CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 28: 100 Most Important Events in Church History

1962 The Second Vatican Council

In an epochal council, the Catholic Church undertook its most searching self-examination ever and renewed itself for a modern world.

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By nine o'clock on the morning of October 12, 1962, a brilliant Italian sun had broken out after a torrential rain. Twenty-four hundred Roman Catholic bishops began a lone procession through St. Peter's Square toward the Basilica for the solemn opening of the Second Vatican Council. Inside the splendidly appointed church, the bishops took their places in long rows to take part in the ceremony. Near the altar sat observers from other Christian communities invited to attend the council.

Pope John XXIII's opening address had the character of a ***Magna Carta***. He distanced himself from "prophets of doom" who could see nothing in the modern world but ruin. He invited the bishops to consider whether a new age might not be dawning for the church. Instead of condemning the ills of church and society, he called for a positive presentation of the Christian message based on a new appropriation of the Scriptures and tradition, and on a careful discernment of the needs and opportunities of the day. The basic content of the faith was one thing, he said; how it is presented is another, and the council was a great opportunity for a new, pastorally oriented exercise of the church's teaching authority.

End of the Counter-Reformation?

Over two years had already gone into the preparation of the council, which John had announced on January 25, 1959. The most extensive consultation of the bishops in the history of the church had produced over nine thousand proposals for the agenda. On this basis, ten preparatory commissions had produced draft-documents for the bishops now to consider. Throughout this work, the prospect of the council had evoked widespread interest, not only among Catholics, but also among other Christians. The pope had regularly insisted that the council should work not only for the spiritual renewal of the Catholic Church and its adaptation to the contemporary world, but also toward the reunion of Christianity.

The Council met in four sessions over the autumns between 1962 and 1965. The first session was by far the most dramatic and set the direction for the other three. It saw the assembled bishops elect the conciliar commissions, clearly opt for substantial liturgical reform—and, above all, refuse to be guided by the defensive attitude dominant in the doctrinal texts prepared by a preparatory theological commission controlled by "prophets of doom." When the bishops rejected the draft text on the sources of revelation because of its academic, negative, and unecumenical character, people began to speak of epochal change: the end of the age of Constantine, the end of the Counter-Reformation.

Pope John XXIII saw only the beginning of the council, but when he died, his successor, Paul VI, immediately announced his intention to continue it. The three sessions over which he presided saw the bishops produce sixteen documents, all passed with overwhelming majorities, in which the Catholic Church undertook its most searching self-examination ever.

Structurally and in spirit, the council differed considerably from the two most recent ecumenical councils. The Council of Trent (1545) was convoked in the midst of the Reformation crisis and involved

a small number of bishops, drawn almost exclusively from the Latin (European) Church. Vatican I (1869) also met with a sense of crisis, caused largely by the spread of a liberalism that was redefining the role of the church in the modern world, and it was rather strictly controlled in its mode of operations. Vatican II, however, was not called by John XXIII to respond to a particular crisis, but to renew the church in the light of the gospel and to reform it to meet the demands of the late twentieth century. It involved bishops from all over the globe, who were given freedom to set the agenda, choose structures, and write texts.

What the Council Said

The council's text on the liturgy called for the thoroughgoing reform of the church's worship. The text on divine revelation returned to the rich biblical springs of the church's central message, proposed an ecumenically sensitive notion of tradition, and urged a greater biblical knowledge and awareness among the people.

In external matters, the church stopped its foot-dragging and committed itself to the work of repairing the divisions of Christians. The council also made important progress in overcoming attitudes of anti-Semitism.

Finally, the bishops addressed in two documents the challenges of the contemporary world. In the text on the church in the modern world, they discussed the opportunities and difficulties presented by modernity, with a confident belief that the message of Christ could welcome and redeem them, and provided particular proposals for the worlds of culture, politics, economics, and the family. In a brief text on religious freedom, the church stated that the inalienable rights of conscience must govern relationships between church and state, thus going beyond the nostalgia for earlier political arrangements that had dominated Catholic thought until the very recent past.

The conciliar texts in general reflect Pope John's initial orientations. Theologically, they endeavored to recover the broad tradition that the struggles of the last four centuries had obscured. Pastorally they replaced suspicion and condemnation of the modern world with openness and dialogue. Ecumenically, they insisted on the centrality of the biblical Word and the communion in faith and grace already existing among Christians.

The Council's Impact

There is scarcely an element in the Catholic Church's internal life or in its relationship with others that has been unaffected by the Second Vatican Council.

Internally, all of the rites have been reformed and are now celebrated in vernacular languages; a far greater access to the Scriptures is common among Catholics; lay people now exercise many more ministries and have more opportunities for participation; a spirit of collegiality now affects every level of church activity; local churches have assumed responsibility for their own life and mission.

Externally, dialogue has replaced suspicion in relations with other Christian communities, with other religions, and with the world itself. The Catholic Church sees itself much more as a partner in the common task of creating a more human world.

It is no exaggeration, then, to say that the Catholic Church has changed more in the twenty-five years since Vatican II than it had in the previous two hundred.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 65: Ten Influential Christians of the 20th Century

Civil Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr.

No Christian played a more prominent role in the century's most significant social justice movement.

Russel Moldovan

"We must keep God in the forefront. Let us be Christian in all our actions." So spoke the newly elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, which had just been organized to lead a bus boycott to protest segregated seating in the city buses. The president, and new pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist, went on to say that blacks must not hate their white opponents. "Love is one of the pinnacle parts of the Christian faith. There is another side called justice, and justice is really love in calculation."

And so began his public role in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The movement produced scores of men and women who risked their lives to secure a more just and inclusive society, but the name Martin Luther King, Jr., stands out among them all. As historian Mark Noll put it, "He was beyond question the most important Christian voice in the most important social protest movement after World War II."

He was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1929 as Michael King, but in 1935 his father changed both of their names to Martin Luther to honor the German Protestant Reformer. The precocious Martin skipped two grades, and by age 15, had passed the entrance exam to the predominantly black Morehouse College. There King felt drawn into pastoral ministry: "My call to the ministry was not a miraculous or supernatural something," he said. "On the contrary it was an inner urge calling me to serve humanity."

From Morehouse he moved on to Crozer Theological Seminary (Chester, Pennsylvania) and Boston University, both predominantly white and liberal, where he studied Euro-American philosophers and theologians. King was especially taken with social gospel champion Walter Rauschenbusch, whom King said "had done a great service for the Christian church by insisting that the gospel deals with the whole man, not only his soul but his body."

King also admired the nonviolent civil disobedience of Mahatma Gandhi: "Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale." King also believed "Christ furnished the spirit and motivation, and Gandhi furnished the method."

King left Boston in 1953 with his new wife Coretta to pastor at Dexter Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. When he took the position, he said, he had not "the slightest idea that I would later become involved in a crisis in which nonviolent resistance would be applicable."

In December 1955, a young Montgomery woman named Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to relinquish her bus seat to a white man. Local pastors rallied the black community for a city-wide bus boycott, named themselves the Montgomery Improvement Association, and unanimously elected King as president.

King immediately implemented his ideas, insisting throughout the boycott on a policy of nonviolence despite the threat of white violence. Even after his home was bombed, King forbade those guarding his home from carrying guns; instead, he told his followers, "Keep moving ... with the faith that what we are doing is right, and with the even greater faith that God is with us in the struggle."

Throughout the Montgomery campaign, critics complained about the ordained clergy's involvement in "earthly, temporal matters." King, however, believed "this view of religion ... was too confined." He saw his civil rights activity as an extension of his ministry: "The Christian gospel is a two-way road. On the one hand, it seeks to change the souls of men, and thereby unite them with God; on the other hand, it seeks to change the environmental conditions of men so the soul will have a chance after it is changed."

When a year later the boycott succeeded in ending bus discrimination, King was propelled into the national limelight. In 1957 he helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an umbrella for civil rights organizations. The next year, he published his first of seven books, ***Stride Toward Freedom***.

Along with increasing national attention came increasing hostility: while autographing his book in a department store, an assailant stabbed King in the chest with a letter opener. It took some time to get him proper care, and his surgeon later told him, "If you had sneezed during all those hours of waiting, your aorta would have been punctured and you would have drowned in your own blood."

In 1959 King moved to Atlanta to become co-pastor with his father at Ebenezer Baptist Church. The next years saw him organizing peaceful demonstrations in Atlanta (1960), Albany (Georgia, 1961), Birmingham (1963), St. Augustine (Florida, 1964), and Selma (1965). King received death threats, was once stoned, was arrested several times and held in solitary confinement.

In addition, after King criticized the FBI in 1964 for cooperating with segregation authorities, the FBI stepped up its surveillance of King. A mixture of politics and personal animosity prompted FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover to try to discredit King as a womanizer and communist. There was, unfortunately, substance to the first charge but not the second (the most that can be said is that King's early advisers had formerly been members of the Communist Party). Hoover called King "the most notorious liar in the country," and the FBI went so far as to send a letter to King suggesting he commit suicide.

King became increasingly troubled with the dichotomy between his private and public selves, and the burden of leading the SCLC often seemed overwhelming. But his preaching continued to inspire his followers. His greatest oratorical moment came on August 28, 1963, when 250,000 demonstrators gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C. All speakers had their speeches pre-approved, but in King's original, the now-famous phrase, "I have a dream," never appeared. King was the last speaker of the long, hot day. He noted the fatigued state of his audience, and he remembered a phrase he'd heard spoken by a young women who had some months earlier led a service at the remains of a torched church.

"I have a dream," he began, "that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. ...

"I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

In 1964, at the height of his influence, King became ***Time*** magazine's first black "Man of the Year," then the youngest person ever to win the Nobel Peace Prize. He donated the prize money ($54,600) to civil rights organizations.

Beginning in 1965, King's popularity waned as his "dream" grew to include peace in Vietnam. With this, most of white America, as well as many African Americans, distanced themselves from King. But he refused to soften his language about the war: "On some positions, cowardice asks the question, is it expedient? And then expedience comes along and asks the question—is it politic? Vanity asks the question—is it popular? Conscience asks the question—is it right?"

In spring of 1968, King was in Memphis to help with a sanitation strike. On April 3, he told his audience, "I may not get there with you, but I want you to know that tonight that we as a people will get to the

promised land." The following day, James Earl Ray shot and killed King as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel.

The nation mourned King's death, and the civil rights movement fragmented irreversibly. King's influence may have waned in the last two years of his life, but 20 years after his death, his legacy was deemed so crucial to the nation's history that a national holiday was named after him.

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You are There

By January 1956, with the Montgomery bus boycott in full swing, threatening phone calls, up to 40 a day, began pouring into King's home. Though he put up a strong front, the threats unsettled him. One midnight as he sat over a cup of coffee worrying, the phone rang again, and the caller said, "Nigger, we are tired of you and your mess now. And if you aren't out of this town in three days, we're going to blow your brains out and blow up your house." King later described what happened in the next few minutes:

> I sat there and thought about a beautiful little daughter who had just been born... She was the darling of my life. I'd come in night after night and see that little gentle smile. And I sat at that table thinking about that little girl and thinking about the fact that she could be taken away from me any minute.
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> And I started thinking about a dedicated, devoted, and loyal wife, who was over there asleep. And she could be taken from me, or I could be taken from her. And I got to the point that I couldn't take it any longer. I was weak...
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> And I discovered then that religion had to become real to me, and I had to know God for myself. And I bowed down over that cup of coffee. I never will forget it. . . . I prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night. I said, "Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right. I think I'm right. I think the cause that we represent is right. But Lord, I must confess that I'm weak now. I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage. And I can't let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage, they will begin to get weak. . . . "
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> And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world. . . . " Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 65: Ten Influential Christians of the 20th Century

Ministries of Mercy: Mother Teresa

She stirred a generation by touching the untouchables.

Ruth A. Tucker

Mother Teresa belongs to the whole world—not to Roman Catholics only, not to Christians only. Indeed, she is the first religious figure in history to be revered during her lifetime by adherents of all religions and Christians of all denominations. And when she died in 1997, there was a universal outpouring of heartfelt appreciation and reverence for her long life of service.

Humility, simplicity, and sacrifice are the terms most often associated with Mother Teresa and her work—though many who encountered her personally would quickly add tenacity. And this tenacity was often accompanied by a stern, uncompromising demeanor. She was driven by an unswerving conviction that she was called by God to reach out to the poorest of the poor, and this conviction left little room to entertain the objections of government officials, church authorities, or even military leaders.

In a famous televised scene from 1985, she insisted that a government minister from Ethiopia give her Missionaries of Charity two unused buildings to be made into orphanages. With cameras rolling, the minister balked but finally had no choice but to capitulate. Pop singer Bob Geldorf, in Ethiopia as part of his Band Aid campaign, witnessed this exchange in the Addis Ababa airport and remarked, "There was a certainty of purpose which left her little patience. But she was totally selfless; every moment her aim seemed to be, how can I use this or that situation to help others?"

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in Albania in 1910. Her father was a businessman whose death when she was 9 years old left the family in difficult financial circumstances. But their faith sustained them. With her mother and brother and sister, Agnes attended church every day, and she sang in the church choir. Her widowed mother, though nearly destitute herself, volunteered in the neighborhood, caring for an invalid alcoholic woman and later taking six orphaned children into her own home. It was a model of servanthood that did not go unnoticed by young Agnes.

At age 12, Agnes sensed God calling her to his service, but she struggled with how she could know for certain. She prayed and talked with her mother and sister, but she had no real peace. Then she talked with her Father confessor. "How can I be sure?" she asked. He answered, "Through your joy. If you feel really happy by the idea that God might call you to serve him, then this is the evidence that you have a call. The deep inner joy that you feel is the compass that indicates your direction in life."

"By blood and origin, I am all Albanian. My citizenship is Indian. I am a Catholic

The joy of serving God stayed with her, and in 1929, at age 19, she was in Calcutta preparing to become a teacher and a nun. From the beginning, she was concerned for the poor, but for two decades, her assigned ministry was in the classroom—primarily at the Loreto Convent, where she taught geography to schoolgirls. She loved her students and they loved her, and soon they were joining her on weekends as she went into the streets to care for the sick and the hungry.

Mother Teresa's call to devote herself entirely to serving the poor came suddenly. It was a clear call from God, she insisted, not pity for the poor. And it was a call that was not easily answered in the affirmative: "To leave Loreto was my greatest sacrifice, the most difficult thing I have ever done," she later reflected. "It was much more difficult than to leave my family and country to enter religious life. Loreto meant everything to

nun. As to my calling, I belong to the whole world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to Jesus." *—Mother Teresa*

me."

She experienced the call in 1946 while traveling to a Himalayan retreat:

"It was on that train that I heard the call to give up all and follow him into the slums—to serve him in the poorest of the poor. ... I was to leave the convent and work with the poor while living among them. It was an order. I knew where I belonged, but I did not know how to get there."

At 38 Mother Teresa left the security of the Loreto community and exchanged her black and white nun's habit for garb of the street—a white and blue sari. With permission from the pope a year later, a new religious order was born. All of the members were required to take the three basic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, as well as an additional a vow of pledging service to the poor, whom Mother Teresa spoke of as the embodiment of Christ. The nuns were not cloistered, and there was no vow of silence. They lived simply, shared work equally (Mother Teresa helped with the daily washing until she was too feeble to do so), and served the dying and destitute with food, medical supplies, and companionship—whatever they needed most.

Mother Teresa was sometimes challenged about the long-term effects of her humanitarian ministry. For example, she was asked, why give people fish to eat instead of teaching them how to fish? She had a quick response: "But my people can't even stand. They're sick, crippled, demented. When I have given them fish to eat and they can stand, I'll turn them over and you give them the rod to catch the fish."

She was quick to emphasize, however, that she gave people more than "fish." Equally important was that which came from the heart—love and joy. The poor, she insisted, deserve more than just service and dedication: "If our actions are just useful actions that give no joy to the people, our poor people would never be able to rise up to the call which we want them to hear, the call to come closer to God. We want to make them feel that they are loved."

In 1952, four years after she left Loreto community, she opened Nirmal Hriday ("Pure Heart"), a home for dying and destitute people in Calcutta. In the decades that followed, she extended her work to five continents. The first 20 years of the ministry passed essentially unnoticed, but that changed quickly in 1969, when she was interviewed by Malcolm Muggeridge for the BBC. A film and a book (both called ***Something Beautiful for God***) by Muggeridge followed, and soon she was on her way to becoming an international celebrity. Special recognition came from Queen Elizabeth and from the U. S. Congress, and even from Harvard University, which granted her an honorary doctorate. In 1979 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. But she was never fully comfortable in the limelight. "For me," she confessed, "it is more difficult than bathing a leper."

Bathing a leper would be her lasting legacy. Of course, she will also be remembered for the international recognition she received, the thousands of nuns who followed her, and the hundreds of homes established around the world. But the image imprinted on the global psyche would be that of a tiny wrinkled old woman reaching out and touching those consigned to the trash heap of humanity.

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You Are There

In my television interview with Mother Teresa, I raised the point as to whether, in view of the commonly held opinion that there are too many people in India, it was really worth while trying to salvage a few abandoned children who might otherwise be expected to die of neglect, malnutrition, or some related illness. It was a point, as I was to discover subsequently, so remote from her whole way of looking at life that she had difficulty in grasping it. The notion that there could in any circumstances be too many children was, to her, as inconceivable as suggesting that there are too many bluebells in the woods or stars in the sky. In the film we made in Calcutta, there is a shot of Mother Teresa holding a tiny baby girl in her hands; so minute that her very existence seemed like a miracle. As she holds this child, she says in a voice, and with an expression, of exaltation most wonderful and moving: "See! there's life in her!" Her face is glowing and triumphant; as it might be the mother of us all glorying in what we all possess—this life in us, in our world, in the universe, which, however low it flickers or fiercely burns, is still a divine flame which no man dare presume to put out, be his motives never so humane and enlightened.

***— BBC journalist Malcolm Muggeridge in* Something Beautiful for God**

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 94: Building the City of God in a Crumbling World

Costly Love, Radical Forgiveness

What made African bishop Festo Kivengere rejoice in the face of monstrous evil?

Tim Stafford

In 1977, Festo Kivengere, an Anglican bishop from Uganda, published a short book entitled ***I Love Idi Amin***. Amin was the African dictator routinely referred to as Africa's Hitler. Huge, hulking, alternating between charming buffoon and nightmarish thug, Amin murdered hundreds of thousands of his fellow citizens. In February 1977, he arrested and killed Anglican Archbishop Janani Luwum, simply because the Anglican bishops had dared to speak up against illegal executions.

Kivengere was one of the last people to see Luwum alive. He waited outside the building where Luwum was interrogated until guards forced him to leave at gunpoint. Expecting arrest, Kivengere escaped Uganda on foot. Within the year he had published his book.

A living church cannot be destroyed by fire or by guns.

I love Idi Amin? It was almost a reckless statement—as though, to put it in contemporary terms, someone standing in the smoke from the Twin Towers erected a sign saying, "I love Osama."

"The Holy Spirit showed me," Kivengere wrote, "that I was getting hard in my spirit, and that my hardness and bitterness toward those who were persecuting us could only bring spiritual loss ... So I had to ask for forgiveness from the Lord, and for grace to love President Amin more."

Kivengere's testimony goes beyond extraordinary forgiveness. He was an evangelist, sometimes called "the African Billy Graham." His book details outbreaks of revival as, in the same year as Amin's terror, Ugandans celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first missionaries' bringing the gospel. Imprisoned church leaders sing and share their testimonies. People come to Christ in vast rallies. Groups of lay people go from one diocese to another to share the gospel. Catholic and Protestant clergy, long estranged, unite to celebrate together. And all the time, terror reigns and many Christians are murdered. "I knew many homes where the family was living in supernatural peace, in spite of the fact that when the husband and father left home in the morning, they had no idea whether he would return that day or not." "A living church," Kivengere wrote, "cannot be destroyed by fire or by guns."

That statement echoes Augustine of Hippo. In ***The City of God***, Augustine described two kingdoms, one temporal and one eternal. The eternal city of God could not be destroyed by invading barbarians, Augustine claimed, for its foundation was the faithful love of God. How should Christians respond to terrorism? To love your enemy and forgive him even as he crucifies you is the essence of the eternal city, as seen through Jesus' cross.

Kivengere did not pluck such a response from thin air. Ugandans knew their history. In 1885 a new king began to target Christians. His first victims were three of his court pages, ages 11 to 15, who resisted his homosexual advances due to their faith. Offered the opportunity of recanting, they refused and were burned alive in a public execution. Just before their deaths they sent a message to the king: "Tell His Majesty that he has put our bodies in the fire, but we won't be long in the fire. Soon we shall be with Jesus, which is much better. But ask him to repent and change his mind, or he will land in a place of eternal fire and desolation."

Stories like that were famous among Ugandan Christians. So Idi Amin was a familiar type to them. They knew about monsters and how Christians were to respond. Thus, "I love Idi Amin."

Kivengere survived Idi Amin's reign, and after Amin's ouster was able to return to Uganda for years of fruitful ministry. He died of cancer in 1988.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 65: Ten Influential Christians of the 20th Century

Evangelicalism: Billy Graham

As an evangelist he has preached to millions; as an evangelical he put a movement on the map.

William Martin

The litany of accomplishments is familiar. Billy Graham has preached the gospel of Christ in person to more than 80 million people and to countless millions more over the airwaves and in films. Nearly 3 million have responded to the invitation he offers at the end of his sermons.

He was the first Christian, eastern or western, to preach in public behind the Iron Curtain after World War II, culminating in giant gatherings in Budapest (1989) and Moscow (1992) and complemented by unprecedented invitations to Pyongyang, North Korea (1992) and Beijing (1993).

He has been a friend to the pope, the queen, several prime ministers, and every president from Dwight Eisenhower to Bill Clinton. When America needs a chaplain or pastor to help inaugurate or bury a president or to bring comfort in times of terrible tragedy, it turns, more often than not, to him.

For virtually every year since the 1950s, he has been a fixture on lists of the ten most admired people in America or the world. He has received both the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1983) and the Congressional Gold Medal (1996), the highest honors these two branches of government can bestow upon a civilian. Thus, it is hardly surprising that a ***Ladies Home Journal*** survey once ranked the famed evangelist second only to God in the category, "achievements in religion."

Born near Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1918, Billy Graham first attended Bob Jones College, but he found both the climate and Dr. Bob's strict rule intolerable. He then followed a friend to Florida Bible Institute, where he began preaching and changed his denominational affiliation from Associate Reformed Presbyterian to Southern Baptist. To round out his intensive but academically narrow education, he moved north to Wheaton College, where he met and married Ruth Bell, the daughter of a medical missionary, and undertook his first and only stint as a local pastor.

In 1945 Graham became the field representative of a dynamic evangelistic movement known as Youth for Christ International. In this role, he toured the United States and much of Great Britain and Europe, teaching local church leaders how to organize youth rallies. He also forged friendships with scores of Christian leaders who would later join his organization or provide critical assistance to his crusades when he visited their cities throughout the world.

"When God gets ready to shake America, he may not take

Graham gained further exposure and stature through nationally publicized crusades in Los Angeles, Boston, Washington, and other major cities from 1949 to 1952, and through his ***Hour of Decision*** radio program, begun in 1950. Stunningly successful months-long revivals in London (1954) and New York (1957), triumphant tours of the Continent and the Far East, the founding of ***Christianity Today*** magazine (1956), the launching of nationwide television broadcasts on ABC (1957), and a public friendship with President Dwight Eisenhower and Vice-President Richard Nixon firmly established him as the acknowledged standard-bearer for evangelical Christianity.

As Graham's prestige and influence grew, particularly among "mainline" (non-evangelical) Christians, he drew criticism from fundamentalists who felt his cooperation with churches affiliated with the National and World Council of Churches signaled a compromise with

the Ph. D. and the D.D. God may choose a country boy ... and I pray that he would!"

—Billy Graham

the corrupting forces of modernism. Bob Jones accused him of peddling a "discount type of religion" and "sacrificing the cause of evangelism on the altar of temporary convenience." The enduring break with hard-line fundamentalism came in 1957, when, after accepting an invitation from the Protestant Council of New York to hold a crusade in Madison Square Garden, Graham announced, "I intend to go anywhere, sponsored by anybody, to preach the gospel of Christ, if there are no strings attached to my message. ... The one badge of Christian discipleship is not orthodoxy but love. Christians are not limited to any church. The only question is: are you committed to Christ?"

The New York Crusade marked another significant development in Graham's ministry. At a time when sit-ins and boycotts were stirring racial tensions in the South, Graham invited Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to discuss the racial situation with him and his colleagues and to lead the Garden congregation in prayer. The implication was unmistakable: Graham was letting both whites and blacks know that he was willing to be identified with the civil rights movement and its foremost leader, and King was telling blacks that Billy Graham was their ally. Graham would never feel comfortable with King's confrontational tactics; still, his voice was important in declaring that a Christian racist was an oxymoron.

During the decade that spanned the presidencies of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, to whom he had close and frequent access, Graham often drew fire from critics who felt he ought to be bolder in supporting the civil rights movement and, later, in opposing the war in Vietnam. The normally complimentary ***Charlotte Observer*** noted in 1971 that even some of Graham's fellow Southern Baptists felt he was "too close to the powerful and too fond of the things of the world, [and] have likened him to the prophets of old who told the kings of Israel what they wanted to hear."

The evangelist enjoyed his association with presidents and the prestige it conferred on his ministry. At the same time, presidents and other political luminaries clearly regarded their friendship with Graham as a valuable political asset. During his re-election campaign, for example, Nixon instructed his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, to call Graham about once every two weeks, "so that he doesn't feel that we are not interested in the support of his group in those key states where they can be helpful." After the Watergate scandal, Graham drew back a bit and began to warn against the temptations and pitfalls that lie in wait for religious leaders who enter the political arena.

When the movement known as the Religious Right surfaced in the late 1970s, he declined to participate in it, warning fellow Christian leaders to "be wary of exercising political influence" lest they lose their spiritual impact.

As Graham came to sense the breadth of his influence, he grew ever more determined not only to help evangelicalism become increasingly dynamic and self-confident, but also to shape the direction of contemporary Christianity. That determination manifested itself in several major international conferences sponsored or largely underwritten by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA).

In particular, the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin, attended by 1,200 evangelical leaders from 104 nations, and the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, attended by 2,400 delegates from 150 countries, helped evangelicals to see themselves as a worldwide Christian force, alongside Vatican II and the World Council of Churches, an international movement capable of accomplishing more than its constituents had dreamed possible.

Few, if any, developments in Billy Graham's ministry have been more surprising or controversial than his success in penetrating the Iron Curtain. Beginning in 1978, virtually every Soviet-controlled country progressively gave him privileges that no other churchman, including the most prominent and politically docile native religious leaders, had ever received. Graham used these visits to preach, to encourage

Christian believers, and to explain to Communist leaders that their restriction of religious freedom was counterproductive, hampering diplomatic relations with America.

A story from Graham's 1982 visit to Moscow highlights the impact of his diplomatic influence. A group of six Siberian Pentecostals, claiming to be victims of religions persecution, had been living in asylum in the basement of the U. S. Embassy since 1978. A vexing source of tension between the Soviet and U. S. governments, the Siberian Six demanded that Graham meet with them during his trip—with full media coverage. Not wanting to exacerbate an already perilous situation, Graham agreed to the meeting but vehemently refused any media presence. He also refused to meet the group's demands that he publicly call for their release and decry communism, which enraged the Pentecostals and led them to tell the American press, "He was like all the other religious figures who have visited us, nothing special."

However, Graham and his adviser Alexander Haraszti were working behind the scenes for the group's release, seeking, through all of their diplomatic contacts, a promise of safe passage out of the country. This Haraszti received when a Soviet deputy told him, "The Soviet Union will not lie to Billy Graham." Graham sent a letter to the Pentecostals in 1983, outlining the steps he felt they should take. Not long afterward, the two families, together with several relatives who had not been with them in the embassy, were allowed to emigrate. Asked in 1989 to assess his role in the incident, Graham said, "I think [the Soviets] eventually did what we asked them to. I have no way of knowing whether [what we did] was a factor or not. But I think it was."

Graham's proudest achievements may be two BGEA-sponsored conferences in Amsterdam in 1983 and 1986, with a third scheduled for the year 2000. These gatherings, attended by a total of 13,000 on-the-job itinerant evangelists from 174 countries, provided basic instruction in such matters as sermon composition, fundraising, and effective use of films and videotapes. As a sign of Billy Graham's change-embracing spirit, approximately 500 attendees at the 1986 meeting were women, and Pentecostals outnumbered non-Pentecostals. Subsequent smaller gatherings throughout the world have afforded similar training to additional thousands of evangelists.

Indeed, it is plausible that the answer to the oft-asked question, "Who will be the next Billy Graham?" is no single man or woman, but this mighty army of anonymous individuals whose spirits have been thrilled by Billy Graham's example, their hands and minds prepared with his organization's assistance, and their hearts set on fire by his ringing exhortation at the Amsterdam meetings: "Do the work of an evangelist!"

Age and Parkinson's Disease have taken their toll, but they have not quenched Billy Graham's spirit. "My mind tells me I ought to get out there and go," he said, as he was beginning to feel the effects of his disease, "but I just can't do it. But I'll preach until there is no breath left in my body. I was called by God, and until God tells me to retire, I cannot. Whatever strength I have, whatever time God lets me have, is going to be dedicated to doing the work of an evangelist, as long as I live."

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 98: Christianity in China

From Foreign Mission to Chinese Church

Missionaries in China were hampered by pressures from home, mistakes in leadership, and identification with the West, but they planted the seeds that would someday yield an astonishing harvest.

Daniel H. Bays

In the first half of the 20th century, the foreign missionary movement in China matured, flourished, and then died. In these same decades, a Chinese church was born—a church that is today growing incredibly rapidly. From 1900 to 1950, Christianity in China forsook its foreign origins and put on Chinese dress. The turbulent forces of history, which shaped all aspects of China's politics, economy, and culture, also burst upon foreign missionaries and Chinese Christians.

If we take a historical telescope and focus just on two years, 1932-1934, we can see the transformation of Christianity in China in mid-stream. And it began with a transformation of the missionary endeavor itself.

On an autumn day in 1932, Pearl Buck, born in China of missionary parents and herself a famous missionary there, strode to the podium in the ballroom of New York City's Hotel Astor to address 2,000 Presbyterian women. Buck had just received the Pulitzer Prize for her novel ***The Good Earth***. Now she addressed the topic "Is There a Case for Foreign Missions?" Her answer was technically "yes," but it was so qualified and unenthusiastic, and her criticisms of missionaries for being arrogant, ignorant, and narrow-minded were so trenchant, that she left her audience stunned. This event ignited a firestorm of agitated comment by both critics and defenders of foreign missions in almost all quarters of American Protestantism. It was a sign of the times.

Another sign of the times was the publication of ***Rethinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years***, commissioned by John D. Rockefeller Jr., the foremost individual financial supporter of missions in the U.S. Widely circulated and read, the Laymen's Report advocated an overhaul of missionary thinking, especially on such questions as the exclusivity of Christianity.

Also in 1932-33, Robert Service, the former UC-Berkeley track star who had pioneered the establishment of YMCAs in western China, was unexpectedly sacked. In the midst of the Great Depression and dwindling contributions, the YMCA and other well-established missions in China had a massive financial crunch in the early 1930s. Their expensive institution-heavy facilities, especially hospitals, schools, and colleges, swamped the mission budgets. Many missionaries headed home.

The missions movement was clearly on the defensive.

Hopeful Signs

Despite these negative portents, however, there were still enthusiastic young people answering the "call" to China. The China Inland Mission (CIM), that remarkable multinational creation of J. Hudson Taylor's, continued the dramatic growth it had enjoyed since the late 1800s. Its "faith mission" principles (no denominational or other regular financial support) managed to adapt to the new climate of scarcity.

Even as other missions were shrinking because of discouragement or shrinking budgets, the CIM launched a successful campaign to add 200 missionaries. David Adeney, a young Cambridge University student, learned of this campaign for "the 200" and felt a strong call to China. He came to north central China in

1934 and found his niche working with students, which he did until he left in 1950. He established ties which remained intact though dormant for more than 30 years, and which were renewed in heartwarming fashion when Adeney returned to China in the 1980s.

In addition to signs of life in theologically conservative missions like CIM, a wave of Pentecostal revivalism was sweeping through some parts of China. A traveling Norwegian evangelist, Marie Monsen, was the catalyst for the famous "Shantung Revival." Participants saw tongues of fire and heard roaring winds, and some even fell to the ground half-conscious. Pentecostalism, with its stress on the "gifts of the spirit," including prophecy, divine healing, and speaking in tongues, also fed the growth of most of the independent churches that had begun organizing by the 1920s.

In these years it could be dangerous to be a Christian in China, whether foreign or Chinese. A few months after David Adeney's arrival in 1934, one of the most dramatic incidents of martyrdom in China missions history occurred. John and Betty Stam, an attractive young couple who were products of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and had come to China with the CIM a couple of years before, were stationed in a small city in Anhui province (central China). When Communist troops captured the city in late 1934, they beheaded the Stams and killed some local Christians who pleaded for the foreigners' lives, but the Stams' three-month-old child was safely taken to a nearby mission station. This story gained much publicity and motivated many young people to go to the mission field.

The effect was much the same as what happened after the death of Yale graduate Horace Pitkin in the Boxer Uprising of 1900. Pitkin died along with more than 10 other foreign missionaries—Presbyterian, Congregational, and CIM—in Baoding, not far from Beijing. His death spurred a surge in mission applicants, many from East Coast colleges, and the establishment of the Yale China Mission in the early 1900s.

The End of the Golden Age

The Boxer Uprising had begun as a peasant rebellion against the increasing commercial, political, and religious encroachment on Chinese culture by Western nations. The Boxers killed hundreds of foreigners, including about 250 missionaries and missionary children, as well as 20,000 or more Chinese Christians (who were considered traitors). In retribution, the occupying troops of eight nations killed at least that many other Chinese in 1900-1902. It was a disaster for China. Yet paradoxically, this national trauma triggered a national reform movement. For a short time, the xenophobia of the past was discredited and China was more open to the West. (Later, the Communists would praise the Boxers as patriots.)

This gave Christian missions in China the largest opportunity they had ever had—truly a "Golden Age." Mission schools suddenly had high prestige and waiting lists. Members of the elite class became Christians. Rates of growth skyrocketed, especially for Protestants. After the revolution which overthrew the feeble Manchu dynasty in 1911-1912, the provisional president of the young Republic was Sun Yat-sen, a baptized Christian. In 1913, the Republic's second president asked the foreign missionary community in China to pray for the nation. Protestant missionary numbers soared from more than 1,300 in 1905 to 8,000 in 1925. Many Christians were confident that events were moving inexorably towards the "Christianization" of China.

It was not to be. The Golden Age lasted less than two decades, until the mid-1920s. What went wrong? During that time, practically all missions in China failed to sufficiently cultivate a Chinese leadership in their mission structures and to permit that leadership to shepherd the flock into independent and self-supporting local churches. The rhetoric of moving from (foreign) mission to (Chinese) church was always present, but it was mainly hollow. At times it appeared that the foreign mission establishment had given way to Chinese leadership. The national missionary conference of 1907 had only half a dozen Chinese delegates out of more than a thousand; the next major conference in 1924 was called the "Christian" (not "missionary") conference, and more than half the delegates were Chinese.

But looks were misleading. It was at best a partnership, and an imbalanced one at that. In almost all cases, missionaries still controlled the purse-strings. The result was that the best Chinese leaders nurtured by the Protestants—such as Cheng Jingyi, respected head of the Church of Christ in China, and Yu Richang (David Z. T. Yui), gifted national secretary of the YMCA—never shed the image of being subordinate to foreign missionaries.

The Protestants put Chinese in leadership roles where they at least had the appearance of responsibility and power, even if that power was limited by close association with foreign missions. The Roman Catholic Church in China suffered even more from tokenism. The Catholic hierarchies in China had for decades permitted (and closely supervised) the training of Chinese priests, who were given mundane tasks and little responsibility. But no Chinese bishops were consecrated until 1926, after a couple of maverick European missionary priests, in particular Fr. Vincent Lebbe, convinced the pope to break the stranglehold that the European hierarchy had over the Chinese clergy. Even so, Chinese priests still continued to be largely relegated to secondary roles in the local parishes, and the new Chinese bishops were shunted into subsidiary functions.

Tainted by Association

There was almost certainly no conscious conspiracy among foreign missionaries to deprive Chinese leaders of the means of emerging and flourishing. There was often respect, genuine friendship, and collegial cooperation between missionaries and Chinese priests and pastors. But in the new political atmosphere that was brewing after 1920 in China, such ties were fatally compromising to the Chinese involved.

In the 1920s, popular resentment against foreigners' legal privileges in China, which dated back to treaties signed by the Manchu government in the mid-1800s, boiled over. This popular nationalism fueled the rapid rise of two major political parties that have dominated Chinese politics from the 1920s to the present: the Kuomintang (the Nationalists) and the Communists, which became bitter rivals and then mortal enemies. The leader of the Nationalists was Chiang Kai-shek, himself a Christian convert and married to Soong Mei-ling, the daughter of one of China's most prominent Christian families. Under Chiang, there were several other Christians in government positions and polite, even cordial relations with the foreign mission establishment. But even Chiang agreed that foreign privileges should be eliminated as soon as possible, especially immunity from Chinese laws.

Missionaries were among those who enjoyed these privileges. There had been the occasional missionary prophet (for example, Frank Rawlinson, editor of the Shanghai missionary journal ***The Chinese Recorder***) who warned that the seeds of the "treaty system," as it was called, might bring a harvest of wrath someday. That day arrived in the mid 1920s, and the most radical elements of Chinese opinion considered missionaries, and for that matter Chinese Christians as well, lackeys of foreign governments and of "world capitalist exploitation."

These attitudes, which pervaded the Communist Party, continued strong until the last foreign missionaries were expelled from China in 1951-1952 by the new government. The missionary community, and the mission project as a whole, paid a high price for its failure to distance itself from at least some aspects of Western political, military, and economic power in China.

This portrayal of the missionary record may seem unfair to some. Missions had brought many blessings to China. Chinese Christian schools had been the first places where Chinese could receive a modern education, and the first to permit enrollment of girls and to employ women teachers. Missionary hospitals and clinics had saved tens of thousands of lives, and missionary-coordinated famine relief saved hundreds of thousands, if not millions. Missionaries had been leaders in the movements to abolish the opium trade and to end the custom of binding and crippling the feet of young girls as a means of increasing their desirability for marriage.

All in all, the missionaries' contribution to the making of modern China was considerable. Though they were reviled and demonized by the new regime after 1949, they are quietly given credit for their accomplishments and warmly welcomed back to visit China today.

Homegrown Faith

If missions were anathema to many Chinese, and many Chinese Christians were tainted by their identification with foreign missionaries, how did Christianity enter the Communist period with enough resilience to survive the dark valley of 30 years and to flourish since 1980?

After Japan went to war with China in 1937, most missionaries left, but hundreds stayed in "Free China," beyond Japanese reach, and ministered during the Pacific War. About 1000 others were interned in camps by the Japanese, where many died, including Eric Liddell of ***Chariots of Fire*** fame. Chinese Christians who remained under Japanese rule now suddenly had full responsibility for their churches and fellowships, and many rose to the challenge, developing leadership skills that were later useful under Communism.

In the brief period between the Japanese surrender in August 1945 and the Communist victory in 1949, a few thousand missionaries returned (including David Adeney). By this time the hated treaties were gone, and foreigners were under Chinese law. But after the Communists took the upper hand in the civil war and established their new government, they decided in 1951, in the context of the Korean War, to expel all foreign missionaries. Dramatic stories abound about the extrication of the last missionaries from the remote hinterlands of China.

Thus ended the foreign missions movement in China, but not the Christian movement. From the 1920s on, there had been another, very healthy development: the growth of independent, wholly Chinese-led movements that had roots deep enough for believers to hold fast when the storms came. By 1949, it is likely that 25% of Chinese Protestants were in these independent churches. They constitute a surprisingly little-known story, with some fascinating personalities.

The fiery evangelist John Sung traveled the country and drew huge crowds. Fundamentalist pastor Wang Mingdao (who would have a fateful clash with the new regime in the 1950s) built his own "tabernacle" for services in Beijing in addition to speaking all over China. Watchman Nee was working out his Holy-Spirit-centered theology. Paul Wei, a Beijing cloth dealer, founded the True Jesus Church, which grew explosively. Jing Dianying developed and ruled rural Christian communities of the "Jesus Family," based on the principles of common ownership and group-directed life. There were important female leaders as well, including Mary Stone. Her Bethel Seminary in Shanghai produced the "Bethel Band" of zealous young musician-evangelists, who spread revival all over China.

Resilient groups of believers carried on, both in the missionary-related and the independent churches. The missionaries were flawed but sincere sowers of the seed; it was left to the Chinese Christians to take their faith into the last half of the 20th century and reap a bountiful harvest in the 1980s and beyond.

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A Gallery of Missionaries

Lemuel Nelson Bell (1894-1973). L. Nelson Bell and his wife Virginia were medical missionaries for the Southern Presbyterian Church. They served at the Love and Mercy Hospital in Qingjiangpu, in the province of Jiangsu, for 25 years before finally returning the U.S. in 1941 during the Japanese occupation. Their daughter Ruth (far right), the future Mrs. Billy Graham, was born in China. In 1956, Bell and Graham co-founded ***Christianity Today*** magazine.

Minnie Vautrin (1886-1941). As a teacher at the Ginling (Jinling) College in Nanjing, American

missionary Wilhelmina (Minnie) Vautrin was in the city when the Japanese army invaded and the horrific "Rape of Nanking" occurred. Rather than fleeing, Minnie stayed and turned the college into an asylum for thousands of women and children, saving many lives. But the memory of the looting, burning, raping, and killing she had witnessed haunted her. She later had a nervous breakdown, was hospitalized in the U.S, and took her own life.

Frédéric-Vincent Lebbe (1877-1940). Born in Belgium, Catholic missionary Vincent Lebbe became a Chinese citizen because he believed that missionaries should identify as closely as possible with the Chinese people. He strongly advocated the consecration of Chinese bishops, and his influence eventually led to this ideal becoming a reality. He was taken captive by the Communists in 1940 and died soon after.

John and Betty Stam (1906/07-1934). One of the most dramatic missionary martyr stories of 20th-century China was the public beheading of the Stams, a young CIM couple who had graduated from Moody Bible Institute, by Communist soldiers in 1934. Their baby daughter Helen was hidden in blankets and rescued by Chinese Christians. The courage of the Stams inspired many others to become missionaries.

Eric Liddell (1902-1945). Olympic-gold-medal winner Eric Liddell, celebrated in the movie ***Chariots of Fire***, ran a much harder race than most people know about. After the Olympics, he moved to China, where his family were missionaries. During the Japanese invasion, all foreigners were interned in prison camps. Eric was a beloved spiritual leader and friend in his camp, showing special concern for the young people. He died of a brain tumor only months before the camp was liberated.

Jonathan Goforth (1859-1936). After barely escaping from the Boxer Uprising, Canadian missionaries Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth returned to China in 1901. Jonathan prayed that God would bring revival to China as he had in Korea, and in 1908 Jonathan witnessed such a revival while preaching in Manchuria. For the next three decades, he became one of the most widely known itinerant evangelists in China.

The Billy Graham of China
John Sung (1901-1944)

Though his ministry lasted only a dozen years, John Sung blazed a flaming trail of revival across China and most of Southeast Asia. Born the son of a pastor in southern China in 1901, he was sent by his family to the United States for theological study. Instead, he enrolled in a university and went on to earn a Ph.D. in chemistry. A guilty conscience then led him to Union Theological Seminary in New York, where he was converted after hearing a young evangelist whom his fellow students mocked as too simplistic.

As a fresh convert, Sung was so zealous that the seminary president had him committed to an insane asylum. For the next 193 days, he read the Bible 40 times. On his way back to China, he threw almost all his diplomas overboard (except the Ph.D. to show his father) and dedicated himself to full-time evangelistic work.

From 1928 to 1940, Sung traveled all over China and also Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand. He preached to large crowds, some of whom walked long distances in bad weather to hear him. A painful physical ailment sometimes forced him to preach sitting or even lying down. Tens—perhaps hundreds—of thousands were converted through his ministry. He never emphasized miracles, but countless people were healed through his prayers after he had preached.

Despite multiple threats on his life, narrow escapes from death, and repeated warnings from powerful people, Sung fearlessly denounced sin and called for total faith in Christ and radical obedience to the Great Commission. Especially in his early years, he often exposed the faults of church leaders publicly; some hated him for it, but many more humbled themselves and changed their lives.

He organized evangelistic teams wherever he went. Those who were moved by his example and teaching formed several Bible schools. He knew that he must strengthen the Chinese church: "One day the Western funds will stop coming, then the churches will be in a dilemma. But only then will the churches in China have revival."

His recently discovered and translated diaries reveal John Sung to be a man of tender conscience, constant self-examination, daily repentance, and unremitting pursuit of holiness. In the end, his constant travel and preaching took its toll, and he was forced to rest for the last three years of his short life. But during that time he became even more convinced of certain spiritual truths: "For a servant of God to have authority in every sentence he utters, he must first suffer for the message he is to deliver. Without great tribulation, there is no great illumination."

—G. Wright Doyle, director of the Global China Center and the China Institute

Everything for the Lord
Watchman Nee (1901-1972)

"I want nothing for myself," said Watchman Nee, "I want everything for the Lord." These words summed up the life of one of the most important Chinese church leaders, evangelists, writers, and martyrs of the last century.

Nee's grandfather was a Congregational minister. His mother had been brought up Methodist. He received a Western education in missionary schools and was converted by the powerful preaching of evangelist Dora Yo. Although he was grateful to the missionaries for bringing the gospel to China, Nee was also critical of them and of the state of the Chinese church. He spoke against the church's superficiality and the inability of some ministers to lead their converts on to spiritual maturity.

Nee formed an independent Christian assembly in Fuzhou in 1922. It practiced believer's baptism and a weekly Lord's Supper, and was governed by elders rather than by a single pastor. Nee believed from his reading of the Book of Acts that such an assembly should be the only church in a particular locality. In 1928, he moved his base from Fuzhou to Shanghai, where outsiders nicknamed his group the "Little Flock Church." His followers formed new evangelistic groups, launching a nationwide movement.

The revival sparked by the Little Flock helped rouse the denominational churches from their complacency and energize them to meet the deeper spiritual needs of the people. Nee emphasized "the priesthood of all believers" and urged the Chinese churches to train their own leadership, develop their own forms of ministry, stop being dependent on foreign financial support, and spread the gospel. These principles prepared Chinese Christians for the terrible conditions they would face under Communism. By 1950, the Little Flock had 70,000 members in 700 assemblies.

Nee became an eloquent, widely-known evangelist and writer who had a gift for calling people to a deeper spiritual life. He believed that a human being is composed of a body, a soul (intellect and emotions), and a spirit (which communes with God), and his teaching stressed the need for spiritual regeneration and sanctification in order to understand Scripture rightly and live in step with the Holy Spirit. His sermons and books—the best known of which is The Normal Christian Life—continue to be republished in a number of languages and are read all over the world.

In 1956, Nee was publicly tried, condemned as the head of a "counter-revolutionary clique," and sentenced to 15 years in prison. He died in May 1972 at a labor camp in the Anhui province. Today, the Little Flock is the largest Christian group in China and has an international following.

—Yading Li, senior associate of the Global China Center

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 35: Columbus & Christianity in the Americas

Protestantism Explodes

Why is a traditionally Catholic region turning Protestant?

interview with Samuel Escobar

An interview with
SAMUEL ESCOBAR

Since Columbus, Roman Catholicism has dominated the history and culture of Latin America. Protestantism was virtually unknown in the region until last century, and then only in a marginal way.

But beginning in the 1940s, Protestantism began mushrooming in Latin America. In 1938 Protestants totaled about 600,000. A decade later they had multiplied five times to 3 million. Another explosion has occurred in the last twenty years—from 15 million to more than 40 million.

To understand the historical causes of this extraordinary transformation, Christian History ***sat with Samuel Escobar, Thornley B. Wood Professor of Missiology at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.***

Christian History: What did religious life in a typical Latin American town look like 400 years ago?

Escobar: In the 1600s, the life of the town would be determined by the church. The Spanish planted their churches in the main square, right beside the government building. The church's presence was felt nearly everywhere.

For instance, people kept time by the church bells. When the bells rang in early morning, you knew it was just before six—time for morning mass. When they rang at late afternoon, it was about four—time for prayer.

The calendar was also governed by the church. In addition to Easter week and Christmas, elaborate festivities were held in each country (and many cities) to honor its patron saint. In Peru, it was Santa Rosa on August 30, and in Mexico, the Virgin of Guadalupe on December 6.

The intellectual life was also thoroughly controlled by the church. Every book read and every teaching offered would be checked. The Catholic church controlled nearly every sphere of life.

Where were the Protestants in Latin America at this time?

The church's control was so strong, hardly any Protestants could survive. Even as late as the nineteenth century, we find stories like this: An American visits a small town in Argentina during a religious procession. Everybody kneels, of course, except this American. As a result, he is publicly beaten and jailed and left there for months—just because he didn't kneel.

Reformer John Calvin sent two Protestant missionaries to Brazil in 1556, but that experiment failed almost immediately. The Dutch occupied northeast Brazil for about thirty years. There were also experimental Lutheran colonies in Venezuela. But these are isolated cases.

How does religious life in a modern Latin American city compare?

Society has become increasingly secularized. When countries celebrate their independence from Spain, for instance, they also see it as a break from rigid Catholic control. In some countries, secularization has gone to an extreme. In Uruguay, Christmas is called "Family

Week," and Holy Week is called "Tourism Week."

Another example: family-planning legislation has passed recently in Peru and Mexico. In each country, the Catholic church tried to dissuade government officials from pursuing such legislation. When that attempt failed, the church began a media campaign against contraception. It showed clearly the church's voice no longer determines government policy.

Add to that the large percentage of Catholics who practice birth control, and you realize that Catholicism cannot exert its former hold over its members, let alone social institutions.

Then today there's more freedom to be non-Catholic?

That's another new reality: religious competition. In the 1600s Roman Catholicism had a monopoly. Today, most countries honor religious freedom. It's a religious open market.

You see this especially in mass media. Protestantism pioneered the use of the media for religious purposes, especially in radio with the opening of radio station HCJB in Ecuador in the 1930s. The Catholic church reacted, and particularly in Brazil developed a strong radio network. But such open competition was unthinkable 400 years ago.

In Latin America, there's still an overwhelming social pressure to stay Catholic, but the church has lost the means of exerting political pressure to enforce conformity.

When did Protestantism first enter Latin America in a significant way?

Not until the early 1800s, when the Latin American nations broke free of Spain and the Spanish church. That's when pioneers like James Thomson began their work.

Sponsored by the British and Foreign Bible Society, Thomson came from England to Buenos Aires in 1816 and worked until 1827. He went from Argentina to Uruguay to Chile to Peru to Mexico, just as these independence movements were beginning.

He wasn't as interested in establishing Protestant churches as in promoting Bible reading within the Catholic church. In every city he found a group of priests who were interested in promoting Scripture reading, and he even created a Bible society in Colombia.

At the end of the century, we have the famous Francisco Penzotti, an illiterate Italian who came to Uruguay, where he was converted. He started to read and study, became a colporteur, peddling devotional material, and traveled all over Latin America in the 1880s, taking Bibles with him. He went town by town on horse, from Argentina to Bolivia, then on to Peru. In many places, Penzotti was either the founder or among the founders of the town's First Methodist Church.

Once he was jailed in Peru because of his Protestantism. Some American traveler took his picture there, and it was published in a New York newspaper. Because of Penzotti's Italian heritage and his connection with the American Bible Society, the incident became an international scandal. It brought to people's attention the religious intolerance of Latin America, and it opened the door for greater religious freedom there.

How have Protestants evangelized in Latin America?

Catholics aimed at the elites. They believed that if you reach the elites and educate them, the rest of society will follow.

Protestants set their sights on the people. James Thomson is a case in point.

Thomson was a member of the Lancasterian Society, which had arisen in an England that was becoming rapidly industrialized. There, crowds of children flocked to city schools, and there weren't enough teachers. What do you do then? You take the best students and make them mentors to the others, multiplying the effect of the teacher. In the 1820s, the Lancasterian system was the latest word in education.

Thomson thus became an educational adviser to many of the independence leaders. He would tell them, "You're beginning your life as an independent, democratic nation. I offer you a method to educate not the elites but the masses."

Why did Protestantism start mushrooming in the 1940s and 1950s?

Generally speaking, change in social structures causes significant change in people's behavior. In the case of Latin America, the significant structural change was land reform.

In Bolivia, for instance, land was redistributed in 1952. That was the year we see significant Protestant growth among the Aymaná and Quechua tribes, the native communizes in Bolivia and Peru who descended from the Incas. Why? Before people owned their land, they had to go to the local Catholic church because the landowner was Catholic; it was the only church he would allow in his territory. After land reform, no one held enough land to control the religious environment, and so choice became a reality.

About the same time, more and more people began moving to cities. In villages, the Catholic priest remains a key person. He knows where people go, what they do. A Protestant has a difficult time getting converts because of the social coercion.

In the city, no church is able to control all that goes on. So when people move to the city, they are more free to choose their own religion.

What makes Protestant Christianity appealing to today's Latin Americans?

They see a Christianity that accepts their culture. Protestants, Pentecostals in particular, have adapted themselves better to the Latin American mentality.

Chile has the largest Pentecostal denomination in Latin America—the Methodist Pentecostal Church. It began early in this century when Willys Hoover, a Methodist, had a Pentecostal experience and began a healing ministry. The Methodist Church could not handle this, so he eventually left and formed the Methodist Pentecostal Church.

These Methodist Pentecostals were less dependent on North American church practices. They created their own hymns, preached in a Latin style, were more expressive in worship. This church mushroomed. The Methodist Church they left has only 8,000 members today. The offshoot denomination has 800,000.

Second, Protestantism helps people organize their lives. Marginalized people tend to have difficulty holding down jobs, controlling drinking, keeping families intact. Pentecostals have gone to the poorest sections of cities and brought these people a Bible centered Christianity. They've gotten people to stop drinking, and taught them to read and to take family responsibilities seriously. Consequently, Protestantism has created upward mobility. As people become more self-disciplined and responsible, they start to become leaders in their businesses and communities.

In addition, such churches become places where people who are nobodies can become somebodies. People whose voice does not matter in society can prophesy in the church.

At the same time, networks are created. In a thousand-member church—not an uncommon phenomenon in Latin America today—people have a great many contacts. A businessman will naturally draw many of these people as customers. Or if you lose a job, it's likely someone in that church can give you a new one.

In addition, Protestantism is tremendously flexible. In Catholicism you need a priest to administer Communion, the most important element of Catholic piety. Protestants need only a Bible and perhaps a hymnbook. And anyone can preach or lead singing.

If we add to that the spiritual gifts the Pentecostals stress, like healing, you have a powerful catalyst for people to become Protestants.

What are the weaknesses in contemporary Latin American Protestantism?

Perhaps the most troubling is the tendency to be dualist. Especially in Pentecostalism, the world is seen primarily as a fight between light and darkness, between the church and the world. Soon governments become the work of the Devil or the visitation of God.

A Baptist sociologist studied the sermons of Pentecostal pastors in Chile. He noted that when military dictator Augusto Pinochet overthrew Marxist Salvador Allende, the preachers said that the Angel of Jehovah had come to expel the Devil from the nation. Thus Pentecostals can sometimes be manipulated for political ends.

Protestant growth in Latin America today is phenomenal. Is it a new Reformation?

To some extent. Just as in the 1500s in northern Europe, a spiritual and theological revival is having great social and political consequences within a Catholic environment.

There's a better historic analogy, though: the revivals under John Wesley in the 1700s. Those Wesleyan revivals took place during a period of rapid industrialization and urbanization in England. Industry and urban areas are growing rapidly in this century in Latin America, and once again, Protestantism is helping people make adjustments.

That comparison, in fact, gives me hope for Latin America. The Wesleyan revivals enabled positive social change without the poor having to resort to violence. Given the power of Protestantism to improve the lives of people, I see the possibility of peaceful social change occurring in Latin America as well.

Reproducing Christianity
By David Feddes

Three basics displayed in three portraits

Three basics

1. Reproducing converts
2. Reproducing children
3. Reproducing content

Three portraits

1. New Testament church growth
2. Europe's cultural suicide
3. Reproducing Christianity today

New Testament church growth

1. Missionary vision to go to new places and peoples.
2. Multiplying in households and spreading through social networks.
3. Teaching new converts and children.

1. Missionary Vision

- "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13:2
- "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Acts 16:9
- "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." 18:9-10

2. Multiplying in Households

- **Caesarea:** An angel told Cornelius, "Peter will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved" (Acts 11:14).

- **Philippi:** Lydia was baptized along with "the members of her household" (Acts 16:15) "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house… he and all his family were baptized … he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family" (Acts 16:31,33).

- **Thessalonica:** "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house." (Acts 17:6-7)

- **Corinth:** "Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord." (Acts 18:8) I also baptized the household of Stephanas." (1 Cor 1:15)
"You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints." (1 Cor 16:15)

- **Ephesus:** "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house." Acts 20:20

- **Colossae:** "… to the church that meets in your home" (Philemon 2).

• **Rome:** "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus… Greet also the church that meets at their house." Romans 16:3,5 (Earlier this couple had to leave Rome and moved to Corinth, where they met Paul (Acts 18:2-3). After moving back to Rome, a church met at their house.)

Church as household

- "God's household, which is the church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:15).
- "members of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).
- "members of God's household" (Eph 2:19)
- "God's family in heaven and on earth" (Ephesians 3:15)
- "household of God" (Hebrews 10:21, 1 Peter 4:17).

Roman Empire decrease

- Abortion: often mother died as well as baby
- Infanticide: leaving baby girls to die
- Homosexuality idealized by many
- Birthrates below replacement level resulted in centuries of decrease.
- Emperors tried to subsidize larger families, but to no avail.
- Imported "barbarians" from beyond the empire's borders to maintain population.

Christian Increase

- Higher birthrates
- More Christian women and girls survived and had families
- Rescued and adopted babies that were abandoned by others
- Cared for their own sick and pagan sick during plagues, resulting in higher survival rate and more conversions.

(See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*)

3. Teaching Christian content to converts and children.

- For a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church [in Antioch] and taught great numbers of people. (Acts 11:26)
- Paul stayed [in Corinth] for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. (Acts 18:11)
- Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

Modern Europe

- "Is France on the way to becoming an Islamic state?" (Barbara Amiel)
- "The problem is not whether the majority of Europeans is Islamic, but rather which Islam—*sharia* or Euro-Islam—is to dominate in Europe." (Bassam Tibi)

Eurabia?

"Europe will be part of the Arabic west… Migration and demography indicate this. Europeans marry late and have few or no children. But there's strong immigration. At the latest, following current trends, Europe will have Muslim majorities in the population at the end of the twenty-first century" (Bernard Lewis).

Europe's spiritual suicide

1. Not reproducing converts
2. Not reproducing children
3. Not reproducing content

1. Not reproducing converts

• Missionary faith: "Missions are the test of our faith. The test of our real belief is our readiness to share it with all peoples."
• Religious pluralism negates missions: "In a supermarket society, a rich variety of religions was a welcome addition to the shelves."
• "What I have been so horrified by is a kind of timidity by Christian preachers and ministers. The kind of attitude that says, 'Well, I happen to be a Christian, but of course I wouldn't expect you to think that…'"
• "A clergyman among them described missions as theological racism. I was provoked into advising him to beware of theological fornication!" (quotes from Lesslie Newbigin, missionary in India for 40 years, who retired in Britain)

2. Not reproducing children

• Russia: Projected drop from 150 million to 100 million by 2050. Russia's low birthrate is partly due to two abortions for every live birth. "This is a crisis threatening Russia's survival." (Vladimir Putin)
• Germany is projected to lose the equivalent of East Germany's population by 2050.
• In Europe 75 retirees will be collecting government pension for every 100 workers.
• Solution: more immigrants
• Canadian birthrate: 1.6
• United States: 2.1
• 1971 was the last year white Americans had enough children to replace themselves.
• Black birthrates have gone even lower.

Two exceptions in the U.S.

1. Immigrants (many of them Christian) have higher birthrates.
2. Some conservative Christians tend to have more children.

3. Not reproducing content

• After 1900 most British homes ceased family devotions.
• **18%** of Europeans consider it important that their children share their faith.
• British church attendance dropped from 60% in 1850 to **8%** in 2000.
• British Sunday school dropped from 55% of kids in 1900 to **4%** in 2000.

Reproducing Christianity

1. Reproducing converts
2. Reproducing children
3. Reproducing content

1. Reproducing Converts

• Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19)

• You will be my witnesses … to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)

2. Reproducing children

"Conservative, religiously minded Americans are putting far more of their genes into the future than their liberal, secular counterparts… In the United States, fully 47 percent of people who attend church weekly say that their ideal family size is three or more children. By contrast, only 27 percent of those who seldom attend church want that many kids."

"Does this mean that the future belongs to those who believe they are (or who are in fact) commanded by a higher power to procreate? Based on current trends, the answer appears to be yes." …When secular-minded Americans decide to have few if any children, they unwittingly give a strong evolutionary advantage to the other side of the culture divide." (Phillip Longman)

The new neighbor struck up a conversation with a 7-year-old boy next door. "How many kids in your family?" he asked. "Eight," said the child. "My, that many children must cost a lot of money," said the neighbor.

"Oh, no sir," replied the boy. "We don't buy them. We raise them."

• I will bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. (Genesis 22:17).

• Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. (Psalm 112:1-3)

• Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. (Psalm 127:3-5)

• The prophet Heman's many children "were given him through the promises of God to exalt him." (1 Chronicles 25:4)

3. Reproducing content

• **Teaching converts:** "Teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you." (Mt 28:19)

• **Teaching children:** One generation will commend your works to another; they will speak of your mighty acts. (Psalm 145:4)

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