

THE WITNESS OF NEW CHRISTIAN MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION:

This paper will focus on new Christian movements indigenous to India most of which are not well known to outsiders but are active, contextual and vibrant in witness. Indigenous Christianity which had significant growth in the twentieth century has roots in earlier attempts in Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. It includes the National Missionary Society and numerous other Indian initiatives. Asian incarnations of the gospel are found in historic as well as non-traditional Churches of several countries, but especially in India. Some of the independent Churches are perceived as deviant in theology or characterized by folk religious practices. Through their worship, practice and teaching many independent Churches respond to the day to day experience and grass-roots culture of the people. There is a vigorous expression of Christian faith and witness of the Spirit in Asia today.

HISTORIC PRECEDENCE

An indigenous Church is one rooted in the culture from which it grows. Indigenous Christian movements are those which arise from within the local context. Unfortunately in India not infrequently Christianity is erroneously perceived as a foreign religion, less than Indian. The examples which follow are demonstrations of what Lamin Sannah calls "the translatability of the Gospel" as well as authentic Indian incarnations of Christian faith. "Translatability is the source of the success of Christianity across cultures."¹

The earliest example of indigenous Christianity in India is found in the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar. Much has been written about the Thomas Christians. More research is needed. Since the Thomas Christians became "Syrianized" the picture is not entirely clear.

The connection between the Church in India and Syrian-Persian Christianity began in the third or fourth century. Gradually the former became dependent on the latter so that "everything ecclesiastical in India was practically East-Syrian." While this preserved a strong Christian tradition, it "prevented the Church of India from developing an Indian Christian culture...."² The arrival of the Portuguese appears to have obliterated the earlier Malayalam traditions leaving only the Syriac forms.³

The essential point is that this earliest Christianity is one of the ancient religions of India (as the late Prime Minister Nehru pointed out). Christianity in India therefore is not a foreign import (although the Thomas-figure might have been an outsider). Christianity was firmly planted in Indian soil long before it arrived in Northern Europe.

¹ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1991, p.51.

² A. Mathias Mundadan, *From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century (up to 1542)*, History of Christianity in India, Vol.I, Bangalore, Church History Association of India, 1989, p.115.

³ Jesudas M. Athyal and John J. Thatamanil (eds.) *Metropolitan Chrysostom on Mission in the Market Place*, Tiruvalla, Christava Sahitya Samithy, 2002, p.55.

Early missionaries in India included scholars who made important contributions to the understanding of Indian cultures. The brilliant but controversial Jesuit scholar, Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656), for example, whose radical cultural adaptations were viewed as a threat by the Portuguese ecclesiastical authorities, adapted his life-style to that of the people and appropriated various "harmless" customs and ceremonies. De Nobili's approach was through the traditions of Hinduism. While strictly Hindu religious practices were removed, other traditional practices were Christianized. Controversies aside, it is to his credit that de Nobili "Tamilized" the gospel.⁴

De Nobili's greatest contribution was in his scholarship. His accurate knowledge of the people, fluency in speech and writing, opened an approach to the Tamil people the fruits of which still continue. De Nobili gave a terminology for Christian theology, a vehicle for conveying Christian ideas. By comparison today's proposals for Indianization of liturgy and theology somehow fall short.

The first Protestant missionary, Bartolomeo Ziegenbalg (1682-1719), likewise was a devoted scholar who translated the New Testament and part of the Old into Tamil, wrote other books, and compiled a Tamil-German dictionary among other works. Ziegenbalg and the early German missionaries adapted their pietist Halle educational tradition to the formation of Christian faith and character in Tamilnadu⁵

William Carey (1762-1834) and the Baptist missionaries of the Serampore Mission continued the scholarly tradition. The translation, printing and dissemination of Scriptures was their first priority. Carey himself translated the entire Bible into Bengali, Sanskrit and Marathi. Within thirty years parts of the Bible were printed in 37 Indian languages! The missionaries also did a careful study of Hinduism and translated some of the Hindu classics into English and into Bengali.⁶ Customs and practices which the missionaries observed were described in detail and published by William Ward (1769-1823).⁷ (1817-1820).

Despite this early sensitivity to social customs and culture, the churches arising from the missionary presence were inevitably European in form--German Lutheran in Tranquebar, English Baptist in Bengal, Church of England in Tirunelveli and Calcutta, American Presbyterian in Punjab, Welsh Presbyterian in Shillong, American Methodist in Bareilly, American Baptist in North East India and Andhra, Salvation Army, Quaker, Alliance--each according to the image of its missionary creator.

⁴ See recent studies on de Nobili, viz. RAJAMANICKAM, S. Rajamanickam, Roberto de Nobili on Indian Customs, An Introduction by S. Rajamanickam and Translation of His Informatio, a Report about some Indian Social Customs; Palayamkottai, De Nobili Research Institute, St. Xavier's College, 1989; A. Saulière, His Star in the East, Revised & Re-edited by Fr. S. Rajamanickam, Anand, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1995; Thomas Anchukandam, Roberto de Nobili: Responsio (1610): A Vindication of Inculturation and Adaptation, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications, 1996; Preaching Wisdom to the Wise, Three Treatises by Roberto de Nobili, S.J., Missionary and Scholar in 17th Century India, Translated and Introduced by Anand Amaladass, S.J. and Francis X. Clooney, S.J., St. Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000.

⁵ Hugald Grafé, The History of Christianity in Tamilnadu, History of Christianity in India, Vol.4, Part 2., Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 1982, p.188. Also see Daniel Jeyaraj, "Early Tamil Bible Translation in Tranquebar," Dharma Deepika June 1997, 67-77; and Daniel Jeyaraj, "Dual Identity of Christians in Tranquebar," Dharma Deepika December 1997, 9-18.

⁶ See various essays in the compendium, Carey's Obligation and India's Renaissance, edited by J.T.K. Daniel and R.E. Hedlund, Serampore, Council of Serampore College, 1993.

⁷ William Ward, History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos, Vols.I-IV, 3rd Edition, 1817-1820; Reprint of the Serampore original by Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1990.

Ziegenbalg in South India, Carey in Bengal, and other pioneers, certainly carried a number of "indigenous" ideals. But, like the Roman Catholics, they too were bearers of their own cultural traditions so that the churches arising on Indian soil nevertheless were molded in the shape of the Catholic and Protestant missions. This "missionary" Christianity is *not* what the present study is about.

Here and there the Christian message caused ferment and reaction. India has seen several attempted cultural incarnations. One such was that of the flamboyant Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884), a 19th century attempt to Indianize the gospel. Sen was captivated by Jesus Christ whom he sought to follow--as an Indian. His was a spontaneous response to the gospel from within Hindu society expressed in Indian culture and symbol. He never identified with traditional institutional Christianity. For this reason Christian writers regard him a Hindu--or a heretic. His method was borrowed from Hindu tradition. Sen acknowledged Christ as Lord but did not opt for the Christian religion. Hindu symbols sometimes were combined with Christian concepts. Keshub Chunder Sen wanted to see India come to Christ. He chided Christian missionaries for doing other things instead of preaching Christ. They should stop presenting Christ as an Englishman because the picture of a foreign Christianity is repugnant. He criticised nominal European Christians whose pseudo-Christianity hinders the progress of the spirit of Christianity in India.⁸

Sen's concern, and the purpose behind the Samaj and his Church of the New Dispensation, was to disseminate Christian ideals and ideas. Had he succeeded, it is interesting to speculate whether the message of Christ might have penetrated the indifferent elite of Hindu society. His was an early attempt to contextualize the Christian message.

Keshub Chunder Sen has been much written about, greatly misunderstood. His was probably the earliest known attempt at an authentic Indian "contextual" response during the Protestant missionary era. An ardent devotee of Christ, Sen's devotion was expressed in classical Indian forms and categories not acceptable to the European missionaries of that time. Keshub was an active leader of the Brahmo Samaj, a Hinduistic new religious movement founded by India's great reformer, Ram Mohan Roy. Roy's controversy with the Serampore Baptists over points of theology had resulted in formation of the Brahmo Samaj as well as of an Indian Unitarian Church.

In Maharashtra the Brahmin poet convert, Narayan Vaman Tilak (1862-1919), left a distinctive mark on the Church. Initially a secret follower of Christ, Tilak eventually publicized his new faith, then faced the question of baptism which was regarded as an anti-social and uncivil act of renouncing one's own community for another. Tilak experienced the disaster and disgrace associated with his baptism, but did not renounce his Hindu heritage! He retained it, and did not separate from his Hindu brethren. Much of his devotional life was formed by the great poet-saint of Maharashtra. He saw his cultural heritage as the best preparation for Christian conversion: "I came to the feet of Christ over the bridge of Tukaram." Through Tilak the singing of *bhajans* and reciting of *kirtans* became part of Christian worship. Tilak adapted the distinctive Marathi *kirtan* (song-recitation performance) for Christian communication. Borrowed from Hindu *bhakti*, this folk media together with Tilak's poetry has enriched the life of the Marathi Church. In the latter part of his life, Tilak was searching for an indigenous expression of Christian faith more attractive to the Hindu society. Reflecting his own experience, Tilak advocated *bhakti* as a way to Christ.

⁸ David C. Scott (ed.), Keshub Chunder Sen, Madras, CLS, 1979, p.63.

Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929) frequently is cited as an example of Indian Christian indigeneity. His conversion, wardrobe, theology, preaching and lifestyle as a wandering *sadhu* all carry the marks of an authentic Indian spirituality. Certainly he viewed Christian life and faith from an Eastern perspective.

Sundar Singh left behind no institutional church bearing his mark. However in South India today a large number of independent *sanyasi* preachers follow his pattern and attract a large following.⁹ The persistence of religion's "little tradition" is largely ignored, but is prominent in the Independent Church Movement in Madras and Tamil Nadu.¹⁰ New Christian movements such as the Laymen's Evangelical Fellowship claim a heritage received from Sadhu Sundar Singh.

Less well-known, but important as an advocate of authentic inculturation, was the Bengali convert, Rajendra Chandra Das (1887-1976), who served for 47 years as an evangelist among the Hindus of Varanasi. Styled an "Evangelical Prophet for Contextual Christianity," Das was highly critical of Western forms of Christianity which he saw as distortions of the gospel.¹¹ The so-called "Indianization" of the Church "has only installed black and brown bureaucrats and authoritarians in the exact place of missionaries."¹² Das advocated ashrams as an Indian ideal and saw the Christian ashram movement as an antidote to the evils of Westernized theological education and patterns of ministry.

R.C. Das, Keshub Chundar Sen, Sundar Singh and Narayan Vaman Tilak are among those who sought an authentic Indian Christianity. There were others.

New Christian movements capture the ethos of earlier attempts in India. For the most part little is known about these movements. In recent decades a movement around the late Subba Rao (1912-1981) attracted attention of writers¹³ More recently the Bible Mission of Fr. Devadas was the subject of an in-depth study¹⁴ The Bakht Singh movement has been described in brief, inspirational accounts¹⁵ and in a recent definitive biography of Bro. Bakht Singh.¹⁶ Here and there mention is made of other independent movements in South India.¹⁷

Indigenous Indian Christianity is found in the Little Tradition of the so-called fringe sections largely (not exclusively) of Pentecostal, Charismatic or Evangelical origin. Questions of

⁹ Werner Hoerschelmann, *Christliche Gurus: Darstellung von Selbstverständnis und Funktion indigenen Christseins durch unabhängige, charismatisch geführte Gruppen in Südindien*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 1977, p.124.

¹⁰ Lionel Caplan, *Religion and Power: Essays on the Christian Community in Madras*, Madras, CLS, 1989.

¹¹ H.L. Richard, R. C. Das: *Evangelical Prophet for Contextual Christianity*, *Confessing the Faith in India Series*, Delhi, ISPCK, 1995.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.100.

¹³ Kaj Baago, *The Movement Around Subba Rao: A Study of the Hindu-Christian Movement around KI. Subba Rao in Andhra Pradesh*, Madras, CLS, 1968; Robin Boyd, *Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, Madras, CLS, 1991; Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theology from an Indian Perspective*, Bangalore, Theological Book Trust, 1990.

¹⁴ P. Solomon Raj, *A Christian Folk Religion in India: A Study of the Small Church Movement in Andhra Pradesh, with a Special Reference to the Bible Mission of Devadas*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 1986.

¹⁵ R.R. Rajamani, *Monsoon Daybreak*, Bombay, 1971; Edwin Samuel, *In the Day of Thy Power*, 1983, pp.126-127; Moses Premanandam, "God Chosen Movement for India," a paper prepared for the Hyderabad Conference on Indigenous Christian Movements in India, 27-31 October, 1998; see *Christianity Is Indian*, 2004 revised edition, pp.331-344.

¹⁶ T.E. Koshy, *Brother Bakht Singh of India: An Account of the 20th Century Apostolic Revival*, Secunderabad, OM Books, 2003.

¹⁷ See Roger E. Hedlund, *Quest For Identity: India's Churches of Indigenous Origin, The 'Little Tradition' in Indian Christianity*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2000; and Roger E. Hedlund (ed.), *Christianity Is Indian: The Emergence of an Indigenous Community*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2004.

contextualisation, adaptation, accommodation, and the cultural transformation of the Christian faith are topics of hot debate in the traditional Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant denominations--all "Great Tradition" Churches--whereas cultural adaptations of the Faith are more likely to be normal occurrences in churches of the Little Tradition. Apart from Solomon Raj's study of the Bible Mission, published accounts describing Indian movements have been few.¹⁸

WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

Study of recent movements involves oral history. Published records tend to be few. In this section the spokespersons tell their own stories. Where possible, additional information has been gleaned from published sources. What follows are several examples of creative witness by new Christian movements.

The Inheritors. The Inheritors is a registered charitable society located in Nagpur, Maharashtra (Inheritors 2002).¹⁹ According to its mission statement, "The Inheritors exists to provide wholistic care for families and the first generation Christians through teaching, training and nurture to establish them in Christian love." The two-pronged mission of The Inheritors grows out of this statement.

Families today experience enormous pressures. To minister to the needs of families, The Inheritors has developed a team of experienced men and women with expertise in communication and counselling who bring insights from their cultural and ethnic backgrounds to facilitate building strong families. Workshops and seminars are offered on parenting and on building and sustaining strong marriages. Programmes focused on living in relationship include seminars for couples, for young people, for professionals, for lay leaders and pastors, and for heads of organisations.

First generation Christians (FGCs) are people with special needs. Having chosen to become disciples of Jesus Christ from various faith backgrounds, the transition is sometimes traumatic. The Inheritors is committed to assisting FGCs in the face of family rejection, suspicion and non-acceptance by the local Church. Help is provided in the form of mentoring and teaching to enable the FGCs to comprehend their relationship with the local Church and society as well as to strengthen their ties with their original community. Simultaneously the local Church is enabled to respond to the needs of the FGCs.

Two projects demonstrate The Inheritors' pro-active philosophy. One is an AIDS/HIV awareness programme offering information, counselling, guidance and help. A skill training centre is designed to enable the infected or affected to live and earn their livelihood with dignity.

The other project is a progressive school linked with home schooling to serve the needs of Indian missionary parents in North India. Griha Shiksha prepares and sends educational materials monthly thus providing home schooling for children up to the age of nine. A play school at Nagpur and summer camps for missionary children are also offered.

In summary The Inheritors is a creative response to the contemporary Indian context as well as to needs in the Indian missionary community.

Maharashtra Village Ministries. Originally founded in 1981 by students of the Union Biblical Seminary while it was located at Yavatmal, Maharashtra Village Ministries (MVM) is

¹⁸ P. Solomon Raj, *A Christian Folk Religion in India*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang Verlag, 1986. Also see P. Solomon Raj, *The New Wine-Skins: The Story of the indigenous Missions in Coastal Andhra Pradesh, India*, Delhi, ISPCK, Chennai, MIIS, 2003.

¹⁹ Information is from a newsletter *The Inheritor*, Jan-Feb 2002; "The Inheritors" brochure; and "Griha Shiksha" brochure.

focused on the spiritual and social needs of rural Maharashtra (David 2002).²⁰ From its original base in Yavatmal District, MVM has expanded progressively into Wardha, Chandrapore, Nagpur, Amravati, and recently Thana, a total of six out of 35 districts in the state. At present MVM has 85 workers, including office staff as well as missionaries, and has started 24 congregations.

Maharashtra Village Ministries is a holistic agency with a vision to proclaim the gospel by word and deed in remote villages. The mission of MVM is to do systematic church planting among unreached peoples in unreached villages (Maharashtra Village Ministries 2001).²¹ An incarnational model of evangelism is carried out by missionaries who live in the villages. The chosen method to fulfill its vision is to train and equip local "native" missionaries. The policy of the mission is to work in close relationship with existing Indian churches.

One of the distinctive features of MVM is that it works in partnership with local churches of several denominations forming a Memorandum of Understanding with each partnering Church. To date such agreements have been made with the Church of North India, the Mar Thoma Church, and the Free Methodist Church.

In Mumbai MVM is partnering with the Church of North India Bombay Diocese and the Mar Thoma Church by providing personnel and supervision for rural outreach. Church members from the urban CNI and Mar Thoma congregations also are involved directly by providing expertise including medical assistance. A village church was started, and the tribal converts have been accepted into the Mar Thoma Church. Dialogue is going on regarding the possibility of ordination of the missionary, a local Marathi person, by the Mar Thoma Church. For its part, the CNI Bombay Diocese has formed the Mumbai Diocese Missionary Movement under the patronage of the Bishop.

Recently Maharashtra Village Ministries entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the South India Conference of the Free Methodist Church to recognize the converts and serve their ecclesiastical needs, i.e. for sacraments, church discipline, marriage and funerals.

Apart from its partnering initiatives with the Churches, MVM has recognized the potential of resource sharing through cooperation with specialist agencies. Thus Campus Crusade for Christ provides the Jesus film with equipment, World Cassette Outreach offers the New Testament on cassette, and Project Philip provides lessons for nurturing new converts.

MVM aims for development of grass-roots leaders through a five-six year process. The missionary identifies local evangelists who are trained in summer camps which serve as short-term Bible schools. This is followed by further in-house training. In recent years the Shalom Mela, conducted for three days during December, helps to encourage the believers, provides opportunity to meet possible marriage partners, and thus strengthens the developing church. Some 450 attended the most recent mela, 50 percent of the cost paid for locally.

Maharashtra Village Ministries is one example of an indigenous mission serving quietly, and with little publicity, making innovative use of local resources to serve human needs in neglected rural communities.

Emmanuel Ministries, Calcutta. A comprehensive mission to the city is found in Emmanuel Ministries initiatives among addicted and afflicted sections of Calcutta society. The plight of 50,000 street children and the problems of slum dwellers as well as the suicidal depressions of sophisticated urbanites are some of the motivating factors behind the multiple projects of Emmanuel Ministries and the Jivan Jyoti Fellowship (church) it has fostered in the

²⁰ Information provided by Mr. Sujit David, a missionary staff worker of MVM, in an interview at Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, 16 February 2002.

²¹ "MVM At A Glance 2001" brochure.

heart of the city (Nathan 2000:288-299).²² A brief description follows of some of these creative answers to the city's challenges.

a) Pauline Bhavan. The railway platforms of Howrah Station and other train stations of Calcutta are "home" to hundreds of lost, abandoned or runaway children in the city. Exploited and abused, these children are deprived of childhood and destined to a life of anti-social behaviour and crime. Pauline Bhavan, with facilities for 50 children, seeks to rescue such children by providing a secure home environment complete with medical care, education, recreation and cultural activities.

b) Pavement Club. Surely a unique service is the Pavement Club conducted at the Emmanuel Ministries headquarter in Rippon Street for destitute children living with their parents in make-shift shelters on the streets. The pavement club caters to the needs of these children on a daily basis by providing nutritious food, hygiene, and non-formal education. Minor ailments are treated and immunizations provided. The cooperation and awareness of the parents is cultivated.

The Pavement Club seeks to affirm the worth and dignity of street children and enable them to recognize their own potential and value, facilitate a change in their attitude and behavior resulting in productive, meaningful lifestyles and prevent them from becoming victims of exploitation, substance abuse and AIDS (Nathan 2000:292).²³

c) Midway Home. In order to facilitate the rehabilitation of recovering addicts and their reintegration into society, a half-way house was established. The Arunoday Midway Home provides counseling and therapy in a disciplined environment. This project is carried out in collaboration with the Calcutta Samaritans who also offer detoxification camps, seminars and workshops on AIDS awareness and the dangers of substance abuse.

d) New Market Community Development Project. The project aims at improving the quality of life of the inhabitants of a slum area lacking most basic amenities. Particular attention is given to the children of commercial sex workers. The object is to affirm their human dignity and enable the women and children to achieve their potential and lead productive lives.

e) Serampore Community Development. A non-formal education programme is conducted on the portico of St. Olaf's Church for children from the surrounding slums along with health, hygiene and drug and alcohol abuse awareness programmes. This project was started in 1996 with the cooperation of the Theology Department of Serampore College.

f) Calcutta Emmanuel School. Originally begun at the premises of Emmanuel Chapel as an effort to get street children off the street, Calcutta Emmanuel School today is a recognized educational institution housed in a modern building providing formal education for 250 underprivileged children.

Other services provided by Emmanuel Ministries include g) an Extension Care Centre providing a residential training course designed to integrate recovering addicts and rehabilitated young adults into society as well as h) a Rickshaw Pullers Fellowship extending God's love to 200 members of a neglected community through awareness and empowerment.

The liberating dynamism of the Gospel is clearly seen manifested in the lives of the people groups ministered to: Street children singing choruses with gusto and giving thanks before every meal and who show interest in Scripture lessons coupled with a change in lifestyle and outlook; drug and alcohol addicts turned out of homes as hopeless and rejected finding new meaning and purpose in life and committing their lives for the same cause sharing testimonies of prayers answered; estranged couples being

²² Information is from personal observation during visits to various ministries over a period of several years as well as from the definitive article by Beena Nathan, "Emmanuel Ministries Calcutta: An Indian Urban Mission Response to the City," in *Christianity Is Indian...* edited by Roger E. Hedlund, Delhi, ISPCK, 2000, 288-299.

²³ Beena Nathan, *op.cit.*, p.292.

rejoined through godly counsel and fellowship; disillusioned young men and women discovering the truth which sets free (Nathan 2002:291).²⁴

The Pentecostal Mission. The exclusivistic Ceylon Pentecostal Mission, now also known as The Pentecostal Mission or The Pentecostal Church, is an indigenous movement originating in South India (Martin 1998).²⁵ Its founder, Ramankutty, born in 1881 to Hindu parents in Trichur District, Kerala, was converted to Christianity in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) at the age of 18 through a vision of Christ which caused him to begin secretly to pray and meditate on Jesus (Martin 1998).²⁶ Then, in 1902, at the age of twenty two, a third vision convinced Ramankutty that he could not longer remain a hidden follower of Jesus. Ramankutty openly confessed Jesus as Lord, was baptized and given the Christian name "Paul".

His ministry developed gradually. It was reported that a leper over whom Paul prayed was cured and a person declared dead was brought to life. People were attracted to his new fellowship called the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission. Among those who joined was a college lecturer, Alwin R. de Alwis. Under the leadership of Pastor Paul and Bro. Alwin the CPM ministry spread beyond Colombo to Tamil Nadu and Kerala, then to other countries (Martin 1998:8).²⁷

Historian G.P.V. Somaratna states that Alwin R. de Alwis was the main instrument in the foundation of the CPM in 1923, and that it was in fact a break-away from the ministry of Walter Clifford who had come to the region as an independent Christian worker but was now forming links with the Assemblies of God in America (Somaratna 1996:33).²⁸

Several distinguishing features are to be noted. Fulltime CPM workers were expected to practice an ascetic life-style including celibacy, obedience to the chief pastor, communal living (including disposal of private possessions) in faith homes, corporate prayers beginning at 4.00 a.m., and the wearing of white dress as a biblical principle--the latter particularly appropriate in Sri Lanka where white was worn by Buddhist devotees in visits to the temples (Somaratna 1996:34).²⁹

From the beginning, indigenous forms of worship were incorporated. Worshippers were seated on mats on the floor--similar to Buddhist and Hindu worship procedures. Domestic musical instruments for worship, singing of indigenous tunes, and other local cultural practices were common features, all of which gave the CPM an identity of its own, yet the main driving force was the healing ministry Somaratna 1996:40,30).³⁰

The CPM laid the foundation for other Pentecostal ministries not only in Sri Lanka and India but beyond. Today, says Paul C. Martin, the CPM under various names, is one of the largest Pentecostal movements in the world with branches in several countries. While exact membership figures are not yet available, here are 848 branches worldwide (including 708 in India) and about 3984 full-time ministers presided over by chief pastor C.K. Lazarus (Martin

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.291.

²⁵ Information about the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission is provided by one of its stalwart members, Bro. Paul C. Martin in a paper entitled "A Brief History of the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission" presented at the Hyderabad Conference on Indigenous Christian Movements in India, 27-31 October, 1998.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.8.

²⁸ Somaratna, *Origins of the Pentecostal Mission in Sri Lanka*, Nugegoda, Margaya Fellowship, 1996, pp.30,33.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.34.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.40,30.

1998:12).³¹ In addition there are numbers of independent assemblies and movements which have severed connections with the CPM.

The CPM was always innovative from its inception. Its practice of voluntary celibacy, while much maligned, was also culturally understandable in the Buddhist-Hindu context and the practices of austerity and discipline in Sri Lankan Buddhist monasticism. Celibacy which was limited to monks and nuns in Buddhist practice, was now extended to Christian ministry through women and men practicing voluntary celibacy.

A recent web site, Shalomindia, leads to TPM, THE PENTECOSTAL MISSION (formerly CPM) providing addresses in several cities in India with other countries listed although the information is not yet available. Information Technology utilization suggests a current vitality in this early Pentecostal movement.

New Life Assembly of God, Chennai. The Assemblies of God history in India dates from the early part of the twentieth century, but is fairly recent in Chennai where the New Life AOG at Saidapet is a "mega-church" of about 25,000 worshipers. Apart from its multiple Tamil and English week-end worship services utilizing contemporary music and drama, the church engages in a wide range of social activities. Eye camps and medical teams recruited from the congregation provide free services in needy rural areas. Creative ministries include a degree-level evening Bible college, deployment of bi-vocational missionary "tentmakers," outreach ministries in slums, rehabilitation of sex-workers, leadership training and care cells. The latter is a somewhat recent innovation which merits our attention.

Participatory lay leadership training has been a hallmark of the Pentecostal movement. Lay women as well as men, people of all ages, are recruited into ministry. Converts are encouraged to witness. Women and men engage in preaching, house visitation, praying for the sick, literature distribution, and Bible study. Teams visit colonies, slums and villages where they engage in various types of spiritual and social ministries. Youth are given opportunity to preach, pray and perform. Missionary teams are sent to North India and neighbouring countries.

Much of the local ministry centres in some 2,000 care cells meeting in homes. The cell system was first introduced by the Rev. Paul Yongi Cho of the Yoido Full Gospel Central Church in Korea and has been adapted to the Indian context by New Life AOG. Care cells are the basic structures for pastoral care, spiritual nurture, teaching and training. A cross-section of population participate in the worship of the church and in its care cells without any discrimination as to class or caste background. It will be instructive to take a closer look.

Mr. A. Gabriel is a care cell leader (Gabriel 2002).³² He is from an agricultural family of a temple town near Mahabalepuram. After the third standard he quit school and learned basket weaving and cane work in order to earn, then came to Madras where he works as a cobbler. He became an alcoholic. His first wife died in an accident. They had lost two babies who died as infants. He remarried. Meanwhile his younger brother's wife was converted in the Assembly of God Church. She urged him to come to the church for healing. He went, but was not healed. He suffered from a serious leg infection, the doctors threatened possible amputation. The second time he was carried into the church, but came home walking. There he went to a nearby temple where he vowed to stop drinking. At home, however, the vow was soon broken. For three days he was unable to get up from his bed. Then one day he felt as if it were a slap--and got up healed! From that day onward he was no more an alcoholic.

³¹ Martin, *op.cit.*, pp.5, 12.

³² Interview with Mr. A. Gabriel at the residence of Mrs. Annie Valsarajan, Luz Avenue, Mylapore, 14 March 2002.

After two months Gabriel joined a care cell. In six months he became the leader of a care cell in his own house. After one year he became a sectional leader, and now has five care cells under his supervision.

He has seen many miracles. A demonized woman had visited mosques and temples, then came to the prayer cell. There she was prayed for for three days. Today she is totally freed. At Christmas she gave a public witness.

Gabriel continues to work as a cobbler. Every day he gives the gospel to people who come to his work place in front of the Mylapore post office. Many come for prayer. Saturday 7-9 PM he leads the care group to the Marina Beach for prayer. Every day he visits the prayer cells.

As a family they continue to live in the San Thome slum. Two years ago they lost everything in a fire which destroyed the slum houses. Through his cobbler business he earns Rs.70-80 per day, but is debt free. Previously he earned more but was in debt due to his drinking habit. Today despite a lesser income he has no debt and is able to send his two sons to good schools (one is studying in the 9th, the other in the 7th) and has time for ministry. His wife earns Rs.300 monthly as a housemaid.

Gabriel's is a remarkable testimony of the social, economic and personal transformative power of the gospel. A radical egalitarianism is experienced in the care cells and in the congregation where rich as well as poor sit together and worship side by side irrespective of caste or social background. Here university graduates serve together with slum residents, and a cobbler ministers to both.

This is but one example of the obliterating power of the gospel in demolishing sinful human barriers. Modern Pentecostalism from its early origins has been a multi-racial integrationist movement characterised by maximum participation for all its members (Hollenweger 1999).³³ New Life Assembly is a dynamic example.

GEMS House of Prayer. The story of the Gospel Echoing Missionary Society (GEMS) is a remarkable account of one local church in mission. It is a record of the achievement of one local church in South India, the GEMS House of Prayer at Chrompet, Chennai, whose concentrated missionary outreach has brought an entire new denomination into existence in an area of North India where previously there was no church.

Today the GEMS Church is growing rapidly with 438 workers at 142 centres in 217 pin codes in the different parts of Bihar as well as in bordering Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Some 6,000 *believers* attended the GEMS convention in Bihar during October 1998.

Many projects are carried out including three children's homes plus a home for 100 children of stonecutters and a home for 60 polio children. GEMS also operates 77 middle schools and 4 English schools including a high school. Out of 69 linguistic dialects in Bihar, GEMS concentrates mainly in three major Hindi dialects of Bhojpuri, Maitali, and Magai (Goforth 1999).³⁴ The Mission works mainly in neglected areas of North Bihar, Central and West Bihar. With 7,000 baptized and 8,000 known believers, the total GEMS Christian community in Bihar may be estimated at more than 13,000. In addition, some 15,000 children are cared for in schools.

The GEMS approach includes a balanced programme of medical ministry involving a hospital and clinics, free medical camps, education, and social services including emancipation of children from bonded labour. Because of this benevolent social dimension the Mission is

³³ Walter J. Hollenweger, "The Black Roots of Pentecostalism" in Pentecostals after a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition edited by Allan H. Anderson and Walter J. Hollenweger, Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

³⁴

Information provided by Mr. Goforth, son of the GEMS mission director in Bihar, Pastor Augustine Jebakumar, by telephone at Chennai-Chrompeth, on 11 January 1999.

well-accepted in Bihar, despite some opposition and persecution (Jebakumar 1999).³⁵ It is a significant achievement in North India through the concerted cross-cultural missionary effort of a single local congregation in South India.

FMPB among the Maltos. The experience of the Malto people in Jharkand is an impressive story of social and spiritual redemption. Decimated by malnutrition, tuberculosis, goiter, jaundice, cholera, malaria and various water-borne diseases, the Malto people also were exploited by rapacious money lenders. Addiction to alcohol and other substances was a further degrading influence (Muthusamy Raj 1997:2).³⁶ This dehumanized tribe had declined from one million to less than 70,000 during the past 40 years and was moving toward extinction (Singh & Manoharan 1997).³⁷ Religion, requiring expensive animal sacrifices to godlings and demons, was a costly affair (Muthusamy Raj 1997:9,11,14-16).³⁸

Into this context of human despair, missionaries of the Friends Missionary Prayer Band and other social development workers came to live and serve. Learning the Malto language and adopting the Malto culture, they identified with the people. Several Christian workers gave their lives, including the FMPB General Secretary's son who succumbed to a sudden attack of cerebral malaria (Muthusamy Raj 1997:24).³⁹ In response to this outpouring of love the Maltos began to turn to Christ resulting in a growing people movement which has brought large numbers into the Church.

The Malto Christians have experienced radical change in their life-style bringing release from fear, from addictions and other costly practices. Self-help projects assisted by EFICOR have made it possible for the people to counteract their own poverty and to rid themselves of exploitation by money lenders and other oppressors. "The message of equality and liberty in Christ came as a great impetus to the Maltos social transformation" (Muthusamy Raj 1997:34).⁴⁰ Their health status is being improved through health camps conducted by the Emmanuel Hospital Association in which basic health and hygiene are taught (Muthusamy Raj 1997:41).⁴¹ Despite opposition by vested interests, community development is underway, and the Maltos are no longer a population in decline.

From the work of the FMPB among the Malto people of North Bihar has arisen an entire new diocese of the Church in North India. A large section of Malto tribe have been baptized. As of 31 January 2002, the records shows 43,048 Malto Christian believers formed into 520 congregations (Berlin 2002).⁴² In January 2000 the New Testament in the Malto language was dedicated, translated by FMPB missionaries and published by the Bible Society of India (Daniel 2002).⁴³

Christianity has brought social transformation to a demoralized and disintegrating society. Previously illiterate, oppressed and exploited, and decimated by rampant disease,

³⁵ Pastor Augustine Jebakumar, telephone interview, Chrompet-Chennai, on 13 January 1999.

³⁶ Muthusami Raj, "Christianity and the Social Transformation of the Maltos People of Bihar, India," M.A. dissertation, All Nations Christian College, Hertfordshire, England, 1997, p.2. Mr. Muthusami Raj is an FMPB missionary to the Maltos.

³⁷ According to the 1981 Census there were 100,177 speakers of the Malto language. See *Languages & Scripts* by K.S. Singh and S. Manoharan, People of India National Series Vol. IX, Anthropological Survey of India, Oxford University Press, 1997.

³⁸ Muthusami Raj, *op.cit.*, pp.9,11,14-16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.34.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.41.

⁴² S. John Berlin, "Malto Update" e-mail communication to Roger E. Hedlund, March 18, 2002.

⁴³ Information provided by the Rev. Dr. J.T.K. Daniel, Tambaram, in a telephone conversation, 26 February 2002.

today the downward trend has ended. The Malto are receiving rudimentary education, learning basic norms of health and hygiene, resulting in a new sense of human dignity. Today the Malto people find their self-identity in Christianity, the incarnational witness of the FMPB missionaries having performed a vital catalytic function.

A Nascent Korku Church in Central India. In his descriptions of tribes in central India, anthropologist Stephen Fuchs described the alienation of the tribes who are dispossessed of their lands and reduced to the status of daily labourers or forced to emigrate (Fuchs 1973:136).⁴⁴ Governmental and other tribal social welfare efforts have been ineffective. Schools run by Christian missions are said to be more successful, however, and that Christian tribals have a higher rate of literacy (Fuchs 1973:140).⁴⁵ This has led to “fears” that the tribals would convert in large numbers, despite the fact that this has never happened. “In spite of occasional alarms raised by militant Hindu agencies, there are at present nowhere any mass conversions to the Christian religion, nor are they likely to take place in the future. If any mass conversions are taking place, they are to Hinduism alone” (1973:143).⁴⁶ Fuchs deplored the sad reality that “aboriginal religion and culture are doomed to disappear from India in the near future”—a likelihood particularly in central India where there is no strong tribal solidarity (1973:141,143).⁴⁷

A possible exception might be the Korku tribe of the highlands of central India, a tribe not in decline but struggling to improve their status. One possible path would be through conversion to Islam. Despite known previous conversions to Islam, the Korkus exhibit an aversion to Islam and appear to strive rather “to be accepted as a respected Hindu caste” (Fuchs 1986:391).⁴⁸ Probably for similar reasons conversions to Christianity have been few despite 125 years of Protestant and Catholic missionary presence. Fuchs noted some 700 Catholics at Chikaldera and 650 in Nimar District (1986:392).⁴⁹

A strong social identity plus leadership that controls the people to prevent culture change combine to inhibit conversion to Christianity. Korkus have had a much longer period of contact with Hinduism resulting in a dual identity in which traditional tribal religion is combined with Hinduism, making conversion to Christianity difficult (Kotien 2001:40).⁵⁰

Where conversions have taken place they tend to be along kinship lines and in response to some human need. A study of 67 converts has shown that 90 percent “believed in Jesus Christ through healing from diseases or release from demonic oppression. Healings have come through prayer and also by medicines.”⁵¹ Kinship lines can either help or hinder the spread of the gospel.

In 1982 the Indian Evangelical Mission (IEM) opened a missionary training centre at Chikaldera in Amravati District (Kotien 2001:38).⁵² Missionaries trained in linguistics and translation principles carried on the Korku Bible translation work which had been started by their

⁴⁴ Stephen Fuchs, *The Aboriginal Tribes of India*, New York, St.Martin’s Press, 1973, p.136.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.140.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.143.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.141, 143.

⁴⁸ Stephen Fuchs, *The Korkus of the Vindhya Hills*, New Delhi, Inter-India Publications, 1986, p.391.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.392.

⁵⁰ Noel Kotian, “Neglected or Resistant: The Response of the Korku People to Christianity,” M.A dissertation, All Nations Christian College, Hertfordshire, England, 2001,pp.47,49.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.40.

⁵² *Ibid.*,p.38.

American and English missionary predecessors (Ganesapandy 1998).⁵³ Portions of the Bible have been translated into Korku and published by the Bible Society, and the translation work continues at the present time primarily through the agency of the Indian Evangelical Mission (Ganesapandy 1998).⁵⁴ Since the 1970s literacy and translation projects, medical services and developmental efforts have been carried out by indigenous Catholic and Protestant missionary personnel (Ganesapandy 1998).⁵⁵ One of the unique developments has been a working agreement between the local church, viz. the Baptist Christian Association, and indigenous mission agencies working for the evangelization of the Korku and other peoples in Central India (Tuggy 1981).⁵⁶

Din Bandhu Ministries. The ministry known as *Din Bandhu* ("Friend of the Poor") has its roots in the campus of the Yavatmal College for Leadership Training (YCLT), the former campus of the Union Biblical Seminary, at Yavatmal, Maharashtra (Sardar 2002).⁵⁷ The ministry came into being in 1990 through the initiative of Mr. Sunil Sardar and several associates. A well-known political activist for the farmers' cause in Yavatmal District, Sunil and his American wife were placed on the YCLT campus to partner with the Friends Missionary Prayer Band (FMPB) for the redemption of the Kolami-speaking Kolawar people.

A triangular flag was created and a *Kolawar Sanghatana* (Kolam's Association) for formed. Films and a songbook in the Kolami language were utilized to present the gospel in more than 150 Kolawar villages. Five Kolawar believers were part of the team effort which resulted in 47 baptisms on the YCLT campus. News that the Kolawar were becoming Christians brought disruption and false propaganda. The campus was attacked, and Sunil was arrested and jailed. The "conversion conspiracy" brought inquiries from former Farmer's Association activists and others who also began to convert.

YCLT, however, asked Sunil to leave the campus. That was the beginning of the new ministry which came to be registered as "Dinbandhu Ministries." Abandoned by former associates, a couple from Youth With A Mission (YWAM) came to work with the Sardars. The ministry grew. Worship was conducted in the Sardar home, but when the space proved inadequate a separate building was rented in Yavatmal for Wednesday fasting, prayer and teaching and for Sunday worship which included open communion.

Other groups began to respond, e.g. members of the Banjara (Gormati) tribe. The ministry was invited to expand into neighbouring Wardha District. Here a number of innovations were introduced. Inspired by Mahatma Jotiba Phooley's literature, Sunil began to address Jesus as "Baliraja" (the King who was sacrificed for His people). Baptism was given the Indian cultural name "Ganga Snan" (Holy Bath) to better communicate the idea of repentance and cleansing. "The ritual of dipping people in the River Ganges can be used as a bridge to bring people to Christ" (Sardar 2000A).⁵⁸ As Sunil explains,

⁵³ Miss Beryl Girard from America and Miss Lillian Merry from England, missionaries of the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society, were pioneer translators among the Korkus.

⁵⁴ See J. Ganesapandy, "Korkus of Chikaldara: A Study of Resistance and Response", M.A. in Missiology thesis, South Asia Institute for Advanced Christian Studies, Kothanur, Bangalore.

⁵⁵ Protestant agencies include the Baptist Christian Association, Indian Evangelical Mission, and Zoram Baptist Mission in addition to Catholic congregations and institutes.

⁵⁶ Leonard Tuggy, "Case Study: Western/Indian Mission Cooperation to Reach Korku Tribals," a paper prepared for the EFMA/IFMA Executives' Retreat, Kansas City, USA, 29 September 1981.

⁵⁷ Information which follows is from "Creative Ways of Dinbandhu Ministries" by Sunil Sardar, 2002, and other miscellaneous papers in a communication to Roger E. Hedlund, February 2002.

⁵⁸ Sunil Sardar, "Redeeming the Hindu Culture for His Glory." An unpublished paper, February 2000.

The Indian culture already understands the need for cleansing. When it is explained that Jesus has prepared a way for 'gangasnan' or holy bath, they begin to understand in a new way that it is no longer necessary to repeat the cleansing. Believers need only to come one, as Jesus Christ has done the cleansing for us by His work on the cross. The Lord has revealed this bridge as a way to bring people to a full knowledge of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us Sardar 2000A:1).⁵⁹

Another innovation was the breaking of coconuts in communion. Familiar in many Hindu rituals, the coconut can be used in India as a meaningful spiritual symbol.

As the coconut is broken during communion, Jesus can be explained as a one-time sacrifice for sin for all eternity. The coconut can also be symbolic of His body being broken and His blood shed for each of us. By using the coconut instead of traditional bread and juice, Hindus understand Christ's sacrificial act in a new way (Sardar 2000A:2).⁶⁰

Commenting on this contextual adaptation of the Eucharist, it is pointed out that "A coconut must be broken first, before its water can be drunk and the meat eaten. In communion, we are reminded of the breaking of the bread symbolizes the breaking of the body" (Beaderstadt n.d.).⁶¹

Not everyone in the team appreciated these innovations, but the new believers were encouraged to be able to worship according to their culture and in their homes. Other bold initiatives include the singing of the songs of Kabir and Tukaram.

Din Bandhu reaches out to OBCs (lower castes) and Dalits by providing affordable English medium education for the Poor at Wardha through the Staines Memorial School, named in memory of the martyrdom of Graham Staines and his two young sons, Philip and Timothy, who gave their lives for Christ among the Poor in Orissa. Sunil continues to develop friendships among the dalit and OBC leaders in an effort to promote personal and social reform Sardar 2000B, 2001).⁶² Bridges into the several different communities are found in the traditions and popular culture of the people. Methods have varied from a kind of political rally strategy to the devotional practices of the Bhakti movement. Struggles continue, but Sunil testifies that hurdles are being overcome. "So we are looking forward to the church which will take place in each caste and home, where worship to Jesus Christ, the Baliraja, will be supreme" (Sardar 2002:2)⁶³

Witness takes many forms and includes empowerment activities among slum dwellers and street children, liberation of backward communities and tribals, encouragement of women's movements and Christ *bhaktas*, use of indigenous media, proverbs and sayings, as well as more traditional roles of preaching, teaching, training, healing, community development, Bible translation, village schools and church planting. Most stories remain untold.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁶⁰

Ibid., p.2.

⁶¹ Jan L. Bearerstadt, "The Theology of the Coconut." An unpublished paper, n.d., provided by Sunil Sardar.

⁶² See various articles by Sunil Sardar, e.g. "Who is the True Mahatma of India?" Unpublished, February 2000; "Thoughts on Brahminism and Hinduism," unpublished, June 2001.

⁶³ "Creative Ways..." p.2.

INTEGRITY OF MISSION

The mission of new Christian movements takes place in a context of massive poverty, social change and increasing tensions related to rising militant religious nationalism. Historically Christian mission has found its authenticity in initiatives among the poor and oppressed as the preceding examples have shown. The mission of the Church is not limited to the marginalized. Yet the overwhelming response to the gospel has been from the margins. The transformational power of the gospel has made possible a new identity of dignity and worth for oppressed peoples.

Poverty is a complex problem. The economically deprived are those who have suffered most “from under-nutrition, poor sanitation and exposure to infection.⁶⁴ Impoverishment cannot be isolated from the inter-related issues of landlessness, employment, income, caste and gender discrimination,⁶⁵ exploitation, globalisation, hunger.... Landless labourers earn a minimum wage of around Rs 10/- per day, an annual income of about Rs 3,000/- which is totally inadequate for a small family.⁶⁶ The struggle for subsistence results in a vicious cycle of child labour and female exploitation together with other social evils.

Bonded labour, officially abolished, continues with an estimated 40 million persons, including 15 million children, as bonded labourers in India, according to a recent report.⁶⁷ Inevitably a majority of the victims are tribals and dalits. Inevitably it is these sections of the population who are forced into the most unpleasant and unhealthy occupations, e.g. carting away human feces from public latrines and scooping buckets of excrement from clogged sewers which they enter naked with no protective gear whatsoever.⁶⁸

Economic deprivation also encourages criminal activities and undesirable avenues such as the sex trade. In Kolkata an estimated one lakh (1,00,000) women engage in prostitution, and India is believed to have four lakhs (4,00,000) child prostitutes.⁶⁹

Rehabilitation is a crucial need for former bonded labourers as well as for sex workers, beggars and other marginalized persons and groups to find human dignity and a productive place in society. Here is a great challenge and obligation for the Christian mission today.

Tragically, huge sections of the poor are caught in a web of deprivation and increasing poverty which is not alleviated by modernisation and globalisation. To the contrary, the suffering of the deprived has increased. Developmental studies reveal that the gap between rich and poor has widened. “Disparities in income distribution have risen sharply with the introduction of global market mechanisms.”⁷⁰ India and other developing countries are unable to compete with subsidised goods and food products from the rich countries of the North Atlantic.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Chiranjivi J. Nirmal, *Madras Perspectives: Explorations in Social and Cultural History*, Madras, Institute of Indian and International Studies, 1992, p.33.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the implications see Francis Nallappan, “Hindutva and the Minorities: Communalism and Discipleship,” *Mission Today* V, July-September 2003, pp.197-214.

⁶⁶ Ninan, *op.cit.*, p.94.

⁶⁷ Meena Menon, “Escape from Bondage,” *The Hindu Sunday*, September 7, 2003.

⁶⁸ Tom O’Neill, “Untouchables,” *National Geographic*, June 2003, pp.2-31.

⁶⁹ Gouri Salve, “A Glimmer of Hope,” *The Hindu Sunday*, September 7, 2003.

⁷⁰ Ninan, *op.cit.*, p.88.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.89.

The future is bleak for India's farmers and others. Despite advances in production, "it is estimated that 360 million people living in poverty now suffer from chronic hunger."⁷² Although we do not undergo famine, multitudes experience malnutrition. Economic as well as demographic and ecological factors converge to impact the present crisis. "Poverty and population growth are linked to environmental degradation."⁷³ The poor would appear to have little hope for their future. Nevertheless, states Bishop George Ninan, "empowering of the powerless and the marginalized is the key to alleviating poverty and bringing about justice, peace and integrity."⁷⁴

What, then, is the Christian response to the injustices of the poor and marginalized? The Good News of the gospel comes not only in words but also in affirmative action. Felix Wilfred calls for a "rethinking of mission in relation to religious pluralism, massive poverty, oppression and injustice. There can be no true understanding of the nature of evangelization in this country without bringing into focus these pressing issues."⁷⁵ Rehabilitation for bonded labourers, sex workers and beggars; critiquing the structures in society that cause sex workers and bonded labourers, and providing alternatives; creating awareness of environmental degradation; challenging the dehumanising effects of globalisation; offering training for access to better options for the marginalised; providing information on HIV-AIDS, hygiene, substance abuse and addiction; exposing corruption -- these are some of the components in the church's mission in today's world.

The poorest of the poor generally lack the means to escape their poverty. Yet it can be done. Writing about Evangelicals' recovery of social dimensions of the Gospel, Jacob Thomas (of the Union Biblical Seminary faculty) points to the emergence of World Vision International, Tear Fund, World Concern, EFICOR and other expressions of compassion. Then he notes that Evangelicals from India and the developing world have a far greater concern than relief services and the alleviation of suffering. The greater issue is to struggle with questions about the evil structures of society which have pushed masses of humanity to the periphery of history.⁷⁶ Integrity of the gospel demands that evangelicals grapple with the root causes of poverty. "At root the struggle is not for the wealth that the rich have but for their heart."⁷⁷ The rich are called to leave everything and come follow the Master. Conversion is a call to a spirituality of discipleship.

Evangelical spokespersons tend to be activists rather than deep thinkers. Perhaps. Nevertheless the Christian mission requires theological reflection. It is rewarding and revealing to engage in theological dialogue from the perspective of the poor.⁷⁸ Dehumanizing poverty is to be seen as an affront to the image of God which is found in every human. The poor, in evangelical perspective, are not only the victims of evil structures and systems, through no fault of their own they are deprived of God's love and compassion. The root cause of poverty is human sinfulness, not infrequently manifested in acts of selfishness and greed which deprive

⁷² Ibid., p.89.

⁷³ R.L. Sarkar, *The Bible, Ecology and Environment*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2000, p.309.

⁷⁴ Ninan, *op.cit.*, p.103.

⁷⁵ Felix Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations*, Madras, Department of Christian Studies, p.207.

⁷⁶ Jacob Thomas, "The Church's Response to the Poor--Evangelical Tradition" in *Good News to the Poor: The Challenge to the Church* edited by Sebastian C.H. Kim and Krickwin C. Marak; Delhi, ISPCK, and Pune, UBS, 1997, p.196.

⁷⁷ Dewi Hughes, "Good News to the Poor--and to the Rich" in *Good News to the Poor: The Challenge to the Church* edited by Sebastian C.H. Kim and Krickwin C. Marak; Delhi, ISPCK, and Pune, UBS, 1997, p.76.

⁷⁸ This is achieved by Jayakumar Christian in his landmark study, *God of the Empty-Handed: Poverty, Power and the Kingdom of God*, Monrovia, MARC World Vision, 1999.

the poor of their basic rights to an abundant life. Rich and poor alike are in need of Christ's redemption.⁷⁹

A disturbing reality is the marred identity of sections of the poor traditionally assigned subordinate positions of perpetual exploitation. Generations of poverty produce a negative outlook. "Low identity sanctions all forms of oppression."⁸⁰ Theologically the poor are victims of cosmic principalities and powers which "belong to the kingdom of Satan and wield control over people, structures and systems."⁸¹ The Christian mission involves rescuing humans from the power of Satan and bringing them under the influence of the realm of God's kingdom of justice and new life in Christ. Evangelization is the multi-faceted process of bringing this about. For whole sections of society this has meant the beginning of a new identity in Christ. The evil powers which have marred the self-identity of the poor are to be displaced by the power of the Kingdom of God "affirming their humanity and the image of God in them."⁸²

A distorted image of God is our common human lot. In the words of an old hymn, we all are "sinners, ruined by the Fall." The good news is about the possibility of a new beginning. Grinding poverty mars the image, but the image can be restored. A start can be made. "This shaping of humans into the image of God is accomplished in the context of the church (that is, community). Therefore, community is an essential corollary to belief that we are made in the image of God."⁸³

Awareness of the role of the church in the struggles of the alienated for humanisation is growing. A new subaltern hermeneutic involves "the rediscovery, re-reading, and reinterpretation of their socio-political history, and religious and cultural resources and texts" by subaltern groups.⁸⁴ History writing generally is by the powerful. "The very process of history-making becomes a source of powerlessness for the poor, because the way history is written assigns an identity to the poor."⁸⁵ Their distorted history perpetuates the powerlessness of the poor.⁸⁶ A remedial alternative is to "reread history from God's viewpoint."⁸⁷ A further corrective is a possible re-*writing* of history from the underside. Being a voice for the voiceless—that too is part of the mission of the church.

That impoverished peoples have risen to claim their spiritual inheritance is a fact of history and a contemporary reality. Many have found new human dignity through a new identity in Christ. Evangelization begins a process of spiritual recovery whereby those of no social status have discovered their true identity of equality and self-esteem as the children of God and full citizens of his Kingdom.

CONCLUSION

New Christian movements are an important fact of contemporary history with significant implications for doing theology. Many (not all) of the new Christian movements in South Asia

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp.67-73.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.140.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.150.

⁸² Ibid., p.197.

⁸³ Ibid., p.128.

⁸⁴ Anthoniraj Thumma, *Voices of the Victims*, Delhi, ISPCCK, 1999, p.18.

⁸⁵ Jayakumar Christian, *op.cit.*, p.137.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.182.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.183.

are Pentecostal or Charismatic in character. Even prior to Pentecostal beginnings at Azusa Street and Topeka, touches of Pentecost were experienced in India. . . “The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the Mukti Mission of Pandita Ramabai in Pune, India, in June 1905 is normally regarded as the origin of the Pentecostal revival in South Asia.⁸⁸ An earlier manifestation of tongues and other charismatic gifts had been reported in 1860 at Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu.⁸⁹ Revivals have been recorded in North East India from as early as 1897. Manifestations such as unison dancing, singing and praying were noted in the 1905 revival, whereas tongues, healing and prophecy were more recent phenomena,⁹⁰ associated with the Mizo so-called “high revival” of 1935.⁹¹

Today Pentecostal and other independent movements comprise the fastest growing sectors of the Church in several areas of India.⁹² Hollenweger, who notes the Black oral roots of the modern Pentecostal movement, observes that it is strongest in areas of the world where oral communication predominates.⁹³

The first major scholarly study of South Indian Pentecostalism⁹⁴ touches the history of all known Pentecostal bodies in South India including those of indigenous origins as well as those of international (foreign missionary) extraction. Bergunder lists a total of 71 Pentecostal bodies in the four southern states. Andhra Pradesh has 14 Pentecostal denominations of which 12 appear to be indigenous in origins. In Karnataka, out of seven Pentecostal groups, six might be classed as indigenous in origins. In Kerala eleven out of 15 Pentecostal bodies listed appear to be of indigenous origins. Tamil Nadu has the greatest number with 33 Pentecostal bodies of which 27 appear to be of indigenous origins. This is not an exhaustive listing of South Indian Pentecostals. New groups frequently appear, other groups are overlooked inadvertently by researchers and compilers. A similar investigation in North India would reveal parallel developments of new indigenous Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Mumbai, in Punjab, and in Delhi.

A common thread running through each of these Pentecostal Churches is a conscious expression of their Indian identity and character. Their Pentecostal faith binds them to fellow-believers worldwide. Yet their life and witness at home and in the diaspora are indelibly marked

⁸⁸ Ivan Satyavrata, “Contextual Perspectives on Pentecostalism as a Global Culture: A South Asian View” in *Globalization of Pentecostalism...* edited by Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, Regnum, 1999, p.204. The phenomena are described by Miss Minnie F. Abrams who was present at Kedgaon at the time in a little book, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost & Fire*, Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission, 1999 Reprint.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.205. J. Edwin Orr documents the phenomena at Tirunelveli as well as at Mukti in *Evangelical Awakenings in Southern Asia*, Bethany, 1975, pp.59-60 and 144-145; also *Evangelical Awakenings in India*, MSS, 1970, pp.33,110-111.

⁹⁰ T.Nongsiej, “Revival Movement in Khasi-Jaintia Hills” in *Churches of Indigenous Origins in Northeast India* edited by O.L. Snaitang, Delhi, ISPCK, 2000, pp.29,36.

⁹¹ C.L. Hminga, *The Life and Witness of the Church in Mizoram*, Serkawn, Lunglei, Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1987, pp.161-162.

⁹² See, for example, findings in fifteen cities of Tamil Nadu, in Roger E. Hedlund, *Evangelization & Church Growth Issues...*, Madras, 1992, pp.202-211.

⁹³ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1997, p.20.

⁹⁴ This is a definitive work by the German scholar Michael Bergunder of Heidelberg (formerly at Halle University) not yet available in English, *Die Südindische Pfingstbewegung im 20.Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 1999.

by an Indian identity and character. Their expression of Indian Christian nationalism deserves publication.

India has numerous subaltern movements, Pentecostal as well as non-Pentecostal, which require study. Ecumenical "Great Tradition" Christianity frequently and pejoratively has tended to label such "Little Tradition" movements as sects, whereas they are better recognized as revival or renewal movements within the larger Christian movement. Documentation is urgent because of the oral traditions and theology of many.⁹⁵

Leaders of movements tend to be activists, not scholars and writers. Archives may not yet exist for many younger churches. But people can be consulted: founders, leaders, members. People who were there should be asked to tell their story. Research will entail extensive travel, visitation and interview. Where they exist, reports and records should be consulted and collected. Even oral communities may have song books, hymnals, promotional literature, and cassettes. Photographs can be copied, stories and songs recorded. Archival deposits should be created. Study of indigenous organizations provides ample scope for archival projects embracing older as well as recent movements.⁹⁶ Church history cannot afford to be confined to retelling the stories of the well-known traditions of the past.

Indian Christianity is incarnate in a diversity of cultures as the new movements demonstrate. Indigenous Christianity is vigorous. India in 1995 observed the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Church of North India and in 1997 celebrated the 50th anniversary of the merger which created the Church of South India. CSI and CNI are significant ecumenical milestones, rightly celebrated as creative achievements in indigenization. Simultaneously have arisen hundreds (perhaps thousands) of new entities arising spontaneously from the Indian soil. These diversified independent churches and structures should not be overlooked.⁹⁷ Diversity notwithstanding, Indian Christianity has in common with churches in other sections of the non-Western world "an indigenous, grassroots leadership; embeddedness in local cultures; and reliance on a vernacular Bible."⁹⁸

⁹⁵ P.B. Thomas, "Pentecostal Ecclesiology, Promises and Problems." *Jeevadhara: A Journal of Christian Interpretation*, July 1990, 286-301.

⁹⁶ A visit to the Ramabai Mukti Mission at Kedgaon near Pune revealed an important archive being maintained by the Mission whereas there is no comparable archival deposit for the existing Marathi churches of various denominations in the region.

⁹⁷ See David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 2000," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* January 2000:24-25.

⁹⁸ Dana Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* April 2000:50-58, p.56.