

Herbert W. Armstrong Turned Hearts to God in Malaysia

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How the *Plain Truth*, YES, YOU, SEP, Spokesman Club and God's Church were established in the region of the South China Sea

By Gareth Fraser

In February 1934, Herbert Armstrong founded the *Plain Truth* magazine. Along with his wife Loma, they produced a few hundred initial copies on a hand-wound mimeograph.

Over the course of the next five decades the publication grew in quality, readership and worldwide impact. By the time of Mr. Armstrong's death in January 1986, subscriptions alone had reached 8 million, with a readership perhaps double or triple that number. Over those years its readers included emperors, kings, princes and princesses, presidents, prime ministers and ambassadors, down to the community of citizens among most nations.

Fifty years after its genesis, during a Far East trip where he met various heads of state, Mr. Armstrong made a historic trip to Malaysia in an effort to serve the country's subscribers in person with Christ's gospel message of the coming Kingdom of God.

This beautiful and unique country spreads across land bordering Thailand to the northeast, Indonesia to the south, and coastal Brunei. Water borders with Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines round out its eclectic geography, which faces the South China Sea.

Mr. Armstrong's "office in the sky," the Gulfstream III jet, touched down in Kuala Lumpur Jan. 21, 1984, for whistle-stop meetings and a special message to magazine subscribers.

Two years prior, he was denied the same opportunity by the Malaysian government.

It's important to understand that half the country is made up of native Malaysians, with additional split demographics of Chinese and Indian residents. Despite this mix of population, the state-recognized religion remains Islam.

This time, with government approval, events ran according to plan. After his arrival, Mr. Armstrong met with Church officials for lunch in the Kuala Lumpur Hilton Hotel, which was also the site of the much-awaited lecture.

The January 30 edition of the *Worldwide News* reported there were 11,364 Malaysian subscribers of the *Plain Truth*. This readership, the popularity of Mr. Armstrong and the Matthew 24:14 gospel message he declared, spanned the South China Sea to the country's east and west.

On the afternoon of his visit, Mr. Armstrong spoke to around 400 of those subscribers, with his message focusing upon the “prophesied events and origins of the problems this world faces.”

Perhaps some in that audience recalled as far back as the early 1960s and an offer for a free subscription to the *Plain Truth* advertised in *Readers Digest* magazine. This campaign resulted in Malaysia’s first subscribers to this prophetic world news “magazine of understanding.” By 1962 the first members of the Church were baptized and the country came under the purview of the work’s regional office in Australia.

Malaysia’s first congregation was in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, which coincidentally was the host city of Mr. Armstrong’s 1984 lecture.

As the work grew, ordinations occurred enabling stability and greater expansion of God’s gospel message in the country. Mr. Armstrong authorized the establishment of Spokesman Club for the development of more converted, God-fearing men, husbands and fathers. In fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6, education of the young between ages 5 and 12 was instituted via the Pasadena, California, headquarters-directed Youth Educational Services (yes) program.

In addition, and in further fulfillment of the prophecy of turning the hearts of parents and teens to each other and particularly to God, Mr. Armstrong established the Youth Opportunities United (you) program for teens ages 13 to 19. A Summer Educational Program (sep) campsite was established at the Bukit Ijok estate, which hosted camps and other activities.

In late 1985, as a parting gift to Malaysians, Mr. Armstrong gave his final and finest work, in the form of the book *Mystery of the Ages*, to members and subscribers, who subsequently were able to read it serially in following issues of the *Plain Truth*.

In the Author’s Statement, he wrote, “It is hoped that this book, written since God’s time for it has come, will open many eyes to the truth of these long-hidden mysteries.

“And now, in my 93rd year, I have been led to write this book before this event-packed life ends, to share with as many as care to know, the answers that the great supreme mind of God reveals in His Word—if one is only willing to understand that Word.”

After his death the light of God’s Word and work through this unofficial ambassador for world peace was all but snuffed out by those he had entrusted to perpetuate his legacy.