I'm bringing my son in to assist you! So I've gone from son-in-law to son! Now, if Doug was brought-in to watch me, what is Joe being brought-in for? So, he brought Joe, Jr. in.

Joe, Jr. had **not** been an employee in the Church, except for a very brief stint as an assistant years before. He did not have a relationship or a credibility with the ministry and he certainly didn't have any with me, and I'd known him since he was a young boy! But, he came-in to be my assistant, and it was only a matter of time before the friction in the office was so great that I personally went to Mr. Tkach and said, I think the only way to solve this so that you're happy and I can continue to function, is if we actually change this department into two departments. Because, Joe, Jr. believes that he can manage the ministry and, I don't believe he can, but if you believe he can, you go ahead. And I will be happy to separate the department into two parts, and I will take all of the international areas, which I've traveled to and Joe doesn't really know much about, and he will have the domestic response-abilities. Mr. Tkach JUMPED at that chance, and said, Great idea, let's do that. Then sent me up the hill to where I was holding an international conference to announce my job was changing. At least I was still their boss. As Frank Brown said, It's the first time I've seen anyone announce his own hanging!

But, at any rate, part of the reason for that, it was not just the friction between Joe and me, it was that I was continually in conflict, fairly continually at that time, even in late '87, in fairly continual conflict with Mr. Tkach, Sr. and, of course, that made it a two against one situation. So, I was continually expressing my concerns and frustrations about certain things, mostly at that time, administratively: the media and the spending of money in certain ways, and the domestic problems that we were creating in Pasadena, economically around the college and the Church.

So we divided the department. Now, I should also mention here that Mr. Tkach, Jr. said, Well look, we've got some situations in the Department that I don't want anything to do with: Imperial Schools, Summer Camps, Divorce and Remarriage decisions which the Church was making at that time, so my job ended up being the International Work, and these added things, and thankfully, the Feast also stayed under my jurisdiction. So, from November 1988 thru 1992, that was my job. Judy and I traveled rather extensively throughout Africa and Asia and Europe and so forth. We never did travel in South America. I went down to Mexico a couple of times. So, that was our general history, trying to manage the Work and the ministry throughout the rest of the world.

What I found continually, in Pasadena, during that period of time was that Mr. Tkach on the one hand wanted to be equal to Mr. Armstrong in terms of the respect and the appreciation within the Church. I also recognize that he did not have the same make-up as Mr. Armstrong. He didn't have the same intellect, he didn't have the same training or education, he didn't have the same history with the Church. So, there was no way for him to step into that role. And, so consequently, he was intimidated by others who thought they could 'manage' him, almost like a politician gets managed.

The very first time Mr. Tkach went overseas, he went to Jordan, to see King Hussein. That was a friendly place Mr. Armstrong had worked a great deal. He went to Jordan. He came home, and I happened to meet his personal assistant, Mike Feasell. I met Mike behind the Mayfair Building on the campus on the way home one day, and we

stood and talked. Mike was just coming back from the airport, and they'd just gotten back from Jordan. Mike said, Larry, we've got a problem! And I said, Well, what do you mean by this, Mike? Now, this was late '86. He said, We've got a problem, and I said, What is it? And he said, "Mr.Tkach can't do this job!" Now, this is his personal assistant talking, a man who's about 12 years my junior, so he would have been in his late 30's at the time. He said, Mr.Tkach can't do this job! And I said, What do you mean, and he said, Well, he just can't keep all this going in his mind, It's not the way he works! Mr.Tkach had been a very successful minister to the widows and the elderly, the needy in the Church, and had been a tremendous example of that in the past. But when it came to high level discussions and holding up the image of the Church and so forth, it just wasn't his bag! You can't blame him for that, it just wasn't what he was cut out to do! And, Mike recognized that.

I bring that up, because in that lies the seeds of what happened as the years went by. Because, in Mike's mind, Mr.Tkach had to be 'protected' and 'managed' and manipulated to do what needed to be done! A few months later, Joe Tkach, Jr. comes on the scene, and the two of them together believed they could manage the Work around him! And so, they took over the management of the Church over a period of time, and I was there, sitting in the meet-ings, sitting in all the discussions, from budget to television, to every kind of media production, to hiring and firing, to buying airplanes and selling airplanes. I was there for it all! And I can tell you that what happened over a period of time was, Mr.Tkach would occasionally rise to the occasion and say, No, we're not going to do that or we're going to do this, but for the most part, whatever happened in the meeting would generally be *changed* after the meeting by private discussion. And, Mr.Tkach began to be manipulated to do things that were not necessarily his initial intent.

But, because there was disrespect for him, because of his own personal weaknesses and his need to succeed in the job, and because of the vulnerability to manipulation, things began to happen that shouldn't have happened!

Now, Mr.Tkach also had a weakness when it came to public speaking and writing and so forth, and yet the Pastor General had a history of writing and speaking continually! Mr.Tkach, rather than use that, managed that some other way, chose to use '*ghost writers*'! And so, Mr.Tkach's sermons and speeches, and articles, were virtually always written by 'others', unfortunately, including yours' truly!! Mike Feasell, Joe Tkach, Jr. and Larry Salyer wrote most of his material! I can go back and pull rough drafts out of my file today of things I wrote for him to present. Now, that's not such a bad thing, except he had to believe in what he was reading and writing, and what we were writing for him, or presenting, or he should have said, No, I don't want to say that! Occasionally that happened, but most of the time it didn't, and Mr.Tkach became vulnerable by what was being written and being presented to him! And so, you had the situation where the younger generation (his son and his friend)² and others of that age group, were basically managing what he was doing.

I was still the 'bad guy'. I was still the guy coming into the office every day and saying, Why are we doing this? To the point where I became the proverbial dripping faucet. And, it pretty much became every day, by the year 1991 or so. I used to tell my wife when I'd leave for work in the morning, Hon, I probably won't have a job when I come home this afternoon, because I knew there were going to be issues that I was going to have to address, and I had to choose in advance to do that, because otherwise, I'd be standing in his office thinking, If I say this, I'm going to lose my job. So, I chose to lose my job before I left home in the morning, but I gotta say it! So, I was prepared to lose my job, and remarkably, I never did! He'd get mad at me, he'd yell at me, he'd yell and create an earthquake in the office to make you tremble, and he did that to many people. He did it to me, but he never fired me!

When I left Pasadena, I finally left of my own volition, because it was impossible to stay, and to continue without the stress killing us.

So, let's go back to this younger generation, you also need to understand, a third party was brought into the fray, and that was Mr. Greg Albrecht, a very good friend of mine, and the Dean of Students from Pasadena, a man I respected and appreciated very much, but somehow he had some of the same approaches to theology and to the Church, that these young men did. And, later I discovered the common denominator was they'd all been raised in the Church from all their years of growing-up. They had been pretty limited in their exposure to things outside the Church, they had all gone thru Imperial Schools, they had certain bitterness and resentment toward the way they had been treated, probably abused by certain people, in the sense of today's term: dominance, correction and public

² This 'friend', in his youth, actually lived in the Tkach household. His mother being a church member with 'problems', the Tkach's took him in!

humiliation. Some times that kind of thing was a factor inside the Church and the school. And so, these men had grown-up with a certain amount of resentment. They deny my analysis, but I happen to know that they did confess at one point that there is a good bit of that in their motivation.

These men were very bright, all academic, philosophical, very capable people! Joe Jr. was a capable man. Mike Feasell was a capable man, Greg Albrecht was a capable man. All of them quite bright, quite capable. And for a long time, some of the rest of us working in Pasadena did not know that there actually was a 'behind the scene' plan of attack: a behind the scene **agenda**, to change the Church from what it was to what they wanted it to become.

One of the first things that happened was that the whole concept of prophecy began to be downplayed, because after all they had some 'hard facts'! You know, Mr. Armstrong wrote a book entitled *1975 in Prophecy*, and here we are in 1989. And, so they began to take pot shots at some of the things the Church had said down thru the decades, and began to pick those apart, and began to use them to claim Mr. Armstrong, as Joe Jr. actually said, in conference with 100 ministers, "I can't call Mr. Armstrong a false prophet, because he never claimed to be a prophet! But, in fact, everything he prophesied, was false!"

And so, it began to be this undermining of the traditions and the teachings of the Church, starting with what you might call, non-doctrinal material, because in some ways, prophecy isn't hard doctrine. We know the framework of prophecy, but there's a lot we don't know. So prophecy isn't hard doctrine in the sense you can say, If you don't believe this, you're a heathen, or you're a rebel or something of the sort. Prophecy doesn't fall in that category, so I found it interesting that it sort of started with manipulation of prophecy. And an undermining of the confidence and the trust in what God had put in the Church over a period of years.

We had doctrinal meetings every week, and we'd sit around this big round table up in one of the conference rooms, and discuss various aspects of what the Church was teaching and preaching and how to refine it, and fix the booklets, and so forth. These things were sort of like the frog in boiling water. It started at room temperature, then they'd heat it up a bit. By the time it boiled, the frog didn't know he was cooked. It sort of started slowly.

Somewhere along in this period of time, Mr. Feasell called me to his office, this was late '86 I believe, He said, I need your help. I said, OK. He said, I need you to sign this document. Well, the document was his application to Azusa Pacific University. Of course, a religious university, and Mike was applying to get into their theology program and he said, I need an evaluation from a superior. I'm not going to ask Mr. Tkach to do this, so you're the logical source, Would you fill out this thing for me? Well, it was easy to do. Mike was a good student, he was a hard worker. I filled-out the thing just fine. Well, then Mike pulls out the next sheet. He says, Now, I've also got this situation, I want you to be aware of. Azusa Pacific requires that to be a student there, you have to confess that you believe in the Trinity! He says, But the way they've written it, it says, I believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and so he said, I do believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, so, I'm going to sign it because, even though what they mean by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is different than what I mean by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I don't have a problem with that, and I'm going to sign it! So, he signed it! And so, he got into Azusa Pacific, and only a couple of years later did we realize, he actually did believe in the doctrine of the Trinity!... But Mr. Feazell became a believer in the Trinity. ³

It wasn't too long after that, if you recall, that the doctrinal booklets and the program began to attack the subject of 'Born Again'. Now, all scholars know, you and I know, that the Bible gives several different analogies about Christians, and that we are in some ways described as having a 'new birth' when we are baptized. We come up out of the water a new creation. We know that we are 'babes in Christ', et cetera. So, there is an analogy that says that we no longer have Satan for our father, as Christ described him to the Pharisees in John 8:44, but we have rather, God as our Father, and Christ as our elder Brother, and so there is an analogy that says we are, quote, "Born Again". But that was NOT the analogy Mr. Armstrong was attacking or his intent when he attacked the doctrine of Born Again, in the sense that you are now 'saved' and your salvation is assured at the time you are converted or you confess Christ. That was the Born Again that has to do with John 3:, where Christ is talking about actually becoming Spirit Beings!

³ The WCG produced three rapid-fire evolving versions of the booklet: "*God Is...*" in the late 1992, early 1993 time-frame! Each increasingly supportive of Trinitarian concepts.

So, there are two different analogies. One is the analogy that we are changed from having Satan as our father, to having God as our Father, at the time we're converted. And, we are babes in Christ, who must grow to full maturity. The other analogy is that we are begotten by God, we are in the womb of the mother, the Church, and that we are going to be born into the Family of God when we are changed at the resurrection. 'Born Again' began to be attacked, and it was attacked rather subtly, and much of the ministry bought into it! ... That became a divisive issue in the Church, and I began to get calls and letters from the directors of the ministers overseas, the regional directors, the regional pastors and so forth, who were saying, What are we supposed to do with this? And so, it began to be the first division that began to develop.

Shortly after that, it was 'salvation by works', and that we *supposedly* taught a gospel of salvation by works, which we never did. And then, it was a matter of was Christ immune to sin? ... I left Worldwide in February of 1994. A lot of things happened after that, and I'm not as familiar with some of those things. But the doctrine of Christ being immune to sin came up. ⁴ Christ could have never been tempted like we are because he was the Son of God, no matter what the Bible says! And what was used, Well, you mean Christ would have been tempted to rape and pillage and burn, like all the rest of us carnal human beings? And so, they painted this '**straw man**', which was a very common approach. Paint a straw man ⁵ that is ridiculous, and then cut it to pieces with your sword, and say, See there, we've conquered the Beast! The false doctrine is obliterated! But, in most cases, the 'false doctrine' had been painted falsely to begin with, and in some cases, fabricated out of whole cloth! Later, of course, the 'Nature of God' thing began to develop.

In 1992, I had been dealing with a number of these doctrinal issues, particularly 'born again' and Christ's immunity to sin, and there were other elements, and in 1992, the distress levels had reached such a point that it was very difficult for me to even go to Sabbath Services, and it was certainly difficult for me to do my job, and it wasn't fair to the regional directors around the world who were looking to me to be their man in Pasadena, who was sort of co-ordinating their frustrations in trying to get answers for them. And so, in 1992, (On my way to summer camp in Orr, Minnesota) I called Randall Dick, my new assistant by that time, who I respected highly, and he said, by the way, you know, you've been saying for several months now that you'd like to get out of here, he said, Are you serious about that?, and I said, Yes, I am serious about that! Why? And he said, Well, Mr. Meeker is retiring in St. Louis, and that's going to be an opening, and he said, If you really want to get out of here, I'd suggest you put your name in the hat! I said, Well, go up to Mr. Tkach's office right now for me and put my name in the hat and tell him I really would like to have that job. I called him back about an hour later down the highway, and said, Randall, What did you find out? And he said, Mr. Tkach said, If you want to go to St. Louis, you can go to St. Louis! And I thought, What a relief for both of us. He's tickled pink to have me out of there, and I'm tickled pink to be gone.

But you know, I was stupid? (Well you know that anyway.) But I was stupid even at the time. I thought, I can go to St. Louis, I'll be the pastor, I'll have a couple of small congregations: St. Louis and Minceville, MO, And, I will go there, and I will teach the Truth, and I will kind of wait thru this, because God IS GOING TO FIX THIS! How many of us thought that? God is going to fix this! So, I went off to St. Louis believing that I could preach the Truth and live in my own little world there. And we went to St. Louis. Well, things were not good, but they were OK.

In the spring of 1993, a remarkable thing happened. Joe, Jr. called me on the phone, along with Randall Dick and Vic Kubik, "Got a question for you, Larry!" Yeah, What's that Joe? Well, my dad finally gave me permission to create regional pastors around the country, and I would like for you to be one of the regional pastors. And I said, Joe, That's ridiculous! He said, what do you mean? I said, Joe, You know that I don't even believe what you're teaching! I'm not even teaching in the Church here what you guys are teaching! How can you ask me to be a regional pastor? He said, Well, Larry, The job has two elements. The one element is, to just go out and visit and help the Churches, and encourage them and preach to them, and resolve difficulties that come up between ministers and brethren, and between, well, like at basketball tournaments and so on, you kind of become the local appeal

⁴ This very issue caused a flap during services in Hartford Connecticut (UCG) in about 1998, about the time of the Dave Hulme splitoff. It's contaminating effect even carried over into 'separated' congregations.

⁵ Other examples of a 'straw man' was that we were accused of teaching that Hitler was still alive, and that we would be sinning if we wore clothes made of two different kinds of fiber! Things we long since had discarded (many decades before), but it was spoken of as though it was still firm doctrine! Stabbing these straw men gave them credibility to overturn Truths!

process. And, you try to keep everybody happy. And, you're good at that. And I said, You know what, Joe, I am good at that. I can do that part of the job. What's the other part?

He said, The other part is we really need the regional pastors to help the ministers to understand where the Church is going. And I said, BINGO! How do I do that? I said, Joe, I can't go and tell the pastors to preach and teach something that I won't preach and teach, and **I can't do that**. And he said, Well, let me make you a deal. I said, What's the deal? He listed off the regional pastors: guys whom, if you had kept up with the Church, you would know: people like Bob Dick, and Roy Holliday, and Doug Horchak. He went thru this whole list of people. He said, These are going to be the regional pastors. I thought, Man, all of these guys are of the same mind that I am, because I talked with them before. He said, What we're going to do is bring you all into Pasadena, we're going to get in a room, I don't care if it's from 7 'o clock in the morning to 7 'o clock at night, and we're going to argue these doctrinal points, until we're all in agreement, before we go out to do anything! I said, Well, that's a novel approach. Are you sure we're going to do that? Oh, yes! So, I tell you what. I'll take it on that condition, because if there's going to be a solution to the problem, I don't want to be sitting out here, crying in my beer, I want to be part of the solution! So, I'll take the job.

So, I was made a regional pastor in the late spring of 1993. We had our first conference in the summer of 1993. So I went in to Pasadena, we were supposed to have this BIG confab. What do you suppose happened? I'll tell you what happened. We were subjected to five days of Dr. Stavrinedes teaching us the Trinity! Because, in Joe's mind, that was the solution. If we all accepted this foundation, then all of these other doctrines would fall into place! It was absolutely amazing! I went in there thinking we were actually going to start to solve the problems, and we received a bigger dose of false doctrine that we'd had throughout all the time we'd been fighting it!

And so, before we left Pasadena, some of us regional pastors, all of whom were there together, went in to see Mr.Tkach, and we made it very clear, that this information **MUST NOT** go out to the Churches, that it needed much further discussion and study and so forth, and under no circumstances should this stuff be dumped on the Church. Mr.Tkach agreed to that. Absolutely agreed to that!

We went home, a couple of months later, August or September of 1993, out came, first of all the Ministerial Bulletin, with the material on the Trinity printed in it. Three different installments. Right behind that, two weeks behind each one came *the Worldwide News*, in which were the installments on the Trinity. And so, the Trinity doctrine was dumped on the Church, with the total DIS-agreement of the regional pastors who said, We don't even believe this, Why are you doing this?

I can remember getting all of my deacons and elders together, we had about 14 of us. We sat around my living room. We went thru the papers and discussed them all and came to the conclusion we didn't agree with any of it. Except for one man, who was my associate pastor, and the factor I hadn't considered when I went to St.Louis to be an island. And, my associate pastor was on the phone with Pasadena explaining that none of us in St.Louis believed in this Trinity junk. And so, you know where that went eventually.

Again, I didn't get fired, believe it or not. In fact, I'll tell you that in a moment. But this 'conference' was laying out the Trinity, we were expected to accept that and go teach it, and of course, most of us could not do that, though some of the fellows felt they could keep working to change what was being taught. Consequently, some of them stayed until May of 1995, when the United Church of God was actually formed. I left in February of 1994, as I said earlier, because after continual discussion with headquarters, I was not able to resolve some of those issues, and I finally called Mr.Tkach, and wrote him personally, and said, I am resigning from the ministry of the Worldwide Church of God, I can not teach the things you are teaching, and so forth. And, that was the end of my association with Worldwide, they actually disfellowshipped me a month or two later, and that was the end of my association.

Now, when I sent my resignation in, Mr.Tkach called me personally, talked with me for two hours on the telephone, trying to convince me that all these changes weren't really happening, and weren't as serious as I thought they were. And I honestly think today that he was sincere. That **he didn't really even KNOW** how much was happening in the Church. The next day, Joe, Jr. called me, from Australia, of all places, and talked to me for over two hours, which must have been a significant expense to the Church, to try to convince me that I should 'hang on' and stay with it, because, sooner or later, I would understand it! Think that didn't scare me? I wasn't prepared to understand it.

These things were happening. The first shots across the bow actually happened in terms of doctrinal deviations, started happening in about 1988. You wouldn't have known anything about that, probably. 1989, you probably still wouldn't have known, 1990, 91, 92. By the time I left in 1994 there was severe things going on behind the scenes, but the Church had been only 'nibbled at' with 'born again' and a little bit of 'Christ couldn't sin' type things. And so, the intent was to undermine the tradition and the history of the Church. The great crisis in the Church was not caused by any one specific doctrinal change. The Church could have weathered a change like that, even as we had weathered Pentecost and Divorce and Remarriage, and things like that. We could have weathered that.

No, the crisis was the breaking of **trust** between the ministry and the brethren, between the ministry and each other, between the ministry and the administration, between brethren and brethren, and even within families. And today, some of us have families, parts of our families, who are in other groups, other organizations, who believe significantly different than we believe. The great crisis in the Church was fomented by sowing seeds of discord, which God says He HATES! The antithesis of sowing seeds of discord is sowing love, and care, and outgoing concern and unity and peace thru the Spirit of God working in the mind, and in the Law of God working in our minds to accomplish His purpose. When there was no longer credibility in the Truth, people scattered to the four winds, looking for a haven. Looking for a place to hide, looking for a place to sort of regroup.

In a thumbnail sketch I'll give you. I left Worldwide in February of 1994, having been in St.Louis 18 months, and seeing that that wasn't going to work, I resigned. At the same time, others were leaving the Church, not because of me. I did not stand up in the pulpit and say, Come and follow me, at all. In fact, the next Sabbath, I met in the home of another person who had seven or eight people there and we sat around and visited for the Sabbath Day. The next week we had 16 or 20 people who met for a little Bible Study, and after 2 or 3 weeks, we were up to about 25 or 30 people who were looking for a place to 'flee' Worldwide in the Spring of 1994! That was because we had been preaching the Truth in that area. And so, ultimately, we ended up with meetings in my house. We did not organize any sort of organization, we did not create any kind of leadership structure, we simply met in my house and built our numbers up to about 45 co-operative brethren, and then we said to ourselves, You know, we can't be God's whole Church. We can't be the only people who are living by the Truth. There must be other people living the Truth, Let's go find them.

So, we did some research and we looked about, and we saw people that were doing various things, and we found those with whom we could not agree with. We did think that we could agree with, and certainly agreed with the doctrinal positions of the Global Church of God under Dr. Meredith. And so, after going and interviewing him personally and discussing his purpose and plans, we chose, entirely, all 45 of us, to become part of the Global Church of God. Well, immediately they offered me a pastorate, and I began to work for the Global Church of God and served the entire Midwest... I worked with the Global Church of God until 1998, when Mr. Meredith then, and our Council had significant problems. I won't go into those, but we parted company. We retained the name Global Church of God, and Mr. Meredith started the Living Church of God. And, we continued the Global Church of God for another year, before we went bankrupt, folded that corporation up, and then started a new organization called the Church of God – A Christian Fellowship, and immediately began to look to how can we find other brethren who are serving God so we can become a part of, so that we can all work together and share the Truth and the love that God has given us. And we ultimately discussed that with the United Church of God, and decided that we were in harmony. There were a few conflicts, and we ironed those out, and we threw our lot in with the United Church of God, and since that time the Church of God – A Christian Fellowship ceased to exist and we became part of United. So, that's how we got here. It's a long funny route, but I wanted to share with you some of the events and the pain of what was going-on in Pasadena long before whatever time you ended up with your legendary conflict, here in Grand Junction, at the Feast in 2002.

Let's conclude with 1st John 1:5, "This is the message that we have heard of Him, That God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, cleanses us from all sin."... If my fellowship is with God in Christ, then I ought to be able to have fellowship with everybody else who has fellowship with God in Christ. In other words, that love and unity that we talked about earlier comes thru that fellowship with the central source. In Ephesians 4:13 "Until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." That's where we must get to... And we've all been thru the next verse, "That we be henceforth no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men in cunning craftiness,

whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” Was there some of that? Oh, you bet there was! You and I were deceived and lied to and dragged along, manipulated and confused, until we weren’t quite sure what to believe. But, that isn’t God’s way. We need to instead, verse 15, “Speaking the Truth in love and grow up in Him in all things which is the head, even Christ.”... Satan the Devil, thru men, tried to take our crown...

Aaron Dean, aide to Herbert Armstrong and Joseph Tkach Sr., speaks:

(In-Transition, 12/96)

By Aaron Dean

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It wasn't hard to know who that was.

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

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

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

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

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

Serving from scratch

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

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

I also ended up doing some setup, hotel arrangements, customs-basically I was the embassy for the work. You could also say I was the gofer, because I was the one everybody always said go for this, go for that. It was an interesting time in my life and provided me with a lot of stories, which I tell now because they tend to keep you people awake, which is something a minister always tries to do when he's speaking.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Seven-year honeymoon

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

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

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

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

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

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

phone call home a week.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

God will help

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Not in the market

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He said, "What do you mean?"

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

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

"Everybody thinks you are," I said.

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

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

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

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

Didn't believe in vacations

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

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

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

"Yes."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I've read so much stuff. I've received literature from every splinter group and from people for us, people against us, people whatever, because they send it to me for whatever reason.

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

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

Yacht in Monte Carlo

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What's always funny to me about some of these stories is that the man was at that time 84 or 85 years old. Some of you are that old. Now, how much do you go out and party? Do you go out and water-ski behind a boat? You just don't do things like that at that age.

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

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

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

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

Certificates of deposit

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Armstrong's salary was separate from that, but a lot of things were done that people didn't understand

the reasons for, and they'd write their own reasons for them.

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

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

I had his last years

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

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

So I'd get asked back.

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

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

Everybody knows

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

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

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

Half and half

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

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

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

Now we know which half.

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

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

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

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

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

Death-bed promises

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why Mr. Tkach?

A lot of you are probably asking: Why did Mr. Armstrong appoint Mr. Tkach, and how did it happen? Mr. Armstrong and I had argued for a couple or three years about whether he could appoint his successor or not. It was a valid question.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Guinea pig for remedies

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

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

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

Wanted to appoint someone

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

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

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

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

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

Request from Mr. Tkach

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

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

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

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

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

Unpublicized stroke

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

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

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

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

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

So it happened that way.

Mr. Armstrong on the true church

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

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

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

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

Endorsement by association

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Korah and Phineas

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

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

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

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

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

It's very, very hard to know when and what you're supposed to do. The one thing that Mr. Armstrong and I talked about was that God runs it His way, and we seek our own way.

Back to the Bible

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

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

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

Purification of the bride

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

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

What did he get? He got one son 25 years later. Why would God do this?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Tkach promised

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So that was one of the promises that was made.

Weeded away

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

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

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

I went and talked with Mr. Tkach.

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

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

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

However, there are those who wish to distort what he said and what he did. I read one of them in the latest coworker letter from a different church that said that our mission at that time was to preach that the beast was going to rise in Europe and attack the U.S.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On our last trip we did nine countries in 24 days. Now, for someone who was at that time 91 or 92 years old, that's a lot of work. It was a lot of work for me, and I was only 32.

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

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

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

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

I know I can

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

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

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

thought he could.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And then I cut up the log.

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

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

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

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

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

The two trees

Where did we go wrong? Where did things happen?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What did God do with those two trees? Did He desert mankind when He closed off the garden? God didn't desert man in the sense that mankind, with the human spirit, was able to give and develop a set of codes and ethics and laws that allowed for society.

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

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

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

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

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

Good and selfish

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

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

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

When those people do have God's Spirit and do understand the truth, I think it will be very easy for them to

change: the Mother Teresas of this world. At the same time, God is the one who decides; God is the one who judges; God didn't desert us in the Garden of Eden, and He still hasn't deserted His church and His people.

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

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

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

The font of the Word

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

