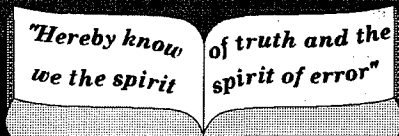


The Discerner



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EDITORIAL

by William A. BeVier

Our issue this quarter features three articles. One is a continuation of the series by Steve Lagoon on the "Oneness Pentecostal" movement. Another article by Sharon Lindbloom titled "City of Joseph" is an interesting presentation about the city of Nauvoo, Illinois established by Joseph Smith and the Mormons. We plan to feature other articles by this same writer in the future. Sharon Lindbloom is part of Word for the Weary ministry.

The third article presents the past and present of the Worldwide Church of God. Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of this group, died in 1986. Under new leadership changes have and are taking place. But is this cult now part of evangelical Christianity?

In recent months we have received a number of telephone calls and written inquiries about the "Boston Church of Christ," also known as the "International Church of Christ." We have been able to obtain some

information and literature about this group. We are beginning to stock selected items about them and their leader, Kip McKean. Valuable information has been obtained from former members and a bibliography is also available. We are now better able to answer questions about this movement.

Another feature we have included in this issue is a selection of excerpts from letters and notes which have come into the office about the ministry of R.A.S. We are not seeking the praise of men, but thought there might be an interest in knowing how R.A.S. is ministering to others.

We are grateful for the continuing prayers and financial support of many people from many parts of the world. We wish we could do more to provide free literature, even on a limited basis, to those who cannot afford to purchase it. At the present time, this is not possible.

WHAT ABOUT THE ONENESS PENTECOSTALS? (PART 2)

by Steve Lagoon

The Trinity, Modalism and the Early Church

While the Bible and the Bible alone is authoritative for determining Christian doctrine, it is helpful to understand early church history concerning the doctrine of God because we need to know how to respond to the common accusation by Oneness Pentecostals that the doctrine of the Trinity is a post-biblical development of an apostate church borrowing Greek philosophy as its basis for the Trinity. If this accusation were true, we Trinitarians might as well fold up our tents and go home, but as we shall see, this accusation is baseless.

Some people study the early fathers because of a theory that the closer you get to the times of the Apostles, the more accurate the writings of the ancient fathers would be. But while this seems plausible, I think certain points should give us pause. (1) Apostasy and false teaching can rise up quickly as it did already even in the times of the Apostles as the New Testament shows, and when the Apostles died it likely got even worse. (2) The canon of the New Testament had not been fully set and therefore the earliest fathers were at somewhat of a disadvantage, making it hard to be thoroughly systematic. (3) Also think of the awesome task these men faced. Without any of our modern technology to help them, and no previous scholarship to aid them, they took this entirely new set of documents we call the New Testament and attempted in one lifetime to harmonize all this with the

Old Testament and to come up with a well formulated systematic theology. If that thought doesn't send shivers up your spine, what would? It then is no wonder it took a number of generations to develop a consistent and systematic theology, and just when each generation was getting it together, another wave of heretics would come along to force the next generation of Christian scholars to be even more precise, and so it went. In researching this section I must concur with Morehead (Foundations introduction) "While studying in preparation for this paper, I was exposed to a wide variety of conflicting and contradicting information...and some history books expressed the personal theological stands of the authors in addition to historical facts." But I believe it is possible to wade through the swamps of opinion and get to the hard facts.

If you look at the Trinity in its most elementary form, that there is one God, and that three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are that one God, then you will find in your search of the ancient fathers that at all times the church has always believed in the Trinity. As time passed and heretics challenged, the doctrine was ever more precisely refined and formulated into the more sophisticated and technical definitions of the creeds. At first, the apostolic fathers just reiterated the biblical language, but as time went on the fathers and the apologists after them grew in their ability to systematize and more explicitly formulate doctrine for didactic and apologetical purposes. Of course this was being done in the

language and culture of the Greco-Roman world in which the fathers lived, and so reflected what Ronald Nash (The Gospel 16-18) calls a weak influence of that world as they expressed their Christian faith. This development continued through the Ante-Nicene fathers, as they responded to each new challenge and finally taking on its current form in the creeds and councils of the fourth and fifth centuries. This sort of development was true of all doctrines in the early church and interestingly, even the Oneness Pentecostals' theology has been evolving all through the 20th century. So they have no ground to attack orthodoxy. By way of analogy, a baby is born fully human, but as time goes by that baby grows, becoming increasingly developed until it matures into an adult. It was always human, but simply went from less developed to fully developed. The same is true of the development of the Trinity.

Now the Oneness writers have a different understanding of the ancient fathers, as you would expect. The basic premise is that the Apostles and the Bible itself taught Modalism, and Modalism continued to be the teaching of the true church until about 180-200 when church fathers who were corrupted began to rise to leadership and forced the original Modalists out. The Oneness scholars theorize that Justin Martyr and other contemporaries developed the Logos doctrine, teaching that the "Word" had a real pre-existence and once this was accepted it naturally led the later Ante-Nicene fathers like Hippolytus and Tertullian to develop the doctrine of the Trinity, followed by the councils of the fourth and fifth centuries who had totally sold out to pagan Greek

philosophy with their explicit Trinitarianism.

By looking at a few representative fathers from these periods we will find this Oneness fairy tale to be untenable. First, it should not surprise us that Oneness scholars believe that the apostolic fathers of the late first and early second century were Modalist, since these fathers did not speculate much in their theology, but used the simple language of Scripture, which the Oneness twist. Despite this, however, Ignatius, who died in AD 107, teachings were only consistent with Trinitarianism. J.N.D. Kelly (Doctrines 93) says:

In view of this language the conclusion has sometimes been drawn that, while echoing the triadic scheme made official by the baptismal formula, Ignatius was really an economic Trinitarian, i.e., regarded God as undifferentiated Monad in his essential being, the Son and the Spirit being merely forms or Modes of the father's self-revelation, only distinguishable from him in the process of Revelation. A closer analysis, however, shows how misleading this interpretation is as an account of Ignatius' thought...in tracing his divine sonship to his conception in Mary's womb he was simply reproducing a common place of pre-originist theology; the idea did not convey and was not intended to convey any denial of his pre-existence. So far as Ignatius is concerned he definitely states that he existed with the Father before the ages, and that he came forth from the unique father, was with him and has returned to him. Phrases like these imply a real distinction....

Fortman (Triune 40) adds, "It has been urged that for Ignatius there is no Trinity before the birth of Jesus." On the contrary, when Ignatius writes that "Our God, Jesus Christ, was born of Mary...and of the Holy Spirit, he seems to indicate that before his birth both 'our God Jesus Christ' and the Holy Spirit pre-existed distinctly and that there was a Trinity before his birth."

Moving to the time of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, roughly 175-250, it is apparent to most that men like Tertullian and Hippolytus were Trinitarians. After all, they wrote extensively defending the Trinity and attacking Modalism as rank heresy. But the Oneness Pentecostals have picked up an argument long asserted in the circles of mostly liberal scholars which say the Trinity of the Ante-Nicene fathers was only a Trinity of Revelation of what is known as "Economic Trinitarianism."

In this view, according to some scholars, God in eternity past in his essential being, existed in a simple unipersonal way, and not in three persons. But when God decided to create the universe, he sent out from himself for this work, two temporary manifestations: the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this view, the Son and the Holy Spirit pre-exist, but are not eternal, being created offshoots of God, the Father. Thus to us, God appears to be triune in this "dispensation" or "economy," though actually in his essential eternal nature he is really only the Father. This way of reading these fathers has caused them to be labeled "subordinationists."

But is this a fair reading? The conservatives say No! They define the

economic Trinity this way. God has existed eternally and internally as three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At the time God the Father began to create, he simply sent out these two already existing persons from himself to do the work of creation. Thus in this "dispensation" or "economy" God appears triune, because He is triune in his essential being. So when you examine the writings of men like Tertullian, Irenaeus and Hippolytus, they insist that from all eternity, the Son and the Spirit were always with the Father.

Though the Economic Trinity is consistent with orthodoxy with it's one God in three eternal persons, it reflected a church grasping at some way to explain the truths of the Trinity, and in rather rough and crude language struggled to do this. As the church advanced, if found better and more precise ways to teach the Trinitarian truths of God's Word. It is a great mistake to see Economic Trinitarianism as anything but orthodoxy and inconsistent with Modalism. For more on Economic Trinitarianism see A Dictionary of Christian Theology, edited by Alan Richardson, Westminster Press, 1969, p. 104 or The Beacon Dictionary of Theology, edited by Richard Taylor, Beacon Hill Press, 1983, pp. 129-180.

Many Oneness scholars will quote liberal scholars, like Harnack, in such a way as to suppose Trinitarianism was a product of a strong influence of Platonic Philosophy on the early church fathers. However, such allegations are canceled out by the denials of this by equally capable scholars such as J.N.D. Kelly.

Also, many Oneness Pentecostals look to ancient Modalism in the early

church for support that the Oneness view is the true Apostolic view. But if Oneness people want to accept the statements of scholars such as Harnack as authoritative they must deal with Harnack themselves when he (New Schaff-Herzog, vol. 7, p. 458) says, "It is not surprising therefore that when once Modalistic Monarchianism had involved the aid of science (i.e., of stoicism) it was on the road to a pantheistic concept of God." Harnack (459) also says "stoic influence can not be denied in the noetian (Modalistic) system..." In fact in his History of Dogma volume 3, pp. 55-56, Harnack spends two pages documenting the philosophical influence on the early Modalist. And so also Biesner (Ankerberg, 1985 year transcript, 442) says:

"As a matter of fact, Hippolytus wrote his entire philosophumera and his entire refutation of all heresies...tracing their (Modalists) thought back to their historical roots in the Greek philosophers...they were just as much into using Greek philosophy as a tool as Trinitarians were. The fact is the tool does not determine the outcome of your thinking."

We should at this point compare and contrast the views of the ancient Modalists with the modern Oneness view. There were two types of Modalism in the early church, both in agreement that God is a uni-personal being but disagreeing in how this is so. The first type represented by early Modalists, like Noetus and Epigonus, believed essentially what modern Oneness does, that the Father and Holy Spirit are just different names or titles of this one person, God, and that the Son was primarily the name of the fleshly humanity of Christ. So in this view Jesus is the

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all at the same time, just one person.

The second ancient Modalistic view is that of the later Sabellianism and its teacher, Sabellius, who reacted to the growing understanding of God's tri-personal nature and posited that while God is one person, this one person plays three successive roles of manifestations, not simultaneously as with the early Modalism, but in successive order; first as Father in creation, switched modes, then as Son in redemption, switched modes and then appears now as life-giving Spirit.

In light of all this information, Oneness writers David Bernard (Oneness and Trinity 154-155) perceptively says, "In this respect he [Sabellius] does not represent the views of the older Modalists or of Modern Oneness." He adds (162) "...it is not productive to identify Modern Oneness directly with ancient Modalism, Patri Passianism or Sabellianism." While I am puzzled at this statement that seems to contradict the whole purpose of his book, I think it is apparent why he would want to distant Modern Oneness from ancient Modalism. Certainly a problem for Modern Oneness is that these ancient Modalists did not affirm other essential Modern Oneness doctrines such as Jesus name baptism for salvation with the sign of speaking in tongues. We thus see Oneness Pentecostalism is a new cult of the twentieth century (Boyd 212).

As we continue our look at the fathers, we are often told by Oneness Pentecostals that during Tertullian's life the majority of Christians were Modalists. To support this they quote Tertullian in his work Against

Praxeas in which Tertullian (The Ante-Nicene Fathers, volume 3, pp. 598-599 Eerdmans) says "The simple, indeed, (I will not call them unwise and unlearned) who always constitute the majority of believers, are startled at the dispensation (of the three in one...)" and suppose this one passage proves most Christians of that day were Modalists, an unwarranted assumption in light of the following four reasons. (1) Tertullian is not saying that Modalist were the majority, but that the simple always constitute the majority, and some of these simple and unlearned believers were confused by the biblical truth of the Trinity. But I suggest the simple (I will not call them unwise and unlearned) would be just as startled and confused by Modern Oneness view of God with all its illusions and natures speaking to each other, etc. Sabin has said that if Jesus had revealed that God is a Trinity, the Jews would have been shocked, but they would be no more shocked than by Jesus simply saying he himself was God, as was the case, as they crucified him for that claim. But back to Tertullian's "Majority" statement— (2) The second point is that it is likely Tertullian was using sarcasm to make a point. As Berkhof (History 66) says concerning Tertullian, "Due to his violent temper he was naturally passionate in his representation of Christianity and somewhat given to extreme statements (emphasis mine). (3) If Tertullian was serious, he may well have been referring specifically to the church at Rome, which was a hotbed of Modalism in his day, and not to the entire Christian church. (4) If Modalism was the dominant view of Christians at this time, why were Modalist teachers like Noetus and Sabellius being excommunicated from the church at this time? So I highly

doubt the majority of Christians of this time were Modalist.

It is also alleged that during the time of the apologist in the second century, that men like Justin Martyr borrowed the logos doctrine of Philo in developing their own logos doctrine. This view is untenable for two reasons. First, it should be obvious, Justin had the prologue to John's gospel to draw on (as he certainly did) and was not in need of borrowing from Philo. Second, the logos of Greek philosophy and of Philo was impersonal. Nash (The Gospel 102) says:

The Logos of Philo was not a person. To be sure, Philo wrote about the Logos in personal terms, but his personifications were metaphors for a metaphysical abstraction... There is absolutely no support for the position that Philo believed the Logos to be personal, let alone a person living in history... Philo's Philosophical System is totally incompatible with the notion of incarnation.

Thus to say that Justin, who believed in a personal and incarnated Logos, borrowed his Logos doctrine from Philo, who believed in an impersonal Logos who could not be incarnated, is ridiculous, especially when John's gospel taught the very same thing Justin did. So you see, there's just no logic to that kind of logic!

Again the allegation is made that the Trinity doctrine is derived from certain ancient Platonic, Egyptian or Babylonian trinities. Against such a claim, the new Schaff Herzog Encyclopedia volume 12, p. 19 says: "There is no reason to seek for sources or types of the doctrines of the Trinity

outside of Christianity or the Bible,...The development of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is historically clear...being almost exclusively due to Christological speculation." Bowman (Trinity 43) puts it this way, "While it is true that pagan peoples of the ancient world worshipped triads of gods, these triads were always three separate gods, not one god. Moreover, they were always or nearly always merely the three gods at the top of the hierarchy of many gods worshipped in polytheistic religions."

Oneness scholars often criticize the anathema clause of the Athanasian creed which says "This is the Catholic faith, which except a man believe

truly and firmly, he cannot be saved." Here Oneness writer Morehead (Foundations 76) writes: "The second step is found in the establishment of the creeds with their anathema clauses. The natural progression to be expected was violence and bloodshed." I fail to understand why the writers of the Athanasian creed are enciters of violence and bloodshed simply because they have the same kind of anathema clause the Apostle Paul used in Galatians 1:9. "...If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" [Gk. anathema, Ed.]

(To be continued...)

CITY OF JOSEPH

By Sharon Lindbloom

Nauvoo, Illinois became the home of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) in 1839. With hard work and commitment, mosquito infested swampland was changed into a thriving city. Indeed, Nauvoo had become one of the largest cities in Illinois by 1844 claiming a population of 12,000 residents. However, due to irreconcilable differences with their neighbors, the Mormons left the city in 1846, moving west to establish their own "kingdom" in the wilderness of Utah. Nauvoo slowly declined until it was nearly deserted. Today it has a permanent population of only 1,100 citizens.

Owing to their shared history, Nauvoo has become something like a "Mecca" to the LDS Church. Faithful Mormons have invested millions of dollars to renovate and restore

Nauvoo. The historic streets, quaint brick buildings, immaculate grounds and tour guides dressed in 1840's costume draw thousands of visitors to the area each year. In addition, for one week each summer tourists are treated to a lavish outdoor musical pageant purportedly depicting Nauvoo's history.

The theme of the show is a rousing song and dance, "City of Joseph, City Beautiful! City of Joseph—Nauvoo!" To the pageant watching tourists, who have just witnessed a beautiful sunset over the Mississippi River, the message is absolutely true! Nauvoo is beautiful.

But this is a re-creation of that frontier town. The 1840's Nauvoo scarcely resembled a picture postcard. This was the time and place that

Joseph Smith, the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, chose to begin teaching the practice of "plural marriage" to his trusted followers. Though denied vehemently in public, the inner circle of the Mormon Church secretly lived this "commandment"—which was required for their salvation—to its fullest extent.

Behind the Mormon Church's version of "faith-promoting" history lies a very different view of historic Nauvoo. Following are just a few examples of characteristics prevalent in this 1840's town of which many remain unaware.

Adultery

In 1841 Joseph Smith sent Henry B. Jacobs on a mission. While he was absent, Joseph seduced and married Jacobs' wife, Zina D. Huntington Jacobs. She became Joseph's 7th wife. One report states that when Jacobs returned from his mission he found his wife pregnant with Joseph's child. In 1846, after Joseph's death, Zina left Jacobs to marry Brigham Young, Mormonism's second Prophet. Brigham reportedly told Jacobs that since Zina had been Joseph's spiritual wife, and since Brigham was now Joseph's proxy, Zina and her children belonged to him (Brigham). He consoled Jacobs by telling him that he (Jacobs) could go and get a different wife for himself.¹

Of the 49 "wives" of Joseph Smith, 13 of them were married to other men at the time they married Joseph. He also married five pairs of sisters and one mother/daughter set (for a biblical perspective on this, see Lev. 18:17, 18; 20:14). Six of Joseph's wives had at

one time been wards in his home and cared for by his legal wife, Emma.²

Wife Swapping

If one's convictions condone marrying other men's wives, it is a small step to accept the appropriateness of *trading* wives. Mormon John D. Lee wrote, "Some have mutually agreed to exchange wives and have been sealed to each other as husband and wife by virtue and authority of the holy priesthood. One of Brigham's brothers...made an exchange of wives with Mr. Decker,...They both seemed happy in the exchange of wives."³

Trial Marriage

Sometimes these polygamists thought it was advisable to check compatibility between wives before the actual marriage in order to avoid problems later on. Lucretia Fisher spent two months living in Hosea Stout's home with his legal wife and family before her marriage to Hosea.⁴

Abortion

When the idea of plural marriage was new Joseph chose mainly married women to become his "brides." Therefore, if a pregnancy resulted it did not create a problem within the highly moral community; the child was naturally assumed to be that of the woman's legal husband. However, as the practice of polygamy spread to include additional men and unmarried women, there arose a need for the services of John C. Bennett, an abortionist. Dr. Bennett, who had at one time been Joseph's closest confidant, admitted that he had performed abortions in Nauvoo.⁵

Fatherless Children

Doubtless, the vast majority of women did not consider abortion to be an option; this left many fatherless children. The public blame for these children was placed on John C. Bennett after he had lost favor with the Prophet. The children themselves were absorbed into trusted Mormon families.⁶

Unknown Fathers

For women who had legal husbands there was a *different complication*. Many women reported that they did not know who the fathers of their children were. In the case of Joseph's third wife, Prescinda Huntington Buell, "she did not know whether Mr. Buel (sic) or the Prophet was the father of her son." However, according to a Mormon historian, photographs lend strong support to the latter being responsible.⁷

Deserted Wives

One may wonder who took responsibility for the physical needs of these fatherless families. At least in the case of Joseph Smith, "No evidence exists that he assumed the support of his wives in the traditional sense of providing them with food, clothing, and shelter, except for the young women in his house." Some of Joseph's wives lived with their parents, some with other plural wives, and some with other polygamous families.⁸ The institution of "family" in Nauvoo had become reprehensible.

Intimidation

Some women who were approached with the idea of secretly marrying a

man in addition to her legal husband—or a man who already had another wife—did not easily accept the proposal. In many cases persuasion was required. Lucy Walker was told by Joseph Smith that he had been commanded by God to take her as his wife. He indicated that if she truly believed him to be a prophet of God she would consent. When Lucy hesitated Joseph said, "I will give you until tomorrow to decide this matter. If you reject this message the gate will be closed forever against you." Lucy described her agony: "I was tempted and tortured beyond endurance until life was not desirable...I felt at this moment that I was called to place myself upon the altar a living sacrifice..." On May 1, 1843 Lucy became Joseph's 25th wife. It was one day after her 17th birthday.⁹

Sexual Harassment

Nancy Rigdon was 19 years old when both John C. Bennett and Joseph Smith vied for her devotion. Having been forewarned by Bennett that Joseph would ask for her hand in plural marriage, she was ready when the invitation came and refused the Prophet in no uncertain terms. However, Joseph would not take "no" for an answer and, despite Nancy's tears, would not allow her to go home. After she threatened to scream and bring the whole town running Joseph let her go, but he sent her an imploring note the next day in order to convince her that polygamy was sanctioned by God. Nancy showed the letter to her father who immediately confronted the Prophet. Joseph denied everything at first, but when the letter was produced he admitted the truth. However, he excused himself by explaining that he had

merely been testing Nancy's virtue.¹⁰ [Sidney Rigdon, Nancy's father, had long been an associate of Joseph Smith and at one time viewed to be his successor. Ed.]

Character Defamation

Certain women, highly offended at being solicited to practice this form of adultery, exposed the efforts of the men who tried to convince them. One such case involved Martha Brotherton. Brigham Young wanted her for his wife and even enlisted the Prophet's help in his appeal. Martha asked for time to consider; when she arrived home she told her parents and wrote down the whole episode while it was fresh in her mind. The Brothertons soon left Nauvoo, but told Martha's story to as many as would listen. Church leaders publicly claimed that the story was a base falsehood and linked Martha's name with the evil John C. Bennett. Others alleged Martha was a harlot and a liar. One of her accusers was her own sister, who later became a plural wife of Mormon Apostle Parley P. Pratt.¹¹

Deception

One of the foremost characteristics of 1840's Nauvoo was deceit. Polygamy was kept a secret from all except the "inner circle" and was publicly denied. One Sunday morning Joseph preached from the Stand, "What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one." Joseph had not seven, but 48 secret wives when he preached this sermon; how those poor women must have felt as they listened to their Prophet/husband mock their "sacred" marriages!¹² [Fawn Brodie documents by name and

dates of "marriages" these 48 wives. Ed.]

Prostitution

One of the modern-day arguments in favor of polygamy asserts that this practice reduces the incidence of extramarital affairs. However, Nauvoo history challenges this conclusion. The town had a brothel and presumably enough business to support it. Two thousand people would pass the building on their way to Sunday meetings each week. The city council eventually put the house on rollers and pitched it over the edge of a deep gully!¹³

Murder

Joseph Smith had enemies wherever he went. Illinois was no different from any other place the Church had called home. Non-Mormon neighbors were fearful and troubled by several issues: the power the Mormons held politically; the unusual City Charter Nauvoo had obtained; the dictatorial rule exercised within the city; and the peculiar ways of the Mormons. These fears turned one-time allies into enemies. Mormon John D. Lee disclosed how these enemies were dealt with: "I knew of many men being killed in Nauvoo by the Danites. It was then the rule that all enemies of Joseph Smith should be killed, and I know of many a man who was quietly put out of the way by the orders of Joseph and his apostles while the Church was there."¹⁴

Apostasy

There were some people of integrity in Nauvoo who could not reconcile the practices of the Church with its

ideals. Many believed Joseph was a fallen prophet and yearned to effect a reformation within the Church. Others considered Joseph a base impostor. These people left the Church and mounted a campaign against the Prophet. They began by bringing the law suits against Joseph for slander, adultery, polygamy, and false swearing. They obtained a printing press and published a newspaper exposing many of the distinctly un-prophet-like dealings in which Joseph was involved. The assault ended a short time later with the death of Joseph Smith.¹⁵

And thus began the death of Nauvoo.

"City of Joseph, City Beautiful! City of Joseph—Nauvoo!"

On May 3, 1842 a Presbyterian minister living in Hancock County, where Nauvoo lies, wrote to a fellow pastor, "I presume Nauvoo is as perfect a sink of debauchery and every species of abomination as ever were Sodom or Ninevah."¹⁶

Is this a portrait of a community of saints? Does this typify the Mormon Church's 13th Article of Faith, penned by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo in 1842: "We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men..."? Apparently this was just another of the Prophet's lies.

Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, remains central to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Membership in the Church is not granted to those who do not profess faith in him. In fact, Mormon salvation hinges on this faith. The second Prophet of the Church taught: "no man or woman in this

dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith...every man and woman must have the certificate of Joseph Smith, junior, as a passport to their entrance into the mansion where God and Christ are..."; "All those who believe in their hearts and confess with their mouths that Joseph Smith is a true Prophet...are in possession of the Holy Spirit of God and are entitled to a fullness."¹⁷

How contrary this is to the Bible, God's Holy Word! Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." The Apostle Paul taught, "...if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."¹⁸

¹ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, pp. 465, 466.

² *Ibid.* pp. 335-337.

³ *Confessions of John D. Lee*, p. 165.

⁴ Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier—The Diary of Hosea Stout*, Vol. 1, p. 21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 311, 312 (see footnote); also Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, p. 111.

⁶ Brodie, p. 305; Newell and Avery, p. 99.

⁷ Brodie, p. 460; Ann-Eliza Young, *Wife No. 19*, p. 71.

⁸ Newell and Avery, p. 147.

⁹ Brodie, pp. 477-479.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 310, 311.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 306, 307 (see footnote);
The Wasp, 8/27/1842 p.2.

¹² *History of the Church*, Vol. VI, p.
411; Brodie, p. 336.

¹³ Newell and Avery, p. 112.

¹⁴ *Confessions of John D. Lee*, p. 284.

¹⁵ Brodie, pp. 374ff.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

¹⁷ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 7, p. 289; Vol. 9, p. 312.

¹⁸ John 14:6; Romans 10:9.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD—HOW HAS IT CHANGED?

By William A. BeVier

The popular name for the Worldwide Church of God is "Armstrongism" after Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986).

The group once had about 80,000 active members with publications, and radio and TV programs which reached millions of people. Reportedly at one time income for the group totaled \$200 million a year. In 1988 the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) claimed to have mailed 127 million pieces of literature. In 1991 it reported 11,426,085 pieces (Gerald Flurry, Worldwide Church of God Doctrinal Changes and the Tragic Results, 4th ed, 1994, pp. 3-4). This was an 80% reduction in mailings.

The one-half hour weekly TV program which once was viewed on 446 stations has now been eliminated, replaced with spot ads (Flurry, pp. 9-10).

Income and membership have also declined (Flurry, pp. 6-13; Joyce Carlson, mimeographed notes). Carlson reports the membership is

now about 55,000 for reasons which will be explained later.

Herbert Armstrong was born in 1892 in Des Moines, Iowa into a Quaker family. By 1912 he was working in the advertising department of a trade journal. In 1915 he started his own advertising business. After some success, he went bankrupt in the early 1920s.

He married his first wife, Loma Dillon, a third cousin, in 1917 to whom he dedicated his last book, Mystery of the Ages (1985). She was a Methodist and he, for a time, became a Methodist.

In 1924 the Armstrongs moved to Salem, Oregon where, through the influence of a neighbor, Mrs. Armstrong became a member of the Seventh-day Church of God, a break off from the Seventh-day Adventists. Armstrong at first disagreed with his wife but after a "personal study" of the Bible he, too, was "converted." He later declared Sunday worship was "pagan" in origin (Armstrong,

Autobiography, pp. 298-299, cited by Joyce Carlson).

In 1931 Armstrong was ordained a minister in the Seventh-day Church of God. In addition to seventh-day Sabbath keeping, Armstrong also concluded Jewish feasts are for today, and "death" in Scripture means annihilation so there is no eternal punishment, these among other non-orthodox conclusions. It was when Armstrong incorporated British Israelism, cf. British and Americans are two of the "lost tribes" of Israel, that he was excommunicated from the Seventh-day Church of God. He also declared at this time that it was wrong to go to a medical doctor if you were sick (he changed this view before he died).

In 1934 Armstrong started what is now the Worldwide Church of God, declaring the "Philadelphia era" of the Church has begun. In June of that year he began his radio program on a 50-watt station in Oregon. The next month he began publishing "The Plain Truth," sending the mimeographed news sheet to his 150 radio listeners.

Armstrong later moved his headquarters from Oregon to Pasadena, California. There, in 1946, he started Ambassador College. Successes, which he claimed were the blessings of God, seemed to reward his efforts.

For a time his son, Garner Ted Armstrong, was his closest associate and appeared to be his father's heir apparent. But in 1972 Garner Ted and Herbert had a falling out over several issues. Garner Ted was relieved of his responsibilities and "excommunicated." Financial support of the WCG dropped 40% in a few months (Joyce Carlson) and so Garner

Ted, who had frequently appeared on the TV and radio programs, was restored. Then in 1984 Garner Ted was "excommunicated" again, this time for alleged immoral conduct. This time financial support of the WCG dropped about 50% and many followers left to become associated with Garner Ted's Church of God International. Garner Ted set up his headquarters near Tyler, Texas.

Briefly, Armstrong's doctrines (which he claimed he received directly from God) included:

1. The true Gospel had been lost to the world from AD 70 until it was restored by God through Herbert W. Armstrong in 1934 (Armstrong, "All About Water Baptism").
2. The WCG is a legalistic system, much like Seventh-day Adventism, e.g., 7th day Sabbath, Mosaic dietary laws (Armstrong, "Tomorrow's World," June 1971, p. 1).
3. A religion adding good works to the Biblical completed redemptive work of Christ.
4. An earthly hope, not a heavenly one as presented in the New Testament.
5. The old heresy of Anglo-Israelism, e.g., British and Americans the lost tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. [Armstrong never explained how a Britisher by immigrating to the US. moves from the tribe of Ephraim to the tribe of Manasseh.]

6. Soul-sleep or non-existence of the souls of the dead between physical death and the resurrection. With this goes the doctrine of a "second chance" at the resurrection.
7. Denial of eternal punishment (typical of so many cults).
8. Denial of the Trinity of the Godhead. God is a "family," currently consisting of only God the Father and God the Son (Holy Spirit not a person, said Armstrong. The Plain Truth, Feb. 1960, p. 26).
9. System of forced tithing, and on special occasions giving a tithe of the tithe.
10. No one has salvation until the resurrection and no one can be sure of salvation in this life. [True of any "works" system.]
11. The gospel to be preached is not about Jesus Christ, it is "the Good News of the Government of God... a message which has not been preached for 1800 years or more" (Armstrong, "All About Water Baptism").

General works on the cults, such as Walter Martin's The Kingdom of the Cults, Dave Hunt's The Cult Explosion, Ruth Tucker's Another Gospel, Bob Larson's Larson's New Book of Cults, and Josh McDowell and Don Stewart's Handbook of Today's Religions all have sections on Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God (all of these works are stocked by R.A.S.). R.A.S. also stocks six monographs, or single subject works, on the WCG (see our catalog—Sorry,

Walter Martin's book on Armstrong is out of print).

I want to conclude this presentation with consideration of what has happened within the Worldwide Church of God in recent years. Herbert W. Armstrong died January 1986 at age 93.

Changes had already started to take place in the WCG before Armstrong's death. Reference already has been made to the troubles between Armstrong and his youngest son, Garner Ted.

Gerald Flurry, a former WCG leader and now a leader in the Philadelphia Church of God (headquarters Edmond, Oklahoma), writes of an attempted takeover of the WCG in the 1970s by what he calls "liberals," that resulted in Armstrong purging the "rebels" (Worldwide Church of God Doctrinal Changes and the Tragic Results, 4th ed, 1994).

After Armstrong's first wife died, he remarried in 1977. His second wife, and his former secretary, was a divorcee. At that time Armstrong made one of his many changes in doctrine and declared it no longer wrong to marry a divorced person. In 1983 Armstrong (then age 90) filed for divorce from Ramona Armstrong (then age 44) in Tucson, Arizona (Good News Broadcaster, Jan. 1984, p. 20). Mrs. Armstrong contested the divorce, which made the whole situation public and well-covered by the media. The divorce was finally granted in 1984, but not before Herbert had accused Ramona in court of stealing certain gold items from their home in Pasadena.

In 1984 the WCG also lost a \$1.26 million defamation suit to Leona McNair, former wife of a WCG executive (Christianity Today, Oct. 19, 1984, p. 51). That year the WCG reported \$70 million income (down from the \$200 million of earlier years).

By that time John Techak's Ambassador Report and David Robinson's Herbert Armstrong's Tangled Web (1980) books had been published documenting sexual misconduct by Herbert W. Armstrong, including incest with his daughter (Robinson, pp. 265-268).

Just before Armstrong's death he appointed Joseph Tkach his successor. Martin Filippello, a minister who had left the WCG, termed Tkach the "son of perdition." Filippello also asserted that he and Armstrong are the two witnesses in Zechariah 4 and Revelation 11, that Armstrong would be resurrected from the dead within one month, and 1,000 years of worldwide tribulation would begin (St. Paul Pioneer Press, Jan. 16, 1988). We can clearly discount Martin Filippello's prophecy about himself and Herbert Armstrong, but what about Joseph Tkach?

Joseph Tkach assumed the title "Pastor General" of the Worldwide Church of God, and became Chairman and Editor-in-chief of The Good News of the World Tomorrow and Publisher of The Plain Truth. However, he did not appear personally as the speaker on TV and radio as had Armstrong. Tkach is now listed as "Editor in Chief" of The Plain Truth (August 1994), as well as Publisher.

A comparison of the mastheads of the first issue published by Tkach after

Armstrong's death and the latest issue is interesting. A reorganization has taken place and most of the names appearing in 1986 are gone with new names and titles replacing them. Much more significant is the change in content, which has been noticed by many readers. For example, see the "Letters of the Editor" in January 1993. One question raised by a reader was the WCG's concept of the Godhead. Part of the editorial response was: "We do not believe that the Bible teaches that the Father and the Son are persons." Another reader wrote asking about the significance of the year 2000 and what he had been taught in a WCG correspondence course. The editorial response included the words: "Several lessons of the older versions... have since been edited and updated... we update and replace our literature. The Plain Truth... reflects the current teaching of the Worldwide Church of God... Do not be surprised to see changes in the literature.... and to make changes when necessary..." For many this attitude is commendable, but it is not the position expressed by Herbert W. Armstrong during his leadership and has caused great concern for many of his loyal followers.

Readers of The Plain Truth magazine between 1986 and 1994 found much less of an emphasis on prophecy which characterized Armstrong's writings. There was a greater emphasis upon Jesus Christ, almost an evangelistic thrust not seen under Armstrong's leadership.

The publication The Good News was discontinued (probably for financial reasons, for it like The Plain Truth, was distributed free). The same was true for the TV program. Ambassador

College in Pasadena has been closed, with a new emphasis on the WCG college in Big Sandy, Texas.

Tkach seems to be gradually moving the WCG toward traditional evangelical Protestant positions in theology, but at the same time seeking to avoid alienating members and supporters of the WCG. Such changes have not gone unnoticed by many. "An open and general letter to the anti cult research community" came to R.A.S. dated September 1991. The 14-page letter pointed out changes taking place in the WCG, but the writer concluded the WCG "an innocent church" was being "smeared and slandered in print."

More recently the Minnesota Christian Chronicle had an article titled: "Worldwide Church of God goes mainstream?" (Sept. 16, 1993, p. 7A). Moody Monthly (Oct. 1993, p. 64) had an article "Group Moves Toward Trinitarian Beliefs," referring to the WCG. Armstrong denied the Trinity, taught the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force and believers in a sense could become God (Moody Monthly, Oct. 1993, p. 64). Moody Monthly reported that since Armstrong's death the WCG has "...gradually distanced itself from these teachings."

Christianity Today (Nov. 8, 1993, p. 59) titled an article "Mainstream Moves May Split Worldwide Church of God." The facts are that the WCG already has suffered divisions, as the Christianity Today article notes citing the Philadelphia Church of God led by Gerald Flurry and the Global Church of God led by former close associate of Armstrong, Roderick C. Meredith.

Ruth Tucker (Another Gospel) and other cult-watchers began to take closer looks at the WCG under Joseph Tkach's leadership. Alan W. Gomes, Talbot School of Theology, and others focused new attention on the WCG. Gomes reported that the WCG no longer prohibits the use of cosmetics; celebrating birthdays and holidays; seeking medical treatment; and interracial marriage ("Winds of Change in the Worldwide Church of God," Nov. 1993, pp. 2-3). Noted doctrinal changes were much less of Armstrong's emphasis on prophecy and date setting, an affirmation of bodily resurrection, and more of a Biblical position on the redemptive work of Christ and the place of good works (Gomes, p. 4). Of greater import is the withdrawal from circulation of a number of Armstrong's written works, including his 1985 Mystery of the Ages. These are no longer available from the WCG. Others of Armstrong's works have been edited to reflect current WCG teaching (Gomes, p. 8, footnote 29).

Gerald Flurry denotes 40 changes in the WCG's doctrines since Joseph Tkach assumed the leadership in 1986 (Worldwide Church of God Doctrinal Changes and the Tragic Results, pp. 16-83).

Gomes states the WCG is very close to affirming belief in the Trinity and has declared its belief in the Person of the Holy Spirit (p. 4). Gomes indicates these and other changes were primarily produced by Joseph Tkach, Jr., the leader's son, along with K. J. Stavrinides, and Michael Feazell. Feazell is Joseph Tkach, Sr.'s Executive Assistant.

In January 1992 Gomes and others, at the invitation of WCG leaders, met at

the WCG headquarters in Pasadena, California for a series of discussions [Remember when Walter Martin met with Seventh-day Adventist leaders in Takoma Park?]. Gomes, on this occasion, seemed most concerned about the WCG's position on the Trinity (p. 6).

In August 1992 Gomes received a letter from Michael Snyder, Assistant Director of Public Affairs for the WCG. He referred to a newly revised WCG doctrinal statement, which stated: "The Church does not believe the Scriptures teach the Holy Spirit to be a person, but to be divine, eternal and coessential with God, yet distinct from the Father and the Son."

But then Joseph W. Tkach in his "personal" column in the August 31, 1993 issue of The Worldwide News (a WCG publication only for its members) stated: "...the Holy Spirit is personal" (cited by Gomes, p. 15). Gomes analyzes Tkach's further explanation of his meaning, and Gomes concludes Tkach's attempt to use the Greek and Latin to support his position is unfortunate. Tkach ends up presenting the Holy Spirit as an "it" rather than a "He."

Gomes concludes his 24-page paper: "Should the WCG now be considered another orthodox denomination within the pale of Christendom? I believe it is too soon to tell" (p. 24).

Even if the WCG becomes "orthodox" on the Biblical revelation of the Trinity, this does not make it "another orthodox denomination." As a study on the cults will indicate, there are a number of groups "orthodox" on the Trinity, but nevertheless a cult. My basic definition of a cult still revolves around the Person and Work of Christ, e.g., Gal. 1:8-9 with I Cor. 15:1-5; and I. John 4:1-4 (with John 3:16-18; Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8-10 supporting this view).

Tkach and his associates have made significant changes in the WCG doctrines of Herbert W. Armstrong. But the latest issue of The Plain Truth (September 1994) proves they still hold to the Old Testament Jewish feast days as valid for this dispensation and hold to good works as being a necessary part of our salvation.

If it is the Worldwide Church of God, or any other group, let us be like the Bereans (Acts 17:11).

NOTES OF ENCOURAGEMENT

1 Thessalonians 4:11

Many of you, our readers, have written notes of encouragement and we thought sharing some of these would also be a blessing to you, too. There have been a number of these and we are including just a few, but we hope to do this on a regular basis.

We value your prayers and support of us.

"Enclosed is our gift for your ministry. You have been of such help to us over the years—now and when we lived in Minnesota. May

the Lord continue His blessing upon you."

Hamilton, MT

"Your paper and catalog find their way into many hands thru our church [name omitted] we attend. Yes, what you provide is a necessity today! My sister and I were both born in Japan of missionary parents whose church celebrates its 100th birthday in Sept! Pray unbelievers in a town of 65 Shinto/Buddhist shrines, and only 2 Christian churches, may be impacted for Christ in the ceremonies.... God Richly bless you all."

Seattle, WA

"I 'discovered' your publication while browsing in the Seminary Library. It was referenced in a book review in the Summer, 1988, issue of the Christian Research Journal.... The sorts of things that you publish in your quarterly are what are so sorely needed among today's Christians."

Apple Valley, MN

"...The articles of The Discerner have been instrumental in my turning back to my faith from deceptive philosophies. Thank you for your work for God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sincerely, a repentant brother in Christ"

Milwaukee, WI

"Thank God for R.A.S. A friend (brother in Christ) got some

literature on Muslims and a catalog. He said, 'It was great and very helpful.' Keep me informed on your outpost for Christ!"

Minneapolis, MN

"I have enclosed a check in payment for the 2 copies of the book sent to me after my phone call to you. The other amount is simply to thank you for helping me. It is a blessing to know such an organization as yours exists."

MN

"I would have loved to have gone to the Open House but I will be 80 years old in two and one-half months and live on \$600 a month so I skip lots of things because I have had Lupus for nine months. I have everything I need and once in a while I can squeeze out a ten dollar bill. So the Lord is taking good care of me. I pray for you at the office."

St. Paul, MN

"Thank you for the nice visit. My husband went to be with the Lord 2½ years ago. I get very lonely."

Boulder, CO