



## GETTING THE GOSPEL TO EUROPE

“AND THE gospel must first be published among all nations,” said Jesus Christ (Mark 13:10).

One phase of our global effort to fulfill that commission is reported by Jack Martin, director of newsstand distribution.

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In the late 60s our efforts to get the gospel of Christ to Europe had

reached an impasse. Ads in *Reader's Digest* and weekly newspapers were suffering from the law of diminishing returns. In 1967, the government had outlawed the so-called “pirate ship stations” anchored off the British coast, thus ending commercial radio broadcasting. The possibility of airing *The World Tomorrow* program on the BBC is to this day practically nonexistent.



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# TALKS

The Independent Broadcasting Authority Code states: "No advertisement may be inserted by or on behalf of any body, the objects of which are wholly or mainly of a religious nature, and no advertisement may be directed towards any religious end" (The I.B.A. Code of Advertising Standards and Practice, October 1972).

In 1971, the then Director of Am-

bassador College's Foreign Educational Service (now International Division), Mr. Ronald Dart, suggested a new avenue of approach. Why not place the *Plain Truth* on newsstands? Why not present the gospel directly for people to pick up and take home?

Our first attempt to place the magazine with one of the largest newsstand distributors in Europe

got nowhere. They flatly refused to handle a *free* magazine, despite the offer of regular payment to do the distribution work. However, after much searching, a Scottish-based company agreed to do the job. But getting an agreement was not easy.

In the United Kingdom, retailers receive around 42% of the cover price of most magazines. That percentage represents far more than we



could ever afford as payment for distributing the *Plain Truth*.

But God often deals in the seemingly impossible. The first reaction of the news promotions manager was, "This is very unusual, it's never been done before." Then, considering the unique problems involved, he said: "Leave it with me. I will promise you one thing, the buck stops with me. If it's possible, we will do it."

We waited a week for them to think it over. The day before our second meeting, Mr. Charles Hunting, our circulation manager for Europe, Africa, India and the Middle East, asked if I had a negotiating price in mind. I told him I could not come up with a definite figure. Mr. Hunting had given some thought to this, and suggested that five pence (12 cents) per copy seemed reasonable. It was high enough to be profitable for the distribution house and low enough to be within our means.

Armed with this as a guideline, we went to see the managing director. His assistant asked me on arrival if I had a price in mind. I said, "Yes, but what do you think?" His reply: "Five pence sticks in my mind."

We went into the meeting and the managing director finally agreed to five pence. And five pence has been our average negotiating price in the twenty or more countries we now supply with newsstand magazines.

In our first trial distribution, we planted a "mustard seed" in Britain — only 399 magazines. But 7.5% of those who picked up the magazine wrote in for a one-year, free subscription. The next month, an 8.8% response came from 1100 magazines.

Reassured by these high percentages, higher than from any other media we had used in the United Kingdom, we asked Mr. Armstrong's permission to expand the program. He was very pleased with the operation and gave the go-ahead.

Eire (Southern Ireland) was our next target. The managing director



London, England

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Brussels, Belgium

of the major distribution agency said of the *Plain Truth*, "I like this. We can make it go." And they did! An excellent distribution has now been in operation for over two years.

### Persistence Pays Off

On the Continent the going was not so easy. Two years of searching in France brought us nothing. Finally, in 1973, one of our newsstand representatives was in Paris, determined to begin a distribution in France. He called at the head office of a well-known chain store to arrange an appointment for me. In a short time he found himself in a director's office explaining the magazine and the College. The director was quite interested and said: "I see no reason why we cannot distribute your magazine." This director represented a group which has 359 stores throughout France. Until recently we had supplied 34 of their best outlets with 16,000 copies each month.

Now after a period of difficulty with his chain, whose directors soon received letters of complaint from religious bodies upon distribution of *La Pure Verité*, a new bookshop distribution has been arranged at half the cost!

Recently, another of our representatives located a distributor in Strasbourg, France. His comments on the magazine were, "This is incredible. Strasbourg is the best area in Europe for your magazine in various languages. We would like to display it."

### Breakthrough in Scandinavia

In Scandinavia the going was even tougher. Distributors refused to handle the *Plain Truth* despite discussions over a two-year period. To place such a magazine in Scandinavia seemed almost impossible. In Norway, for example, a monopoly exists between publishers and distributors; a free magazine was viewed with suspicion and disapproval. To accept it might open the floodgates to numerous other



free publications, and commercial publishers would suffer.

But a visit to Oslo, Norway this year broke the ice. The British Embassy supplied a list of department stores and possible outlets for the *Plain Truth*. Delivery would be direct; we would not have to use a distribution agency. One large chain of stores accepted the magazine. Because many Norwegians speak English and have close affiliation with the British people, the managers asked for the English edition.

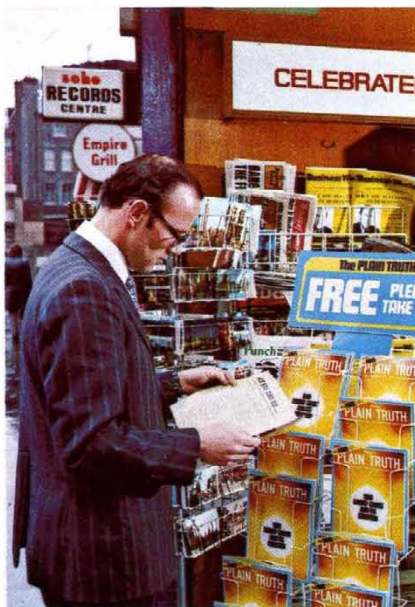
They have given the *Plain Truth* excellent display — better than any of our other newsstand displays worldwide. There are even posters on shop doors advertising “The *Plain Truth* — free inside.” In fact, the management liked the magazine so much we were able to negotiate an unusually low payment for using their newsstands.

Next, we went to Sweden. A representative of the major Swedish distributor had previously told me that the *Plain Truth* will be distributed “over my dead body!”

We now have a fine distribution in Sweden. The British Embassy directed us to a department store with newsstand sections and outlets throughout Sweden. Their marketing manager was so impressed with Ambassador College and the magazine that he asked us to send the president of the company our booklet *This Is Ambassador College* in order to make a final decision on distribution.

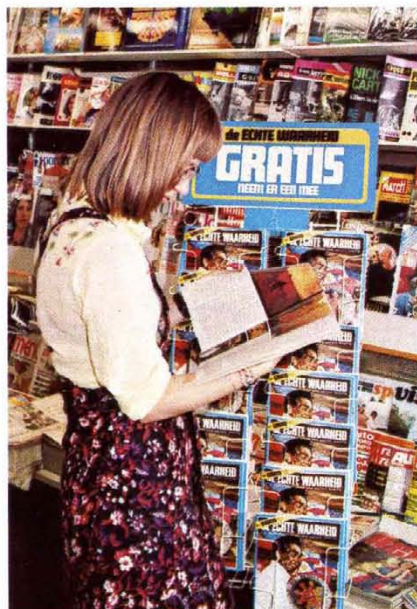
Two days later the president asked to see us: “We are going to distribute the magazine for the smallest charge possible. I am not doing this for money, but because I believe it will be good for the Swedish people.” He has since written to his managers and asked *them* to read the *Plain Truth* each month!

With two down, one to go, we went on to Finland. After much searching we had only one choice: we would have to approach a distributor who had refused us twice before. First we prayed, then we phoned. Both of the men I had seen



London, England

“Do your people really understand what a tremendous and marvelous open door this is?”



Amsterdam, Holland

previously were out of town. Only the president was in and he agreed to see us!

After 2½ hours of discussion, he said, “This is fantastic. We are going to do it!” After two years God had opened the door to all of Scandinavia in one trip.

### Spectacular Growth

Today, 300,000 *Plain Truth* magazines are distributed from newsstands each month in countries as far afield as Japan, South Africa and French Canada. In general, the outlets we use have a high volume of trade and are well situated. They vary from supermarkets to department stores, from airport and railway stations to regular city center news agencies.

Distributors have even placed the *Plain Truth* in the EEC (European Economic Community) and SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters of Allied Powers in Europe) buildings in Belgium, as well as the European Community Center, housing the European Court of Justice, in Luxembourg. One distributor plans a new display in the European Parliament Building in Strasbourg.

From an initial 399 issues we have gathered 160,000 new subscribers for our mailing list at Bricket Wood. Eighty thousand of these people are in the United Kingdom.

The magazine is becoming quite well known in Britain. One newsagent commented that thirty or forty people had recently come into his shop asking for the *Plain Truth*. He was very relieved when we offered to supply him. The wholesale managing director who first accepted the *Plain Truth* in Britain recently said to me, “Do your people really understand what a tremendous and marvelous open door this is? People will flock to get the *Plain Truth* because it offers them solutions to their problems.”

Newsstand distribution has indeed become a very effective open door to publishing the gospel to the whole world before Christ returns. □