

*What in
the world
is God
doing?*

In the 19th century, thanks to the colonial system, missionaries were able to come and go as they pleased without passports, visas, residence permits and other forms of red tape; but when they entered those wide-open doors they found the hearts of the people closed against them. In the latter half of the 20th century the shoe is on the other foot. The political doors are sometimes difficult to enter; but once inside, missionaries find the hearts of the people are wide open. One thing is clear. God is doing a new work in our day and we had better get with Him if we want a piece of the action.

Never before in history have the non-Christian peoples of the world been so open to the claims of Jesus Christ. Millions of people in all walks of life are showing an unprecedented interest in the Christian faith. Animists in Africa, Hindus in India, Buddhists in Southeast Asia, and even Muslims in the Middle East are reading Christian literature, listening to gospel broadcasts, and enrolling in Bible correspondence courses in record numbers. Everywhere the Holy Spirit is at work, creating a genuine hunger for the Bread of Life. And this quest for spiritual reality is not confined to the poverty-stricken masses whose interest in religion might be suspect. It includes teachers, students, government officials, successful business and professional people whose hearts have been touched by the Holy Spirit.

With few exceptions the churches in the Third World are throbbing with vigor and vitality. Missionaries on furlough are using two adjectives to describe the exciting situation in many parts of the world—*fabulous* and *fantastic*. Today the cutting edge of the Christian church is in the Third World. That's where the growth is taking place. Some of the "daughter" churches over-

seas are now larger than the "mother" churches in the West.

It is estimated that in Black Africa some 20,000 persons are embracing Christianity every day. In many churches the Sunday morning congregation is five times larger than the membership. For the first time in history Christians outnumber both the Animists and the Muslims. While a significant percentage is evangelical, many are only nominally Christian.

In Korea six new churches come into existence every day. In Seoul one local church has 30,000 members; another has 75,000. In Brazil some 3,000 new congregations are springing up every year.

The largest single congregation in the world is in Santiago, Chile—with 80,000 members! In Indonesia the churches are growing so rapidly that pastors and missionaries have been unable to provide adequate training for all those who want to join the church. In some parts of the Third World one ordained pastor has the oversight of a dozen congregations. Under such conditions he can do little more than administer baptism and communion.

In the 1960's three new movements got under way—Saturation Evangelism, Church Growth, and Theological Education by Extension. All three are proceeding under full steam on a worldwide scale with results that ten years ago seemed impossible.

Saturation Evangelism, which began in Latin America, has more recently spread to all parts of the world, where it is known by various names. Wherever it has gone it has brought tens of millions within sound of the gospel, resulting in church growth on an enormous scale. One mission leader, after a visit to Africa, wrote:

"In some areas where New Life For All campaigns have been held there has been a 50 percent church growth in one year. The results are fantastic but can only be preserved with thorough follow-up by the churches."

The Church Growth Movement has gone into orbit in recent years. Church Growth workshops have been held in 45 countries. Resource personnel have been unable to respond to the many calls that have come from all parts of the world. Vergil Gerber's book, *God's Way to Keep a Church Going and Growing*, has been published in 35 languages, with as many more on the way.

Theological Education by Extension, which began in Guatemala in 1960, aims to provide basic theological training for older pastors who cannot leave home, church, and farm or business to attend Bible school. By 1965 one hundred students had enrolled in the program. Ten years later there were 300 TEE institutions in 75 countries with a total enrollment of 40,000. Only persons who have served on the mission field can possibly appreciate the significance of this development.

Modern technology has made it possible to proclaim the Good News to all the world. Today there are 65 radio stations owned and operated by Christian missions in the Third World. Most of these are small with local coverage. Others are large and powerful enough to beam the gospel around the world by short-wave. One of these stations in Manila is broadcasting the gospel daily from 27 transmitters in 72 languages to more than two billion people in Asia. Every month 18,000 letters are received from almost 60 countries. More than 1,500,000 have enrolled in Bible correspondence courses. The operation requires a full-time staff of 400.

Another exciting venture is the translation of the Scriptures into over 1,660 languages. The complete Bible is now available in languages spoken by 90 percent of the world's population; the New Testament in another five percent; and at least one book in another three percent. This leaves only two percent without any vernacular portions of the Word of God. The task, however, is far from finished. There are still well over 3,000 tribes still waiting for John 3:16 in their own language. Scores of missions and hundreds of missionaries are now at work on this last frontier.

In the past it was taken for granted that the task of world evangelization was the "white man's burden." In recent years the "younger" churches of the Third World have begun to take responsibility for this work. Today some 4,000 non-Caucasian missionaries are serving in cross-cultural situations, most of them supported by their own churches. There is every indication that these churches intend to accept their full share of responsibility for the evangelization of the world. This is one of the most exciting developments of twentieth-century missions.

Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few." This was never truer than it is today. From every part of the world come calls for help. To meet the desperate need for additional personnel, mission boards have had to depend increasingly on short-term missionaries. The term usually lasts from one to three years. Over six thousand short-termers are now serving overseas. This means that 16 percent of all Protestant missionaries from North America are now short-termers; 25 percent of them sign up as career missionaries when their term of service is over.

And so it goes. All around the world the Christian

Facts & Figures

church is on the move—teaching, preaching, helping, healing, building, growing. For the first time in history we have the tools and the techniques to finish the job of world evangelization in one generation. The only problem is *manpower*. Can we get the right kind of missionary in sufficient numbers to complete the task?



On his return from a recent world tour one Christian statesman said: "The more I see of what God is doing in the world, the more I am convinced that we stand today, *at this very hour*, on the threshold of the greatest spiritual advance the world has ever witnessed. Clearly God is telling us that tens of millions are ready and waiting to know Jesus Christ."

—J. Herbert Kane

WORLD POPULATION. Now stands at 4.3 billion. Annual increase is 1.9%. Christians account for slightly less than 30%. There are more non-Christians in India and China than there are Christians in the entire world.

CHRISTIAN POPULATION. Estimated at 1.24 billion. Includes 740 million Roman Catholics, 400 million Protestants, and 100 million Eastern Orthodox. Evangelicals may number as many as 200 million.

PROTESTANT MISSIONS. Total number of missionaries—56,500. Divided as follows: From North America 37,000; United Kingdom 7,000; Europe 5,500; Third World 4,000; Other 3,000.

ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSIONS. Total number of missionaries—65,000. Of these 6,600 are from the U.S.A., down from a peak of 9,655 in 1968. American missionaries are supported by 240 different missions and orders.

AMERICAN MISSIONS. Mainline denominations (with few exceptions) are retrenching rapidly. Evangelical missions continue to expand. Recruitment is a continuing problem. Older societies, due to deaths and retirements, are barely holding their own. Younger societies are still forging ahead.

WORLD CHRISTIANITY. Christianity is losing ground in Europe; barely holding its own in North America; doing fairly well in Asia (outside China); gaining ground in Latin America; and registering phenomenal gains in Black Africa.

MUSLIM WORLD. Apart from Indonesia the Muslim world has yielded few converts to Christianity. Several Muslim countries are closed to Christian missionaries—Saudi Arabia, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Mauritania, South Yemen. Several Arab countries are using their fabulous oil revenues to promote the spread of Islam, especially in Black Africa. Some 25 million Muslims now reside in Europe where they are making their presence felt. The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 may well spark similar movements in other Muslim countries. In spite of this, however, there is reason for cautious optimism regarding the future of evangelical missions to the Muslim world.

COMMUNIST WORLD. Some 1.3 billion persons now live under Communism. All suffer some degree of religious perse-

cution. Missionaries, of course, are excluded; but national Christians continue to witness courageously. In the U.S.S.R. there are 40 million Orthodox Christians, 5 million Evangelicals, 3 million Roman Catholics, and a million Lutherans. The last two groups are found in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Contrary to popular opinion, Bibles are published and distributed in small quantities behind the Iron Curtain. In China, Albania, and North Korea the institutional church has been destroyed. With the "normalization of relations" between China and the U.S.A. in early 1979 there are faint but encouraging signs that the Peking government *may* be getting ready to grant the religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution. It is just possible that a select group of missionaries may be permitted to return to China.

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