

ARE CHRISTIANS FALLING BEHIND? This paper shows that non-Christians are fairly exploding in number, (Graphic I.A.). But Graphic I.B. makes clear that the percentage rate of growth of the Christians is definitely greater. And Graphic I.C. shows the degree to which the Christians are thus catching up. The rest of the paper grapples with the awesome fact that the vast majority of the non-Christians in Asia are beyond the reach of any of the existing national churches or mission agencies as presently deployed.

Seeing the task graphically

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Without apology, we see the entire world as the legitimate target of Christian expansion. This does not mean we envision forcing anyone to be a Christian, nor forcing anyone to change his language or his culture in order to become a Christian. This is not an institutional "triumphalism." We simply believe everyone has an equal right to knowledge of, and faith in, Jesus Christ. But if this is our goal, how are we doing?

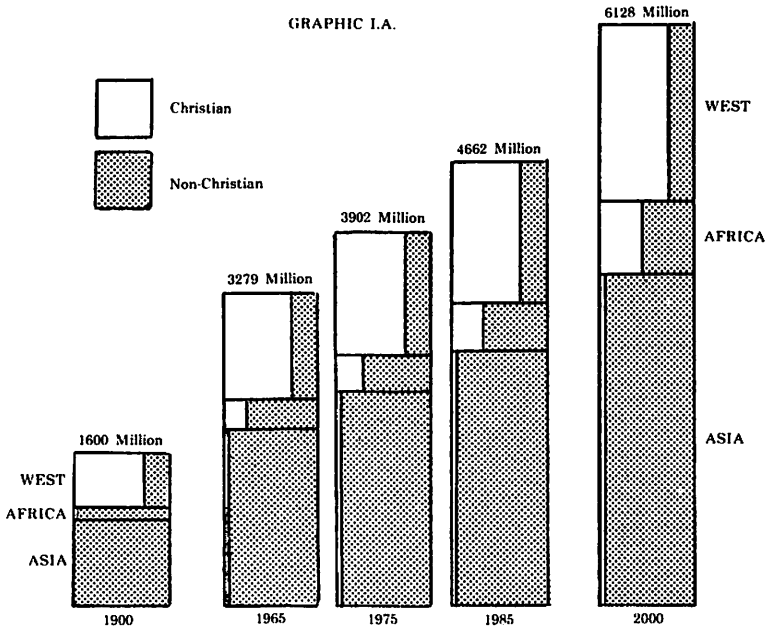
HOW ARE WE DOING?

The first graphic clearly shows by an exact scale drawing the explosive growth of mankind during what was once predicted to be the "Christian century." The details are at the end of the article.¹ But you can tell by the unaided eye that the darkened (non-Christian) areas are getting larger, not smaller, and are bigger today than in the year 1900, and, at present rates projected, will be even larger by the end of the century. Bluntly, the number of people yet to be won in Africa and Asia has more than doubled since 1900 and will be more than tripled by the end of the century.

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GRAPHIC I.A.



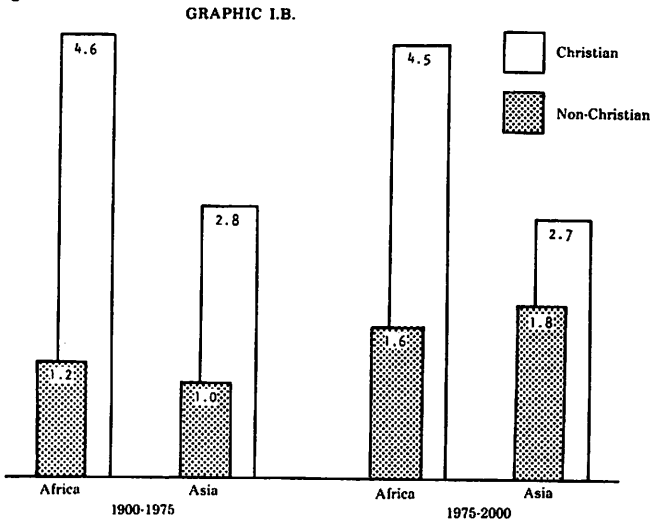
WORLD POPULATION GROWTH DURING THE "CHRISTIAN CENTURY"

However, first impressions may be misleading. The facts above have led some people to shout "Hopeless!" and then go on to propose that Buddhists don't really need to know Jesus Christ. (What would such people have said when there were only twelve disciples to do the task that Jesus left?) The other side of the coin is that while non-Christians in Africa and Asia have more than doubled since 1900 and will more than triple by the year 2000, the number of Christians in Africa and Asia is today *thirteen* times what it was in 1900, and by 2000 it will be 34 times as large.² The crucial factor is the difference in *rates* of growth. When we take *rates* of growth into account, as in the next graphic, we are not concerned simply by the fact that non-Christians are getting more numerous each year. Rather, we ask a much more important question: Just how fast are they growing? And, Is the rate of growth of the non-Christians faster than that of the Christians? What this means is that we mentally divide all the people of Africa and Asia into groups of one hundred and then ask, After one year of growth how many more than the original 100 are there?

The answer to this question is told in Graphic I.B. where

the very first pair of columns says this: "For every 100 non-Christian Africans there were 1.2 more at the end of a year (on the average, during 1900-1975), while for every 100 Christians there were 4.6 more!"³

For the same period we see Asian Christians growing at an average of 2.8 more each year per hundred Christians, while non-Christians grew by only 1.0 person per hundred. This, by the way, is called simple annual percentage growth. It is like interest on money in a savings account, and it is the easiest way to compare growth rates of two different groups of people.

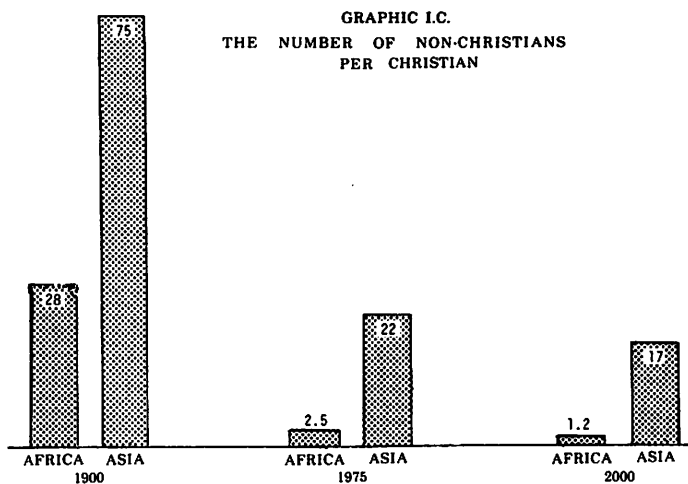


POPULATION INCREASE EACH YEAR PER HUNDRED PERSONS
 (Christian growth rate exceeds that of non-Christians in both Africa and Asia
 and does so during both periods—the latter based on present rates)

Note, however, that on the right half of Graphic I.B. our projections for 1975-2000 are not quite as striking a picture as on the left. During the entire first 75 years the Christians in Africa and Asia have been growing about three times as fast as non-Christians. But during 1975-2000 our estimates show the non-Christians increasing their rate of growth, and the gap between growth rates narrowing. In Asia, in particular, Christians are growing only 50 percent faster than non-Christians. The main point remains: While Graphic I.A. shows non-Christians truly exploding in sheer numbers, Graphic I.B. reveals the fact that the Christians in Africa and Asia are steadily catching up: they are on record

as growing three times as fast during the last 75 years, and will likely continue to grow at least 50 percent faster in the next 25 years. If this is true, what is the discernible impact on the over-all population?

Graphic I.C. answers this question. It shows that in 1900 non-Christians out-numbered Christians 75 to one in Asia, and 28 to one in Africa. Today the same ratio is only 22 to one in Asia and 2.5 to one in Africa! Should present growth rates merely hold (not even increase), the picture in A.D. 2000 is definitely brighter. Are we going backwards? Not exactly!⁴



However, we must in all honesty admit that the growth picture in Asia is not what it needs to be. In order to see just what the problem is, let us take a closer look at the kind of people who are yet to be won.

WHO IS TO BE WON?

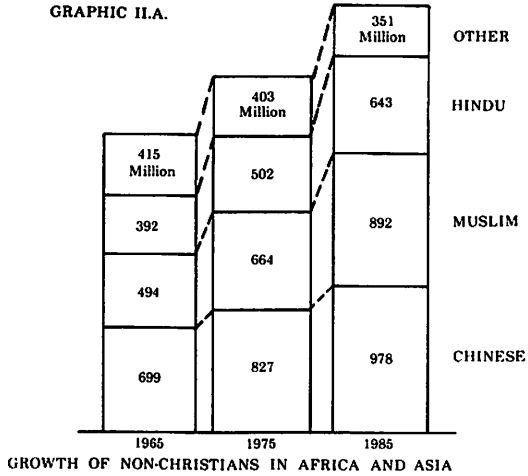
Winning people to Christ in Europe and America—in the Western world—where most people consider themselves Christians, is not a problem to be ignored. Every new generation has to be reevangelized, and hollow, nominal Christianity is a massive, urgent problem, even in the so-called mission lands, where unevangelized second and third-generation Christians are as nominal as the average citizen of the Western world. Big as this problem is, the task of winning non-Christian Asians and Africans is both far

different and far larger. This is the task often referred to as the two billion who have never heard the name of Christ. For convenience, in Graphic II.A. we break these groups of people down into cultural rather than geographic categories.⁵ Immediately three groups loom large. Most missionaries and most mission boards may hope that someone else will worry about the special problem of winning Muslims, Hindus, and Chinese, since these have historically been the most resistant to the gospel. But let's face it—these groups are by far the larger part of the task we face. There are now new insights regarding the reaching of these particular “resistant” peoples. But first let us avoid a common misunderstanding.

Current gloating over the emergence of the overseas “national churches” could easily lead us to suppose that we at least have a beachhead of Christians within each of these major non-Christian blocks. This is not exactly true. All of a sudden we have a reappearance of Jewish Christians among the Jews. But there are very few “Muslim Christians” or “Muslim churches” today. (The closest thing to this is the Christian movement resulting from SUM work in the Lake Chad area in Africa.) Chinese Christians are a tiny minority, and are isolated from the bulk of the Chinese by geographic, linguistic and cultural barriers. Most of the castes of India are not represented among the Christian denominations of that land. Ninety-five percent of the Christians come from less than 5 percent of the castes: this means that 400 million middle caste peoples in India cannot join any existing church without monumental social dislocation (the kind Paul didn't think the Greeks had to undergo).

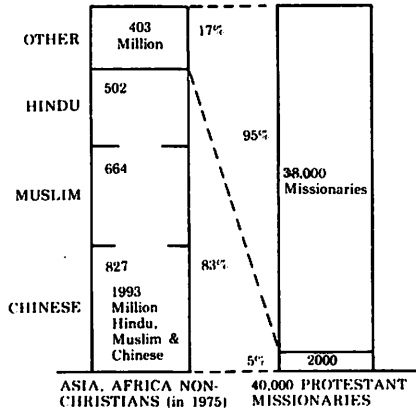
Thus, the following graphic displays three mammoth fast-growing blocks, Hindus, Muslims, Chinese, that are *mainly beyond the reach of the ordinary evangelism of Christians reaching their cultural near-neighbors*. This horrifying fact means specifically that “native missionaries using their own language” can hardly begin to do this job. Recall also that most missionaries are not focused on any one of these three blocks of humanity. Yet in 1975 in these three blocks alone there will be roughly two billion people who will constitute 83 percent of the non-Christians in Asia and Africa.

GRAPHIC II.A.



Graphic II.B goes on to show the amazing fact that the other 403 million non-Christians, who are 17 percent of the task, are the object of the attention of 38,000 missionaries who are 95 percent of the force. Meanwhile, the Hindu, Muslim, and Chinese blocks, some 1993 million people in all, are the object of the attention of only 5 percent of the missionary force. Please do not suppose that too many missionaries are devoted to the 403 million! The major lesson here is that we need to exert more effort on behalf of the bigger problem: if it is *reasonable* (and we believe it is) to send 38,000 missionaries (from all Protestant sources) to

GRAPHIC II.B.



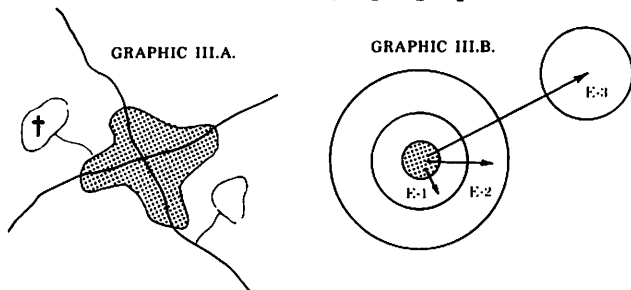
403 million people, then it is *unreasonable* to send only 2,000 to reach 1993 million. If we were to give the larger group equal effort per million, it would require 212,000 missionaries—almost 100 times as many as the 2,000 we are now sending!

But is this necessary? Yes. Can we do it? Yes. Will we do it? I don't know. We surely will not bestir ourselves if we are not convinced that it is both necessary and possible. Note in passing that the 38,000 working among the 403 million are extensively aided (and often even out-numbered) by national Christians working on an E-1 basis within those peoples. By contrast there is not any comparable internal evangelism going on at all among the 1993 million, with the possible exception, in part, of the Chinese. Surely in the Hindu middle-castes and in the Muslim world, there are virtually no internal allies. This fact greatly deepens the problem we face, and it is necessary to take a closer look at the full implications of it.

HOW "FAR AWAY" ARE THEY?

Our remarks just above lead us to spell out the problem of *cultural* distance. In Graphic III.A. we depict a typical village in India. Happily, thousands of villages in India today include Christians; nevertheless, there are still over 500,000 villages without any worshipping Christian group! Worse still, even where there is a church—note the cross—it is in most cases located in the ghetto of former "untouchables," in Telegu called *Palem*. The distance from this ghetto to the center of the village may be only half-a-mile *geographically*, but it is like 25,000 miles *culturally*. In this same sense, at least 80 percent of the non-Christians in the world today are beyond the reach of existing churches!

Graphic III.B. portrays Acts 1:8, where Jesus uses an analysis that is not basically *geographic* distance. E-1



evangelism is ordinary evangelism, where you cross only the one barrier between the church and the world; and if there were no other barriers ordinary evangelism would be good enough. It would be good enough to pray that every church in the world would be warmly evangelistic in reaching out to its culturally near neighbors.

But there are other barriers. Jesus pinpointed a small community on the doorstep of the Judeans, called Samaritans with whom the Jews were not on speaking terms. They were culturally and ethnically *related* to the Jews, but their differences were significant enough to be considered an additional barrier. Call this E-2 evangelism.

Jesus then mentioned the whole rest of the world—"unto the ends of the earth"—where you don't expect any linguistic head start at all, no cultural affinity whatsoever. This is E-3 evangelism and is humanly speaking, the hardest kind.

Where there is a specific prejudice factor, the problem, whether in the E-1, E-2, or E-3 areas, may be so difficult that wise strategy will be to arrange for someone to make the contact who is not the special object of prejudice. This is one reason why Christian witnesses *from a geographical distance* have always played so strategic a role in the expansion of Christianity down through history. In evangelism cultural distance is always more important than geographical distance, because cultural distance, whether it consists of linguistic difference or structured prejudice barriers, obstructs effective communication no matter how close the evangelist is geographically.

This is what is meant when we say that "crossing an ocean never made a missionary," or "you can go 18,000 miles but it's the last 18 inches that count." Geography is thus nearly irrelevant in such well known observations. But a brand new astonishing meaning for the same basic truth is the fact that the Christians who live next door to the Muslims in the Middle East, for example, may be the least likely to be effective missionaries to those Muslim people: it is the 18 inches that count, and if a person from afar can more easily cross that 18 inches, then so be it, it has got to be arranged. In such cases there may be little strategy in waiting for local Christians to do the job.

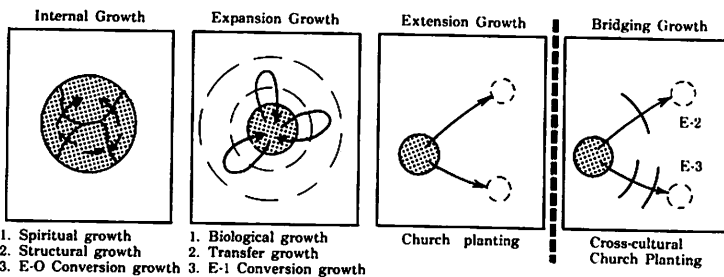
The full weight of this presses down on us when we recall

that the vast bulk (say 80 percent) of the non-Christian world is at the E-2 and E-3 cultural distance from every existing Christian. This fact in turn has profound implications for concrete arrangements in strategy.

WHAT WE MUST DO

In keeping with the concept of “body evangelism” we must not feel content—we can hardly feel our job is begun—unless people are brought into vital fellowship with other Christians. Once this is clear, there are four different categories of growth of the Christian movement which can usefully be distinguished, because *all four must take place*.

GRAPHIC IV



The first broad category of growth, *internal growth*, includes three quite different processes: (1) *Structural growth*⁶—the growth of internal structure, for example, the formation of a youth group; (2) The *spiritual growth* of the church community, and (3) *E-0 conversion growth*—the confirmation, the “evangelical experience” which, through E-0 evangelism (which crosses “zero” culture barriers) transforms mere members of the church *community* into *communicant* members. This kind of evangelism is very important but not the same as E-1 evangelism, where you are working across the cultural barrier between the church and the world. Thus *internal growth* does not include expansion of the church community but does refer to anything related to the development of life and health within the church. Internal growth makes sure both new and old persons in the fellowship are edifyingly related. In Japan this has been so great a problem that a high proportion of new Christians leave by the back door within two years.

Expansion growth expands the local church community. Hopefully, this expansion is the result of winning people

from the community outside of the church. But it may also result from people coming from other congregations elsewhere. Lest these two mechanisms be confused with each other, or with a third, let us define the components of all three: (1) *Biological growth*—where an excess of births over deaths increases the size of the Christian community; (2) *Transfer growth*—an excess of believers transferring in (from other congregations) over the number transferring out, and (3) *E-1 conversion growth*—the excess of people outside the church being converted into the church over the number of those in the church who may revert to the world.

Extension growth is where new churches are planted. Few pastors have a vision for this and in certain spheres it is almost a lost art. It requires a very different set of skills from that of expansion growth; yet it involves, crucially, all the skills of internal growth and expansion growth as well. Studies have shown that a church movement that falls back on expansion growth alone—and is not able and willing to plant new congregations—is a movement whose growth rate will rapidly taper off.

Bridging growth—to the right of the heavy dotted line symbolizing cultural barriers—is that special case of extension growth where the new church being planted is made up of people who are sufficiently different from the kind of people in the mother church that they would be happier running their own church. This, according to our definitions, requires E-2 evangelism, or perhaps even E-3 evangelism. In other words, it requires cross-cultural communication in addition to all the other skills involved in the categories of internal, expansion, and extension growth.

Tough as this fourth category of growth is—it is the classical missionary task—it must be pointed out that all of our preceding charts suggest nothing less than that this task and technique is crucially necessary for the reaching of at least 80 percent of the non-Christian world in Africa and Asia. But, this is what we must do! Alas, how many missionaries are content to “let the nationals do it” in a social unit already penetrated, meanwhile overlooking pockets and strata in the same field which the nationals are not as able to reach as the foreign missionary! This is especially true when the “national church” unconsciously restricts the missionary to the limitations of its own

immediate vision. These sobering thoughts introduce us to our final section.

HOW CAN WE DO IT?

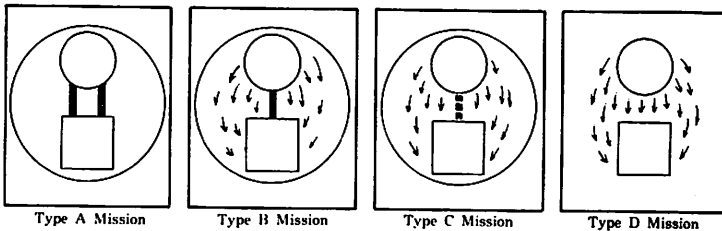
At this point, we could easily give up. The task seems so vast, so distant culturally, so complicated to tackle. What can possibly be the vehicle of all this special effort? Two thousand years give us only one answer: the para-church structure. There is powerful evidence that while Paul *began* at Antioch, he did not simply work out of Antioch. He apparently employed a "missionary band" structure or an "apostolic team" structure borrowed from the Pharisaic proselytizing movement, just as he borrowed the Jewish synagogue structure for his local churches. Thus then and now we see both church and mission—two separate, very different structures which must both be considered normal.

This understanding is crucial for the immense task we face. Roman Catholic orders girdled the globe for well over 200 years *after the Reformation* with essentially no Protestant competition until William Carey broke the logjam and launched the mission that catalyzed the formation of a dozen other missions in the next two decades. In the ensuing 175 years Protestants in general have never quite become used to the para-church structure.

We must become much better acquainted with the subject, however, because successful world evangelization depends almost totally on the proper relation of the para-church mission structure to the on-going churches in both the sending and receiving countries.

Taking first the relation of missions to sending churches, Graphic V.A shows four common relationships. Since we hope and pray (and plan?) for all churches everywhere to be *sending* churches, these relationships apply just as well to overseas churches and their relationship to *their own national missions*. But we'll pick that up in a moment.

GRAPHIC V.A.



Type A Mission

Type B Mission

Type C Mission

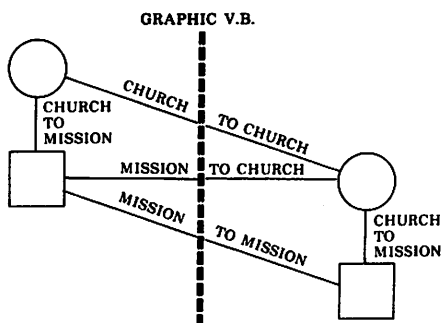
Type D Mission

A *Type A Mission* is one that is (1) related to a specific church body; this is signified by the large circle; (2) administrated by that church through a board appointed by ecclesiastical processes; this is signified by the vertical bar on the left; and (3) funded by that church through a unified budget which discourages (or prevents) local churches from affecting the percentage going to the mission structure; this is signified by the vertical bar on the right and the *absence* of small arrows of relationship between the church and the mission.

A *Type B Mission* differs from Type A missions only in the elimination of the third characteristic mentioned. This type of mission raises its own support. It does not depend on a certain percentage of a church budget. Most Type A missions used to be of this kind.

A *Type C Mission*, such as the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society, sustains a close relation to a church body (the Conservative Baptist Association) but neither its administration nor its budget are determined by the official processes of that church.

Type D Missions acknowledge no special relation to any specific church (although churches may choose to regard a certain Type D mission as their official expression in overseas work). All IFMA missions are of this type. By comparison, the EFMA includes all four types, and the DOM of the National Council includes mainly Type A structures.



Graphic V.B. shows the additional dimensions of relationship once a mission has planted a “national church” across a cultural barrier. The two short vertical lines—Church-to-Mission—may be taken to imply any of the four cases in Graphic V.A.

Mission to Church. This relation may best be only temporary. Once a national church is able and autonomous it may choose to be related to a sister church directly rather than through a mission agency.

Church to Church. When a new national church is related directly to a sister church in a foreign land, this signifies full equality and maturity. This is why many U.S. churches have added a new office to handle these relations.

Mission to Mission. The tendency in some quarters is to phase out the older mission apparatus in favor of the church-to-church relationship. This is a profound mistake, since (as we have seen) the non-Christian world is not dwindling. Far better: encourage the national church to sponsor its own E-2 and E-3 outreach by means of its own mission initiative. This then allows the two mission structures to continue on, in relationship with each other, to complete the task of world evangelization.

If all churches are to become sending churches, they will be most effective only if they can express their energies through the mobile specific ministries carried on by dedicated mission structures. There are already more than 200 such agencies in the non-Western world. But there is still vast confusion both in the Western and non-Western world regarding the nature and destiny of the mission society. We need to be as concerned about the care and feeding of the mission structure as we are about the church structures.

Can we now "see" the task ahead? A relatively tiny trickle of missionaries from the Western world has, under God, produced over 200 million Christians in the non-Western world. Roughly half of these are in Africa, the other half in Asia. This is a significant achievement. It proves that Christianity, unlike any other religion, is truly universal. It provides an unprecedented base for what must, in the days ahead, be an unprecedentedly strong new push forward.

¹ *West* refers to all people of Western culture, whether in Europe, the Western hemisphere, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, etc. For simplicity, all non-western peoples not in Africa are included here under *Asia*, such as those in Oceania, and New World aboriginals.

Graphic I.A. is drawn from the data in the following table which in turn is derived from Table IV in David Barrett's famous article "AD 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa" in the January 1970 issue of the *International Review of Mission*. Note that he is calling *Christian* those who call themselves *Christian*.

This leaves Africa and Asia (as defined above) as the two large non-Christian continents. Also, since he gives world data for only the three years, 1900, 1965 and 2000, we have had to calculate the data for the intervening years 1975 and 1985, by using the average annual growth rate between 1965 and 2000.

Table VI.

	1900		1965		1975		1985		2000	
	NonCn	Cn	NonCn	Cn	NonCn	Cn	NonCn	Cn	NonCn	Cn
West	131	443	272	857	327	965	388	1101	500	1371
	.30	to 1	.32	to 1	.34	to 1	.35	to 1	.36	to 1
Africa	114	4	231	75	282	116	337	181	417	351
	28.5	to 1	3.1	to 1	2.4	to 1	1.9	to 1	1.2	to 1
Asia	896	12	1769	75	2114	98	2527	128	3297	192
	74.7	to 1	23.6	to 1	21.6	to 1	19.7	to 1	17.2	to 1
Total Cn:	459		1007		1179		1410		1914	
Total NonCn:	1241		2272		2723		3252		4214	
Cn +NonCn:	1600		3279		3902		4662		6128	

²These conclusions may be arrived at from the data in Table VI. For example, the number of African and Asian Christians in 1900 was 4 + 12 million, while today it is 116 + 98 million, or 13.375 times as great.

³Note that these rates are not the general biological growth rates for these areas of the world, nor are they the biological growth rates of specifically the Christian or non-Christian populations. In each case they consist of the biological rates plus (or minus) the effect of conversions from one group to the other.

⁴One of the rumors going around is simply, "The percentage of Christians in the world is getting smaller." This, it is said, is due to "the population explosion." We have seen that the percentage of Christians in Africa and Asia is markedly increasing not decreasing, despite the population explosion. Of this there is no question. How can people say that the overall number of Christians in the world is decreasing percentagewise? Easy: the great mass of Christians, nominal though they may be, has been in the Western world (defined in note #1). When Communism pulled a mass of these nominal Christians into nominal atheism there was a huge drop in the apparent number of Christians. At the same time Christians in Europe have been unable to win their children to true Christian faith. Finally, what Christians there were have decided on a zero population growth. What this does not mean, however, is that Christianity in the so-called mission lands cannot keep up with the very real population explosion in those areas of the world. There is where the crucial race is, and the presence or absence of population growth among Western Christians is not going to decide that issue.

⁵I am indebted for part of these data to the MARC office in Monrovia, California, but they must not be blamed for the guess work I have added in regard to other parts, growth rates, etc. Graphic II.B. cities 50,000 Protestant missionaries. This datum MARC offered to me in advance from their soon-to-appear *Mission Handbook: North American Protestant Ministries Overseas* (Monrovia: MARC, 1973).

⁶Alan Tippett has called this organic growth, because it involves the development of the internal structure of a social organism.

⁷Norman Cummings in a recent paper has presented this phrase as well as the underlying exegesis of the New Testament.

⁸A more extended discussion of this analysis, and many other characteristics of mission agencies, is found in a chapter entitled "Organization of Missions Today" in *Mission Handbook: North American Protestant Ministries Overseas* (Monrovia, MARC, 1973).

⁹An extended discussion of this diagram and this general subject is found in Chapter Seven, "Planting Younger Missions," in C. Peter Wagner, Editor, *Church/Mission Tensions Today* (Moody Press, 1973).

About the Author

Dr. Winter is the founder and director of the U.S. Center for World Mission in Pasadena, a new research and resource center whose sole aim is to help missions mobilize to reach the world's 2.4 billion people now culturally isolated from any existing Christian witness.

He served ten years as a missionary in Guatemala, taught ten years at the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission, and has been active in the formation of many organizations. He holds degrees from Cal. Institute of Technology, Columbia University, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Cornell University, where he earned the Ph.D. in Anthropology and Linguistics.

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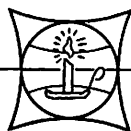
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