

The Painful Truth

AMBASSADOR REPORT

BOBBY FISCHER SPEAKS OUT!

"Fischer does not merely outplay opponents; he leaves them bodily and mentally glutted.... Fisher himself speaks of the exultant instant in which he feels the 'ego of the other player crumbling.' "

-George Steiner, Fields of Force



"Fischer is... the strongest player in the world. In fact, the strongest player who ever lived."

-Larry Evans, U.S. International Grandmaster

Bobby Fischer is the undisputed "psych-out" champion in the world of chess. On this cerebral battlefield, he has crushed many an ego with his ferocious, relentless attack coupled with his steely-cold logic and near perfect strategy.

Bobby was born in Chicago on May 9, 1943, but grew up in Brooklyn, New York. On his sixth birthday, he received a gift of destiny from his sister Joan—a chess set. Since that time, little else interested Bobby, who played chess for hours every day. Consequently, his knowledge and skill grew enormously.

In 1956 he won the junior chess championship of the United States at the age of thirteen. The next year he won the prestigious U.S. championship. He continued his meteoric rise, and in 1958, he placed fifth in the interzonal tournament at Portoroz, Yugoslavia, thus qualifying at fifteen years of age as the youngest International Grandmaster ever.

He spent the next decade preparing for the chance to gain the title he coveted most: world champion. In 1972, on the island of Iceland, Bobby finally got his shot at the crown. There he single-handedly took on the entire state subsidized

Soviet chess machine and became world champion, defeating Boris Spassky in a grueling match. Several years later, Bobby unfortunately forfeited the title back to a Russian, Anatoly Karpov, over a dispute regarding international tournament rules. However, Bobby still has amassed far more FICA tournament points than any other player in history, thus qualifying Bobby as one of the greatest chess minds of all time.

But as well-known as Bobby's chess history is to the general public, precious little has been reported on his long association with the Worldwide Church of God. Bobby's immersion in the "Ambassador experience" for over ten years has proven to be his greatest battle of mind and ego.

In this rare interview, Bobby Fischer describes in his own words his relationship with Armstrongism and explains how even he, the "psych-out king," was able to be out psyched and manipulated by the Armstrongs through long-term exposure to subtle religious mind-control techniques. The interview itself was conducted by several staff members at various locations in the Pasadena area over the course of several weeks. What proved more effective than a formal question-and-answer format was a loose discussion style that fit Bobby's personality better. The following are the most valuable excerpts, organized under various topic headings.

WHY BOBBY CAME TO US

LEN ZOLA: Bobby, how did you first come across our publication, and after several years of not making any statements to the media, why have you chosen to share your thoughts and perspectives regarding the Worldwide Church of God with us?

BOBBY FISCHER: I was walking by Bungalow News store in Pasadena, and a copy of *Ambassador Review* [the predecessor of *Ambassador Report*] was in the window. I'm really glad you guys put out that magazine. You really put a lot of work into it. I was coming around anyway, but that sped it up. It might have taken me another year or two to get where I am.

I didn't even want to give an interview in a sense, because my privacy is very important to me. But I feel that it is my duty to help out people, to help even one person. I just worry about the people in the Armstrong organization and those who may come into it. Why should they have to suffer because we rationalized that we didn't want to do anything?

"I'm not interested in getting my money back. I just want to make sure that nobody gets ripped off mentally."

I called you up about this. I hardly know you guys, but I want to help you. I think your publication is going to reach the people I want to reach. I really think that people should have information to make intelligent choices. I believe this.

Really my story is no different than that of any other jerk that was sucked into the organization. The only difference would be that I, Bobby Fischer, was

saying it, and people would be more interested because of my name, my veracity, and the fact that I gave a lot of money.

However, I want to emphasize that I'm not trying to destroy the college or the Armstrongs. I know the Bible says, "Vengeance is God's." I'm not trying to "get" those guys. And I'm not interested in getting my money back. I'm trying to protect others. I just want to make sure that nobody gets ripped off mentally. That's the most important thing. I am not necessarily backing the whole magazine, but I'm using it because it is a good forum to get my views across.

INITIAL CONTACT WITH WORLDWIDE CHURCH

LEN ZOLA: Was it in 1962 or around then that you said you first became involved with the Worldwide Church of God? Did you flip the radio to the Worldwide Church of God's radio broadcast by accident?

FISCHER: I had some personal problems, and I started listening to a lot of radio ministers. I listened every Sunday all day, flipping the dial up and back. So, I heard just about every guy on Sunday. And then I heard Mr. Armstrong, and I said, "Ah, God has finally shown me the one, I guess. This guy really has power. authority. He doesn't talk like the other guys. He really knows his stuff!"

When I started listening, it was to Herbert Armstrong mostly. Then Herbert and his son were alternating every day for awhile. One day it was Herbert, and one day it was Ted. Then it was Herbert just on Sundays. And eventually, Herbert was just phased out.

Well, I kind of split my life into two pieces. One was where my chess career lies. There, I kept my sanity, so to speak, and my logic. And the other was my religious life. I tried to apply what I learned in the church to my chess career too. But I still was studying chess. I wasn't just "trusting in God" to give me the moves.

WHAT TITHING HAS DONE FOR ME

ZOLA: As you continued to listen to the WCG's "World Tomorrow" broadcast, did you begin sending donations?

FISCHER: I never gave any money to a work or any church. I didn't believe in that stuff. But I got a whole bunch of literature from Armstrong. I felt guilty after awhile about getting so much. I was getting *The Plain Truth* for a couple of years. I had written for every last piece of literature I had ever heard him offering. Finally, I sent him five bucks or something. Then I got a co-worker letter. And then later on I sent them maybe \$20. And then I remember in late 1963 I was in some tournament, and I said, "I'll send the whole tenth." It was a really big decision.

BILL HUGHES: In 1972 when they got that money from you [\$61,200], did they discuss what proportion they ought to receive?

FISCHER: No, no. I wanted to do it. I was enthusiastic!

HUGHES: What was it that you won in that chess tournament?

FISCHER: I don't know exactly. It was about \$160,000, plus I received a lot of royalties. I made about \$200,000 that year.

HUGHES: Well, didn't you donate more than 10% of your winnings?

FISCHER: Yeah! Well, I told them that I wanted to give them a double tithe. Whatever it was, I wanted to do it the very right way, whatever that was. I did it on the gross amount. They cleaned my pockets out frankly. I have some money left, but not that much. I've got some assets. It's amazing they didn't get everything. Now my only income is a few royalty checks from my books. I was really very foolish, but I thought I was doing what I had to do. When I sent those checks off, I really didn't have the slightest qualms, no regrets, not the slightest. I don't really regret it that much, to tell you the truth, even now.

Now that I think about it, I never heard Armstrong once say, "Well, that's nice Bobby that you want to help us, but don't forget your family. Help them too." The Armstrongs never once said that.

You know, I didn't improve my living standard one bit either. It wasn't like I just didn't help my mom. I didn't do anything for myself either. You know I don't even have a car. About the only luxury I got was quite a few \$400 suits. I got ten maybe. But still what I'm saying is that that is still not a lot of money spent on me considering all the money I made. It wasn't like I was living high on the hog and neglecting my mom, but she's living real poor in a crummy apartment in England. She doesn't even have a bathroom. I just saw her a few months ago. I have to help my mom now. She's an old woman. She could soon be gone and here I was giving money so that Rader and these guys can have their parties in Beverly Hills. This whole thing is so sick.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ARMSTRONGISM

Church members shouldn't let themselves be confused. They begin not trusting in their own judgment, and then they're finished. That's a terrible, terrible thing. First, they get conducted in with a nice sweet program, no money, everything free, free, free. And then they get sucked in, and suddenly a few lies get mixed in. They are told that their human nature is wicked and these nice people who gave them all these things wouldn't be lying to them, would they? And then I think once you start distrusting your own mind you're finished. From there you just get more and more confused. Once you think that your own mind is not your friend-then I think you are on your way to insanity. You have been stripped bare. All your defenses are gone. You must trust Armstrongism, his ministers, doctrines, and organization. Otherwise you're going in the wrong direction, and you know where that leads.

Herbert Armstrong claims to be freeing you from the world's churches, freeing you from all the trash you've heard all your life. He's freeing you, and finally you're coming to know the truth that will set you free, free, free, and the next thing you know you are really a zombie. You are completely under the power of Armstrongism. Good luck... you're going to need it.

"...once you start distrusting your own mind, you're finished."

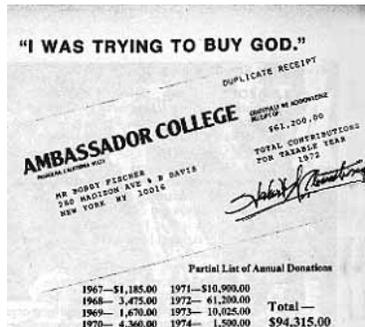
This idea of Herbert's that you can't trust your own thoughts-that's the key doctrine that I think has to be blasted out. I would say that if there's one thing that is the whole essence of Armstrongism, that's it. That's how he screws up your mind. That's how he hangs on to people.

I have to discuss some of the things Herbert has done to me-how he screwed up my mind-just to let people know that this is for real, because if anybody tried to live by the letter of the law... it was me. I truly tried to be obedient. The more I tried, the more crazy I became. The pressure he puts on you! You can't do this, you can't do that, you can't tell your friends this, you can't see unconverted people, you can't eat this, you can't eat that, on the sabbath you have to rest, you have to listen to the radio program every day, you have to study the correspondence course... and then you're supposed to pray....

"They'll never come up with a better con than this."

I can remember times coming home from a chess club at four in the morning when I was half asleep and half dead and forcing myself to pray an hour and study [the Bible] an hour. You know, I was half out of my head-stoned almost.

And every time you try to think a sane thought you think it's of the devil. They keep pushing that thing. They keep pushing about this tremendous struggle that goes on between God and the devil. And the devil keeps injecting his thoughts into your mind. They really got you coming and going. I don't think that they will ever come up with one better than this. They'll never come up with a better con than this. They are playing with people's lives like toys.



PROPHETIC FOLLIES

The real proof for me was those [false] prophecies. Everybody has a different way of looking at it, but to me that shows he [Armstrong] is an outright huckster.

Like the Bible says, when a prophet makes prophecies that don't come true, then that guy is not of God and you don't have to be afraid of him. Yet church

members are afraid of him [HWA]. And he's failed umpteen times. This guy, Armstrong, in terms of religion, is the world's biggest loser.

[Next Fischer spoke about Herbert Armstrong's prophetic failures during and after World War II.] Okay, he could have made those mistakes, and I'd let them go. But he made mistakes again in 1950, 1952-the same trap over and over again. And he was dead wrong-100% wrong. He blew it all, and he pulled it again and again and again and again. And here I was in the sixties reading this stuff sincerely and believing it. And I should have known that it was all just a pack of lies. He was just playing with me. Lie after lie, letter after letter.

"Either God is a masochist and likes to be made a fool of, or else Herbert Armstrong is a false prophet."

But I was really upset in 1972 when Herbert Armstrong refused to apologize. He could have just apologized and said, "I became overly enthusiastic. I wanted Christ to return so badly. Everything seemed to fit. Please excuse me. I won't do that again."

I thought, "This doesn't seem right. I gave all my money. Everybody has been telling me this [1972 would be the date the WCG would flee to a place of safety] for years. And now, he's half-denying he ever said it when I remember him saying it a hundred times. And then on top of it, he won't even apologize for saying it." When you put it all together, it's hard to accept his sincerity. That's the problem.

And what convinces me even more that I'm right is when I talk to Dr. Robert Kuhn and a few others. When I talk to him, he has no answers. When you press him about these prophecies, he says, "Well, Herbert thought he was right."

And I said, "Yeah, he thought he was right. I can accept that the first time. What about the second time?" Kuhn replied, "Well, he thought he was right. He convinced himself he was right."



"Once I quit tithing, my mind started to clear up."

"Okay, what about the third time?"

"No, he convinced himself."

I said, "How many times did he convince himself? You mean he never once thought, 'Well, I've been wrong all these times. Maybe I'd better go back and reanalyze the whole thing from A to Z?'"

"No, he didn't. He was so convinced."

I said, "I can't accept that, Robert. That blows my mind that a guy can make a hundred prophecies and think he's right every time and be sincere every time. That is impossible. And that's utterly impossible unless he's insane!"

This is a joke. If you talk about fulfillment of prophecy, he's a fulfillment of Elmer Gantry. If Elmer Gantry was the Elijah, Herbert's the "Christ" of religious hucksters. There is no way he could truly be God's prophet. Either God is a masochist and likes to be made a fool of or else Herbert Armstrong is a false prophet.

REFLECTIONS ON THE WCG MINISTRY

Basically, I don't want people to do anything rash because they think God is smiling down when they talk to a minister. That's the thing people have to be disabused of. It makes me sick to think these two-bit salesmen are running around pretending they're God, and people buy it. And I shudder to think how they're ruining lives. They don't even think. Ministers just speak what they've been taught.

My main concern though is that people don't get ripped off by these local ministers. To me this is the most vicious thing. The people hear new ideas and they want to obey God, so they listen to these guys, and their lives are ruined. These guys will ruin your life in five minutes flat. They'll tell you to move. They'll tell you to change jobs. They'll tell you not to have an operation. They'll tell you to marry this person. And people do it.

And if you ask questions or say something derogatory, they'll hit you back and insult you right away. Like I once said to this minister, "I think GTA is obnoxious." He replied, "I think you're obnoxious." They're fast on their feet.

FISCHER ON HERBERT ARMSTRONG

Herbert Armstrong has a way with words. You know, he seems so sincere. He has all the right principles: dedication, hard work, perseverance, never giving up. He's dogged; he's persistent.

You know, from reading his stuff and listening to his sermons, you'd think he was very interested in God. But when you meet him personally, there is nothing there at all.

I find Armstrong to be an egomaniac. He sitteth in the temple of God saying great things as if he were God. He apparently wants to leave his permanent

mark on all he comes in contact with and can bring into submission. He is simply a mad man who would love to rule the world.

"Herbert Armstrong keeps encouraging people to give up everything for the kingdom, but why doesn't he set the example himself"

I was looking through some of his old co-worker letters-so phony, you know. He talks about this world and how evil it is and all, but actually he's really of this world with all these high-pressure sales tactics. That's exactly the stuff he talks about-the stuff he was doing as a kid that he supposedly outgrew. For example, he continuously tries to frighten and panic you in his coworker letters about the supposed imminent end of the world-so that you will empty your bank account before him. Articles in old *Plain Truths* tell you that you haven't much time to develop character to prepare for Christ's return-to take the last train to sanity by joining Armstrongism. The idea is constantly drummed into your head that you must obey God=Armstrongism before it's too late. You must decide now. Time is running out This kind of super high-pressure salesmanship leads people to make rash decisions, based on fear, often made against their better judgment. This is the very essence of Armstrongism (i.e., fear, panic, guilt).

He is even more advanced than Madison Avenue because he is willing to give you his literature indefinitely almost, whereas the Madison Avenue people kind of want that quick return. He is much more insidious because he's combining the most powerful and evil techniques of everybody This guy is voracious. He never quits on you. He wants you. You can turn against him completely and he would still want you back. He'd still want your mind. He never gives up on getting your mind.

Oh, man, he keeps encouraging people to give up everything for the kingdom, but why doesn't he set the example himself? He plays on your emotions. That is what he does. He pretends that he is trying to get away from that. That's what "the world" does. They play on your emotions and weaknesses, but he plays on them the worst. There is no depth at all in his spiritual approach.

People have committed suicide under the tremendous barrage of Armstrongism's subtly induced feelings of self-hate and hopelessness for this life.... Like he tells you to be interested in the next life, but he's interested, in this life very much.

Really, people are just getting one side of this whole story all the time from Herbert Armstrong. He's so convincing, you know. I don't think anybody has a more convincing style than he. This Armstrong-I was thinking if you had to think of one word to describe this guy, if you could only use one word, I would use "dangerous."

The only thing that refutes his style is true facts-hard facts.

[Next Bobby tells what it was like taking a tour of Ambassador College campus with Herbert Armstrong and one of Herbert's old friends.] Herbert was with this

old man, and he [Herbert] must have said the same thing about ten times. He said, "I've done all right, haven't I, Cliff?" And he said, "Oh, yes, you've done fine, Herbert. This is a beautiful college you've got here. And this beautiful land is beautifully kept up."

And Herbert replied, "Well, I see that everything is kept up. I see to it personally that all this property is kept up." "Well, Herbert, you've really done fine." So we walked awhile longer. And then Herbert stopped again, saying, "I've done all right, haven't I?" So the other man repeated, "Yes, you've done great. You really have." And then it would start all over again a little later. And I thought, "What the hell is going on here? Man, have I gone ...? I gave my money to this? I must be nuts. I can't believe this!"



"I've done all right, haven't I, Cliff?"

Herbert Armstrong remarked to Clifford DePuy (January 2, 1973). DePuy was publisher of a trade journal and employed Herbert Armstrong as an advertising salesman from 1915 to 1922.

FISCHER ON GARNER TED ARMSTRONG

I've tried to carry out what Garner Ted says to its logical conclusion. You know, it never seems to form. He carries things to a point but not to a conclusion. If you go to the conclusion with all this stuff, it comes out bad. By the time you've thought enough to come up with a good answer, he's on about 18 other subjects already. He gives you a very obvious kind of snow job.

Now I understand. I never understood how it could be that Herbert Armstrong seemingly had so much love and compassion and his son seemed so selfish and nasty. They're just the same people. They just have a different way of doing it, you know. Well, Herbert wrecked his son. I can see how that old man could ruin his son. I think GTA is just a massive inferiority complex.

ZOLA: Did you ask Herbert what was Ted's sin? And did he or did he not tell you it was adultery?

FISCHER: No, I didn't want to insult him. Why, did you hear that we had a conversation?

ZOLA: Yes.

FISCHER: I met Herbert in the Hall of Administration, and he started to talk to me about his airplane and flying. And then he started going off on some wild tangents that may be significant. Then, it meant nothing to me. He was talking

about stewardesses on the airplanes and how one of them was tempting Ted. I didn't know what he was talking about. I thought it was raving stuff, because I had no idea what he was talking about. I was wondering why he was telling me this. But he didn't admit anything.

See, I wasn't at that stage trying to find the loose brick. I wanted to believe. I feel that if Ted had done something 3 years ago, and nobody knew about it, it would be cruel to bring it up.

But this is different. This is a way of life, apparently from what I'm starting to hear. I'm sure if there's all that smoke there's plenty of fire. Now if a guy is that calloused to make it a way of life, I don't see how his feelings are going to be that hurt. Anybody in the spotlight preaching purity while doing all this on the side has to know it's going to come out. He has to know that, or maybe he's nuts, right? But it is a shame. You would think that if Ted is rational, he could pull himself together and could see himself. But he is not rational apparently.

What if I was coming on the air every day for 20 years telling people: "Don't play chess" and then I ran home and played chess every day? I don't know how he does it. It's too much!

WHAT CHURCH BRETHERN MEAN TO ME

I like church people. I don't really feel these are bad people. But Herbert has exercised this power and authority over the church people for years. He knows that no matter what he says, they keep coming back for more. Have you noticed the people around the college and church? They are all very immature. Everybody, no matter how young or old, stays immature. And they get back so little for all that they give. Here in Pasadena, the employees do all right because they are on the receiving end of donations from all the people in the rest of the country. But "out there" the local church people get nothing back-except bad advice and co-worker letters.

I'm not even going to say that all the doctrines of the church are necessarily bad and that members should reject everything. That is not my point. My point is that they should be thinking for themselves.

In the Eric Hoffer book, *True Believer*, the greatest danger to an authoritarian organization like the WCG is when the authority is relaxed a bit-they ease up on the people a bit. Then, the true believers begin to lose their fear. Most people are sheep, and they need the support of others. With enough people like us, the people will see they are not alone. Then it can be just like an avalanche.

CLOSING REMARKS

Well, I know what Armstrong is going to say [in reaction to this interview]. He'll say, "His [chess] career is finished. He's bitter." Or, "He's disturbed. He was a fringer. He was never with us."

It's all so sad, though. It's very tragic because it's just the opposite of what we got into it for.

Anyway, I can't imagine anybody not having their minds cleared after reading your publication. Our mind is all we've got. Not that it won't lead us astray sometimes, but we still have to analyze things out within ourselves.