

# Church of God, The Eternal

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## How to Evaluate Anti-Church Literature

July 1980

Dear Brethren:

We live in a fast-paced world. One does not turn his head or blink twice, lest he miss significant political or geographic occurrences.

In a comparable manner, events involving the sphere of Church of God influence are unfolding. Once again, it is necessary to interrupt the series of *Monthly Letters* in which the subject "The Two Facets of Divine Revelation" is being covered.

### What Is the Problem?

Books are being written at a very rapid clip. Letters are broadly circulated. Other material abounds in superabundance.

In each case, the very Truth of God is being attacked or categorically rejected because of human frailties and sins. The way of life which was once believed and which became the very basis for baptism is now spurned, ridiculed, and repudiated because certain human beings (at high levels of responsibility) acted in ways which were not Christian and which were less than befitting for those in such responsibilities.

This proliferation of "exposé literature" will critically influence many people. Far too few will take the time to think through the problem and arrive at correct conclusions—conclusions predicated on all the necessary information, not just on the emotional response characteristic of injured and defensive human beings.

We felt it imperative—for the sake of those who were called of God and who once KNEW the Truth—to send this letter of explanation preceding any further avalanche of deceptive and biased material. Our prayer is that people will pause sufficiently long enough,

in their moment of agitation and doubt, to ask all questions relevant to the problems which exist. Unless consideration is given to *all factors involved*, it is very easy to become prejudiced and biased. This letter is written in hopes of presenting the necessary questions—and making clear the specifics of the times as outlined in the Bible.

Conclusions which are based upon partial information contain many inherent assumptions. That is, many pertinent questions are ignored and therefore left unresolved. This approach is a very clever ruse, intended to camouflage the real issues and lay undue emphasis upon some specific part of the whole problem. To understand how assumptions fit in, and the consequential emotional response, let us analyze the problem. When the right premise is established, facts will not be denied—but neither will a false and biased conclusion be established.

### **Assumptions Involved and False Conclusions Implied**

All literature (whether book, article, or whatever) is written from some premise. But not all premises are objective and honest.

In many cases, the "facts" and material presented may be either wholly or partially accurate. In fact, the most deceptive material is that which very closely resembles the truth but contains error. The intent and purpose of that kind of presentation is NOT the establishment of facts. Quite the contrary, such presentation of "facts" and "documented information" is intended to give credence to the conclusions drawn or *implied*.

Few authors are willing to take the time, spend the energy, or make the sacrifices necessary to present unbiased fact. Therefore, we need to ask specific questions concerning any writing, speech, or other communication. First: What is the purpose, motivation, or intent? Second: What is the accuracy and reliability of the facts and conclusions presented? Third: Is there allowance for unwarranted and deliberately intended assumptions?

Regarding literature written about the Worldwide Church of God or specific individuals in that organization, what are some of the assumptions? Keep in mind these two things: One, we are neither denying nor substantiating the accuracy of any facts, data, or information given. Two, we are not defending the church or any individual within it.

*Assumption Number One:* That God categorizes sin. In other words, sins committed by certain individuals are vastly more heinous than are those committed by others.

*Assumption Number Two:* That the authors or speakers of such defaming material are not, nor ever were, themselves involved in sins of such magnitude.

*Assumption Number Three:* That God has put His stamp of approval on these authors to denounce, condemn, and warn those who have committed sins of such grievous magnitude.

*Assumption Number Four:* That no called and commissioned servant of God would ever depart from his God-given responsibility. Such a servant would be faultless at all times.

*Assumption Number Five:* That if a servant fails in character, the Truth which he taught is no longer Truth. That Truth remains Truth, and is substantiated as such, only by continuity of character of the servant called and commissioned of God to proclaim it.

*Assumption Number Six:* That Truth does not remain absolute, but the character of the man does. That one must be able to walk in the footsteps of the chosen servant blindly, without fear of being led astray. That such a man, only, is a true servant of God.

*Assumption Number Seven:* That the only responsibility placed by God upon the laity is to observe the chosen servant, and not to be custodians of the Truth themselves. That is, observe the man. If he remains faithful to expectations, he is the true servant of God. However, if he fails in character—for, the revealed Word of God has nothing to do with any evaluation process—he is not the servant of God.

This assumption fails to consider that the Truth of God stands in its own right. It is absolute, eternal. In no way is it affected by the erroneous assumptions of one who proclaims it or who "changes" it.

What is Truth at the time God calls and commissions His servant remains Truth, regardless of what happens to that servant. God, or His Truth, cannot be judged on the basis of what *any* human being does.

Because of anger, hatred, resentment, distrust, and disbelief—emotional responses to the problems of our time—those traumatized by events which have occurred in the church, or by things they have read, usually make wild and thoughtless assertions. For example, the statement, "I'll never trust *any* man again." Yet, tragically, those making such comments are doing the same thing they *assume* they were doing earlier when they subscribed to the Truth as taught by a chosen servant. How are they doing the same thing now? By believing everything they read which exposes the past, without analyzing the real issues involved. Human nature is indeed fickle!

## Fickleness of Human Nature

A Work is born. A man proclaims the revealed Truth. A very small number of people respond. They, too, are called to understand. They come from all walks of life, from every level of education, and from a multiple variety of religious convictions. They have heard the message.

Following their call and conversion, they *prove* the Truth. That is, they *put it to the test by living it*. In sequence they had been called, they had heard the message, and they had opened their Bibles and verified that Truth from the pages of God's Word. Now they progressively *prove it—living it day by day*.

These people, for the most part, do not know the man through whom they have heard the Truth. What counts is, *they have heard God's Word* and are excited and enthusiastic about it. They jubilantly live that way of life. They prove its *value* by becoming recipients of the promises and assurances of God—promises realized as a result of faithful obedience to the true way of life.

Because of conviction and dedication to those spiritual principles which they have learned, they cannot be swayed by other men. Publications, letters, books, and other forms of communication cannot affect their thinking. They cannot be dissuaded. They have received the Truth, and they *know it*.

Vehemently, loudly, and stubbornly, these called of God are accused of following a man—the man through whom they have received the Truth. But God's people merely smile and manifest a deep pity for those who are accusing them. They *know* the Truth. They *know* what they have heard is Biblically verified, for they have studied God's Word. And they know it is practical—this they have proven by living it.

In process of time, the servant through whom they have learned the message displays doubtful character and sincerity. The results are as follows: Those called of God begin to question the Truth which they have learned. Now they do not believe anything that servant says or writes. But the anomaly is this: The very people who were *always* critical of this servant, and whom the called of God did not regard or trust in times past, are now completely and totally accepted. Those called of God now reject the message given, because of the failure of the servant through whom they learned the Truth.

So, the chosen of God turn from the man and the message taught, vehemently stating, "I will never follow a man again." This is the very accusation which they had so often disregarded previously, because they *knew* they had not followed a man. They had heard

the true message of God. Why, then, has their thinking completely changed? Does Truth become falsehood because the man who proclaimed it did not live up to it? Have the people, because of emotional hurt and injury (experienced at a time when rational and sound thinking did not exist), reacted in such a way as to reject their purpose of life? What if a large percentage of the "expose material"—now believed because of personal hurt—is found to be false or unwarranted? Who will the people blame then?

Succinctly, let us analyze the fickleness of human beings:

1. They hear the message, regardless of past convictions, and are thoroughly convinced of its veracity.
2. They believe only the true servants of God, although many detractors accuse and malign.
3. By living what they have learned, they prove its value and authenticity in their lives.
4. Over the years, they patiently wait for the expectations of their hearts and minds.
5. Because of critical times and conditions, the faith of all is sorely tried and tested.
6. Doctrine is changed. Character defects begin to surface. Politicking and hypocrisy become rampant.
7. Because of these unsettling conditions, many turn from the way of life to which they were called, stating: "I do not really know what the Truth is," "I will never follow a man again," or "The man could not have had the Truth, because God would never have given His Truth to such a man."
8. Now the people return to the very thing which they once rejected (knowing that it was *not* of God).
9. They jeer and "poke fun" at everything which that servant writes or speaks. They will not believe one word uttered from his lips.
10. *Now* these same people believe only those who oppose that servant. They categorically believe most, if not all, which is written against that individual.

Brethren, is it possible to trust information which proceeds from such an emotional and volatile premise? What, then, should we trust? The faith once delivered! This is the faith—the belief—which was not predicated on personal knowledge of any man. Rather, this faith was predicated on the initial call of God, the revelation of Truth to us all, and the proof effected in our lives by the fact we lived it and experienced the beneficent results.

Initially, we did not accept the Truth on the basis of any personal belief that the man who proclaimed it was perfect. *It stood in its own right*. It was the Truth and we all knew it. Why, then, do we not continue to evidence faith in that Truth, regardless of what may happen to changing men?

Brethren, will those who reacted against the Truth—because of character defects in the one through whom they learned it—suddenly, by further discovery in the future, realize they have been emotionally swayed by volatile men whom they *followed right out of the Truth*? There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth in the last, closing days of this era of human history.

Are there any indications that such conditions are to exist just before the Second Coming of Christ, in our generation? What do those conditions reveal concerning the Truth, the servant through whom that Truth was taught, and the reaction of the people?

### **A Last-Day Servant Who Fails**

The Scripture cannot be broken. It is the unalterable, infallible Word of God. What God has spoken *will come to pass*. The heavens and the earth may cease, but the Word of God shall stand forever.

What does that Word reveal about these times in which we live?

The Truth—the Gospel—was to be committed to someone who would proclaim it. As a result of that message, the people called of God would turn from their own evil ways and obey that Truth. Next, doctrinal change would interrupt the continuity, faithfulness, and loyalty of that body of believers called of God. The result would be a massive departure from the doctrine which God had given. Why? Because the majority would remain loyal to a man instead of to "the faith once delivered" (2 Pet. 2:1–2).

The point is this: That man whom the majority would follow once taught the Truth. For, false teachers were to come into the Body, bringing their heresies. By heretical concepts, they would deny the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of the influence of the leading

individual himself, credence would be given to doctrinal changes, and consequently the majority would follow him—or them—into error. As a result of the changes in doctrine, the very Truth which was initially taught—the doctrine and way of life which all heard and which became their basis for baptism—would be ridiculed, denigrated, and held in evil repute. So says 2 Peter 2:1–2, a prophecy for the last days!

Many texts could be quoted to substantiate the above facts. That, however, is not essential. If doubters do not accept the validity of one text, neither would they be convinced by many dozens.

Matthew, also, was inspired to reveal circumstances of the last days. His statements augment those of Peter. These texts most certainly apply to our time period. He wrote:

Who then is a faithful and wise servant [one who refuses to depart from the revealed doctrine], whom his lord hath made ruler over his household [the ministry is held accountable by God, for He put them over His flock], to give them meat in due season [the faith once delivered—Jude 3]? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord *when he cometh* shall *find so doing*. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if [conditional because man is a free-moral agent—God does not force or compel even His own chosen servants] that evil servant [not evil when God chose him, but when he turned away—because of human vanity and arrogance—from the original commission] shall say in his heart [use deception, for what he writes and speaks is not what really exists in his own heart], My lord delayeth his coming [the very 'justification' for what presently is transpiring in the church]: And shall begin to smite his fellowservants [could anything be more characteristic of what happened in the ministry of the Church of God?], and to eat and drink with the drunken [how demonstrative of the feasting and banqueting which took place!]; The lord of that servant [he *was* the servant of God until he turned from the way of life which God had given him] shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 24:45–51).

Prophetically, the Bible makes it clear that a servant of the last days would turn from his original responsibility, beginning to abuse his fellow laborers and to feast with drunkards and sottish people. That servant *was* God's chosen servant. Matthew specifically states, "The lord of that servant . . ."

Let us think. For a servant to turn from the glories of the way of life to the behavior indicated by Matthew, those characteristics must have been latent for years within that man. As free-moral agents, all chosen servants of God must make the continual choice of which direction to go.

The commonly heard expression, "He could not have been a servant of God, and have manifested the traits and characteristics he did," is not viable. It *presupposes that a chosen servant of God cannot fail*: that once he is selected by God, he is no longer a free-moral agent—*he is prevented from doing evil*. Also, it presupposes that no other human being could fail when selected to be the last-day servant of God.

If you were God, how would you bring to pass the prophecy which clearly indicates God's own chosen servant of the last days would turn away from his call and commission? The answer is given in the Bible!

Jesus was questioned relative to His *selection* of the original twelve disciples. Some could not understand the application of Jesus Christ's words. Therefore, He made specific statements and said those who were with Him would understand when the events came to pass.

He said: ". . . I know whom I have chosen [the twelve disciples, including Judas]: but that the scripture may be fulfilled [remember, it cannot be broken], He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his [Judas'] heel against me" (John 13:18).

Jesus did not compel Judas to fulfill prophecy. Judas was a free-moral agent. But Jesus did know that Judas possessed the nature which made it possible for him to fulfill the prophecy.

Continuing, verse 19: "Now I tell you before it come, that, *when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.*"

God works all things according to the counsel of His own will. The certification of Jesus Christ and His commission was the willful fulfillment of a prophecy which was written concerning Him. Judas, because of his own defective character, became another instrument by which prophecy was fulfilled.

The Bible was written many centuries ago. The prophecy relative to the "evil servant" of the last days was written long ago and must be fulfilled today in the same manner as was the prophecy which related to Christ. Further, the certification of that way of life in our day—and the commission given—is the fulfillment of prophecy. It was in Jesus' day. It is

no different today. The event has come to pass. If we are the true people of God, we will experience the substantiation of our faith and confidence (not the destruction of it) in the fulfillment of this prophecy.

All that is being written in a derogatory manner about that servant only substantiates his commission. To those who believe and know the Truth, it supports their faith.

A tragedy indeed! But it reflects the character flaw of the individual, not something God compelled him to do.

In some respects, those who have reacted emotionally and volatily to the difficulty of our day must somehow believe that God would *compel* His own chosen servant to remain faithful. That it is impossible for any servant of God to fail. This concept does not allow the right of free-moral agency. Prophecy indicated what would happen. But the servant willed of his own volition to do what he did.

In the morass of confusion, a major mistaken conclusion is being drawn by many. How will it affect you?

### **A Major Deception—God's Word Denied and Rejected**

Many are saying, "Mr. H.W. Armstrong could not have been a last-day servant of God. He has committed horrendous sins. God would never use such a man to do His Work." But is this rationale correct?

A simple question should put the whole matter into proper perspective. If Jesus Christ knew whom He had chosen (Judas) so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, how would you choose someone to fulfill prophecy so that the Scriptures might not be broken—scriptures which clearly reveal that the last-day servant would become evil, committing the things we have seen take place? The answer tells the whole story—reveals clearly the complete picture.

But there is another factor—a factor which is just as obvious as the failure of the last-day servant. That factor involves the *people*.

While the people accuse the servant of dereliction, they themselves are equally guilty. They have turned against the Truth of God. They trample upon it with hate and contempt. They judge the very Truth of God on the basis of a man's obedience or disobedience. Although they broadly publish or proclaim various self-justifications for leaving the church,

they *all* did so *only* because of the problems manifested within the Body. This is hardly an acceptable "reason" for what they call "growth" into further "truth."

Satan has had a heyday. He has convinced many to depart from—to utterly reject, because of men's imperfections—the revealed Truth. How can they equate this action to the statement of Jesus Christ—who said, when faced with a comparable situation, "He that is without sin among you [remember, '. . . there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not' (Eccl. 7:20)], let him *first* cast a stone at her" (John 8:7).

All circumstances plainly reveal the failure to be that of the *man*—not the Word of God. The Word revealed to us in the last day shall stand for ever and ever. It cannot be broken.

Because of the force and efficacy of that Word, a servant of the last days had to fulfill the prophecies written about him. Further, because of the writings of many prophecies, the people had to manifest their defective character, too. Thus it is written.

The equal failures of servant and people do not disprove the Truth. On the contrary, they substantiate the Word of God. Therefore, as we are told, ". . . when ye shall see all these things, *KNOW* that it [margin: 'he' (Christ)] is near, even at the doors" (Matt. 24:33). We have seen the *fulfillment* of God's Word, *not a breaking of it*. Those who see and understand will have their faith anchored more surely and firmly.

Deception is so clever! Most do not realize how deception works in their own minds. They conjure up in their *own* minds what *they think* God should have done. Then, in the stubbornness of their own minds, they refuse to accept revealed fact—the actual fulfillment of prophecy.

Could Mr. H.W. Armstrong have been a last-day servant? Emphatically yes! The Scriptures compel the necessity that just such a one be the chosen agent. *If* it is another man, not the one all of us heard, there must yet be one to come with the same character defects! Will you be any more capable of handling the situation then?

Because of our faithful obedience to the way of life taught by Mr. H.W. Armstrong, we are often accused of following *him*! Does such an accusation have validity?

### **Do We Follow Mr. H.W. Armstrong?**

The Apostle Paul said: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Again, he said, "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me" (1 Cor. 4:16). And

finally, he said to the brethren at Philippi: ". . . be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (Ph'p. 3:17).

It is Biblical to follow a chosen servant of God. For, by that servant people hear the Word of God and are afforded the opportunity to obey the way of life. Those of us called of God today heard through a human agent, just as did those of the Apostle Paul's day. After being called of God, it is *necessary* to follow that servant through whom we learned the Truth—just as the Holy Spirit, through the writings of Paul, instructed those of his day to follow him.

But are there constraints? Are we morally and spiritually admonished and instructed to follow a commissioned servant into ungodly changes or error of any kind? Absolutely not! Paul makes this point clear in his letter to the brethren at Philippi. Note carefully what he said:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are *true*, whatsoever things are *honest*, whatsoever things are *just*, whatsoever things are *pure*, whatsoever things are *lovely*, whatsoever things are of a good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *THINK on these things* (Ph'p. 4:8).

What are the "things" of that exalted nature? The very next verse answers the question—"Those things, which ye have both *learned*, and *received*, and heard, and seen in me, DO: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Ph'p. 4:9).

What things had the Philippians learned, received, and heard from the Apostle Paul? *Those things which God had revealed to him.*

Many times Paul stressed the necessity of loyalty in following him, but always *in the revealed Truth*. In no place does God's Word instruct us to follow any man into error!

If the servant of God continued to follow that which was revealed, who were the brethren really following? One only! They were following Christ.

So it is today. We were called to a knowledge of the Truth. We heard the message and responded to it. Because of our conviction, we were baptized and began to make the Truth of God a way of life. We were following *the message* which we heard. We heard it through a chosen servant of God. As long as that servant remained faithful to the way which God revealed to him, we walked in the same footsteps. When he departed, we continued to use the proper guide of revealed Truth and consequently refused to follow that servant into error.

The people who *really follow a man* are those who followed that servant into error. How can we be accused, by any logical rationale, of following a man? What we are continuing to practice is what was accepted and practiced by all of us until tainted and perverted judgment caused the majority of the brethren to reject the Truth because of a man's failure.

Others have rejected all, turning to their own imaginations. They have rejected their call, conversion, and relationship with God. They deny Jesus Christ—deny His Work of the last days.

The one group of people follow human beings into error and perversion. The other group follow their own imaginations and carnal reasonings. But only one course of action can be right. That is the acceptance of the divinely revealed way of life. The substantiation of that way is the fact that a servant of God turned from it and a great number of people who lost faith turned to their own reasonings. What we have *seen* is the living proof of what Christ said were the signs of the times in which we live. Can we ask for any greater insight and substantiation? The wise will *see* and understand.

### **How Do We Know We Have the Truth?**

The just shall live by faith. Faith is the evidence of things not seen.

But faith has an end. Once the prophesied event has been fulfilled, faith is no longer necessary. On a number of different occasions Jesus told His disciples that when they saw the event come to pass, then they would *KNOW*—not by faith, but as a reality.

The revealed doctrine is frequently called "the faith." It is a way of life known and understood only by those called of God. From the beginning of our call, conversion, and baptism, we *KNEW* the Truth. We had been called to understand. In like manner, when the prophesied events began to transpire, those who had not lost faith *KNEW*. They had seen their faith substantiated. The faith substantiated was the doctrine—way of life—initially given.

Therefore, the doctrine—substantiated, authenticated, and made more *comprehensibly* absolute—is that which was repudiated and rejected. In other words, the proof of the true doctrine is the fact it was altered, changed, or repudiated. We *saw* the repudiation come to pass—therefore we know it to be the true doctrine.

What we accepted as a call from God, substantiated by faith, and proved by living, was now made absolute by what we saw—the prophesied doctrinal departure of those who once believed and practiced that way of life.

How do we *KNOW* what was and is the true doctrine? By knowing what was rejected and abandoned! The very words of Jesus and His early servants have been verified and substantiated by the fulfilled events.

## Conclusion

This letter was necessitated because of faith which was shattered—shattered by troubling actions of high-level church personnel. Such events created considerable doubt and confusion.

The volatile and emotional reaction of most members was based, to some degree, on assumption. Reason and integrity had departed. Faith had been lost. Many were so traumatized, it never occurred to them that their *original* faith and confidence was actually being substantiated. They saw the prophesied events unfold, but were too troubled to comprehend their true significance. Yet, the believing *KNEW* the truth of the times and circumstances.

The results of losing faith have been tragic. Both the servant and what he taught have been rejected categorically. Long-standing opponents of God's way of life are now implicitly trusted and believed. How fickle! God's called and chosen have *not yet* learned to cherish, first and foremost, the revealed Word of God—they still look to man. They are destined to learn an even more bitter lesson.

We must not be deceived by events or circumstances. We must not deny Christ and the Word of God because of human failures. Let us not be deceived by our own volatile and traumatized emotions!

What has been seen, by those who hold faith, is the *proof* of the true doctrine. We *can* know and understand. Fulfilled prophetic events are living, undeniable proof. The broad rejection and abandonment of the doctrine is the real proof of its authenticity.

One's failure to hold faith and continue a given responsibility does not disprove that he was an end-time servant. It was prophesied. It had to come to pass. The Scriptures cannot be broken. Therefore, human failure ought not disturb us—except in the sense of pity and compassion. For, that failure is a prophecy come to pass—a fulfilled prophecy, by which we can *KNOW* the way and the true doctrine.

Let us hold faith. Let us endure unto the end. For, the events which are unfolding dramatically at the present are events which will lead to the Second Coming of Christ.

What a glorious thought! May God hasten that day.

With profound love and regard,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'R' and 'C'.

Raymond C. Cole