

EDINBURGH 1910: 'Roots and Fruits'

Murdoch and Anne MacKenzie
Madras India July 1966 – June 1978

EXPECTATIONS

Anne and I felt called to be missionaries when we were 16. Having attended 6 annual LMS Swanwick Conferences, I specialised in India and Pakistan in my Oxford Geography degree, studied under Alec Cheyne at New College, Anne having gained medical qualifications including a Diploma in Tropical Medicine, and having both been tutored for a term by Kenneth Mackenzie at St Colm's, during the month in which Ian Smith declared UDI in Rhodesia, we did have expectations!

Having been awarded the Cunningham Fellowship at New College I wanted to study Hinduism in preparation for going to Rajasthan but Lesslie Newbigin advised that Marxism would be more appropriate for India in 1966. Thus, after St Colm's, I studied Marxism under André Dumas in Paris and suddenly we received a letter from Duncan Fraser to say that instead of Rural Mission in Rajasthan we would be involved in Industrial Mission in Madras. I therefore worked with Georges Velten in the Mission Populaire, as well as studying Le Marxisme. Sailing from Tilbury we reached Bombay on 19th July 1966.

Our expectations were clearly that we were no longer going to a 'younger' church, that Indians were firmly in control, that our vocation would be to take second place to local people and that the first 5 years would be learning and only then could we begin real work. I went as a missionary while Anne went as an asterisk but had to find a hat to wear for the Valediction in the Assembly Hall.

THE REALITY

We spent 10 months at language school in UTC Bangalore learning Tamil. I was ordained as a Presbyterian in the Church of God in St George's Cathedral Madras, by Bishop Lesslie Newbigin and the C.S.I. Presbyters who were gathered there on 30th April 1967. The service was in Tamil and Lesslie gave me a Bible with an invaluable text from 1 Thessalonians 5:24 'He who calls you is faithful.' My annual salary was £960 and we worked twelve years in Madras Diocese. In 1966 there were 22 CofS missionaries in and around Madras. In 1978 there were 4 but by then Anne had become a missionary and was no longer an asterisk!

After ordination I was appointed as a junior Presbyterian to the VVK Unit – 3 tiny mud churches built on the city rubbish tips with services in Tamil, and also to Rural/Urban/Industrial Mission alongside local people in villages, in factories, with politicians, aid agencies and Government departments. May Day, Harvest Festival and Industrial Sunday saw special industrial liturgies used in many churches, with Trades Unionists and Managers participating in Bible studies, role plays and case studies. In factories we offered family welfare courses for which the industrialists paid. On the urban side we initiated a citizens' group called the 77 Society which, amongst many other things, started integrated urban community development work for the Tamilnadu Government's Slum Clearance Board (whose motto was 'God we will see in the smile of the poor'). Thus began the 'New Residents Welfare Trust' employing a hundred people including social workers, nurses, nutrition educators, doctors, drivers and administrative staff. You can read about it in Lesslie Newbigin's autobiography. We also began the Leprosy Rehabilitation Trust and in the early 70's, after the Train Report on the environment was published in the United States, we inaugurated a very extensive environmental movement in Madras dealing with air, water, solid waste and noise pollution which movement continues to this day. Anne, as well as having three children, did some

medical work, was convener of the Diocesan Medical Board and represented the CofS on Vellore Council.

In 1972 we were appointed to St Andrew's Kirk where I inherited the Presidency of the Madras Association of the Deaf, and of the British and Commonwealth Ex-Services League, from Roy Manson, and we started a Day Care Centre and socio-economic unit which now has 150 children and has seen thousands of families educated and rehabilitated in the past 35 years. Also an Integrated Rural Development Project in 10 villages, which is still in progress and through which thousands of village people have received medical care and hundreds have learned new skills and obtained employment. The congregation grew exponentially and new pews had to be made for the first time in 150 years. Before we went to the Kirk Lesslie had said that we should go there and help the congregation to become involved in the kind of things which we had been doing alongside really poor people in the VVK Unit. When we left in 1978 with a crowd of people waving us off at Madras Central Station and singing 'Shalom my friend' we felt a great sense of fulfilment and that God had indeed been up to many things for which we gave thanks.

THE OUTCOME

The outcome is that what was the VVK Unit is a flourishing pastorate with five churches whilst the Kirk thrives with lively worship and a whole range of evangelistic cum socio-economic projects. For us the outcome has been a further 30 years of ecumenical work, latterly at Bossey. Being Ecumenical is painful and we bear in our bodies the slings and arrows of outrageous ecumenism. The CSI was no problem, it had problems but not that one, because we were all united and Presbyters like myself could pass fairly seamlessly from conducting Cranmer's Prayer Book liturgy in Tamil in some ex-Anglican churches, to Willie Barclay's liturgy for the Lord's Supper in English in St Andrew's Kirk and to the CSI Liturgy in most places including the Kirk. Thank God for Lesslie Newbigin.

As we approach the centenary of Edinburgh 1910 I suppose our biggest disappointment in life is the lack of seriousness with which most churches and most Christians entertain the possibility of full organic unity. This is illustrated by the following comment from a very fine young man from Northern Ireland who shared in a week on Iona recently. 'In Northern Ireland there is a deep suspicion of the ecumenical movement because there is a feeling that there is a hidden agenda to unite all churches in a single denomination. From my experience on Iona I have to say that there is some truth in this fear. While I am content to engage with ecumenism to the point of co-operation between different denominations, those in the movement do seem to have an underlying desire to see institutional unity.' My friend, Martin Conway, replied that there was nothing hidden about it. That was the agenda!

Murdoch MacKenzie, Advent 2008