

# How much help does a king need?

By Dean Merrill

God is sovereign. That leads to a puzzling question: How does He demonstrate His control?

The Lord of the universe does not work entirely alone. He accomplishes many of His goals through His "staff members"—heavenly staff, a.k.a. angels, and earthly staff, a.k.a. born-again believers.

In the current culture war, however, some believers have decided that the additional job of keeping the public square halfway swept and clean is critical to spreading the gospel. "We have to hold the line against evil in our society," they say, "or the advance of Christianity won't stand a chance." They may use this analogy: "The soil of the culture is growing ever more acidic, with rampant moral pollution on all fronts. If this is allowed to worsen, the seed of the gospel will be unable to sprout and grow. People will be so wicked they'll be totally impervious to the good news."

This theory does not square with the Bible or what is actually happening

these days around the world. Rather than the gospel being overwhelmed and intimidated by hostile culture, the New Testament teaches: "Where sin increased, grace increased all

the more" (Romans 5:20, NIV). The gospel is a powerhouse breaking down enemy strongholds.

Three modern illustrations are:

1. The Christian movement in China had about 1 million adherents in 1949 when Mao Tse-tung and the Communists swept into power. For the next 40-some years, pastors were hauled off to labor camps, meetings were forbidden and Bibles were unavailable.

Today, it's still no picnic to be a Christian in the People's Republic of China. Yet the church numbers anywhere from 50 to 80 million believers. Chinese are coming to Christ at a rate of 30,000 per day.

2. In sub-Saharan Africa (everything south of the Sahara desert), church growth is estimated to be 20,000 converts per day—in spite of struggling economies, drought and subsequent famine, civil war in places, and stiff competition from Islam. Almost two-thirds of the world's HIV/AIDS cases live in this region.

3. In Latin America, from the Rio Grande to the tip of Cape Horn, the conversion rate is 10,000 a day ... despite poverty, governmental corruption and lack of educational opportunity in many places.

Yet, "people are praying in Latin America as never before," reports Marcos Witt, a worship leader and evangelist. "All-night prayer vigils are held in homes, churches and public places. These are not just little prayer meetings; they are powerful, loud and insistent rallies, attended many times by hundreds and thousands of people.

"The Latin Americans are a selfless people, well-acquainted with true sacrifice. They are not given to wasting time or resources on superficial and

unproductive activity; rather, there is an urgency about them."

These examples show a gospel surge without concern for cultural receptivity. Leith Anderson, Minneapolis pastor and author on the subject of societal change, says, "We read the Book of Acts and celebrate the fact that, on the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 people came to Christ. Today, if you combine mainland China, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, there's nearly a Pentecost every hour.

"Meanwhile, in the United States, we are closing 60 churches [of all denominations] a week. The growth rate among white churches in this country is zero—absolutely flat. The only growth we Americans have to talk about is what's happening in ethnic congregations."

Believers in many other countries have almost no access to the levers of power. They couldn't get a law passed if they tried. They don't even get a tax deduction for their tithes. Yet the kingdom of God is advancing in their lands.

Our Christian stance in a fallen world is less dependent on external conditions and working majorities than it is on the calling and purpose of the mighty God we serve. Jesus is still in the process of building His church, the gates of hell notwithstanding. He has a blueprint, with definite strategies. The more we align ourselves with His plan, the more His kingdom surges forward. ■

*Editor's note: The statistics on China, Africa and Latin America represent church growth in all denominations. They may also include both members and adherents in the churches, which counts infants and children.*

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