

Commentary — From the Margins

When is “close” not close enough?

THINK! Will any human person still be alive on this earth in another five or ten years? The number one problem we all face today is that of HUMAN SURVIVAL! WHY has the human mind produced such AWESOME modern progress, yet remain HELPLESS in the face of such appalling EVILS? The answer to this baffling enigma lies in the HUMAN MIND. (Armstrong, Herbert W. *What Science Can't Discover About the HUMAN MIND*. Worldwide Church of God, 1978 — author's emphasis)

Well, was there anyone left alive in 1983, five years after Armstrong's booklet was published, or in 1988, ten years later? Was the number one problem *we all faced* human survival? And what were those appalling evils of 1978, President Carter's administration? Or was the appalling evil global cooling? Garner Ted Armstrong had authored a booklet a couple of years earlier about global cooling and the serious threat it posed to human survival. Always, there was some threat to human survival that continually allowed one or the other of the Armstrongs to annually scare another crop of disciples into “holding up Mr. Armstrong's hands” as he took the good news of the soon coming kingdom of God to world leaders. And there continues to be threats to human survival that allow for Armstrong's theological descendants to refine earlier scare tactics: the *Doomsday Clock* has been moved forward so many times that it is one or two minutes behind where it was thirty years ago; yet today, Armstrong's clones use the forward movement of this flawed timepiece in new attempts to convince one more generation of disciples to swallow his mixture of honey and gall, the toxic syrup Armstrong peddled as the only cure for the lawlessness of *Churchianity*. But how will mass marketed fear cause the synagogue of Satan to bow before those who would be of *Philadelphia*?

Good intentions are not enough: Herbert W. Armstrong used to remind his listeners that Hitler had “good intentions,” but used these *good intentions* to commit some of the greatest atrocities in human history. And using his advertising skills, Armstrong pandered a snake oil concoction of partially understood biblical scriptures and fear into a theological fiefdom in his lifetime. Now, two plus decades after his death, he has become the preferred idol for thousands of sincere but deceived disciples who continue to market the same medicine he sold by the barrelfuls for fifty years. Fortunately, these who today “give what they freely received” simply are not as good at selling what he sold.

As Armstrong reminded his listeners thousands of times, a deceived person doesn't know that he or she is deceived: the person who now professes that Armstrong was God's essential endtime man is deceived, for no man is essential to the plan of God except the One without sin. The person who believes that God used Armstrong to restore all truth is both blind and deceived, for humankind does not yet see the disobedient turned to the wisdom of the just (Luke 1:17). The person who would stupidly state that Armstrong's *Mystery of the Ages* is the greatest book written since the Bible is him or herself a carnally minded racist, for no book better typifies what has been wrong with the Church of God than *Mystery of the Ages*—the Church of God has been and remains physically minded, its focus on the things that happen in this world as it teaches that Christ will bring one-world government to human beings as if the kingdom of God were to be some form of a super-sized United Nations ... the prince of this world today rules the single kingdom of this world through his broadcast of disobedience, a broadcast originating in the heavenly realm and transmitted to all living creatures as part of their received "natures," whether human and animal. And this is the kingdom Christ will receive: He will rule over the mental topography of living creatures by projecting His spirit and His mind onto all. His kingdom is not of his world or from this world (John 18:36). His kingdom will not be another "visible" kingdom, with a visible world headquarters and throne in present day Jerusalem or anywhere else. Rather, His throne will be in heavenly Jerusalem, a city where flesh and blood human beings cannot go. And until heavenly Jerusalem comes to this earth, Christ's throne will not be here on earth, nor will the temple of God be here, where death, darkness, and decay reign supreme.

The universe as humankind observes it is passing away (1 John 2:17), literally flying away at an accelerating rate, with the model for it passing away being the opening and closing of the earthly fissure that swallowed Korah and his friends (Num chap 16).

Racism is the epitome of being physically minded. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27-28).

If there is neither Jew nor Greek among disciples, then there is neither black nor white, for all are one in Christ. With God there are no mud people or second class citizens or racial purity checklists: racism is contrary to the gospel Paul taught. Yet Armstrong advocated a separation of the races based upon skin color. The practice of Ambassador College under his administration was to actively discourage racial mingling. His version of Israel—the English speaking peoples of this world, excluding original inhabitants of India, America, Australia, Africa, and New Zealand (more English speakers are excluded than included)—was to maintain its racial purity as ancient Israel had been commanded to maintain its genealogical purity by not marrying foreign women. But Armstrong never realized that moving from physical circumcision to spiritual circumcised [i.e., circumcision of the heart by Spirit — Rom 2:28-29], purity is no longer of the flesh but of the mind: a disciple cannot simultaneously practice obedience and disobedience. Even a little lawlessness causes the person to be a sinner (Jas 2:10). Therefore, disciples are to have nothing to do with the lawlessness of this world.

They are not to embrace sin as if embracing a lewd woman. They are not to give their new selves into idolatrous practices as if giving a son into marriage to a foreign woman ... Christ's millennial rule will be plagued by a desire to return to "good old ways of the past," especially capitalism, so much so that when Satan is released after a thousand years of being bound in the bottomless pit, he will again deceive nations that set themselves up for deception by *marrying* the ideologies of this age, when one person could deliver a message to the world with nothing more than a used computer and telephone service.

If among disciples there is neither male nor female—this is Paul's declarative statement—for all who are baptized into Christ are one in Christ, then sexism is contrary to the gospel Paul taught. For the son of God, born of Spirit, is not of the flesh. Biological gender pertains to the flesh. It comes from the flesh, and it will not enter the heavenly realm even though the sons of God will be created male and female to be in the image of *YHWH Elohim* (Gen 1:27) ... ponder that for a moment: "In the beginning was the [Λόγος — *Logos*], and the [Λόγος] was with [Θεόν — *Theon*], and the [Λόγος] was [Θεός — *Theos*]" (John 1:1). Linguistically, because of the differing case endings, *Theos* cannot be *Theon* though the two are both God—one God, not two gods—so these two are one as a man and a woman, when married, were one flesh in the beginning, not two co-equal partners, one who was President and one who covets being President of the United States. Thus, when human beings are created in the image and after the likeness of *YHWH Elohim*, they will be glorified as *great* and *least* (Matt 5:19), with the *least* to be helpmates for the *great*; for the *least*, in this era, relaxed the least of the commandments of God whereas the *great* diligently kept the commandments. Note: the *least* does not break a commandment, but only relaxes the commandment the person considered least, which will be for most the Sabbath commandment—and all who are glorified from this era will be the helpmate for the now glorified Son, for all in this era have sinned and have come short of the glory of God. Therefore, within one God a hierarchical structure will exist that is not like that of a family but analogous to that of a living human being.

Armstrong wrote, "Matter is *NOT* Spirit—cannot be converted into Spirit" (*What Science Can't Discover*, p. 5) ... this is true. Until God the Father raises the dead (John 5:21), whether deceased or physically breathing, by giving spiritually dead human beings life through receipt of His Breath [πνεῦμα ἄγιον] — this "life" is a second life, a spiritual life domiciled in a tent of flesh — a human being is only composed of matter, the dust of this earth so Armstrong was correct: human beings are not born with an immortal soul. Eternal life is the gift of God (Rom 6:23) and does not come from fornication in the backseat of a Chevrolet. But there, with that simple declaration, Armstrong's understanding of "the vast MISSING DIMENSION OF KNOWLEDGE" (*What Science Can't Discover*, p. 4 — author's emphasis) ends; for human beings who receive the divine Breath of God receive a second life. They are no longer "made wholly of matter" (p. 5), flesh [*soma*] and swallow breath [*psuche*] (Matt 10:28), what Armstrong taught, but they have become tri-part, spirit [*pneuma*], flesh, and swallow breath (1 Thess 5:23).

Armstrong never understood spiritual birth, baptism, or that the fleshly body of a person is only a tent or tabernacle for the new creature, born of Spirit. This

new creature, born of Spirit, came from heaven in the form of the Father's divine breath. It is not of this world or from this world. A person neither knows from where this spirit came nor where it goes (John 3:8), but the person has a pretty good idea from where the flesh came and where it will go.

Both the Father and the Son must give life to the person who will enter heaven (again, John 5:21). The Father gives life to the person when He draws the person from this world (John 6:44) by giving the person His Breath or Spirit as the earnest of entrance into the heavenly realm. This new creature, an infant son of God, a real spiritual being albeit immature and as spiritually helpless as a human baby, must now grow to his majority in this physical realm where change is dictated through one moment becoming the next moment. In the timeless heavenly realm, all that will be must function as one with all that is. Thus, that which has life has everlasting life, for the presence of life and the absence of life cannot co-exist in the same moment. A spirit being must enter this physical realm before it can die; for in this realm, one moment changes to the next moment. That which has life this moment can lose that life when this moment becomes the next moment; whereas in heaven, all change must co-exist with what is, so the type of radical change seen in human physical maturation is not possible. Only in this physical realm can a son of God grow to spiritual maturity through construction of a spiritual body composed of obedience (in lieu of flesh) hung onto a scaffolding of faith (in lieu of bones)—and this growth is as spectacular as is the change from a seven pound thirteen ounce, eighteen inch long newborn to a two hundred forty pound, six foot three inch tall linebacker.

Or a newborn son of God can not grow at all, but remain as a bawling human infant, if this son of God practices lawlessness ... this son of God will appear to the Father as a cigar-smoking, whiskey drinking human infant would appear to human parents. And this would not be a child any parent would want, including God.

The Son will give life to those whom He will of all whom the Father has made spiritually alive by raising them from the dead. Note: it is not enough to be born of Spirit—being born of Spirit is only being raised from the dead through a second birth, a spiritual birth. The Son must now give life to the one who has been raised from the dead, and the Son does this by causing the mortal tent of flesh to put on immortality.

The “person” who looks out through eyes of flesh is not the flesh, but the received human nature given to every person born. Thus, as the flesh ages, the person who looks through the eyes sees in a mirror or feels in aches and pains a decaying body even though the person or personhood who looks through the eyes doesn't seem to perceptively age beyond physical maturity. Eventually, the person “feels” trapped in an aging body. A difference develops between mental and physical age. It is as if the person “watches” his or her own death as human life becomes like a movie that must end.

When a person is born of Spirit, the received human nature must be put to death and the new nature or new creature must begin to look through the eyes of flesh, with this new creature making a journey of faith that is mentally comparable in distance to the patriarch Abraham's physical journey of faith. The old creature or nature is crucified with Christ and becomes analogous to the

nation that left Egypt and was counted in the census of the second year. Of this nation, only Joshua and Caleb entered into God's rest. Everyone else perished in the wilderness because of unbelief that became disobedience when this nation tried to enter God's rest on the following day. And among disciples, it is the old natures of disciples that try to enter God's rest on the following day, the 8th-day. The new creature, as a child born in the wilderness into the tent of a physically circumcised Israelite, will enter God's rest if this new creature chooses life while the promise of entrance remains. By faith, this new creature must turn to God when in a far land and begin to love God with heart and mind, keeping His statutes and commandments and everything written in Deuteronomy; this new creature must choose life when figuratively standing on the plains of Moab. Otherwise, this new creature will be made into a vessel of wrath, to be endured for a season. (Heb 3:16-4:11; Ps 95:10-11; Num chap 14; Deut chap 30; Rom 9:20-23)

When King Solomon dedicated the first temple as a shadow and copy of the dedication of the heavenly temple constructed from living stones, Solomon sacrificed 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep ... how many vessels of wrath prepared for destruction will be sacrificed at the dedication of the living temple of God? They are being prepared now for destruction "in order to make known the riches of [God's] glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory" (Rom 9:23). Every disciple is either a vessel prepared for destruction, or a vessel prepared for glory. There is no way for a disciple to escape being one or the other.

Those human beings who have not yet been born of Spirit have not been prepared for either destruction or glory. Their "preparation" comes after spiritual birth.

It is not good enough to say that human beings are born with a spirit of man in them that is not a soul (*What Science Can't Discover*, p. 9), or that "the spirit of man [τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου]" (1 Co 2:11) with which a person is born causes the human mind to differ from an animal's brain—Solomon asked, "Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth" (Eccl 3:21). Who knows whether this spirit or breath [again, in Greek: πνεῦμα] of a man is different from that of a beast, also a *nephesh* or breathing creature? Armstrong argument was that it wasn't (*What Science Can't Discover*, p. 5, 5th par.), and that it was (p. 7, 1st par.). To him, the breath/*pneuma* of a man imparted human nature to a human being while the breath/*pneuma* of a beast imparted an animal nature to the beast. But by citing only English translations of what Paul wrote to the saints at Corinth, Armstrong made the breath/*pneuma* of a man comparable to the Breath/*Pneuma* of God—he made both sides of a metaphor substantively identical, thereby recognizing the Holy Spirit as only a human nature changing force and not as a life-giving force that places a real spiritually alive living creature into the tent of flesh in which the old creature or nature dwelt.

God's "Breath" is not like human breath although spiritually it serves the same life-giving purpose as human breath serves. But the reality of every metaphor in which one thing is said to be another thing is that the first thing is

not the second thing. Only in some function of the first thing is it like the unknown or indescribable second thing.

The sad part of all of this is that a person should not have to address flawed logic and partial biblical understandings contained in a thirty year old booklet questioning whether human beings would even be alive in ten years. Unfortunately, the logic Armstrong employed in the booklet—a logic that is close to what Scripture teaches, but not close enough—is still the dominant belief paradigm of the splintered Churches of God ... too many disciples drank the snake oil sold by Armstrong for half a century and either severely stunted or killed their spiritual growth.

Spiritual birth is not about the mortal flesh putting on immortality, but about spiritual life being given into a tent of flesh through the Father raising the dead.

The Father judges no one. All judgment has been given to the Son, and judgment is only now on the household of God (1 Pet 4:17) — on those whom the Father has raised from the dead, with baptism being representation of real death. Judgments will be revealed when Christ returns as the Messiah (1 Co 4:5). Disciples will not then be born of Spirit as Armstrong taught, but the judgment of the born of Spirit sons of God will be revealed. And Jesus said not to be surprised when some disciples are resurrected to glory [these are the ones to whom Jesus will give immortality] and some are resurrected to condemnation (John 5:28-29). And while it is not the Father's will than any shall perish, He knows that of the many who have been called—who have been born of Spirit—few will be selected to receive glorified bodies (Matt 22:14).

Because spiritual life must twice be given to disciples before they enter heaven, the comparison to human life and human conception that Armstrong made is fatally flawed. The better analogy is that of a butterfly:

- A physically living human being prior to being *raised from the dead* by the Father can be best compared to the egg stage of a butterfly.
- Once a person has been born of Spirit, the person becomes as a newly hatched larva, or worm. It is in this stage when the growth of the butterfly occurs, with the worm going from being very small to being the size of the butterfly.
- When a person who has been born of Spirit dies physically, the person is like the worm spinning its cocoon; for the person awaits his or her transformation in the grave as the worm awaits its transformation in the cocoon.
- When the butterfly emerges from the cocoon, it doesn't look at all like the worm, but like a fully developed butterfly (albeit, with wet wings). Likewise, when a disciple is resurrected from death to be glorified, the disciple will not be carnal flesh but a glorious new creature, a son of God, like his elder brother, Christ Jesus. No significant additional change will occur, for now in heaven, all change must co-exist with what is.

God is not a family that fights among itself as Herbert W. Armstrong did with his son Garner Ted: God is one spirit as Adam and Eve were one flesh. The new creature that is born of Spirit is of the divine Breath of the Father—it is of the same Spirit as the Father is even though it is manifest as a different entity. The

man Jesus of Nazareth received this divine Breath when it descended upon Him as a dove: He is of the same spirit as is the Father. He is one with the Father as every glorified disciple will be one with both the Son and the Father (John 17:20-23). So it is always wrong to say that God is a family. The analogy is close but false. For if God were a family then God would be divided and would not stand. Only by God being one will the kingdom of heaven stand; for with God, no one goes to a family reunion looking for a date (there will be no third cousin liaisons).

Everything Armstrong wrote in *What Science Can't Discover About the HUMAN MIND* is close but far enough off the mark to spiritually kill disciples by "friendly fire" ... there has been a succession of pastors and teachers that have come forward through time from the 16th Century Radical Reformers, and in particularly, from Andreas Fischer (dod 1540 CE). Armstrong was only one in this succession, each advancing the remnant that left spiritual Babylon a little closer to the foundation of the house of God that the Apostle Paul laid in heavenly Jerusalem. In Armstrong's case, he began better than he finished. Regardless, his judgment is for Christ to reveal when He returns. The reality is that Armstrong did not find the foundation Paul laid—in fact, he quibbled with Paul, saying that he, too, was an apostle and he could judge a matter as well as Paul could, which did not prove to be true (and cost the Church more than a million dollars in a divorce settlement). And because Armstrong did not find the foundation Paul laid, it has fallen to another generation of disciples to first find that foundation then to build on that foundation, with this latter generation to be pillars in the household of God.

It is unlikely that those disciples who claim that Armstrong restored all truth will repent of their idolatry and resume their journey toward the foundation Paul laid, but in the event that they do, we stand (I stand) ready to help them grasp the potential of typological exegesis, what Paul taught and the reading strategy that unseals endtime prophecies. Until then, perhaps the most that can be done is to hinder these false teachers from making another generation of disciples for Herbert Armstrong instead of for Christ Jesus. And to hinder them, the racial bigotry, prophetic errors, and half-truths that Armstrong used to annually bilk millions from unsuspecting disciples must be exposed for what they are, spiritual poison, which should be buried and allowed to decay in silence.

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