

# Herbert W. Armstrong: 1892-1986

The purpose of Giving & Sharing is to preserve Biblical truths taught by Herbert W. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God. These truths are different in many respects from the teachings of mainstream Christianity. Since 1961, I have been intimately involved with this work, and was a member of the Worldwide Church of God from 1969 to 1975. (See the article, "Who are We?" in the book, Bible Studies, for further personal details.)

## A Controversial Man

With the death of Herbert W. Armstrong on January 16, 1986, many questions need to be answered. His impact was so great among Twentieth- Century Sabbath keepers that we must discuss his passing. By doing so, we are not judging him spiritually, but telling what we know and have researched. I loved the man, and his teachings based on the Bible. He has led thousands into a better understanding of Bible truths.

As the author of A History of the Seventh Day Church of God, I have done a great deal of research into the early years of the life and ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong. For twenty years, I have had a rough draft of over one hundred pages on the early ministry of Mr. Armstrong. At the outset, I decided not to publish my findings, some of which were unsettling, until after his death. Aside from a few items, there is little that casts a severely unfavorable light on his life. My historical notes fill in some of the interesting details, of which most members of the Worldwide Church of God, even many old-time ministers, have no knowledge.

Many details of Armstrong's early years are shocking and surprising, revealing spiritual lessons. They are not all bad. It amazes me that Armstrong, who never tired of telling some of the stories about the early years that put him in a favorable light, either forgot about, or failed to relate, some facts about his past which show his good character traits. On the other hand, some of his worst detractors have missed entirely some true episodes which show the dark side of his character.

With Mr. Armstrong's death, I will proceed, God willing, and as time allows, to prepare my findings for publication. If I were a huckster, I could do it for profit. If I were bitter, I could write about HWA from a hostile point of view. (For brevity sake, the abbreviations HWA for Herbert W. Armstrong, GTA for Garner Ted Armstrong, WWC for Worldwide Church of God, COG7 for Church of God, Seventh Day, and PT for the Plain Truth magazine, will be frequently used in this article.) But as I did in the History of the Seventh Day Church of God, I will show both sides to controversial issues. This article is a brief summary.

I have a responsibility to record for history "the rest of the story." During the early 1970s, I had the unique opportunity to interview many elderly COG7 members. In addition, I sought out and spoke with a number of pioneer members of the Radio Church of God, and carefully recorded their recollections of his early ministry. The opportunity to do this again is gone. Mr. Armstrong outlived most of his initial associates and converts. Those who succeed him either know nothing of the past, or will perhaps attempt to distort it. Worst of all, some will attempt to bury the past.

Although I never sat down and had a conversation with HWA, I feel that I knew him in a unique way. Much of the Bible study relating to my conversion took place in the Portland, Oregon Multnomah County Public Library, with the same books and possibly at the same desks that HWA labored at during his famous "six-month study" attempting to prove that his wife Loma's "new religion" was wrong. I tried to disprove Armstrong in the 1960s. I couldn't do it. Although attempting to refute Armstrong, my study instead led to my conversion.

Armstrong's Church of God compatriots such as Helms, Ellis, Walker, Barnes and Kiesz are men that I know. They have told me what HWA was like and what he did. I am familiar with Andrew N. Dugger, COG7 leader who helped Armstrong in the early years. Pioneer members of Armstrong's church, such as the Fishers, Conns, Eva Bodenhamer, Amy Larson, the Henions and many others told me about Armstrong and the Church of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Yet with all this data, there are many nagging, unanswered questions. Herbert Armstrong is a "man nobody knows."

## **Tremendous Impact**

There are few religious leaders of the Twentieth Century that have had greater impact than HWA. The February 1986 issue of the Plain Truth magazine (published before his death) showed an English language circulation of 8,075,000. At the same time, the more religiously oriented Good News magazine had a listed circulation of 754,000. The PT began in 1934, and is now distributed in French, Spanish, German, Italian and other languages in addition to English. The World Tomorrow broadcast at the time of Armstrong's death was on scores of television stations in North America and overseas. Membership of the WWC was only a little over 100,000. Yet Church Festival sites were around the world. PT newsstands were located in numerous airports, street corners and other public places. Mountains of free literature were constantly being distributed.

Hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps millions, have gained a better understanding of Bible truths through HWA. There is probably no other religion in the Twentieth Century that had such a vast media impact. Pat Robertson, Billy Graham, and Jimmy Swaggert have not had such universal exposure as the WWC. Ambassador College (later renamed, Ambassador University) is a wealthy

college with luxurious grounds and clean-cut students. WWC offices dot at least 30 countries and ministers and churches are scattered around the world.

The name Armstrong, as well as Ambassador College and the WWC are household words around the world. This is in spite of the fact that the doctrines he taught, such as Seventh Day Sabbath, Holy Days, Tithing, Divine Healing, Sanctity of Marriage, etc., were different from most other religions. Also, he was against the universally accepted doctrines of Trinity, going to Heaven, immortality of the soul, ever-burning hell, Christmas, Easter, born again, and many others.

How did he do it? How did this advertising-man-turned-minister establish and lead such a wealthy and powerful institution, which for over fifty years gave literature away and yet prospered so well? How did he continue to lead and dominate the Church organization he founded until well into his nineties?

Detractors may scoff and say he was an Elmer Gantry, but they are ignoring the amazing success story of HWA.

Thousands of dedicated people have been and are beneficially influenced by HWA's teachings. Joseph Hopkins, in his book, *The Armstrong Empire*, page 216, quotes an ex-member who was impressed with Church members who did their best to follow the Biblical teaching, exhibited tremendous hospitality to strangers, and were fervent in seeking the truth in every subject -- even in nonreligious areas, such as natural health foods.

I have been joyously received into many Church member homes across the country. People who didn't know me before I showed up in their Church Services, invited me into their homes. These are people who sacrifice their money for the Work, who pray for conversion of others, who want above all else for the gospel to go to the whole world for a witness before the end of the age and the return of the Messiah. Their dedication shows the good side of HWA's teachings.

## **The Dark Side**

And yet the dark side is just as vivid. Even though I love and respect the man who taught me so many Bible truths, I would not be honest if I ignored the whole picture. In relating what I know, I will leave everything judgmental in the Creator's hands.

## **A False Prophet**

During World War II, Armstrong taught many false prophecies. He set prophetic dates that were patently false, such as the date of the end of the age and the return of the Messiah. Marion McNair's book, *Armstrongism: Religion or Ripoff?* graphically documents many of these false prophecies. I convinced the librarian

of the Ambassador College Library to unlock a safe and let me see the original copies of the earliest Plain Truth magazines. I confirmed for myself that McNair is telling the truth and Armstrong was a false prophet.

I have heard a tape recording of an early World Tomorrow radio broadcast in which HWA made this prophecy:

“A terrible famine is coming on the United States, that is going to ruin us as a nation inside of less than twenty more years. Alright, I stuck my neck out right there. You just wait twenty years and see whether I told you the truth. God says, if a man tells you what's going to happen, wait and see. If it doesn't happen, he was not speaking the word of God, he's speaking out of his own mind. If it happens, you'll know God sent him.”

The twenty years is long past! Herbert Armstrong labeled himself a false prophet.

## **A Host of Divisions**

Schisms and defections from Armstrong's church became epidemic in 1974, and escalated in 1978 with the ouster of his son Garner Ted Armstrong, who founded his own Church of God, International (CGI). A bitter pill remained at the death of HWA. He had never reconciled with his son, refusing to speak with him for years prior to his death.

Armstrong's doctrinal changes relating to Pentecost and Divorce, and other areas, forced many out of the Church who didn't go along with his changed teachings. A shocking fact is that in the late 1940s and early 1950s Armstrong put members out of the Church for keeping a Sunday Pentecost when he kept a Monday Pentecost. In the mid-1970s Armstrong abruptly changed to a Sunday Pentecost and put members out for keeping a Monday Pentecost! The important thing seemed to be obedience to him as "God's Apostle" no matter what. Those who refused to toe the line on any issue, no matter how small, were summarily removed.

Many hundreds of ex-WWC members are in numerous splinter groups from the WWC. Perhaps an even greater number have left all religion and do not even profess to live by the Bible anymore. When I consider the death of HWA, I grieve at the spiritual shipwrecks that have been produced directly or indirectly by HWA and his ministers. It is sad to contemplate that many continued to hate Mr. Armstrong, and, no doubt, some rejoiced at his death.

## **Soft Gospel Message**

I remember the 1967 death of Loma Armstrong, HWA's wife of nearly 50 years. I recall the fasting I did for her healing. When she died, it seemed that HWA was deprived of her strong support for the good side of his character. It was, perhaps, the next year that he began making contacts with the great secular and political leaders of the world. Visits with Presidents, Kings, and Prime Ministers of many countries were his emphasis from then on. Gifts of costly Steuben crystal paved the way for these meetings which gave glory to the Church and fame for HWA, and political benefits such as favorable articles in the PT for government leaders of questionable character. It was said that these contacts opened the way for public evangelistic meetings. But I never did see published results of baptisms and conversions from these meetings. Instead, the gospel message was merely an "announcement," not an explicit denouncing of sins of the people and the government leadership, nor a call for repentance. In fact, I have heard HWA stop right in the middle of Mark 1:15, not quoting "repent ye, and believe the gospel."

The gospel message was always soft-pedaled so as not to offend others. During World War II, the excuse was that wartime censorship would have taken him off the air if he was too strong. In the 1940s, Burdette Marrs, a leading COG7 elder, made the following comment after hearing Armstrong preach: "That was just a newscast." There were always excuses for avoiding a clear, frank, doctrinal statement of belief to the world, and a really straight-from-the-shoulder message. It might offend someone!

The quality of the ministry of the WWC is a strong indication of the quality of the ministry of HWA. Just as the Apostle Paul said that the Corinthians were his letter of commendation, II Corinthians 3:1-2, so these ministers ordained and trained by HWA are proof of the authenticity of his ministry. Did HWA commit the truths he taught to faithful men who are able to teach others also, II Timothy 2:2?

HWA ordained five men to the rank of Evangelist on December 20, 1953. In the early years of Ambassador College, these were among the top Church leaders below HWA. Two of them, his son Richard David Armstrong, and Dr. C. Paul Meredith, are now dead. One of them, Raymond C. Cole, left the WWC in 1975 to form an independent group, Church of God, The Eternal. The other two remained as top ministers in the church: Herman L. Hoeh, Editor of the Plain Truth, and Roderick C. Meredith, senior writer. In late 1992, Meredith, faced with forced retirement, left the WWC to found his own organization, the Global Church of God.

What are men like Cole, Hoeh and Meredith like? Are they faithful, strong men able to teach others the truth? I like each one of these men. They are capable speakers and good writers.

I was Raymond C. Cole's Administrative Assistant, being closely associated with him for a number of years, both in the WWC and after he and I left. Mr. Cole's job was on the line if Mr. Armstrong didn't like what Raymond Cole was telling him. It

was only due to my youthful brashness and naivete in forcing the issue that brought the conflict to a head. The result was that Mr. Cole was put on a year's Sabbatical "for health reasons," and I was let go from church employment. Raymond Cole had no guts.

Let's look at the scholarly Dr. Herman Hoeh. I felt more comfortable around him than almost any other WWC minister.

The divorce and remarriage doctrinal change was announced at the 1974 Ambassador Auditorium dedication. It was reported that fellow ministers had to restrain Roderick C. Meredith because he was enraged at the change. He calmed down, and later accepted the D&R doctrinal change. Meredith's refusal to ordain Joseph Tkach and Stanley Rader as evangelists ultimately led to his departure in 1992, when Tkach was Pastor General.

One of the most able WWC preachers was Albert J. Portune, long-time Business Manager for the Work. I remember him coming into Mr. Cole's office crying on Mr. Cole's shoulder, with pangs of conscience about the financial manipulating going on. Eventually it became too much for Mr. Portune and he had to get out. It is sad that Mr. Portune gave up most of the truths taught by the Church.

## **No Strong Successor**

HWA did not train anyone to succeed him. After he banished his son Garner Ted in 1978, HWA was the only speaker on the Church's television and radio broadcasts

Mr. Joseph Tkach, age 59 at the time, head of Church Administration for the previous six years was finally named Armstrong's successor by HWA in early January, 1986, just a week before Armstrong's death. Joe Tkach, Sr., is a very likeable person. Tkach is an unknown outside the Church. His name did not appear on the Plain Truth or Good News mastheads until after HWA's death. He is not a noted religious writer, nor an exceptionally good speaker. He has a tough act to follow. I do not envy his task of keeping the Church together. Some have referred to Mr. Tkach as a "hatchet man" because of his running a tight ship during the 1970s legal battle between the WWC and the State of California. It remains to be seen if he can hold the Church together.

In 1973, when I worked in Worldwide Church Administration in Pasadena, California, I knew "Joe" Tkach quite well (nobody called him Joseph then). He was a Local Elder of the San Marino church. In my opinion, he demonstrated little interest or respect for Biblical doctrine. He was a byword among the headquarters ministry for someone who was a social climber and barely qualified to even be a minister. Because of personal observation of some of Tkach's character weaknesses, I determined never to allow my wife Shirley to be alone with Joe Tkach. I have complete faith in her to take care of herself in an

honorable manner, but I did not wish to place her in jeopardy at the hands of what seemed to me to be a smooth-talking lady pleaser.

In 1972, Tkach had told a friend of mine that he, Joe Tkach, a low-ranking elder, would someday succeed Herbert Armstrong. At that time, for anyone to think that Armstrong would entrust Joe Tkach with leadership of the Church would have been preposterous. The odds against such an event would have been astronomical. But in 1986, with the death of Armstrong, that is exactly what happened.

Mr. Armstrong did not leave the leadership of the Church in strong capable hands, which he should have done according to II Timothy 2:2. There were no such leaders available. How could a strong minister with real backbone and tenacity, uncompromising with the truth and above all moral reproach, continue for long in a high position in the WWC? I honestly don't see how it would be possible.

## **Like Father, Like Son**

Herbert's son Garner Ted was the heir apparent after Richard David was killed in a tragic car accident in 1957. The wayward boy had joined the Navy and only after a few hard knocks did he later come into his father's religion.

Garner Ted came close to matching his father's speaking skill, but was not quite as close in writing ability. Whereas his father was a serious analytical speaker, Garner Ted is an emotional, helter-skelter preacher. It must have been difficult being a "preacher's kid." Garner Ted shows visible scars from it all. During the 1960s, Garner Ted was the major radio and television voice of the World Tomorrow. He has more charisma than his father ever did.

As an aside, I do indeed respect Garner Ted Armstrong. I am appreciative of many of the things he taught on the radio and in print during the 1960s and early 1970s. His Church of God, International, is not patterned after the centralized WWC type of Church government. He appears to be sincere when he says all he wants is to preach the gospel and would never go back to Pasadena and work within the Worldwide Church of God. He is right that he will probably never be asked to do so. I appreciate the fact that GTA is sick and tired of Church politics. Who isn't? He believes he is still preaching the same doctrines as he always did, even though the fact is that he has changed a few areas of teaching.

## **The Early Years**

I got another viewpoint of Mr. Armstrong when I sat in the home of Milas C. Helms, the man who HWA admits got him into the ministry. Helms' handsome son Mike is a big strapping man, the very one whose healing Mr. Armstrong

recorded in his Autobiography. M.C. Helms pictures Armstrong as one of the biggest dividers in the Church of God, Seventh Day. For Helms, Armstrong was a "radical" who should have been put out of the Church and who was out to become successful in making himself a millionaire. Helms said that Armstrong's broadcasts had little Bible, and merely appealed to current issues to get people's interest. At one time, Helms kept the Holy Days with Armstrong, but later renounced this practice. The Helms farm is quite large, and they appear to be very prosperous.

The McGill's were another staunch COG7 family intimately involved with Armstrong in the 1930s. The story in the Autobiography of Mr. Armstrong chopping the tree up for firewood to convince Church members that he was not a loafer and should be supported in the ministry, has always been intriguing to me.

The tree-chopping incident and the hard times story seem to be "protesting too much." HWA did indeed experience some lean years before the work became prosperous, but those difficult years should have taught him humility and concern for the poor.

The pork issue was extremely important in the first years of Mr. Armstrong's ministry. He did not at that time believe that eating pork was a sin, only that abstinence from unclean meats was a good physical health law. Many of the COG7 ministry of the time largely believed it was a BIG issue, and would not baptize converts unless they first abstained from eating pork and kept the Sabbath. Mr. Armstrong said that he would baptize converts first, then afterwards teach them about unclean meats.

Mrs. Amy Larson of Portland, Oregon, a Church member since the late 1930s, relates that she once had HWA to dinner and served him roast pork. He said nothing, but took a little. It was only later that she found out he taught against eating pork. He didn't wish to offend Mrs. Larson's husband, who was antagonistic towards the Church.

It is very surprising that Mr. Armstrong gave the impression of being tolerant with regard to church doctrine during the early years.

Because of HWA's tolerant and independent stance, Elder Unzicker of the COG7 refused to baptize Armstrong. HWA states that he had a Baptist minister in Portland baptize him, about 1927 (see The Good News, August 1969, page 4). Who ordained HWA into the ministry of the COG7? That remains somewhat of a mystery, although my historical deduction is that Elder Arvin Stith of Idaho was the minister who performed the ordination of HWA sometime in the summer of 1931. Stith's relatives and associates maintain that Stith claimed he baptized Armstrong. If this is true, then Armstrong was later rebaptized after 1927. I have deduced that this is a slight memory lapse and it was Stith who ordained rather than baptized Armstrong. (Note: According to COG7 member Orville Traver,

Elder Ray Benight said that he and Alice Henion were baptized in 1930 in the Dever District in a creek six miles west of Jefferson, Oregon, by Elder Stith. They were ages 16 and 14 respectively. Alice Henion Benight said that Stith also baptized Herbert Armstrong, near Salem.)

## **Renouncing Erroneous Teachings**

The Conns and Bobbie Fisher cite a 1940s incident that they vividly recall. Mr. Armstrong had at first thought that all of the dead would be resurrected during the Millennium. A woman named Belle Rogers set Armstrong straight when she pointed out the scripture in Revelation 20 about the resurrection after the Millennium. In his early years, HWA was willing to listen to anyone and upon being given Scriptural proof, would renounce erroneous teachings.

## **Early Elders and Ministers**

Little is known today of the early ministers HWA ordained. In addition, the COG7 ministers that HWA associated with during the early years, are totally unknown by most Worldwide Church of God members today. It has been correctly observed that Mr. Armstrong could never work closely with other ministers. His experiences prove this.

Jeremiah Day was possibly the first minister ordained by Armstrong. An old man who came in during the famous Alvadore meetings of 1934, Day was highly respected by Armstrong. Day never preached. He did the Scripture reading before Armstrong preached. Another possibility for the first elder is Claude Ellis, who sang on Armstrong's radio broadcast and gave short sermonettes. Ellis moved to Idaho, stayed with the COG7, and managed an ambulance service.

Dr. Doug Blake, a chiropractic instructor from Everett, Washington, headed a little group there, which included many of his students. Blake left the Church when he divorced and remarried. Another minister Armstrong later ordained at Everett was a Mr. Neff, a gray-haired "smooth talker." He took tithes for himself, deceiving Mr. Armstrong, and when Neff died, the Church there became scattered.

Emil Heibel was trained as a minister and ordained by HWA to assist him in the Eugene Church. Heibel took charge of the Eugene Church when HWA moved to Pasadena. Along with Oscar Spires, Heibel espoused a Sunday Pentecost and led a number of the original Church to form a group separate from Armstrong.

Armstrong sent Pete Bartschi and others to Cottage Grove, Oregon, to preach. As happened in Everett, and Eugene, opposition arose and local ministers appointed by HWA incorporated separately, and kept tithes locally rather than supporting Armstrong.

## Close Ties With Church of God, Seventh Day

Until his ministerial credentials were revoked by the Salem, West Virginia, COG7 in 1937, Armstrong was considered a minister in good standing with the group he later termed "Sardis." At the 1937 Oregon Campmeeting, Armstrong said he and his wife had vowed on their knees to God that never again would they be subservient to any man or organization. Obviously they were reacting to the type of strong laymember control which characterizes some, but far from all, COG7 Churches.

As late as the 1940s, Armstrong was considered just another independent COG7 minister. He frequently asked COG7 ministers to speak at the Eugene Church, and/or the Feast of Tabernacles. These included Frank Walker, Andrew N. Dugger, Ed Severson and John Kiesz. Kiesz remains in the COG7 Denver Group but still keeps the Holy Days. Armstrong spoke at the Scrael Hill and Junction City, Oregon, Seventh Day Churches of God.

The Marion, Oregon, Church was one that didn't invite Armstrong to preach. It was headed by J.J. McGill, who said, "As long as I live, I'll run the Marion and Harrisburg Churches." And this he did! His son Yancy McGill, referring to a minister, O.D. Grimm, who was allowed to speak there, said "He can preach what we want him to preach." With the McGills against Armstrong, it is very surprising that the other powerful farming family there, the Helms, took such a liking to Armstrong in the early days. As related, Helms later rejected Armstrong. The attitude of some of the Oregon COG7 farmers was summed up in this quote: "I'm a farmer, we pay the minister to study and find things out." Today, some 50 years later, the McGills and Helms continue to exert a powerful influence on the Marion and Harrisburg Churches.

Other Churches, such as nearby Scrael Hill (nicknamed "Squabble Hill" because of its many doctrinal disputes) were wide open with many opposing viewpoints. Some were pro-pork and others were anti-pork. The attitude of this camp is summed up in this direct quote: "I've got a Bible; no man can tell me what to preach."

Another "freethinking" Church was the one in Jefferson, Oregon, where the Cole's moved when they left Oklahoma. Raymond C. Cole's father, Otis Cole, remembered that Armstrong and Roy Dailey were co-pastors of the Jefferson Church, speaking on alternate Sabbaths for a time. About 1945, the issue of Feast Days was debated by Dailey and Armstrong. Cole remembered that Dailey spoke first for 30 minutes, during which Armstrong remained quiet. Then Armstrong spoke for 30 minutes, but was constantly interrupted and contradicted by Dailey. They each had rebuttals for 30 minutes. That was the last time Armstrong came to Jefferson to speak. Closed-mindedness, hostility, and the antagonism of Dailey prevented further co-operation.

It is ironic that during the early years, HWA flourished in the "local autonomy" and "liberal" group rather than the strong lay member Church government group. His 1939 article on Church Government, widely circulated today among ex-WWC members, shows his disdain for a centralized Church government at that time. The reason for this practice is clear: the loosely organized groups were the only Sabbath-keepers that would even listen to Armstrong's teachings about the Holy Days. Helms and a few of the other Oregon farmers for a time were leaning towards Armstrong and the Holy Days. They seem to admit they might have kept the Feasts for a short time. The pull of leaving the harvesting of their crops in the fall for the Feast of Tabernacles was too great, and they gave up all attempts to keep the Holy Days.

During evangelistic meetings such as a public Bible Study held in Portland in the late 1930s, Armstrong said nothing about the Sabbath until the last of the meeting series. Mrs. Bodenhamer thought at the time, "has he been fooling us?" Most dropped out when Armstrong brought up the Holy Days. One lady said to Mrs. Bodenhamer, "Why should I burden myself with the Holy Days. The Sabbath is enough." She dropped out. During a time of economic hardship, it seemed folly to those enduring the Great Depression to cease from work during the Feasts and Holy Days.

Frank Walker, a COG7 evangelist in Oregon, met HWA at a 1940 COG7 campmeeting. Armstrong had already broken with the COG organization, but he and his people were fellowshiping with other Sabbath-keepers. Armstrong told Walker that he agreed with the Stanberry organization 90%, but wanted to keep his own radio work, so thought he had to work alone. The opposing Salem, West Virginia, group had wanted to take over his radio work. Armstrong told Walker, "I don't want a tight organization, but I can see it coming." Armstrong sincerely wanted to work with the COG7 people, and said the Holy Days didn't make any difference in them working together. Heibel later told Walker that he (Walker) was almost chosen to pastor the Eugene Church when Armstrong went to California.

After the Everett, Eugene, and Cottage Grove local ministers carried this local autonomy so far as to break with him, Armstrong in the early 1950's did an about-face and instituted a strong centralized Church government. All ministers were paid from headquarters and were under headquarters control. This is what he himself had refused to do with regard to the Salem and Stanberry COG7 organizations.

The recollections of surviving Eugene Church members paint a chilling picture of young Raymond C. Cole being sent from Ambassador College as one of the first graduates to institute "law and order" in the rebellious Eugene Church. It almost sounds like Cole was a tough sheriff cleaning up a town of lawlessness.

One of the early elders ordained by Armstrong, and who remained faithful until his death, was Basil Wolverton. Baptized by Armstrong in the icy waters of the

Columbia River in 1940, Wolverton was ordained an elder in 1942, and headed a little group in Vancouver, Washington. Wolverton was not a strong leader or powerful speaker, but he would give "sermonettes" the longest being about 40 minutes or so. He later became a noted cartoonist and artist. Wolverton wrote and illustrated The Bible Story series for the Church. He was one of my favorites because he had such a great sense of humor, something severely lacking among "religious" folk. It was fascinating to talk with this man.

Elder Garver Gray of Vancouver, Washington, worked with Armstrong for a time, but later pulled away a group that leaned toward the "pentecostal" sentiment.

Ed Blenis moved to Oregon in 1909 and probably led the first organized COG7 effort in the Pacific Northwest in what he calls the "cottage program." This is where small groups met in homes for Sabbath Bible Studies. He became state secretary and collected tithes and sent some to Stanberry. Blenis led the 1937 Harrisburg meeting in which Herbert Armstrong was asked to leave the Oregon Conference and work alone. This is revealing, because more than any other COG7 leader I have spoken with, Blenis is the one most opposed to rulership of the ministers in the Church. He staunchly supported democratic control of the lay members, and thought that a lay member and not a minister should be Conference President. In 1971 when I met the aged Blenis, he was as sharply opposed as ever to centralized Church control. Even that of his own Denver organization. Did Blenis think that Armstrong wanted his own centralized Church government, and did this result in his leading the effort to break all ties between the COG7 and Armstrong?

Robert A. Barnes was a powerful COG7 minister who preached in Oregon at various times during the 1930s and 1940s. A man of strong views, Barnes told me, "I'm dogmatic about what I believe," and "I'll let no man or group tell me what to preach." Barnes considered himself a personal friend of HWA, although he differed with him on many points. He expressed a common COG7 doctrinal position that is totally against what HWA taught. Barnes, along with most of Armstrong's COG7 peers, was very much against alcoholic drinks. Any consumption of alcohol, even for medicinal purposes, was as much a sin to Barnes as adultery. This belief like the Holy Days was a wall of division between Armstrong and the COG7.

## **John Kiesz, "Dropped Like a Hot Potato"**

Perhaps the most well-known and most respected COG7 minister associated with HWA in the early years was John Kiesz. For sixty years, Elder John Kiesz has captivated audiences. The first time I heard him speak, I was startled at how much he sounded like HWA. His topic was the "Wonderful World Tomorrow," i.e. the Millennium.

In the early 1930s, Kiesz was editor of the COG7 magazine, Bible Advocate, and published several of Armstrong's articles that HWA and Elder Taylor were distributing in the Oregon area. With the 1933 division in the COG7, Kiesz and Armstrong both went with the Salem, West Virginia, faction. Kiesz was chosen by lot on November 4, 1933, at Salem, West Virginia, to be one of the Twelve Apostles. Armstrong was chosen at the same time to be one the of the Seventy Elders.

The Twelve had the responsibility of approving the ministerial credentials (ministerial license to preach) of the Seventy. Kiesz was against giving Herbert credentials because of some personal correspondence he had had with him. Armstrong baptized people when they went through a "conversion" experience and before they even kept the Sabbath. He said that eating pork was only a physical sin. The rest of the board of Twelve overruled Kiesz and gave Armstrong credentials. Kiesz relates, "In his autobiography he maintained that he never was a member of the Church of God (7th Day), which is incorrect for we did not grant credentials without one being a member." Armstrong had already commenced observing the Feast Days when he was taken into the Salem organization in the fall of 1934, but it was not an issue at that time.

Kiesz met Armstrong for the first time at Armstrong's Church in Eugene at an all-day Sabbath meeting in June, 1935. Kiesz was impressed with Armstrong's message and delivery. For the next ten years they were to be close associates.

Kiesz relates that in 1937, the Twelve Apostles of the Salem Church voted to revoke Armstrong's ministerial credentials, ostensibly because he taught and kept the Feast Days. C.O. Dodd, who went on to lead the beginning of the Sacred Names Movement, was put out in the spring of 1937 for the same reason. "But the real reason," Kiesz states, "seems to have been because of his uncooperative attitude." Armstrong refused to file monthly reports to Salem, and to take a monthly salary like the rest of the ministers did. This was about \$50 a month. Kiesz, who had opposed Armstrong's credentials in 1934, was not in favor of revoking them in 1937.

After the revocation, Kiesz and Armstrong continued to work closely together. Kiesz himself turned in his credentials in the summer of 1938. Kiesz spoke at two different Feast of Tabernacles camp meetings near Eugene with Armstrong. The last time he spoke was in 1945 at Belknap Springs, Oregon.

Cryptically, Kiesz relates, "Something happened at that meeting which caused Herbert to drop me like a hot potato.' He was by then getting away from some of the ways in which we used to worship." This may refer to altar calls, which HWA at first believed, but later rejected.

## **Kiesz details his differences with Armstrong:**

1. He disagrees with Armstrong's statement that Armstrong was the first one to preach the true gospel for 1800 to 1900 years, and that his teachings came directly from Jesus Christ. "The fact is," Kiesz states, "that what truths he does preach he learned from the Church of God (7th Day)."
2. Kiesz states that Armstrong at one time invited interested people, regardless of belief, to his services, but later allowed only those already in the fold or prospects given special invitations to attend. "Truth has nothing to fear," says Kiesz.
3. Kiesz knew Armstrong when he taught strongly against Church organization, "but now he is so strongly organized that many of his followers actually fear him. It appears now that he is to his followers what the Pope of Rome is to the Catholic Church."
4. Kiesz is against Armstrong's allowing and even encouraging of drinking, mixed dancing, card-playing, movie attendance, worldly music, excessive jewelry. "I consider his [Armstrong's] Church a worldly outfit."
5. Kiesz points out many failed prophecies of Armstrong, which have been fully documented elsewhere. "If he [Armstrong] is God's true prophet for these times, he should never have made such predictions as have miserably failed . . . for the Almighty . . . does not reveal things to His servants which never came to pass."
6. Kiesz reacts strongly to Armstrong's statement that only Armstrong's Church has been giving the message of the final revival of the Holy Roman Empire in Europe just prior to the return of the Messiah. Kiesz says that he and the COG7 have taught this since at least the mid-1800s.
7. Kiesz claims that true believers are "born again" when they receive the Holy Spirit, not at the resurrection as Armstrong teaches. This is another sore issue between the COG7 and Armstrong.

## **Claimed He Was Never a COG7 Member**

Was Herbert W. Armstrong ever a member of the Church of God, Seventh Day? From the 1973 edition of *The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, Volume I*, we find:

On July 11, 1928, a little more than a year after his conversion, Armstrong wrote a letter to A.N. Dugger, leader of the Church of God at Stanberry, Missouri, declining his invitation to affiliate actively with the COG7. Elder Stith had approached him also on the same subject. Armstrong felt the Lord was preparing him for an important mission, and did not feel led to join any organization (page 478).

In June of 1931, a former SDA minister, Robert L. Taylor, who was then affiliated with the COG7, came to Oregon from California. "It was decided by the officers of the [Oregon] Conference that on the next all-day meeting I was to be ordained. All the brethren -- as many as could get their hands through to my head -- laid their hands on me -- on my head, my shoulders, my chest and my back. . . . I was ordained by, and under the authority of, the Oregon Conference of The Church of God, separately incorporated; not the Stanberry, Missouri, headquarters" (pages 364-366).

After the 1933 COG7 split, Armstrong admits that Salem considered him one of "the Seventy." "If the Salem' re- organization did accept me as one of the 70' in spite of the opposition of Messrs. Ray and Oberg [who were against Armstrong's stand on pork], we would go in. Otherwise, we would remain independent." The Eugene church cooperated with Salem, but "did not join' in the sense of becoming an integral part of it. I then began to send in regular minister's reports. We co-operated fully as brethren in Christ. But I did not accept salary or expense money from them. None in our local church put himself under their authority. We kept ourselves free to obey God as set forth in the Scriptures, should any differences come up" (pages 471, 473).

In a member letter dated May 2, 1974, Armstrong admitted, "For some years I worked in cooperation with the [Seventh Day] Church of God . . . . I never joined them -- never became one of their members . . . . I received no salary or remuneration of any kind from either the Salem or Stanberry organization . . . . The story that I went out from them . . . is 100% false! I was never even a member of them."

Robert Geringer, in the 1977 issue of Ambassador Report, pages 68-69, cites a host of witnesses disputing Armstrong's statements. In a letter written to the Salem, West Virginia Church of God, by Herbert W. Armstrong on January 29, 1934, just three weeks after his radio work had begun in Eugene, Oregon, Armstrong states: "I hasten to follow your suggestion, and enclose herewith my acceptance of the ministry of one of the Seventy." The acceptance states:

I am anxious to begin on the ministry . . . in the one body, and am determined . . . to live and teach the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, as found in the Holy Scriptures, and as outlined in the Constitution of the Church of God . . . . Will you please record this my acceptance, and have credentials issued to me . . .

Although Armstrong said that he began the Philadelphia era began in August, 1933 (Autobiography, page 492), in January, 1934, he affirmed in writing that the Salem Church of God was "the one body" -- God's one true church.

In a letter to Salem, West Virginia, dated August 15, 1934, HWA affirmed his views were "in harmony and accord" with their "40 Points of Doctrine" and that

his teaching was "not out of harmony with that of the other ministers of the church."

COG7 Elder E.A. Straub referring to a confrontation with Herbert in 1935, says

When he [HWA] said that he never received that money, Elder Haber [the treasurer] went to his briefcase and he got a check, over \$500. It was over \$500 which was cancelled by Herbert. He said, Herbert, what is this here? You never received any money from this organization? What is this here?' . . . . That was too convincing, I mean, that was an open falsehood.

A ledger book from the Church of God Publishing House in Salem, West Virginia, in 1937, also shows that Armstrong received pay at that time.

Why did Armstrong leave the Church of God, Seventh Day? According to David M. Kauer, secretary-treasurer of the COG7, "it was basically his teaching on British Israel and the observance of the Feast Days which led to his separation from the church" (letter to B.R. Guillory, dated March 19, 1974). However, at a Ministerial Conference in May 1974, HWA claimed that he did not leave the Church of God, Seventh Day because of doctrinal reasons, but because he merely got so busy that he "just didn't have time to work with them anymore."

## **Failure to Give Credit to Others**

The truth is that Herbert W. Armstrong learned much from others. Instead of giving credit to those he learned from, Armstrong often made grandiose claims that he, like the Apostle Paul, learned the Truth straight from the Savior, Galatians 1:11-12. During the Ministerial Conference of May, 1974, Armstrong quoted the above passage, and added: "I say the same thing, brethren!" Armstrong claimed that he, too, learned "by the revelation of Jesus Christ," going on to say, "I was not converted as the result of the teaching or preaching of any man." Again, "I did not go to any minister, to any seminary, to any religious school, to any religious denomination, any man or group of men, but I was taught by God in His Book." In a sermon on July 24, 1976, Armstrong declared, "I came to the truth in a way I know of no other church leader. I know of no other minister who ever came to it by himself through the leading of God in that way."

It has been noted that in many respects, Armstrong's book, *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*, resembles the much earlier book by J.H. Allen, entitled *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright* (published in 1902, copyrighted in 1917, still available from Destiny Publishers, PO Box 177, Merrimac, Massachusetts 01860). Allen's book was written three decades before Armstrong's "exhaustive study" of the Anglo- Israel issue (see *Autobiography*, pages 315-316). Armstrong should have given credit where credit was due.

The booklet, *The Proof of the Bible*, by Herbert W. Armstrong, was copyrighted by Ambassador College in 1958. However, there are many instances of nearly identical language, as well as the order and structure between this booklet and an earlier Seventh Day Adventist publication *Prophecy Speaks*, which was later re-named *David Dare*. Its author, Earle Albert Rowell, copyrighted *David Dare* in 1933. Again, Armstrong did not give Rowell credit.

And finally, there is the remarkable similarity between Herbert W. Armstrong's teachings and that of Seventh Day Church of God independent G.G. Rupert (1847-1922), as I have noted in my article, "The Remnant of Israel," contained in the book *Six Papers on the History of the Church of God*. On at least two occasions, different employees of Ambassador College have discovered boxes of Rupert's works in Herbert Armstrong's basement, including his magazine, *The Remnant of Israel*. There is no question that Armstrong studied the teachings of G.G. Rupert, who died before Armstrong's baptism.

Indeed, HWA was a sifter, inspired by God to sift through the literature of various groups. He then produced a beautiful mosaic of doctrine that was unknown in such quantity and quality since the Apostles.

## **The Beginning, and the End**

Born in 1892, Herbert Armstrong was baptized in 1927, ordained to the ministry in 1931, began his radio broadcast in 1933 and the same year was chosen #40 of the Seventy Elders of the Salem COG7 group. As previously related, his ministerial credentials were revoked by Salem in 1937. The year 1945 was a turning point as his ties with COG7 ministers were left behind. In 1946-47 he moved his headquarters to Pasadena, California, and founded Ambassador College. His wife Loma died in 1967. I believe it was 1968 that the name of the Church, Radio Church of God, was changed to Worldwide Church of God.

In 1972 he said the work of preaching the gospel to the whole world was finished. His son Garner Ted Armstrong was put out of the Church.. In 1973 his son was brought back in, and given the full reigns of power as second in charge under the Church leader.

In 1974, Garner Ted and other ministers convinced Herbert Armstrong to approve a number of doctrinal changes, among them a total change in doctrinal teaching regarding divorce and remarriage. This change allowed divorce and remarriage both in and out of the Church for a variety of reasons. Shortly before this was the major change of moving the date for the observance of Pentecost from Monday to Sunday. During this same time, many left the Church to follow former WWC minister Dr. Ernest Martin, who advocated basic Protestant teachings. These included abrogation of the Sabbath and Holy Days and tithing. Many other ministers and members left to form splinter groups with varying doctrines more in harmony with WWC teachings.

In 1977, HWA "married" Mrs. Ramona Martin, a divorcee many years his junior. After a divorce lawsuit, an out-of-court settlement was made in 1984.

In 1978 HWA banished his son for the last and final time. GTA founded his own Church in Tyler, Texas, the Church of God, International. In 1979, the WWC had a major confrontation with California, which had placed it into receivership on charges by ex-members of corrupt use of Church funds. Armstrong successfully resisted the state and regained total control with the passage of a California state law exempting them from accountability.

In 1986 at the age of 93, HWA died in his sleep. A few days previously, he had turned the reigns of Church leadership over to Joseph Tkach.

Armstrong's Ministerial License Certificate, issued March 2, 1932 by the Oregon State Conference of the Church of God, certified that "H.W. Armstrong is a recognized licensed minister, and apostle of the true primitive faith, that he has labored for Jesus, and among this people for the required period before being recognized in this capacity. He is a man of high Christian character, able to defend the true doctrines set forth by Christ and the apostles, qualified and commissioned to preach the gospel, and administer the ordinance of baptism."

About the last issue of the Plain Truth with HWA's stamp was the February 1986 issue printed prior to his death the previous month. In the last paragraph of his "Personal" column are Armstrong's parting words. He refers to Revelation 3:21 "To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne." Armstrong pointed out that the Messiah is going to rule the entire world, and we, if we qualify, are going to rule with Him as kings and priests. Jesus is the firstborn of many brethren. We can be one of those brethren, if we overcome.

## **Halley's Comet**

Ironically, the lead article in that February 1986 Plain Truth is about Halley's Comet. The article says that the comet is not a sign or omen of anything. I am not dismayed at the signs of the heavens, but is it only coincidental that the comet allegedly portended the death of Antiochus Epiphanes in 164 B.C., the one who desecrated the Temple? Is it all coincidence that Halley's Comet preceded the destruction of Jerusalem by the comet's appearance in 66 A.D., the attack of the Huns in 373, and again in 451, the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, Genghis Khan in 1222 and the English colonization of America in 1607?

Is it coincidence that 1910, the previous appearance of Halley's Comet, saw the death of COG7 pioneer leader A.F. Dugger (father of A.N. Dugger), who predicted a soon-coming Great World War (World War I)? Again in 1986, was it significant that HWA died during the appearance of Halley's Comet again? Halley's Comet is just a bunch of dirty ice circling the sun every 76 years. The

divine Being who put it there in the first place controls the affairs of mankind. History seems to repeat in cyclical fashion.

## **Strengthen The Things That Remain**

Some lost their faith when Armstrong died, because they followed a man and expected their leader to live until the return of the Messiah. Others deified him more in death than they did in life. Surely his teachings will be mis- interpreted by some, as they were during Armstrong's ministry.

A powerful message for the Church today is found in Revelation 3:2-3 in the message to the Church of Sardis: "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou has received and heard, and hold fast, and repent."

What is this talking about? Bible truths are in a dying state, ready to die. We must strengthen them. We must remember how we received and heard them, and hold fast, and repent of our lukewarm and lazy attitude toward the Truth.

I have summarized the basic, root teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong: Sabbath, Holy Days, Tithing, Health (Clean Meats), Divine Healing, Sanctity of Marriage, and opposition to Divorce. These essential doctrinal truths are ready to die, and need to be strengthened.

Affluent lifestyles by the ministry and just plain old financial mismanagement have given tithing a bad name. "Tithing pays," the critics of the Bible say, "it pays well the ministers who receive the tithes." From the way many ministers live, this is all too true. In the matter of health and healing there sometimes appears to be a double standard. Ministers sometimes resort to doctors while making members feel guilty for doing so. Little here needs to be said about divorce and remarriage. HWA and the ministry of the WWC have set a horrible example of marital infidelity, totally contrary to their own former teachings. Why don't hypocrites leave the Creator's name out of their own personal religion?

Revelation 3:2-3 continues to apply vividly to our day: truths once taught and practiced are ready to die out. They are being mouthed by those who do not live them to their full intent. That hurts the Truth more than the Truth merely dying out.

The Apostle Paul warned that after his departing grievous wolves would destroy the flock that he built, drawing away disciples after them, Acts 20:28-32. This has happened to a great extent since the mid-1970s among those in the WWC and its many offshoots. How much more now, after Armstrong's death?

I vividly remember how it was that I was able to hear the Truth proclaimed on the radio and in print. I remember the sacrifice of a man who drove himself to succeed in preaching the Gospel. I remember the 20 quarts of oil he had to use one Sunday morning during the 100 mile drive from Eugene to Portland, Oregon, to do the radio broadcast, because his old car was almost worn out. I remember the tithes and offerings of dedicated believers freely given, often at great sacrifice, so that I could listen, so that I could read, so that God could work with my mind and call and convert me.

I remember the first Worldwide Church of God home I stayed in overnight. When I realized that these people actually got up every morning and prayed a half hour to an hour on their knees for more people like myself to repent and believe the gospel, for the ministry to be given power to speak, counsel and help nourish the Church, I was broken up and amazed. Yes, I remember how I received the truth, and heard it. I am deeply thankful for Herbert W. Armstrong, however imperfect he was, and thousands of others who helped me to come to repentance and the Truth. I will, with the Spirit of the Almighty, hold fast, even if the men who taught me the Truth fall away into error. By the power of the Creator's Spirit, I will strive to strengthen the things that remain, until He comes, or until I die.

Hannah Danielson, sister of Mrs. Fisher, after a personal struggle with the truth, finally was convicted during the early evangelistic meetings of Herbert Armstrong. In her broken Swedish accent, she said, "Vell, I guess ve have to give up and keep the Sabbat." Bless her, and the thousands of true believers like her, scattered around the world.

The true Church has never been one incorporated organization. The gates of hades (the grave) will never prevail against the true Church. "God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him," Acts 10:34- 35.

## **Exiled From His Own Church**

Gerald Flurry's Philadelphia Church of God offshoot idolizes the man who founded the Worldwide Church of God. New prospective members of Flurry's church are asked the question: "Do you believe Mr Armstrong fulfilled the role of the end-time Elijah? If they don't believe this then we don't invite them [to services]" (The Philadelphia Trumpet, Janury, 1993, page 15.

On the other hand, WWC leader Joseph Tkach has sought to bury Armstrong's teachings. Indeed, he has buried them nearly completely. The Good News magazine is dead. Armstrong's Mystery of the Ages book has been put out of print, his United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy booklet has been killed. Many of Armstrong's teachings, such as Trinity, Born Again, opposition to inter-racial marriage, etc., have been reversed or watered down. Then, in 1995, the Tkach blew the lid off. He changed so many of the Church's teachings, such

as the Sabbath, Holy Days, Clean and Unclean Meats, etc., that it could be truly said that the Worldwide Church of God had become another Protestant Church. Herbert W. Armstrong would not be welcome back in the Worldwide Church of God of today! In a real sense, Armstrong has been exiled from his own Church.

This should not surprise us. In the end time, the Savior will be standing at the door, on the outside, knocking for entrance into the hearts and minds of His own people, Revelation 3:19-21. But, this was true long before Armstrong died. In 1973, Herman Hoeh told me candidly in his office: "Richard, this is the Laodicean Church." The legacy of Herbert W. Armstrong (and the whole history of the Church since it was founded at Mt. Sinai and renewed on Pentecost in 31 A.D.) is that God's people, even with His Holy Spirit, have botched it time and time again. They have watered down His Truth and have not kept it faithfully for long. We need the return of the Messiah to make it right. We cannot consistently do the right thing, even with His Holy Spirit. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches" Revelation 3:22.

## **Requiem for Truth?**

Does the death of Herbert W. Armstrong indicate the end of the doctrines he taught? His death definitely did NOT extinguish these truths!

The strength of the Truth of the Almighty is not measured by numbers of copies of magazines, tons of free literature, amount of tithes contributed, Church members, television stations. It is shown in the power it has over people's lives. People sometimes change and corrupt the Truth, but the Truth lives on through scattered believers.

The Truth of God will not die out if we don't die spiritually.

A very deep spiritual lesson is given in Mr. Armstrong's Autobiography. During the Great Depression, the story goes, a poor widow was praying in her basement, with the window open, for God to give her a loaf of bread. Some mischievous little boys heard her pray and decided to play a trick on her. They got a loaf of bread and tossed it through the window. The widow knelt and gave God thanks. The boys jeered that God didn't throw in the bread: they did. But the widow countered: "Maybe the devil brought it, but just the same, God sent it!"

Live by the Truth, no matter where you get it. As it says on the entrance to Ambassador College, "the Word of God is the foundation of knowledge." The Bible is the source of Truth, not a man, and not an organization of men.

**-- written by Richard C. Nickels**

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