

Drs. Wagner, Arn, and Oliver have described the amazing contemporary explosion of interest in church growth. My task is that of describing the matrix out of which the explosion is taking place. This will enable us to see other facets of the jewel and to estimate correctly what we ought to do and where the church growth movement is likely to go.

1. Millions of Marginals. Millions of nominal, marginal, slightly lapsed Christians and ex-Christians characterize the North American scene. Enormous numbers of our kind of people live all about us with vague but ineffective commitment to Jesus Christ. They speak our language. They live in houses like ours. Their children and ours go to the same schools. We shop at the same supermarkets and eat the same kind of food. They are our kind of folk. Yet they have little consciousness of life lived in obedience to a Master. They consider themselves Christians, but do not really know what being "in Christ" means. So they grow more and more alienated and secular. They watch the family breaking up and the sex life of millions gravitating toward the animal, and rush out to buy pornographic books by the million. They bring magazines full of liquor advertisements into their homes and accustom their children to the thought that in America today everyone drinks. They seldom if ever have family prayers. On Sundays they immerse themselves in papers and football. The Bible in the house accumulates dust. In all this, they have little feeling of betraying Christ or disobeying their Shepherd; but the fact of the matter is that they are living without a Shepherd and acknowledge no Lord.

Europeans have all this in mind when they speak about 'post Christian Europe'. We in Canada and the United States know the situation well ourselves. Of the 220 million citizens of the United States; about 170 million are our kind of people. Of them, let us generously assume that 70 million have a current obedient relationship to Jesus Christ. They are the backbone of all churches. They intend to be Christians, to walk in the Way and to rear their children as believers. They give liberally. They read their Bibles. They confess their sins and ask God to forgive them. If this estimate is correct, that would leave 100 million of our kind of people living all around us - without Christ. These are the most winnable people in the world. They consider themselves in some way Christians. Nothing keeps them from practicing their faith and loving their Lord - except sin and selfishness. They suffer no persecution when they are saved. Multitudes of new churches can be started among them. Multitudes of them can unite with existing churches.

One must distinguish these lax Christians from perhaps twenty million hard-core card-carrying pagan Americans and Canadians - materialists, secularists, positivists, and the like. These are not responsive. The

special evangelism needed to reach them is seldom seen. I cannot present their case here. I am not talking about them.

A map of the United States has been recently prepared which shows every county, and colors it according to the per cent of persons living in it whose names appear on no church roll. Huge sections of the map appear pink - 30 per cent; light red - 50 per cent; and dark red 70 per cent! In the light of this map, the comfortable myth that we live in a well churched land is totally incredible.

A few denominations have been taking these lost multitudes seriously. For example, the Southern Baptists 25 years ago resolved to treat the seven central northern states as mission territories and to multiply churches in them. If Southern Illinois be excluded, we may say that in 1950 the Southern Baptists had 50 congregations and now have 1300. They found these unchurched myriads and tell me that millions in these seven states remain undisciplined. The Church of the Nazarene, also, in its meteoric rise from nothing in 1906 to 600,000 and the Assemblies of God from nothing in 1905 to 500,000 today have found these unshepherded sheep. So have thousands of unusual mainline congregations led by unusual pastors who in Canada and the United States during the time when most churches were not growing, have grown to great size and effectiveness.

11. The Ethnic Multitudes: Essential also to a right understanding of the church growth situation are the unchurched ethnics. Racial, linguistic and ethnic peoples have been pouring into North America in a steady stream. This continent is no longer a preserve for white Anglo Saxons. Consider the Latins - from twenty-five countries of Latin America and islands of the Caribbean. At least sixteen millions of these can be identified today. Depending on how they are defined, one may say that there are two million in California, three million in Texas, a million and a half in New York City, and other huge minorities in other states and cities.

Consider the Blacks. It has been customary to think of these as fairly well churched - mostly belonging to Baptist or Methodist denominations. This was - in a loose way - true thirty years ago; but today millions of younger Blacks (like tens of millions of younger Whites) are outside the Church.

Canada has experienced a flood of immigrants. Hundreds of thousands of Italians live in Toronto, Montreal, Regina, Vancouver and other cities. Asians flow in a steady stream to this favored continent - masses of Philipinos, Koreans, Chinese, Indians, Arabs, Vietnamese, and many others. Eight million Jews reside in North America in some very large concentrations.

These minorities think of themselves as distinct from the white majority. They speak a different home language, have different customs, like different foods, vote differently, and for a generation or two have a markedly different standard of living. By and large they cannot be won into existing churches. At this point, one must not be misled by the steady trickle of individual converts from these minorities into existing

churches. This is to be sure, going on. Most white churches welcome ethnic converts and tens of thousands of Old American churches have a few Italians, Jews, Latins, Arabs, Blacks or Asians in them. But when one realizes that out of a million Spanish name Americans in Los Angeles County, less than 20,000 are Protestant Christians (and this number includes the allegedly fast growing Pentecostal and Southern Baptist churches) he realizes that this thin little trickle is not what is needed.

A way must be found for multitudes of each ethnic unit to become staunch believing disciples of Christ while they remain distinctly themselves. The present system whereby 'becoming Christian' involves 'becoming a helpless minority in an old Caucasian congregation' is neither Christian nor effective. It is not discipling the ethnics - and cannot do so. In the course of the next hundred years - perhaps - the population of North America may become one cultural monolith. But it is certainly not that now. Churching the ethnics must not be confused with the secular goal of merging many cultures and races into one - and that may not happen either. Discipling the ethnics means multiplying tens of thousands of churches in which each ethnic, racial or linguistic unit can be as distinctive as it wants to be.

This means that Christians must not consider 'near-neighbor evangelism into existing congregations' as the only method needed. Rather, they should realize that tens of thousands of E2 missionaries are demanded. For example, North American Christians ought to keep at work among the 300,000 Italians in Toronto 100 E2 North American missionaries. These would speak Italian fluently and have spent a couple of years in Italy in the districts from which the Toronto immigrants have come. They would be engaged in planting at least one thousand Italian churches. These missionaries would be lifetime workers, shifting out of the limelight as fast as leaders from the converts could be prepared as pastors. In a similar fashion, E2 missionaries should be set to work in all unchurched segments of every ethnic and linguistic population in every state and province.

It should be normal for every old American Caucasian congregation to depute two per cent of its members to become E2 missionaries to some piece of the wonderful ethnic mosaic so characteristic of this continent. When millions of our youth are learning German, Spanish, Mandarin, and Hindi, is it not reasonable to propose that tens of thousands of Christians become E2 missionaries?

Yet, large as the ethnic opportunity is, it is small compared to the tens of millions of nominal Christians among the Old American and the old Canadians. Both opportunities comprise the almost inexhaustible mine from which diamonds may be quarried. The size of the nominal back log is so great that any talk of sheep stealing or keeping out of other churches' 'territory' must be dismissed as the whimperings of defensive static-minded men and women.

III. Church Growth Legitimate. Integral to right understanding of the church growth situation is the vivid realization (for which the Global Church Growth Movement takes some credit) that growth is a legitimate task

of every congregation and every denomination. For twenty years this has been strenuously denied. I remember hearing the president of a famous theological seminary say to his students in chapel,

"I am not impressed by your reports of members added to your churches. I want to know the quality of your members. Are they pulling their weight in your community? Are they ethical Christians? Are they changing your social structures?"

Church growth men never call members added to the church insignificant. Church growth men have long maintained that both discipling and perfecting are essential and must go forward together, (Bridges of God, 1955, pages 13-16). Improvement in quality must not be purchased by devaluating the coin of the realm - evangelism and church planting. The conscience on church growth now sweeping North America rests on a conviction that evangelism which issues in increased responsible members in old churches and the establishment of new churches as needed, is a chief and irreplaceable purpose of the Church.

Conservatives are driven to the above conviction by their theology. They believe that all men are lost until they believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and accept the Bible as the inspired infallible and authoritative Word of God. They are also driven by the stubborn plateaus in the graphs of growth of the most orthodox and devout denominations. Indeed, with the advent of the Pill, it can be affirmed without fear of contradiction that unless an orthodox, devout denomination engages in intentional intelligent processes calculated to result in church growth, it will gradually wither away. Solid, sound denominations can no longer count on biological growth maintaining their numbers. With the Pill, the better the denomination, the less the biological church growth.

Liberals are driven to the above conviction by declining memberships and empty headquarters' offices. In the last twenty years, some of their leaders have been pontificating about how sinful it is for Christians to be interested in mere church growth and survival. A really Christian Church should be, they said, like its Master, ready to die!! But when they realize that their survival is at stake (and their ability to do good) they may see their error and rush to establish effective forces of evangelism and church growth.

IV. Marching This Way: Soon To Be Among Us: Interest is certain to quicken and increase. Commitment to church growth cannot decline in the foreseeable future. Obedience to the Saviour, the clear teaching of the Bible, the pressure of the contemporary context, the fundamental needs of our fellow men, and a certain earthy self interest all combine to guarantee that church growth will prove no flash in the pan. It is here and it will remain. We shall see a mighty multiplication of efforts for church growth by denominations large and small. Some will, of course, continue to fight growth. A few die-hards refuse to see the movement of history and continue to bleat out a feeble protest against effective evangelism - in the interests, of course, of respecting the sovereignty of God, serving

the whole man, or being true to the Bible - at least to that isolated account of the Lord's displeasure with David for numbering the people!

We may confidently look forward also to a mighty increase in knowledge about church growth. Large church growth has been going on for decades and much more will go on in the decades ahead. Research will determine in reliable fashion exactly what growth (quantitative, qualitative and organic) has taken place, what the line of growth over the past years can tell us, what lessons we can learn from it, what growth is likely to occur in the years to come, and what God's obedient servants ought to do in the light of the current realities. Professors of church growth and evangelism will be appointed in most seminaries. Hundreds of books about church growth in Canada, the United States, the Northern States, the Southern States, parts of each state or province, cities and ethnic units will be written, published, sold, and read by millions of Christians - lay and clerical.

Awakenings, fueled by all this and by intense widespread Bible Study and Prayer for Revival, may be confidently expected. The record, so painstakingly compiled by J. Edwin Orr, of the close relationship which revival bears to evangelistic effectiveness cannot be disregarded. It will be read and will have an increasing effect. The relation of church growth thinking to revival is like that of railway tracks to a full head of steam in a locomotive. Without the tracks, the steam blows the whistle but goes nowhere. With the tracks, the engine roars off at sixty miles an hour. Awakenings plus knowledge of those methods which it has pleased God to bless to the mighty growth of His Church will spell continuous sound increase of Christians, churches and denominations - to the redemption of multitudes and the mighty increase of justice, brotherhood and peace in this continent.

It takes no prophetic insight to see marching this way, soon to be among us, a missionary movement of unparalleled proportions. We stand in the sunrise of missions. E Two missionaries (to the ethnics of this land and to hundreds of millions somewhat like us in other lands) will be recruited and set to work by the tens of thousands. Multitudes of E Threes, also, (essential to the evangelization of three billion "other culture" Non-Christians in this continent and overseas) will hear God's call and offer themselves for lifetime service. They will not be the only missionaries, of course. Asians and Latins by the thousand and Africans by the tens of thousands will also hear God's call. Any church growth worthy of the name must issue in multiplied missionary sendings. Renewed missionary commitment can be predicted with assurance. If the Lord tarry, we shall surely see these things.