

# Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference

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*The Rev Augusty Gnana Ganghi and the Rev Daniel Sekar come from the Church of South India where they have a responsibility for work with young people in their area in Tamal Nadu. They led a discussion on*

## **'Connecting Young People and Encouraging them to Reach Out'**

### **Introduction**

India is a very beautiful country. Our climate is just the opposite of Finland's! We are world leaders today, not in the army or weapons, nor in economy or politics, but in population. We have one of the world's great wonders, the Taj Mahal, in our territory, and also the world's highest mountain.

We have 1400 languages, nearly 300 religions, 1200 castes, and a multitude of cultures and traditions. The main religion is Hinduism. Christians account for only 2.5% of the population and as a tiny minority we Christians are facing many troubles in our day to day life.

But even though Christians are in the minority, we are a model for others. The 'Father of our Nation', Mahatma Gandhi, himself said: 'Jesus is my role model.' And former President, Dr Radha Krishnan, said: 'Christians are ordinary people but they are doing extraordinary things.'

On the very first day of this conference one of the Bishops asked me, 'Which denomination are you?' I replied, 'Christian!' He said it was a good answer. The reason I have told you that is that in India we have many Churches; Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Church of South India, Church of North India, Salvation Army, Mar Thomas Syrian Orthodox, Assemblies of God and Pentecostal. But the people consider them all to be simply 'Christian'.

In India we have also provided a model of Church union. On 27<sup>th</sup> September 1947 the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational missions joined together to form the Church of South India. Similarly, we have the Church in North India. And today we are working towards creating one 'Church in India'. Our theological seminaries too are symbols of union. Tamil Nadu Seminary, Madurai, is for all Lutheran, Church of South India and Mar Tomas Christians. And our United Theological College is the same.

When this conference is over we are going to be connecting young people and encouraging them to reach out.

### **Missed Track**

'Pressing on together, doing good to all,  
In the name of Jesus lifting those who fall.  
To the poor and friendless give an open hand –  
This is our endeavour, this is the Lord's command!'

These words of Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) remind us that, from Old Testament times right down to the present day, God speaks to his people about the way in which they are to address social concerns. Isaiah said that they are 'to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke'. And he adds; 'You are to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring to your house the poor and outcast...when you see the naked to cover them and not to hide from your own flesh.' (Isaiah 58.6-7)

In the New Testament that rugged preacher, John the Baptist, out in the desert called for repentance and urged his hearers; 'He who has two shirts, let him give one to him who has none, and he who has food, let him do likewise.' (Luke 3.10-11)

Jesus said; 'What you do to one of these the least of my brothers, you have done to me.' (Matthew 25.40)

So, at different times the prevailing social issues were addressed by God's people.

On 9<sup>th</sup> July 1706 Ziegenbalg and Pluetchau landed in Tranquebar, an eastern coastal village in Tamil Nadu in India. They were sent by King Frederik IV of Denmark as missionaries to India. They established Lutheran churches in Tamil Nadu State and were very much mindful of addressing the deep rooted social issues prevailing at that time within the Indian community – untouchability, the caste system, discrimination (gender), child marriage, saathi (whenever a husband died, at the time of his funeral, his wife was also forced to die – in other words she was murdered) – all these things presented a great challenge.

"There is no question that the missionaries and in the very first place Ziegenbalg and his Lutheran colleagues had a large share in breaking down caste and overcoming the caste spirit" says E. Arno Lehman in 'It began at Tranquebar', page 26.

During that time the girls and women were denied their right to education. The missionaries started schools exclusively for women.

"This avenue also runs due north, parallel with the principal avenue already mentioned, and passes in front of the orphan girls' school where nearly 100 poor little girls are brought up for the duties of Christian women and wives." (Extract from 'Coloured pictures to the Tracts on Christian Missions')

The Church, the missionaries and the Christians are called to address the social issues deep rooted in their respective points of time. But of late it is to be deplored that we have become derailed, leaving the track and focusing more on participation in church services, worshipping God, conducting prayer meetings, conducting retreats, and so forth. Of course these things are all

important, but if they do not carry us out into the community outside the Church, what is the use?

Terrorism, global warming, HIV/AIDS, and so on, are issues which are terrifying the whole world. How are the Christian communities responding to these issues?

As Lutherans, and as members of the Church of South India in India, we are trying to address social issues to the utmost of our ability with our Lord's grace and strength in our region in India. We hope and pray that this spirit of addressing social issues from a Christian perspective should fall upon every Christian in every nation and spread across the world. We wholeheartedly believe that we and the whole Christian community should join hands in this endeavour. In addressing social concerns in India we are looking forward to being in partnership with Christians across the world.

Come! Let us get back onto the right track.

If you would like to respond to this article and share examples of social concern in your area of the world, contact Augusty Gandhi at [augusty.gandhi@gmail.com](mailto:augusty.gandhi@gmail.com) or Daniel Sekar at [Sheela.Sekar52869@gmail.com](mailto:Sheela.Sekar52869@gmail.com)