

A Synopsis of the Life and Work of Herbert W. Armstrong—Part V

February 2015

Dear Brethren:

In the December 2014 issue of this *Monthly Letter*, we brought forward the story of Mr. Herbert Armstrong and the Radio Church of God up through 1942, describing the growth of that work through the expansion of the *World Tomorrow* radio broadcast into markets across the USA. This month, we will continue our summary of that unique church history. Most of us today are too young to have been part of the church during those eventful years, but it is critical that we understand that history. It is the history of God's true Church in our age—the same Church through whom you are being nurtured today with your own spiritual hope. We would have no such hope if it had not been for God laying that foundation through the work of Herbert Armstrong in the early twentieth century. For that reason, this story must be retold.

On the Threshold of Great Expansion

Once the *World Tomorrow* radio broadcast began to be heard nationwide in 1942, the whole focus of that little religious work began to change. It was no longer just a local/regional outreach in the Pacific Northwest, but now began to impact people across the whole nation.

From 1943 through most of 1945, new contracts with more powerful radio stations were added, including XELO, a 100,000 watt station in Juarez, Mexico, just across the border and covering the entire USA with its transmission signal. The problem, however, was that the *World Tomorrow* was typically being heard either very late at night or very early in the morning, outside of the time that most listeners would have paid attention. Only one station carried the broadcast at 8 P.M., and then, only one night a week. By late 1945 that was about to change.

Mr. Armstrong considered 1945 a most pivotal year in history affecting his work. It was a special moment in time which saw the end of World War II, the simultaneous rise of the Soviet Union as a communist geopolitical power, the birth of the United Nations as a final attempt to solve man's problems, and the unexpected dawning of the atomic era with

the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. These events cumulatively changed everything on the world scene, and Hebert Armstrong was there with his unique brand of radio program, showing how these troubling developments fit with last-day prophecies of the Bible. His was neither a traditional religious program nor a secular news program, but a combination of both, and in that day it had no equal. Decades since then, many others have tried to copy Mr. Armstrong's format, but without any of the impact that he enjoyed from being fresh and new. Critics would say he just happened to be at the right place at the right time to ride this unexpected *new wave* and to fill a developing "niche" market. He claimed, by contrast, that it was the Eternal God who had timed it all perfectly to achieve a *divine* purpose.

It was October 1945—just two months after the first atomic bomb was dropped—when the *World Tomorrow* expanded to an unprecedented six-night-per-week format:

In 1944 we broke into an earlier time, 8 P.M. on XELO, with 100,000 watts of power—but still Sunday nights *only*. However, this prime listening time had greatly increased the number of listeners and the mail response.

But now, at last, the Eternal God had opened the mighty door of super-power XELO at this prime 8 P.M. time, *six nights a week!*

After this tremendous impact of *nightly* broadcasting got under way, the number of listeners to God's Truth increased faster than ever.

Then, on the heels of this, GOD OPENED ANOTHER STILL BIGGER DOOR! Station XEG, with 150,000 watts, making it the most powerful voice reaching over the United States, opened its mighty doors—and at the prime listening time of 8 P.M., Central Standard Time, *and also six nights a week!* (*The Plain Truth*, October 1962, *Autobiography of Herbert Armstrong*, p. 16)

The after-effects of this new-listener response was significant. Thus, 1946 became the year requiring a *major expansion* of the infrastructure of that little church operation in Eugene to try and cope with the volume of letters flooding into the office. Requests for *The Plain Truth* magazine were skyrocketing, as well as for booklets like *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*. In order to afford to pay for these big, new radio contracts, Mr. Armstrong had often "robbed Peter to pay Paul" by cutting back on publishing. But now the demand for the printed material being advertized on the radio program made it mandatory to reinvest in that follow-up service. The scope was now beyond the capacity of any "mom-and-pop" outfit to manage.

Outgrowing Eugene, Oregon

With 75,000 issues of *The Plain Truth* now being printed, the capacity of local printers in rural Oregon was being taxed. The need also for expanded office facilities for a growing infrastructure led Mr. Armstrong to contemplate moving his headquarters. Also, prerecording multiple installments of the *World Tomorrow* broadcast to feed a six-night-a-week schedule on multiple stations across the country required the kind of studio equipment found in few cities. Because the real center for media and broadcasting was in Hollywood, CA, this was the area that became preeminent on his list of options. He did not want to be right in Hollywood and its culture, or even Beverly Hills, but he very much liked the neighboring community of Pasadena for its more conservative flavor.

At the very same time, the chronic, persistent lack of reliable shepherds to serve new local congregations was as troubling as ever before. What good was it for Herbert Armstrong to succeed in raising up a new local group through his evangelical efforts, if the man he then left in charge of that group "flaked out" and destroyed the fellowship within six months time? Something had to change:

In Eugene, one of the four larger churches conducted a school for training ministers. It became headquarters for a new denomination. I had noticed that once *they* established a new small church group here and there, their little churches continued to hold together and grow. They had ministers available to pastor each new church raised up. They had a school for training ministers.

If necessity is the mother of invention, perhaps God created the necessity to get through my thick skull the realization that God wanted a college of His own, for the training of His ministers, as well as other trained personnel that soon would be required for His rapidly-growing Work. . . .

And so it came about that, by the time of my flight to New York in late March, 1946 [to cover the first United Nations Security Counsel session], I was well aware of the need for a college. And I knew that college must be located in Pasadena, California (*The Plain Truth*, November 1962, *Autobiography*, p. 44).

Ambassador College Is Conceived

After a nation-wide baptizing tour by Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong in the summer of 1946, they returned home in the fall to focus upon finding a means to begin a college. The whole idea was quite audacious. How many would ever have dared taken the steps Herbert Armstrong did over the previous twelve years—to generate a national radio broadcast and

print program from a shoestring budget—let alone thereafter to conceive starting his own college? He did not even have a higher educational degree himself. Who was he to start an institution of higher learning? Besides that, he had no available funds to invest in such a project. Everything coming in was being churned back into the Work to continue expanding the reach of that unique religious message. But nonetheless, he went shopping for property in Pasadena, California, believing that if it was God's will, a way would open to turn it into a reality.

His initial concept of a college campus was simply a bare-bones facility to provide what was minimally necessary to meet basic needs. He looked at empty lots with the idea of building a facility. Many starts and stops occurred, but all efforts ran into severe obstacles. In November 1946 he stopped in to see a real estate broker whom he already knew, and from that time forward, everything changed:

I was taken to a small mansion of some 18 rooms, on Grove Street just off of South Orange Grove Boulevard—Pasadena's "millionaire row" residence street. This was a 2¼ acre place known as the "McCormick estate" .

...

The property was on a hillside. It had been magnificently landscaped, although it appeared not to have been maintained in good condition for a few years. Beside the main building, there was a four-car garage with two servants' apartments. To the east of these buildings was a beautifully contoured slope to a balustrade, and then a six-foot drop of ornamental concrete retaining wall under the balustrade, dropping to a long, level space known as "the lower gardens." This space was headed by an ornate concrete tempietto, and ended at the other end with a large square pool and a classic pergola (*The Plain Truth*, December 1962, *Autobiography*, pp. 30–31).

The problem was, the retired lawyer who owned it wanted \$100,000 cash for the property, quite out of the question for Herbert Armstrong. Eventually, miraculously, a lease-to-purchase arrangement was agreed upon, whereby the Armstrongs promised to pay \$1000 per month until July 1947 (ten months), only thereafter first taking possession of the property. Ultimately, the contract provided for the transfer of deed to be completed once twenty-five total months of payments had been made (\$25,000). The lawyer never intended to honor the contract, thinking to take nine months of advanced payments and then to renege on his promise to turn over the property, but through some clever maneuverings of Mr. Armstrong, they did indeed take possession of that property, and they did indeed obtain the deed as contracted. Audacious! In the name of the Radio Church of God, the Armstrongs now owned a mansion in Pasadena, California.

The Mission of Ambassador College

From the time the contract was signed in the fall of 1946, immediate plans were made to open Ambassador College in the fall of 1947. Mr. Armstrong tapped his brother-in-law, Walter E. Dillon, to become President of Ambassador College. He held a Master's Degree in Education and was an experienced school principal. He had no foundation in religion, and that was just fine with Mr. Armstrong. In fact, it was preferred. The Armstrongs were not opening a religious seminary. It was conceived as a liberal arts college which would also include some religious courses. The initial advertisement spread featured in the January-February 1947 issue of *The Plain Truth* defined the purpose of this unique institution. Mr. Armstrong describes the purpose of that special magazine feature:

The center spread—pages 8 and 9—had a large 4-column picture showing a portion of the new campus. The article announcing the new college began on that page, with a 4-column headline: ". . . and now . . . OUR OWN NEW COLLEGE!"

The article explained that "an amazing new setup has come into our hands that is unique, and, we believe, without parallel! Prospective students learning of the unusual program are thrilled!"

Policies were announced. The article said: . . . "AMBASSADOR is to be a general liberal arts institution—not a Bible school, ministers' college, or theological seminary. It will fit students for all walks of life, offering a general and *practical* basic education. . . . There is no other college like AMBASSADOR. . . .

"But why should we establish and conduct a college in connection with this, God's Work?" the article continued. "The reasons are concrete and vital. . . . The work has grown to a scope where *called*, consecrated, properly educated and specially trained assistants, ministers and evangelists to follow up this work in the field, have become an imperative need." . . .

But why, then, was this not to be a Bible school, or theological seminary?

The article, continuing, explained that:

"Yet, the active ministry is *different* from every other profession in one very important respect. No man ever should enter it of his own volition. . . . A true minister of Jesus Christ must be specially *called* of God. And how may we *know* whether one is really called? Experience has shown human nature to be such that most who *think* that they are called are mistaken, and those who really are called invariably try to run from the calling! Jesus gave us the only test. 'By their fruits,' He said, 'ye shall KNOW.' But the fruits are worked out by experience, and that requires time. For that very reason, *our college cannot be a ministerial college*—though it *is* being designed so that, should we be fortunate enough to find one out of twenty really and truly called to the

ministry, that one will have been prepared and properly trained. . . . These considerations led naturally to the policy of making AMBASSADOR a general liberal arts institution for all young men and women, regardless of future vocation, occupation, or profession." (*The Plain Truth*, January 1963, *Autobiography*, p. 42)

Furthermore, how was Ambassador College to be different from other colleges?

The Biblical revelation provides man with the true *concept* through which to view and *explain* what he can observe. . . .

But the educational institutions of this world have rejected this FOUNDATION of knowledge. They have built an educational structure on a false foundation. They left God, and His revelation, out of their knowledge. They have built a complicated and false system composed of a perverted mixture of truth and error.

Ambassador College was to *correct* these ills and perversions in modern education. That was to be its basic policy.

The Board of Trustees of the Radio Church of God, of which I was Chairman, would set all policies until the college could be incorporated in its own name with its own Board of Trustees. Until that time, it would be operated as an activity of the Radio Church of God (*The Plain Truth*, May 1963, *Autobiography*, p. 26).

Preparing for the First School Year

Early 1947 saw the assembling of a new college faculty, including some retired professors and academics with prestigious degrees in history, languages, and music. None of them were members of the Radio Church of God or shared Mr. Armstrong's religious beliefs. He was serious about wanting Ambassador College to be a true liberal arts institution, with the caveat that *he alone* would teach the religious curriculum.

But a number of very serious problems emerged which put the new college much in jeopardy. Even though the Armstrongs were able to take possession of the property in July (a true accomplishment in and of itself), a building inspector then condemned the property as being unfit as a classroom because it did not meet current fire codes. The cost to improve the property to standards would be another \$30,000, nearly one-third again of the original purchase price of the property. How would they ever secure these funds, let alone have the work completed in time for opening that very fall term? On top of this, there were grumblings among members of the church in Oregon who Mr. Armstrong claimed resented his move to Southern California and his transition to a national focus away from prioritizing members in the Pacific Northwest. With all of these pressures coming to bear at the very

same time in 1947, Mr. Armstrong describes being near despair (*The Plain Truth*, June 1963, *Autobiography*, p. 30). Many outsiders had already concluded the idea of this new college was folly, speaking not about "if," but "when" it would fold up. But he also describes his strong belief that God indeed was guiding it all. The fact that every obstacle was eventually overcome, even dramatically, was evidence to him that there was something going on here beyond what was visible to human beings.

College Opens With Four Students Only

Herbert Armstrong's audacious plan did indeed come to fruition, and Ambassador College did indeed open for business that fall. But the first class was very limited due to the construction delays of the summer:

We had received some forty applications from prospective college students. But this reconstruction program had delayed the college opening. I had been compelled to notify all applicants that I would advise them when we finally were ready to open. . . .

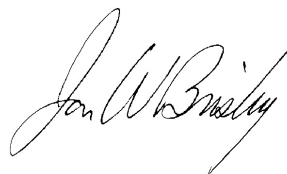
Ambassador College did finally swing open its big front door to students October 8, 1947. But by that time nearly all applicants had gone elsewhere. Besides our son Dick (Richard David), there was only Raymond C. Cole, who came down from Oregon where his family had been in the Church for years; Herman L. Hoeh, who came from Santa Rosa, California; and Miss Betty Bates from Oklahoma—four pioneer students—with a faculty of eight.

Did ever a college start so small? Or with a ratio of two professors to each student? But the things of God, through human instruments, always start the *smallest*, and grow to become the BIGGEST! (*The Plain Truth*, June 1963, *Autobiography*, p. 30)

In the next installment, we will continue the incredible story of the Radio Church of God and Ambassador College, summarizing the key historical events which would catapult that small little work into the worldwide work that it became.

As beneficiaries today of that Work, may God keep you all as you write *your own* personal histories of God's work in these critical last days.

Much love and devotion in Christ Jesus,



Jon W. Brisby