

# Joseph W. Tkach, Jr.



## Ex-cultic Apostle of Grace

*BrotherWatch™ proudly presents this award to*

*Joseph W. Tkach, Jr.*

*for his unquenchable commitment to the  
Truth and the Light embodied in Christ and  
his unwavering love for “all that Jesus stuff.”*

*- December 1997*

## Introduction

When the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) was translated from the kingdom of the cults into orthodox Christianity the Christian community was *astonished*. Those who knew WCG best saw it as a legalistic, judgmental, works-oriented, prophecy-obsessed, conspiracy theory-advocating and isolationist/exclusionist fellowship – *and rightly so*.

A long-time member myself, I experienced this transformation first-hand and know the deep spiritual, intellectual and emotional turmoil many members felt during the transition from heresy to orthodoxy. The new birth from darkness into light was *difficult* for some, *easier* for others and *radical* to outside observers.

The *redemption* of our cultic fellowship proves the *power* of the hand of God and the gospel of Christ, and gives *hope* to a world lost in darkness. If God could redeem *us*, He can redeem *anyone*.

Let me hasten to add that while the Worldwide Church of God *was* a cult, it was – *while a cult* – still *part* of the body of Christ and many (if not most) of its members were *genuine* Christians wholly devoted to God and doing His will. And God's grace extended to them even in their heretical doctrinal errors. God does indeed see the *heart* of the believer and His grace *extends* to their greatest need.

## Interview

**BW:** Could you encapsulate the Worldwide Church of God's transition over the last ten years?

**JWT:** In the briefest terms, we moved from the fringe of heterodoxy to the center of orthodoxy. Our transition is not something that any one person can take credit for, rather it was God's action to move in the hearts and minds of many of our church members to acknowledge the errors that were being taught and embrace the truth.

**BW:** How was Jesus Christ a stumbling stone and rock of offense in our fellowship, and how is that dynamic manifested in other fellowships and in the world at large?

**JWT:** Half of the members of our denomination were unwilling to acknowledge the mistakes of that Herbert W. Armstrong taught. They prefer to view Jesus as a person they can be equal to in the future, so they stumble over his identity. The Christian community at large has been encouraged and celebrates what God has done in our fellowship.

**BW:** In *Transformed by Truth* (p 21) you write about the Worldwide Church of God's *internal* and *external* credibility problems. Was this a consequence of having one foot in the kingdom of God and the other in the kingdom of the cults?

**JWT:** The credibility problems were, no doubt due to over fifty years of misinterpretation of both history and Scripture. External to our organization, people concluded that we were deliberately misinterpreting Scripture and history, when in fact we suffered from poor scholarship. Since our organization had long asserted forcefully that all other Christians were false, there were some who wondered why we should now be trusted.

Internally, the credibility problem was more complex. Some people offered conspiracy theories about the people involved in the doctrinal reforms. Some people felt they should

have a greater role in leadership than they were given. One of the reasons I wrote the book was to offer my perspective on what was happening.

**BW:** How are the scales – the “theological barnacles” and “fog of legalism” – removed?

**JWT:** I believe that God removes them and continues to change us from the inside out as we surrender to him.

**BW:** What vestiges of legalism remain in the Worldwide Church of God?

**JWT:** No church is completely free of legalism because all churches are comprised of people. However, it is our prayer that our church will continue to grow in the grace of God that teaches us to live upright and godly lives.

**BW:** How is legalism manifested in *other* fellowships?

**JWT:** Legalism creeps in when outward forms of righteousness are upheld as necessary to be a valid Christian, or as setting forth one group as more faithful or righteous than another group.

**BW:** The Worldwide Church of God once held an exclusive view of the body of Christ but has since seen God’s hand in Christian fellowships worldwide. What is the interrelationship between differing forms of worship, personality types, spiritual gifts and individual callings? In other words, how is God’s Spirit expressed in the lives of His people in various ways, through different gifts and ministries (Romans 12, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, Matthew 16:14).

**JWT:** There are diversity of gifts, personality types, and worship preferences. There is often a correlation, but not always.

**BW:** What are the *essentials* of the Christian faith?

**JWT:** The bare essentials are to believe that because of his love and according to his promise, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, born of a woman, to redeem us from sin and make us his children. He died for our sins, was raised to life on the third day and as heir of all things will come again to judge the living and the dead. He sends the Holy Spirit to sanctify us, lead us into all truth and teach us how to live godly lives. We are saved, therefore, only by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and not by our own works, which means that no one can boast.

**BW:** What are the “*doubtful matters*” over which Christians can genuinely disagree?

**JWT:** The term used in Romans 14 is “opinions” or “reasonings.” These are items of secondary or peripheral importance, and might include such matters as the style of music for worship services, when to come together for worship, what one may drink or eat, how to dress, how to understand certain matters of end-time prophecy, whether one is a pre-millennialist, post-millennialist, or amillennialist. While this is by no means an exhaustive list, you can see that it is vastly different from essentials of faith.

**BW:** What is the *opposite* of legalism and what are *its* dangers?

**JWT:** Lawlessness or antinomianism is the opposite of legalism. It is the grotesque heresy of changing the grace of God into a license to sin. The grace of God disciplines us toward the faithfulness and obedience of Christ.

**BW:** How do you balance the Pauline and Johanine traditions of the Church?

**JWT:** This depends upon the assumptions that a person makes in their reading. I would prefer not to assume what you mean in this question.

**BW:** What are your views on these three categories of Christians – *committed* Christians (have a *living* faith; *live* by faith), *complacent* Christians (have a *lifeless* faith; spiritually *lethargic*), and *nominal* Christians (have a *false* faith; spiritual *imposters*)? How do each of these adherents *affect* their communities and their churches?

**JWT:** Committed Christians affect their communities and church and community in a variety of ways, according to the way God has gifted them. Complacent and nominal Christians vary from helpful to harmful.

**BW:** Cognitive dissonance is a hallmark of the cults. What is this “delusion” called cognitive dissonance? How does it compare to George Orwell’s *doublethink*?

**JWT:** The social scientist, Leo Festinger, coined the term *cognitive dissonance* to describe the unwitting practice of a person to believe two inherently contradictory ideas as both being true. (It is different from a paradox, in which two ideas *appear* to be contradictory but are in fact both true, such as the paradox of light being both a particle and a wave.) As I recall, Orwell pointed out that this occurs because we do not always think matters through to their logical conclusions and Orwell's doublethink compares favorably to Dr. Festinger's work on the topic.

**BW:** In many ways the doctrinal paradigm shift of WCG parallels that of the apostolic church. Please describe.

**JWT:** Our journey parallels the experience of the apostolic church in that like them, we have had to come to understand that the old covenant form of worship has been replaced by the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. There are continuities and discontinuities between the old and new covenants. The writings of the New Testament gives us the record of how the early church dealt with these issues.

**BW:** What heresies did the apostolic church encounter and in what way did WCG’s heterodox teachings replicate those heresies?

**JWT:** The apostolic church encountered certain Jewish converts, whom Paul referred to as “Judaizers,” who believed that the law of Moses was still in effect and should be required on all believers, including Gentiles. In the WCG, we believed that certain aspects of the law of Moses, particularly the Sabbath, Holy Days and meat laws, were still binding on Christians.

**BW:** What does liberty in Christ mean to you?

**JWT:** In Christ, I am given freedom from sin and death and empowered by the Holy Spirit to become everything God created me to be, truly human in the fullest sense. It also means I am not under the law of Moses, rather I am under the law of Christ.

**BW:** What are the greatest lessons you draw from the recent WCG experience?

**JWT:** Two of the most meaningful lessons for me have been realizing God's sovereignty over eternity and understanding that we wait patiently on God for his intervention at the time he wills.

**BW:** What are the greatest challenges facing modern Christianity in our post-Christian era?

**JWT:** I believe three major challenges are certain negative influences of psychology, consumerism and relativism. The negative influence of *psychology* I am referring to is the idea that the major goal of life is to feel good all the time. This causes us to neglect the fact that if we are to enter into the joy of Christ, we must enter into his sufferings. *Consumerism*, I think, has weakened the faithfulness of Christians in that we tend to view our church in the same way that we view a shopping mall, as being there to serve us rather than to be an environment in which we are equipped and sent to serve others. The third negative influence comes from *relativism*, which tends to erode our understanding of Christian doctrines and values.

**BW:** Historically, WCG was rightly criticized for having an exclusive view of the body of Christ. How do you answer the charge of *non*-Christians that proclaiming Jesus as the *one* and *only* path to salvation is narrow and exclusive?

**JWT:** From one perspective, it is narrow and exclusive: Jesus is the only name by which every person must be saved. But the beauty of Jesus is that he opens the way for all. He laid down his life that all may enter eternal life. He is in fact the greatest *Inclusivist* of all.

**BW:** PromiseKeepers' Stand in the Gap provided dramatic proof that Christianity *transcends* politics. Christ weaves together our differences. In this context, would you expand on the theme of the hymn "One Faith, One Love"?

**JWT:** This beautiful hymn celebrates the unity of believers in Christ. The words by Paula Marler Johnson construct a picture of unity that transcends all boundaries of time, space, geography, culture, economics, politics, race, etc. We are hidden in Christ and in spite of our diversity we have unity because the Holy Spirit binds us together.

**BW:** Some believe God is initiating another Great Awakening in America and on a global scale. Do you agree? Is PK an example of God using *Jesus* to unite us, of Christ bonding Christians together?

**JWT:** God is forever the author of reconciliation and unity. I believe the Holy Spirit is leading whenever Christians lay aside their agendas of peripheral matters and join together in worship. Whether this means that God is going to initiate a global scale revival is another matter. I think we might do better to strive to serve God with all our hearts and see what he brings about rather than trying to call the shots for him.

**BW:** Did you attend Stand in the Gap? What is your most compelling memory?

**JWT:** I attended with my eleven-year-old son, Joseph. There was a particularly tender moment for me when men formed small groups to pray together. I did not know whether my son would join in saying a prayer, but I was touched when he gave the last prayer in our small group and asked that God give special blessing to the children without fathers. It was both moving and inspiring to hear my young son join in the prayers with the adults and his prayer made us all misty-eyed.

**BW:** Is the UFO and extraterrestrial phenomenon indicative of an unsatisfied spiritual hunger, yearning? Does this spiritual void account for the *Star Trek* / *Star Wars* enterprises, and, if so, how can this cultural trend be channeled toward Christ?

**JWT:** I suppose that the popularity of science fiction and the fascination with life on other planets is a representation of the spiritual hunger in society. The way we can channel this spiritual hunger toward Christ is to carry out the commission he gave to his church. We need to be the salt and the light. We need to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit to point people to Jesus. We need to learn how to answer questions that people have about spiritual matters. We need to learn to give answers for the hope that lies within us.

**BW:** What are your thoughts on what Pope John Paul II calls America's "culture of death?"

**JWT:** While the pope is not the first one or the only one to notice it and call attention to it, he deserves credit for saying it. Authors such as Neil Postman, who wrote about Americans amusing themselves to death, and others, have also pointed out a trend toward nihilism. The last 40 years have shown the ineffectiveness, despite increased spending, of most programs to prevent social problems. As I recall, it was Senator Moynihan who made an interesting argument that the more money spent, the greater the problem becomes. By saying this, I do not mean that there should be no programs. However, the problem is not caused only by socioeconomic factors.

**BW:** *Do* – and *should* – religion and politics mix?

**JWT:** From my observations I believe we can say that they don't mix well. One problem is that even Christians can become so passionate for a particular political platform that they can allow their zeal to impair their ability to let the love of Christ lead. It is as though some think Jesus is a Republican, while others seem to think he is a Democrat. I do believe Christians should be model citizens, and in a democratic government that includes responsible vote casting and appropriate involvement in government. Yet, each one must seek Jesus for determining what is personally appropriate.

**BW:** Do you believe America was ever a "Christian nation?"

**JWT:** I would say that there was a time when the majority of the population generally embraced at least an outward form of Christian standards and values. There were genuine Christians among the founding fathers of our country, but not all were Christians. There were quite a number of Deist's in the mix. Even then, Christianity in America was weakened by racism and exclusivism.

**BW:** What are your views on patriotism? On "American Exceptionalism?"

**JWT:** I believe it is appropriate to be a Christian and a patriot as long as one remains a Christian first and a patriot second. I believe, in fact, that Christians make the best patriots, because their love of country and countrymen is rooted in their love of God. At the same time, Jesus died for all people everywhere. Christians do not allow their patriotism to erode Jesus' love in them for all people.

**BW:** What are the roots of crime: material poverty or poverty of the soul?

**JWT:** Material poverty of itself does not produce a criminal. There are too many examples of people who rose above their material poverty without being criminals. The brokenness of human nature and the influence of evil are at the heart of the problem of crime.

**BW:** What do you think of California's Proposition 209?

**JWT:** Proposition 209 is designed by lawmakers to eliminate any form of discrimination based on race or gender, but only time will tell whether it will be able to live up to its promises. As a Christian, however, I believe that the real solution to unfair treatment of human beings by one another is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which places the highest value on every human life and alone has the power to bring about a changed heart.

**BW:** Today there was another school shooting (Springfield, OR). There certainly seems to be a trend taking place, what with the shootings at Paducah, KY and Jonesboro, AR (and several others as well). Do you have any thoughts on all of this?

**JWT:** I have several thoughts about this since it has been occurring with increasing frequency. Sociologically and psychologically, it appears to me that there is some culpability due to the messages of violence and hate that pervade the news and entertainment and is even contained in some advertisements. I would include the on-going debate about abortion in this mix. What kind of message does it send to youth that it is acceptable to kill the unborn? Spiritually, I cannot deny the presence of evil in the descriptions of these events via the news. It does motivate me more to pray for Christ's return.

**BW:** What do you think of California's recent ban on smoking?

**JWT:** It appears to me that California's ban on smoking in certain public places reflects the desires of the majority of California voters. There is no question that expanding the boundaries of the smoke free environment will result in healthier air for more people.

**BW:** What do you consider the "defining moment" of your generation?

**JWT:** My defining moment was my conversion. I consider the defining moment of a generation to be when they advance the kingdom of God. In secular terms for America it would be the abandonment in the last '60s and early '70s that spawned the post-modern era.

**BW:** How do you deal with differences of opinion?

**JWT:** For me, I take a less complicated approach of being a bridge to others over which God calls whomever He calls. And, as a bridge, I try not to erect barriers but keep side rails of appropriate size so that I am not guilty of pushing people off the bridge and unwittingly work at odds with what God is doing.

**BW:** Where do you see WCG in the next few years?

**JWT:** We will be in transition for several years. I believe that we will see more church plants and it will happen in a couple of ways. In some cases we will see a core of people within a congregation move to a new location or even stay in the same location but move to a different time or different day to hold church services. In other cases, we will see more congregations, more ministries, more decentralization as opposed to the supra-episcopal way we have operated in the past. Some congregations will grow larger and some will be smaller. One of the keys will be the health and vitality of the each local congregation and the local leadership.

**Interview Dates:** November 4, 1997; January 27, 1998; March 19, 1998; May 25, 1998; November 5, 1998; December 16, 1999.

## Personal Comments

Joe Tkach has become a dearly-loved friend, in large part due to his gracious and loving attitude towards others. Joe and I have debated political and religious issues (at times heatedly on my part), often finding little common ground (apart from the foot of the cross). While we are for the most part *theologically* in accord, our *political* perspectives – derived from our scriptural understandings and personal experiences – are often poles apart.

Joe has personally demonstrated to me that people can have *significant* differences (whether in beliefs, backgrounds, lifestyles, or whatever) and *still* be friends with love for one another.

Joe sees the common *humanity* – and the incredible human potential – in *each* human being. He looks upon fellow children of God with compassion and love. A mighty prayer warrior and selfless servant of God, Joe has been instant in prayer and service, willingly giving of himself for the benefit of others, with no thought for recognition or reward.

Joe's love and grace have *deeply* touched my heart and given me hope that such love and grace can transform even the hardest human heart. I am *overcome* by Joe's grace and love, and wish that every reader could come to know him as I have.

God does indeed *transform* our hearts and *restore* our souls – with *His* love and grace, which form a bridge *vertically* between us and Him and *horizontally* between fellow children of God. Thank you, Joe, for letting His love and grace flow through you to others (and to me).

**Bio** – <http://www.wcg.org/pastorgeneral/tkach.htm>

Joseph Tkach is pastor general and chief administrative officer of the Worldwide Church of God and president of [Plain Truth Ministries](#). Dr. Tkach has served the Worldwide Church of God as an ordained minister since 1976. He has co-pastored congregations in Detroit, Michigan; Phoenix, Arizona, as well as Pasadena and Santa Barbara-San Luis Obispo, California.

His father, Joseph W. Tkach Sr. appointed Dr. Tkach to the position of pastor general. The elder Tkach died in September 1995, at which time Joseph Tkach became pastor general.

Dr. Tkach's education includes attendance at Ambassador College from 1969 to 1973, where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in theology. He received a Masters Degree in Business Administration from Western International University in Phoenix, Arizona in 1984. He received a Doctor of Ministry degree from Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California in May, 2000.

His job related experience in social work began in 1976 where he worked for Arizona's Boys Ranch, a private agency, until 1977. His responsibilities involved the development and implementation of rehabilitation programs for juvenile delinquents. From 1977 to 1984 he worked for the State of Arizona as a social service worker with an institutional and community caseload serving the developmentally disabled population. While working for Intel Corporation from 1984 to 1986 in Phoenix, Arizona, he supervised the corporate services training department. He was hired to work in the Church Administration department of the Worldwide Church of God in 1986.

Christian growth, proclamation and unity are of utmost importance to Dr. Tkach. He is on the Board of Directors for the [National Association of Evangelicals](#), as well as the Church Advisory Committee for the [American Bible Society](#). He also assists in coordinating a Christian network for [Mission America](#) about the unbiblical teachings of alternative religions. He serves on the Doctor of Ministry Committee at Azusa Pacific University. He attends yearly regional and international conferences with leaders of the Worldwide Church of God to encourage Christian growth, share ideas, motivate and discuss the Church's goals for the upcoming year.

Born December 23, 1951, in Chicago, Illinois, Dr. Tkach spent most of his childhood in Chicago until his parents moved to Pasadena in 1966.

Married in 1980, Dr. Tkach and his wife [Tammy](#) have one son, Joseph Tkach III and one daughter, Stephanie.