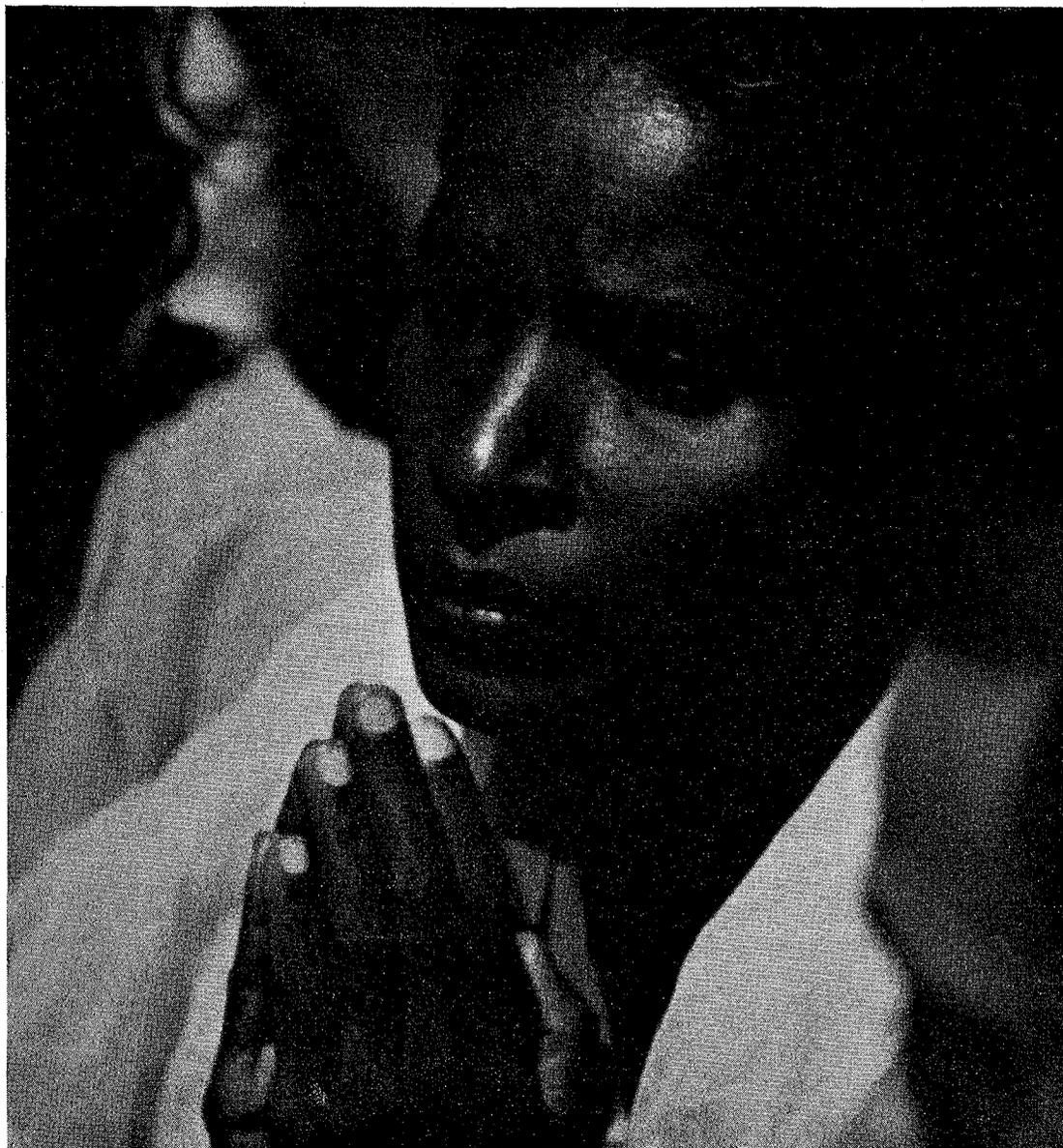


THE EAST IS WHERE YOU MEET IT



They were enormous, weighing about fourteen stone each and wearing a Stetson, the trade mark of the American Midwest. We were about to take off from Kathmandu, crowded into an old, tired Dakota with war-time bucket seats down each side and a parachute rip-cord line down the centre. Luggage was piled to the roof between us, and two of the passengers had to stand. Judging by the amount of daylight showing round the door, it had seen better days.

After much revving of engines, manoeuvring, not a little perspiration and prayer, we finally cleared the peaks in front of us and flew along the Annapurna Range rising to 26,000 feet between Gorkha and Pokhara. My companions were a group of American amateur mountaineers, who had flown out specially from California to this remote land of Nepal. They typified the sudden popularity which this previously closed and legendary land has acquired.

Nepal : mountains and temples

Most visitors spend their time photographing the awe-inspiring, snow-covered mountains, or the colourful people, or the ornate temples and bazaars. But the Christian would look beneath the picture-postcard beauty and be surprised, and perhaps horrified, to learn that in Kathmandu alone there are officially more temples than houses and more gods than people.

Ignorance married to superstition has bound the people in their fear of the unknown. Bondage to fear and to gods that cannot see leads on to depravity in worship. Paul on Mars Hill penetratingly gave the Christian answer for all missionary work in this country when he said with such devastating simplicity, 'whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you' (Acts 17 : 23, AV).

Nepal is a land of eleven million people, but the total Christian church

may number as little as 300, scattered in fifteen to twenty congregations. Persecution, opposition, imprisonment, these have been the whetstone for a sharper and more firmly held faith. But we should not underestimate the cost to those involved. The leadership of the church is in the hands of Nepalis, and missionaries provide the ancillary Christian work of education, medicine, agriculture and pioneer evangelism. It was easy to see why some had found it so satisfying to live and work amongst these delightful people in their beautiful, mountainous and almost inaccessible land.

Impressions of India

My impressions of India were more varied. The impact of millions of people everywhere was almost overpowering. The poverty was on such a large scale that emotion was stifled at birth and gradually replaced by objective detachment from a need that was astronomically great and beyond the resources of any missionary society.

Yet India has a haunting, mystic charm that casts its spell over most who go to live and work in this land, where time and speed are unwelcome intrusions from the West. I preferred the slow-moving pace of life, the plodding bullock cart, the buffaloes awash to their backbones in every river and looking like submerged rocks glistening in the hot sunshine, impish boys dressed in little more than the coat nature supplied, squatting ancients in the shade of every tree, wide banana leaves protecting one from the fierce heat of the sun while gaily coloured birds and flowering bushes abound all around. These are but a microscopic selection of the impressions indelibly recorded during my extensive visit through the country seeing some of the 150 BMMF missionaries.

In the south the church is strong but in the north numerically weak.

Division and friction and lawsuits are regrettably common, coupled with an introversion born of a minority group complex in a largely hostile community. But on the brighter side the work amongst students is growing and the Union of Evangelical Students of India (IVF equivalent) is developing its own strong leadership. The Evangelical Fellowship of India is bringing together evangelical churches and institutions and developing a stronger and clearer evangelical theological ministry for the church in India, an aspect previously overlooked when so much of the emphasis was on evangelism alone.

Rise of nationalism

The government has fired warning shots, and more recently broadsides, at foreign missionary presence. I saw that most missions have taken these warnings seriously and have handed over the leadership of institutions to Indian nationals. This will make the church lean less upon western support, and I believe the sovereign Lord of history has used these politically-motivated restrictions to strengthen His church.

India is strongly Hinduistic, but religious observance is less obvious in the modern cities than in the villages. The Christian church is tolerated by most people and is now officially numbered at twelve million. But nationalistic feelings have been stirred up by the extreme Hindu party and recently laws have been

passed in two states curbing religious liberty and making conversion a punishable offence under certain circumstances.

The news of the first six imprisonments under the new laws will, I believe, arouse the Christian church to pray. The persecution may become worse, and spread in spite of our prayers, but I believe God will use it to strengthen the church and expose and identify real believers among many who are only nominally Christian.

Role of missions

If missions continue to emphasize their role in preparing the church to stand on its own feet, and concentrate their resources on developing stronger national leadership, then I think they still have a work to do in this land which has one sixth of the world's population. Stress must be laid on theological training, Bible institutes, centres for training writers, student hostels, student workers, educational and medical programmes, whose goal is the building of a national church.

If we keep our priorities right, then I think God will keep the door open in India and other countries for the entry of new missionary forces until our work is done. Meanwhile we are partners and colleagues with Christian nationals in preparing the church to reach the millions who have never heard of a Saviour for sinners, and to be ready for whatever persecution it may be called upon to face in the days ahead.

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GOING OVERSEAS LATER THIS YEAR?

Then come to
**OVERSEAS SERVICE
CONFERENCE**

21-25 July 1969
Bulmershe College, Reading

This IVF conference is attended by Christians home on leave from secular jobs overseas as well as by others about to go out for the first time in such work. The object is to prepare ourselves for Christian witness in a secular occupation overseas.

As well as sessions dealing with the opportunities and problems of Christian

witness, there will be Bible readings by Mr Tony Wilmot (on leave from West Africa where he has had over 20 years' experience) and opportunities for united prayer. Mr David Gitari, until recently PAFES Secretary, from Kenya, and the Rev. Franklin Chunga, from Malawi, will be there to explain how national Christians see the role of the expatriate in a secular job.

Brochures are being circulated to missionary secretaries and can also be obtained from the IVF office.