

June 2017

Dear Brethren:

We finally arrive at the twelfth and final installment of the succinct summary of Mr. Herbert Armstrong's life and work, a project which began exactly four years ago. As mentioned previously, all of the material being provided here is obtainable by anyone who chooses to read Mr. Armstrong's autobiography and supplemental writings. It would only take a little personal research to get that story. But this particular telling of the story has also shined a spotlight on selected events—mostly unremarked by other writers—which provides clues that explain the ultimate downfall of the Worldwide Church of God. In order to bring that material into the light of day after so many decades—especially for those who have never been exposed to that history—it is hoped that this condensed work will provide a context for the history that still has implications for all that we are doing today.

The *Back on Track* Years

In the aftermath of his son's ouster from the church in 1978, Mr. Armstrong began to define a new mission to try and *undo the damage* that had been done by liberal leaders within the organization during the preceding decade. Most often in writing to the membership, he described this effort as putting the church *back on track*. It was a phrase used over and over again, and one that was quickly parroted by the laity to show support for their founder's efforts.

Less than two years ago, God brought me back from death. Recently I asked myself WHY did God bring me back? HOW has God used me these 22 months? The answer is: PUTTING GOD'S CHURCH BACK ON THE TRACK!

Brethren, we've got to FACE IT! God's Church—and Ambassador College—had been shockingly derailed—SECULARIZED! The whole WORK had become the work of MAN! My son Garner Ted had taken to himself authority never given to him. He took advantage of the fact I was in other parts of the world, carrying Christ's Gospel Message into other countries, to assume authority to CHANGE DOCTRINES, and to CHANGE POLICIES. I had denied him BOTH! Much of it was done SECRETLY! Top-ranking ministers were warned of being fired if they told me what was going on.

Many of the basic BIBLE TRUTHS God had revealed to me as the very FOUNDATIONAL BELIEF OF THIS CHURCH were BEING CHANGED! It was no longer GOD'S College or GOD'S Church! It was becoming precisely what my son is now trying to build—"GARNER TED ARMSTRONG'S CHURCH"! He was surrounded by a small group of secular self-professed "intellectuals." . . .

Jesus Christ is the HEAD of this Church and entire Work.

HOW has He used me, since bringing me back from total heart failure and death? Recently I asked myself this question. Although Christ has made me His Apostle to carry HIS GOSPEL around the world, He has used me since my recovery primarily in SETTING HIS CHURCH AND HIS COLLEGE BACK ON GOD'S TRACK! GREAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE! But the job is not yet complete (*Co-Worker Letter*, July 24, 1979).

For the past two years I have been laboring very hard to be Christ's servant and apostle in SETTING GOD'S CHURCH BACK ON THE TRACK. The entire Church had been derailed. A LIBERAL spirit from Satan had been injected into some in high positions under me at Headquarters in Pasadena. Instead of wholeheartedly OBEYING Christ through HIS WORD, THE BIBLE, there was creeping in, during years when I was in other parts of the world up to 300 out of the 365 days in the year, a LIBERAL spirit of SATAN.

Those leaders to whom I had delegated the responsibility of ADMINISTERING the POLICIES and DOCTRINES Christ had set in God's Church through His apostle, went way BEYOND the authority given them. They started CHANGING POLICIES and watering down God's TRUTH, changing DOCTRINES, compromising—seeing HOW CLOSE they could go—and lead the Brethren in going—to the ways of SATAN! They wanted to be more LIBERAL—more like THIS WORLD OF SATAN. . . .

But for two years Jesus Christ has been using me and those loyally still with and under me to SET BACK ON GOD'S TRACK God's Church.

AND THE CHURCH IS MOSTLY BACK ON THAT TRACK NOW
(*Co-Worker Letter*, September 15, 1980).

How did Mr. Armstrong define what he considered to be "off track" and requiring correction? Notice (from above) that he listed, specifically, *doctrines, policies, and Bible truths!*

Satan has attacked this Work this year and also me personally as never before. But Jesus Christ, as He promised, has not left nor forsaken His Work or me, or us in it. We have been getting His Church and Work back on the track—HIS track—this year. I know He is pleased, because He has blessed this WORK this year as NEVER BEFORE!

Let us now get whatever remains to be put back on the track, and PUSH AHEAD AS NEVER BEFORE THIS COMING YEAR (*Co-Worker Letter*, December 27, 1981).

Notice that Mr. Armstrong seemed always to speak of "back on track" as a *progressive effort*, one making great strides, but not yet fully accomplished. How fully must a train's wheels be *on the tracks* in order for it to be sound again? What was never emphasized in the analogy is that a train even ninety percent *on track* is still ten percent *off track*, and thereby quite unstable. However, the *back on track* phrase would continue to dominate until his death, but always qualified as not having yet been fully achieved:

On behalf of Jesus Christ, Head of God's Church and his work, I THANK YOU with all my heart for your faithfulness and liberality. And what a year it was! The Church and work made great strides in itself getting "back on God's track," and in GIVING and proclaiming Christ's last Gospel message to a dying world in confusion (*Co-Worker Letter*, January 11, 1984).

Now a recap of what has happened to the Church and its work.

God had blessed His Church with an unprecedented approximate increase of 30 percent per year for 35 years. As these liberals began gaining more and more control God removed His blessing. I have often said that God blesses us as we please Him. During these liberal years in the 1970s, the income virtually stagnated. In 1974 the Church experienced a 1.6 percent decrease in income under 1973, the first negative growth in the Church's history. It fell another 4.8 percent the following year.

Since God brought me back from total heart failure, and directed me in removing these liberals, and putting the Church back on track, He has restored His blessings. Income for the Church this year will run two times the dollar volume of 1978. Income growth is allowing the Church to get the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world as a witness as never before. These physical blessings are matched by new spiritual growth and new truth added to His Church (*Worldwide News - Special Edition*, June 24, 1985).

Which Doctrines, Policies, and Bible Truths?

"Back on track" became applied to almost every aspect of church activity, including emphasis on increasing the evangelical outreach work, as well as overcoming personal spiritual laxity. But Mr. Armstrong originally applied it to *doctrine, policies, and Bible truths* which had been corrupted by liberal elements. To gauge how many of those items had been fully restored by 1985—*put back* as they were before liberal ministers changed revealed Truths—what did Mr. Armstrong include on that list to be fixed? From the same letter to the church in June 1985, here is what he wrote concerning *specific doctrinal controversies* in the early 1970s:

I quote now from a memorandum by Leroy Neff, the current treasurer, who was on the first Doctrinal Research Committee [from 1972] and wrote concerning others on the committee. I am quoting this to give an example of the direction some of the liberals on the doctrinal committee were taking.

1. Any marriage where the people are unconverted, or did not fully know what they were getting into, was not a valid marriage.
2. Polygamy was tacitly approved by God in Old Testament times, so multiple marriages or divorces in modern times might just be a form of polygamy by having wives sequentially rather than concurrently.
3. God divorced ancient Israel and then both parties were free to remarry.
4. The ministry should be able to loose marriages that God had joined.

These liberals wanted complete freedom in the Church for divorce and remarriage at will. Other questions raised by the liberals were complete freedom for any type marriage, some more and some less freedom from tithing, doing away with or modifying Church teachings on healing by direct prayer as in James 5:14, complete freedom for women in facial makeup, and even the approval of celebrating birthdays (never approved in the Bible) and even of voting in elections as part of the world.

On the Pasadena campus more and more friction developed between the liberals and those loyal ministers and members who held to the biblical truths God had placed in His Church. It was a sort of cold war of nerves.

It had become custom to hold an annual ministerial conference of ministers at Pasadena headquarters. In the 1974 to 1977 conferences, these meetings had been marred by controversies over doctrinal issues (*Worldwide News - Special Edition*, June 24, 1985).

How many of those liberal ideas actually became approved doctrines during the 1970s? Well, polygamy (item #2) was never approved, but every other numbered point (1, 3, & 4) were all approved (even reluctantly) by Mr. Armstrong in 1974! Yes, it was never his idea, but *he certainly signed off on those changes* (in spite of emphasizing that they were

done without his knowledge). The same is true concerning a change in *the doctrine of divine healing*, when church members in the mid-1970s were advised it was no longer wrong to use the full gamut of modern medicine that had previously been prohibited as an act of faithlessness. The use of makeup was approved at that time as well. The doctrine on tithing had only been modified in a small way, again, with Mr. Armstrong's sign-off, but changed it certainly was! There was never an announced acceptance of the celebration of birthdays, or a change to allow voting. So then, of all the doctrines and policies that Mr. Armstrong listed (and these were by no means all that were actually changed), which ones of them had gone "off track" and needed to be put "back on track"? Apparently, it would imply a need to restore the original teachings on *marriage, tithing, modern medicine, and makeup!* (Remember that the first major doctrine changed through liberal lobbying was the Holy Day of Pentecost when it was moved from Monday to Sunday in 1974. In that June 1985 article, Mr. Armstrong did not reference that Pentecost change, but it certainly had been the *number one target* of those liberals seeking to change church doctrine, as has already been documented.)

Given that Mr. Armstrong was very sincere in his commitment to doing God's will, how is it possible that he would have approved changes to doctrines that he would later claim to be abominations? That same June 1985 article to the church is very revealing:

A primary reason for the contentions and slowing down in the growth of the Church during the liberal years is the fact that, in our desire to hold rebellious and liberal ministers and members within our fellowship, we did not rigidly obey the command of Romans 16:17: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." Also in I Corinthians 5:11: "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat" (*Worldwide News - Special Edition*, June 24, 1985).

So here is an admission that these liberals could have been *pulled up short* early on (especially his own son), but since they were not, that is why the church got "off track."

Which Doctrines Were Actually Restored?

If, by 1985, Mr. Armstrong felt that the church was *mostly* back on track, which of these *particular doctrines* he listed had been *restored* within the church to make that reformation evident?

What about the marriage doctrine? The new liberalized marriage doctrine was *never restored* to the original! The same "new" *liberal change* in 1974 to permit divorce and remarriage was *still being practiced in 1985*, just as much or even more so than it was in 1974. What about tithing? Those "small" changes in defining "titheable increase" were likewise never restored to the original definition. What about the use of modern medicine? Once again, the relaxation in doctrine of the 1970s was *never again restored* to that which Mr. Armstrong originally taught to the whole church. Well then, what about women's makeup?

Finally, yes, we have a doctrine that Mr. Armstrong *made sure* to restore to his original teaching! In fact, earlier, in 1981, he emphasized that the issue of women's makeup was *the very root cause* of all of those problems in the church:

FOR THREE YEARS the living Christ has been working to put His Church back on the track! But how did the people of the living God get off track? . . .

But as Satan maneuvered to start ALL HUMANITY off the track in the garden of Eden, so in these latter days he maneuvered to use the women of God's Church to start the END-TIME Church off the track. And the whole Church was deceived! . . .

Jesus Christ through me has been GETTING US ALL BACK ON THE TRACK, ready for His return to earth as the KING OF KINGS, and Lord of lords. The Church, as HIS BRIDE to be spiritually MARRIED to Him, is to rise to meet Him in the air as He descends. Women of the Church, do you think Jesus Christ will say to me, "SEND A PROCLAMATION TO ALL WOMEN IN THE CHURCH TO PREPARE FOR MY COMING. TELL THEM TO GO TO THEIR DRESSING TABLES, PLUCK OUT THEIR EYEBROWS, PAINT ON NEW ONES HIGHER ON THEIR FOREHEADS, AND USE COSMETICS TO MAKE UP THEIR FACES TO MEET ME IN THE AIR."

No, dear people, I don't think He will have me make such a proclamation. But rather, "Wash the dirt off your faces! CLEAN UP your faces!" . . .

Satan used human reason and make-up and WOMEN to START the ball of LIBERALISM AWAY FROM GOD and TOWARD SIN to rolling in the Church beginning October 1974 (Herbert W. Armstrong, "How Subtly Satan used MAKE-UP to Start the Church Off the Track," *Pastor General's Report*, November 2, 1981; *Worldwide News*, November 16, 1981).

Compare his very strong emphasis upon *one particular point* within the first three years after his son's 1978 departure—women's makeup—with that which he wrote a few years later, in 1985, near the end of his life. By 1985, he was *no longer* claiming that it was women in the church and makeup in particular that had started the problem, but instead, *liberal scholars* who were clamoring for *many changes in doctrine*, of which makeup was only a relatively minor issue.

The point is this: When Mr. Armstrong told members in the early 1980s that *corrupting the makeup doctrine* had been *the major issue* that took the church "off the track," by restoring *that one doctrine* to the original teaching, that became the *best evidence* that the church was now "mostly" *back on track* again. It was a change in doctrine that was *dramatic in its effect* upon the membership, and was easily demonstrated by the fact that women who were previously wearing makeup to church services during the 1970s now came to church without it. It seemed to be a very bold move to "restore" past conservatism.

But again, what about all of those other doctrines that Mr. Armstrong cited in 1985 as having been sponsored by liberals in the early 1970s, like changing the definition of marriage, the teaching on modern medicine, and redefining tithing? And what about the Pentecost change that had really started it all off? Absolutely *none of those teachings* were ever restored! But to the church in the early 1980s, that single reformation on women's makeup made everyone feel that they were finally back in good graces with God again. They were "mostly" *back on track*.

Mystery of the Ages

Perhaps the most lasting legacy produced by Herbert Armstrong in his final years was the release of a new book in August 1985, entitled, *Mystery of the Ages*. Here is what Mr. Armstrong wrote to the church about his last published work:

We of God's true church do keep God's commandments. But the churches of this world say the commandments were done away. Therefore their eyes, even though they do not realize it, are blinded to the truth as revealed in the Bible. That is why the churches of "traditional Christianity" do not and cannot understand the Bible.

This new book MYSTERY OF THE AGES does put the many "pieces of the jigsaw puzzle" properly together. Because the world has been unable to do this, the Bible and the things in the Bible have certainly been a mystery. . . .

This new book MYSTERY OF THE AGES unveils all these mysteries. It puts the many different parts of the "jigsaw puzzle" together. It is, in fact, a synopsis of the entire Bible. It is my prayer that you will read it along with your Bible—that it will make your Bible come alive and understandable. And with God's Holy Spirit dwelling in you, I feel sure that it will. I am now in my 94th year and I feel that this book is the most valuable gift I could possibly give to you. This book is a partial expression of my thanks and gratitude to you for being a co-laborer with me and with Jesus Christ. With all my heart, I do appreciate and thank God for your part with me in the wonderful work in these closing days (*Co-Worker Letter*, September 12, 1985).

In reality, *Mystery of the Ages* did not really reveal anything "new" to church members that had not already been published by Herbert Armstrong many years before. The very same interpretation of the Bible can be found in his 1950s and 1960s publications, as in, for instance, *The Wonderful World Tomorrow—What It Will Be Like*, as well as many articles in *The Plain Truth* and *The Good News* magazines (later turned into booklets). All of these early writings described the same foundational understanding of the Bible in opposition to what is taught in the churches of the world. *Mystery of the Ages* was therefore a very good *repackaging* of what some would call "Armstrong theology." It took the very same teachings that had made his work unique through much of the twentieth century, but now formatted them into a single volume, with a very clever and attractive messaging theme. If one wanted to know how Herbert Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God differed from all other churches, simply read *Mystery of the Ages* and it would all unfold right there in one succinct storyline. The genius was in the organization and simplicity of the work. And even today, more than thirty years after its introduction, used copies of *Mystery of the Ages* are still having an impact upon certain individuals who pick it up for the first time. Amazingly, it really did turn out to be one of Herbert Armstrong's most significant final legacies.

Succession

Mr. Armstrong's health was such that by mid-1985 he seemed seriously to be considering the likelihood that he might not last much longer. That too is reflected in the same article we have been quoting:

A final personal word. In a few days I will be 93 years of age. For some years now, there have been some, like vultures, waiting for me to die. They would like to come back and take over the leadership of the Church in my stead. I have been deeply concerned about this, but in no sense worried. This is the Church of God, not of any man. Jesus Christ is the living Head of this Church. I am not.

And Jesus Christ will never receive any of those who have gone out to draw a following after themselves to come back and lead God's Church into Satan's liberalism. It would be no longer God's Church, even as Ambassador College was no longer God's college, and Christ had to start it all over again through me with one freshman class.

When I have, even rarely, mentioned my concern in this category, the response of members has always been the belief that God will keep me alive. I hope that He will, and I do try to take every care of my health and physical condition, but whether God keeps me alive 10 more years, or only 10 more minutes is entirely in God's hands. Brethren, put your faith in Christ and the living God and not in me. If Christ should remove me, He will direct the Advisory Council of Elders to select one of them to continue leading you until the coming of Jesus Christ in power and in glory. Pray that God will keep YOU in His Church until He replaces this evil world and brings the wonderful, peaceful and blessed Kingdom of God (*Worldwide News - Special Edition*, June 24, 1985).

Again, it appears that he was adamant against his son, Garner Ted Armstrong—or any other minister who had departed—making a comeback within the Worldwide Church of God after his death. And although he had published his confidence in the church Advisory Council of Elders to appoint his successor, in the closing days before his death, he actually changed his mind and decided to appoint his own successor:

This is my first letter to you in 1986, and could very well be my last. Now in my 94th year I am in a very physically weakened state enduring severe pain and with virtually no strength whatsoever. I briefly described my condition in last month's co-worker letter to you, and now it has worsened. It may be that the Work God has given me to do is complete, but not the Work of God's Church, which will be faithfully doing God's Work till Christ, the True Head of this Church, returns.

After much counsel and prayer over the past months God has led me in announcing a decision last week to appoint Mr. Joseph W. Tkach, director of Church Administration, to the office of Deputy Pastor General, to assist me while I am in a weakened state, and should God choose to take my life, to place himself totally in Christ's hands to lead God's Church under Christ, succeeding me as Pastor General, in the difficult times ahead. Christ will lead in the decision about which men will continue the telecast (*Co-Worker Letter*, January 10, 1986).

And indeed, it would be Mr. Joseph W. Tkach who would assume that position after the death of Herbert Armstrong.

Death and Burial

The Worldwide News carried the church announcement of the death of Herbert Armstrong:

Family and Church members, dignitaries and representatives of national governments paid their last respects to Herbert W. Armstrong, 93, at Mountain View Cemetery in Altadena, Calif., Jan. 19. About 4,700 were in attendance.

Mr. Armstrong, apostle and pastor general of the Worldwide Church of God, editor in chief of the Church's publications and founder of Ambassador College and the Ambassador Foundation, died at 5:59 a.m., Jan. 16, while resting in the bedroom chair of his late wife, Loma. . . .

Mr. Armstrong's burial plot lies between his mother, Eva Wright Armstrong (1866-1961), and his wife, Loma Dillon Armstrong (1891-1967). Mr. Armstrong's son Richard (1928-1958), who died in an auto accident, is buried on the other side of Mrs. Loma Armstrong (*The Worldwide News*, January 27, 1986).

That same article also reported on some of the comments made by the new Pastor General, Joseph Tkach:

In a Jan. 16 co-worker letter Mr. Tkach said, "I am deeply saddened to have to inform you that Herbert W. Armstrong's illness has ended in the manner least expected by all of us." . . .

In the letter Mr. Tkach told brethren: "The greatest tribute we can give Mr. Armstrong is to *do the Work* we've been called to . . . Let us *carry on* in FAITH. There is much yet to do!"

The same day, in a letter to the ministry, Mr. Tkach wrote: "God mercifully granted us what Mr. Armstrong considered several additional years of his leadership, to *turn the Church around* from the liberalized path it had strayed onto in the middle seventies. God used him powerfully to get the Church *back on track*."

"I am personally deeply sobered and humbled by the responsibilities God has placed on my shoulders," Mr. Tkach said (*The Worldwide News*, January 27, 1986).


Thus completes a summary of key events in the life of Herbert Armstrong from 1892 to 1986. In spite of some unavoidable expounding along the way, this is still merely a succinct chronicle of those events that are most necessary to document, as a beginning point, in analyzing *the real value* of Herbert Armstrong's work and achievements.

What is the true and lasting legacy of Herbert and Loma Armstrong? Was it merely an empire built by a very determined and very lucky salesman? Is there anything of value that survived the relatively short twentieth-century lives of the individuals themselves? Is it possible that it really did emanate from a purposeful God who used them to confirm real Bible Truth?

That is what a deeper, detailed analysis will seek to determine.

Thank you, brethren, for being an audience for the serial chronicle of this story. There are more pieces to fill in, and God providing, the completed work will include documentation of that which all of you value, and for which you have sacrificed so much.

Yours with sincere affection in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

Jon W. Brisby