

November 2015

Dear Brethren:

This now will be the seventh installment in the summary of Herbert Armstrong's life and work, as condensed primarily from *The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*. We began this synopsis more than two years ago, in June 2013. Back then, I provided this introductory statement to set the stage for the project, and it is important to remember that premise today:

It can be overwhelming to take mountains of facts and figures and make cohesive sense of it. Reading Mr. Armstrong's *Autobiography* will certainly tell the tale, but that requires digesting over one thousand pages of his writings. During the heyday of the church, members often heard stories repeated of how Herbert Armstrong first became interested in religion, how the Radio Church of God and Ambassador College were first founded, and how that work grew over time. But as with all such history, it is easily forgotten, even by those who lived through part of it, let alone cloaked in obscurity for those to whom it is all so foreign. So here will be a relatively *condensed outline*, taken primarily from the *Autobiography of Herbert Armstrong* (1967), of key events in the life and work of the man we believe God used to reveal Biblical truths—truths which we continue today to cherish most of all.

In the last installment, we covered the first four years of Ambassador College beginning in 1947, as well as the first deployment of a delegated ministry with the assignment of Mr. Raymond Cole, and then the first seven ministerial ordinations in late 1951. In this issue, we want to continue by summarizing the key events that transpired through the remainder of the 1950s, that led to some of the most climactic events in that church's tumultuous history.

Mr. Armstrong's Institutional Philosophy

The March 1964 issue of *The Plain Truth* contained a revealing statement by Mr. Armstrong, defining the *overriding philosophy* regarding *monetary funding* of his work through Ambassador College, as contrasted with that of most other institutions of higher learning:

. . . they [the Ambassador College institutions] rely solely on GOD ALMIGHTY, in living faith, as their sole source of financial support! Of course we are well aware that, if GOD sponsors and finances us, HE is going to insist upon directing our policies—just as human government, corporations, or foundations see to it that they pretty largely direct the policies of institutions *they* finance. We know well that if Ambassador Colleges depart from GOD's ways and policies, God's financial sponsorship will stop forthwith.

But that's precisely the way we want it! And that is the real reason for the miraculous, almost incredible SUCCESS of these institutions! God Almighty will back financially—to an extent almost beyond human belief—any person or institution that will place himself or itself unreservedly and vigorously under His direction! (*The Plain Truth*, March 1964, *Autobiography*, pp. 17–18)

Eventually, when we begin to analyze in more detail the events of the early 1970s within the Worldwide Church of God and the basis upon which major changes began to be made "at the top," the significance of this *early philosophy* about trusting God in the face of financial threats will become more revelatory. But for now, back to the storyline.

Expanding Into Europe

After the second year commencement ceremony for graduates of Ambassador College in June 1952, Mr. Armstrong sent his newly-graduated son, Richard Armstrong, to Europe to investigate the potential of growth into England, France, and Germany. The result of this trip was the expansion of *The World Tomorrow* radio broadcast onto *Radio Luxembourg* on the first Thursday of January 1953. Mr. Armstrong would later mark this date as a significant turning point for the Work—the point at which God chose to *open the door* for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be preached beyond the confines of North America. In order to support the growing number of listeners being attracted by that new program, Richard Armstrong became instrumental in laying the groundwork and then in opening an office for the church in London by early 1954.

Note at this point that of Mr. Armstrong's two sons, it was Richard as a young man who had shown the most earnest appreciation for his father's work in God's service. Garner Ted Armstrong, by contrast, had joined the Navy (in 1948) at age eighteen without his father's knowledge or consent, and chose only much later to become part of his father's religious work (*The Plain Truth*, June 1964, *Autobiography*, p. 9). Much more

will be chronicled concerning the eventual influence and pivotal role of Garner Ted Armstrong in that growing church, but for now it suffices to show that in the *early* 1950s, it was Richard—not Ted—who had made himself an invaluable resource to his father. Richard became a trusted instructor at Ambassador College during the 1953–1954 school year, but the need for leadership in the growing European work forced him back to London in May 1954.

After that groundwork laid by Richard in Europe, Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong finally made their own personal visit to Europe in August 1954, with Mr. Armstrong conducting personal appearances for new radio listeners in Belfast, Manchester, and London during September. Hundreds of attendees flocked to hear his message at each stop, and thus began the expansion in earnest of that unique evangelistic movement into Europe, including the very first baptism for the Radio Church of God in England performed by Richard Armstrong (*The Plain Truth*, June 1964, *Autobiography*, pp. 12–14, 29). It would be the first of many to come.

Television Broadcasts—a False Start

April 1955 saw the broadcast of *The World Tomorrow* program on television for the very first time. The boom in television set production and the move away from radio by other major broadcasters caused Mr. Armstrong to fear that television was the "new medium" required to remain relevant, that radio would soon become a dinosaur, and failure to act might lead to a real loss in public exposure of his message. Investment in network radio broadcasting was therefore severely reduced, and a huge investment of time and money was put instead into producing a television program. Initial results were promising:

Our mail response was big, considering the number of stations—only 12. It was bigger than from similar radio broadcasts—but TV was so much more costly, we felt it *had* to bring a much heavier mail response, to justify its heavier cost. Actually, even with only twelve stations, *The WORLD TOMORROW* was being viewed by a million or more people—perhaps two or three million. We were delivering a dynamic Message in power to a *huge* audience, who were not only *hearing*—as you do on radio—but also *seeing*—for a full half-hour (*The Plain Truth*, April 1964, *Autobiography*, p. 44).

But in the end, the results were not really sustained and did not prove to be cost effective. The experiment with TV lasted only twenty-seven weeks. A once-a-week TV

broadcast simply failed to produce as good a result as did a daily radio broadcast. Quite contrary to the expected trend, radio in the 1950s was not yet dead, people were buying more radios than ever before, and they were still tuning into radio broadcasts much more than they were watching television. That would certainly change over the ensuing decades, but at this stage, radio proved still to be the sustaining bread-and-butter medium for Mr. Armstrong's message.

Through the 1950s, the broadcasts continued to bear fruit, *The Plain Truth* magazine continued to "grow up" and to expand in content and quality, and the Radio Church of God continued to multiply its membership. For the period from 1950 through 1954, Mr. Armstrong claimed an average annual growth rate of fifty-six percent (*The Good News*, June 19, 1978, p. 3). From 1955 through 1959, that rate of growth continued averaging almost thirty-five percent annually. This was a huge, sustained, cumulative increase, taking into consideration the multiplying effect of those numbers year after year.

Ambassador College continued to expand physically, with the acquisitions of adjacent campus properties like the four-acre Hulett C. Merritt mansion in 1956—renamed Ambassador Hall—and the Lewis J. Merritt mansion—renamed Manor Del Mar (*The Plain Truth*, August 1967, *Autobiography*, pp. 18–19, 21–22). The college also continued to graduate the new men needed to take on the administrative tasks required to minister to an ever-growing membership. Although Mr. Armstrong did not choose to emphasize it in his autobiography, belief in keeping the annual Holy Days found in Leviticus 23—especially the Feast of Tabernacles for eight full days in the autumn—created a continual logistical challenge in accommodating the multiple thousands gathered together to keep these "annual conventions."

Texas Festival Site Development

From the early 1930s, Mr. Armstrong had held the Feast of Tabernacles in Belknap Springs, Oregon, a small resort in the Cascade Mountains to the east of Eugene. This remained an annual festival site through 1951 (along with some keeping the Feast in Pasadena, CA). But by the fall of 1951, attendance at Belknap Springs was reported at over one hundred fifty (*The Good News*, December 1951, p.13). This site would be far too small for the future, and so by 1953 the annual festivals began to be hosted in Gladewater, Texas. Mr. Armstrong would eventually develop property in Gladewater for a major festival site, and this would later lead to a second campus for Ambassador College as well. Here is some of the history of that project in Mr. Armstrong's own words, from the April 17, 1952 *Co-Worker Letter*:

A year ago, only two or three days before Passover, I was prompted to get busy on long distance telephone and call up a limited number of Texas and Louisiana co-workers we had come to know personally that God had added to His Church. Gladewater seemed to be the most central location. I called up first Brother Roy Hammer at Gladewater. He and Mrs. Hammer said they would be delighted to have the Passover at their home. We sent Herman Hoeh (pronounced "Hay"), then one of our senior students, by plane to conduct the service. Only thirteen were able to make the trip to Gladewater on such short notice.

This spring a number of brethren, having heard of the service last year, wrote to ask if such a service would be held at Gladewater again this year. As the number of such requests increased, I had a general form-letter mimeographed after arranging with the Hammers to have the service once again in Gladewater. Several urged that Mrs. Armstrong and I would make the trip to Gladewater to conduct the service this year, so notices were sent out to that effect.

I had not realized how many kept writing in, wanting to attend this service, and we didn't expect more than part of them to really attend. Consequently we were not at all prepared for the conclave that poured in. Tuesday afternoon and evening cars began driving up in front of the Hammer residence with many different-colored license plates. . . . As the people started pouring in at the Hammer home toward dusk, there was nothing to do but try to squeeze them all in the house and conduct the service as best we could. There were 85 adults who partook of the Passover, not counting children. We were packed in like sardines. . . .

On the Holy Day, Thursday [first High Day of Unleavened Bread], there were so many written questions turned in, and others asked orally during the service, that we never did get to a sermon. The entire time was taken up answering questions, and in a service of laying on hands for the receiving of the Holy Spirit on the eleven who were baptised during this conclave, and the blessing of infants and children, following the example of Jesus.

As it turned out, there was a huge and growing demand for a site where church members could keep the spring and fall festivals, and the site in East Texas became the strategic location where members who were now scattered across the entire country could gather. Mr. Armstrong continues:

GLADEWATER, TEXAS, IS THE MOST CENTRALLY LOCATED PLACE, closest for the largest number. Now God always supplies every need, WHEN that need arises. During this festival, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Hammer, Buck Hammer, who owns a farm about seven miles west of Gladewater, offered to donate and deed over to us several acres of the most beautiful sloping, wooded land we ever saw, for this purpose. . . .

. . . We shall have to build a tabernacle—not a costly one, but one large enough,—with dining area for our festivals, and plan the kind of housing to be provided for all who come—perhaps well-planned but inexpensive cabins. However, we do not feel it wise to try to erect any buildings during the first year. For the festival next spring we will rent large tents, to provide a meeting place and dining facilities, and a large number of small tents which can be rented to each family. We will "rough it" our first year on the place next spring, and then try to have at least temporary buildings erected by the year following (*Co-Worker Letter*, April 17, 1952).

Thus began the development of a property which would serve the church well for many years. As the church continued to grow, this "Big Sandy" property in Gladewater would become the focal point of many Holy Day festival observances, including gatherings of more than ten thousand attendees by the late 1960s.

Church Growth Statistics

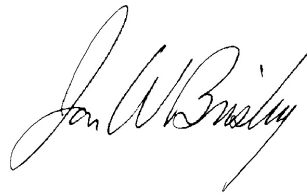
To provide some perspective concerning the growth curve of the Radio Church of God through the 1950s, take a look at the statistics for attendance at the fall Feast of Tabernacles through that decade:

In 1953, approximately 1000 attended for at least part of the fall festival in Gladewater (*The Good News*, November 1953, p. 1). In 1957, that number rose to 2800. There were 4000 attendees in 1958, 5500 in 1959, and 7000 in 1960 (*The Good News*, 11/57, p. 1; 12/58, p. 1; 11/59, p. 8; 11/60, p. 3). That trend would continue unabated through the 1960s as well. By 1960, there were also international feast sites with 250 attendees in England, 475 in Africa (Rhodesia), 104 in Australia, and 444 in the Philippines. This tracking of annual festival attendance became an excellent barometer of the trending strength of the church as a whole—much more so than estimating broadcast listeners or mailing list recipients. The "real members" were ones who made the sacrifice to attend the Feasts.

In the next installment, we will cover critical events transpiring in the late 1950s—including the untimely death of Richard Armstrong—and the effects of these events on the entire church as that growing Work moved into the 1960s and beyond.

It is a continuing pleasure to be of service to all of you who have a regard for the work that God performed through Mr. Herbert Armstrong in the twentieth century—a work by which we all came, in one way or another, to understand and to participate in this glorious salvation plan. May God preserve each one of you in fulfilling that calling to the very end.

Yours with much love in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jon W. Brisby