

# Good News & Bad News!

– some interesting statistics –

*compiled by*

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## (A) GOOD NEWS

### (1) THE DAY OF PENTECOST

- on the *Day of Pentecost* the population of the world was probably around 500 million, while the total number of believers was probably about 1000 (Ac 1:15; 1 Co 15:6)
- since then the number of the earth's inhabitants has increased by a factor of *12* (to 6,000 million), while the church has grown by a factor of *two million* (that is, to 2,000 million adherents worldwide)
- if the present growth rate of the church continues unabated, then before the middle of this 21st century more than half the people on earth will be calling themselves Christians.

### (2) THE EARLY CHURCH

- by the year 100 (that is, after some 65 years of witness), the number of Christians was possibly as many as 200,000 (although some historians would halve that figure, while others would increase it somewhat)
- by the year 200 Christians numbered about 2% of the *Roman Empire*

- by the year 300 Christians had grown to about 10% of the empire
- after the conversion of Constantine (in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century) all official persecution ceased (except for a couple of years under Constantine's nephew, Julian the Apostate) and the church expanded so rapidly that in 391 the emperor Theodosius I decreed that Christianity should be the sole religion of the empire.

### **(3) THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT**

- the *Pentecostal Movement*, which began early this century, today numbers (according to some statisticians) about 200 million people
- concerning this growth rate, we may say two things
  - (a) in absolute terms, it shows the greatest explosion of soul-winning and church-planting the world has ever seen
  - (b) if the movement continue to flourish, then the next 100 years may see us embracing 10% or more the world's population (which, in a total population of 10,000 million, would mean perhaps 1000 million Pentecostals among 6500 million Christians).

## **(B) BAD NEWS**

### **(1) WORLDWIDE**

- after nearly 100 years of witness, Pentecostals still comprise no more than 3% of the world's population
- the Pentecostal growth rates (to 3% in 100 years, and 10% in 200 years) are only a little better than the figures achieved by the early church in a totally pagan environment.

### **(2) AUSTRALIA**

- (a) In Australia, the position is worse
- only 70% of Australians now claim to be Christian, a decline of 10% since 1970
- *Anglicans*, who were once dominant, now represent only 22% of the population, while the *Roman Catholic* church, whose growth has markedly slowed in recent years, now equals 27%
- other statistics are: *Uniting Church* (7.5%); *Presbyterian* (3.8%); *Baptist* (1.75%); *Muslim* (1.5%); *Hindus/Buddhists* (1.15%); *Pentecostals* (1.5 %).

(b) The *Pentecostal* growth rate in Australia has declined from as high as 88% during a 5-year census period in the late 1970s to 16% in the most recent period

- some commentators think that the next census will show that the growth rate has declined even further, to less than 10%.

### WHY THE BAD NEWS ?

(1) No doubt there are many reasons for this drastic slow-down, but in my opinion a major cause lies in the squandering of effort and resources by constantly pursuing emotional by-paths.

(2) The way to turn this around is surely to stop chasing ephemeral rainbows, with their mythical pot of spiritual gold I mean, such things as "holy laughter", "falling under the power", dancing in the aisles, involuntary prostrations, and the like, all of which have been proclaimed as the "key" to national revival. They did not turn the nation to Christ, and never had the remotest chance of doing so. But they did trivialise our message, and caused many thoughtful people to look elsewhere for the answers they were seeking.

Instead, let us get serious about the patient, demanding, and often wearying task of planting local churches, which in turn send out witnesses to plant other churches, and so on. *Truly, there has never been a better tool for soul-winning than a lively, Spirit-filled local church, sound in doctrine, sober in practice, eager in outreach, and resolved in all things to give pre-eminence to Christ!*