



Herbert W Armstrong and Vegetarianism

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Some decades ago I began to listen to Herbert W Armstrong on his radio programme "The World Tomorrow" here in Brisbane, Australia, and to read his monthly magazine "The Plain Truth" (PT). He operated in public as Ambassador College with an office in North Sydney and campus in Pasadena but if one looked deeper there was the Radio Church of God with its headquarters in Pasadena, California, closely linked to Ambassador College. Eventually I began attending religious services on Saturday mornings with a small group of Herbert Armstrong's followers. In those early years I learned Herbert Armstrong's plain truth about vegetarianism. His doctrine was based on 1 Timothy 4:1-5:

1. Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;
2. Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;
3. Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.
4. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it is received with thanksgiving:
5. For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

This was an important doctrine for the purpose of convincing prospective members to not go to the Seventh Day Adventist Church. One of the major distinguishing features of the Radio Church of God was its observance of the weekly Sabbath and its rejection of Sunday worship. Mr Armstrong explained how it was the issue of the Sabbath that aroused his initial interest in religion. Plain Truth articles regularly extolled the Sabbath and showed the pagan origins of Sunday. Booklets and reprints were available on this topic. A potential problem confronting the Radio Church of God was that prospective members resulting from the Radio Church of God's radio programmes and free magazines could become convinced of the necessity for keeping the Sabbath, look for a local group with whom to meet, and join another group. Herbert Armstrong was effectively spending money and resources to add recruits to other organizations. The most likely group to benefit from this happening was the Seventh Day Adventist Church, well known to most people and with local services widely established in many countries. Speaking to fellow attendees at early Radio Church of God services, I discovered that generally these had thought they were the only ones in Brisbane receiving the literature and were surprised to learn that there was even a minister in Brisbane. A much greater surprise came when they walked into services for the first time and discovered a congregation of nearly two hundred. I also discovered a high proportion of ex-Seventh Day Adventists in the congregation. Mostly these were Seventh Day Adventists who had been eating meat before they came into contact with The World Tomorrow. Because of Herbert's doctrine on vegetarianism, some prospective members would have been warned away from the Seventh Day

Adventists.

This doctrine made good sense to me at the time. Herbert Armstrong's warnings on vegetarianism warned that vegetarians were strange, probably demon influenced or even demon possessed, unhealthy, sickly, and suffering from inadequate supplies of nutrients that could be found only in meats. I used to bake bread at home and bought flour and yeast at a Sanitarium shop in the city. Frequently when I went there I saw customers who seemed to me to be strange looking, thin, sickly, wearing old fashioned clothes. My brother, an elder in the Jehovah's Witnesses, once made some remarks reinforcing this Seventh Day Adventist / vegetarian stereotype.

Observation and a Reality Check

Gradually over the decades, I slowly realized there was something very wrong with this doctrine. I think Herbert Armstrong probably realized it too and the doctrine seemed to move into the background (but not repudiated). I had a friend at Telecom, a fellow engineer, who was a vegetarian. When I first discovered this, I was wary of this demon influenced / possessed man. Over time, I learned he had a strong analytical mind, high moral principles, and was an ideal employee. He was healthy and active. Very different from what Herbert Armstrong warned me to expect.

In Daniel 1:8-17 I read how Daniel and his three associates, with God-given knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning, became vegetarians in Babylon rather than eat the palace foods, with noticeable improvements in their health.

Paul wrote to the Jews and Gentile in Rome about eating meat, and to the Greeks in Corinth about eating meat obtained from the markets where the supplier had dedicated the meat to an idol. In both cases, Paul was not opposed to abstention from meat, although he did not advocate it either. In fact, he took a neutral position, stating it is irrelevant to the real issue of salvation. In Romans 14:21 Paul wrote they should abstain from meat rather than offend others. Doesn't sound anti-vegetarian. In Romans 14:23, he wrote that if anyone had doubts, he/she should not eat meat, i.e. should be a vegetarian for at least that meal. Extrapolating this, if the situation persisted, such a person should be a permanent vegetarian. Again not anti-vegetarian. To the Greeks Paul wrote he would rather never eat meat again than offend others, showing Paul was not opposed to vegetarianism per se (1 Cor 8:13).

Around the time when bans on tobacco smoking were being advocated, a magazine (I think it was Choice, from the Australian Consumers) published a USA survey of the health of smokers vs non-smokers. One non-smoking group used for a comparison was the Mormons. This large group lived in all areas of the USA, worked in all types of jobs, etc, and were an excellent control group, being very similar in profile to the smoking population with the difference that they did not smoke. The published results showed the Mormons were healthier than the general population, had fewer lung problems, etc. The survey made the interesting comment that there was an even healthier group, the Seventh Day Adventists. The main difference between the groups for the purpose of the survey was that the mormons eat meat. (Neither group drinks alcohol).

Stories about Herman Hoeh's association with Buddhists were initially

greeted with consternation by many. What's he doing mixing with these demon possessed Buddhist vegetarians was a common reaction. I had my doubts about him. Much later I attended a Festival of Tabernacles in Thailand and we met some of these Buddhists. They appeared to be quite normal people, and behaved in a very friendly and hospitable manner.

In more recent years I have been able to attend a number of technical conferences. I was surprised that special lunch meals for vegetarians were available, indicating a significant number of vegetarians. These technical conferences were not for people with weak minds who were unable to think properly. Obviously the vegetarians there were performing well in technical employment or they would not have remained in employment. I have attended staff conferences held by the Faculty of Information Technology at QUT. Vegetarian food is always provided. These staff members have at least a Master's degree by research, and most have a PhD in research. To claim, as Herbert Armstrong did, that these vegetarians lack mental skills in analysis and synthesis in nonsensical and out of touch with reality.

In the late 1970's I had some problems with a malignant melanoma and studied into cancer treatments. I survived the experience and learned some important facts about cancer and the medical establishment. One of the things I learned was that the healthiest diet is a diet with little or no meat. All of the natural treatments involved diets with no meat. I learned that the pancreas generates two important enzymes, trypsin and chymotrypsin, which are targetted at breaking down proteins which are in meat and which coat cancer cells. In heavy meat diets, these enzymes are completely used up during digestion, but in diets with less meat, the excess enzymes after digestion pass through the intestine walls and into the blood stream, circulating through the blood stream and attacking cancer cells. It is not surprising that heavy meat eaters have higher incidences of cancers of the colon, breast, cervix, uterus, ovary, prostate, and lung. Another fact I learned was that vitamin B17, from kernels of stone fruits and apples, is another defence against cancer. This gave me a deeper appreciation for Gen 1:26:

I have since learned that a diet high in fresh fruit and fresh vegetables is beneficial for more than cancer resistance. A Dr Dean Ornish has shown that a vegetarian diet can halt and even reverse heart disease. (Dr Pritikin has shown a similar outcome using a low cholesterol low meat diet). Diabetes can be prevented, symptoms relieved and insulin treatments rendered unnecessary. Time, in March 1984, claimed that in regions where meat is scarce, cardiovascular disease is unknown. The Framingham Heart Study reported that vegetarians outlive others by about six years.

It is common knowledge among many that meat has special proteins which do not occur elsewhere, and a vegetarian is deprived of these proteins with detrimental health effects. Unfortunately this "knowledge" is outdated and scientifically erroneous. (For example, see *Position Paper on Vegetarian Diets*, American Dietetic Association, 1993. It states among other things that "soy protein has been shown to be nutritionally equivalent in protein value to proteins of animal origin and, thus, can serve as the sole source of protein intake if desired." Readable on the WWW at

<http://www.envirolink.org/arrs/VRG/nutrition/ada1993.htm>). The reason for this is that body cannot directly use any proteins it takes in. The design of the human body is protein-independent. God has

achieved this by having the body break down all incoming proteins into their constituent amino acids. (There are "essential" amino acids and "non-essential" amino acids. Meat contains all of the essential amino acids, so do many other foods.) The body then reassembles amino acids to make body proteins as needed. Excess amino acids are discarded. This discovery has dramatically altered weight training. The old way was to consume large helpings of steak, eggs, etc. The modern way is to consume large helpings of mixtures of amino acids, as powders, drinks, or tablets, and is much more effective.

Is there nothing that can be gained from meat only? Yes there is. Residues of antibiotics, sulfa drugs, growth hormones, and various chemicals added to the feed of animals for economic purposes. And perhaps mad cow's disease. How about iron? Don't we need to eat meat? Spinach has 14 times the iron of sirloin steak. Iron requires the presence of vitamin C to be absorbed. Meat contains no vitamin C so it needs to be eaten with foods containing vitamin C or the iron is wasted. Spirulina, a water plant harvested and sold as powder, somewhat like kelp, contains 50 times more iron than spinach (but no vitamin C). Spirulina contains all nine essential amino acids and nine non-essential amino acids, and is also rich in vitamin B12 which was once thought to be available only from meat. Vitamin B12 is available in mushrooms (marketed as "meat for vegetarians"). The body will internally synthesize vitamin B12 from the byproducts of breakdown of vitamin B17 available from many seeds and kernels, particularly those of stone fruits and apples.

A Sin to be Unmarried?

Herbert Armstrong "reasoned" from verse three that demons teach people to abstain from meat, and therefore abstaining from meat is evil and a sin, and the duty of a Christian is to NOT abstain from meat. However he neglected the first part of this verse which refers to abstaining from marriage. Using Herbert Armstrong's reasoning: demons teach people to abstain from marriage, and therefore abstaining from marriage is evil, and the duty of a Christian is to NOT abstain from marriage. Hence, a Christian will marry as early as possible, probably in the teenage years, and widows and widowers should remarry as soon as possible. Of course, using this reasoning method of Herbert Armstrong, both Jesus and Paul sinned by being unmarried. This is obviously nonsensical because the unmarried Paul wrote the words of verse three and he did not think he was following the doctrines of demons.

Some demons teach against marriage but being unmarried is not a sin in itself. A person who is unmarried is not necessarily following demons. This is an important point that Herbert Armstrong overlooked. Satan is the father of lies (Jn 8:44) but not everyone who tells a lie is possessed by Satan.

Why the Conflicts with Reality?

How can these facts be? How could Herbert Armstrong have been wrong? Is the Bible unbelievable? Was Paul lying to Timothy? A closer look at the verses in question reveal the answer. We need to see what they really tell and what they do not tell.

Firstly, Herbert Armstrong's false basic assumption was as follows: "If demons teach people to be / do X, then it is a sin to be / do X, and a

Christian's duty for salvation is to NOT be / do X".

Applying this to vegetarianism, Herbert Armstrong came up with: "If demons teach people to be vegetarians, then it is a sin to be a vegetarian, and a Christian's duty is to NOT be a vegetarian". This may sound plausible, until we apply the same principle to abstaining from marriage: "If demons teach people to be unmarried, then it is a sin to be unmarried, and a Christian's duty is to NOT be unmarried".

Abstaining from "Meats"

Next, for further information, we note the NIV translation:

1 Timothy 4

1. The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.
2. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.
3. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and obey the truth.
4. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it received with thanksgiving,
5. because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

The KJV "meats" is translated into twentieth century English as "foods". Who today teaches people "to abstain from certain foods"? Many groups: medical doctors, surgeons, dieticians, physicians, physical trainers. Some of the foods affected are meat (gout, allergies, cholesterol), cheese, butter, cream, milk (cholesterol, allergies), bananas (Potassium poisoning), salt (cardiovascular), tea, coffee (caffeine, kidney, heart), sugar, molasses (diabetes), and whole groups for ulcers, teeth problems, stomach problems, digestion problems, etc. President George Bush, a role model for young Republican Americans, made headlines some years ago when he publicized his lifelong rejection of broccoli, which of course God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and obey the truth. According to Herbert Armstrong's doctrine, this information told us George Bush was demon possessed or influenced.

Herbert Armstrong combined verses one and three to claim that those who teach abstention from a type of food are demon possessed. Is a heart specialist who tells you to stop eating hamburgers and chips for lunch really demon possessed and teaching doctrines of demons? (There are followers of Herbert Armstrong who still think so). If so, then the Bible looks rather stupid. The Bible is not stupid. The error is with the teachings of Herbert Armstrong.

Herbert Armstrong separated the teachings about marriage and foods in verse three, leading to these nonsensical conclusions about demons infecting unmarried people, vegetarians, doctors, dieticians, physicians, etc. The alternative is that both of these teachings must occur together and be teachings of a religion, i.e. Paul is warning about religious groups which teach both abstention from marriage and abstention from foods for religious reasons. These two clues are to be taken together as a warning signal about religious groups in the later days which might cause one to abandon the Christian faith and join religious organizations led by hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

Herbert Armstrong did not use this understanding of the verses, for fairly obvious reasons. Since Seventh Day Adventists teach marriage, these combined verses would not apply to them. Also these events are to occur in the latter days, and Seventh Day Adventists have been around for too long to be classed as a phenomena arising in the latter days.

More on Marriage

Anyway, who teaches abstention from marriage? The Seventh Day Adventists don't. I personally do not know of any group which has a blanket ban on marriage. Herbert Armstrong himself had a blanket ban on certain classes of people, a form of partial ban on marriage. Did that make him partially demon possessed? He taught abstention from marriage among certain groups of people based on race and even on colour of skin within a race. Presumably his disciples hold to this doctrine, e.g. Stephen Flurry, Rod Meredith. The Roman Catholic Church teaches abstention from marriage among certain groups, e.g. its priests and nuns, but not for the majority of its members. In Buddhist countries, boys as they grow up, enter the temples for a period of celibate service, after which most resume normal lives. Some stay on as priests but the majority marry and contribute to the overpopulation problems of their countries. Buddhists, Hindus, etc. don't abstain from marriage.

There is a recent (by Indian measures) Indian religion which has "spiritual universities" around the world, including Brisbane. One of my students was an adherent. They are vegetarians. They allow marriage but discourage sexual relations. Does this prove that vegetarianism itself is an evil because this group preaches it? Does it prove that being single is an evil because this group preaches it? Well, they also believe in a single god, the "Supreme Soul", with whom they attempt to communicate during meditation and trances. Is monotheism wrong because they teach it? They also teach honesty, diligence, service to other people, are opposed to violence, stealing, murder, disrespect for parents, adultery, covetousness. Are these wrong too?

Where are the Demons?

What does Paul and the Spirit warn us of in the last days? What are these groups in the last days which (will) cause some to abandon the faith of Christianity (not just modify or augment their existing beliefs, but completely abandon the past and adopt a new way), and follow deceiving spirits and hypocritical liars (teaching one thing to their followers but doing otherwise privately). Perhaps only those in the last days will know. Assuming we are in the last days, my opinion is the warning is against eastern religions which claim that followers can experience a closer relation with God and that the religion of Christ is superseded by their broader religion. The fastest growing religions in the "Christian" world in the past decade have been eastern religions such as Hare Krishna, Bhagwan Rajneesh, Buddhism, and now Tibetan Buddhism with the promotion of the Dalai Lama by prominent persons and groups.

Vegetarians are Ascetics?

A widely held belief among anti-vegetarians who eat large amounts of

meat seems to be that vegetarianism is a form of asceticism, that vegetarians eat their food in deprivation, displeasure and suffering. The term "rabbit food" is disparagingly applied to salads and vegetables. As is known by vegetarians and those who are privileged to be able to eat a wide variety of vegetables and fruits, the reverse is true. Those who limit themselves to mostly steak and eggs, mashed potatoes and cooked beans, meat pies and beer, are the ones who are missing out on the pleasures of foods. Another conflict with reality. One form of asceticism would be to eat only a steak with a glass of wine for every meal during the day, day after day. One would soon tire of this unvarying menu, and would soon become debilitated (e.g. with scurvy) and would be unable to continue.

History's Report Card

Robert Brinsmead is an influential religious author who has gone through a wide spectrum of religious beliefs. He was once a legalist Seventh Day Adventist who changed to preach against all laws in the Bible, including the Sabbath. At that time he caused some strong ripples amongst the Seventh Day Adventists. Herbert Armstrong claimed that vegetarians have weaker minds than meat eaters and are open to demon possession, yet when Robert Brinsmead's doctrines entered the Worldwide Church of God they caused catastrophic damage. His followers left in droves. Meanwhile, the Seventh Day Adventist Church had earlier shrugged them off with no lasting harm.

Herbert Armstrong is now dead and gone. His successors have abandoned his teachings. His church has largely fragmented into dozens of splinters, in part due to Robert Brinsmead's teachings, with most people having left for other interests, with no prospects of any improvement and every sign of bankruptcy and complete annihilation. Meanwhile, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, first attacked by the Brinsmead doctrines, continues strong and healthy, with a growth each year which is larger than the combined remnants of the work of Herbert Armstrong. It reported a mid-1996 membership of over nine million, with a new baptism on average every 48 seconds of every day of the year (over 650,000 in the year), and on average four new congregations organized every day of the year. Their Bible Schools graduated over 250,000 in 1996. (See <http://www.adventist.org/facts.html>). Herbert Armstrong's Ambassador College (changed to Ambassador University in the early 1990's) will be shut down in mid-1997 and the assets sold.

I assume Herbert Armstrong's teachings on supposedly inferior weak-minded vegetarians and vegetarianism as a less spiritual way of life live on in the various flavoured clones such as Stephen Flurry's Philadelphia Church of God and Rod Meredith's Global Church of God, but those who wish to treat the Word of God carefully and learn from their experiences in the real world have outgrown them and left them behind.

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