



*A South India Diary*

1960

J. E. Lesslie Newbigin

(2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; London: SCM Press, 1960)

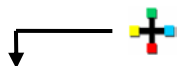
All material is reprinted with permission from the Newbigin family, the Newbigin Estate and the publisher. All material contained on the Newbigin.Net website, or on the accompanying CD, remains the property of the original author and/or publisher. All rights to this material are reserved. Materials are not to be distributed to other web locations for retrieval, published in other media, or mirrored at other sites without express written permission from the appropriate parties. The material can be used for private research purposes only.



**FOREWORD**

WHEN these little sketches were first written in 1950 the union of churches which brought into being the Church of South India was a very recent event which had been the subject of fierce controversy in the Church of England. One could not help feeling that much of the harsh criticism of the Scheme of Union was directed against a mirage: the authors of it knew nothing about the living men and women who had come together in the Church of South India. They were thinking of a theological abstraction, not of living people; or - if any living people were in their view - it was the denizens of the Methodist Chapel opposite the Parish Church, and not the villagers in far-away India. I had already joined in the theological battle with a book called *The Re-union of the Church* which was first published in 1948, and is being re-published in 1960 with a new long preface in which I have, so to speak, tried to bring that part of the story up-to-date. But I felt that it was perhaps more important to try simply to introduce the combatants to the living human beings about whose spiritual interests they were supposed to be fighting.

Today the dust of battle has mostly settled. Thanks to wise and truly Christian leadership in the Church of



England, the authorities of that Church have given a very large measure of recognition and acceptance to the Church of South India. Many other provinces of the Anglican Communion have done the same, and the Lambeth Conference of 1958 has said very kind and generous things about the development of C.S.I. during the first decade of its history.

The situation is thus different from that which first prompted the writing of these pages. But I venture to think that these sketches are still true to life; and in an Epilogue I have brought some of the stories up-to-date.

Lesslie Newbigin *Madhurai, 11th February, 1959*



## EPILOGUE

SOME of the stories told here have since had a happy ending; some not so happy. 'Veerabutrnan' (pp. 115-116) is now a baptized Christian and has given noble witness to Christ in the face of severe trials and persecutions. The hut in the middle of 'Paradise Gardens' (p. 119) has been rebuilt by the efforts of the young men of the congregation there, and is now regularly used for the meetings of the Christian Youth League. Has not even an Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches delivered an address in it? The movement among the leather workers has continued with increased momentum. The whole community is now treated with a new respect by the Hindu landowners, and 'M' itself has a fine little church. The deep-seated ills of student life (p. 98) have found a large measure of healing under the good hand of a wise Principal, and the College has had nearly a decade of quiet and healthy development. In the sphere of liturgical development, the hopes expressed on pages 87-88 have been most abundantly realized. The C.S.I. Liturgy, has become a precious common treasure of the Church and is valued and used at ecumenical gatherings in many parts of the world.



Some parts of the story do not have such a happy ending. The seaside congregation whose baptism is recorded on pages 95-96 has proved most disappointing. The village on page 77 has got its new school building, but is still wanting a bell. The congregations in that area have been caught up in a tragic conflict between one of the low-caste groups and their hereditary over-lords – a conflict in which Christians were deeply involved and in which there was rioting, murder, and arson. The whole series of events has illustrated one of the tragic dilemmas which face a missionary Church. It is inevitable that the preaching of the Gospel should create a ferment in society, and that those who have received the status of children of God should rebel against social conditions which deny that status. But if that revolt is to be constructive, if it is not to become enmeshed in the whole evil web of violence and counter-violence, it requires both the wisest possible pastoral guidance, and also a mature understanding among church leaders of the realities of the political order. Many are the hours I have spent in these last months with hurt and angry people, sometimes amid the ruins of their houses, trying to help them to find out what it really means to be the children of God in the midst of ancient oppressions and new-found powers. This is a situation which will make the greatest demands upon the future leadership of the Church.

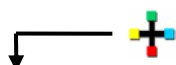
In spite of these developments, I believe that these pages convey a true picture of the Church as it still is. Perhaps the real danger today is just the fact that the C.S.I. is no longer a matter of public controversy. It



has become – at least in England – 'respectable'. The danger is that in this situation the question which the existence of C.S.I. puts to the older Churches should be silenced. For a long time now Christians have been accustomed to talking about unity. But one has the impression that underlying this talk there is a tacit understanding that nothing is to be done about it. Some of those who have spoken much about Christian unity were among those most horrified by what happened in South India in 1947. There is a danger, now that C.S.I. has been so largely accepted, lest the whole subject should again revert to the purely academic level. But if the union in South India remains an isolated event it will have failed in one of its great purposes. The hope of the Churches in South India has always been that the union there would be the starting point for wider union. It will have largely failed if this hope is not realized. The reunion of the Church will never be distilled out of a process of purely academic discussion. It will only come about when

Christians find themselves compelled to make real decisions concerning the practical issues which arise in the course of the fulfilment of the Church's mission. The union in South India was brought about in the context of such practical decisions, arising out of the obligation to preach the Gospel effectively to the vast unevangelized areas. It in turn placed its parent Churches in the position of having to make decisions. It will be no real victory if these Churches come to the point of accepting the C.S.I. but are not moved to do anything to follow its example.

But, though the C.S.I. has been largely accepted in



Britain, the development of serious theological discussions in South India between the C.S.I. and the Lutheran Churches in India has naturally aroused the interest of the Churches in Germany, and the C.S.I. has become a subject of study in that country. The questions raised in this new context are new ones. In the context of Anglo-Saxon Christianity the main issue which C.S.I. raised was the question of reconciling ministries standing in the historical episcopal succession with ministries standing outside of that succession. In the context of European Protestantism it is rather the question of reconciling unity with loyalty to the confessional positions taken by the Churches at the time of the Reformation. I should not like to embark upon a theological discussion of this issue on the last page of this book. I do not want to suggest that it is a question which is to be answered easily. But I would simply ask the reader who has spent an hour or two in the company of this young Indian Church, struggling with the questions posed by modern Asia, to ask himself as he closes the book the following questions: 'What does loyalty to Christ mean for these Christians in this situation? Can it be expressed in the forms created by the conditions which led to the Reformation in the Churches of Western Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries? Or may it not be that the "confession" which these Christians are called to make in India today is just this, that Christ is greater than all our confessions and that he can make us one – that the world may believe?'

If the reading of this book poses that last question seriously in the minds of a few readers, I shall be happy.

All material is reprinted with permission from the Newbigin family, the Newbigin Estate and the publisher. All material contained on the Newbigin.Net website, or on the accompanying CD, remains the property of the original author and/or publisher. All rights to this material are reserved. Materials are not to be distributed to other web locations for retrieval, published in other media, or mirrored at other sites without express written permission from the appropriate parties. The material can be used for private research purposes only.