

CHURCH GROWTH EYES ON LA MARGINAL by Donald A. McGavran

President Balaunde (Bay-lah-oon-day) of Peru first proposed La Marginal in 1957 while he was still only a leading architect in Lima. He envisioned a 3500 mile road running down the eastern shelf of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia at about 4000 feet, opening up a vast, healthful region to settlement.

When he became president of Peru, he instituted feasibility studies. These showed that the road would draw 1,500,000 settlers to virgin land along its route and would pay for itself with new agricultural production. The foodstuffs--bananas, tea, rice and coffee--would move to market through links with Venezuela's highways to the north and with Bolivia's railroad to southern Brazil, and through the extensions of twenty-four existing or planned roads from the Andes to the jungle.

Today, stretches of the road are already opening for colonization. Peru built or contracted for half its 1500 mile leg. Bolivia, committing 51 million dollars has begun construction. The Colombian and Ecuadorian sections are to be ready by 1981. The Andean Indians are already swarming down from the mountains with their chickens, pigs, bedrolls and grabbing up home-steading plots. Last spring on one thirty-mile leg I counted no fewer than fifteen tiny sawmills buzzing out crude boards for the colonists' thatched roof huts--the log cabins of South America's new frontier. And such determined homesteaders!! The colono figures out where the road is to go, a bulldozer operator told me, and when I push down the forest, there is his hut waiting along the route.

Airports are being spotted along La Marginal to handle giant cargo jets that will haul produce from jungle colonies at per mile costs matching those of truck transportation. The town of Tarapoto (population 25,000) looking to this super-jet age, has constructed the largest cargo airport in Peru, after Lima's. "Not only will one of the world's last grand land reserves be settled," says Balaunde, "but future generations will develop closer cultural and commercial ties."\*

The above account may be viewed by ordinary eyes or church growth eyes. The ordinary American Christian says, "How interesting. I'm glad to see our Latin American neighbors doing something dramatic like that." But the Christian with

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\* Excerpts from "Peru's Path to Progress" by Dorothy Gow Stroetzel, used with permission, from September 1967, Reader's Digest.

church growth eyes, who marches under the great commission, sees at once that here in process of creation is a great receptive population. The Indians of the High Andes have been resistant to the Gospel. Many of them have been serfs on great haciendas and have not been free to believe. Many have heard the Gospel in ways which do not communicate to them. But when they move down onto La Marginal and homestead perhaps twenty to forty acres of land apiece, they will become receptive. Free of the bonds of the villages and fear of the overlords, and inclined in this new country to new things, they will constitute for the next thirty years a great, receptive population. The million and a half settlers by the end of the first thirty years will be five million people, occupying some of the good land of the earth, with towns of considerable size dotting the road like beads.

Mobility in missions is demanded. Those missions which have been quietly "serving the Indians" who have steadfastly rejected the Gospel, should make provision for the supervision of whatever congregations they may have in the high country, and shift their major forces to La Marginal. These people moving down then need help. They will be doubly unchurched down there. If they needed the Gospel up on top, where they could not "hear" it, they need it all the more down on La Marginal where they can "hear" it. The experience of the Oregon Friends in their tent campaigns and of all other missions, which have already been planting churches in the high yungas, should be pooled and made available to the churchmen (nationals and missionaries) who will be planting churches on the eastern shelf.

La Marginal will be built. It has passed beyond the experimental stage. The Church should be in with the beginning settlers, serving them and bringing them to faith and obedience.