

June 2016

Dear Brethren:

This is now the ninth installment of what was intended to be a fairly condensed summary of the life and work of Herbert Armstrong. It would have been completed long before now except that in the process of writing, many "key" aspects of the storyline were just too compelling to omit. Hopefully the story will be finished soon, and then this *synopsis project* will provide a basis for reminding some of a history they once knew but may have forgotten, and introduce others for the first time to a story that, even today, is relevant for them as well. Given that this is the month that we prefer to provide material relevant to our keeping of Pentecost (meat in due season), this installment just happens to cover the time period leading to that change in Pentecost from Monday to Sunday in 1974.

We ended the last installment by confirming growth statistics of the Radio Church of God through most of the 1960s, based upon increasing membership and the exploding annual attendance at fall Feast of Tabernacles gatherings around the world. In relating the next events in their sequence—the late 1960s through the early 1970s—only a very brief description of key events will be recorded because many of these events deserve detailed attention in their own right, and we will be expounding individually upon them in separate writings.

Loma Armstrong Dies

In early 1967, Mrs. Armstrong was stricken with a severe intestinal malady which left her in a perilous condition. After the initial three-week ordeal, she seemed to be improving somewhat, but then had a progressive downturn which ended in her death on April 15, 1967 (*Co-Worker Letter*, April 17, 1967). Here are the comments made by Mr. Armstrong to the church at that time:

But I am deeply sorry to have to announce, at the same time, that my wife's critical illness has ended in the manner least expected—in her death just after midnight Saturday morning, April 15. . . .

Thirty-four years ago, at this same time of year, when my father died having reached his 70th year, I had to learn that GOD'S PROMISES ARE ABSOLUTELY SECURE—but not always in the way we expect. . . .

We did fully expect that God would heal her NOW. True, she was 75 1/2 years of age. . . .

God already had given my wife 5 1/2 years more of this life than He gave [King] David. She was just a few months older than I, though part of each year we were "the same age," as they are counted. Yet neither of us have felt or acted in any manner like "old folks," or "elderly" people. We never thought of her as being anywhere near seventy! (*Co-Worker Letter*, April 17, 1967)

What most forget today is that by 1967, both Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong had already lived "full lives." In their mid-seventies, most people would already have been long since retired from their life occupations. But interestingly, from the death of Mrs. Armstrong forward, the very *most significant* events for Mr. Armstrong and the church would only then begin to unfold.

A New Commission?

Soon after Mrs. Armstrong's death, events began to happen that would take Mr. Armstrong in a very different direction than could ever have been anticipated. That was the opportunity to meet in person with world leaders of many different countries. And based upon these spontaneous new opportunities, Mr. Armstrong came to believe that his commission from God was changing. Rather than just proclaiming the gospel to the masses through expanding media outlets around the world, it appeared to him now that God was opening *a new door* for him to take the gospel to *world leaders*. In 1971, Mr. Armstrong summarized to the church this new philosophy and looked retrospectively at how that transition had come to pass:

As I mentioned in my previous letter a month ago, the Work of necessity had to begin by reaching the grassroots—the masses of the common people—the RULED. We now are reaching more than 150 MILLION of them.

...

But we have reached the point where it has now become necessary that we reach ALSO the RULERS—those in the very top echelons of POWER in the world. Because, whether we have realized it or not, this Work is the GREATEST, MOST EFFECTIVE activity on earth for WORLD PEACE! (*Co-Worker Letter*, May 28, 1971)

How did this opportunity open to him? The very first such contact seems to have resulted from trying to get *The World Tomorrow* radio program on a Jordanian radio station broadcasting from Jerusalem. This was in June 1967, soon after Mrs. Armstrong's death. The contract for radio time had been made with the Jordanian government (which controlled the "old city" of Jerusalem), but before the first broadcast could be aired, the Israelis took

over that portion of the city in the Six-Day War, resulting in Jordan losing control of this station. Negotiations with highly-placed representatives of King Hussein of Jordan led to Mr. Armstrong broadcasting from the city of Amman instead, with that broadcast signal reaching into Jerusalem. Mr. Armstrong would eventually meet with King Hussein in person (*Co-Worker Letter*, July 31, 1967).

A second opportunity to meet with people in high places came in February 1968, when King Leopold III of Belgium asked for a visit from Mr. Armstrong:

. . . The wife of our office manager at Bonn, West Germany, happened to show a copy of the 1966 Ambassador College year book—"The ENVOY"—to an industrialist friend in Brussels. He was much impressed by the book, and the high character of Ambassador students, reflected in their photographs and action shots. This industrialist happened to be a personal friend of King Leopold of Belgium. He asked if he might show the ENVOY to the King. The King was quite impressed, and said he would like to meet the founder and Chancellor of this unique high-character educational institution (*Co-Worker Letter*, May 28, 1971).

The King of Belgium would become a personal friend to Mr. Armstrong, would visit Ambassador College a number of times in ensuing years, and would even travel with Mr. Armstrong on some of his future state visits.

A third event occurring in 1968 was the participation of Ambassador College in an archeological venture with Hebrew University to excavate the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Mr. Armstrong summarized the project this way:

. . . In September, 1968, Dr. Ernest Martin, Dean of the faculty at our English campus, and Dr. Herman L. Hoeh, Dean of Faculties at Pasadena, wanted Ambassador College to conduct an archeological project at a location in Israel, some miles north of Jerusalem. I was personally not interested in such a project. But I consented to their visiting Jerusalem to see whether permission could be granted from the government authorities.

Dr. Hoeh happened to be acquainted with Dr. Benjamin Mazar, archeologist, and former President of Hebrew University. He found Dr. Mazar at the time in charge of the most important "dig" so far undertaken, starting from the south wall of the Temple Mount. Three major United States universities had sought participation in this outstanding project. All had been rejected. But Professor Mazar offered a 50-50 joint participation to Ambassador College! . . .

I began to realize the scientific and educational value to Ambassador College. A luncheon was held in a private dining room in the Knesset—the government's capitol building. Present at the luncheon were five high-ranking officials of both the university and the government. And also, with me, were Dr. Hoeh, Mr. Charles F. Hunting, one of Ambassador's Vice Presidents in charge of finances for Britain, Europe and the Middle East, and Mr. Stanley R. Rader, our chief counsel (*Co-Worker Letter*, May 28, 1971).

So from 1968 forward, Mr. Armstrong was suddenly catapulted into *the halls of power* around the world, and invitations to visit other heads of state would begin to multiply.

Take note, for the moment, of the fact that Mr. Stanley Rader was part of Mr. Armstrong's personal entourage in these early 1968 visits. He would likewise become a very formidable character in the church's history in the coming decade. Having first worked for Mr. Armstrong as an accountant and financial consultant in the late 1950s, even though he was not a church member, Mr. Rader would rise in influence to become the church's treasurer, chief legal counsel, and more importantly, a trusted confidant and traveling companion of Mr. Armstrong during this *new phase* of the Work. Much more will be covered separately about his role and influence.

Seeking the World's Approval

But at this point in the storyline, note how 1968 marked a radical shift in Mr. Armstrong's approach to his religious mission, compared to his beginnings in the 1930s. Whereas the Radio Church of God had always celebrated its identity as being *contrary* to the world and its major institutions, now we see Mr. Armstrong beginning *to court* these very institutions and to attribute their flattering overtures toward him to God's special blessing. In the name of *opening doors* to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ—a gospel very contrary to *every other religious work* and one hated by most—Mr. Armstrong would begin to forge alliances with famous people and with worldly humanitarian institutions. Notice this in his description of the Jerusalem "dig" project:

First, it is one of the most important scientific projects under way anywhere on earth today. It will mean great prestige and recognition of Ambassador College. If some wonder why we need recognition by the world, remember that we are commissioned to GO INTO THE WORLD TO PREACH THE GOSPEL. We have to deal with the world. We have to obtain the use of the world's facilities—radio broadcast time on their radio facilities, television facilities, and publishing facilities when we buy large advertising space in the great mass-circulation magazines. This is increasing the readership of The

PLAIN TRUTH by hundreds of thousands. Without favorable recognition and status in our "public image" we simply COULD NOT CARRY OUT CHRIST'S COMMISSION! (*Co-Worker Letter*, December 10, 1968)

What a drastic change in philosophy from the first thirty-five years of his ministry! When had he ever before needed personal visits with heads of state in order to secure access to radio broadcasting time and print media distribution? When previously had soliciting the "favorable recognition" of worldly institutions been required in order to proclaim the gospel and to build the church?

A decade later, in the June 19, 1978 issue of *The Good News*, Mr. Armstrong would publish to the church a summary of church growth statistics from 1950 through that present day. He showed in chart form that from 1950 through 1968, the church grew in membership by an average of 31.7 percent *annually*. But from 1969 through 1977, the church experienced an *average annual loss* in membership of 1.8 percent. Given that 1968 was the key year of this new *major pivot* in orientation toward seeking alliances with worldly institutions, what might that imply in the minds of those who believe (or believed) God was the one who had been blessing Mr. Armstrong's efforts from the beginning? Mr. Armstrong himself had always asserted that God blesses us as we please Him.

What's in a Name?

It was also in 1968 that the name of the Radio Church of God was changed to the Worldwide Church of God. It is interesting that there is little to document how that name change was communicated to the church as a whole, but anecdotal accounts (to the extent they can be trusted) assert that Mr. Armstrong felt the church had outgrown the original name. No longer a single, small congregation in Eugene, Oregon, producing a local radio program, that church had grown over thirty-five years to claim over 150,000 members, and offices and publishing operations around the world. And now, with the growing attention of world leaders, the church needed a name more befitting its blossoming new status. A document entitled, *1968 Certificate of Amendment of Articles of Incorporation of Radio Church of God*, confirms that the name change was approved in a meeting on January 5, 1968, and signed by Mr. Armstrong and the corporate Secretary, Mr. Albert J. Portune. The name change was filed with the state of California on June 18, 1968. The first use of the new name seems to have emerged in publications being produced by the church in very late 1968. It seems much more than coincidence that this name change was occurring in concert with a whole new view of the organization, its identity, and its mission before God.

Prophetic Expectation

By the late 1950s, thanks to certain prophetic speculations that had taken hold within the church, especially those advanced by Dr. Herman Hoeh, Mr. Armstrong and the whole church *believed sincerely* that the end of the age was at hand, and that Jesus Christ would be returning to rule as King very soon. In fact, although never declaring it as an absolute fact, many writings of the ministry had primed the membership to believe that Jesus Christ would return in 1975. They were also schooled to believe that the faithful of God would be taken to a "place of safety" in 1972, to escape three and one-half years of great tribulation before that Second Coming. Mr. Armstrong's own view of his new commission before kings of this world was expressed in terms of "finishing the Work" in the run-up to 1972. Notice just one example:

So there will be a Temple built on the spot of the old Temple in Jerusalem. The Jews will again be offering the daily sacrifices. This is shown not only by the fact that the type of Antiochus Epiphanes stopping the sacrifices in 168 B.C. indicates it—but also the prophecy of Daniel 12:11 which is a direct and specific prophecy of stopping the daily sacrifices 1290 days before Christ's coming, and the resurrection of the dead in Christ . . .

But be sure time is shorter than you supposed! Momentous prophecies are due for fulfillment, very rapidly, from now on! . . .

I will just say, now, that from those prophecies, it is possible that the taking away of the daily sacrifice in the Temple—the placing of the "abomination" there also—could take place early in 1972. This is indicated in Revelation 12:14 (another three-and-one-half-year period), by Rev. 3:10; and other facts of history and prophecy connected with Matthew 24:14—as well as other prophecies in Daniel (*Personal, The Plain Truth*, June 1967, p. 5).

This is only a small excerpt that confirms the material that the whole church had been digesting for many years. Perhaps the most dominant example of this particular prophetic interpretation was found in Mr. Armstrong's 1956 article (turned into a very popular booklet), entitled, *1975 In Prophecy*. No, the article never drew a *firm conclusion* in "setting dates" for the return of Christ, but that was nevertheless *the effect* that it had upon many church members, especially given the title of the article. All eyes were focused upon 1972–1975, and that expectation continued unabated, even as the 1960s ended and the new decade of the 1970s began.

Trouble on the Horizon

Several critical factors were coalescing in the early 1970s to create *a prefect storm* within the Worldwide Church of God.

Firstly, as noted above, the greatest issue was the *membership expectation* of last-day prophecies beginning to unfold *in earnest* in 1972. They were awaiting Mr. Armstrong's signal that it was "time to flee." What would happen to the church if no such fulfillment manifested?

Secondly, there was a serious lack of cohesion within the ministry by this time, due to a difference in doctrinal interpretation among several factions which had emerged over the preceding decade. Several ministers, especially some who had sought higher degrees in worldly institutions, now brandished their credentials as "scholastic doctors" within the church, intent upon changing a number of long-held teachings of the church with which they disagreed. (Mr. Armstrong provides revealing insight into this controversy in his final writing to the church on June 24, 1985; *The Worldwide News*, pp. 2–3.) The irony was, that on the one hand, by the 1970s, Ambassador College was turning out many new graduates (including ministers) to serve the ever-growing needs of the church. But on the other hand, Ambassador College was turning out many new graduates (including ministers) who *did not* all share the original orientation of their founder, Mr. Herbert Armstrong—an orientation which had been *the core of that church* from the beginning. Many of Mr. Armstrong's teachings were now under fire from within. These "doctors of the law" claimed he had never been a true "Bible scholar." He was "an amateur" and needed their *superior skills* to help "fix" doctrinal errors long held in the church. Until this time, Mr. Armstrong had rejected the majority of these pressures from within. He *pushed back* very hard against this liberal faction in the ministry, asserting often that God had *revealed* these doctrines to him and that therefore he *refused to change them!* He would point to the monumental growth and success of that enterprise under his direction as proof God had led him into the Truth. But now, with an end to that phenomenal growth pattern, would his strong defense endure?

Thirdly, Garner Ted Armstrong had assumed an ever-increasing role in the church throughout the 1960s, becoming "the public face" of that church by the end of the decade. *His* was now *the voice* of *The World Tomorrow* radio broadcast, not his father's. *His* was now *the face* in the new TV programs. At the very time when the Radio Church of God began to reach more people around the world than ever before, it was Garner Ted—not his father—who was branded as *the spokesman* for that empire. But that charismatic spokesman had some personal problems which could not help but become public in due time. And inconveniently, the timing of those personal revelations would manifest publicly in the early 1970s.

Garner Ted Suspended

In the fall of 1971, Mr. Armstrong had no choice but to suspend his son from ministerial duties. The earliest announcements emphasized that it was due to stress and

exhaustion from too many duties. But by the spring of 1972, given that the media was digging deep for specific details, Mr. Armstrong finally wrote the following to the whole church:

I hope you will realize that this is the most difficult and painful announcement that I have ever had to make in a Co-Worker letter. . . .

Last autumn [1971] I was dismayed to learn that my son had been so overcome with personal, emotional problems, that it led to conduct inconsistent with the high standard of the Work of the Church of God and the scriptural qualifications for a minister of Jesus Christ, and rendered him incapable of carrying on the duties of a minister, and of his responsibilities of Executive Vice President.

The Board of Directors of Worldwide Church of God, and the Board of Trustees of Ambassador College, grieved as we were, had no choice but to remove Garner Ted Armstrong from his office and his responsibilities. Mr. Albert J. Portune was made ACTING Executive Vice President of both corporations, and Mr. Garner Ted Armstrong was granted a leave of absence, hoping that full repentance and overcoming of his personal, emotional problems would allow reinstatement without a long delay, and for the protection of the Work, no public announcement was made (*Co-Worker Letter*, April 25, 1972).

During these months that Garner Ted was put on "sabbatic leave," his disappearance created a vacuum, publicly, for the church. All at once, the charismatic spokesman and "face" of the church was gone, and without any creditable explanation. By the spring of 1972, the impact of lower financial contributions was being felt, and it appeared that the absence of Garner Ted on radio and TV was a key factor. The May 1972 issue of the *Ministerial Bulletin* (a publication sent to all Worldwide Church of God ministers from Headquarters), included a letter from Roderick Meredith (in charge of Church Administration). It is revealing:

As many of you know, the general income for the Work, for the building fund and even for the spring Holy Day offerings is down considerably this spring. In addition, the number of new Co-Workers, numbers of visit requests and numbers of new prospective members are also down on a percentage basis. There are several factors which contribute to this picture . . . One is the "1972 syndrome" [meaning the failed prophetic speculations of the ministry]. In spite of all our statements or wishes to the contrary, a lot of our brethren HAVE let this affect them—even before most of them realized there was a really serious

problem with Mr. Ted Armstrong. Because they think we were dogmatic on this point in the past, many are distrusting the Church a little more in general and are retreating spiritually and, at the same time, obviously, in their support for the Work. . . .

The second internal area we need to concentrate on has been called the "G.T.A. syndrome." Because of the uncertainty of Mr. Garner Ted Armstrong's real status for a while, many brethren and Co-Workers became discouraged or "uneasy." Some began cutting down on or withholding their tithes and offerings—a few even sending us anonymous letters to this effect.

There is nothing like a significant drop in income to get the attention of any corporate empire like the WCG had become. A number of the very ministers who had first objected fiercely to allowing Garner Ted to continue as a minister—deeming him unfit—now clamored to bring him back. And a loving father, who was eager to see his son restored to good grace within "the Work," was easily convinced to accept Garner Ted's claims of heartfelt repentance. Here is an excerpt of Mr. Armstrong's letter to the church about the reinstatement of his son:

Messrs. Portune, Antion and Dart—all Vice Presidents, Mr. Stanley Rader and I, are returning to Pasadena from a momentous meeting with my son Garner Ted Armstrong. I had spent the better part of two days with him last week, and I knew then that with God's help, and countless hours of submissive, prevailing prayer on his part, coupled with the prayers of thousands for him, his problems have now been overcome. There is no question in our minds that God is calling him back now, with plans for the greatest lunge forward this Work of God has ever taken. He is like a NEW Garner Ted Armstrong, and we believe God will now use him with far greater power in getting out Christ's Gospel to the world than ever before. We know God has forgiven, and filled him—and us—with a completely new dedication for the finishing of the Work for this age (*Co-Worker Letter*, May 31, 1972).

But had that prodigal son really turned over a new leaf? Time would tell.

Solving the "1972 Syndrome"

So now they had solved the "G.T.A. syndrome" by bringing him back. But what about the "1972 syndrome" which was still suppressing income and causing disaffection among the base of church members? It was not possible to force world events to coincide with unwise prophetic speculations of the past. What could be done to soothe members who were

discouraged and even depressed because Jesus Christ was not truly coming to usher in His Kingdom right away?

The *nagging problem* now plaguing the church was the burden of "difficult doctrines" which members were required to practice, most especially the teaching on divorce and remarriage. Mr. Armstrong had taught from the beginning of his ministry that marriage was *bound for life*, and there was *no option for remarriage* while an original mate was still alive. The huge influx of new members who had joined the church in preceding decades included some who were divorced, and in many cases, these had remarried and had children of these second marriages. Much more will be detailed about this doctrinal issue, but at this point in the storyline, note simply that there were many members who had acquiesced to this "hard teaching" and were remaining celibate—even separating from second marriages—in order to avoid committing adultery before God and missing out on God's special protections in *the last days*. As long as there was hope that this requirement to endure *physical deprivation* of companionship would end soon—because Jesus was returning by 1975—many were willing to "tough it out." But when 1972 came and went, with no fulfillment of these great biblical last-day events, many of these celibate members became restless. If Jesus Christ did not return in the next decade, or even *in their entire lifetimes*, would they be willing to remain single and celibate? The answer for many was, "no." The ministry became fearful that there would be a *mass exodus* of members. What could be done?

The 1972 Doctrinal Committee

The solution was to find a way to justify *relaxing* these burdensome doctrines and to make it easier for people to remain members in good standing. How could these members be given what they wanted, humanly, while remaining loyal to the church and keeping those tithes and offerings coming? It would be very difficult to announce a *radical new change* concerning the marriage doctrine—to begin to permit divorcees to remarry—without offending many other "conservatives" within the church who believed the original teaching came from God Himself. Mr. Herbert Armstrong had always asserted that God *had revealed* that Truth to him. If the current doctrine was actually in error and needed correction, it would undermine *the very legitimacy* of Mr. Armstrong's ministry. But that is exactly what would occur with the creation of a new doctrinal committee to "reprove" all of the church's former teachings, one by one. And eventually the leader of that committee would be none other than his son, Garner Ted Armstrong. The liberal scholars in the church finally had their opening. In the name of *growing in grace and knowledge* (2 Peter 3:18), they would challenge *every former doctrine* of the church, one by one. In hindsight, Mr. Armstrong would write of that time:

. . . But soon a few would-be scholars had established themselves into a "Doctrinal Team." What started as an honest effort to find and establish real TRUTH in due time turned into a group of "would-be scholars" not appointed by me, seeking to destroy the true doctrines of the Church.

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 (*The Worldwide News*, June 24, 1985).

The goal was to change the marriage doctrine. But how to go about it? It would be better to sponsor a change in a "lesser doctrine" first, especially if there was one *inherently* hard to understand anyway, and one that many of the church members would not care that much about. Once *the precedent* for changing doctrine was established, it would be easier thereafter to make changes to more important doctrines. It would be a classic "priming of the pump."

The Pentecost Doctrine

The Doctrinal Committee decided to tackle the issue of Pentecost early on. The annual Holy Day of Pentecost had been kept on a Monday within the Radio Church of God since 1937. Why so, when the Jews *did not* keep Pentecost on Monday, and when *no other major religious group* emphasized a Monday either? Mr. Herbert Armstrong had gone to *great lengths* over many years to justify a Monday Pentecost, even though the biblical texts providing instruction for counting (especially Leviticus 23:15–16) are confusing at best. There had been several ministers under Mr. Armstrong who had questioned a Monday Pentecost from the 1950s, arguing instead for a Sunday observance. Those arguments had been crushed time and again by the weight of Mr. Armstrong's claim of inspiration from God.

Was the true Church founded on a Sunday in A.D. 33 as the *Catholic and a few Protestant churches claim*? REMEMBER, if any church which claims apostolic authority has erred in the traditional date of its founding, *how can we* believe that its other traditions are true? ("Was the New Testament Church Founded on Sunday?," *The Good News*, May 1959, p. 5)

Other "scholars" in the ministry were not convinced, but they knew they had *no way* to effect a change as long as Mr. Armstrong was so adamant. But after the prophetic failures of 1972, Mr. Armstrong's technical biblical scholarship was now suspect, and the liberals had their opening. It took until early 1974 for that first major change to be accomplished, but indeed, Mr. Armstrong *finally acquiesced* to the committee scholars, and the announcement was made to the whole church:

We did not have, at that time, access to all of the scholarly research that we have today. . . .

According to the facts available to me and that small parent church at that time—back in 1927 to 1933—Pentecost was put on a Monday.

But now, consider: Why did God use me in founding Ambassador College? Simply to provide an educated ministry for His Church? Ambassador College has indeed provided an educated ministry. It has developed a scholarly research team. Today at the Pasadena Headquarters it has provided me—and the Church—with many facilities I did not have in 1927.

And that team of scholarly researchers—delving into every possible phase of this subject in depth—has now indeed brought me new facts—new evidence (Personal letter to the church from Mr. Armstrong, February 11, 1974).

Now, no doctrine of the church was immune from re-review. If Mr. Armstrong was wrong on Pentecost, what else might he have erred in teaching to the church over the first forty years?

So, friends and brethren, as you prepare to observe Pentecost this month on Monday, June 13, remember how significant has been these particular historical events within God's Church in either confirming or compromising God's divine inspiration. Lest any of us begin to think that we would never have approved such changes, stop and think about the areas of our lives in which we too have compromised in order to solve a "short-term" problem. Would we really have stood on faith and defended a Monday Pentecost under the same circumstances? Our observance of Monday, today, is a testament to our continuing belief that God *did indeed* lead His Church to the Truth, in spite of the inadequacy of any man's scholastic ability. And as *the firstfruits* of God's work today, may we remember always the requirement to *act in faith* when compromise is presented.

Next time, we will continue the story of the Worldwide Church of God as it reeled through the tumultuous 1970s.

Your servant and brother in the faith,

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