

# Credentials

In his book *Raising the Ruins*, now available in bookstores, *Trumpet* executive editor Stephen Flurry exposes the reality of what happened to the Worldwide Church of God. Here is the fourth chapter.

BY STEPHEN FLURRY

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In conducting his studies, however, Armstrong had no seminary training

and lacked any disciplined study of church history, biblical interpretation and original languages of Scripture.” —Michael Feazell 2002

Besides wanting to be an apostle, Joseph Tkach Sr. also liked the idea of having an impeccable resume. “They were trying to create a legend out of him from the word *go*,” Aaron Dean remembers. Ellen Escat, Mr. Tkach’s administrative assistant, even asked Aaron to “make Mr. Tkach look like Mr. Armstrong” when discussing him in sermons or conversations.

If, in fact, Tkach was self-conscious about his qualifications for being pastor general, you can understand why. Mr. Armstrong, in addition to having established the church, was a prolific teacher and writer, a distinguished author, a famous television personality and an unofficial ambassador for world peace who was known among kings, prime ministers and presidents.

Mr. Tkach wasn’t even well known *within the Worldwide Church of God*. He rarely wrote for church publications. *WCGministers* knew him because of his position in Church Administration. But most of the church membership had never even heard him speak before he became pastor general in 1986.

## Tkach’s Life in the Church

What little background information there is about Tkach was mostly written around the time he became pastor general. The most informative piece is a short article that

appeared in the *Worldwide News*, “Passing the Baton,” by Jeff Zhorne and Michael Snyder.

Mr. Tkach was baptized in 1957 and spent his early WCG years in the city of his birth—Chicago, Illinois. He became a deacon in 1961 and a local elder in 1963—the same year the church employed him to work full time in the ministry.

His three years as a local elder in Chicago were unusually productive, according to the *Worldwide News* synopsis: “The pastor general established churches in South Bend, Fort Wayne and Indianapolis, Ind.; Rockford and Peoria, Ill.; Davenport, Iowa; Grand Rapids, Mich.; Milwaukee, Wis.; Cincinnati, Ohio; and St. Louis, Mo.” That a *local elder*—and a *new* one at that—would ESTABLISH 10 congregations across seven different states, is something that just didn’t happen in the WCG during the 1960s. My own father started attending services in St. Louis *in 1961*—two years *before* Mr. Tkach even became a minister. So there is no way he could have “established” that congregation. “The only time I remember seeing him in St. Louis was for softball tournaments,” my father remembers.

Someone might have alerted the WCG’s editorial staff about this attempt to pad Mr. Tkach’s resume after “Passing the Baton” ran in the *Worldwide News*. By the time the information appeared in the *Good News* four months later, it had been revised, saying Mr. Tkach “helped” establish those congregations—which might be closer to the truth, but still seems like a stretch.

In 1966, according to the *Worldwide News*, the WCG moved Mr. Tkach and his family to Pasadena so he could go to Ambassador College (AC). The article says “he attended for three years before being assigned to serve with [Roderick] Meredith in the Los Angeles, Calif., church.” Tkach Jr.’s book says his father and mother “took classes for three years, intending upon graduation that my dad be sent out to pastor a church. Instead, he remained in Pasadena and eventually pastored a church there.”

The way Tkach Jr.’s book is worded gives the impression that his father graduated from Ambassador, which he didn’t.

As it happens, my father also went to Pasadena in the late 1960s and took classes for three years. He enrolled in the summer of 1967, one year after Tkach started his AC career. Both of them would have attended a small liberal arts college of about 500 students for at least two years together. And like Tkach, my dad was married at the time. And since most students were single, the Tkaches and the Flurrys would have been part of a fairly exclusive married student community between 1967 and 1969.

My father was photographed as a freshman in the 1968 Ambassador College envoy. Because he had previous college credit transferred to AC, he was on the three-year graduate program. So the following year, in the 1969 envoy, he can be found within the junior class. And in the 1970 edition, he is included within Pasadena's graduating senior class.

Mr. Tkach, however, cannot be found in *any* of the college envoys between 1966 and 1970. "I don't remember ever seeing him in a class," my father says. He does recall seeing Tkach from time to time around the Pasadena campus, but not as a regular student.

In fact, Mr. Tkach did not come to Pasadena in 1966 as an AC student. The church had experienced rapid growth during the 1960s. It wasn't like the 1940s and '50s, when *nearly all* the leaders of the church were young men in their 20s who graduated from Ambassador College. During the 1960s, with bigger field congregations, there were more potential leaders, many of them already married and with grown children, who had developed in the local area without Ambassador training. To provide these men with some headquarters training, the superintendent of the U.S. ministry at the time, Roderick Meredith, established a one-year program for their benefit. Approved by Mr. Armstrong, the program called for a handful of local elders to come to headquarters for a year, where they could audit Ambassador College classes and receive on-the-job training in Meredith's Los Angeles congregation, which had 1,100 members. The idea was for them to get a year of training at headquarters before rotating back out into the field to work as an associate pastor and eventually a pastor.

Meredith says Tkach did sit in on some of the Bible classes, but not for credit. He can't remember if he audited any classes after that initial year, but during his "three

years” at Ambassador, according to his boss, he never attended full time, he didn’t take any classes for credit and “he definitely did not graduate.”

So the impression the Tkaches gave, that Sr. went to Ambassador College for three years *before* being assigned to pastor congregations, is not true. Tkach was assigned to Mr. Meredith in 1966 upon his arrival in Pasadena. And for the next several years, he worked with widows so as to not be a liability elsewhere.

He was raised to the rank of preaching elder in 1974, after being a local elder for 11 years. Throughout the 1970s, Tkach continued as an assistant pastor in various congregations in Southern California.

When California’s attorney general’s office tried to seize control of church operations in January 1979, Joseph Tkach was an assistant pastor for the Pasadena A.M. congregation. After church members spontaneously descended upon the headquarters property to show their support for a church under fire, Mr. Tkach and a deacon named Joseph Kotora hastily set up the Hall of Administration lobby for a makeshift church service. Dean Blackwell gave a sermon before the “sit in” congregation that day, and Mr. Tkach closed the service with prayer.

Tkach’s involvement in the 1979 crisis did not escape Mr. Armstrong’s attention, even though Mr. Armstrong was living in Arizona at the time. In July 1979, he appointed Mr. Tkach as director of Ministerial Services (later named Church Administration). Then, on September 27, 1979, in Mr. Armstrong’s Tucson home, the church founder raised three individuals to the rank of evangelist—the highest ecclesiastical office in the church (besides Mr. Armstrong’s). The new evangelists—Ellis LaRavia, Stanley Rader and Joseph Tkach—had all played a role in defending the church against the state’s unconstitutional attack.

Besides heading up Church Administration, Mr. Tkach also became associate pastor of the Pasadena P.M. congregation—the headquarters congregation Mr. Armstrong pastored. In 1981, Mr. Armstrong selected Mr. Tkach to serve on the Advisory Council. These were Mr. Tkach’s primary responsibilities for the final years of Mr. Armstrong’s life.

## Sketchy Education

Besides adding to his exploits in the church, it appears that Tkach's handlers also wanted to create a legend out of his life *before* conversion—particularly his academic background. In light of Mr. Armstrong's views about modern education, one wonders why Mr. Tkach seemed so self-conscious about his formal education. Mr. Armstrong viewed his lack of training at an "assembly line" university or seminary as an advantage. Mr. Tkach, however, wanted scholarly credentials, even if he had to invent them.

After becoming pastor general in 1986, for some reason, he wanted the brethren to think that he was born in 1926. "Passing the Baton" gives precise dates for Tkach's baptism, ordinations and marriage. But no birth date is given—it just says he was 59 at the time he became pastor general.

The WCG's personal correspondence department produced a "Letters Series" in 1989 in which there is a fact sheet about Mr. Tkach's background for people who requested such information. That letter, prepared three years after Mr. Tkach took charge, says he was "born in 1926," but does not give the exact day or month of his birth.

According to his birth and death certificates, however, Mr. Tkach was born on March 16, 1927, which means he would have been 58 when Mr. Armstrong died—not 59. By the time Mr. Tkach died in 1995, after critics had exposed these birth date inconsistencies, the WCG got the date right in a *Worldwide News* article by Jeff Zhorne. Tkach Jr. also corrected the date in *Transformed by Truth*, justifying the mix-up this way: "As was common in those days, the doctor didn't get around to filling out a birth certificate until a *few months* after my dad's birth." In fact, according to the birth certificate, the doctor filed the information just *eight days* after Tkach was born.

As far as why they wanted him to be a year older, it's hard to say. With the correct date, he would have finished high school early, soon after his 17th birthday. So maybe they wanted him to be an 18-year-old graduate. In any event, he did finish high school in 1944. He graduated 155th in a class size of 349, from Tilden High School in south Chicago.

The following year, in January 1945, he ran off and joined the Navy as a 17-year-old. So maybe they tried to make him 18 for that reason. But Tkach admitted to *Plain Truth* readers in 1986 that he ran away from home and was “under age” when he joined the Navy.

It’s just an odd “fact” to lie about. But why they stuck with the 1926 birthday for the first several years of Mr. Tkach’s pastor generalship, when they could have gotten the correct date from his driver’s license, is inexplicable.

Continuing with the timeline, according to Jeff Zhorne, Tkach served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, from January 17, 1945, to July 22, 1946. Mr. Tkach, however, wrote in the *Worldwide News* that he returned from the war to Chicago on December 21, 1945, which would have limited his service in the Navy to 11 months.

From 1946 to 1950 is when the biography gets real sketchy. In reading what the WCG produced, you are left with the distinct impression that Mr. Tkach went to college during those four years. In “Passing the Baton,” for instance, it says that after Tkach received a naval certificate in “basic engineering” in 1945, he then returned home to attend the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, where he studied industrial management. After that, he was hired by Hupp Aviation in 1950.

Upon searching their archives, however, representatives at the Illinois Institute found no record of Joseph Tkach ever having attended there. His career at the Illinois Institute, apparently, was not unlike his “training” at Ambassador College.

### **Lack of Scholarship**

Writing in 2002, Michael Feazell criticized Mr. Armstrong because he “had no seminary training and lacked any disciplined study of church history, biblical interpretation and original languages of Scripture.” In his book, Feazell said that “Herbert Armstrong and scholarship did not mix well.” As if it mixed well with *Tkach*. Feazell wrote, “Many of Armstrong’s doctrinal errors sprang directly from his ignorance of biblical scholarship and sound methods of biblical interpretation.” In *Transformed by Truth*, Tkach Jr. criticized Mr. Armstrong for his lack of training in “hermeneutics, epistemology, or apologetics.”

Of course, Mr. Armstrong would have responded to those criticisms thunderously, by pointing to the RANK IGNORANCE about God within scholarly circles. Critics may scoff at Mr. Armstrong's supposed lack of scholarship, but hundreds of thousands—including a great many world leaders Mr. Armstrong visited—would have considered Herbert Armstrong a Bible scholar and expert educator. Look at the fruits: Perhaps thousands of pamphlets, articles and letters, hundreds of booklets and seven books. Thousands of sermons. He produced and delivered 1,500 radio programs and nearly 200 television programs. He developed the curriculum for three colleges—giving what must have been thousands of class lectures himself. Objective observers, even if they disagree with his theology, would at least give him credit for all that he produced.

Compare that with Tkach Sr.'s exploits, even counting his fabricated academic record. Before taking over in 1986, he hardly ever wrote or spoke publicly. According to Aaron Dean, Mr. Armstrong actually took comfort in Tkach's average intellectual capacities, believing it would make him more prone to rely on the Advisory Council. After becoming pastor general, Tkach's own son even admitted that his "dad was not known as a theologian." Tkach's former boss, Roderick Meredith, evaluated Mr. Armstrong's successor more bluntly, saying he "did not speak well, and I didn't realize how little he understood the doctrines."

In light of Tkach's sketchy educational background, it's astonishing how often Tkach Jr. and Fezell have found occasion to ridicule *Mr. Armstrong's* lack of scholarship. But if Mr. Armstrong was uneducated, where would that leave Joseph Tkach?

### **The REAL Church Historian**

In a 2002 deposition, we pointed Tkach Jr. to the statement about Mr. Armstrong's lack of seminary training and disciplined study of church history and then asked, "Could the same thing be said of your father?" That question caught the younger Tkach completely off guard.

"No," he stammered, "not as precisely as that, no." According to Tkach, his father spent more time studying church history than Mr. Armstrong. He later said that Mr. Armstrong "read mostly on philosophy," as if Joe Jr., who was born the same year

Mr. Armstrong turned 59, knows everything the founder of the church *read*. When he spoke and wrote, Mr. Armstrong did, at times, refer to the written works that had made an impression on him. But how Tkach Jr. took these many comments to mean he read mostly philosophy, I'll never know.

In his *Autobiography*, Mr. Armstrong discussed his earliest plunge into the study of church history. His wife had challenged him to prove the biblical truth on the question of the Sabbath. In response to her challenge, he “spent a solid six months of virtual night-and-day, seven-day-a-week study and research” trying to prove that Sunday was God’s day of worship. “I even studied Greek sufficiently to run down every possible questionable text in the original Greek.” He used Robertson’s *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. He also relied upon a number of other commentaries and Greek and Hebrew lexicons. He delved into several encyclopedias—Britannica, Americana, as well as the Jewish and Catholic encyclopedias.

“I read Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, especially his chapter 15 dealing with the religious history of the first four hundred years after Christ,” Mr. Armstrong wrote. “*I left no stone unturned.*”

From that alone, you get the impression he read quite a lot more than just philosophy.

In *Mystery of the Ages*, Mr. Armstrong wrote, “Scholars and church historians recognize that events in the early Christian Church between A.D. 50 and 150 can only be seen in vague outline—as if obscured by a thick mist.” To support his conclusions, Mr. Armstrong relied upon the noted English scholar Samuel G. Green in his *Handbook of Church History*. He quoted from William Fitzgerald’s *Lectures on Ecclesiastical History*, William McGlothlin’s *The Course of Christian History* and Philip Schaff’s *History of the Christian Church*.

In his booklets *The Plain Truth About Easter* and *The Plain Truth About Christmas*, Mr. Armstrong relied on Alexander Hislop’s *The Two Babylons*.

Mr. Armstrong’s study of church history is also reflected in the many writings he produced on the subject. In *Mystery of the Ages*, his longest chapter by far was titled



“Mystery of the Church.” He also wrote an eight-part *Plain Truth* series in 1979 on the “Proofs of God’s True Church” and a 1984 booklet, *Where Is the True Church?* Included among his more than 1,500 radio broadcasts is an eight-part series on “The True Church.”

Tkach Jr. boasted that his dad “read books” about church history, some of which weren’t even published until after Mr. Armstrong died. Among the works Tkach Jr. cited were those of Methodist minister Justo Gonzalez.

Mr. Armstrong studied Gibbon, Schaff, Fitzgerald, McGlothlin and Green and wrote extensively about the history of the church. Tkach Sr. studied Gonzalez and never wrote a thing about church history.

Of course, deep in his heart of hearts, Joe Jr. knows Mr. Armstrong’s extensive research and training, as well as his productive life, towers above his own father’s intellectual achievements. But the reason he raises the “uneducated” card in reference to Mr. Armstrong is because he *doesn’t agree* with Mr. Armstrong’s *explanation* of church history. Had he put it that way, at least it would have been honest. But to say that his dad studied church history and Mr. Armstrong didn’t—that he read mostly philosophy?

Every present and former member of the Worldwide Church of God should *know* that is a lie.

### **Disciplined Study**

In the deposition quoted above, to support his father’s credentials as being superior to those of Mr. Armstrong, Tkach Jr. claimed that besides his father’s grasp of church history, Tkach Sr. went to Ambassador College. Our attorney then followed up with the question everyone on our side of the table almost blurted out: “Well, it would be sort of difficult to distinguish your father’s educational background from Mr. Armstrong’s wouldn’t it, to say that he attended a college that Mr. Armstrong created and supervised?”

Unbelievably, Tkach responded, “Not at all. Because in the college milieu, there was disciplined study. Mr. Armstrong never had that.”

For the sake of argument, let’s suppose Mr. Tkach actually attended Ambassador College for three years as a full-time student and then graduated in 1969. Let’s assume he was an active participant in the “disciplined study” of Ambassador life. How does *that*—attending what Tkach Jr. now calls an “indoctrination camp” started by a heretic—qualify as disciplined study, while *establishing, teaching at* and *supervising* that same college does not?

### **Herbert Armstrong and J.H. Allen**

In *Transformed by Truth*, Mr. Tkach Jr. wrote, “In fact, it is no secret that Herbert Armstrong’s *The United States and the British Commonwealth in Prophecy* was copied from a book titled *Judah’s Scepter and Joseph’s Birthright* by J.H. Allen.” He offers no support for this plagiarism charge. It’s just true because he says so—it’s “no secret”—*everyone* knows Mr. Armstrong “copied” it. But if you actually take the time to examine the two books, you will find that they are entirely different. Yes, ENTIRELY.

Just because both books discuss the modern identity of the lost 10 tribes of ancient Israel does not mean Mr. Armstrong “copied” Allen. If William Manchester and Martin Gilbert both write biographies about Winston Churchill, does that mean one plagiarized the other?

And it’s not like Mr. Armstrong tried to conceal the fact that he read Allen’s book when studying the subject of ancient Israel’s migration into Europe. He said, “It’s true that I had read one or two other writings and that book of J.H. Allen on the truth about the lost 10 tribes.” But it would be a “bald-faced lie” for anyone to say it was copied, Mr. Armstrong said.

“I examined this so-called Anglo-Israel theory,” he continued. “But I checked it very carefully with the Bible, and *I only believed what I saw in the Bible*. I didn’t believe and I threw out a lot of what they had.” Isn’t that the way any honest theologian would study a biblical commentary or history? If it squares with the truth of the Bible, then Mr. Armstrong was entitled to expound upon it just as much as any other theologian.

J.H. Allen introduced his book by writing, “Although it is not generally known, it is nevertheless true that God made two covenants with Abraham ....” Compare that to the introductory statement in *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*: “A staggering turn in world events is due to erupt in the next few years. It will involve violently the United States, Britain, Western Europe, the Middle East.” These opening remarks, like the titles for both books, highlight the *vast difference* between the two.

J.H. Allen organized his work into these three sections: 1) the birthright promise; 2) the scepter promise; and 3) the veil being lifted from the Abrahamic nations. The first two sections revolve around the promises God made to Abraham in Genesis 12 and how they played out in history. And to Allen’s credit, he tried to be honest with the Bible as compared with secular history.

The third section is also mostly historical and secular. And when Allen does venture into explaining the prophetic significance, he veers way off course.

Mr. Armstrong’s book, on the other hand, is about a PROPHESED CAPTIVITY to come upon our peoples unless we repent of our sins. That is the book’s central focus from beginning to end.

In expounding on these end-time prophecies, Mr. Armstrong devoted some space in the book, between chapters 3 and 8, to establish Israel’s present-day identity based upon Bible and secular history. These are crucial historical facts that must be explained for readers to understand the truth about end-time prophecy. J.H. Allen is to be credited for teaching the truth about some of these historical facts. But he certainly did not grasp the tremendous significance of this history as it relates to Bible prophecy.

And yet, that’s what *the last six chapters of Mr. Armstrong’s book* are devoted to—expounding upon the real significance of this history as it relates to end-time prophecy. In chapter 10, for instance, Mr. Armstrong wrote about how the birthright promises were withheld for 2,520 years. There is nothing like this in Allen’s book. Another chapter asks the question, “Why did Israel lose its identity?” J.H. Allen not only failed to answer that question, he never asked it. Then Mr. Armstrong concluded his book by discussing what is prophesied to happen to the American and British

peoples in the very near future—a conclusion that is not only different, but at complete odds with J.H. Allen’s conclusions.

While it is true that Mr. Armstrong read *Judah’s Scepter and Joseph’s Birthright*, along with other books about the “Anglo-Israel” theory, HE DID NOT COPY those works. Joe Jr. made that dishonest claim without any supportive evidence whatsoever, simply because he dislikes Mr. Armstrong and doesn’t agree with the book that more than *6 million people* requested.

## **The Ghost Writers**

On page 66 of his book, Tkach Jr. wrote, “When my dad did give a major sermon on doctrinal changes, he always read major portions of it, confirming in these people’s minds that he was a mere dupe of the ‘gang of four.’ They circulated rumors that others were writing his articles for church publications and publishing them either without his knowledge or against his will.”

And that’s true. I remember listening to a number of Mr. Tkach’s taped sermons from the late 1980s and early 1990s—I even reviewed a few videotaped sermons. He would read and read, and oftentimes trip over words. I also remember the rumors vividly: *Who prepared this for him? And why doesn’t he pull away from his notes?*

Later on in the book, after referring to these “rumors,” Tkach Jr. wrote, “It didn’t seem to occur to people that if my dad didn’t like or agree with material Mike Feazell (who was his executive assistant and editorial advisor) or others prepared for him, he could have changed it or not used it at all.”

Yes—in the very same book Tkach Jr. accuses Mr. Armstrong of copying J.H. Allen, he admits that his own father had his sermons *prepared for him*. Then he justifies that by saying his father *didn’t have* to use those preprepared sermons if he didn’t want to.

And it wasn’t just Tkach’s *sermons* that others prepared. Tkach Jr. continued, “My dad hired Mike Feazell to assist him, especially in *writing* and *theology*, and he could have fired him at any time. My dad spent hours every day with Mike, working out

details of *letters, articles and sermons.*” In 2002, Fezell admitted that as Mr. Tkach’s assistant, he was primarily “responsible for editing and drafting his written material.”

Rod Meredith remembers how awkward and embarrassing it was to see Tkach Sr. ramble on using someone else’s material: “In the sermons in Pasadena, when he got away from his manuscript—which was written at times by Larry Salyer, at times by Robin Webber, and most of the time later by Mike Fezell, who wrote virtually all of his articles—why then, he would start shouting and they would bawl him out backstage, ‘Dad, why did you get away from the script?’ And so it was kind of embarrassing.”

The men who assisted Mr. Tkach justify these actions by saying that he just wasn’t a good communicator. Mike Fezell wrote, “Because Tkach Sr. did not possess the same facility of written and oral expression as Armstrong, *he had to rely heavily on others* for his *written communication* to pastors and church members.” His own son admitted that Tkach Sr. wasn’t a *theologian*—and that others prepared his sermons and articles—that when he gave sermons, he was “anchored to his [actually someone else’s] notes.” Mr. Tkach’s personal assistant, the one who prepared his sermons and articles, readily admits that Tkach was *not* a good communicator—whether in writing or verbally. And the WCG’s own website says Mr. Tkach didn’t have the “magnetic personality that Mr. Armstrong did.”

It’s all kind of pitiful, isn’t it? Tkachism has worked so hard to make Mr. Armstrong out to be an unqualified, uneducated ignoramus. And yet, look at the one who led them through their transformation.

Source: <https://www.thetrumpet.com/3091-credentials>

Further information at Wikipedia:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_W.\\_Tkach#:~:text=He%20was%20born%20March%2016,of%20Vassil%20and%20Mary%20Tkach](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_W._Tkach#:~:text=He%20was%20born%20March%2016,of%20Vassil%20and%20Mary%20Tkach)