

CHURCH OF THE
G E R N A L

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” – Matthew 24:14

January 12, 2006

Dear Brethren, Co-Workers and Friends:

As I write this letter, I am mindful of the fact that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, the late human leader of the Worldwide Church of God, has been dead for over a full time cycle of 19 years. As most of you will remember, Mr. Armstrong died twenty years ago—in the morning hours of January 16, 1986. At that time, I was working in the Worldwide Church of God’s Legal Department. Even though we had hoped and prayed that Mr. Armstrong would not die then, we also knew that, barring a miracle from God, he could die at any time. I remember the deafening silence, when we came to the office and heard the news, and I also remember how Mr. Tkach later that morning addressed all of the Headquarters’ employees, assuring us that he would follow in Mr. Armstrong’s footsteps. Of course, we are all too aware of the fact how miserably Mr. Tkach failed in that endeavor.

Mr. Armstrong was a remarkable man. I remember how he encouraged all of us in one of his last sermons to continue learning and overcoming. He asked the pointed question, “How much have you grown this last year?” (Compare 2 Peter 3:18). He also remarked that he had learned more that year—which turned out to be the last year of his life—than in all his previous years.

It is therefore sad that some teach, in effect, the unbiblical concept that since the time of Mr. Armstrong’s death, the Church of God cannot and must not grow in understanding. They falsely claim that Mr. Armstrong restored all knowledge to the Church, and that nothing can be changed since his death in 1986. They overlook that it is Christ who will restore all things (Acts 3:21). Mr. Armstrong would be the first who would, with his thundering voice, dismiss this totally unsound concept that we don’t have to grow in knowledge and understanding. He encouraged us to change, when we find error. He said that he was willing to continue to change, when he was proven to be wrong from Scripture. Those who think and teach that the fullness of God’s truth was restored to the Church during Mr. Armstrong’s life refuse to follow one of Mr. Armstrong’s most fundamental instructions—that of CHANGE when one is found to be wrong. We must change, when proven wrong by the Bible.

It is also very sad that some claim the Church does not have to preach the gospel anymore, as Mr. Armstrong allegedly completed the preaching, and it is somewhat appalling that they misquote Mr. Armstrong for that wrong concept. They fail to mention that Mr. Armstrong instructed the ministry to continue doing the Work. In his last member letter, dated January 10, 1986, he wrote that the “greatest work lies yet ahead.” He also said: “It may be that the Work God has given me to do is complete, but not the Work of God’s Church, which will be faithfully doing God’s Work till Christ, the True Head of this Church, returns... God’s Work must push ahead.” Once again, Mr. Armstrong would be the first to dismiss, with his thundering voice, the concept that the Church should ever refuse to continue to preach the gospel into all the world.

It is somewhat amusing to me, but also very telling, that these kinds of claims seem to be made mainly by those who did not live at Headquarters during the last years of Mr. Armstrong's life. They did not have the privilege of listening to Mr. Armstrong personally, and so they misconstrue statements from his writings, without knowing what Mr. Armstrong really felt and taught.

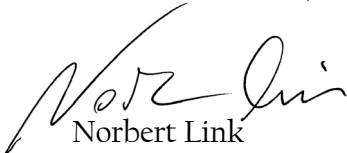
When thinking of Mr. Armstrong, I also think of his concern that we fully understand the deep meaning of the two trees in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-17; 3:1-24). I must have heard him teach the meaning of the two trees in ten or more consecutive sermons, and he mentioned more than once that most who were hearing these sermons were “not getting it” and that they were not even converted. Subsequent facts have shown how right he was.

Mr. Armstrong also spoke and wrote much about prophecy. He understood that it is the Church's duty to warn and to watch. But it was clearly understood that we are not to preach prophecy as an intellectual exercise. Rather, prophecy is to help us to see the signs of the times, for what they are, and to try to help others, as well as ourselves, to become better people. If we study prophecy—or the entire Bible, for that matter—for any other reason, we have failed to study God's Word properly.

Many will remember that Mr. Armstrong was called an “ambassador for world peace” and “a builder of bridges between the nations.” He was even nominated at one time for the Nobel Peace Prize. From the very beginning of the work he was given to accomplish, Mr. Armstrong advocated peace—which is much more than just the absence of war. He worked for peace, and the preaching of the gospel or good news of peace (Ephesians 6:15) has everything to do with the coming of a peaceful world, when war will no longer exist (Isaiah 2:4).

There is much more that I could write about the legacy, which Mr. Armstrong has left us. Rather than misquoting him and inventing or clinging to ideas which are absolutely contrary to his very thinking—the very core of his being—let us respect him by following God's lead. Mr. Armstrong is dead, but Christ is very much alive (compare Isaiah 63:16). The Worldwide Church of God, including its Headquarters facilities and Ambassador College, has been effectively destroyed. Those who were forced to leave the Worldwide Church of God organization, because of its doctrinal heresies, are scattered. However, the truth that was revealed continues to be taught and grows among those who are faithful to the Head of the Body—Jesus Christ! It is the living Christ who cleanses His Church and prepares it for His Coming (Ephesians 5:25-27). Those who follow Christ (Revelation 14:4) will have made themselves ready, when He returns (Revelation 19:7).

In Christ's service,



Norbert Link