

June 2015

Dear Brethren:

This month's letter will be used to continue the historical summary of Mr. Herbert Armstrong's life and work in the twentieth century as recounted from the *Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*. This is now the sixth installment and brings us to the earliest days of Ambassador College and its opening that first year in 1947. Many of you have read the *Autobiography* in past years, but few of you have read it in the context of today's events within God's church and identified key elements that portended the destruction of the Worldwide Church of God. Even while that Work was growing and thriving over the first forty years, the seeds of its own destruction were likewise being planted along the way. It is this aspect of the history that we want to highlight for you because it matters very much regarding future tests that God's true Church will certainly face before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Against all odds, Ambassador College did indeed open its doors in the fall of 1947, but only with four inaugural students. Some of the greatest tests were yet to come, because it is one thing to open for business, but quite another to keep the doors open. Not only was the financial "wolf" continually at the door, threatening to devour the new little enterprise, but likewise other pressures emerged to put the entire program at risk.

Opposition From Within

The main problem with hiring secular professors as college faculty was that their own religious views could not help but manifest in the course of performing their duties. Whether it was Far Eastern occultism, atheism, or Protestant Christian leanings, Mr. Armstrong became challenged to maintain control and prevent his vision of "God's College" from being hijacked in spirit before barely getting underway. This is how he described it:

I was determined that the AMBASSADOR POLICY was going to be inculcated thoroughly in faculty and students alike. Ambassador was to be GOD'S college—not another rubber stamp of the educational institutions of this world! But, with a faculty trained in this world's scholarship, I found that it required determined dominance on my part, plus vigilance, to assure it (*The Plain Truth*, September 1963, *Autobiography*, p. 18).

Ironically, this would be *the very same circumstance* that would present itself in the 1970s, when worldly scholars attempted to take Mr. Armstrong's work in a divergent direction. However, his lack of "dominance plus vigilance" in those particular years (as he later admitted) would result in a very different outcome.

Because of becoming grossly overextended financially in taking on the overhead of the new college project in 1947, the Armstrongs fell behind in paying their bills for some of the major national radio contracts. They were forced to drop the six-night-per-week broadcast on station XEG through most of 1948. There was still significant national presence, but nowhere comparable to that which they had achieved previously. The cumulative effect of these pressures left Mr. Armstrong near despair:

Other bills were pressing. I was being hounded on every side for money by creditors. Many around me continued to harp about "when this thing folds up." But I was determined it was not going to fold up!

Two or three times, through those harassing months, I did give up and quit—at night after going to bed, trying to push the nightmare out of mind and relax into sleep. But always the next morning was *another day*—and I bounded back with renewed determination to *win through* to success! (p. 22)

In spite of the discouraging setback of having to scale back the *World Tomorrow* broadcasts—which Mr. Armstrong described as being "thrown off the air"—the established loyalty of existing radio listeners around the country held firm, even without those *nightly* programs in many areas. Tithes and offerings continued to pour in at near previous levels, proving that Mr. Armstrong's base of listeners included more than just fair-weather acolytes (p. 22). This truly was something the religious media world had never seen before.

These perpetual financial crises also required Mr. Armstrong to cut in half the Ambassador College second-year curriculum. Half of his eight professors did not return for the second year, and classes were offered only three days a week. This action would make it impossible to complete a four-year program on schedule without additional efforts by the students (p. 45).

Several more financial crises arose from 1947-48, any one of which could have destroyed the college. Many times, the future of that college looked very bleak. Yet, time and again, income would dramatically appear just when needed, or else circumstances would open up to provide another temporary reprieve. It was not until January 1949 that the major financial crises ended and a little relief was finally realized (*The Plain Truth*, October 1963, *Autobiography*, p. 18).

Even so, during 1949, there were only three issues of *The Plain Truth* published, and Mr. Armstrong was still writing all of the articles himself (*The Plain Truth*, November 1963, *Autobiography*, p. 13).

College Expansion

Having finally weathered years of financial and personnel problems and having achieved a tiny moment of reprieve in early 1949, one would think it a chance to embrace the *status quo* for just a bit and seek to retrench. Not so with Herbert Armstrong.

A neighboring, dilapidated mansion adjoining the college property became available in May, and Mr. Armstrong could not pass up the opportunity to secure it. That very month, the 28-room Tudor-style building named "Mayfair" was added to the college campus. By the fall of 1949, it would become the first on-campus student dormitory. With this expansion, Mr. Armstrong felt that the college was finally beginning to come into its own (p. 13).

Seven students participated in the second-year program during 1948-49, and then enrollment in the fall of 1949 rose to twelve. The 1950-51 school year was the first one with a full, four-year program. That year saw a student body of twenty-two, including six women. Ambassador College was finally showing signs of "growing up."

An additional adjacent property was purchased in November 1950, and slowly the campus of Ambassador College began to take shape.

First Ministerial Helper Assigned

Recall that the fundamental intent of Ambassador College was to train men who could be commissioned to help care for the brethren who were flocking into the Radio Church of God as a result of the successful radio broadcasts. Up until this time, Mr. Armstrong would lay the foundation for a local congregation, only to have that group decimated after he turned it over to a local representative. Suitable leaders needed to be trained to think and to behave as Mr. Armstrong would do if he were doing the job himself.

But the first college graduation could not possibly occur until the spring of 1951. If the degree was considered absolutely essential, this would be the first time that any one of the first students might possibly be deployed as a minister. But Mr. Armstrong could

not wait that long. By early 1951, the churches in Oregon were once again embroiled in problems as a result of poor local leadership. Waiting even a few more months probably would have seen the destruction of those congregations. The solution was to pull one of the men out early and send him out to take control. Speaking of that particular school year, Mr. Armstrong said:

That school year Raymond Cole, one of the four pioneer students, was student-body president. However, the local churches I had left up in Oregon, at Eugene and Portland, these years without a Pastor, were in serious need of leadership. And so in February, 1951, we sent Mr. Cole to Oregon to pastor and revive the flock. This was the very first beginning of a ministry produced by Ambassador College. After three and a half years at Ambassador College, Mr. Cole was able to repair the situation in Oregon, and start building up again (*The Plain Truth*, November 1963, *Autobiography*, p. 15).

Although Raymond Cole was "pulled green" for this assignment, the success of his half-year shepherding of the Oregon churches became the *very first fulfillment* of Mr. Armstrong's long-range dream to cultivate a competent and devoted ministry to support his work. The experiment was paying off.

The first graduation took place in the spring of 1951:

Since we had operated on half-schedule in the 1948-49 year, it had been made virtually impossible for students to graduate in four years. Mr. Cole returned to Pasadena in August, 1951, and graduated in 1952, along with our son Dick. However, by taking a heavier-than-normal load the last two years, both Herman Hoeh and Betty Bates graduated in June, 1951—completing their college work in four years (p. 15).

Delegation of Writing Duties

In addition to local pastors, Mr. Armstrong also needed help in producing the magazines:

A one-man ministry could not maintain several local churches, an expanding broadcasting work, editing and writing all the articles for a fast-growing magazine, teach four college classes, and act as executive head of a growing college, without something slipping backward somewhere.

But 1951 was the year that produced the first "fruits" of the new college.

In April of that year we began the first activity toward an enlarged PLAIN TRUTH. I was still unwilling to publish in *The PLAIN TRUTH*, articles written by students. Yet something had to be done. . . .

Twelve years before I had started a second magazine, called *The GOOD NEWS*. It was to have been a church membership organ, edited exclusively for baptized church members. *The PLAIN TRUTH* was to continue as the general magazine for as many of the general public as would request it. But at that time—February, 1939—I had been unable to continue publication of *The GOOD NEWS* beyond the first issue! The reason? Same reason—lack of funds, and inability of ONE MAN to do so much.

But now, twelve years later, I decided to bring *The GOOD NEWS* back to life. . . .

Consequently, in April, 1951, *The GOOD NEWS* was re-born!

Now, for the first time, our students began to make active contributions to the activities of this expanding Work! (*The Plain Truth*, January 1964, *Autobiography*, pp. 9–10)

Students began by writing and editing articles in *The Good News*, but by August 1952, Mr. Armstrong approved selected articles from other writers for *The Plain Truth* as well. Full sixteen-page issues of either one or the other magazine were now able to go out every month, and at the beginning of 1953 the number of radio stations carrying the *World Tomorrow* program was also rebounding.

Mr. Armstrong had turned one room of the main college building into a recording studio in 1948, and making their own master recordings for the broadcast began to save as much money each month as the cost of the mortgage payment for the campus property. Students were also enlisted to learn to run the recording equipment, and Richard (Dick) Armstrong became the first radio studio operator (*The Plain Truth*, February 1964, *Autobiography*, p. 44). Over time, this formula for providing part-time work for students in "the Work" while completing their degrees on campus would become a reliable means to train future full-time workers for a permanent, large-scale operation. In time, Mr. Armstrong would employ the very same philosophy—investing large initial sums to build upfront infrastructure in order to reduce long-range production costs—in other key areas, including publishing.

First Ministerial Ordinations

During this same period of time, the very first ordinations of new ministers were performed by Mr. Armstrong. Even though his evangelical work had been carried out for more than twenty years by this time, it was the first recorded instance of exercising his "authority" to induct *other new servants* into the ministry of Jesus Christ:

On December 20, 1952, by authority of Jesus Christ, with fasting and prayer and laying on of hands of God's ministers, in congregation assembled in Pasadena, California, upon recommendation of the Board of Trustees of The Radio Church of God, five of our young ministers were fully ordained.

They are Richard David Armstrong, Raymond Clifford Cole, Herman Louie Hoeh, Dr. C. Paul Meredith, and Roderick Carl Meredith—all graduates of Ambassador College, except Dr. C. Paul Meredith who already held the doctor's degree from Iowa State College, but who had completed the entire four years of Theological study at Ambassador College.

Upon recommendation of the Board of Trustees, two more of our young ministers, Marion Joel McNair and Raymond Franklin McNair, will be fully ordained following their graduation from the college January 30, 1953.

This ordination authorizes these ministers to perform all the duties and exercise all the powers of the clergy, and clothes them with all the AUTHORITY conferred by Jesus Christ upon His called and chosen ministers.

And so it is that God has sent to us here, caused to be thoroughly trained by education, by experience, and thoroughly fitted by conversion, consecration, and Holy Spirit-leading, SEVEN fine young ministers whom HE has called and chosen. They have studied hard and diligently for years. They are all experienced and competent. They have been tried and tested, and found faithful and loyal (*The Good News*, February 1953, *Seven Ministers Ordained*, p. 2).


Note that this ceremony of formal ordination was not *the very first time* that these men had begun to be used by Mr. Armstrong for official ministerial duties. We already have seen that Raymond Cole was sent to pastor the churches in Oregon for several months in early 1951 before this ordination took place later in December. Yet he was already preaching, baptizing, anointing for sickness, and officiating with many of those "powers of the clergy." A number of these men were also sent out on baptizing tours

while still attending college, as well as writing articles for the church, as we have already seen. Since this was all being done by delegation, it appears Mr. Armstrong used the example of Jesus in sending out His disciples with "power," even while *they* were still in training, not even yet having received the Holy Spirit, which would come only after Christ was resurrected (compare Luke 9:2–6 with Acts 2:1–4).

This example becomes important later in the story in comparing how Mr. Armstrong seemed to view the issue of ministerial authority early on, vs. how that view changed over time as his ministry transitioned from a sole proprietorship to a more expansive, "corporate" structure. Once these new men began to be deployed in that Work, it was finally able to begin dealing more effectively with its growing pains and to serve a rapidly expanding membership. At the very same time, the introduction of these new men would see their personal influences begin to impact the doctrinal teachings more and more, as well as the "personality" of that church. The work that for the first twenty years had reflected Mr. Armstrong's "flavor" would begin changing to reflect the orientation of other men.

In the next installment, we will continue with the key events of the 1950s and 60s that would leave an indelible imprint upon the final legacy of Herbert Armstrong and his work.

Yours in diligent service through Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and a prominent "B".

Jon W. Brisby