

could have grown this big without the help of God."

The girl blushed. Standing near the desk was an impeccably dressed middle-aged man.

"I'm Mr. Harris," he said quietly. "Come in."

Thirty minutes later the corporation executive had purchased a Bible for himself and 25 more to distribute to his immediate staff.

"I've had a successful life," he told the salesman, "but I've always felt there was something lacking. Perhaps the Bible is the answer."

These three incidents, while seemingly isolated, are inextricably related. The biggest best seller in history is selling better than ever. Everybody's buying one—rich man, poor man, Protestant, Catholic, and Jew. Yet the modern renaissance of the world's oldest book defies explanation. No one quite knows why it's happening.

Publishers offer conflicting reasons. Some say it's the beauty of the new editions, which has changed the Bible from its traditional black-and-white past to the colorful editions of today. Others claim it's the dedication of a new kind of salesman, who has taken the Bible out of the bookstores and brought it right into the living rooms and offices of the country. Still others say that there is a genuine resurgence of faith in our time and Bible sales are merely one indication of it—perhaps the best.

Whatever the reasons, there's no doubt that the renaissance is here. Bible sales—which have always outstripped any other book—are estimated at triple that of pre-World War II, and there's no end in sight.

The quality of the new editions is undoubtedly a factor. The Bible itself, of course, remains unchanged, but supplementary art and text make some editions richly beautiful one-volume libraries of the faith.

Some of the art work is outstanding. Chicago's Catholic Press, for instance, has reproduced in full color more than 100 old masters, tracing Bible stories with great paintings, from Rembrandt's *Moses* to Fra Angelico's *Crucifixion*. Some of the art transcends denominational lines. Guy Rowe, commissioned by Texas publisher Houston Harte to create new pictures of the prophets for a modern Protestant edition of Old Testament stories, won an award with Harte from the Christophers, a Catholic layman's group.

SOME OF the art was born in persecution. Menorah Press discovered a Jewish refugee who hid from the Nazis for three months in a French garret. His only book was a Bible. He began sketching scenes and characters, and after the war used them to illustrate Menorah's new Jewish Family Bible, making two trips to Israel to complete the project.

Supplementary text is equally appealing. Many new editions feature, in addition to the basic Bible, synopses of chapters, maps of the Holy Land, a concordance or dictionary of Biblical terms, and other helps peculiar to each faith. Jewish Bibles, for instance, explain the Jewish holidays and their rites and meanings. Catholic Bibles describe in words and pictures the Mass, the sacraments, the rosary, and other prayers.

One of the most exhaustively supplemented Protestant editions is the New Analytical Bible, created for the John A. Dickson Publishing Co. It uses no art, but contains both the original King James Version and (in brackets) clarification of its archaic words from the American Revised Version, plus 800 pages of explanatory text, including probably the most comprehensive cross-indexing of Biblical names, places, and subjects.

So attractive are some new Bibles, both from the artistic and scholarly viewpoints, that they often sell on sight. One door-to-door salesman uses the same brief sales talk to each prospect. "You know better than I do what you think of the Bible," he says, turning the pages, "but what do you think of *this* Bible?"

Most Bible salesmen, however, add something of their own to Bible selling—an intensity unequalled in any

other field. Like the ex-schoolteacher who prayed before approaching each new home, many of them consider their work a mission.

One summed it up, "I'm selling the most important product in the world. If I don't sell it, it's because the family already has one or because, somehow, I've failed to make them understand the necessity of owning one."

Such doorstep evangelism, naturally, often meets resistance, but this new breed of salesman is usually equal to any occasion.

One salesman encountered an agnostic who told him caustically that the only Bible he believed in was the baseball record book. The salesman smiled and showed him where the Bible mentioned southpaw pitchers. (Judges, 20:16: "There were seven hundred chosen men left-handed; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss.") The man bought one.

Most communities permit house-to-house canvassing, but sometimes problems arise. One saleswoman, selling Bibles in a small-town residential neighborhood, was arrested as a peddler. She showed the policeman her permit, then, before he could get away, she sold him a Bible and went back to ringing doorbells.

Where does this new breed of salesman come from? Almost anywhere. Nearly all Bible publishers consider the professional, high-pressure type of salesman worthless, even undesirable. Many prefer to recruit their salesmen from ordinary walks of life—a staff of former insurance agents, white-collar workers, and bus drivers is not unusual—because they'll be selling to ordinary people and because they'll never consider themselves better than their "product." The executive director of one large publishing firm said flatly, "The best Bible salesman in the world is the man who just bought one."

High on the list of those who consider Bible selling a dedicated ministry is the Dickson Company, whose staff includes a large group of ordained ministers and active church laymen. One such salesman, who had given up a pastorate he held for 12 years, explained, "I can spread the word of God farther in the Bible ministry than I could by having a church and always ministering to the same people."

That such ministering bears fruit is beyond argument. It's a rare Bible salesman who can't recount at least one instance of a broken home mended, a teen-ager turned from a life of crime, a rich man who became philanthropic, or a convict who became a minister—all because someone placed a Bible in their hands.

The following case history—a favorite at one Bible house—is fairly typical.

A St. Louis salesman was canvassing a poor neighborhood when he came to one home of indescribable squalor. "I shouldn't have been in the neighborhood," he said later. "When I came to this place, I wanted to run. The husband was a jobless alcoholic. The six children were half-naked. The wife was numb with despair. I gave them a Bible and left. It was all I could offer."

It was the wife who turned to the Bible for comfort. "I didn't find it," she wrote the salesman some time later. "Instead, I began to realize that I was not without fault. Instead of kindness, I had given my husband only rebuke. When I stopped feeling sorry for myself and complaining about how badly he was treating us, I began to see how much worse he was treating himself and how much he needed help."

The salesman still hears from them. The husband, inspired by his wife's new-found goodness, stopped drinking. He's now a railroad brakeman. Three of their children finished high school. One went on to college.

Where will the Bible renaissance end?

"When we've got a Bible in every home in America," the official of one firm said. "And even then we won't be through. There are nearly 30,000 new marriages and new homes being created every week. We aren't even keeping up with that pace."

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