

July 2012

Dear Brethren:

In past issues we have been examining various aspects of the history of Herbert Armstrong's work in the twentieth century, seeking to provide a perspective which has been mostly hidden to many. There is much insight to be gleaned from historical publications of the Radio Church of God/Worldwide Church of God since the 1930s, but seemingly few today have grasped key lessons from that catalogue of material. There are certainly many individuals who have written books, articles, and expose's, seeking to "enlighten us" through the prisms of their own partisan filters. And yet most of these have failed to see the forest for the trees. This ministry may equally be labeled as promoting a partisan agenda, and we readily admit that the way we interpret church history certainly supports our own world view of events. But our "take" is without doubt a version of the story which is not being told by anyone else. Does ours have any greater merit than the existing histories written by former ministers and members? That is for the reader to decide, based upon the credibility of the documentation being presented. What we hope to explain is *why* events unfolded as they did in that unique work over the previous seventy years.

We have already provided a summary of many parts of the story, explaining "what happened." The chronology of key events is well documented. But *why* did many events take place over time to *transform* the underlying philosophy of Mr. Armstrong's work through those years? What were *the hidden forces* at play which influenced the focus and direction of that organization over time?

Organizational Personality

No matter what kind of enterprise it may be, every organization has a unique personality, even as does every individual. In this regard, *personality* refers to characteristics which influence our perception of one's character. Sometimes personalities are manufactured by design. But in most cases a personality emerges spontaneously over time without any conscious, calculated vision. An individual becomes "known" for certain traits, and his image derives from the *perceptions* that others have about him. The same is true of organizations. Whether it is planned or accidental, calculated or not, every business, fraternity, club, charity or church also acquires a distinctive personality. Many different—even contradicting—labels may be attached to an organization, based upon divergent perceptions about that group. It is all very subjective. That is why many seek to generate their own identities with aggressive programs to foster positive perceptions and to create goodwill. Much of the marketing industry exists specifically to create positive identities in the minds of the masses, to generate good feelings about a company and its products. The business of politics is all about crafting

an identity which will generate confidence and popularity, leading to votes. But whether we try to or not, we all generate an identity of some kind which can be described as a personality. It is part of the "footprint" we each leave in this world.

The work of Herbert Armstrong certainly had its own personality as well, but not one that remained constant over time. Setting aside the polarizing opinions about the "footprint" left by that work—either good or bad—what were some early and later characteristics of that organization, and how did the personality of the Radio Church of God *transform* over time?

Early Personality of The Radio Church of God

One of the earliest hallmarks of the evangelistic effort which ultimately became the Radio Church of God was *humility*. Firstly, its origin with a handful of members in rural Oregon certainly bespeaks a very humble beginning. But it was also "humble" with regard to the *leadership style* manifested by Mr. Armstrong while the church was being served single-handedly by himself and his wife, Loma. Many stories from those earliest years paint a picture of a man whose personal philosophy about conducting that work was incredibly meek. Not so with the content of his messages as he stood before assemblies to preach. Those sermons were anything but meek or mild. It was his authoritative, thundering assertion about Bible truths which electrified his audiences. And yet, at the very same time, his manner when dealing with individuals one-on-one was often much more self-deprecating.

The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong is the best single source for detail about those early years, but admittedly, trusting Mr. Armstrong's own accounts might not be considered very objective for proving his virtue of humility. Regardless, accepting those accounts at face value provides a fascinating contrast between his early leadership style vs. that which would become ascribed to the Worldwide Church of God decades later. The *transformation of organizational personality* is what we want to examine.

Recall that Mr. Armstrong emphasized often how God had dealt with his youthful vanity and arrogance by bringing him low over a number of years. By the time he began to preach (if his own testimony is at all trustworthy), he had come to recognize his own unworthiness. There may be no better means to verify a man's *sense of self* than to note how he reacts to criticism, especially a public challenge. One particular anecdote will demonstrate this point about Mr. Armstrong, although there are many such examples which could be cited from his writings. Here is his account of a 1933 incident:

In this neighborhood, near the school house, lived an elderly "Bible scholar" with quite a reputation in the community. His name was Belshaw. He owned the most extensive theological library in the district—probably the only one. The neighbors regarded him as something of a Bible authority.

Mr. and Mrs. Fisher had warned me of one of his habits which was traditional in that neighborhood. In Eugene, adjoining the University of Oregon campus, is a theological seminary. Frequently advanced students were sent to one of these country school houses to hold a short series of meetings as part of their training. It was Mr. Belshaw's custom to attend one of the first two meetings, and to put the speaker on the spot by heckling him with a trick question.

It was Mr. Belshaw's contention that these young men did not really have a thorough knowledge of the Bible. He was sure that he did. He was adept at asking questions the answer to which he was pretty sure the young preacher, or preacher-to-be, did not know. If he could tangle the speaker up and expose his ignorance, the neighbors would have a good laugh—and then fail to attend any further meetings.

"If Mr. Belshaw can trap you with a trick question, no one will attend your meetings after that," warned Mr. Fisher, "He nearly always has a question these young men can't answer. But if you can answer him, or turn the tables on him, the news will spread all over the neighborhood and the attendance will increase."

Mr. Belshaw had not put in an appearance the first night. Apparently he had decided to first see whether I had a good crowd. But the second night, he was one of the 19 present.

He interrupted my sermon.

"Mr. Armstrong," he called out, "may I ask you a question?"

"Yes Sir, Mr. Belshaw," I replied, "you may" ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," *The PLAIN TRUTH*, May 1960).

The point is not to reprint the whole story of Mr. Belshaw's tricky technical question about salvation and how Mr. Armstrong replied to win the point based upon his effective use of Scripture. The point is the manner in which he chose to handle a disrespectful confrontation which he knew in advance was coming. The purpose of that evangelical work under Mr. Armstrong was not the idolization of a preacher, but the spreading of a unique take on the gospel about the Kingdom of God. Mr. Armstrong did not seem to focus on himself, but on the message he wanted to share. He could have barred the man from attending "his meeting," or he could have refused the question as being impolite or disrespectful. All of that was true. And many other men—concerned most about their personal dignity—would have bristled with indignation at the effrontery of such behavior.

But the *personality* Mr. Armstrong manifested during those early years was one of humble confidence, with a focus upon the spiritual work, willing to cooperate with others who shared that goal, and not making himself the object of vain adulation. This same meek approach is reflected in many of his accounts about confrontations with those who sought to undermine him in some way, including the story of his giving up a very small salary to another minister to create peace for the overall good of the brethren (*Autobiography, The Plain Truth*, June 1960). And that style of leadership became the earliest *personality* of the Radio Church

of God as well. After all, with Herbert Armstrong as the single driving force at that time, it only makes sense that the early church would be a close reflection of his own sense of values and style. His personal style became synonymous with the personality of the church. But the truth is, it simply did not remain that way over time.

The Latter Personality

Fast-forward forty years to see the transformed *personality* of the Worldwide Church of God in the mid-1970s. It was anything but humble. By that time, the church had hundreds of ministers and administrative staff on several continents, three college campuses, worldwide recognition from prolific media exposure, and a Pastor General spending much of his time overseas in high-profile meetings with world leaders and dignitaries. Quite a contrast to that insignificant, humble, one-man ministry of the 1930s. Along with the money, influence, and public visibility came a definite change in the *character* of that physical church body. That difference was reflected in the way the church was perceived by members, by non-members, and also by the way the organization functioned internally.

In all fairness, it would be impossible for any organization which had grown so aggressively over a relatively short period of time to have remained the same. It is ridiculous to expect that a multimillion dollar international enterprise with over 100,000 members and millions of media subscribers would resemble in any way the original shoestring assembly of farm families led by a poor preacher and his wife in the 1930s. The common denominator they still shared is that Herbert Armstrong was at the helm—the CEO, if you will—throughout all of those decades of growth. But the transition from a mom-and-pop operation to an international corporate enterprise made it impossible for things to remain the same. Sometimes a very astute small business owner might find a way to preserve his company's original personality, even after that business grows substantially. But most often, monumental growth begets a total rewriting of organizational character.

The *fundamental mission* of Herbert Armstrong never changed through all of those years. No matter how much the characteristics of that physical church changed over time, he was resolutely committed to what he called "The Great Commission," taking the *real truth* of the Bible to the world. His writings show a consistent and dogged determination to resist any attempt to modify that focus or to retool the basic drive of his work. But success can be a two-edged sword. As his work was increasingly successful in reaching and influencing more and more people around the world to respond to that message and to join the church, the challenges of managing such a behemoth enterprise and keeping it focused on his own values and principles became ever more difficult.

Culture vs. Personality

If *personality* defines the face which an organization presents to its customers and to outsiders, *culture* defines the environment which exists internally. The culture of the

Worldwide Church of God as a corporate entity by the 1970s included the full range of human "problems" found in any large, hierarchical organization. In any collective endeavor there will be many personal agendas which threaten to detract from the true organizational mission. But while well-managed groups find ways to *neutralize* this inevitable tendency and to create a *positive culture* which fosters unity and common purpose, the Worldwide Church of God instead developed a *toxic climate* of factionalism which ultimately tore it apart from the inside out. A snapshot of that organization in the mid-1970s shows a leadership team at war with itself, including several high-profile players under Mr. Armstrong vying for dominance. Everything the church previously held dear had been called into question by that time, from its most fundamental doctrinal theology to its philosophy about church governance and leadership.

Did these internal political maneuverings bleed over and affect the "customers" of the church, its members and co-workers? Absolutely. Members in smaller, more outlying areas may have been better insulated against these influences for a time. But when major rifts in ideology saw dozens of ministers defect in 1974, followed by the ultimate expulsion of Garner Ted Armstrong in 1978, no members were left unaffected.

The Tail Wags the Dog

What is true from documented history is that Herbert Armstrong lost control of the physical organization he had started with his wife in 1933. He acknowledged that fact himself to the whole church in the wake of the internal turmoil of the 1970s. Here are just a couple of excerpts to verify it from Mr. Armstrong's own point of view:

This brought controversy into the Church. These self-professed "scholars," influenced by teaching in universities in which they were enrolling for higher degrees, were becoming more and more liberal. They wanted to skirt as close as possible to the precipice of secularism, falling off the cliff into Satan's world. These were the years when my commission required that I be absent from Pasadena, and traveling overseas to almost all parts of the world as many as 300 of the 365 days of the year. This liberal group, small at first, came to be in executive positions at Pasadena, surrounding and influencing the one responsible for day-to-day administration at headquarters during my absence. Much of what they did was carefully kept from me.

Those of higher rank, but subject to the one in day-to-day executive administration at Pasadena, who were steadfastly loyal to the Church and its true teachings, were suppressed or gradually removed from Pasadena and sent "into the field," pastoring single churches in other locations. So much of what was going on in Pasadena was kept from me that I did not realize the direction the Church was actually traveling into controversy, liberalism and either Protestantism or total secularism (*Worldwide News Special Edition*, June 24, 1985; *Recent History of the Philadelphia Era of the Worldwide Church of God*).

Brethren, we've got to FACE IT! God's Church -- and Ambassador College -- had been shockingly derailed -- SECULARIZED! The whole WORK had become the work of MAN! My son Garner Ted had taken to himself authority never given to him. He took advantage of the fact I was in other parts of the world, carrying Christ's Gospel Message into other countries, to assume authority to CHANGE DOCTRINES, and to CHANGE POLICIES. I had denied him BOTH! Much of it was done SECRETLY! Top-ranking ministers were warned of being fired if they told me what was going on.

Many of the basic BIBLE TRUTHS God had revealed to me as the very FOUNDATIONAL BELIEF OF THIS CHURCH were BEING CHANGED! It was no longer GOD'S College or GOD'S Church! It was becoming precisely what my son is now trying to build -- "GARNER TED ARMSTRONG'S CHURCH"! He was surrounded by a small group of secular self-professed "intellectuals" (*Co-Worker Letter*, July 24, 1979).

Mr. Armstrong speaks of the problems as beginning in the early 1970s based upon this surge in liberal influence among *scholarly* leaders. Yet, what has never been well-documented are the *many earlier events* which actually *fostered* the environment which would ultimately *produce* these later results. It is always easier to see something in hindsight. Criticism is not intended here, but simply an objective examination of critical events which opened the door for what Mr. Armstrong admitted later as *the loss of control* of his own work. In the business world, it would never suffice for a CEO to blame his underlings for the fact that his company *ran off the rails*. The real culprit might be one or more executives in the chain of command, but the individual at the top is still accountable for oversight.

Likewise, there are a number of actions (or lack of actions) over many years which paved the way for that church organization to "get out of hand." An obvious weakness was the love of a father for a son, and the desire for that son to be a prominent leader of the church, in spite of the fact the son did not truly share his father's values and beliefs. But deeper than that, there were other more subtle elements from decades before the 1970s which coalesced to produce the results.

Delegation Has Inherent Risk

Over time, as that work grew, Mr. Armstrong's sole focus could not remain upon preaching and writing. That seems to be where Mr. Armstrong truly excelled. But the fruit of his successful labors meant that hundreds—and ultimately thousands—of new members began pouring in, and that meant a formal structure had to be created to serve that growing church body. The need for organizational management expertise therefore increased in importance. No longer could he and Mrs. Armstrong single-handedly do everything, like printing *The PLAIN TRUTH* magazine by hand on a mimeograph machine while also conducting the spiritual work to preach and to support member families.

And once Mr. Armstrong began to enlist the help of others to manage critical responsibilities—especially after graduates from the new Ambassador College began to be deployed as "minister helpers" in the early 1950s—he faced the very same problems as do all small proprietors when their businesses grow beyond their personal abilities to manage single-handedly. Once you are forced to begin delegating key responsibilities to others, there is less personal control to assure that the work is done exactly the way you would do it yourself. Some individuals are both good entrepreneurs *and* good large-scale managers, but that is not often the case. Many very successful small-scale businesses have failed once they grew too large for the original proprietor to manage on his own, because he simply did not have the ability to translate his small-scale success into a large-scale operating environment.

Every individual has his own ideas about what to do and how to do it. Without very careful oversight and explicit programs from the top to keep an organization precisely focused upon its founder's philosophy and values, it is inevitable that the underlings will eventually exert personalized influence which will affect the culture of the enterprise. If those key helpers truly share the founder's values, looser oversight might still work out fine. But if not, conflict and disappointing results are inevitable. An old management axiom is, "You get what you *inspect*, not what you *expect*." *Assuming* that your management team understands and *supports* your vision and is pulling in the same direction—rather than *ensuring* it through close oversight—invites unexpected surprises.

Examples of Progressive Organizational Drift

What are some examples of very early changes which took place within the Radio Church of God as that organization grew over time? The more significant and profound changes which occurred in later years were preceded by more subtle, philosophical detours along the way.

One of the early issues that set Herbert Armstrong in opposition to many of the leaders of the Church of God, Seventh Day in the 1930s, was a dispute over how much the doctrine against eating pork should play as a condition before baptizing new members. These other local leaders considered abstinence from pork-eating as a key indicator of one's spiritual commitment to the truth. They asked the question as a test, and failing to give the correct answer meant no baptism. Mr. Armstrong did not agree. When he was challenged by these ministers about baptizing before confirming acceptance of "not eating pork," this is what he replied:

In Matthew 28:19–20, God's order is, 1) Go and preach the Gospel (compare with Mark's version, same words of Jesus, Mark 16:15), 2) baptizing those who REPENT and BELIEVE; then, after that, 3) teach them to observe the COMMANDMENTS. Since people cannot fully comprehend the truth of the

Commandments and the teaching of the Bible until AFTER they receive the Holy Spirit, and since there is no promise God will give the Holy Spirit until after baptism, therefore I baptized them after repentance and faith, just as the Bible instructs—and *then*, after laying on hands with prayer for their receiving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:12, 14–17; Acts 19:5–6; I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6, etc.), I taught them God's Commandments, and not to eat unclean meats, etc. Every convert I had ever baptized had obeyed all these truths as soon as I taught them. They were submissive, teachable, yielded to God, hungry for His truth. The KNOWLEDGE of the Lord is something to teach *converted* people whose minds are opened by God's Spirit. We must continually GROW in this knowledge ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," *The PLAIN TRUTH*, June 1960).

So during the early years of the Radio Church of God, Mr. Armstrong did not use the litmus test of pork avoidance—or other particular doctrines of the church—as a reason to refuse baptism. He looked for other indications that the individual was truly called by God and serious-minded about accepting that spiritual call.

Yet, fast-forward thirty years, and by the early 1960s, similar *litmus test items* were absolutely being demanded by ministers under Mr. Armstrong before they would baptize new members. Besides eating unclean meats, abstinence from smoking tobacco became a prominent test question. By the late 1960s, it had become increasingly difficult for any new contact to become "approved" to even attend church services, let alone become baptized. Can you imagine Mr. Armstrong treating those early farm families that way in Eugene, Oregon? People virtually had to beg and plead to finally receive an "invitation" to attend Sabbath service after the church became large and prestigious. And if one was still smoking, he was often rejected outright until he quit the habit. Never mind that Mr. Armstrong's *fundamental premise* included that one called of God requires the active power of the Holy Spirit to really overcome and make spiritual progress. Over those ensuing decades, many weaknesses which Mr. Armstrong believed would be overcome by the sincere initiate *after baptism*, were now required to be achieved *before* ever being considered for baptism.

This change does not appear to have been made because Mr. Armstrong made an *executive decision* to repudiate his former philosophy and to begin accepting the old Church of God, Seventh Day ideology. If that were so, then he would have needed to admit that he was foolish and wrong-minded ever to make the stand that he did back in the 1930s. It is not apparent that he ever made such an about-face or believed that his original approach was wrong. Then why was his own church applying similar "conditions" upon new members thirty years later, when he had come to believe strongly that it was an unwise and faulty policy? This is very likely an example of *organizational drift*—a slow change in philosophy which occurs obliquely over time from the cumulative influence of other key individuals in an enterprise.

Whereas the original *personality* of the Radio Church of God was of a humble, inviting group, where those with the potential of valuing the truth of God were encouraged to participate in spite of their current weaknesses, the personality of the later Worldwide Church of God presented the image of *an exclusive club* whose entrance required *jumping through many hoops* to prove one's "worthiness" before being permitted into fellowship. Again, the point is not to debate which orientation is superior, but to emphasize the fact that a significant and far-reaching *change* occurred away from Mr. Armstrong's original philosophy, in spite of the fact that he was the undisputed leader during all of those years.

Another example of this inadvertent change in philosophy due to the subtle and progressive influence of underlings is the role of the ministry in relation to the laity. There is much more we will cover of the details of evolving church government, but for now, simply compare the original belief Mr. Armstrong expressed in the early years with that which was promoted by his subordinates years later. Another of his stories from the 1930s is revealing:

The quotation, "God helps them that help themselves" is not found in the Bible, as many believe, but it is a saying of Benjamin Franklin. Yet it does express a Scriptural principle. Long ago I learned that I cannot carry others into the Kingdom of God on my shoulders, or drag them in. I can only point the way, proclaim the truth, give counsel and advice, aid in many material ways, and pray for others. I can give aid and help—but each must stand on his own feet before God, and by strong motivation yield to allow God to transform him and mould him into God's own holy character. God does it by the power of His Holy Spirit. But we also have our part in denying ourselves, in overcoming, and in DOING! It is the DOERS, not those who hear only, who shall be justified through Christ's blood and enter finally in to His Kingdom (Rom. 2:13). ("The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong," *The PLAIN TRUTH*, September 1960)

Here he expressed an important philosophy about the limits of ministerial authority due to *the impossibility* of any third party being able to generate character development in someone else. Yet by the early 1960s, that concept seems to have been forgotten. Notice the contrasting ideology being taught to the church:

Does the Church also have power to intervene in your private life, in your home, if you are going contrary to the general practice and teaching of this Church? . . . God has given us a responsibility for your sake to intervene on special occasions in your personal life—in matters of adultery, drunkenness, utter laziness, etc. It isn't a question of our wills, it is for your sakes. The great requirement is that you learn to submit to the government of God. After you have recognized that this is God's Church, that we are fulfilling that commission which God has commanded, you are to submit to God's government in the Church ("How Far Does Church Government Extend Into Your Life?" by Herman L. Hoeh, *The Good News*, January 1961).

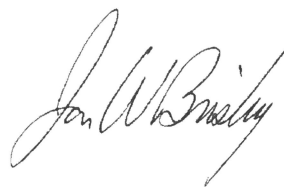
This "intervention" was not limited just to blatant bad behavior which might affect the whole church. Local ministers slowly began to *insert themselves*, unsolicited, into individual and family matters, justifying this intrusion to "get the church ready" for the return of Christ and to "make the church clean." They were going to investigate and find out where *hidden sin* might lie and "help" members overcome and grow spiritually.

Notice that, ironically, the Herman Hoeh article was written to the church only three months after Mr. Armstrong wrote the chapter in his autobiography detailing the need to recognize *wise ministerial restraint*. How is it that he himself is still espousing one philosophy while his underlings are promulgating an ideology which opens the door for contradiction? Contradiction is exactly what occurred in subsequent years, as the ministry became more and more aggressive about not only the rights of ministers to intercede in personal affairs of members, but a zealotry to do so. Where was the hand of the Pastor General to reinforce his earlier *acquired wisdom* and to teach the growing corps of new minister helpers how to think about their duties? It is another example of *the tail wagging the dog*.

Lest someone feel incensed that Mr. Armstrong's management ability is being impugned unfairly, recall that we have already seen evidence from his own hand that Mr. Armstrong had had control of that church wrested from him by the early 1970s. The question is not, *did he* fail to maintain a strong executive hand on the corporate church, but *when and why did he lose control?*

An interesting history of the Radio Church of God is how and why much of Herbert Armstrong's *original personality and philosophy* failed to become instilled in that larger body over time as it became more expansive. In future installments, we will examine other events which transpired in the early Ambassador College days, as well as a biographical sketch of some of the early ministers who left their indelible mark on that work.

Yours with love and affection in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Jon W. Brisby