

December 2014

Dear Brethren:

We are using this month's letter to forge ahead in telling the condensed story of Mr-s. Herbert Armstrong and that incredible work which God did through them beginning in the early twentieth century. In last month's issue, we described the very beginning of that little organized assembly outside of Eugene, Oregon, which would become the Radio Church of God in 1933; and also the inauguration of the *Radio Church of God* radio broadcast (later to be named *The World Tomorrow*), as well as the debut of *The Plain Truth* magazine in early 1934. From the very beginning of that enterprise, God opened the doors for a very positive response that would soon catapult the Armstrongs into a whole different world.

Faith Strategies Begin to Form

Through 1934 and 1935, Mr. Armstrong implemented and sustained his "three-point campaign" of radio broadcasts, monthly publishing of *The Plain Truth* magazine, and local evangelistic campaigns in the Eugene area. Committing in advance, financially, to pay for these programs well beyond his existing wherewithal certainly required an act of faith that God would provide the needed income. And the income always appeared right when required. It was all being operated on a shoestring budget, and Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong were the ones personally doing the lion's share of the manual work required to make it all happen, from the cleaning of local meeting halls to the physical production and mailing of mimeographed issues of the magazine. The hours were long and brutally taxing.

Yet, Mr. Armstrong was still hesitant to commit *very much more* to newer programs without "guarantees" of financial support. He describes that lesson regarding the first opportunity to expand the radio broadcast outside of Eugene, Oregon:

But the point I wish to make is that, by the end of our first year on the air, CHRIST opened *another door*! He opened the door for us to go on station KXL, Portland, then only 100 watts.

But at that time I was afraid to walk through that door—until *after* co-workers had PLEDGED enough money to pay for it. This very letter quoted above [a Co-Worker letter dated December 20, 1934] went on to ask co-workers for those pledges—totalling only \$50 per month, for the year 1935. A coupon form of pledge was mimeographed at the bottom of the second page of the letter.

Our co-workers failed to pledge the needed \$50 per month. And I failed to walk through the door Christ had opened. We had to wait almost two more years before God gave us another opportunity for His work to expand into Portland! Later other doors were opened, when I wanted definite pledges before walking through those doors. But definite pledges was not FAITH.

We had to learn, by experience, that when God opens doors for CHRIST'S GOSPEL, He expects us to start walking on through, IN FAITH, trusting HIM to supply our every NEED (*The Plain Truth*, March 1961, *Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, p. 14).

Although the radio broadcasts and personal evangelistic campaigns continued through 1936, publishing of the magazine issues was interrupted. He simply did not have the time and resources to tend to all of those irons in the fire. Here is Mr. Armstrong's explanation of that:

Not only was the expansion of the broadcasting withheld two whole years, but *The Plain Truth* was suspended from publication, also! After I failed to TRUST GOD by going on KXL when He opened its door to us, we were allowed to print and send out only *two* more issues of *The Plain Truth*—March and July issues, 1935—AND THEN *The Plain Truth* WAS ENTIRELY SUSPENDED FOR TWO AND A HALF YEARS! . . . Not until January, 1938, did *The Plain Truth* appear again! (*The Plain Truth*, June 1961, *Autobiography*, p. 12)

This history is important because it reveals the thinking that Herbert Armstrong consistently used from that time forward concerning decisions about *bold expansions* of the work. What the world would consider as reckless disregard for fiscal prudence would be the *faith philosophy* that Herbert Armstrong would use to make many "audacious" strategic choices to walk through "new doors" in the ensuing years.

By the end of 1936, the *Radio Church of God* broadcast had indeed expanded and was then heard on KXL in Portland, and next on KSLM in Salem, through a networked transmission relay from the KORE broadcast in Eugene. Even though these were all small stations, by early 1937, Mr. Armstrong was reporting to his co-workers a listening audience approaching 50,000 every Sunday. By the end of that year, he was reporting over 100,000 listeners, based upon the mail responses they were receiving. At this time he was still using the "church service" format for the broadcasts, including music and a short prayer as a part of each program, more akin to the "other" ministers who were on the radio. This too would change dramatically as exposure grew.

During this same time Mr. Armstrong continued to try working cooperatively with the other Sabbath-keeping groups in the area, but his success in pastoring expanding local

congregations made possible by his radio broadcasts seemed to have fostered jealousy among the other ministers. After it became apparent that their plots to undermine him would never cease, he finally broke with them and focused exclusively upon serving those who were coming into the church through his own personal ministry.

These continued to be what Mr. Armstrong called "the lean years." His family lived a very meager existence. There were many times when it appeared that there would be no funds to pay the bills, let alone the cost of continued broadcasts on the radio. *The Plain Truth* began to be published again in January 1938, but it was a continuing challenge from month to month to keep it all afloat. Citing a Co-Worker letter from July 1938, Mr. Armstrong paraphrased:

. . . only one in ten of those on *The Plain Truth* mailing list had ever sent a contribution of any kind toward the expenses of the work. And they had never been asked. The few contributors had become Co-Workers voluntarily, without solicitation. The other nine in ten had never received any solicitation (*The Plain Truth*, November 1961, *Autobiography*, p. 5).

He also stated that this same ratio of listeners to contributors would continue to apply (as of 1961) even as that work multiplied exponentially through the decades. But even though he never solicited contributions from his radio audience, the enterprise survived and grew, even if painfully, year after year:

By April 5, 1939, a letter to Co-Workers found in an old file says: "At last, after many unavoidable delays, we are sending you *The Plain Truth*. This issue goes to about one thousand NEW READERS. It is still mimeographed, because we have not enough funds to print it, as we did two issues last year. It is a tremendous task, and nearly all the work is done by Mrs. Armstrong, our daughter Beverly who is office secretary, and myself."

In spite of inside office, lack of light or ventilation, lack of desks, filing cabinets and office equipment, the work was GROWING! *The Plain Truth* circulation was growing. We were not able to get it out every month. There were seven issues in 1938. The June number was only the third during 1939. It was issued as often as there was enough money for paper, ink and postage. Yet already this little mimeographed "magazine" was being read by a few *thousand* people—and a hundred thousand or more were hearing the very Gospel Christ Himself preached every week—besides almost continuous evangelistic campaigns reaching hundreds (*The Plain Truth*, November 1961, *Autobiography*, p. 8).

Next Big Expansion

The next big breakthrough occurred on September 17, 1940, when the *Radio Church of God* broadcast debuted in Seattle, Washington, on 1000-watt station, KRSC. The timing of world events with the war in Europe had provided an ideal opportunity for Herbert Armstrong to address those events in light of Bible prophecy, and people were responding:

By mid-May, 1941, the weekly listening audience, over the three stations in Eugene and Portland, Oregon, and in Seattle, had grown to a quarter million people.

That seemed a huge audience. Indeed, it *was* a huge audience. The work of God, having been started so very small was, as stated before, growing up.

The circulation of *The Plain Truth* had gone up to 5,000 copies. . . . Beginning with the issue of August-September, 1940, *The Plain Truth* had "grown up" from a mimeographed paper to a 16-page printed magazine, bimonthly. By mid-May we were receiving between 200 and 300 letters from radio listeners every week, and mailing out 5,000 copies of *The Plain Truth* (*The Plain Truth*, January 1962, *Autobiography*, p. 11).

Even though this explosive new response to the radio program generated a sense of great satisfaction in the accomplishment, it came with a huge burden of administration:

Think of just the two of us—with at times the help of a girl who knew no shorthand and could not use a typewriter—handling and answering an average of 250 letters a week, beside all the other things Mrs. Armstrong and I had to do! Then having to call in a half dozen church brethren for volunteer help in addressing 5,000 copies of *The Plain Truth* BY HAND. And in those days we had to paste 1-cent stamps on every copy. Mrs. Armstrong had to cook paste of flour and water at home and bring it to the office to paste those wrappers (*The Plain Truth*, January 1962, *Autobiography*, p. 12).

A new office suite became available in Eugene allowing for needed expansion. A secretary could now be hired. Little by little, an infrastructure began to be added to accommodate the growing enterprise.

Seeds of a National Work

It was also during this particular time in 1941 that Herbert Armstrong began to expand his horizons in considering what further work God may have wanted him to do:

The realization flashed to my mind with terrific impact that in WORLD WAR II—already then under way—America being then drawn closer to participation—that *I could see this "sword" of WAR coming* [Ezekiel 3:17–21; 33:1–19]! I looked around. NO ONE had ever sounded this warning! No one was then sounding it! I saw numerous prophecies showing how terribly God is going to *punish* America and the British Commonwealth people for our apostasy from Him. I saw our sins, individually and nationally, fast increasing!

The conviction came. *IF* God opened doors for the MASS-PROCLAMATION of His Gospel, and of this warning, nationwide, I would walk through those doors and proclaim God's Message faithfully, as long as He gave me guidance, power, and the means.

I had no illusions that I was chosen to be the "modern Ezekiel" to proclaim this message. But I did know that no one was sounding this alarm. . . .

Of course I had been sounding this warning all along—but only in the Pacific Northwest. Now I began to see that God intended to send it to ALL ISRAEL. And He had revealed to me that that meant, today, the United States, the British Commonwealth, and the nations of northwestern Europe. The idea of *my* being used, personally, in reaching Britain and these other countries did not yet take sharp focus in my mind. But I *did*, now, for the first time, begin to *think actively and definitely* about this work expanding to the entire United States! (*The Plain Truth*, January 1962, *Autobiography*, p. 13)

The bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, provided the means for Herbert Armstrong to really begin to exploit "a niche" not being filled by anyone else on the radio:

. . . A number of nationally famous news commentators and analysts gained the public spotlight—such men as Elmer Davis, H. V. Kaltenborn, Raymond Gram Swing—and some still in the public eye, Ed Murrow, Eric Severeid, and others—just to name a few.

But these men knew nothing of Biblical prophecy. Not knowing the real purpose being worked out here below, they did not grasp the true significance on the world of the future, of the news they were analyzing. They did not know where it was leading.

On the other hand, none of the ministers broadcasting religious programs had the newspaper and analytical background, nor, I may add, the true understanding of the prophecies, to connect that entire third of the Bible with war events.

Putting the two together—factual knowledge and analysis of war events, with Biblical prophecies—put at my disposal a powerful interest-compelling message (*The Plain Truth*, January 1962, *Autobiography*, p. 39).

Many of the higher wattage radio stations in larger market areas that Mr. Armstrong had contacted (including Chicago and Los Angeles) were not inclined toward additional religious programming. But they did seem receptive to Herbert Armstrong's program. As well, the radio managers where the program was already broadcasting began suggesting dropping the music, given that it was the hard-hitting news analysis that was actually driving the audience response:

At first I was both reluctant and afraid to drop the music. So I experimented by reducing it. No harm resulted. There was no lessening in the response or expressed interest. I reduced it still more. Finally, it was eliminated altogether. We found, as radio station managers had recommended, that our program attracted and held a much larger interest when it started off with analysis of world events and the MEANING, as revealed in Biblical prophecy (*The Plain Truth*, January 1962, *Autobiography*, p. 39).

By the time Mr. Armstrong was negotiating the first expansion into the Los Angeles, California, market with KMTR radio in April 1942, he was prepared to make these significant changes:

The time had come to drop the church-service type program altogether. Since the original broadcast name, Radio Church of God, did not invite a listening from non-churchgoers whom we wished primarily to reach, and since in the world's language the Message of the true Gospel—the KINGDOM OF GOD—is about tomorrow's world, I adopted the broadcast name, THE WORLD TOMORROW!

And so, in mid-April, 1942, THE WORLD TOMORROW went on the air in Hollywood (*The Plain Truth*, January 1962, *Autobiography*, pp. 39–40).

Instead of merely one half-hour time slot each Sunday morning on KMTR, an opportunity opened for daily broadcasts at 5:30 P.M. The cost meant doubling the cost devoted to the whole work at that time. But rather than shying away out of fear, Herbert Armstrong applied the lesson he had learned in 1935 and made the commitment. Here was the result:

But, miracle of miracles!—for once in our experience, the impact of this early evening DAILY broadcasting was as tremendous as the test of faith had been! Not once did I ask for contributions on the air, just as I had refused to do from the first broadcast in 1934. And the mailing address for free literature and *The PLAIN TRUTH*, offered on each program, was then Box 111, Eugene, Oregon.

Not only was there an immediate tremendous increase in mail from listeners—there was a corresponding increase in tithes and offerings arriving in Eugene (*The Plain Truth*, February 1962, *Autobiography*, p. 12).

Mr. Armstrong was not capable of sustaining a nightly program in Hollywood for more than a few weeks. But the experience had shown the fruits that were borne with such exposure. Likewise, pulling back to one day a week broadcasts allowed him finally to contract with WHO radio in Des Moines, Iowa:

Station WHO was, at the time, probably the *very MOST* valuable single radio station we could have hoped to use. It was a 50,000-watt top-ranking station. It was one of *only eight*, of all radio stations in America, that still had an absolutely exclusive channel. . . .

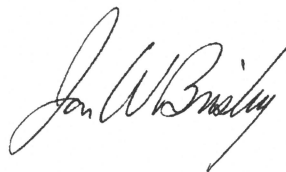
Of course, in 1941, this giant WHO was still completely beyond our reach. But by early 1942, with our income doubled, and with the very low rate offered by the manager of WHO, I felt ready to take this leap.

On Sunday night, August 30, 1942, for the first time in my life I was speaking, from the studios of WHO, *to a nationwide audience!* (*The Plain Truth*, March 1962, *Autobiography*, pp. 19–20).

This was only the beginning of Herbert Armstrong's national exposure as *The World Tomorrow* program began to be heard in every state. Contracts with specific stations would come and go, but increasingly that voice could be heard regularly from anywhere across the continental USA.

Time has been spent in this particular installment to provide additional details showing how that tiny evangelistic work grew from being just a local outreach in rural Oregon to the national enterprise that it became within a few short years. It was that radio broadcast in concert with *The Plain Truth* magazine that provided the platform for Herbert Armstrong to proclaim a brand of Bible understanding never before heard in the twentieth century.

In loving service to the remnant of God,

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

Jon W. Brisby