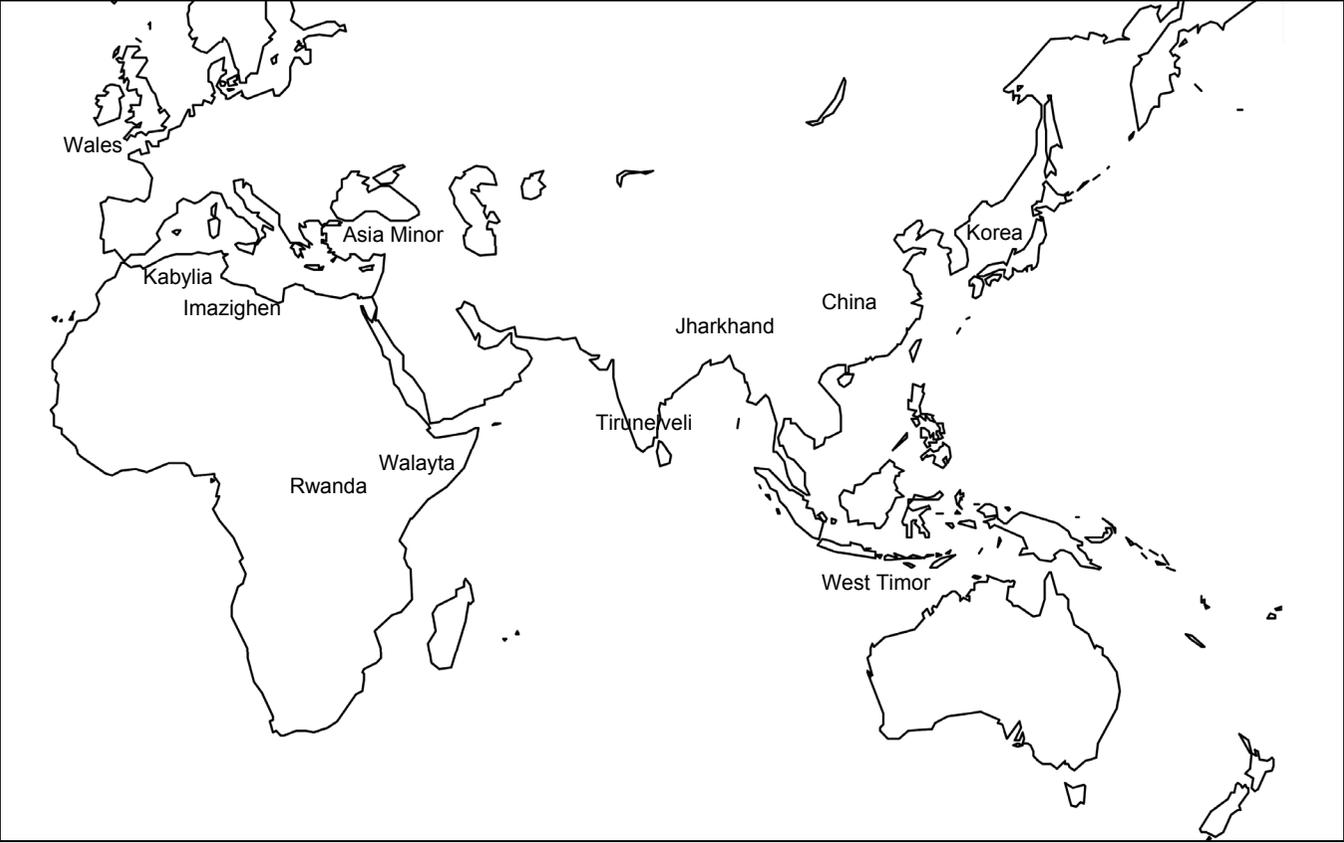


Rapid Mass Movements

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As followers of Jesus we long to see many people quickly come to faith in him. This rarely seems to happen, but at certain times and places it has happened, and we may expect it to happen again. For a period of weeks or months thousands of people hear the gospel willingly; many are profoundly moved by the Holy Spirit, and many are converted to Christ.

This raises a very practical question. Is there anything we can do to stimulate or launch such a movement? Or is it purely a sovereign work of God, mysterious, unpredictable and beyond human comprehension? We may be told it requires prayer, or fasting, or miracles, or the blood of martyrs, or an elaborate evangelistic campaign. We may wonder if there is some other key to starting a mass movement that we have not yet identified.

Is it possible to discover why, in certain times and places, large numbers of people have come to faith in Christ? Attempting to answer this question, we will study a number of mass movements that have been well documented in various parts of the world.

The first took place in **Asia Minor and southern Europe in AD 40-150**. It is described in the book of Acts. The numbers who believed were 3000, rising to 5000 in Jerusalem, followed by “a great many” in Thessalonica, “many of the Corinthians”, “a great many people” in Ephesus and throughout Asia Minor. We notice five things about it:

1. There was a situation of **great tension**. The Jews were frustrated with the failure of their ancestral religion. Their nation was suffering the bitter humiliation of Roman occupation in addition to the political corruption of the Sadducees and the bullying legalism of the Pharisees. At the same time, Gentile converts to Judaism were unhappy with the food and sabbath restrictions and the racial tensions within the synagogue communities. Other Gentiles were disillusioned with traditional paganism – its expense, corruption and absurdity. Among all these, there was a general desire for something new.

2. People were **accessible and willing to listen**. Visiting teachers were welcome to speak in the synagogues around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue communities spoke Greek. They would give focused attention to any teacher who knew the Greek scriptures and taught them well.

3. Missionaries came with a **positive message**. Speaking earnestly, they brought a solution to deeply felt problems, offering certainty instead of doubt, hope in place of despair, love instead of fear. They proclaimed a clear vision for a better life and a happier community in this world and the next.

4. The good news became a **general talking point**. So we read, “you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching” (Acts 5:28), “all Joppa” (Acts 9:42), “all Lydda and Sharon” (Acts 9:35), “almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord” (Acts 13:44), “throughout the whole imperial guard” (Phil 1:13). Everyone heard about it.

5. The people **responded to the Holy Spirit**. They wanted to change for the better and accepted the gospel with enthusiasm.

It happened again shortly afterwards among the Imazighen (Berbers) in **northern Africa (AD 150-275)**. There is evidence that during the first two hundred years Christianity spread here more rapidly than other parts of the Roman Empire. Believers were threatened, imprisoned, exiled and martyred by the pagan Roman authorities, and yet Tertullian in Carthage could write, “we have filled every place belonging to you: cities, islands, castles, towns, markets, even your military camp, your companies, the palace, the senate, the forum.”¹ Fifteen years later he declared: “We are a great multitude, almost a majority in each city.”²

In addition to this, the gospel had spread far inland of the Roman territories. Tertullian spoke of “the varied races of the Getules [Imazighen] and the vast territories of the Moors, inaccessible to the Romans *but subjugated to Christ*.”³ The remains of church buildings and inscriptions are found far beyond the Roman frontiers, evidence indeed of a major turning to Christ at this time. Several reasons for this may be identified:

1. There was a **universal feeling of tension**. Impressed with Roman technology and culture, the Imazighen were much less happy with the Roman tendency to occupy land, maintain law and order on their own terms, and deny the ancestral rights of local kings and chiefs. But above all, they resented the excessive demands of corrupt Roman tax-collectors. In addition, the failure of African traditional religion to protect them against their oppressors had discredited the old customs and beliefs of their people. They were unsettled – some ambitious for gain, many embittered by loss.

2. There were **natural points of contact**. With greater safety on account of the *pax romana* (Roman peace), ordinary people were travelling long

¹ Tertullian, *Apology*, 37

² Tertullian, *To Scapula*, 2

³ Tertullian, *Answer to the Jews*, 7

distances, and many would naturally find their way to the coastal ports and the inland markets where attractive goods were readily available. The majority of the foreigners known to the Imazighen were probably Christians. Some were refugees fleeing from Roman persecution on the coast. Others, banished by law from Roman territory, were forced to settle further inland. A significant number were Christian captives carried away for ransom after tribal raids on Roman settlements. In certain places, retired soldiers and officials were granted lands for agricultural development, arranging for the gospel to be taught to their African farm workers and other local people. Many seasonal workers travelled long distances for the wheat and olive harvests.

3. Individual Christians brought a knowledge of the wider world, of science and art and many new technologies. They came not as conquerors but as skilled workers and traders. They shared a **positive message** of freedom from occult powers and evil spirits. They, like the Imazighen, had suffered at the hands of Rome and would be especially welcome for that reason.

4. As Roman trade goods and technologies spread through North Africa, the new ideas associated with them would become a **general talking point** among the most intelligent of the populace.

5. Many people evidently responded to the Holy Spirit.

Christianity was seen by the Imazighen as a progressive way forward in opposition to Rome. Here again, as we have observed earlier, a mass movement was triggered by a general feeling of tension, natural contact with people responsive to new ideas, a positive way forward offered with enthusiasm, a general interest and a widespread response.¹

Now we turn to **Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu (1859-1865)**. In southern India there were many Indian Catholics and Anglicans who occasionally attended church and considered themselves to be Christians. Yet among them was much drunkenness, lying, quarrelling and many lawsuits. It seems that most had never heard or understood the gospel.

John Christian Arulappen was an Indian evangelist and pastor. Burdened by the problems he saw among the church people, even in his own evangelical fellowship, he urged them with great earnestness to seek a fresh baptism of the Spirit of holiness in order to live good lives and enjoy the blessing of God. Seeing no response, he preached again on the same subject. Then one or two believers saw visions of a man questioning them

about their sins and were profoundly convicted. They yielded their lives to Christ and went out testifying joyfully that they had been saved.

Soon a profound conviction of sin had taken hold of many others. During the next five months, thousands were converted throughout the region, including Indian Catholics, Hindus and Muslims, until the network of evangelical fellowships associated with Arulappen numbered 30,000 members. Many thousands more were drawn to faith in other churches too.

Here again we see a situation of tension, this time within the church as well as the wider community. People were accessible and willing to listen; there was a positive message in their own language; it became a universal talking point, and they responded wholeheartedly to the Spirit of God.¹

We move on now to consider **Wales, United Kingdom (1904-5)**. In the nineteenth century, Wales was a part of Britain with a distinctive language of its own. The English exploitation of Welsh resources such as coal and iron had brought industrial and technological progress but also much suffering to the Welsh people. Many families had left their farms and villages to escape poverty, migrating to the new towns on the coalfields in the hope of a better life. There they endured appalling living and working conditions in overcrowded communities afflicted by gross pollution and disease. Falling wages and unemployment led to periods of terrible poverty and distress.

Many Welsh people had hoped to attain a measure of prosperity in the growing British Empire by learning the English language. The government in London encouraged this and established English schools where children were often forbidden to speak in Welsh. But the majority, who knew little or no English, began to feel that their national identity was under threat. They saw Welsh as the language of poets and preachers and an idealised past, whilst English belonged to commerce, industry and a starkly uncertain future.

Throughout Wales the traditional churches preferred to conduct their services in English, and in a time of theological conflict and doubt they seemed powerless to offer help or comfort. It was then that growing numbers of men and women were drawn to the nonconformist Welsh-speaking chapels.

Here the preachers spoke eloquently like the poets of old with much dramatic imagery. “Gradually, fervent Welsh people began to attend Welsh-language services not because [the services] were Christian but because

¹ Robin Daniel, *This Holy Seed* (Tamarisk, 2010), pp.27-38

¹ Robert Bernard Dann, *Father of Faith Missions* (Authentic, 2004), pp.358-360

they were in Welsh... The Welsh-language churches would become cultural societies which people would frequent for the sake of the language.”¹

In the chapels a simple gospel of salvation was proclaimed earnestly, and many hearers responded with enthusiasm. Stirring emotional hymns were composed in Welsh and sung with passion, interspersed with heartfelt prayers and testimonies. As gifted preachers travelled from place to place, the chapel members would march through the streets singing and inviting people to come and hear them.

The number of those converted to Christ in the Welsh-speaking chapels during this brief period rose well above 100,000. News of these events inspired similar movements in other parts of the world and in other languages – in India, Madagascar, the USA, France, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Brazil, Chile and other places.

We see in Wales, as elsewhere, that many people were profoundly unhappy with their circumstances. They were pleased to hear earnest preaching in their own heart language. A positive gospel message brought comfort and assurance, and they spread the news widely, responding to the Spirit of God.

The next mass movement to be examined took place in **Korea (1890-1910)**. It came at one of the darkest periods in Korean history. The nation and its government were extremely weak in the face of Japanese regional dominance and the threat of invasion. Buddhism and Shamanism were discredited as useless for the defence or comfort of the people.

In the 1890s a small number of Koreans were converted to Christ through the painstaking efforts of gospel missionaries over many years. These believers had scriptures in the Korean language, which gave them a strong Korean identity.

In January 1907 a Bible conference was held in Pyongyang. Through earnest preaching, much prayer and strong exhortations to love one another, the Holy Spirit moved in a mighty way. Many of those present were convicted of sin. Aware that they had behaved badly towards other believers, they confessed and went to put right whatever they had done wrong. Those who had stolen money repaid it. News of this spread throughout Korea and many who were present at the conference travelled to testify in other places. A number gave up their employment to become evangelists. In that year, as many as 50,000 Koreans were converted.

Three years later, in 1910, the threatened Japanese invasion took place. The Korean churches, using the Korean language, became the community

¹ R Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation: Wales 1890-1914* (Univ. of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2004), p.413

with the greatest patriotic potential for uniting the nation. Although the Korean language was prohibited by the authorities, the Christians used it anyway. When Korea finally achieved independence in 1945, the Korean churches were honoured for their role in preserving Korean culture and identity; they became part of the new Korea.

As we have seen elsewhere, the mass movement was triggered by a situation of great tension. Many people were willing to hear and accept a positive message in their own language. This became a general talking point, through which the Holy Spirit led many to faith in Christ. Now it is said that there are more Christian books in Korean than any other language.¹

Next we move to **Rwanda and Uganda (1929-41)**. In eastern Africa at this time there was much weak and lazy Christianity, with very low moral standards. Stealing, lying and drunkenness were common among church-goers, along with financial corruption and traditional occult practices. Many were Christians in name but not in character, and this was especially true in the Roman Catholic Church, in the Anglican Church of Uganda, and in the Christian hospitals that had been started by missionaries. Some said that the only difference between Christians and pagans was that pagans sinned openly while Christians tried to hide it.

With the rise of African nationalism there were racial tensions and bad relationships between white missionaries and black church leaders. Some emphasized sacraments and rituals while others promoted “modernism” (denying the authority of the Bible). Everyone was unhappy with the disunity and the poor spiritual state of the churches.

In September 1929 Simeon Nsibambi of Kampala, Uganda, visited a missionary doctor from Rwanda named Joe Church. They spent two days studying the Bible and praying together for a solution to these problems. They both felt a desperate need for the Holy Spirit to purify the heart of every believer before there could be any outpouring of blessing. Joe Church went back to Rwanda as a new man with a new message. He preached and prayed earnestly. He asked each Christian he met, “Are you saved?” And then, “Are you sanctified and filled with the Holy Spirit?” And if so, “Have you told your family and friends about it?”

The circle of friends around him started to confess resentments, unkind words and bad attitudes. They asked one another for forgiveness and received it. They restored relationships, returned stolen goods, redid shoddy work. There was a new spirit of love and joy in the Lord as they testified to

¹ W Blair & B Hunt, *The Korean Pentecost and the Sufferings which Followed* (Banner of Truth, 1977)

the blessing of acting in this way. Thousands were soon filled with the Spirit, and thousands of nominal Christians were truly converted to Christ.

The movement that started in Rwanda spread to Uganda, and later (in the 1940s) to Kenya, Tanzania and Sudan. The great emphasis lay in humility and brokenness, in love, forgiveness and unity, and the key Bible verse was 1 Jn 1:7, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

In this situation again, we have seen an initial tension felt by many people, a desire to change, a positive message, a widespread willingness to hear, and a genuine response to the conviction of the Spirit.¹

Now we come to the **Walayta people, southern Ethiopia (1937-43)**. Dwelling in rural farming communities, the Walayta were among the poorest people in the world. Ruled for generations by the dominant Amhara tribe, their ignorance and illiteracy were exploited, and their children frequently captured and sold to Arab slave traders. They were oppressed by occult magicians and diviners who required costly offerings to appease Satan or the spirits of the dead. Their only contact with Christianity was the oppressive religious system of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, conducting all its rituals in Ge’ez (an ancient religious language) or the Amharic language of their rulers, which they did not understand.

About 1900 a “prophet” arose among them called Esa,² who urged the Walayta to stop following traditional occult practices and turn to the one true God. He taught a code of laws and prophesied that foreigners would soon come with God’s book which must be obeyed. In the 1930s, missionaries entered the region but saw only a small number of genuine conversions. They translated a small booklet of scripture portions into the Walayta language with the title “God has spoken”. The Italian invasion in 1937 then halted the missionaries’ work as they were expelled and the believers imprisoned.

The Italians started to dismantle the Orthodox religious system and introduce Roman Catholicism. This meant that the Walayta were free for the first time from the control of the Amhara tribe and the Orthodox Church.

The believers in prison continued to pray and teach in their own language, and they became a heroic symbol of resistance for the Walayta. A few of them could read and interpret the Amharic New Testament; others taught from the Walayta booklet “God has spoken”. Their faith was focused on

¹ J E Church, *Quest for the Highest* (Paternoster, 1981); Michael Harper, *New Dawn in East Africa*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1986/issue9/9108.html> (accessed 12 April 2014)

² Esa is pronounced *éssa* as in “race-a”.

salvation from evil spirits, witchcraft and illness, supported by strong testimonies of deliverance. They developed an antiphonal way of singing Bible stories with exhortations and promises.

In 1942, when the war was over and the Italians had gone, missionaries were once again able to enter Ethiopia. They found to their astonishment that the number of believers had increased in five years from 48 individuals to 25,000, and from one church to 200 churches. It is said that when the missionaries left it was hard to find a Walayta person who was a Christian, and when they returned it was hard to find one who was not. The Walayta had even started sending missionaries to neighbouring tribes; one of these was Sorsa Sumamo.

As in the other examples we have considered, there was an underlying tension. People were willing to hear the gospel in their own language from believers they respected. A positive message became widely known and discussed, bringing an extensive spiritual response.¹

We move eastwards now to **West Timor, Indonesia (1965-72)**.² In 1960 most people here were either Roman Catholic or Protestant, yet frequently involved in the occult practices of traditional animism.

At this time Muslims and Communists were competing with the Indonesian government for political control of West Timor. In September 1965 there was a serious Communist coup, which eventually failed, followed by violent persecution of all suspected Communists. Indonesia was in chaos with a universal feeling of terror approaching civil war. Fear of atheistic Communism led the government to decree that everyone must have a declared and registered religion. Many former Communists requested baptism to avoid arrest and execution. At the same time, in the years 1951-66, the country was suffering from drought, famine and massive inflation. Many people were unable to buy food, and risked starvation.

In July 1965 student teams from a Bible college (Institut Injili Indonesia in Batu, East Java) came to West Timor on a mission. Their earnest preaching and testimony emphasized repentance, regeneration and sanctification through the Holy Spirit. There was much prayer, with strong exhortations against demonic practices. Although local church leaders were not supportive, some people had dreams and visions and many burnt their fetishes. In October and November of that year, a comet was seen every morning in the eastern sky. Animists and Christians both accepted this as a spiritual sign or portent.

¹ Raymond J Davis, *Fire on the Mountains* (Sudan Interior Mission, 1980, 1991); E Paul Balisky, *Wolaitta Evangelists*, (Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon, USA, 2009)

² Timor is pronounced *TEE-more*.

During the following three years, it is said that as many as 200,000 people were converted in West Timor alone. On another small island, 20,000 professed faith in Christ. Although reports of miracles and healings were undoubtedly exaggerated, there was a definite mass movement. Mission teams later went to East Timor and to Kalimantan, South Sumatra, West Irian and other islands, seeing similar results.

All this took place, once again, in a context of great tension. Many people, for social and political reasons, were very willing to hear the gospel message and accept a Christian identity. The gospel became a subject of widespread interest and discussion. Although many conversions were not permanent, others led to genuine faith and lasting commitment.¹

We draw nearer to the present time as we consider the **Malto people, Jharkhand**² (1985-2003) in north-eastern India. As a Dravidian people, they were despised and exploited by the Hindus of Aryan and Santal race who held regional authority there.

The traditional worldview of the Malto was animist, but without any religious organisation or leader or book to provide stability of belief or expectation. As subsistence farmers and herders they were often in poverty and debt. Because the Maltos were illiterate, they were easily cheated and could offer no means of legal defence. Many had lost their land, surviving only as bonded labourers. Smoking, drinking, gambling, sexual abuse, disputes, theft and murder had brought widespread poverty and despair.

In 1985 some indigenous Indian missionaries, associated with the Friends Missionary Prayer Band, came from the southern state of Tamil Nadu. They, like the Maltos, were of Dravidian race. They arranged evening meetings, showed films, acted dramas, and prayed for the sick and demonised. They opened clinics, taught adult literacy, and started schools for children.

Soon there was a communal acceptance of Christianity among the Maltos. They were immediately responsive for several reasons:

1. The missionaries were Dravidians like themselves, supporting them against Aryan exploitation and teaching them to read, which made it much harder to cheat and exploit them. The missionaries taught social equality and enabled the Maltos to achieve it, encouraging them to pass on what they learned to others.

¹ George W Peters, *Indonesia Revival: Focus on Timor* (Zondervan, 1973); Kurt Koch, *The Revival in Indonesia* (Kregel, 1972); Gani Wiyono, *Timor Revival* (Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies, Vol.4, 2 (July 2001) pp.269-293

² Jharkhand is pronounced *jer-KOND*.

2. Their tribal culture was affirmed. The New Testament was translated into their language. They could maintain their traditional diet, including meats forbidden by Hinduism.

3. They were released from their fear of many competing spirits and the obligation to offer expensive sacrifices. When Jesus was proclaimed as mighty God come to earth, more powerful than the spirits, and when missionaries broke taboos without suffering any harm, many Maltos believed. They easily accepted that the Holy Spirit of Jesus is active in the world and in people.

4. Modern medicines offered with prayer replaced pagan spells and rituals, and were far more effective in healing the sick.

5. When local leaders chose to accept Christ, the entire clan would follow, according to Malto custom. This enabled missionaries to teach freely wherever the leaders welcomed them.

“The Maltos were living in a time of cultural, economic and religious crisis and social turmoil, deeply dissatisfied with their traditional existence. Missionaries were able to tailor their teaching to respond to this crisis.”¹ Over a period of 18 years, as many as 45,000 Maltos were converted to Christ, that is about 45% of the total population. In 7 years (1991-98), the number of congregations increased from 70 to 457.

Here again we see a situation of tension, a willingness to listen, a positive message, a widespread discussion and a genuine response to the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the most surprising mass movement of all has taken place in **China (2000-12)**. There is significance in its location on the Communist mainland, and not among Chinese in Taiwan or other parts of world.

The background to this lies in Mao Tse-tung’s “Cultural Revolution” of 1968-78, an attempt to purge the nation of everything contrary to Communism. Millions of people were harassed, denounced, imprisoned and tortured, and much property was seized. Many young men and women were forced to move from cities to rural areas. Families were separated, historic buildings and artefacts destroyed, cultural and religious sites wrecked. Absolutely no churches were allowed, and many expert observers said that Christianity had been eradicated from China. That was far from the truth.

Because of the Cultural Revolution, a whole generation of Chinese lost their utopian vision for Communism. They began to see it as an oppressive monster. To destroy cultural and artistic treasures, to engage in spying and denouncing others, to partake in power struggles – all this was contrary to

¹ George Edward, *Welcoming the Gospel in Jharkhand* (SAIACS press, Bangalore, 2003), p.27

ancient Chinese culture. Confucius had taught self-control and moderation, believing in the essential goodness of human nature. But Mao had openly denounced Confucius.

There were other unintended consequences to Mao's policies. The political unification of the country, the universal use of the Mandarin language, the forced relocation of people, and the growing network of roads, railways and telecommunications – all this enabled new ideas to spread much more easily than in the past. Many Christians had survived the harassment, and as it drew to a close their numbers began to increase rapidly. Secret meetings and official churches attracted people of all sorts, including the rural poor and the more educated populace of the cities.

It is estimated that Christians in Communist China now number about 160 million, that is more than in the USA. Several reasons for this astonishing growth can be identified:

1. Many ordinary people had behaved very badly under Mao and afterwards deeply regretted it. They understood the meaning of sin, guilt and forgiveness
2. There was a strongly rooted Christian culture in many families, especially in provinces where several generations of missionaries and Chinese evangelists had previously worked. Their faith was not shaken by persecution, and as the population was forced to move around the country, their testimony and example became known in other provinces too.
3. House fellowships provided excellent support for the vulnerable, especially for women and ethnic minorities and alienated youth.
4. These house fellowships were very adaptable, changing places, times and leaders, and so were able to survive persecution.
5. House fellowships were easy to run without expense. New converts had no obligation to pay for religious offerings or buildings or priests, as in other religions. Believers did not waste money on alcohol, and their lifestyle won respect.
6. The Chinese people in general were starved of music and were attracted by gospel hymns in their own languages.
7. In 1980 many Christian leaders were released from prison camps, which added a strongly heroic element to the movement. It is said that local persecution, discrediting the authorities, continues to strengthen rather than weaken the Christian Church in China.

Again we see a context of widespread tension in which many people became aware of an alternative worldview and were attracted to it. When

believers were bold enough to declare their positive faith in the face of persecution, the Holy Spirit added many to their number.¹

Our final example comes from **Kabylia in Algeria (2000-12)**.² The Kabyles are descendants of the Imazighen, whom we have already considered.

During the conquest and settlement of North Africa by Muslim Arabs in the seventh and eleventh centuries, the Kabyles were driven into the mountains and high inland plains. Although despised and oppressed, and required to speak Arabic and practise Islam, they were allowed to live there in relative freedom. In December 1991 the militant Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won the first stage in the national elections, declaring their intention to impose hard-line Islamic law. There was widespread fear and dismay among the Kabyles, with demonstrations in the streets.

The army intervened, suppressing the FIS and cancelling the elections. A referendum in 1996 increased the power of the president and banned Islamist parties. The Kabyles were greatly relieved, and resolved that Islamists would never again gain power by democratic means. They strengthened their own political agenda. Many began to think of Islam as an oppressive Arab religion. Some turned to atheism, others researched their animistic roots, but many expressed an interest in Christianity and began to seek out the few churches and Christians known to them. They became aware of North Africa's remarkable Christian heritage, predating Islam and providing an authentic cultural history of their own. They were also attracted by the Christians' use of the ancient Tifinagh script, which became a cultural emblem for their people.

Within a few years, thousands of conversions were reported and many new fellowships started in parts of Kabylia. Alarmed at this, the government introduced an anti-conversion law in 2008, but the movement continues. An Algerian leader has recently said, "I know of many, many churches today who baptize about 120 to 150 every year... the church is already packed 2½ hours before the meeting."³

So in this most recent of our examples we again identify a context of great tension, a willingness to consider a Christian alternative, and a widespread response to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Monarch Books, 2006)

² Kabylia is pronounced *kab-EEL-ya*. Kabyle is *KAB-eel*.

³ Mathew Backholer, *Global Revival: Worldwide Outpourings* (By Faith Media, 2012), p.141

Conclusion

Now we are in a position to answer the question: Why did mass movements happen in these places at these times, and not in other places and times? Was it because people prayed more, or fasted more, or did miracles, or because there were martyrs or massive evangelistic campaigns? We see that mass movements are always triggered by:

1. General tension in the region or the church. Men and women are unhappy with their circumstances.

2. People are accessible. They welcome someone who will speak to them about Christ.

3. Earnest public preaching. A positive message boldly addresses current needs, supported by much prayer.

4. The good news becomes a general talking point. Everyone is aware of the problem and solution.

5. The people respond to the Holy Spirit. They want to change and so accept the gospel with enthusiasm.

Does this mean there is no way for us to prepare for a mass movement, or to foresee where and when it might take place?

Although we cannot normally create a crisis in any people-group, we should be able to identify a crisis when we see one. And we should look out for the early stages of what may become a crisis.

News programmes from around the world may make us aware of tribes and nations that slowly or suddenly enter a time of great tension. In some cases it may be a physical emergency through famine, disease or natural disaster. It may be a growing disillusionment with traditional religion, or resentment against social, political or racial oppression. It may be a fear that a distinctive culture or language is under threat. It may be frustration with corruption and compromise in churches or Christian institutions.

When there is such tension people are often unhappy and willing to listen. In this context someone comes who is a catalyst for change. He or she offers a new idea, a solution to the problem, speaking earnestly, prayerfully, persistently, convincingly, bringing hope in place of despair. In the Roman world, Paul saw himself as that person. You or I can be that person. We must go to the place of tension. And we must know what to say when we get there.

It is possible to prepare for such a moment by learning useful languages, by studying cultures and religions, by gaining experience in various places, so that when a door opens in a crisis context we are quickly able to go in and speak to people who will immediately listen to us and accept what we say.

Mass movements have sometimes started in places with many nominal Christians who begin to regret their weakness and turn in sincerity to Christ. As church people admit their offences to one another and humbly ask forgiveness, putting right what they have done wrong, there will be many testimonies of salvation and joyful reconciliation. This becomes known throughout the region and attracts outsiders from other religions and beliefs. Many churches are in need of such an awakening. They live in a permanent crisis and we can go to them at any time.

Before we leave this subject there are two important things to note. Firstly, it should be clear that in a crisis situation the followers of Jesus are never called by him to engage in political revolt or armed conflict. We are taught to respect the legal authorities, remembering that any authority is better than none, for wherever anarchy breaks out there will be no restraint on wickedness (Rom 13:1-7). Taking up weapons of violence is not an option for disciples of Jesus since he taught us to love our enemies and commanded Peter to return his knife to its sheath (Lk 6:27-30; Matt 26:52).

Secondly, some mass movements have achieved far less than they might have done. This is cause for great regret. Once a movement has started, we are responsible to do all we can so it may continue forcefully and spread widely. People transformed by the Spirit of God in one place should be encouraged to testify in other places – among people with similar problems and potential. New believers must be stimulated to progress in their spiritual understanding and character, committed to teaching others what they learn. That is the only way for a movement to keep moving.