



STATEMENT DW-075

## VIEWPOINT

### **A Church Reborn**

**by Joseph W. Tkach, Jr.**

During the past 10 years, the Holy Spirit has blessed the Worldwide Church of God with unprecedented growth in doctrinal understanding and in sensitivity to the world around us, especially other Christians. Yet the scope and speed of changes since the death of our founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, has confounded both supporters and detractors.

It's worth pausing to take a look at what we have lost and what we have gained. Our beliefs and practices have undergone a continuous process of revision under the direction of our pastor general, Joseph W. Tkach, Sr. (my father), who succeeded Mr. Armstrong. Before he died this past September, my dad appointed me to succeed him.

I am grateful for the collaborative leadership style that my father introduced. I am also grateful for the unity among those who assisted him and who continue to assist me as we yield to the authority of Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Gone are our obsession with a legalistic interpretation of the Old Testament, our belief in British Israelism, and our insistence on our fellowship's exclusive relationship with God. Gone are our condemnations of medical science, the use of cosmetics, and traditional Christian celebrations such as Easter and Christmas. Gone is our long-held view of God as a "family" of multiple "spirit beings" into which humans may be born, replaced by a biblically accurate view of one God who exists eternally in three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We have embraced and now champion the New Testament's central theme: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' saving work on behalf of humanity is now the focus of our flagship magazine, *The Plain Truth*, rather than end-time prophetic speculation. We proclaim the sufficiency of our Lord's substitutionary sacrifice to save us from the death penalty for sin. We teach salvation by grace, based on faith alone, without resort to works of any kind. We understand that our Christian works constitute our inspired, grateful response to God's work on our behalf — "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19) and that by these works we do not "qualify" ourselves for anything, nor do we compel God to act on our behalf. As William Barclay put it, "We are saved for good works, not by good works."

My father articulated to the church the scriptural teaching that Christians are under the New Covenant, not the Old. This teaching resulted in our abandoning past requirements that Christians observe the seventh-day Sabbath as "holy time," that Christians are obligated to observe the annual festivals commanded to Israel in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, that Christians are required to triple tithe, and that Christians must not eat foods that were "unclean" under the Old Covenant.

All these changes in the space of 10 years? Many are now advising us that profound course corrections of this magnitude are without historical precedent, at least since the days of the New Testament church.

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The leadership and faithful members of the Worldwide Church of God are deeply grateful for God's mercy in leading us into the light. Yet our progress has not been without costs. Income has plummeted, costing us millions of dollars and requiring us to lay off hundreds of long-time employees. Membership has declined. Several splinter churches have broken off from us to return to one or the other of our previous doctrinal and cultural positions. As a result, families have separated and friendships have been abandoned, sometimes with angry, hurt feelings and accusations. We are deeply saddened by this and pray that God will bring healing and reconciliation.

No personal confession of faith in our new beliefs has been required of members, nor have members been expected to automatically embrace new beliefs. We have stressed the need for personal faith in Jesus Christ, and we have instructed our pastors to be patient with members and to appreciate their struggles to understand and embrace doctrinal and administrative changes.

Despite the material losses, we have gained much. As Paul wrote, whatever was to our profit in what we embraced before, we now consider worthless for the sake of Christ. We take courage and comfort in knowing "Christ and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:7-11).

We are grateful for those fellow Christians — Hank Hanegraaff, Ruth Tucker, David Neff, and friends at Azusa Pacific University, Fuller Theological Seminary, Regent College, and elsewhere— who have extended the hand of fellowship to us as we sincerely seek to follow Jesus Christ in faith. We welcome the blessing of being part of not just a small, exclusive, physical corporation, but the body of Christ, the community that is the church of God, and to do all we can to help share the gospel of Jesus Christ with all the world.

My father, Joseph W. Tkach, subjected himself to the truth of Holy Scripture. In the face of opposition, he insisted that Jesus Christ is Lord. He was a humble and faithful minister of Jesus Christ who allowed God to lead him and the Worldwide Church of God into the riches of God's grace. Relying on God in faith and in fervent prayer, we fully intend to stay the course on which Jesus Christ has set us.

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