

Armstrong, 93, Founder of the Worldwide Church, Dies

By RUSSELL CHANDLER,
Times Religion Writer

Herbert W. Armstrong, a pioneer radio preacher who used his sales talents to build the multimillion-dollar Pasadena-based Worldwide Church of God, died early Thursday at his home in Pasadena. He was 93.

Armstrong "died peacefully at 5:59 a.m. while resting in the favorite chair of his late wife, Loma," church spokesman David Hulme said. The cause of death was "basically just the effects of becoming old, just old age," Hulme added. "He began to suffer with it back in August."

His death was announced two days after Joseph K. Tkach, director of church administration, was named Armstrong's successor.

"I am in a very physically weakened state enduring severe pain and with virtually no strength whatsoever," Armstrong wrote church members earlier this week.

Although television viewers saw videotapes of Armstrong as recently as last Sunday, he taped his last telecast in August, Hulme said, adding that a decision will be made later about whether the taped appearances will continue.

The deteriorating physical condition that marked Armstrong's final months was in marked contrast to the rest of his long and controversial life.

Mysterious, Famous

The jet-setting Armstrong was the patriarch of a religious empire often as mysterious as it was famous. In 1934 he founded the Radio Church of God on a shoestring in Eugene, Ore. He moved it to Pasadena in 1946, renamed it the Worldwide Church of God in 1968 and proceeded to build a lavish church headquarters and the Ambassador College campus near the corner of Orange Grove Avenue and Green Street.

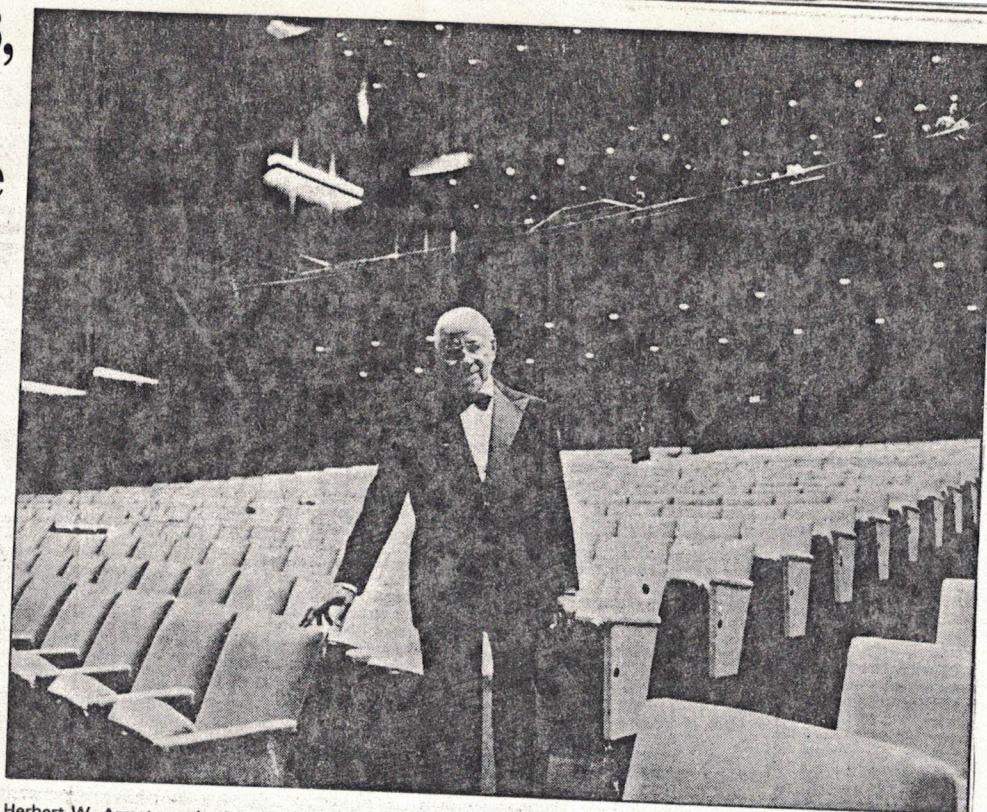
In addition to the 725-student, four-year unaccredited Pasadena school, the church operates a 350-student junior college in Big Sandy, Tex., and controls the education- and culture-oriented Ambassador Foundation in Pasadena. The opulent Ambassador Auditorium, a pet Armstrong project and a showplace for performing arts concerts, was built for \$11 million in 1974.

Armstrong brought in the Vienna Symphony for the auditorium's debut at a cost of \$112,000. A year later the foundation inaugurated a glittering 64-concert series featuring world-renowned artists.

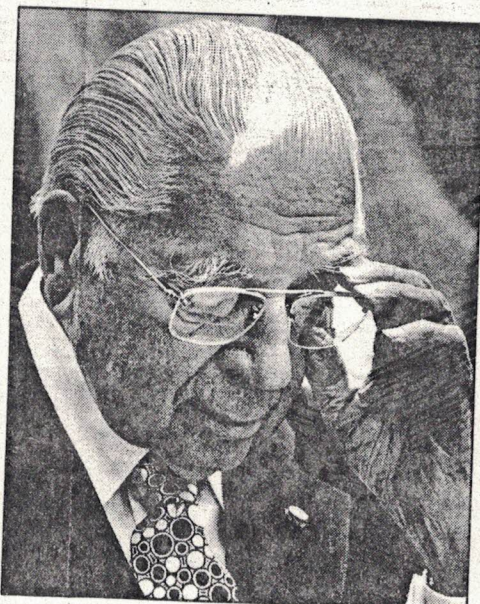
In recent years, saying stress could put a fatal strain on his frail condition, his attorneys repeatedly tried to keep him from having to testify in church-related civil suits. Even when he was in good health, Armstrong ducked court appearances and rarely spoke to the media.

Armstrong suffered a serious heart attack in 1977, but he remained at the helm of

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Herbert W. Armstrong in the newly completed Ambassador Auditorium in 1974; the opulent hall cost \$11 million. Los Angeles Times



Los Angeles Times



Armstrong in 1977, and with his first wife, Loma, during a radio broadcast in the 1930s; she died in 1967.

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All this transpired shortly after Armstrong's son, Garner Ted Armstrong, known as the "silver-tongued" voice of the church's World Tomorrow TV broadcast and heir-apparent to the Worldwide empire, was ousted by his father in an apparent power struggle. The son founded his own breakaway Church of God International in Tyler, Tex.

Garner Ted Armstrong said Thursday that he intended to fly to Pasadena today and attend his father's funeral Sunday.

"He is to be buried in a family plot in Altadena," the son said. "He had asked that it be a graveside service only." Church spokesman Hulme would say only that servi-

ces will be private.

Armstrong also had two daughters. A second son was killed in a traffic accident in 1958.

Born in Des Moines, Iowa, on July 31, 1932, Herbert Armstrong described himself as a precocious youth who at 16 was obsessed with a desire for both wealth and academic learning. He decided against a college education, however, and at 18 entered sales and advertising.

He became interested in religion through his first wife, Loma, who died in 1967. In 1933, Armstrong was elected minister of a small group known as the Church of God, Oregon Conference, a sect that observed a Saturday Sabbath. In 1946, he moved to Pasadena to further develop the independent ministry, he then headed, and he founded Ambassador College to train pastors for his congregations.

The Armstrong empire gained

visibility and funds, but it also ran into problems.

In the mid-1950s, Armstrong had written a pamphlet titled "1975 in Prophecy."

The booklet, underlined, italicized, capitalized and filled with triple exclamation points, predicted that Germany would rise again, creating a United States of Europe which in January, 1972, would attack this country with nuclear bombs. Meanwhile, members of the Worldwide Church of God would "flee or be taken to a place of safety"—the ancient city of Petra in Jordan. After this worldwide destruction, Jesus Christ would return in 1975.

Armstrong withdrew his booklet from circulation when the world did not end on schedule. And although nuclear holocaust did not devastate America in 1972, the Armstrong empire was rocked that

year when Herbert—saying that his son, Garner Ted Armstrong, was "in the bonds of Satan"—put him out of the church for four months. The younger Armstrong was later reinstated, apparently repentant and chastened until the final split in 1978.

In 1974, six ministers resigned, charging the Armstrongs with sexual transgressions, financial irregularities and doctrinal rigidity. When the dust had settled, 35 ministers and several thousand members had left the church; by the end of 1974, nearly 3,000 more had been excommunicated.

Both the Worldwide Church and its leader had a resiliency that surprised many, however. The elder Armstrong maintained control, instituted changes and some reforms, and pursued his cultural and literary tastes until the end of his days.