

December 2015

Dear Brethren:

In the last issue of this *Monthly Letter*, we recounted the history of Mr. Herbert Armstrong's work and the growth of the Radio Church of God through much of the 1950s. We ended with an account of the numerical growth of that church through the decade by tracking attendance at the fall Feast of Tabernacles. This month we will pick up where we left off in this chronicle of key events shaping the legacy of Herbert Armstrong and that most unusual and compelling religious movement of the twentieth century.

Growth and Delegation Fosters Cultural Changes

As mentioned previously, rapid expansion of the church required Mr. Armstrong to rely more heavily upon other men to begin writing articles and managing administrative duties. It is not surprising, therefore, that the 1950s witnessed a slow but persistent change in the culture of the church as a growing *governing structure* began to expand. By the late 1950s, there were an increasing number of articles in *The Good News* magazine addressing the topic of church government and the need for members to submit to ministerial authority. These articles were often penned by men like Herman Hoeh and Roderick Meredith, two of the earliest ordained ministers who were wielding increasing authority within the church.

More detailed attention will be provided in later chapters concerning these *changing leadership dynamics* through the 1950s, but for purposes of this brief introductory summary, take note of the fact that Mr. Armstrong came to believe that God would bless these *newly-ordained men* with the *same level of inspiration* in discovering new truth from the Bible as he himself had experienced during the first thirty years of his calling. That *single assumption* in his mind—that God would use other men equally—would become *pivotal* in shaping the eventual direction of that church in later decades. Whether it was actually true or not that God inspired these other men, accepting that God would bring "new truth" into the body through the *personal scholastic research of others* opened the way for many *new theories* to take root side-by-side with the doctrines of Herbert Armstrong, as they came to be taught to members of the church as "a package deal."

Appointing a Vice President

The other critical decision made by Mr. Armstrong in the late 1950s was the appointment of his younger son, Garner Ted, as Vice President of the church and

Ambassador College. Here is an expanded excerpt which will shed light on this pivotal decision:

However, by late 1957, the growth of the Work demanded more organization, and Garner Ted was made Vice-President of Ambassador College, and also Vice-President of the Radio Church of God (the incorporated name of the Work), on November 21, 1957.

Shortly afterward Roderick C. Meredith, who is second Vice-President, wrote an article on this nomination of Garner Ted to the Vice-Presidency.

I think our readers will find it interesting. So I include it here:

. . . Recently, Mr. Armstrong came to realize the need of someone who could be in *complete charge* of the Work during his absences on business trips or campaigns in God's service. . . .

Until very recently, Mr. Armstrong was hesitant about making such an important decision for two reasons. First, he had tried to work and cooperate with other ministers time and again in his early ministry. But *always* he was disappointed. These other men—in nearly every case—eventually turned to *lying*, to *stealing* God's tithe money, *adultery* or, they were just incompetent—and God bore no "fruit" through them.

So Mr. Armstrong learned the *hard way* that he must TEST and PROVE *any* man before placing him in an office in God's Church—not to speak of designating another man to have full authority to direct the entire Work in his absence!

Second, until the past few months there has been *no one* who was in any way qualified to take over the *many* and *varied* types of responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of the one in Mr. Armstrong's office.

The man in his position must be able to take over the broadcast and reach the world *effectively* with God's message. He must be able and competent to oversee the writing and editing of the magazine and booklets—and to do a considerable part of the writing himself. He must be able to *teach* and *instruct* in many ways, and he must have the executive know-how, and the *wisdom* and *balance* to guide the Work and Ambassador College in the sound policies it is now following.

This man must be able to be the *business executive* for the Work and College, and be able to command the respect of businessmen, engineers, architects, printers, advertising men, radio men, educators and a host of others. He must have a *sound mind* and a *balanced personality*. For wherever he is, he represents the *entire* Work and College! And he must

have the *vision* to think BIG—to personally inspire and guide the Work around the *entire earth*, as God intends.

In addition to all these qualities, he must, of course, be thoroughly *yielded* and *consecrated* to God—totally SURRENDERED to His will. He must have the spiritual *love* and *compassion* to be a minister and help to all those he can personally reach, and these qualities must be the *motivating factor* in the exercise of all his gifts and in the administration of his high office in God's Work. And he must be a DRIVING FORCE—a *hard* WORKER—and show by his "fruits" that God is able to *use him* in effectively carrying out all the responsibilities and tasks that fall his lot. . . .

Mr. Armstrong recently made the official announcement that he was appointing Garner Ted Armstrong as the Vice-President both of the Radio Church of God and of Ambassador College. Thus, during any prolonged absence of his father, Mr. Ted Armstrong now has full authority to take complete charge and make any decisions necessary for the effective accomplishment of God's Work (*The Plain Truth*, September 1967, *Autobiography*, pp. 21, 31).

Within twenty years of the date of this announcement, Mr. Armstrong would come to regret this decision to put so much confidence in Ted. The eventual divide between father and son would become a most serious wound to the entire church. But back in 1957, Mr. Armstrong came to believe that Ted was his strongest asset. Even though his oldest son, Richard, had shown much more loyalty and devotion to the church by his early personal choices, Ted's incredible *natural gifts* seemed to overshadow the manifested weaknesses in his personal character. Mr. Armstrong came to believe that his youngest son was truly now "converted" and could fill his father's shoes if required.

Richard Armstrong Dies

On July 23, 1958, Richard Armstrong was involved in a terrible car accident on the Pacific Coast Highway near San Luis Obispo, California. He was in the passenger seat as he and another minister were traveling north, conducting a visiting/baptizing tour. It was a head-on collision which impacted Richard's side of the car. He had multiple broken bones and internal injuries and he died a week later on July 30. He was not yet thirty years of age, leaving a new wife and a two-month old son (*The Plain Truth*, October 1967, *Autobiography*, pp. 41–43). Compared with his more outgoing younger brother, Richard, had more quietly and steadily increased his contribution to his father's work through the 1950s. What would his influence have been upon that church as a whole had he lived through the 1960s and into the tumultuous decade of the '70s? Perhaps nothing

would have been different. Perhaps everything would have been different. It is a question left only to speculation. Needless to say, the Armstrong family was devastated.

Yet, the pressing needs of that burgeoning church and expanding evangelical work demanded attention from the Armstrongs, so they were compelled by circumstances to carry on as they mourned for Richard.

New College Campuses

Mr. Armstrong continued to "think big," and the growth of church membership in Europe and other countries around the globe led him to desire a branch of Ambassador College in the UK to facilitate training of ministers to serve new international congregations. Here are excerpts from his announcement to the church in June 1959:

Also plans were made for establishing a second Ambassador College in Britain, beginning September next year, 1960. God opened to us one of England's fine, spacious country estates. . . . In this case, the estate has been subdivided into many smaller farms, and most of it sold, except for the fine big mansion, with its 8 acres of beautifully landscaped lawns, rose garden, etc., and a 2-acre plot containing brick housing units for the former employed staff, the fine brick stables, garages, etc. These will make student housing, as also will servants' quarters in one large wing of the mansion. . . . We obtained it for less than we paid for any of our college buildings in Pasadena, tho this is larger than any of them, and even finer than any except Ambassador Hall. . . . This also provides adequate office space for our fast-expanding London office. Our London office manager told me the savings in office rent will more than pay for this fine property.

Thus GOD has providentially opened to us a superb, magnificently landscaped 10-acre college campus, only five miles from the edge of London, walking distance from suburban train, with a fine, stately, 33-room college building, with ample classrooms, and offices and mailing rooms—and without putting any financial burden on our United States and world-wide work from Pasadena headquarters! (*Co-Worker Letter*, June 29, 1959)

This new campus in St. Albans would be named Bricket Wood, and would enhance the international presence of the Radio Church of God and act as an anchor for the development of churches across Europe.

In another letter from early 1963, Mr. Armstrong confirms his consistent strategy for managing the incredible growth of the church:

The Work CANNOT GROW unless the colleges continue to turn out an INCREASING number of graduates every year. This great Work now encompasses THE WHOLE WORLD. It now requires the full time work of HUNDREDS of trained men and women. It now reaches MILLIONS of people every week—our estimate is at least 22 million! (*Co-Worker Letter*, May 22, 1963)

Toward this end, a *third campus* of Ambassador College opened in Texas in 1964, on the grounds of the very property in Big Sandy that had been developed for observance of the annual festivals. An excerpt from a 1964 issue of *The Good News* provides background:

All of this time, the facilities in the East Texas woods were expanding to accommodate the Feast of Tabernacles. However, these facilities were *only* under use for *eight days* of the year.

When the need for a THIRD AMBASSADOR COLLEGE became so apparent that it could not be avoided, the obvious answer to the problem was to use the *already-existing facilities*—God had ALREADY PREPARED—in East Texas. . . .

With all of the last-minute activities, finally, dormitories were prepared; all the existing facilities were put into shape, personnel were hired, and the faculty moved in.

Sophomore, junior and senior students had been transferred over from the Pasadena Campus to set the pace and atmosphere in Big Sandy so that it would be *exactly the same* as the atmosphere in Pasadena and Bricket Wood—in fact, one student was sent from Bricket Wood so this atmosphere would also have its influence in Big Sandy. Six seniors, twenty-one juniors, and nineteen sophomores were joined by sixty-four freshman students and *Ambassador College was under way*. . . .

After exactly the same entrance examinations and entrance procedures, Ambassador College began with the full curriculum of classes on Tuesday morning, September 7, 1964 (*The Good News*, November 1964, "The THIRD Ambassador College!," pp. 21–23).

Continued Phenomenal Growth

If it seemed that the incredible growth of the Radio Church of God through the 1950s could not be long sustained, more surprises were in store for the doubters. Again, just examine the records for attendance at the fall Feast of Tabernacles through much of the 1960s.

In 1961 a new festival site was opened in Squaw Valley, California, to help provide space for all attendees. This was a rented facility. Total attendance around the world that year (dominated by those gathering in Big Sandy and Squaw Valley) was 11,000 (*The Good News*, 9/61). In the fall of 1962 that number was 15,000—8,000 in Big Sandy alone and 5,000 in Squaw Valley (*GN*, 10/62). With a total of ten gathering sites around the world, the following three years reported 20,000, 25,000, and 31,000 attendees respectively (*GN*, 11/63; 10/64; 10–11/65). To handle this incredible influx, another new Feast site was "rented" in Jekyll Island, Georgia, in 1964. The "meeting hall" was a giant circus tent erected on an open lot. This creative solution pointed out the lack of large convention facilities in many areas of the country at that time. Mr. Armstrong's solution was for the church to purchase land in strategic areas across North America and to erect large tabernacle buildings onsite. The first of these was opened for the Feast of 1968 in Mt. Pocono, Pennsylvania. Identical facilities opened in Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri, and Penticton, British Columbia, Canada, in 1969, and another in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, in 1972. Total Feast attendance in 1970 included 70,000 people at twenty-two sites in twelve countries.

In the next installment, we will summarize the pivotal events of 1967–68 specifically, and finally arrive at the cataclysmic 1970s in the history of that church.

Yours most truly in Christ Jesus' name,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Jon W. Brisby