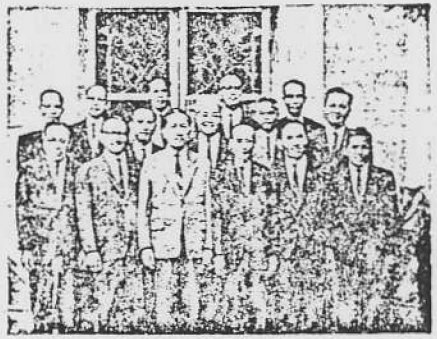
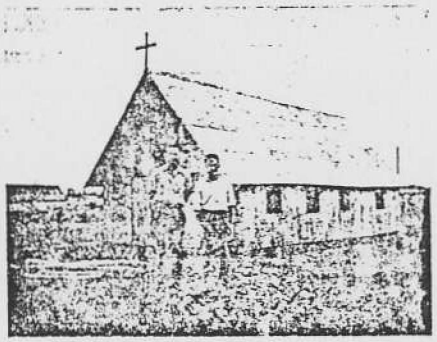
Wounded soldiers in World Vision wheelchairs

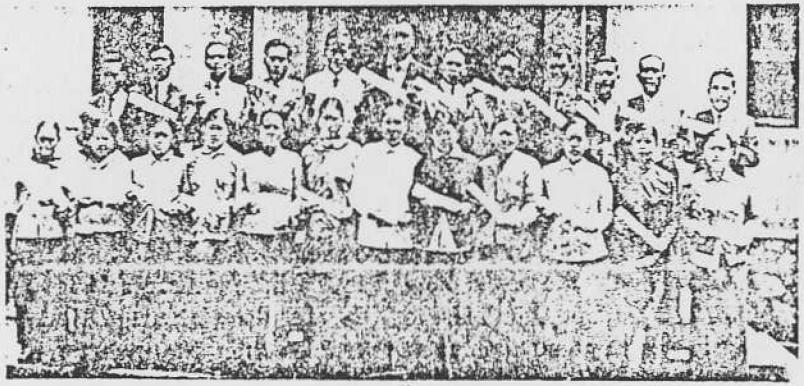
Missionary Richard Drummond visits military hospital



Group of Vietnamese pastors



A typical rural church



CMA Bible school pastors in 1971

The Church in Asia

V

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SOUTH VIETNAM

by Reginald Reimer

THE CHURCH TODAY

VIETNAM was vaulted into the spotlight of world attention during the 1960's, with the acceleration of its civil war. Though the news media flooded the world with information about that once-obscure Asian country, accurate data about the people of Vietnam and their life still remain in short supply. Especially is this true about the Christian movement among the Vietnamese. Even though Christians around the world often took a leading role in meeting human need and in protesting the horrors of war in Vietnam, now that the American involvement is ended there is a tendency to want to forget the whole Vietnam decade. In the process, rightful Christian concern for the people of Vietnam is in danger of becoming a casualty.

REGINALD REIMER has been a missionary under the Christian and Missionary Alliance in South Vietnam since 1966. Furlough studies at the School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth, Fuller Theological Seminary, equipped him for further in-depth studies of the Vietnamese church upon his return in early 1972. With his wife, he has been involved in evangelistic and humanitarian ministries and in nationwide church growth research.

The chapter on Vietnam was first written in 1968 by Rev. Gordon Cathey, a missionary under the major Christian and Missionary Alliance Mission. Because the entire volume has been delayed five years, during which radical changes have marked the whole Vietnam picture (climaxing with the conclusion of the war in 1973), Rev. Reginald Reimer, also a missionary of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and who is now engaged in church growth research evangelism, rewrote this entire chapter in the light of recent church and historical developments.

Due to recent happenings in Vietnam, a brief updated report is given on page 589.

Among the seven countries of mainland southeast Asia, South Vietnam has by far the largest Christian community. God is working and giving rapid church growth. Three and one-half centuries of Roman Catholic efforts and some sixty years of Protestant missions have brought more than 2 million persons into the organized churches—11 percent of the population. In all of Asia only India and the island nations of Indonesia and the Philippines can boast larger Christian communities.

The Protestant movement numbers about six hundred churches. Their distribution is so remarkable that not a single one of Vietnam's forty-four provinces is without at least one congregation. Several provinces have more than twenty churches. At the end of 1972 the Protestant community numbered 154,000. Some 53,000 of these were communicant members, which are by definition of their churches baptized adults. About two-thirds of the Protestants in Vietnam are ethnic Vietnamese, while most of the remaining third derive from a dozen or so of the highland tribes collectively called Montagnards.

Because of a unique missionary history, in which one Protestant mission held a virtual monopoly in Vietnam until the mid-1950's, 83 percent of these Protestants in the country belong to one major denomination, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN—sometimes referred to as the "Tin Lanh Church," after the Vietnamese word for "gospel"). It has existed as an independent body since 1928, the fruit of the work of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, which dates its beginning in Vietnam to 1911. In the late 1950's, during a period of relative peace following Vietnam's war of independence, the CMA was joined by other evangelical mission boards, which began evangelism (see later section in this chapter titled "Christian History"). Together the newer missions, along with several small independent churches, now have about twenty-five thousand adherents. At this writing all are experiencing slow to moderate growth among the ethnic Vietnamese. Acceptance of Christianity by the tribal minorities, however, continues at a better rate, with at least one significant people's movement among the Stieng tribe currently in progress.

Roman Catholic Christians outnumber Protestants about thirteen to one. Their large church is the fruit of a long and vigorous missionary saga which began 2½ centuries before the French colonial administration of Vietnam. In 1960 Pope John XXIII crowned these 350 years of missionary labor wtih the creation of a full ecclesiastical hierarchy, including eight dioceses and two archdioceses, complete with Vietnamese archbishops. Today some two thousand Vietnamese diocesan priests look after the faithful. Catholic Christians hold prominent positions in government and society. The church has long taken a leading role in education and more recently in providing other badly needed social services in this war-torn

country. Roman Catholics have also provided the backbone of anti-communist resistance among the Vietnamese people. Even in North Vietnam, where perhaps an additional million Catholics remain, there are strong indications that the church has not capitulated to pressure. However, the evangelistic fervor of early Vietnamese Catholicism has apparently dissipated. Statistics released by the church indicate that the influx of new converts has been reduced to a trickle.

But what of the church in severed North Vietnam? Reports on Protestant Christianity in North Vietnam are conflicting. Almost no one is optimistic. When the country was divided in 1954 only about a thousand baptized believers and a handful of pastors stayed behind. There are no indications as to their number now. A Christian officer of the International Control Commission reported seeing Protestant churches boarded up and used as granaries. In 1969 reports of a national Protestant meeting came out of North Vietnam. They indicated that nine clergymen and eleven congregations were still active. It was significant that Protestant leaders in South Vietnam recognized all the faces except one in a photograph of the North Vietnam Protestant gathering; only one new face in fifteen years does not testify to growth. A South Vietnamese Christian prisoner who had been taken to the north in 1972 and released in 1973 reported that the government control of remaining Protestant activities was virtually complete. We may gather from our scant sources that the Protestant church in North Vietnam has fared no better under the communists than churches in other Asian countries.

Catholic Christianity, however, has been reported to be alive in North Vietnam. At the end of 1973 observers visited churches and attended mass there, having been granted an interview with the reigning Catholic hierarch in Hanoi. He reported that Christians were faithful in church attendance and interest and that there were "thousands of the faithful."

What has been the overall effect of the bitter Vietnam war on South Vietnamese churches and missionary efforts? This question elicits widely varied answers even from those on the scene. To present a balanced answer to this question, I will begin at 1964, which in a real sense marked the beginning of world attention on Vietnam because of the large-scale intervention of the United States during this year. Calculations based on the records of ethnic Vietnamese congregations of the ECVN showed an average annual growth rate of 6.6 percent in the decade before 1964 and an average of 4.1 percent from 1964 to 1970. In plain language, church growth was slowed by more than one-third. This calls into question the careless statements of some who have said that the war was good for the Christian movement.[1]

REFUGEES AND RESPONSIVENESS

Accurate statistics may never be known, but at least one-fourth of the population of South Vietnam was uprooted at one time or another during the war, probably about 4 or 5 million people! People were dislocated in one of two ways. One was by spontaneous flight in the face of danger or actual battle; an example of this type of dislocation took place during the 1972 Easter invasion, when North Vietnamese forces smashed their way across the seventeenth parallel into South Vietnam. A half-million people in the two provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien fled southward, where they were organized into temporary camps in the area around Da Nang. The second type of dislocation was a planned, though usually involuntary, relocation of entire villages or districts for both military and political reasons. In both cases a settled, agrarian people were torn from ancestral lands and familiar surroundings. Such dislocation is much more than physical, and of necessity people in such circumstances are open to innovation, including religious change. Away from ancestral tombs and disillusioned with the host of local spirits who were supposed to take care of them but didn't, refugees looked around for something with which to integrate their lives. Experience in Vietnam revealed that even people from areas formerly resistant to the gospel suddenly became responsive. In central Vietnam, for example, almost any systematic presentation of the gospel met with a welcome response and produced visible results.

However, time and time again the war presented difficulties which prevented solid church growth. Sometimes the same people became refugees several times over, and their continued economic and social uncertainties were not conducive to good church growth. In one case some thirty new groups of Christians, carefully nurtured in a highland resettlement area, were forced to flee. In their dispersion they were lost as countable Christians in identifiable churches. In another case a promising Christward movement among refugees in Quang Ngai province produced eight new congregations in 1966 and 1967, but three years later only two still functioned, both held together by lay leadership. Already shorthanded, the church leaders could not provide trained pastors for new congregations, and regrettably they did not make alternate provision by training local lay leaders. As a result, in case after case promising churchward movements melted away, leaving only the sparest of fruit.

A BRIGHT SPOT—TRIBAL CHRISTIANITY

The most rapidly growing churches in Vietnam today are those in the highland tribes. Collectively called Montagnards, these attractive, bronze-skinned people are divided into four tribes of over a hundred thousand population each, plus twenty-five or so smaller tribes. Their ethnic-

linguistic diversity has long presented a challenge to Christian missions. However, though Protestant missionary efforts were begun only about forty years ago, there is now a total Protestant community of forty-five thousand people, including an established, growing church in every major tribe. Most of the evangelism and church-planting has been done by missionaries of the CMA, with assistance by Vietnamese missionaries of the ECVN. CMA linguists have completed the New Testament in two tribal languages and are well along in two others. Wycliffe Bible Translators, who began working in Vietnam in 1960, are now producing literacy materials and translating Scriptures in another twenty languages. There are now only six tribes (with a total population of less than fifty thousand) who have no Christian witness.

The work of the church among the tribes has often gone forward in the face of great difficulty. For one thing, the tribes have been treated much like the Indians were in American history. Also, by reason of their location the tribes have often been caught between the opposing sides in the war.[2] In the early 1970's tribal churches were touched by revival fires, with miraculous acts of the Holy Spirit frequently reported.[3] One of the outstanding results of the revival among the tribal churches was confession of the sin of reliance on fetishes by many second-generation Christian young people. A considerable number of spectacular happenings (instant healing, rocks splitting, raising from the dead, appearance of angels, etc.) were reported, often raising the eyebrows of sophisticated Western Christians. I have heard these things reported with such simple sincerity by reliable believers that I have frequently been convinced of their authenticity.

The rapid conversion of many tribesmen is continuing. Because of their closely knit social structure, the tribesmen often make their decisions together. When many people of one particular tribe make the decision to become Christian, within a short space of time a people's movement occurs. Such a phenomenon is now going on in the Stieng tribe. Three years ago there were only a hundred Stieng Christians; now (early 1974) five thousand Stieng have become Christians in spite of the fact that their entire tribe was uprooted twice in two years and was forced to move dozens of miles each time. All this has happened with only one full-time Stieng worker and one missionary, both of whom early saw the need of training lay leaders. These leaders are doing the bulk of day-to-day spiritual teaching. Naturally, the mushrooming infant church among the Stieng is faced with problems, but thankfully they are problems of growth!

The tribes' churches, thanks to movements such as that among the Stieng, are an encouraging development in Vietnam Christianity. If these present trends continue, the Montagnards in spite of their diversity could

be on their way to becoming the first fully evangelized group in the country. Calculations based on 1973 statistics of the ECVN are revealing: though Montagnards make up only 6 percent of South Vietnam's population and 33 percent of the membership of the ECVN, they accounted for a whopping 53 percent of the baptisms! The tribes' churches have also formed a "mission" to carry the gospel to unreached sister tribes.

EVANGELIZING THE MILITARY

The war did not greatly restrict opportunities for evangelism, as might be imagined. In fact, the war presented some unique opportunities for Christian witness. Also, the cruel uprooting of peoples from ancestral lands and villages as a result of the war had the effect of making people more responsive to the gospel than they were before. One of the most remarkable evangelistic ministries to develop during the war was among Vietnam's large military establishment. This ministry was pioneered in the 1950's by Mrs. Ruth Jeffrey, veteran Vietnam missionary and daughter of Jonathan Goforth. During the 1960's this ministry gave a Christian witness to hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese soldiers in training camps, military hospitals, military prisons, and even forward battle posts. A team of Vietnamese evangelists led by CMA missionaries Garth Hunt and Jim Livingston preached and distributed gospel literature and gift packets to thousands of Vietnamese servicemen from the Mekong delta to the demilitarized zone. They also distributed hundreds of wheelchairs and crutches supplied by World Vision and the Kathryn Kuhlmann Foundation. This unique ministry continues today under the direction of Glenn Johnson of Overseas Crusades.

Experience in Vietnam has shown that family solidarity has often proven a barrier to giving the gospel a fair hearing. In the military, however, thousands of young men, many of them literally boys plucked against their wills out of their family units, were thrust into battle with only minimal training. Many already lay near-neglected in military hospitals, having escaped close brushes with violent death. Thus those who gave themselves unsparingly to witness to such men often found them eager to receive the gospel. The recorded decisions for Christ and the number who signed up for Bible correspondence courses was in the thousands. Unfortunately, however, the mobile nature of military life made the follow-up of new converts very difficult. The handful of Vietnamese Protestant military chaplains was too thinly spread or too concerned with other affairs to pay much attention to these new believers. Yet I believe that many of these men and their families may become responsible church members in more peaceful times.

WELFARE-EVANGELISM TENSIONS

The Vietnam war brought with it a considerable influx of new missions (see later section in this chapter titled "Christian History"). Of the twenty-five foreign Protestant agencies in Vietnam in 1973, fifteen came after 1963, and for the most part these new agencies were concerned with meeting the intense human needs brought on by the war. Their help was welcomed because the existing evangelistic missions simply did not have enough physical resources, though they, too, contributed to emergency relief. These new organizations represented Christians in at least ten different countries, but the bulk of financial resources came from the United States. This American generosity in alleviating human suffering in Vietnam demonstrated that the consciences of Christians in the United States were concerned about the Vietnamese people. Missionaries carried on the two tasks of evangelizing and ministering to human need in an admirable, selfless fashion. At least eleven missionaries died at the hands of the communists during the 1960's.[4]

Not enough can be said about the multitude of good works done by such Christian agencies as World Vision, Vietnam Christian Service, Mennonite Central Committee, World Relief Commission, and others. By the care of neglected infants, the feeding and clothing of refugees, and the provision of medicine and prosthetic devices for the sick and wounded, they demonstrated the love of Christ. In addition to providing emergency relief in terms of food, clothing, shelter, and medicine, several of these agencies set up more permanent aid programs in the areas of child care, education, medical assistance, vocational training, and community development. And at least in one instance, the generous example of foreign Christians helped inspire the formation of an effective all-Vietnamese organization called Christian Youth for Social Service.

While the positive social contributions of these organizations is well-known, their overall effect on Vietnamese Christianity and the propagation of the gospel has not often been discussed. On the plus side, large-scale Protestant involvement in social welfare gained for the small Protestant minority a new recognition and respect. Yet there were problems. Mismanagement and occasionally outright corruption were not absent. Generally the Protestant organizations with an ecumenical orientation suffered most in this way because of their failure to work with or (at times) even consult the Vietnamese Protestant leaders, who were all evangelicals. The most effective work was usually done when the welfare assistance was channeled through existing churches.

This proved to be no simple matter. Local churches and their pastors had almost no preparation for this added task thrust upon them. The

tendency was for the responsibility of relief distributions and the running of schools to fall on pastors, thus robbing them of the time necessary to provide spiritual care for their flocks. Experienced observers, both foreign and Vietnamese, noted with sadness a decline in the spiritual and evangelistic vigor of the churches. Following the cessation of the war, many Vietnamese pastors, having become accustomed to the economic power and independence which came with involvement in social welfare, are now reluctant to give up that role. Until they learn to entrust the "waiting on tables" to others and return to the scriptural priorities of prayer and preaching the Word, the spiritual life of the church may be expected to languish.

The newfound recognition which came with the availability of foreign resources for social welfare raised other questions of priorities in Christian responsibility among Vietnamese church leaders. Some leaders of the forty-five-year-old ECVN asked why their founding CMA mission did not help them get involved in education and welfare activities sooner. The new involvement in social welfare and especially in education, it was sometimes assumed, would attract more new converts than the traditional evangelistic approach. Before this theory was disproved by the facts, some of the more tried and tested methods of evangelism were abandoned. It is perhaps true that the CMA mission could be criticized for underestimating the cultural mandate. But Vietnamese Christians are now in danger of viewing as normal the overbalanced emphasis of foreign missions on welfare and social work during the war emergency. To do so will impart a distorted sense of priorities in mission. While applauding the Christian involvement in helping alleviate the Vietnam tragedy, one must also recognize the fact that the influx of new missions which are largely engaged in social work has not measurably speeded the discipling of the Vietnamese people to Christian faith.

EFFECT OF U.S. INTERVENTION

There were those who were quick to blame this slow acceptance of Christianity directly on the U.S. military involvement.* It was true that the large expeditionary force was soon supporting a huge parasitic community of those who made their living by the vices which accompany war. Having been present in Vietnam during those years, I saw the development of a black market of incredible proportions. And at the height of the war, free world forces, chiefly those of the U.S., were supporting tens of thousands of prostitutes, thereby exposing a seamy side of America to

*One eminent European churchman who is usually knowledgeable about missions speculated that the Vietnamese would turn a deaf ear to the gospel for five generations because of what the U.S. was doing. This opinion has proved as mistaken as that of those who said the war was good for churches and missions.

the Vietnamese. Worse still were the frequent incidents when drafted American soldiers, embittered by having to be in Vietnam, became vindictive toward all Vietnamese.

But, remarkably, the Vietnamese were usually willing to judge each individual on his own merits. While anti-American prejudices did develop, many Vietnamese openly admired many American characteristics. "Every nation has its good and its bad people," I was frequently told. Too, the many selfless deeds of American soldiers in generously assisting orphanages and schools, for example, helped provide a counterbalance to their more publicized vices. Today, only a year after the Americans have officially pulled out of Vietnam, there is a greater and more open interest in the gospel than at any previous time. Even as I was writing these lines I was interrupted by a teenage student from a government school who came to request Bibles; he reports that forty to fifty boys have begun on their own to study the Scriptures.

Opponents of the gospel in Vietnam have often tried to frustrate the advance of Protestant Christianity by calling it the "American religion." In the early years the Roman Catholics coined this epithet. The fact that many of the early missionaries who brought the gospel to Vietnam were Americans, and that these missionaries did not always distinguish between the gospel and their own cultural expression of it, helped reinforce the idea of an "American religion." During the massive American wartime presence there was an upsurge in this type of criticism. A leading Catholic clergyman with influence in Vietnamese intellectual circles published a statement saying that wherever the American military went, Protestant churches sprang up. This connection was exploited most by communist propagandists, with telling effect in the areas they controlled. Just how much the alleged connection between Protestantism and America hindered the acceptance of the gospel in government-controlled areas of Vietnam is debatable.

The U.S. presence did have some interesting side effects on the thinking of the Christian community, which soon found out that all Americans were not the same kind of "Christians" as the missionaries were. The tremendous diversity in life-style and theology of the hundreds of U.S. military chaplains baffled some Vietnamese, whose only previous experience had been with evangelicals. Often Vietnamese churches and pastors became the beneficiaries of the generosity of chaplains or military units who supported church projects with cash and materials to the tune of thousands of dollars. This generosity, coupled with incredible wastefulness in U.S. civilian aid and military programs, had the effect of convincing most Vietnamese, Christians included, that U.S. resources were limitless. Some

found it difficult to understand why American missions, too, could not keep up the abundant flow of goods and money.

In summary, I conclude that the U.S. presence has not been nearly as negative for the propagation of the gospel as was expected. Certainly the Vietnam War gave a lot of Americans, including many Christians, the opportunity to see dire physical and spiritual need firsthand. Some of them returned to Vietnam on missions of mercy. And the worldwide attention on Vietnam has helped stimulate the size of the missionary enterprise there to its greatest proportions ever.

A SATURATION EVANGELISM PROGRAM

As mentioned above, the war seems to have had a moderately negative effect on the spiritual life of the church. This included a decrease in evangelistic zeal. Recognizing this, ECVN and CMA leaders combined to draw up a program of saturation evangelism known as "Evangelism Deep and Wide" (EDW). The drafters of the program were influenced and inspired by the evangelistic congresses of the 1960's (Berlin and Wheaton) and by Evangelism-In-Depth (E/D) in Latin America. Thus the program that emerged in Vietnam incorporated several of the principles of Evangelism-In-Depth but differed in some key points. The basic principle of lay mobilization was retained, along with the general cycle of organizing prayer cells, training Christians for evangelism, systematic visitation, etc. However, the E/D requirement that these activities should be carefully programmed within a specific time limit was not kept. Evangelistic campaigns which culminated E/D programs were downplayed. The architects of EDW insisted on a cyclical but time-flexible application of the basic principles. EDW theory also included specific plans for planting new churches. The customary prayer cells were renamed evangelism cells and were viewed from the beginning as nuclei for new churches.

This practice, however, has not been as good as the theory. Though officially launched on Christmas Day of 1969, four years later there is no evidence to show that EDW has successfully mobilized the Christians in evangelism or that it has changed the slow growth pattern of the church. In fact, EDW leaders say that with the exception of a few localities the program has not even been implemented. EDW appears to have been stymied by internal ECVN politics and has been affected somewhat by church-mission tensions. It was especially undermined by one foreign organization which paid lay Christians to do what EDW hoped to inspire them to do as their Christian duty. But perhaps the greatest problem was that EDW attempted too much: it was intended as a total program of church renewal, evangelism, and extension, and to this end all kinds of

supportive literature was produced—so much, in fact, that it produced confusion rather than fruit. By the time the proponents of EDW recognized this and moved toward simplification it was too late. The magic had gone out of the catchy name, and fatigue had already set in. Now some other way may have to be found to reintroduce the essentially sound principles of EDW into Vietnamese Christianity.

TRAINING THE MINISTRY

The predominant evangelical church, ECVN, has three main pastor-training institutions: a large school for Vietnamese pastors located at Nha Trang and two smaller ones which train tribal pastors in the highland towns of Da Lat and Banmethuot. The Southern Baptists have a small residence school in Saigon and the United World Mission has one in Da Nang. The Nha Trang school is moving in the direction of self-support, with the mission at present underwriting only one-third of the operating expenses. Probably few theological schools elsewhere in Asia could boast such a record, especially in a war-torn, developing nation. The military draft instituted during the war seriously hampered the recruitment of students, so that in the mid-1960's enrollment dropped from one hundred to fifty students. The school's leaders countered this crisis by lowering age and educational requirements to get pre-draft-age students. Only in this way was it possible for students to get ministerial deferments from military service. While this action solved the recruitment problems in terms of numbers, it did not provide the kind of leaders the church needed; the ECVN was placed in a position where it had to place very young men, some only teenagers, into pastorates. In an age-conscious society this had serious repercussions.

The Theological Education by Extension (TEE) movement has in it a built-in solution for this kind of problem. Since 1970, when a TEE workshop was held in Saigon, church and mission leaders have discussed TEE principles and passed a number of resolutions in favor of implementing them. But it was not until 1973, when the dean of Nhatrang Theological College caught the vision and sold his colleagues on the idea, that anything was actually done. The program was launched in the fall of 1973, with some four hundred students registering to study one to three of the six courses offered. These students were to meet at intervals with their professors in one of five regional centers in order to go over prepared course materials. A dozen new centers and several new courses are to be added in the spring of 1974. While initially there have been problems in the administration of such a far-flung program, it shows great potential for training leaders. As a part-time teacher in the program, I am particularly impressed with the caliber of the students who enroll. They are often

capable, experienced adults who are already making significant contributions to their local churches.

The Baptists, who have also experienced great difficulty in recruiting suitable students in their residence program, are now launching into an extension program and are working on the preparation of programmed materials.

Schools for training tribal pastors are having an even harder time in meeting the need for pastors, mainly because tribal churches are growing considerably faster than the Vietnamese. In past years these schools bracketed their semesters into the slack periods of tribal rice cultivation cycles. Pressure on these standards, however, has lengthened semesters and in the process increased recruitment problems. Consideration is now being given to some modified form of extension education for the tribes. Fortunately, tribal churches are more open to lay leadership than the Vietnamese churches.

Nation and People

During the Vietnam war, this lazy, S-shaped country on Indochina's eastern seaboard became a familiar sight to TV viewers and newspaper readers around the world. Both ends of the "S" spread into large river deltas—the Red in the north and the Mekong in the south; these deltas are joined by a long, narrow strip of land. The geographical feature which sets Vietnam aside from the rest of Indochina is the Annamite mountain chain. The seventeenth parallel was set by the 1954 Geneva accords as the political dividing line between North and South Vietnam. Each of the Vietnams today compares roughly to the size of the state of Washington, or about three-fourths the size of Great Britain.

The central feature of North Vietnam is the Red River Valley. Here a gigantic human effort, begun before the Christian era, tames an unpredictable river and makes its delta habitable and productive. Today the Red River Valley in places supports two thousand people per square mile, a world record for agricultural land. The mountains of North Vietnam provide rich mineral resources: coal, manganese, tungsten, antimony, tin, and chromium, to name only the chief ones. The north, like the south, takes advantage of easy access to the sea for food and transport.

The narrow strip of land which runs southward between the deltas is geographically divided into a flat lowland strip adjacent to the sea and the interior mountains. In South Vietnam the country widens, and the mountains spread into a vast plateau called the central highlands, where the temporate climate and fertile soil combine to support productive plantations of coffee, tea, tobacco, and rubber, though vast areas of the plateau are still undeveloped. Along South Vietnam's long coastline the

warm, blue-green waters of the South China Sea, friendly except for autumn typhoons, yield a bounty of fish, crustaceans, and salt for the Vietnamese diet.

The southern delta, transversed by the several branches of the Mekong River, is a veritable garden of Eden; it could well serve as the rice bowl of southeast Asia. In the years before the destructions of war three rice crops produced each year provided a large surplus for export. In addition to rice, the bountiful production of fruits and vegetables makes the region coveted real estate. By far the greatest portion of the population lives on the river deltas and on the narrow coastal strip, where tropical climate, flat and fertile land, and an abundance of moisture have made rice cultivation the natural means of livelihood. The highlands have for centuries been the home of the aboriginal tribes; only in the last two decades have the Vietnamese begun permanently settling in that region.

The estimated population of South Vietnam reached 19.1 million in 1973, while the population of North Vietnam was slightly higher, at 22 million. With an annual growth rate in excess of 2 percent, there could be a total of 75 million Vietnamese by the end of this century. Considerable difference of opinion on the precise origin of these Vietnamese people remains. Their forebears appear to have been born in a complex process of racial and cultural mixing between the people of mainland Asia and the people of the Pacific (in the Red River Valley) centuries before the Christian era. Racially the Vietnamese belong to the Mongoloid group. They are a yellow-skinned people with strong racial unity, remarkable vigor, and a well-developed, highly Sinicized civilization. For at least two thousand years the Vietnamese have been an agrarian people whose culture revolved around the rice cycle. Ethnolinguists do not agree which element is the dominant one in the Vietnamese language, and Vietnamese is usually placed in a subclass of its own.

In addition to the Vietnamese who form the dominant majorities, both Vietnams have ethnic minorities. In the south about 15 percent of the population is made up of minorities, of which the largest is the Khmer (Cambodian) population; it is estimated that there are about 1.4 million Khmer concentrated in several regions of the Mekong delta, and in several provinces they make up a majority of the population. These Khmer are the least evangelized people in South Vietnam, and until recently no concerted effort had been made to reach them. In late 1973, however, one missionary couple with long experience in Cambodia began gathering a core of Khmer workers and found the Khmer to be more open to the gospel than ever before.

A million Chinese, mostly Cantonese-speaking, also live in South Vietnam. Each of the major cities and towns of Vietnam has a Chinese busi-

ness community, but most of the Chinese live in the huge Cholan quarter of Saigon, where through their banks and warehouses they wield tremendous economic power. The total Protestant community among the Chinese is only two thousand Christians, who meet in about a dozen congregations divided among three mini-denominations. Five expatriate missionaries are at work among the Chinese.

The Montagnards number somewhere between eight hundred thousand and a million people. They reside chiefly in the central highlands, where they survive by swidden (slash and burn) agriculture; a few tribes with a wet-rice culture survive in pockets on the lowlands. Linguistically the thirty or so Montagnard tribes are divided into two main classifications: Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian, but each tribe has a distinct language, and the social structure between tribes also varies considerably. (The Rade are matriarchal and the Jeh are patriarchal.) The Montagnards are quite receptive to the gospel. A dwindling minority of about fifty thousand Cham people is all that is left of the once-proud kingdom of Champa, which once ruled the territory now known as central Vietnam (its culture influenced predominantly by India). The Cham have so far proven very resistant to the gospel, and there is only one Cham Christian worker.

National History

Recorded Vietnamese history begins ironically with the imposition of a thousand years of Chinese domination in the year 111 B.C.[5] In it Vietnamese culture, at first confined to the Red River Valley, was thoroughly Sinicized in both material culture (especially rice-paddy farming) and social institutions. The Chinese language, too, left a lasting imprint on the Vietnamese. The most remarkable feature of this long period, which ended in A.D. 939, was the emergence of the Vietnamese as a separate and distinct people, a true testimony to their unity and amazing vitality. Then followed nine hundred years of Vietnamese independence, interrupted by only one brief Chinese interregnum, in the fifteenth century. In the thirteenth century the Vietnamese were able on three separate occasions to withstand attacks from Kubla Khan's numerically superior hordes through the use of guerrilla warfare. Not only were the Vietnamese able to maintain independence, but they embarked on a course of southward expansion. Their first obstacle was the kingdom of Champa, which stood astride present-day central Vietnam. This once-powerful Indianized civilization was finally crushed in a decisive battle in 1471. Three hundred years later the present borders of Vietnam were achieved when the Vietnamese wrested most of the fertile Mekong delta from their second enemy, the Cambodians of the declining Khmer empire. This growing land area of

Vietnam presented Vietnamese rulers with serious difficulties in maintaining political unity, and as a result a series of divisions prevailed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

The sixteenth century witnessed the beginnings of Western mercantile and missionary penetration of Vietnam. First Portuguese, and then, a century later, Dutch, British, and French ships sailed into Vietnam's harbors—all without notable trading success. When the merchants' interest in Vietnam dropped off in the seventeenth century, it was Roman Catholic missionaries who stayed on to play an important role. Early Catholic missions met with remarkable success, due in large part to men like the French Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes, who laid the foundations of the great Vietnamese Catholic church more than any other single man. He is better known in secular history for the Romanization of the Vietnamese alphabet, a by-product of his missionary work. The church, as we shall see below, made good progress in spite of fierce official opposition. By the time the French established their political hegemony over Vietnam in the nineteenth century, there were nearly a million Vietnamese Catholics.

Just how the French were able to establish their control is a matter of historical controversy. The underlying cause was an overtly expansionist French foreign policy in competition with European neighbors. The man who helped precipitate the first armed intervention, however, was the overzealous Catholic missionary bishop Pigneau de Behaine. He formed an unholy alliance with French gunboats to help him enthrone a deposed Vietnamese prince, whom he had protected and raised in the hope of placing a Christian monarch on the Vietnamese throne. But it was not until 1883, some sixty years later, that the French were actually successful in taking control of Vietnam. It is still not popular to speak of the colonial era in any way but polemically, and because of later events the French control of Vietnam receives particularly bitter criticism. Yet the French period did bring blessings in the form of modern roads, a nationwide rail system, irrigation and reclamation, schools, hospitals, control of epidemic diseases, and other benefits. Some scholars are beginning to challenge the long-held assumption that the only French motivation was economic exploitation, and they are now suggesting that the greatest sin the French committed was their unwilling and disgraceful exit from Vietnam.

French intransigence, along with Allied (particularly British) acquiescence, tragically permitted the French to regain a foothold in Vietnam after World War II, when the Japanese occupation had effectively ended French authority. A long and bitter anachronistic war of independence ensued. During this war America was drawn into supporting the French and "nationalistic" forces when the independence forces of Ho Chi Minh took a communist turn. The war ended, albeit temporarily, with a major French

defeat at Dien Bien Phu. The Geneva Accords of 1954 dictated the terms of a tenuous peace agreement by dividing Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel.

But ten years later the struggle in Vietnam had heated up to the point where the U.S. under President Johnson felt that massive intervention was necessary in order to save South Vietnam from communism. After eight years of bitter war, in 1973 the U.S. pulled out the last of her troops under terms of a cease-fire. The outcome of the war was inconclusive. Indeed, it continued scarcely abated for the Vietnamese. The first year of "peace" claimed the lives of another estimated sixty thousand soldiers from both sides, more than the total number of Americans lost in the entire war! Under terms of the cease-fire South Vietnam was now divided, with a large number of areas under de facto communist control. At this writing a political settlement is still not on the horizon. The threat of another North Vietnamese invasion and of economic problems arising out of long, near-total dependence on the U.S. makes precarious (humanly speaking) the continued existence of South Vietnam. A relatively stable government under the leadership of President Nguyen van Thieu for eight continuous years is a rare, good sign.

Men of faith, having witnessed the hand of God restrain the oppressors before, are encouraged that God will do it again. Hadn't pessimists and self-proclaimed "realists" been predicting the closing of Vietnam for twenty-five years? Yet the door still remains open. Unequaled opportunities of gospel witness persist to this very day.

National Religions

The religious picture in Vietnam is complex and widely misunderstood. Though most Americans in Vietnam during the war assumed that most Vietnamese are Buddhist, few Vietnamese can articulate Buddhist beliefs, few ever attend organized Buddhist rituals, and only a minority even claim to be Buddhists. The unwary observer is often deceived because in recent years Buddhism has occasionally become the rallying point for political dissent. In such instances large numbers of Vietnamese became Buddhists for political reasons. It is my conclusion that there are fewer orthodox Buddhists in Vietnam than Roman Catholics!

The underlying web of everyday religious belief and practice is an all-pervasive animism which continues to affect many people who claim adherence to Buddhism, Cao-Daism, or even Christianity. This animism manifests itself in myriad ways: astrology, numerology, palmistry, geomancy (determining directions in relation to the influence of the elements), and zoochiromancy (use of animal parts in divination). Traditionally, unusual rocks, trees, or water formations; as well as countless other things,

were believed to be inhabited by spirits. The description and classification of spirits is almost an impossible task. Some spirits are common and are given proper names, such as the "Spirit of the Earth," the "Thunder God," etc. Every power or natural force has a spirit, every craft has a patron genie, every locality has its own spirit. "The true religion of the Annamese is the worship of spirits," wrote Father Leopold Cadiere, the leading authority on Vietnamese religion. Most of the spirits are believed to be intensely active, attaching themselves to a human being at the moment of his conception and continuing with him to death and beyond. They produce life, death, disease, loss of harvests, failure in examinations, and sterility in women. They watch over all the acts of man's life. The spirits are to be appeased, frightened, duped, fed, or flattered, depending on the situation.

The one unified, highly developed cult which has grown out of basic animism is ancestor worship. So developed and universal is this cult that some are tempted to classify it as a separate religion. Anthropologically speaking, however, ancestor worship is animism. Man is believed to have three souls and nine vital spirits. After death the souls of the deceased are honored during funeral rituals and thereafter at the ancestral altar. The souls of those not so honored become feared, malevolent, errant spirits which on certain days demand ritual attention by everyone who would avoid falling victim to them. This Vietnamese animism did not disappear quietly with the coming of Western educational influences and scientific thought. The French colonizers were surprised to find that the Vietnamese created new spirits for the machines they introduced. During the war American military advisors were sometimes horrified to find that horoscopes played an important part in military strategy. Even the new 1967 national constitution is categorized in such a way as to take numerology into account in the belief that perhaps the right combination of numbers will bring success.

The three great Eastern religions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism came to influence Vietnamese life especially during Vietnam's millennium under Chinese domination. Buddhism and Confucianism enjoyed periods of ascendancy in Vietnam's history but faded again. Modern Vietnamese Buddhism is felt by some to be in a mild state of revival, marked by the joining in 1963 of sixteen Buddhist organizations, including for the first time sects of both the Theravada and the Mahayana branches in what has been loosely translated the "Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam." The record of this organization, however, would indicate that it is more a testimony to the weakness of the component parts than to their united strength.

Confucianism left its mark on Vietnamese culture more as a social and

political philosophy than a religion. But even its social ideals were soon woven into the web of Vietnamese animism. Ancestor worship, for example, was seen as the logical extension of filial piety. Some remnants of the Confucian system of government persisted until the early years of the twentieth century. Taoism, which originated in China as a speculative philosophy, was known in Vietnam primarily as a system of magic, divination, and sorcery based on animism. Syncretized and interwoven with animism, the great traditions have left their mark.

Two significant religious movements sprang out of the Mekong delta in the last forty-five years. The Vietnamese tendency toward syncretism is seen in the rapid rise of the Cao Dai religion. In 1926 its founder, influenced by Taoist mediumship and European spiritism, professed to have been divinely led to attempt deliberate syncretism. Hence Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, animistic worship, and other beliefs were incorporated. The deliberate syncretism is seen in Cao Dai buildings, which incorporate the cathedral, the mosque, and the pagoda. The Cao Dai religion, starting from zero, gained a million followers in its first generation and today claims 2 million adherents. A second religious movement, which could be classified as a Buddhist revitalization movement, was spawned by the prophet Huynh Phu So in 1939. He gained wide popularity by his mysterious ability to heal the sick and his appeal for a simplified Buddhism which was not burdensome to the poor and oppressed. His Hoa Hao movement also gained a million followers within a generation. Doubtless both the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao movements owed some of their popularity to an anti-French political stance, for each maintained a powerful militia for that purpose.

Animism also plays a predominant role in religious beliefs of the ethnic minorities. The Montagnards were animists to the exclusion of everything else before Christianity came. The Chinese religious practices are every bit as animistic as the Vietnamese. The Khmer people are Theravada Buddhists. Though their Buddhism is considered more "pure" than the Mayahana variety, it too is riddled with animism. Many Khmer monks in fact are animistic practitioners who are sought out by the Vietnamese for their spiritist powers.

Christian History

Catholic Missions and Church

Roman Catholic missions began a full three centuries before Protestant efforts, and, though this volume's perspective is evangelical Protestant, I feel compelled to give the Catholics equal time because, as I have discovered, they have a remarkable but little-known history in Vietnam. The size and strength of the Catholic church today is the more remarkable

when one is aware of the great odds against which early missionaries labored. In contrast to Latin America or the Philippines, where the Christianization of relatively weak and fragmented cultures was easily achieved, the conversion of the Vietnamese was an uphill struggle. Missionaries encountered a well-developed, reasonably united culture of long standing.

In 1615 a band of Jesuits (including five Japanese!) established the first permanent Roman Catholic mission in central Vietnam, and in 1627 another mission (which proved unusually fruitful) was established in Tonkin, or present-day North Vietnam. By 1660 the lowest estimate places the number of Vietnamese Catholics at three hundred thousand; in 1680 one estimate, probably exaggerated, claimed eight hundred thousand. Whatever the precise figure, it is clear that there was phenomenal growth.

Some insights into the evangelizing process can be gained by following the remarkable career of a French Jesuit named Alexandre de Rhodes. Within three years of establishing the Tonkin Mission, Rhodes recorded the baptism of sixty-seven hundred converts, including members of the royal household and a number of "idolatrous priests." Rhodes himself attributed much of this success to "the constant miracles taking place in the birth of the church." Both his writings and those of his contemporaries reveal that they firmly believed that they and their catechists had been invested with divine power to perform miracles of exorcism, healing, restoring of sight, and even raising the dead. Their superior power apparently convinced not a few animistic priests to become Christians. Evangelicals today will not be surprised that this confrontation, power-encounter approach resulted in conversions. One cannot help but notice the sharp contrast of this approach to modern missionary ideals, which often tend toward tolerance and dialogue.

The long-term success of Rhodes' ministry was due to two farsighted policies. First, his converts were prepared for baptism by the study of the rigorous Eight-Day Catechism, which emphasized the radical error of their previous non-Christian beliefs and grounded them in doctrine. Second, Rhodes started from the very beginning to train a functional indigenous clergy—a "celibate lay brotherhood," he called them—though complications of church law prevented their ordination until 1660. Rhodes' catechists and these brotherhood members were the vanguard of the early Catholic movement.

It is not surprising that such success in converting the Vietnamese soon raised the suspicions of the temporal authorities. Before long the converting and teaching missionaries had to carry on their work underground. Rhodes himself was expelled from the kingdom on several occasions. Finally, in 1645, he was permanently banned from returning on penalty of death. Though his total career among the Vietnamese spanned less than

twenty years, Rhodes was called the "apostle of Vietnam"—and he was not yet through, for on his return to Europe he made three more important accomplishments on the behalf of missions in Indochina!

First, Rhodes successfully agitated for the creation of a special missionary office in the church, called an "apostolic vicar," which paved the way for the formation of a duly recognized national clergy in Vietnam and other Asian countries. Second, he generated a tremendous amount of popular and missionary interest in Vietnam by his tireless speaking and prolific writing. Finally, he helped inspire the formation of the Societe des Missions Etrangeres de Paris (MEP), which was the first Catholic order founded specifically to train and send missionaries (many of whom came to Indochina).

In the later years of the seventeenth century the Catholic movements in Vietnam entered a new and difficult period. The spontaneous expansion stopped. No net gains were recorded for over a century, and at times the movement even dwindled. Why, after such a good beginning, did this reversal occur? The reason most commonly given is simply political opposition. The ruling Confucianist mandarins feared, not without reason, that the new religion would upset the status quo, and they reacted accordingly by burning churches and even taking Christians' lives. Missionaries and priests had to innovate all kinds of ingenious ways of carrying on. But this kind of opposition could not have been the sole reason for interrupted growth, because in the nineteenth century growth resumed and continued in spite of even more severe anti-Christian persecution. The "perverse religion of the Europeans" was now officially proscribed. Christians were systematically dispossessed of their property, and the villages and churches were put to the torch. Thousands were imprisoned and forced to wear a twenty- or thirty-pound square wooden yoke. Those who recanted their faith were branded on the cheek, while those who refused were submitted to a hundred different tortures and cruel kinds of death. Christians were strangled, sawed apart, hacked limb from limb, and for sport tossed to be trampled by wild elephants. Estimates on the number who were martyred range from 80,000 to 130,000 people! How does one account for such a persevering faith and growing church in spite of such repression? A serious student of Christianity in Vietnam must come to terms with this question.

How different the picture today! Though the Vietnamese Catholic church is now large, powerful, and wealthy, playing a significant role in Vietnamese society, the early dynamic is gone. One looks in vain for that ancient evangelistic zeal of Rhodes' catechists. Where is the power that once cast out demons, healed the sick, and even raised the dead? The gospel is half-hidden. In her attempt to be culturally relevant the church has been ambushed by creeping syncretism. Virtually the only Vietnamese

who are becoming Catholics today are the children of Catholic parents, and even some of these are lost to the church. Can these bones, being dead, live again? Let us pray that they might.

PROTESTANT MISSIONS AND CHURCH

The first Protestant witness in Vietnam was launched in the late 1820's by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Because of hostility from both the Vietnamese and the French, the Society operated from Shanghai. In 1890 Monsieur Bonet, a professor at the Paris School of Oriental languages who had undoubtedly spent some time in Vietnam (though this cannot be confirmed), translated the gospel of Luke into Annamese (the Vietnamese spoken in central Vietnam), basing his work on an earlier French version. In 1898 two Britishers, James and Lawrence, sailed from Shanghai to central Vietnam to explore missionary possibilities. They purchased a boat and sailed along the coast and up the rivers, distributing gospel portions in Vietnamese. Less than a year later they were expelled from the country for "illegal religious practices," but not before James had translated the gospel of Mark into Vietnamese.

In 1903 Charles Bonnet, another Frenchman, met with more favorable acceptance. Shortly after he entered the country he gathered around him a number of Vietnamese, whom he trained as colporteurs, and began distributing the Word of God, assisted by two French Protestant clergymen, Pastor Pannier of Hanoi and Pastor Richemond from the Hue area. While these latter two men probably ministered exclusively in the French language, one may assume that their lives and ministry made an impact upon the Vietnamese as well. When Bonnet's failing health forced him to return to France in 1911, he was replaced by Monsieur Gidoin, a French merchant in the city of Da Nang. Before Bonnet left, the two men had made a decision to sell the Bible Society residence in Da Nang and relocate in Haiphong. In the providence of God the first missionaries of the Christian and Missionary Alliance arrived in Da Nang before Bonnet left, were encouraged by these men, and purchased his residence and the adjoining property.†

The oldest and largest of the Protestant churches in Vietnam today is the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, born of the work of the Christian and

†The Bible Society published the entire New Testament in Vietnamese in 1923, a joint effort of CMA misisonaries John D. Olson and W. C. Cadman, assisted by a committee of nationals and other missionaries. In 1925 the Old Testament was completed. There was a revision of the text in 1954, and currently another revision is nearing completion, based on the text of the *New English Bible*. This will be a church translation, updating the text in the vocabulary understood by the average Christian. A simpler, common-language version for the man on the street will also be completed soon.

Missionary Alliance. A three-man team from south China arrived in Da Nang in 1911 (just before Charles Bonnet returned to France on health leave), headed by Robert A. Jaffray. Jaffray, representing the relatively young North American Missionary Society, had already established a reputation for daring faith by pioneering in the Kwangsi province of China. Years later he was to spearhead the work of the Alliance in Indonesia, Borneo, and West Irian. Convinced that God had at last opened the door to Indochina, Jaffray almost immediately purchased the Bible Society property in Da Nang. Two missionary couples soon took up residence there, and in 1913 a tiny thatched chapel was built in the city.

The first decade of CMA missions in Indochina (1911-21) may be called the exploratory period. The first missionaries experimented with a number of approaches. They suffered an early setback when French colonial authorities severely restricted their activities during World War I. From the very beginning, the missionaries felt that the training of national workers and the wide use of literature would be necessary to evangelize Indochina. Accordingly, at the end of the first decade the missionaries were operating a productive printing press in Hanoi and had opened a Bible school in Tourane. Sensing a great opportunity, the CMA sent a total of twenty-two missionaries to their new field. By this time more than half of the New Testament was already in circulation. The three major centers of Vietnam—Hanoi, Tourane, and Saigon—had been occupied by missionaries who had baptized a core of believers in each place.

The second major period of CMA missions spanned the two decades from 1922 to 1940, which have been called "the remarkable years." They were characterized by an amazing response among the Vietnamese, particularly in the Mekong delta and central Vietnam—a response which came in spite of the fact that French authorities for a time officially proscribed Protestant Christianity in large sections of Indochina. Nearly twenty thousand Vietnamese were baptized during these years. In 1928 the Vietnamese congregations were organized into a church body, today called the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN). By 1940 there were 123 churches, of which 86 were fully self-supporting. The early missionaries deemed their efforts at evangelizing the Vietnamese so successful that they began to direct their attention to the other peoples of Indochina as well. A mission to the Khmer in Cambodia was begun in 1923, and in 1929 CMA missionaries began to work among the highland tribes in Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand.

The year 1941 marked a definite turning point in Vietnam's political and missionary history. In that year began a series of wars which have continued nearly unabated for three decades. The first was the Japanese occupation (1941-45), the second was the war of independence (1946-54), and the third is the present Vietnam war, which began gradually in the early 1960's and continues to this day. These three wars have affected the work of propagating the gospel in Vietnam in quite different ways. The young Vietnamese church rose to meet the challenge presented by the Japanese occupation of Indochina. When in 1941 mission financial support was virtually cut off and in 1943 those missionaries who remained were interned by the Japanese, the church nevertheless continued to grow both in membership and in self-reliant status, until in 1945 it was larger and stronger than it had been in 1940.

The August Revolution in 1945 signaled the start of a bloody, eight-year struggle by the Vietnamese to rid themselves of their longtime colonial masters. This war of independence had drastic consequences for the church, and despite the return of missionaries the church suffered its first major setback. In 1954 fewer Christians could be counted than in 1944. The dispersion of congregations and the tremendous destruction of property shattered the self-support principle. For a number of years both church and mission concerned themselves with recouping losses rather than with making new gains. The Geneva Accords of 1954, though they tragically divided Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel, at least brought a brief period of peace to the South. The church soon recovered its strength, and the CMA mission in the late 1950's responded by bringing in the largest influx of new missionaries ever, placing them in the major unevangelized areas of the country. In keeping with the new political divisions being shaped in Indochina at this time, the CMA Indochina mission divided into separate organizations in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. In 1953 it also seemed wise to form two missions in Vietnam, one to the Vietnamese and one to the Montagnards or tribes. Separate tribal and Vietnamese mission organizations existed until 1959, when new political developments encouraged a merger.

OTHER MISSIONS AND CHURCHES

The brief interlude of peace after 1954 was marked by the coming of several other evangelical missions, ending the virtual monopoly of the CMA.‡ The new arrivals have met with varying success. The Worldwide

‡Chinese colporteurs representing the Seventh-Day Adventists of South China had visited central Vietnam in 1920, but governmental authorities would not permit them to stay. Almost a decade later Elder and Mrs. R. H. Wentland officially opened the Adventist work in Vietnam, but returned to the United States shortly afterward because of poor health. In 1936 he returned to establish a church in Hanoi (1938) and a church and clinic in Djiring (1940). A spiritual foothold which the Adventists had gained among the Montagnards in the central highlands and the Vietnamese in Tra Vinh, My Tho, and Soc Trang prior to 1942 was dissipated during the difficult years of Japanese occupation. In that same period, however, a strong Chinese congregation was established in Cholon under the leadership of four Chinese, the guiding hand being a layman by the name of Tran Canh Huy, who was a Swatow Adventist weaver

Evangelization Crusade (WEC) mission, which began in 1956, set as its goal the evangelization of the Montagnards in northern South Vietnam. But since unstable conditions often confined their missionaries to the cities, they also had opportunity to establish churches among the Vietnamese. In 1968 sponsorship of the WEC churches, called "Vietnam Christian Mission" churches in Vietnamese, changed to the United World Mission which now continues (under the leadership of Gordon Smith) with national churches, two orphanages, and a leprosy rehabilitation center. In 1973 these churches numbered thirty-seven, with an estimated total community of fifteen thousand Christians.

Mennonite missionaries of the Eastern Mennonite Board arrived in 1957. Concentrating largely on social concern ministries and maintaining a peace witness during the war, their efforts have so far given rise to only one Vietnamese congregation.

The Wycliffe Bible Translators arrived in 1957 and are now carrying on a vigorous and fruitful translation work among more than twenty tribal languages, of which more than half now have portions of the Scriptures. Their wide influence has strengthened the evangelical church, created favorable government contacts, and opened wide doors of service. The Overseas Crusade began work in 1956, largely in the Da Lat area of the highlands, where they have a school for tribal children. The Pocket Testament League has distributed over a million New Testaments among Vietnamese and American military men.

Mention should also be made of the numerous organizations carrying on a ministry of Christian social concern in the country. The Christian Children's Fund entered Vietnam in 1952 and is now giving financial assistance to thousands of children. The World Relief Commission of the National Association of Evangelicals has been carrying on relief work, vocational training, and model farm work since 1956. The Mennonite Central Committee sent workers in 1954. In 1964 World Vision began a ministry of relief, orphanages, and educational assistance, working closely with all protestant missions. In 1965 the Asian Christian Service began emergency relief work. The Church World Service and Lutheran World Relief joined with the Mennonites in establishing the Vietnam Christian Service Organization in 1966. Today they have a large staff of workers, including doctors, nurses, social workers, home economists, agriculturalists, and community development workers. More recently, and on a more limited basis, Quakers, the Salvation Army, and others have also joined the organization.

who had come to Vietnam in 1937. After World II missionaries and nationals alike found a much better attitude toward the gospel. Membership within the church increased, and the French government gave permission for the establishing of a medical hospital in Saigon to be directed by American missionary physicians; it was officially opened in 1955.

The Challenge of the Future

Serious problems face the expansion of the gospel and the establishment of a strong and united Christian witness in Vietnam as the nation rebuilds for the future. Foremost among these is the problem of integrating the small churches of the newer mission organizations with the established, nationwide evangelical church. This would provide a desirable witness toward the total community, but such unity will be difficult to achieve because of the diversity of church government and theological expressions within even the evangelical camp. Liberal theology is also present in Vietnam, and along with some early liberal teaching has come the heavy infusion of cultist groups: Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Unitarians, who have established beachheads largely through the American military and U.S. AID workers.

A critical problem within the church has been the long-standing tendency of the clergy to completely dominate the churches. Even though some of the church's social institutions and business affairs might better be handled by lay Christians with expertise in these areas, potential lay leaders often complain of being stifled. However, the new depth-evangelism program is beginning to alter pastoral attitudes, and Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and other youth efforts are strengthening the voices of young people in the churches. Another continuing problem will be that of maintaining balance between social concern and evangelism. Already involvement in social activities has sapped the strength of many evangelicals. Wise leadership is imperative in order to prevent very real social needs and the influx of large foreign funds from swamping the church in social welfare administration and thereby cutting the nerve of aggressive evangelism.

Conclusion

In Vietnam today God is giving beauty for ashes and the joy of gladness for mourning. The gates of hell throughout the war did not prevail against the church of Christ. Vietnam is a receptive area that must be exploited for the glory of God and the evangelization of its people today. What has been achieved must be considered as merely the firstfruits of a much greater harvest ahead. Although growing increasingly strong, the existing churches are still a tiny minority who actively seek the help of sister churches around the world in their task of evangelizing this nation. The Christian mission in Vietnam stands at the beginning of the age of maximum blessing and growth.

As the inevitable defeat of South Vietnam became imminent in March and April of 1975, fear for the safety of Christians mounted. Because of their association with the international Christian church and American

missionaries, pastors and lay leaders were feared to be marked for persecution and martyrdom. Evangelist Billy Graham tried desperately, up to the last minute, to charter a special airplane to evacuate several hundred Christians, who were praying and waiting in the International Church in Saigon. His efforts failed.

By the time Saigon fell, the frantic evacuation efforts of the American government were estimated to have included 800-1200 Vietnamese Christians. Later reports indicated that scores of Christian farmers probably escaped in small boats and were later picked up by American ships. Thus, the Rev. Grady Mangham, director of southeast Asia for the Christian and Missionary Alliance, estimates that 1,600 Christians (one percent of the total of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam) may have escaped. In late spring these refugees were being processed in four camps in Guam, California, Arkansas, and Florida for relocation throughout the United States. Nightly evangelistic meetings by Christian and Missionary Alliance missionaries and pastors saw hundreds of refugees confess Christ. Mangham estimated that thirty-seven pastors were among the Christians who escaped. President Mieng of the denomination chose to stay with his flock.

The fate of nine American missionaries who were seized in the Danang area in April is still unknown at this writing. Official United States government appeals have been made for the release of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Miller and their five-year-old daughter; three Christian and Missionary Alliance missionaries, Betty J. Mitchell and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Phillips; and three government-related Americans. In addition to these American citizens, a Canadian couple associated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Mr. and Mrs. Norman Johnson, are believed to be with the group; they were last reported to be prisoners in a camp in Pleiku province.

Late reports (June 1975) indicate that Christians in Saigon have been relatively unmolested, since the city is a Vietcong showcase, with many Western reporters. It was reported that in Ban Me Thuot, however, a pastor was subjected to a mass trial and buried alive. Persecutions and martyrdoms are probably inevitable. But God is there, and the revival movements among the tribespeoples of recent years and the courageous witness of Christians may well cause the church to grow.

Another recent report indicated the presence of possibly 10,000 Protestant Christians in North Vietnam who are meeting quietly with supposedly little repression.

DONALD E. HOKE
June 23, 1975

NOTES

1. This is statistically documented in Reimer's thesis, "The Protestant Movement in Japan," p. 136.
2. The highland tribes' heroism in the face of danger has been popularized for the Christian public in Homer E. Dowdy's *The Bamboo Cross*.
3. Aspects of this revival have recently been published in a small book titled *The Holy Spirit in Vietnam*, by Orrel Steinkamp (Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, 1973).
4. See James C. Hefly's *By Life or By Death*.
5. An excellent recent history is Dennis J. Duncanson's *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*.

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At Pleiku in addition to a vigorous Jerai church, there is the work among the Bahnar tribespeople. The door to both the Bahnar and Mnong tribes was opened by the leprosarium which began leprosy treatment centers and established segregation villages. Although the progress of the work among the Bahnar has been slower this past year, it shows steady growth. Translation work is being done in conjunction with the Wycliffe Translators. There are two student pastors working with their own people.

The death and capture of our missionaries and the twelve Raday Christians and the wanton destruction of church and mission buildings at Banmethuot have affected the whole church and the mission as well as the 2,500 Raday Christians themselves. The blood that was shed at Banmethuot and the love that was so vividly demonstrated is surely God's call "to arms" for the church. The Bible school building and church have been repaired. On Sundays the new church building is filled, sometimes to overflowing. Prayer meetings sprang up all over the Raday village to take the place of church prayer meetings closed because of curfew. Present plans call for the reopening of the Banmethuot Bible school next year.

God's blessing remains upon the work among the Mnong. In one area seven villages were moved to the district headquarters of Kien Duc for security reasons. The Christians who had been relocated erected a new church building. Throughout the province this work of faith had a tremendous testimony with civilian, military, and government personnel.

Another group of Mnong Christians forced to leave their homes have reassembled their newly dedicated church building in this same area. Thirty new believers have been added to their number. There are problems in these two large congregations numbering over one thousand since many are very new in the faith, but there have also been miracles, both spiritual and physical. Most of the two thousand Christians in the Mnong church believed in the last ten years. Work with the Koho tribe, estimated to have one hundred twenty thousand members of whom seventeen

thousand are Christians, is our oldest work among the tribespeople. The Bible school at Dalat opened in October with an enrollment of 36.

Medical Work

In the highlands the leprosy program continues with no decrease in work. Approximately two thousand patients remain on monthly treatment and more are continually being added. A small hospital and treatment center built a few miles outside of Pleiku City was dedicated on June 2. There are an estimated twenty thousand leprosy patients in the province of Pleiku. Clinics at Banmethuot are being held temporarily in another building until we can rebuild the treatment complex destroyed during the *Tet* offensive. Basic to all this work is the primary objective of using the physical need as a means of introducing the patient to Jesus Christ. Our leprosarium staff both in Pleiku and Banmethuot has a preponderance of nationals.

Cambodian Work

The work among the nearly one million Cambodians in South Viet Nam is carried on from the center at Vinh Binh. Evangelistic preaching is supplemented by literature distribution and the sale of Cambodian New Testaments.

Chinese Work

The work continues among the million and a half Chinese people. Home of Blessing, the orphanage run by the Chinese church, should be ready for reoccupancy soon. This building was badly damaged during the second offensive in May. The Student Christian Fellowship, an evangelistic effort of the Chinese young people to reach mainly high school youth, meets every Tuesday noon with an average attendance of over fifty. Sales at the Chinese bookstore continued to be excellent throughout the year. Next year three of the Chinese young men will have finished two years of practical service. They plan to open new Chinese churches in Danang, Nhatrang, and Cantho.

Servicemen's Centers

The International Servicemen's Center was opened in Saigon in April to provide recreational and lounge facilities,

1968 In the year 1968

too, has added many new believers since *Tet,* and in this city, the hardest hit by fighting during 1968, the giving of the Christians has tripled. The church and parsonage at Quang Tri have been completed.

Last year the Christians at Phu Bai were meeting in a little tin shack which also served as a residence for the pastor. The congregation consisted of two refugee families, but now has a lovely brick church and a three-classroom school with about 60 children in each class. This church was built by labor and gifts from American servicemen and Vietnamese Christians. In one year, 70 new believers have been added to the congregation; 23 were just baptized.

Mr. Loc, the Vietnamese missionary who was working with the Bru tribespeople at Khe Sanh, is now helping them get established in the Cua Valley. Two young men from this tribe are attending the Bible Institute at Nhatrang this year. Next year the Katu and Pacoh tribes would also like to send young men to Nhatrang to train for the ministry. The nine churches in Danang have joined in what they call "Pentecost Crusade." Their goal is 3,000 new believers by Pentecost of 1969.

Tam Ky now has four churches. Just north of this city, two laymen led over two hundred to the Lord. They themselves are shepherding this flock of new Christians until a pastor is available. Mr. Gian, who was the pastor of one of the country churches in Quang Nam province, was taken by the Viet Cong a few months ago. Since nothing has been heard from him, it is feared that he was killed. He leaves a wife and small children.

In the province of Quang Ngai, none of the four new chapels that had been built in refugee areas was damaged in the heavy fighting during the past months. These churches are served by local pastors. In Quang Ngai City a youth center was built with help from the Marines. The center provides facilities for a Christian bookstore and reading room, two classrooms, and a lounge.

At Quang Ngai, weekly services have been held at the large prison. During one of the VC raids when over one thousand prisoners were released by the Communists, some

who had become believers while in jail elected to stay behind and continued to attend the services.

In Kontum a beautiful new church building and parsonage were dedicated. Plans are underway for three more new churches in Quinhon. The churches have opened schools and an orphanage. The church at An Khe has opened a promising branch church in a nearby refugee village.

In Nhatrang the work at the military hospital has continued with tract distribution, visitation, and witnessing. Jail services are also held regularly.

The work of reconstruction of the damaged churches is progressing well. Because of special offerings, more than forty church buildings are in the process of being repaired or rebuilt.

Bible Institute

Once again the month of September brought the opening of the Nhatrang Bible Institute. It had been feared that, with the increased mobilization of young men for the armed forces, only a very few would attend; however, of the 79 students enrolled, the large majority are men, including a number of tribal young men and 14 Chinese students.

Radio

Located in Nhatrang, the recording studio of the radio work is under the direction of the national church. Daily broadcasts over FEBC and local stations reach a multitude of people with the gospel. Young men in the armed forces broadcast an excellent gospel program in Saigon once a week over the Armed Forces' radio station. We hope to utilize before too long the free time on television offered to the national church.

Tribal Work

In Central Viet Nam the work among the tribes people was seriously disrupted because of the *Tet* offensive, but it, too, shows progress. The Jerai tribe, considered to be the largest in Viet Nam, has four men who are pastoring groups of believers.