In a recent conference several missionaries discussing the present position of the Anuak church agreed that in God's providence the strength of that church is in a large measure due to the fact that from its earliest stages it has had available to it portions of the New Testament, coupled with literacy; and now, finally, the completed New Testament is in the language of the people. In fact, it is difficult to visualize how the church might have developed without the emphasis on literacy and translation.

With the Anuak living on both sides of the Sudan-Ethiopian border, the New Testament has been printed in two scripts. The Sudan Anuak use the New Testament having English letters with adaptations, and the Ethiopian Anuak have their New Testament with Amharic symbols. An initial printing of a thousand copies was made in each script. Thus the text is the same, but the script is entirely different. Today there are hundreds of Anuak who have come out of the darkness into the light of Christ. Through reading many have come to know Christ. And being able to read, they are able to draw deeply from God’s own revelation of Himself.

In the Sudan the missionaries are no longer on the scene. But, God has not left himself without a witness. The very day the last missionaries were made to leave, the first copies of the complete New Testament arrived. God’s timing was perfect, and he who has begun a good work, will see it through to the end. “My Word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

Harvey T. Hoekstra

Bible Distribution in Chiapas

A fearless British colporteur landed in Veracruz, Mexico, with a shipment of Bibles even before the reform laws removed the inquisitorial road-block that had kept the forbidden book out of Mexico until then.

Today the Mexican Bible Society is housed in a spacious modern building. Until recently, as an agency of the American Bible Society, it rented space in a church-building in the heart of the city of Mexico. This agency has supplied Spanish Bibles for the selfless colporteurs who, to interest people in the printed Word, have trudged so valiantly from village to village and from house to house, while to their physical hardships were added the insults and threats of fanatical Bible-haters.

Colporteur Manuel Fernández, arriving in Jalisco (now Arriage), Chiapas, with boxes of Bibles, transported them inland on muleback, and was elated at the demand for the books in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. He did not know what was learned later from a converted culprit, that people asked for Bibles only to take them to the priest’s patio to be burned. Fortunately, some copies escaped the flames. It was a colporteur whose name no available record retains who entered the state of
Chiapas from Tabasco, the state at the north, and sold Bibles long before the Reformed Church in America began working in Chiapas.

In 1948 the Mission received a substantial gift from a Grand Rapids church for Bible distribution. This money became a revolving fund with which to purchase Bibles in order to have a supply for sale in each organized church. Bibles have always been available, too, in the homes of the missionaries and the pastors.

For many years linguists have been engaged in the translation of the New Testament into Zoque, Chol, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Lacandón and Tojolobal, the native languages still spoken by thousands in Chiapas. Consecrated friends and Daily Vacation Bible School children of some United States churches have contributed money to a revolving fund for the purchase of these Indian dialect versions from the Bible Society.

A red-letter day on the Chiapas evangelical calendar is Bible Sunday, celebrated enthusiastically with well-prepared programs, Bible memorization, and Bible distribution, all of which has its climax in the generous offering (in which churches seem to seek to outdo one another) for the Bible Society. Some of the largest contributions come from the poor Indian congregations deeply grateful to have the Word at last, and desirous that other tribes may have that blessing.

The Bible is the evangelist's tool. Copies are sold to the inquirers. In some instances Bibles are loaned, and only in exceptional cases are they given to the unconverted. Psychologically, the book and the message are devalued when the Bible is given away like propaganda.

An interested group in a penitentiary was asked, "How many of you do not have copies of the New Testament?" Quickly a believer, who unfortunately was one of the prisoners, drew me aside and excitedly said: "But, Mr. Kempers, we mustn't just give New Testaments to these men! Some will trade them for cigarettes, others will throw them around as if they were comic books."

Most of the Indians are extremely poor. A public speaker one time exclaimed that it would be a crime to charge them for the Scriptures. Those of us who live on the field know that it would be a "crime" to give them their New Testaments. The selling-price for a well-bound New Testament is about a dollar, far below publishing cost, but a sum which gives dignity to the book. The Indian's main problem is not where to get the dollar, but how to learn to read the precious book.

For several years it has been our pleasure to present annually to some child a Bible given by an American Christian woman in memory of her daughter who met a tragic death. One year I thought I knew just the boy who should have that Bible. He was an Indian lad living in a Spanish-speaking village. When we visited his home we learned that he owned a Bible bought from his own earnings. He had patiently collected fertilizer in the pastures, carried it in his shoulder-bag, and sold it to the women of the town for their gardens and houseplants.

We sell New Testaments for one peso (twelve American cents) apiece, to the crowds that gather for Christian-film showing. Obviously, that is not the cost of
the books. The purchasers, however, have committed themselves by taking a voluntary part in the acquisition of their prized books.

How the official Roman Catholic turn-about in attitude toward the reading of the Bible will affect the evangelization program we cannot predict. Decrees filter down slowly to the grass roots area. What is more important than the availability of the book to the Roman Catholic, or anyone, is the use that is made of the Scriptures.

All of the Bible Societies have set goals for tripling the distribution of God’s Word to man. The Reformed Church Mission in Chiapas and the 30,000 Chiapas people affiliated with the church there will seek to do their part to attain that goal.

JOHN R. KEMPERS

An Arab and the Bible

“Behold, a sower went forth to sow...” are words that are familiar to every Christian throughout the world. In this parable Jesus points out to His disciples the fact that the fruitfulness of the seed depends to a great extent on the fertility of the soil. Fruitfulness is the primary concern of the sower. For this reason he labors diligently in the preparation of the soil and the planting of the seed. It is impossible that anyone can work thus diligently without it having a definite influence on his life.

Thus it was with our friend Abdullah (and here I use a fictitious name). Abdullah was a Muslim living here in the Middle East, a member of a minority language group. When the seed of God’s Word fell on his heart, it found very good soil, indeed. That seed brought forth a real concern that God’s Word be distributed as widely as possible. He applied to the Bible societies to work as a colportuer and was accepted. He served diligently in this capacity, going out with missionaries or native Christians when possible, or else going out alone. A number of times he found persecution and physical suffering as he sought to sow the seed.

He was not content to sow the seed without studying it more carefully each day, both in Arabic and in English. I, personally, have never met anyone more familiar with the Bible in these two languages. The more he sowed, the deeper the seed entered his own heart. He began to study Hebrew and Greek in order that he might more fully understand what is written in the Word.

At the same time, a concern was growing in his heart for the people of his own group who did not have God’s Word in their own language. Gradually he came to feel that God was laying his hand upon him to prepare the seed for sowing in his own place, among his own people.

No Bible School or Seminary was available in his own country for a man of his education. It was decided that he should go to India for study. That meant