

October 2016

Dear Brethren:

In the June 2016 issue of this *Letter*, we recounted the history of events in Mr. Herbert Armstrong's life—and that of the Worldwide Church of God—from 1967 through early 1974. In this, the tenth installment of that synoptic storyline, we will carry forward with key events transpiring in that church through the remainder of the 1970s.

Recall that when we left off, the first *major* change in doctrine of the Worldwide Church of God had finally been approved by Mr. Armstrong in February 1974—the change from keeping the Holy Day of Pentecost on Monday to Sunday. This had been a long-standing goal of "liberal scholars" in the church, but by no means the doctrinal change they most coveted. The Pentecost change was accomplished principally to "prime the pump," for making future doctrinal changes on their *wish list* more acceptable to the whole church.

The House of God

The most aggressive building project ever conceived by Mr. Armstrong was the Ambassador Auditorium, to be built on the Pasadena college campus to serve not only as a venue for college functions and local church services, but to be made available for secular concerts and fine arts performances. The idea for this grand structure formulated in Mr. Armstrong's mind in the early 1960s, and architectural plans and funding arrangements were already being developed by the mid-1960s (*Co-Worker Letter*, February 28, 1964). Although Mr. Armstrong made sure to affirm this was not in any way a "holy temple," he did indeed envision this building as bearing similarities in quality and grandeur to Solomon's Temple, and as a *signature edifice* to proclaim the identity of the true Work of God on earth.

After many delays, groundbreaking was finally accomplished on January 14, 1972. It took over two years to complete the project, and when it was finished, it bore a commemorative plaque with the inscription, "TO THE HONOR AND GLORY OF THE GREAT GOD." Mr. Armstrong wrote to the church:

This magnificent new Auditorium will be dedicated to the Honor and Glory of the GREAT GOD on May 6th, with some 600 ordained ministers of the Worldwide Church of God, from all parts of the world, in attendance (*Co-Worker Letter*, April 28, 1974).

Redefining Marriage—a Precedent

Immediately on the heels of the Pentecost change in February 1974 was the announcement of a *redefining* of what it means in God's eyes to be "married." In May 1974, the "liberal ministers" once again prevailed in securing Mr. Armstrong's approval for their long-sought change—for the first time allowing hundreds and even thousands of members to remarry, who until that time had been told that to do so would be adultery. Mr. Herbert Armstrong approved that change—making the announcement to all of those assembled ministers in that new Ambassador Auditorium on May 6, 1974. Is it not ironic that the dedication ceremony of this building to The Great God was accompanied by a monumental change in doctrinal teaching which would upend the very idea that God had ever "led" Mr. Armstrong in any *unique* way over the past forty years? Until that time, Herbert Armstrong had vociferously opposed the idea of any amendment. It was his son, Garner Ted Armstrong, and a cadre of other ministers, who had lobbied for years for this change. When Mr. Armstrong finally approved it, he claimed authority as an apostle from Jesus Christ to make it. But from which direction had the inspiration really come—from on High, or from his mortal underlings?

Would this *relaxation* of the marriage doctrine solve the problem of *member discontent* resulting from the failure of ministerial prognostications about the return of Jesus Christ? Only time would tell. Mr. Armstrong confirmed the long-reaching tentacles of those past disappointments, which had still not dissipated even by 1976:

Before 1972 many of you made great sacrifices for the precious WORK OF THE LIVING GOD. I TOLD YOU, time and again, I was NOT setting dates—there was no ASSURANCE our Work would be over by January, 1972. Yet some DID set the date, and when the Work was NOT finished in January, 1972, some said, "Well, MY LORD HAS DELAYED HIS COMING. I've been sacrificing to support the Work. NOW I'm going to SPEND THAT MONEY ON MY OWN SELF ENJOYMENT. Christ may not come for another thousand years!" (*Co-Worker Letter*, August 19, 1976)

The membership numbers did finally stabilize again. But what those 1974 doctrinal changes *did* accomplish *for certain* was to make *every other doctrine* of the church suspect. If the marriage doctrine could have been so wrong, what else had Mr. Armstrong gotten wrong as well? Through the remainder of the decade, many more changes were made to church teachings, some by formal proclamation, but many more by *quiet adjustment* in ministerial practice and in private counseling. In short, many of the doctrines that formerly had made members of the Worldwide Church of God seem so "outside of the mainstream" were now being modified to make it *easier to coexist* with the world. If Jesus Christ was not

really coming "soon," then the people would have to have a respite from some of those "hard teachings" that made them such oddballs in their local communities and which threatened to drive future members (and tithe contributions) away.

Recall that since 1968, the *primary commission* of the church had been amended to *begin cultivating relationships with world leaders* as a means of proclaiming the Gospel. The church budgetary expenses for Mr. Armstrong to move in such grand circles could not be funded without loyal, tithe-paying church members, and therefore, relaxing *hard doctrines* served the "greater good" of keeping those members loyal, and thereby preserving "the Work" abroad.

The AICF

In June 1975, Mr. Armstrong announced to church members the creation of a new legal entity to augment his work overseas. The Ambassador International Cultural Foundation (AICF) was to be a secular organization, and it would have its own magazine. Mr. Armstrong described it this way to the church at large:

Now about the new magazine. Some weeks ago I authorized the formation of a new FOUNDATION—named the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation. It is non-profit, dedicated to serving humanity worldwide. It has become a necessary adjunct to this new worldwide dimension of getting Christ's TRUE Gospel to the nations through heads of government. . . .

This new Foundation is giving us great added prestige, credibility, and favor. It is something NO ONE can CRITICIZE. It doesn't sound "religious." Already it has met with GREAT AND FAVORABLE RESPONSE.

And on the heels of this, the TREMENDOUS ANNOUNCEMENT of a new magazine! Under the auspices of the new Foundation, I have just authorized the publication of a NEW MAGAZINE that will go before KINGS! Bi-monthly! It will be the very highest quality magazine in every respect. It will contain in easy-to-understand language articles on the very PURPOSE for human life upon earth, the AWESOME human potential, HOW world PEACE will soon come! It will carry the GOSPEL MESSAGE in the same PLAIN and UNDERSTANDABLE LANGUAGE I use personally in speaking with world leaders, heads of government, and their top officials. It will reveal what science cannot, what religion has not, what education doesn't teach. It will

have a larger size page, fully-illustrated, in full-color (*Co-Worker Letter*, June 5, 1975).

What was not published to the members were some *additional comments* made by Mr. Armstrong to the ministers of the Worldwide Church of God specifically, in an issue of *The Bulletin* (a publication sent only to the ministry):

Now about the Foundation and the NEW MAGAZINE.

One thing has been a serious handicap, and caused me and my touring team no little embarrassment. We have had to say that we represent either Ambassador College, or Worldwide Church of God.

I am regarded as an Ambassador for WORLD PEACE. But if I represent a CHURCH, immediately that shouts to them "RELIGION!" and that sparks prejudice and competitive religious prejudice. If I try to get away from appearing to be a religious crusader by representing Ambassador College, they ask, "where is this college? How many students do you have?" A college even with two campuses, having enrollments of only some 500 to 700 sounds pretty small, compared to the universities all over the world each with from 5,000 to 68,000 students.

Christ said we must be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Some weeks ago I authorized the forming and incorporating of a new FOUNDATION, named "The Ambassador International Cultural Foundation." It is non-profit, dedicated to serving humanity worldwide. . . .

Already we are finding that this new Foundation is giving great added prestige, credibility and favor. It is something NOBODY CAN CRITICIZE! It carries no RELIGIOUS connotation (*The Bulletin*, June 3, 1975, pp. 293–294).

Again, compare this approach to God's Work with that of the previous forty years. Was it truly God's will that the spokesman for Jesus Christ be "acceptable" to the nations, so as not to offend non-Christians? If so, it was certainly a departure from his early ministry. Was the Gospel truly being proclaimed through partnering with world leaders and secular humanitarian organizations that were attempting to solve the world's problems through *their own physical devices*? If you are aiding someone *trying to solve problems without God's help*, does that action really "open the door" to allow you to convince them of the need for the return of Jesus Christ as Savior? This was the philosophy that was multiplying through

the 1970s in the Worldwide Church of God, and the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation seemed to be the epitome of that new strategy.

The AICF actually seems to have been the brainchild of Stanley Rader, who was increasing his influence greatly within the WCG during this very time. Concerning his visit in August 1976 with the Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, Mr. Armstrong wrote:

My appointment with the Prime Minister was at noon Monday. Ambassador Ravid (also formerly Ambassador to Guinea) went along with us. As you know, I am nearly always accompanied on such visits with Mr. Stanley R. Rader, our chief legal counsel, and now also Vice President for Financial Affairs, and Executive Vice President of the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation (AICF). This time Mrs. Rader also accompanied us (*Co-Worker Letter*, August 19, 1976).

Mr. Armstrong Marries Again

In 1977, at the age of eighty-four, Mr. Armstrong announced to the church his marriage to thirty-eight-year-old Ramona Martin, who had a fifteen-year-old son from a previous marriage. She had been in the church since 1962, becoming one of Mr. Stanley Rader's secretarial assistants in 1974, and thereafter working more closely with Mr. Armstrong as well (*The Worldwide News*, April 25, 1977). Here are some excerpts from the letter Mr. Armstrong wrote to the whole church the day following his marriage:

Since her death [Loma Armstrong], God miraculously has opened to me doors (Rev. 3:8) to kings, emperors, presidents and prime ministers, so that Christ's message may be taken into nations whose doors were closed to this message. At this stage no one but myself can do this. And I could not endure the grueling worldwide travel had not God blessed me with youthful vigor, vitality, and energy (Isa. 40:28–31) enabling me to carry on more vigorously than one in a hundred half my calendar age. This almost constant travel (last year 300 out of 365 days) and loneliness has reawakened me to the serious need God recognized when He said, "It is not good that a man should be alone." . . .

Of course no one could take the place of my beloved wife of fifty years. But the Work of God must go on, finishing the GREAT COMMISSION God committed to me, in this new and MOST IMPORTANT phase of the entire Work. And God now has graciously provided the wife to be constantly at my side—a woman truly led by God's Holy Spirit. We have given the matter much

time, to be sure it has grown into true love and like-minded rapport, as well as definitely sure it is God's will.

This is to announce my marriage to Ramona Martin, in an informal and simple ceremony, attended only by our respective families on Sunday, April 17th, Garner Ted Armstrong officiating (*Co-Worker Letter*, April 18, 1977).

In spite of Mr. Armstrong's heartfelt belief at the time that God was behind his new marriage, that turns out not to have been so. The couple were separated in 1982, and after the legal filing of divorce made headlines in local newspapers, Mr. Armstrong then wrote the following to the church:

. . . But in my letter to you April 18, 1977, I said the loneliness had reminded me how God said, "It is not good that a man should be alone," and I felt God had, after 10 years, provided me with a wife to be constantly at my side and give the help and companionship needed for God's Work.

But with deepest regret I have to say to you now, Mrs. Ramona Armstrong has refused to be at my side here in Pasadena headquarters or in further travel, but has insisted on living separately in Tucson. It has been determined by events, facts and fruits that I am not spiritually bound by God and only by man's law of this world.

Circumstances now render it ill-advised that I condone the continuation of the legal marriage, both from the Church point of view and of my own. It was my hope and effort to resolve the matter, and with the least publicity possible, for the benefit of the Church, for her and for myself. All attempts to do so have failed. It has therefore become necessary that I accede to the advice of Church legal counsel and file the necessary legal proceedings. I assure you every effort has been made, at cost of heavy stress on me personally, to avoid this.

God HATES divorce. So do I. I have gone to every effort to prevent this. It would be inappropriate at this time that I state all the facts, but if necessary and proper later, I will reveal more. . . .

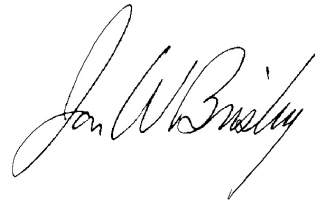
This determination SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A PRECEDENT TO ENCOURAGE OR JUSTIFY OTHER DIVORCES IN THE CHURCH (*Co-Worker Letter*, April 21, 1982).

For the first forty years of his ministry Mr. Armstrong had championed the *inviolability* of marriage, but then compromised in 1974 to permit divorce within the church, followed next by his own marriage to a divorcee and then subsequent divorce. Sadly, all of this provided *great fodder* for critics of the Worldwide Church of God, and Mr. Armstrong in particular.

This brings us to the last portion of the 1970s. In the next installment, we will cover the most serious threat ever faced by that physical church in the aftermath of a final separation between Mr. Armstrong and his son.

Dear friends and brethren, the history we are covering now is very sad indeed, but if you will keep in mind that we are speaking of the very fulfillment of God's prophecies concerning an attack upon the Truth in the last days and the scattering of the sheep, you will have a basis for putting all of these events into perspective. The story most definitely will have a happy ending.

Yours sincerely and faithfully,

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

Jon W. Brisby