

March 14, 1980 Letter to Roderick C. Meredith from Herbert Armstrong

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD WORLD HEADQUARTERS
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA 91123

HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG **Tucson, March 14, 1980**
President and Pastor

Dear Rod:

Your letters of February 1 and March 7 show, I am sorry to say, that either you still cannot understand WHY the living Head of God's Church, Jesus Christ, had you sent to Hawaii, or you are unwilling to see or admit—and I prefer to believe the former.

There is no point in telling you this letter is written in LOVE for YOU—for you ought to know that without my saying it. But out of love for you, and DESIRE to see you back as PART OF GOD'S TEAM, working in full co-operation and right attitude with the rest of[f] us; I shall take time and space to make it clear once for all this time.

I have tried to hold the mirror up for you to see yourself as others see you. But still you don't see in that mirror the same YOU that others see—or are unwilling—I hope not the latter. But now I must be SURE! I shall speak plainly, candidly. If this letter hurts, I quote from a letter the Apostle Paul sent to brethren at Corinth: "For though I made you angry with a letter, I do not repent ... for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance, for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

For godly sorry worketh repentance to salvation ... but the sorrow of the world worketh death." (11 Cor. 7:8-10).

Now I'm going to come with plainness of speech as Paul said—in I Corinthians 2.

To overseas audiences, and to Kings, Emperors, Presidents and Prime Ministers, I simmer down the WAY OF GOD and the WAY OF THE WORLD in two very small words—"GET" and "GIVE." This world is geared to the way of "GET." That is the way of VANITY, SELF-centeredness, coveting, lust and greed, jealousy and envy, rebellion against authority, competition which leads to strife, violence and war. The way of "GIVE" is OUT-flowing LOVE, harmonious co-operation, serving, helping, sharing, giving.

In spiritual PRINCIPLE, the latter is the way of God's Law, the Ten Commandments—the former the way of Satan. I tell them that ALL the Unsolvable problems, troubles and evils in the world are caused by the fact the world lives by the "GET" principle.

Rod, WHY have so many who have worked [with you] said that you rub the fur the [w]rong way? You are DOCTRINALLY correct., But in II Corinthians Paul says we are not to live by the strict letter of the Law, but by the SPIRIT or obvious INTENT—the basic PRINCIPLE of it (II Cor. 3:6). You are a model of doctrinal correctness according to the LETTER—the strictness of the letter—but you do overlook the SPIRIT from the heart. You won the mile in a state high-school meet, You had know[n,] as Satan injects into us all from childhood, the spirit of competition. You b[e]came a COMPETITOR. In conversion you learned and accepted the strictness of the letter of God's Commandments. You wrote a good booklet on the Ten Commandments. But now I hold the mirror up for you to see in yourself what SO MANY who know you well see in you—the SPIRIT of COMPETITION is still there!

You are not going to like this, Rod. Members of your family will resent it. But I am the chosen apostle of Jesus Christ and in His name, I have to say these things to you, for I want to have you with us IN GOD'S KINGDOM—and there will be no contentions—no spirit of competition there! No one is going to be there who strives for himself to take over the CHIEF SEAT!

Jesus Christ through me elevated you to the chief seat (which you had come to me suggestin[g] over the ministry of God's Church in what we then called CAD, you were a harsh task-master over the ministers. You, yourself, find it difficult and perhaps impossible to TAKE what you dished out. Dozens of ministers would testify to that. You rubbed the fur the wrong way! That has been your life-style!

In a sense, though I approved it at the time, you came to me [(]when Raymond Cole was trying to administer CAD from Eugene,[])] to jerk the rug out from under Raymond—and he feels that to this day. I knew, as did you, that CAD could not be handled from Eugene, and I approved your suggestion and put you in the driver’s seat over the ministers of the Church when it was not yet so big.

When you were made second Vice President, it became a standing joke among leaders at Pasadena, the saying, “Well, after all, I am the second Vice President.”

Jesus said, “And whosoever of you will be chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even th[e] Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Mark 10:44-45). Jesus said further, “Beware of the scribes which wear long robes, ...and [love] the highest seats in the synagogue, and the chief rooms (offices—ranks—positions), at feasts” (Luke 20:46). Rod, am I qualified to call to your attention, these things? I came into the ministry more than fifty years ago, back in Oregon. I was never a member of the Church of God, Seventh Day, headquartered at Stanberry, Missouri. The church of Dugger and Dodd at Salem, W. Virginia, was an off-shoot, and, like Ted’s present “church”. Ray Cole’s, and other’s, NOT the true Church of God. However, I never became a member of the Salem offshoot. Half of the Oregon brethren (while all were in Stanberry) had incorporated as a separate church, “The Oregon Conference.” I was ordained by them. Twice I was paid by them—about four months at \$20 a week, and 15 mon[*n*]ths later, from February to July, 1933, at \$3 per week.

But I did CO-OPERATE with the Stanberry people, from 1927 until ordained by the Oregon Conference, June, 1931—without salary, I co-operated with the Salem people after the start of the present Worldwide Church Of God (then called the Radio Church of God), and WITHOUT RECEIVING FROM THEM A PENNY OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT in any way, from 1934 (after both the World [T]omorrow radio program was going, and The PLAIN TRUTH was being published) until August, 1937. And after that, while building the present Church of God, Philadelphia era, I co-operated at my own expense with the Stanberry (Sardis era) people until October, 1945.

I DID NOT, as Ted claims (he was 5 years old when I ceased the co-operation with them because of the pressure of the Work in the present Church of God). I did not leave them to start something of my own. I continued working with them—GIVING, not getting—at my own exp[*e*]nse co-operating—GIVING—as long as my time allowed.

But the point I want to make is this: I SERVED—I HELPED—I co-operated. And I did not have or seek any high position. I always considered myself, just as the Sardis ministers did, that I was the LEAST of the ministers—the TAIL-ENDER!

When I conducted the campaign in the Firbute school house (36 seats) in 1933, I stopped receiving even the \$3 per week salary from the Oregon Conference.

As the tail-end LEAST of the ministers, Christ started me in that little 36-seat school house, I constantly suffered persecution—first from Stanberry ministers, then again from Salem, W. Va.-ministers, then again from Stanberry. The 19 members we had from that Firbutte campaign was the START of the present Worldwide Church of God. The brethren at the start were my own converts—my own children in the Lord. NEVER in all my ministerial experience, I once sought a higher position.

Jesus Christ gave me the Pastor position at the start. The Church grew, as I held other campaigns in Eugen[e] and in Alvadore. Finally I appointed and ordained two other elders, one a preaching elder and one a local elder, at Eugene, beside two deacons. In those early years of this, our present Church, I served as pastor of a Stanberry church near Jefferson, Oregon. There I appoin[t]ed and ordained two elders, and two deacons—for THEIR church. All the time I “GAVE”—I did not “GET.” Before that I had learned how Paul says, in II Corinthians 3:6, that we must obey the SPIRIT or obvious INTENT of the Law, not the letter. I had dedicated my life to “GIVE” and not to “GET.” As the Work grew, Christ used me in founding Ambassador College. After their graduation I ordained m[y] son Dick, Raymond Cole, Herman Hoeh, Raymon[d] Mc Nair and his brother. From there you know the history, Your uncle and yourself came along about next, then others. I ne[v]er sought or moved up to a higher rank or office. Jesus Christ raised up the Church through me. I came to the position I hold as the simple result of what the living Head of this Church raised up through me.

But others have sought higher Position. There has been, it seems, NO END of worldly POLITICS at Pasadena Headquarters. As Christ blessed and prospered God’s Church and Work, and we came to have better than \$100,000,000 of net worth, and a near \$80 million a year income, there devel[o]ped a

mad scramble for ever higher and higher rank. Sure, I made some mistakes. I naively TRUSTED men like Al Portune, David Antion, my own son, Wayne Cole, many others no longer with us. But now, f[o]r the first time since about 1967, there is HARMONY and a spirit of Co-oper[a]tion at Pasadena. AND I AM DETERMINED TO KEEP IT THAT WAY!

Now back to you.

You have demonstrated, as seen clearly by many others, a spirit of rank-consciousness. In plain language that is coveting higher authority. I do not think you have coveted more money. I do not think more money is what Ted, Al Portune, Dave Antion, Ray Cole, Wayne or others really coveted. They coveted POWER—more authority—like a 15-year old boy coveting the POWER of a steering wheel and a throttle. We have gone through a House CLEANING. We now have PEACE and CO-OPERATION at Pasadena. And eight to ten others on the executive level there have voiced to me their fears and convictions that if you now come back to Pasadena, that PEACE, and HARMONY, and CO-OPERATION will be turned once again into constant contention, irritation, and HARM TO GOD’S WORK! I do not like to tell you this. I haven’t mentioned this to all, but to those I mentioned your return, that is the unanimous feeling.

If I have you come back as Dean of the Faculty, several say you would delegate most or the real duties of the Dean, and devote yourself to trying to make yourself the LEADER and boss of the College, and even of the Chur[ch.] You have—and all are aware of it—been possessed with the idea that I will not live much longer, and that YOU are the “FIRST among equals” to take my place.

Rod, in frankest candor, JESUS CHRIST will NEVER put any one at the head of His Work on earth who is competitive, covetous of power and status, and [self-righteous]. In brutal frankness, you lack the charisma to lead God’s work You do not attract—as I said before, you REP[EL—] people. You are a harsh taskmaster over those under you. THAT IS YOUR RECORD!

When I wr[o]te you [<uncertain>] that a change of ATTITUDE is needed, perhaps I have at last made myself clear.

You have said that you only said a few statements you probably should not have made, but you didn’t think you had said enough to warrant this six months’ leave of absence. Rod, I’m very well aware of the amount of words you said against Christ’s chosen apostle. But Jesus said, “of the abundance of the heart (attitude) the mouth speaketh.” What you did say, affirmed to me by two witnesses, was sufficient, coupled with many other things, to show me the [a]ttitude back of those words. You try to c[o]nvince me of how glowingly and how numerous were the times you have shown loyalty by the things you have said “hundreds” or “thousands of times”. But in this regard your attitude reflected [<uncertain>] OMISSION rather than the sparse and sparing things you did say. Ted was leading a conspiracy to destroy my credibility before the ministers and the brethren by saying nothing about me—as if the human leader did not exist—and blowing himself up. Radio and TV programs went under his name—no longer The World [T]omorrow. He even started correspondence under HIS OWN [Letter head] NAME, rather than that of the Church or College. Now I do not want any of our ministers flattering me, or trying to see how often they can mention my name.

But neither do I want it deliberately AVOIDED in both speaking and writing, as if I did not exist. Jesus Christ—NOT MAN—has made me the human leader under Christ. A leader cannot be a leader if all under him IGNORE his very existence. I never did want anyone to go out of his way deliberately to mention me—as you profess to have done. That is not what I mean. But I do not want the other extreme, caused by a competitive feeling, and deliberate non-mention.

Now another thing you cover in your letters. You imply that in what few things you did say, you were FOLLOWING MY ORDERS. Rod, that is hypocrisy. It is not a matter that I CHANGED MY MIND. Let me tell you how it [ac]tually was. When I told you and Raymond, and perhaps another or two, that IF I were no longer among the living, I wanted you to be su[re] Ted did not slip in and take over. At that time, I had heard SO MUCH talk about my dying right away, perhaps started by Ted, that for a while I was overly conscious of it.

It is not that later I changed my mind. But as time went on I began to realize very deeply that God has not prepared ANYONE to take my place. You, Rod, could never take it. I know that is 100% contrary to your own estimate of yourse[l]f. You have a WILL to lead, but not the qualifications. I came to realize that God raise[d] me [from the dead—f]rom total heart failure—in August, 1977, FOR A PURPOSE.

I have felt like the Apostle Paul, when he said earlier in life it would be more profitable for him to depart this life—and in the next split—second of consciousness, be with Christ in the resurrection, but it was more needful that he stay.

I did not CHANGE my mind. I did come to realize, as God caused me to realize, that He had raised me up as His instrument to raise up His present Church and Work—and that Work is not finished. So after my heart had completely stopped, my breath—no pulse—no blood-pressure—by mouth-to-mouth resuscitation I was br[o]ught back. I have not said I now believe God will keep me alive until Christ comes. I have said and I say now again, I do believe He will keep me alive AS LONG AS HE NEEDS ME!

You have taken the attitude that “some one GOT [you].” No one did but your own self.

I have tried here to make clear what I mean by a CHANGE OF ATTITUDE. I sincerely hope you “get the message” this time. Self-pity is not your need. A change of ATTITUDE from “GET” to “GIVE” is! If this letter does not get through to you, I shall not try again. So far you have not admitted a wrong attitude. Your RIGHTEOUSNESS you have maintained! But it has been only so much “filthy rags” to GOD! God said—rather, Christ to His disciples, that he who would seek the top seat should be the SERVANT of all. We should be as a little child.

So far, four months or more of your leave of absence has profited you NOTHING! Rod, in a candor, HAVE YOU EVER REALY REPENTED? To repent means much more than being sorry, or remorseful. It means a CHANGE_OF_HEART—a CHANGE OF ATTITUDE—a CHANGE FROM “GET” TO “GIVE.” From competition, vanity, coveting power and position, to harmonious co-operation. BELIEVE ME, there is PEACE, and HARMONY at Pasadena now. Our men there do not want it disturbed. I have held up the mirror with BRUTAL frankness—in LOVE not only for you but also for GOD’S WORK! The Work is getting along wonderfully well now—without you. It can go on growing and pleasing Jesus Chris[t] an[d] prospering under His blessing WITHOUT YOU. I have written you are not coming back until I am CONVINCED BY THE FRUITS of a real REPENTANCE, and CHANGE OF ATTITUDE. I hope at last I have MADE IT PLAIN.

In deep LOVE as a father to a son,

In Jesus’ name.

/s/ Herbert W. Armstrong

This letter was retyped from an old copy with corrections made in brackets []. I remember reading an Internet message by Aaron Dean who said that he believed that this letter was genuine. In his defense, Rod Meredith will accurately point out that a few months after this letter, Herbert Armstrong returned him to the WCG Council of Elders and a teaching position at Ambassador College. Mr. Meredith was later made head of the College in Big Sandy, Texas.

It is my hope that the reader of this letter will look beyond determining if Rod Meredith should or should not be the “successor” to Herbert Armstrong—and see the bigger picture of the way these kinds of issues were handled in the Worldwide Church of God. Please notice:

1. The letter is mostly accusation about what Mr. Armstrong and others think Mr. Meredith is like. How could Mr. Meredith correct himself with no specific instances of sin mentioned?
2. Mr. Armstrong says Rod needs to take on a humble, serving, giving attitude, but writes many paragraphs about his own importance in “the Work”.
3. Mr. Armstrong claims he never sought a higher office or rank, but that is silly since he always had the highest rank in his own organization since the 1930s and he proclaimed himself the head of the **one spiritual Church** on earth under Christ. According to him, no human had a higher rank. He also wrote how he liked to be with the “great and near great”. It is no wonder that “political” men wanted to work with him.
4. News prepared for members frequently mentioned “peace” and “harmony” at the WCG headquarters and how “Christ was leading his Church”. In fact, there were frequent changes among headquarters staff and most of those were associated with accusations and problems like this—or worse.

— Norman Edwards

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