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The Sociological Dimension of Pentecostalism in Brazil

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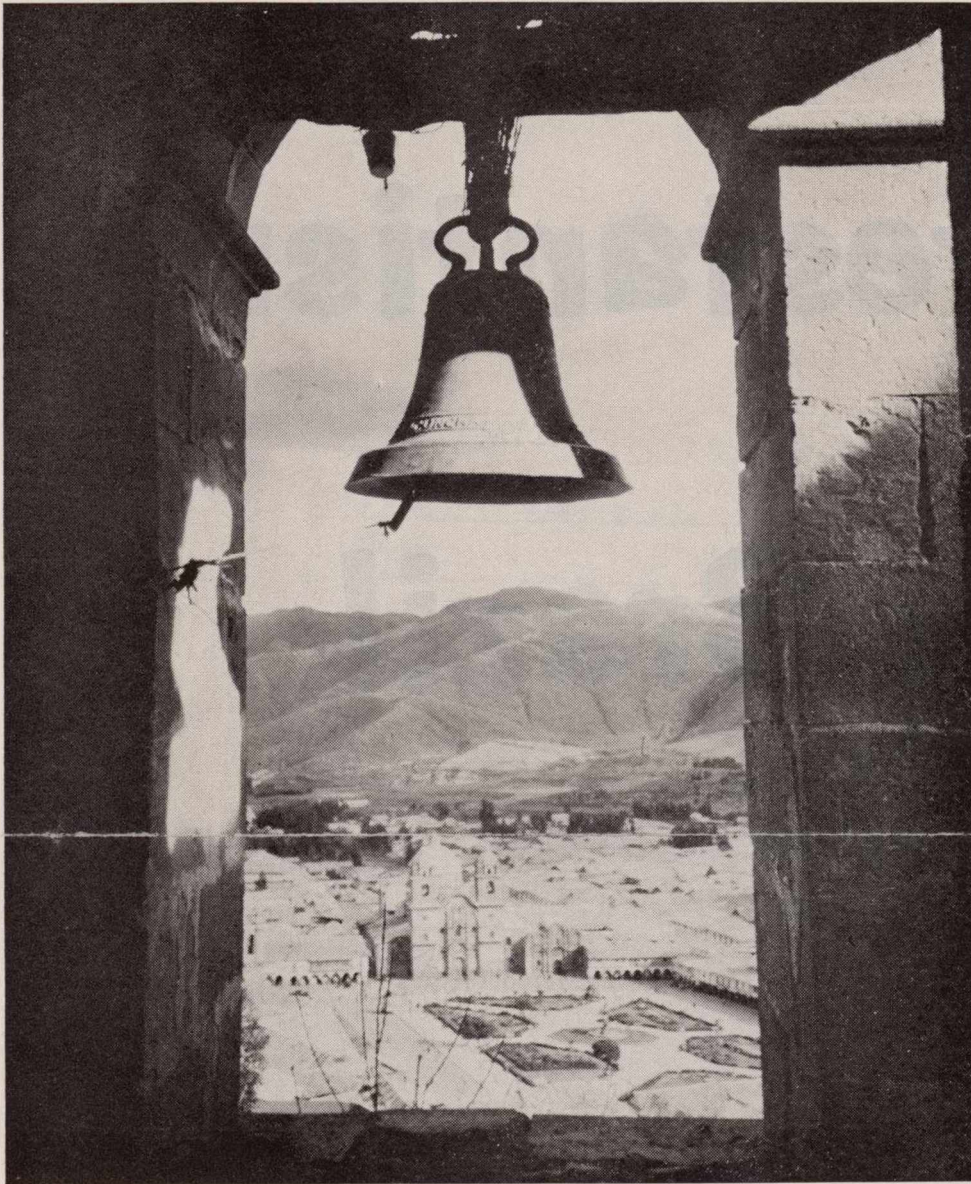
# Protestantism In Brazil

*Reprinted from THE LAMP, March 1960*

# Protestantism

by PETER A. NEARING

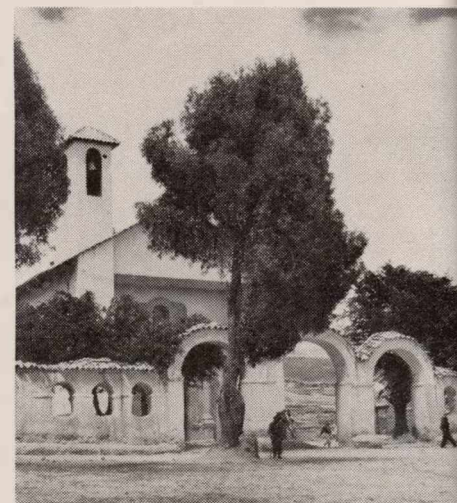
The shortage of priests in South America is making Catholics everywhere take a serious view of the situation



A vista from the bell tower shows a rural town. In these country areas one often finds sheep without a shepherd and therefore people are anxious for the knowledge of Christ



One of the modern churches recently built by Catholics in Pampulha, Brazil



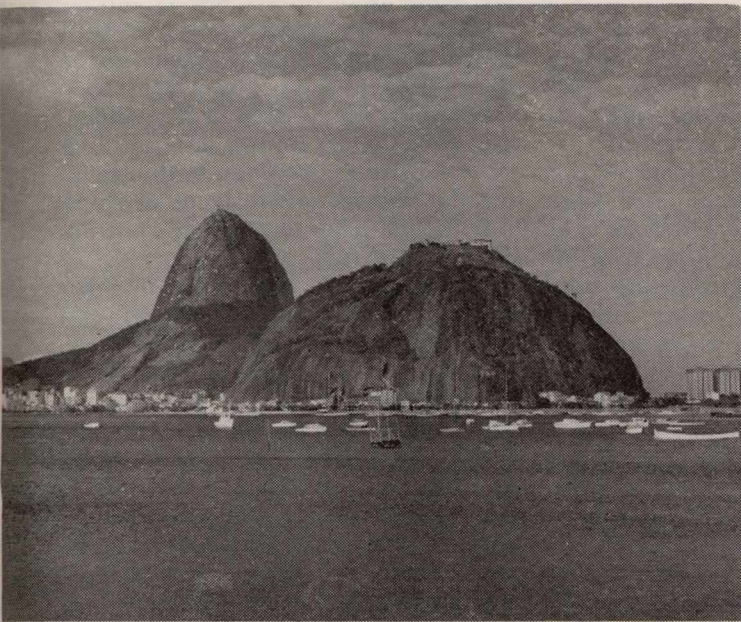
Some old churches are in a state of decay because of the lack of priests

**B**RAZIL is the hope of Protestants because it offers such opportunities. It is the best disposed of all countries and the most available." The opinion is a Protestant one, quoted by the Most Reverend Agnelo Rossi, Bishop of Barra do Pirai, Rio de Janeiro, and Chairman of the Brazilian Bishops' Committee on Defense of the Faith.

Bishop Rossi, in an interview with the writer, offered his answers to the following four questions: *What is the actual situation in Brazil with regard to Protestantism? What are the factors that have contributed to it? What is being done about it? What can be done by Catholics in North America to remedy it?* We set down his answers here.

**THE ACTUAL SITUATION.** Protestantism is actually making great progress in Brazil since 1930. In 1910, at the World Missionary Congress in Edinburg, South America was considered a closed field. In 1916, at the Congress of Panama, this opinion was modified, due to the influence of American missionaries who had been active and successful in South America. In 1928, at the

# In Brazil



Sugar Loaf Mountain in Rio de Janeiro harbor is a landmark of rapidly growing Brazil

Congress of Madras in India, Latin America was regarded as a mission country of prime importance. Shortly after the expulsion of missionaries from China, in 1949, Latin America became the place to work in.

The Protestant Church is one hundred years old in Brazil. In 1940 its adherents numbered 2.5% of the population. In 1950 the figure was up to 3.3%, still a minority, but a very active minority. Professor Emile Leonard, now of the Sorbonne, formerly of Sao Paulo, considered Brazilian Protestantism the most active in the world, the most apostolic.

The Presbyterians held a World Assembly in Sao Paulo in 1959. The Baptists are planning their World Assembly here for 1960.

What are they offering the people? Christ, the Bible and the Holy Spirit. Christ is offered as the one, sole mediator and savior. The Bible is there for all to read without the need of an interpreting church; and the Holy Spirit is at hand to guarantee a safe conduct to the man of good will.

The principal reason why the people go to Protestantism is because the people are hungry for Christ, and there is no one to tell them about Him. The Protestant missionaries have been most successful in those places where there are no priests, or too few of them. In the larger centers they have gone into the homes of those who were not going to Church and not being contacted by any priest. In the rural areas it was easy for them to find sheep without a shepherd. Their zeal took them even among the Indians, though relatively few Indians have accepted their teachings.

The Brazilian people did not know Christ; and those

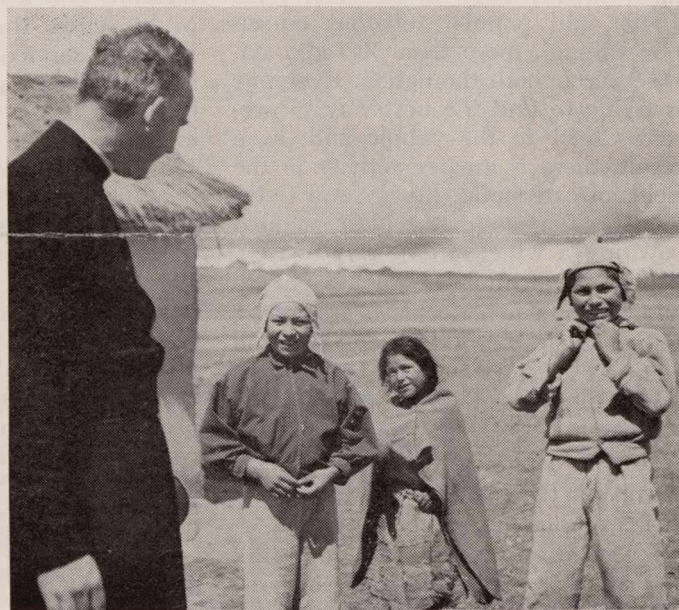
who had nothing more than a sentimental attachment to Our Blessed Mother were easily "debunked" of even this. Bibles were distributed freely until Brazil has become second only to the United States in the number of Bibles distributed.

In the matter of morals, they insisted on strict observance in some minor ways but showed themselves more liberal than the Church of Rome in others.

They have supplied food, constructed hospitals, and built schools and colleges. Eighty percent of their school children are Catholics.

That is the actual situation. What are the factors that have contributed to it?

**THE MAIN FACTORS.** Many factors have contributed to this situation but the main one is the shortage of priests. That, along with the general ignorance of the people and the instability of family life, accounts for a situation that could be tolerated so long as no outside hostile influence aggravated it. In a country where everyone, practically, was baptized



The vastness of Brazil makes it difficult for priests to get around to everyone

and regarded as Catholic, there was little evidence of that militant Catholicism that is more characteristic of those countries where Catholics form a more or less active minority. But ignorance and the shortage of priests seem to be the principal factors. The fact is that there are few converts to the Protestant religion where there is a good priest. The return of Protestants to the Church, however, is more difficult to bring about than the return of Spiritualists; the priest comes too late if he comes only after his sheep have entered another fold. The rapid growth of Brazil's population, proportionately greater than the growth in the number of priests, continues to aggravate the situation.

WHAT IS BEING DONE? The Bishops of Brazil are neither idle nor despondent in face of this situation. They are well aware that Protestantism, supported by missionaries and money from outside the country, and taking advantage of the unhappy state of affairs within the country, is presenting the Church with a still more serious situation. And they realize, also, that the remedy does not lie in a direct attack upon Protestantism but rather upon the factors that have made it possible for Protestantism to grow.

A Commission for the Defense of the Faith was set up with Bishop Rossi as its Chairman, and the Conference of the Bishops of Brazil are now working on a plan that includes the training of popular catechists, the diffusion of Holy Scripture, (there is a new translation in the making), a more intensive effort to find and foster vocations to the priesthood, the establishment of Catholic faculties in universities, (one hundred and fifty have already been established, since 1940) and popular religious education through more than 30 radio stations throughout the nation. Everyone is trying to find the best way to present Christ to the people and, as a result, there is greater activity in the fields of catechetics, liturgy, and Catholic Action—with the last named covering a wide variety of efforts.

Some indication of the extent to which popular catechists are being trained may be gathered from the fact that a manual prepared by Bishop Rossi, with the help of some Jesuit Fathers, has gone into a third edition of 10,000 copies. Catechetical Weeks, set up for the same purpose, are held in many dioceses.

Very encouraging success has marked the efforts of some dioceses to increase the number of seminarians, principally in the south and center of the country. In Campinas, for example, in the Archdiocese of Sao Paulo, the number of seminarians has been doubled from 100 to 200 in five years. In his own Diocese, Bishop Rossi has assigned a priest to the work of re-

cruiting seminarians and after two years of intensive work the number of minor and major seminarians has been increased from 11 to 76. Moreover, four boys will be entering the major seminary directly from the university this year.

Another instance of what can and is being done is also given by Bishop Rossi. Throughout his Diocese 850 Readers were prepared to carry on Sunday worship when no priest was available; and that was most of the time. To become a Reader one must have good morals, genuine faith and the ability to read. The Readers were supplied with two books; one explained how to "offer" Mass without the priest, through the use of prayers, hymns and readings; the second book contained a series of dogmatic instructions suitable for reading.

A special instruction was prepared for the Readers for use during Holy Week, and the Bishop tells of an incident to illustrate its effectiveness. After Easter he was visiting one of the missions and an old man, with tears in his eyes, thanked him for "that beautiful service" which he had never seen or taken part in before in all his Catholic life but was now able to enjoy with the aid of the Reader. Later, Bishop Rossi related the incident to Pope Pius XII and the Holy Father said, "From the bottom of my heart I bless that catechist."

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP? When Bishop Rossi was asked what might be done by North American Catholics to help in the present situation and prepare for future growth, he made two specific suggestions: 1) Help Brazilian students who are already in North America and 2) supply scholarships to Catholic Universities for those who would like to study in the United States and Canada.

It is a regrettable fact, the Bishop said, that some of the Brazilians who go north come back with even less faith than they had when leaving Brazil, because they have not been given the opportunity to meet good Catholics or to study at Catholic Universities.

From my own observations I would like to offer a third suggestion, if I may. In the State of Maranhao, northern Brazil, I have seen at work teams of missionaries from the Canadian Province of Quebec. These teams are made up of priests, Sisters and lay workers. The effectiveness of their efforts in building up Catholic life in the interior of the State of Maranhao—and they have made only a beginning—is enough to warrant the suggestion that anyone interested in helping the Church in Brazil, or in South America in general, ought to consider this form of help.

"I hope," said Bishop Rossi, "that with help from outside Brazil and with increased activity within our own ranks, we shall in time have enough good shepherds for all the sheep. I can never forget what one layman said to me when he told me that on the previous Christmas Eve, three Protestant churches were beautifully lighted in his community while the Catholic church was in darkness, 'Excellency, we are sheep without a shepherd!' I don't want to erase those words from my memory, terrible though they are. I want only to help erase the conditions that prompted that simple man to say them."

"We are optimistic," he concluded, "because it is God's work we are doing. I have seen what can be done, for example in Londrina, a community long considered as a Protestant stronghold. Where there was one Catholic high school we now have two. The enrollment has risen from 1,500 to 2,200 and we have to enlarge our facilities. But the most significant fact is that our increased enrollment has come from the Protestant high school. Where they had 1,600 students they now have less than 1,000. I think it illustrates what I have said before. The principal reason why the people go to the Protestant Churches is because they are hungry for Christ, and there is no one to tell them about Him, but when we are able ourselves to supply this need they are happy to stay where; by the grace of God, they belong." †