

## What Ever Happened to the Worldwide Church of God?

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**ABSTRACT:** Prominently cited as a “cult” by Christian counter-cult watchers in the twentieth century, the Worldwide Church of God (WCoG) experienced a downward trajectory beginning in the 1980s, massive schism in the 1990s, and then disappeared altogether early in the new century. Although no church named “Worldwide Church of God” continues to exist, the former WCoG maintains a significant presence both through its official continuing body, now renamed Grace Communion International, after having renounced most of its unique doctrinal heritage, but most substantively in four schismatic churches—the Philadelphia Church of God, the Living Church of God, the United Church of God, and the Restored Church of God—each of which has tried with some success to reproduce the former WCoG’s beliefs and practices. Simultaneously, the WCoG and its present successors remain important reference points in ongoing discussions of both the nature of charisma and the process of schism in new religious movements. (A previous version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of CESNUR in Vilnius, Lithuania, June 20–23, 2023).

**KEYWORDS:** Worldwide Church of God, Grace Communion International, Philadelphia Church of God, Herbert W. Armstrong, Schisms in the Worldwide Church of God, Restored Church of God, Living Church of God, United Church of God.

### *Introduction*

Among the groups high on the list of 20<sup>th</sup>-century cult watchers, the Worldwide Church of God (WCoG) peaked in the 1980s with congregations across North America, Western Europe, and many of the former colonies of the British Commonwealth—the geography of its spread being largely determined by its acceptance of the teachings of Anglo Israelism, a perspective on Bible history aimed almost exclusively at white people.

The WCoG emerged as one of the most successful of the 50+ denominational bodies generated from the Millerite movement of the 1840s. In the 1830s,

William Miller (1782–1849) announced the imminent return of Christ from heaven. Following the Great Disappointment of 1844 (when Jesus failed to appear), the movement divided into three branches primarily over the practice of sabbatarianism and the acceptance of the prophecies of Ellen G. White (1829–1915). The divisions would lead to the founding of the Seventh-day Adventists, the Jehovah’s Witnesses (originally called Bible Students), and finally the WCoG.

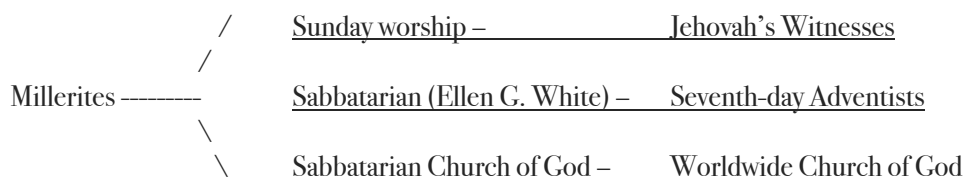


Figure 1. How the Millerites divided.

Once founded, each of these three religious bodies grew steadily through the mid-twentieth century, but in the 1990s, the Worldwide Church of God began to splinter, breaking into half a dozen larger factions and dozens of smaller ones. A decade ago, in his *Fragmentation of a Sect*, David V. Barrett provided a detailed early report on what was occurring (Barrett 2013). This paper will attempt to follow-up on Barrett’s work and carry the story forward, even as the WCoG became one of the most important groups to consider in building a theoretical understanding of what happens to new religions over time.

Founded in the 1930s as the Radio Church of God, the WCoG grew from the minuscule audience of the broadcast of founder Herbert W. Armstrong (HWA, 1892–1986). It began to experience significant growth in the 1950s, after Armstrong moved from rural Oregon to Southern California and then made the transition to television. Even as the broadcast, which offered “The Plain Truth About the World Tomorrow,” gave the church access to every home in North America with a television set, the church’s network of committed members remained almost completely invisible on the religious landscape as its congregations met unannounced in rented facilities and its members did not invite neighbors and friends to attend. Admission to the services (even knowledge of when and where they met) was carefully controlled.

Through the 1970s, the World Tomorrow broadcast was seen in all the major urban centers and at its height each issue of *The Plain Truth*, the monthly magazine (to which a free subscription was offered on every TV broadcast) was

mailed to some 3 million+ people. The church also offered numerous booklets on its key ideas (also free for the asking) with two or three featured in each issue of the magazine and/or mentioned on the TV show. As the church prospered, it offered more substantive books including the two-volume *Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*. Its basic introductory text, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*, grew step-by-step from a small pamphlet into a substantive book as new editions appeared through Armstrong's lifetime.

While the elder Armstrong built the audience of his initial radio broadcast from next to nothing into a small church, his early radio success did not translate well to television. He lacked the audience appeal of competing televangelists, but his son Garner Ted Armstrong (GTA, 1930–2003) came to the rescue. Handsome, personally winsome, and a talented orator, he assumed responsibility for the church's TV broadcasts in 1957. He had the charisma his father lacked, and at the height of his career, he was among the most recognizable persons in the United States.

The contrast between the elder and the younger Armstrong reminds us of the varied ways we use the terms “charisma” and “charismatic” in our discussions of new religious movements. The elder Armstrong was the typical (1) founder and self-appointed leader of the WCoG, while the younger Armstrong was (2) the magnetic personality that drew people to him by his oratorical skill and winsome personality. Neither claimed (3) to be in direct contact with paranormal or supernatural reality in the manner commonly claimed by mediums, channelers, or enlightened Asian teachers, and thus privy to spiritual realities unavailable to the average believer.

Charismatic Christian leaders commonly have gained the allegiance of followers by their mastery of the Bible and claims that through their study of the Scriptures they have attained an unusual level of insight and/or discovered truths abandoned or forgotten over the centuries. A variety of recent innovative Christian leaders have placed themselves in a Restorationist tradition delivering new biblical truth lost to the larger older church bodies. More negatively, of course, charismatic leaders are also seen as (4) sinister individuals who have mastered the art of brainwashing (mind control, mental manipulation) which they use to override the rational decision-making ability (free will) of group members (Introvigne, 2022).

### *The WCoG's 1970s Turmoil*

Even as the WCoG emerged on the national and international stage in the 1970s, some dissent in the WCoG's leadership began to develop. One source of the disagreement was the prophecy that a United States of Europe would emerge and in 1975 rise up to overthrow both the United Kingdom and the United States (Armstrong 1957). Church members were advised to flee to a sanctuary in the Middle East. The younger Armstrong was among those who disagreed with his father on how the WCoG should handle the failure of the prophecy.

Simultaneously, however, it became known among the church's leadership that GTA was a sexual predator, and that he was targeting co-eds at the church's college (Barrett 2013). However, he was the church's public image as the host of its TV show. Reluctantly, the elder Armstrong removed him, but ratings and cash flow dropped significantly. Forgiven of past indiscretions, he was brought back, but his philandering ways continued. Thus, in 1978, he was completely disfellowshipped. After being pushed aside by the WCoG, GTA founded the Church of God International (CoGI), the first of the significant WCoG splinters (<https://www.cgi.org>).

Even as Armstrong was dealing with problems created by his son, other church leaders were raising a set of questions about the church's teachings. In response, a theological commission was organized to examine the questions, among them the practice of tithing and the dating of the feast of Pentecost. Included in the cadre of leaders who would leave with GTA to form the Church of God International were some who dissented theologically with what they had previously been taught. Eventually, the CoGI leadership, who had cast their future with GTA, found themselves unable to deal with his continued illicit sexual encounters, and in 1997, pushed GTA out of the CoGI. GTA then formed the Intercontinental Church of God (<https://theicg.org>). He died before it could again rebuild a public following. Both of these early splinters challenged the WCoG's teaching on tithing.

### *The WCoG's Unique Perspective*

In founding the WCoG, HWA began with a few teachings that differed from mainstream Evangelical Protestantism, though they were well-known among the

different Millerite groups. To these beliefs common to the Millerite heritage, he added others more unique to himself and it was upon the adoption of this spectrum of beliefs (and the practices they implied) that Armstrong claimed that the WCoG was the one “true” Church of God. The WCoG published a mass of material expanding upon these basic notions, mostly booklets written by HWA, and more recently, the various splinter groups have begun duplicating Armstrong’s prodigious output with numerous booklets written by their founders.

The first and most important belief espoused by the WCoG was the identification of the ten lost tribes of ancient Israel as the Anglo-Saxon people of Northern and Western Europe, best known as the theory of Anglo Israelism (aka British Israelism: Cottrell-Boyce 2020). Through the nineteenth century, the idea would be used to justify the establishment of the global British empire and then the rise of the United States as a world power. Though the WCoG leaders did not emphasize the white supremacy inherent in British Israelism as did some of its more notorious twentieth century exponents, they were never able to shake off its racial connotations.

Even before his move to California, HWA published a summary statement of his views on Anglo Israelism for the audience of the Radio Church of God (Armstrong 1945). He would continue to issue new editions through his lifetime, each edition including new content. By the time of his death, the work had grown into a substantial book (Armstrong 1980), a text now kept in print by the Philadelphia Church of God (Armstrong 2007).

The adoption of sabbatarianism, which claims the Jewish Sabbath as the primary time for weekly communal worship, led to WCoG congregations gathering on Saturday rather than Sunday. Such practice also includes a recalculation of Jesus Christ’s death believed to be on a Wednesday, not Friday, and his resurrection on the Sabbath (Saturday) rather than Sunday (Armstrong 1972). This distinct understanding of biblical events had been perpetuated by both the Seventh-day Adventist and the Sabbatarian Church of God traditions among the Adventists. Within some Church of God groups the practice of sabbatarianism was correlated with the maintaining of the celebration of the traditional Jewish festivals described in *Leviticus* 23—Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread; Pentecost; the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur); and the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last

Great Day. The different WCoG groups now publish an annual calendar that emphasizes the festivals and provides members with information on regional gathering sites for their celebration while additionally highlighting the schedule to be followed at each event.

While many different churches require (or recommend) that their members tithe (give ten percent of their income to their church), the Worldwide Church proposed a triple tithe. The first tithe directly supported the church, especially its activity of spreading the gospel of the kingdom. The second tithe was set aside to support the member's attendance and celebration of the annual "Feast of Tabernacles," the primary Jewish festival celebrated by the church. The third tithe (given only every third year) was used to support church members in need.

All publications were distributed at no cost, the price of production being paid by the church member's tithe. Armstrong additionally developed a way for non-members who listened to the TV show and wanted to become financial supporters of the church (co-workers) to contribute (but in a manner completely separated from any church literature or benefits they might otherwise receive). However, people who sent in money to "purchase" any of its publications would be sent the requested publications and their money would be returned.

The celebration of the festivals aligned with the WCoG's understanding of the primary role of the church—the proclaiming of the coming kingdom of God, which occurred through the church's broadcast ministry, the circulation of its magazine, *The Plain Truth*, and the distribution of additional printed material. It was through the broadcast that prospective members found their way to the church itself and began the process of joining that culminated in being baptized. Only baptized members attended the weekly Sabbath services. Their main task was not to evangelize, but to support the work of spreading the kingdom message.

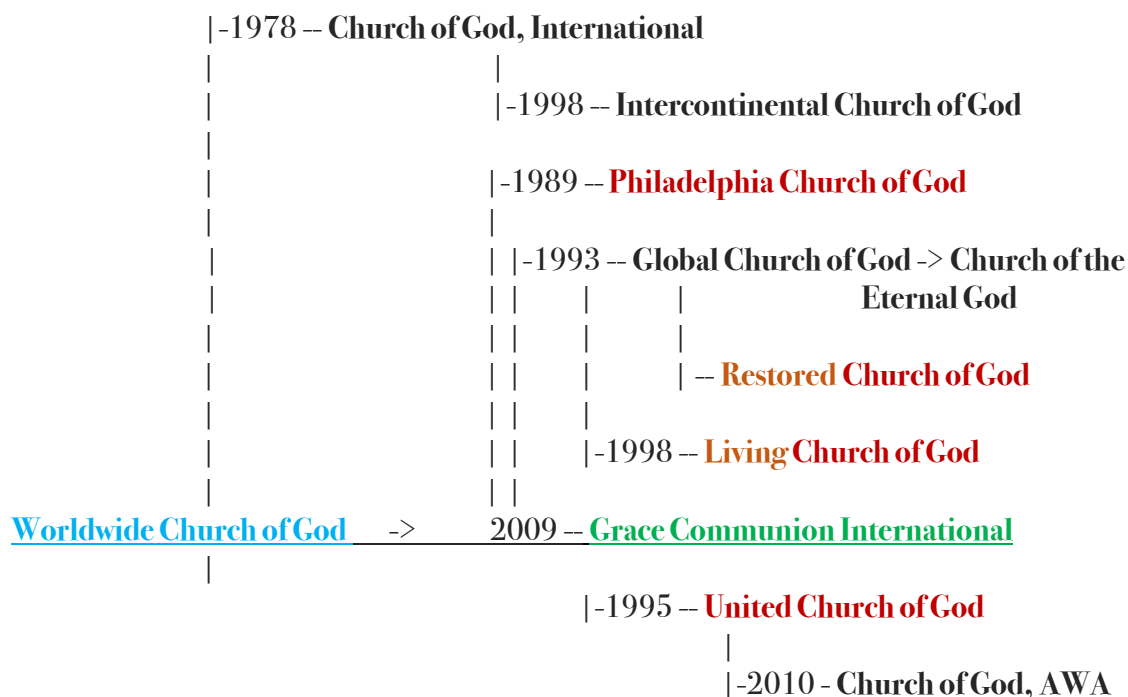
Church members spent their church time in Bible study, learning the teachings of the WCoG in some depth, and personally preparing for the kingdom, due to arrive in the near future. Among the key beliefs to which they would be introduced, would be that of God as a Family. This teaching replaced the traditional Christian belief in the Trinity. God was seen as a family of two personages—God the Father and Jesus Christ—with the Holy Spirit understood as God's power (Flurry 2012, 2020).

Organizationally, the WCoG privileged *Ephesians* 4:11. HWA was seen as the Apostle of the Church of God. Other ministers were seen as pastors, evangelists, and teachers. Though not emphasized as much as his designation as Apostle, HWA was also seen as a prophet. Armstrong and the ministers, teachers, and evangelists he had ordained led the church.

### *Joseph Tkach*

Armstrong died in 1986. He overrode any possible action by the church's Council of Elders to seize control, and appointed Joseph W. Tkach, Sr. (1927–1995) as his successor. Initially, Tkach was seen as inheriting all of Armstrong's autocratic powers to rule the church. Over the next few years, however, he was deeply affected by the theological critique of the WCoG's unique teachings by representatives of the Evangelical Christian counter-cult movement (Tucker 1989, Feazell 2003). Once convinced of the error of Armstrong's distinctive interpretations of the Bible, Tkach slowly informed the church's leaders of his conclusions and began the withdrawal of Armstrong's many publications from distribution. By the mid-1990s, he had moved the church into the orthodox Evangelical camp (Tkach 1997).

His actions created a crisis for the church's ministers and members. Should they continue to follow HWA's stance, which they had been teaching for decades, or should they support the man Armstrong appointed to lead them? Most chose the teachings, and through the mid-1990s the WCoG splintered. In the midst of the splintering, Tkach died, and was succeeded in office by his son Joseph Tkach, Jr. The younger Tkach continued the direction set by his father and in 1997, he led those who remained loyal to the WCoG into the National Association of Evangelicals. A decade later, the church's leadership concluded that they no longer represented anything created by their founder and in 2009 changed the church's name to Grace Communion International. By this time, most of the membership had left for one of the multiple schismatic groups.



**Figure 2.** A Worldwide Church of God organizational tree (1978-present; the four groups in red slowly gathered in the great majority of members).

As each faction of the former Worldwide Church of God emerged, it saw itself as continuing the WCoG in both appearance and substance. Each reorganized its supporters in a pattern reminiscent of the WCoG and each began to publish a monthly magazine modeled on *The Plain Truth*. Each began a broadcast ministry and published its own basic statement of the British Israel perspective in its own text of *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*. And each published a regularly increasing number of booklets on the basic teachings of the former WCoG distributed freely upon request.

### 1. Philadelphia Church of God (1991)—Gerald Flurry

The first of the WCoG leaders to break away was Gerald Flurry, a pastor whose early questioning of Tkach’s changes led to his excommunication in 1989. He immediately founded the Philadelphia Church of God (<https://pcg.church/>) to perpetuate HWA’s teachings, and began publishing *The Philadelphia Trumpet*, modeled on *The Plain Truth*.



The name of the church came from *Revelation 2–3*, which speaks of seven ancient Christian congregations. Most of the denominations in the Adventist tradition interpret *Revelation 2–3* as a prophetic depiction of church history, with the last of the seven churches being the Philadelphia church. The remaining chapters of *Revelation* can then be used to illuminate contemporary events. Seeing his actions as foreshadowed in the *Book of Revelation*, Flurry immediately published a book, *Malachi's Message* (which he equated with the “little book” mentioned in *Revelation 10*: Flurry 1995). This book was received as a new prophetic message and its release began Flurry's own writing of himself into biblical prophetic history as continuing Armstrong's apostolic and prophetic work.

Even as Flurry was establishing the Philadelphia Church of God, Tkach had quietly withdrawn HWA's books from circulation, and the Philadelphia Church began to bring them back into circulation, beginning with *The Mystery of the Ages*, a substantial work published by Armstrong just before his death (Armstrong 1985). The Philadelphia Church's reprinting of the *Mystery of The Ages* soon led to a direct conflict between the WCoG, which owned all of the Armstrong copyrights and publishing rights. Litigation reached a climax in 2000, with the court ruling against the Philadelphia Church and sustaining the WCoG's control of Armstrong's writings.

The Philadelphia Church did not give up, however, and responded to the initial court decision by filing a broad lawsuit in which it made a somewhat unique argument that the WCoG was hanging on to the Armstrong copyrights not to assert its exclusive right to publish, but to suppress Armstrong's writings, after having abandoned his teachings. The WCoG now simply wanted to ensure that no further copies of the material would be published and in their action it was completely subverting the intent of the copyright laws. Before this case, which had the potential of rewriting copyright law in the United States, went to trial, however, in 2003 the PCOG and the WCoG reached a settlement in which an unnamed amount of money was paid to the WCoG and the PCOG received the copyright to *The Mystery of the Ages* and 18 additional books, all initially published by the WCoG, not the least important being Armstrong's final text of the all-important basic WCoG volume *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*. Additional Armstrong titles acquired in the lawsuit (all previously published by the WCoG) included: *The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, *The*

*Incredible Human Potential, The Missing Dimension in Sex, The Wonderful World Tomorrow, The Plain Truth About Healing, The Seven Laws of Success, and Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?*

The acquisition of the Armstrong copyrights has significantly bolstered the PCoG's claim to be the true continuation of the former Worldwide Church of God. Pursuing that endeavor, the PCoG has published a set of booklets about Armstrong including *He Was Right, Ambassador for World Peace*, and *A Warm Friend of Israel*. In addition, Gerald's son Stephen Flurry wrote a scathing volume against the leadership of the Grace Communion International for its attempts to dismantle the former Worldwide Church of God (Flurry 2006).

## *2. Global Church of God (1993)—Roderick C. Meredith*

In 1993, when the changes in the Worldwide Church of God became undeniable and the possibility of recovering even a small portion of what Armstrong had taught lost, a second large schism occurred under the guidance of one of the few church leaders known outside of the WCoG, Roderick C. Meredith (1930–2017). Meredith had been one of the first people attracted to the church following its move to California in 1947. He was also one of the original graduates of Ambassador College, which Armstrong had started immediately after the move to California. The Global Church of God grew slowly at first, but as knowledge of the changes in WCoG teachings permeated the ministerium and the members, the new Global Church spread across North America and to the United Kingdom.

Then, in 1998, to the complete surprise of most, the Global Church's church board experienced a break with Meredith, its founder and presiding Evangelist. The board suddenly fired Meredith, the culmination of a set of events that had begun with the firing of another elder, David Peck, a few months earlier. Seemingly not aware of (or unconcerned with) Meredith's popularity within the Council of Elders and overwhelming support within the church, the board's action proved disastrous. Meredith and the elders withdrew taking most of the members with them, their action causing the Global Church of God to collapse, at least in North America. It survived in the UK, while the small remnant in the United States (and Canada) reorganized as the Church of God, a Christian Fellowship. That relatively small church, however, soon disappeared altogether

by merging into the United Church of God (see below). A few pastors resisted the merger, continued under the name Church of the Eternal God, and remain in communion with the British Global Church of God.

### *3. Living Church of God*

Following the 1998 implosion of the Global Church of God in the wake of its firing of its Presiding Evangelist Rod Meredith, the latter publicized the firing and soon reorganized the great majority of the ministers and lay membership as the Living Church of God (<https://www.lcg.org/>). By this time, dozens of additional local congregations had separated from the WCoG and reorganized independently, each taking a variant name but one always designating it as a “Church of God.”

Immediately upon its reorganization, the Living Church of God appeared on the stage as the most prominent of the several WCoG splinters that had developed beyond a single local church into an association of congregations, and began to attract some of the new independent congregations into its fellowship. While numbers are hard to come by, the Living Church seems not to have caught up with the Philadelphia Church which was organized a decade prior to its coming into being. The Philadelphia Church has certainly built a far larger broadcast network both domestically and overseas than has the Living Church.

Within the context of the several WCoG schisms, the Living Church can also be seen as possibly the most liberal. While maintaining most of the doctrinal distinctiveness of the WCoG, it has taken steps toward mainstream Evangelicalism, and has offered a somewhat limited openness to the Charismatic Movement and to spiritual healing. Possibly its most important deviation from the WCoG has been its opening a role for its congregations and lay members to participate in evangelism and members to offer a direct witness to nonmembers of their faith in Jesus. In the wake of the changes, the Living Church of God has become the only one of the major WCoG splinters to invite nonmembers to worship with its local assemblies (Meredith 2016; Ogwyn 2010).

#### 4. *United Church of God*

Shortly after the formation of the now defunct Global Church of God, another group of former ministers exited the WCoG and founded the United Church of God (<https://www.ucg.org>). They wished to maintain the basic doctrines and practices of the Worldwide Church of God, but moved toward a more collective leadership which they placed in a 12-member Council of Elders, to which were assigned powers previously exercised by WCoG's founder, including the development of church-wide policies and the oversight of any alterations or innovations in doctrine.

In the new structure, the Council appoints the church's president, who has been designated as the day-to-day spokesperson for the church and the administrative head of the national office. *Beyond Today* is issued as the United Church's monthly magazine. While holding real power for making policy, the Council is, however, elected by and charged with maintaining the confidence of the General Conference of Elders, consisting of all of the church's ministers (United Church of God 2016). The council members are elected to three-year terms and four members rotate off annually.

Most recently, the United Church has announced the circulation of *Beyond Today* to be above 300,000/issue, while that of the Living Church's *Tomorrow's World* is above 500,000.

In 2010, several senior pastors and elders separated from the United Church of God to form the Church of God, AWA (A Worldwide Association). Headquartered in McKinney, Texas, it claims some 5,000 members in the United States and 10,000 internationally.

#### 5. *Restored Church of God*

David C. Peck a minister successively with the WCoG and then the Global Church of God, moved forward from his 1998 disfellowshipping from the GCG to found one of the most conservative splinters of the former WCoG, the Restored Church of God (<https://rcg.org>). Following his dismissal from the GCG, Peck did a personal survey of the then existing WCoG splinters, and in each of them found a problem of leadership. As he put it, among the various

groups, he sought one headed by a leader “committed to truth.” He concluded, “There were no such group.” He found all of the current leaders had either “compromised doctrines, were blind to the age or lacked training” (Peck 2012).

His assessment led him in 1999 to found the Restored Church of God, a very conservative new splinter that aimed to restore the WCoG as closely as possible. He began to see his role as being the one to lead God’s final end-time work. As of 2023, he continues as the Pastor General of the Restored Church, for which he has authored a number of books. He also contributes the lead article each month to *The Real Truth*, the church’s monthly magazine, over which he serves as publisher and editor-in-chief. In keeping with his earlier assessment of the various WCoG schisms, Peck also monitors the various groups and maintains an account of their innovations and changes in Armstrong’s teachings at a minute level (Peck 2018; Restored Church of God 2018).

Of the more impactful of the many WCoG splinters, the Restored Church is among the more difficult to assess in terms of support. It is the only one not to develop a radio or television broadcast ministry, but to rely primarily on its internet site ([www.rcg.org](http://www.rcg.org)) for its outreach. It has, however, developed a large library of written material (most authored by Peck) and numerous videos, which it offers free to site visitors. Its monthly periodical, *Real Truth*, maintains the same high quality as those of the other major splinters.

### *Additional WCoG Groups*

From even a cursory search for the Worldwide Church of God on the internet in 2023, one could easily come away with the impression that it was a large church with a global impact that continues to have a significant influence today. In fact, it was a relatively large church that was beginning to make a place for itself on the religious landscape, an influence that peaked in the 1980s just before the scandal that took the younger Armstrong off the air initiated its downfall. That downfall was followed by the founder’s unfortunate appointment of a successor who over the decade after assuming office renounced all that the elder Armstrong believed and practiced.

In the wake of the attempt of Tkach Sr. and Jr. officially leading the WCoG into the Evangelical Christian fold, the great majority of church members and leaders

deserted the parent body, and did so with relative ease. The WCoG's physical assets were few and all owned by the centralized church body—a college, a cultural auditorium, and its headquarters and publishing facilities. The local churches met in rented facilities, and having separated themselves from the larger Christian community, they remained unattached to other groups inhabiting the religious landscape. Meanwhile, the national church neither owned nor possessed any equity in the facilities used by church members that could become a matter of contention should a congregation choose to withdraw.

And while the WCoG was distributing some three million issues of its magazine to those who requested it, the church's expenses were being paid by the relatively few people (little more than a hundred thousand) who went through the involved procedure of learning the church's full position on a host of teachings (such as the three tithes and the attendance at the festivals) before being baptized and welcomed into a congregation.

Once a congregation withdrew from the WCoG, it had several choices. Many attached themselves to one of the larger congregational associations discussed above. Some formed new associations that have remained small regional bodies. Many have simply remained single independent congregations. Of the later, a few have published books on matters of concern and/or a newsletter, but most have limited their outreach to a single web site. All have become lost in the massive population growth and the fragmentation of North American Christianity into its currently existing 1200+ denominations.

Almost all of the local and regional remnant groups of the WCoG have adopted variant names that include "Church of God" as part of the name, hence we see names like The Church of the Eternal God, the Continuing Church of God, the Church of the Great God, or the Church of God's Faithful among the lists of the names of all these small factions.

### *So, What Ever Happened to the Worldwide Church of God?*

Out of this quick overview of the history and current status (as of 2023) of the Worldwide Church of God in the years since the death of its founder, we can begin to understand what has happened to the once vital church that had emerged in the mid-twentieth century. The simple answer is, of course, it continues on in

its varied new incarnations. One small faction maintains organizational continuity, though its membership is increasing embarrassed by its origin and has adopted a name that distances it from its early years.

The main life of the former WCoG is now carried in the four larger splinter groups that formed in the decade after the successor to the founder gradually dropped all the church's distinctive ideas, in the wake of which the great majority of members and ministers left. In the new century, each of these four churches has established itself across North America, opened a headquarters complex, and developed branches globally. Three of the four have launched a vital radio/TV broadcast ministry now more than equal to that the WCoG possessed in the mid-1980s, as it began its decline. In addition, each of the four groups has developed an expansive internet presence with multiple sites that rival the TV show in reaching the public and potential new church members. HWA died before the internet was really a part of social existence.

Each of the four groups has published numerous books and booklets on their major teachings, especially those points of theology that distinguish them from the mainstream of Christian Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions. Of the four, the Philadelphia Church of God stands out for having obtained copyrights to the founder's writings, though the three others have over the last two decades largely rewritten and published clones of Armstrong's key books using their own authors. Additionally, each of the four churches now issues a monthly full-color magazine (in the tradition of *The Plain Truth*) for general distribution and one or more for internal distribution.

Each of the four churches has grown to the point that it has founded a college for ministerial training. Meanwhile, the Philadelphia Church has garnered enough resources to open both a cultural foundation in the United States and an archeological institute in Israel.

Each of the four groups started with a relatively small membership (5,- to 20,000 range) and they have know collectively grown to have more than 100,000, that is to say, that collectively, the four have grown to the point that they now fill the vacuum created by the destruction of the WCoG in the 1990s. At the same time they remain mostly separatist and largely invisible on the religious landscape, known outside their fellowship to relatively few people, even among scholars of religion.

In the 1980s, it looked as if the WCoG was on a trajectory similar to the earlier Millerite groups, as both the Seventh-day Adventist church and the Jehovah's Witnesses now claim more than a million members in the United States. Dreams of such success were cast aside amid the disruption of the 1990s, but now a generation later, the substance of the pre-disruption era has been reconstituted and the churches that are still being nourished by Herbert W. Armstrong's life and work appear to be more than able to carry its founder vision forward.

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