

From the Bhavan's President
**Christianity in
India**

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The contact between Christianity and India helped both. India made contributions to Christianity and enriched it.

Christianity has become an inextricable and valuable facet of Indian life.

Less ravaged by invading armies than the North, South India offered hospitality to Christianity from the earliest decades of the Christian era. The consolidation of the Syrian Christian Church in Malabar by Mar Thoma and Mar John in the fifteenth century; of the Latin Catholic Church by St. Francis Xavier in the sixteenth century; of the famous Madurai Mission of Jesuits by Fr.

Robert de Nobili in the seventeenth century; the Protestant Mission in Tranquebar under Danish inspiration in the 18th century; the London Mission Society in Travancore in the 19th century and a host of other missions and brethren churches in the following decades, bear this out. The first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad observed on the antiquity and significance of Christianity in India as follows:-

"..... Remember St. Thomas came to India when

many countries in Europe had not yet become Christian and so those Indians who trace their Christianity to him have a longer history and higher ancestry than that of Christians of many of the European countries. And it is really a matter of pride to us that it so happened ?"

But the establishment of these missions all over India by itself would not have held significance were it not for the fact that the initiators of these missions also started schools and colleges under the aegis of these missions. This development led, in course of time, to the building-up of powerful intellectual aspirations. Historians have traced the origins of some of our powerful reformist movements such as the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj to the example and influence of Christian missionary enterprise. An area of reformist activity was the social emancipation of women. Equally important was the

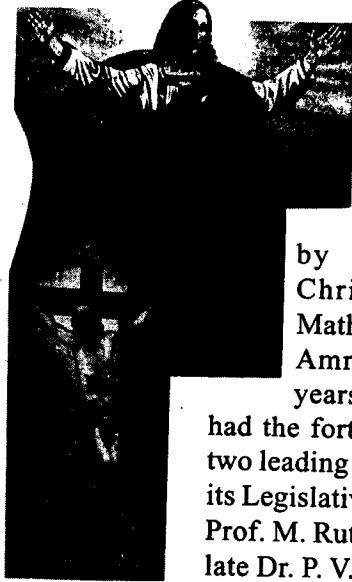
VANDE MATARAM
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influence of Christianity on the status of the so-called depressed classes. Christian missions worked among the adivasis, the aboriginals and among the Harijans in a practical implementation of the Christian ethic of service.

The contact between Christianity and India helped both. India made contributions to Christianity and enriched it. The remarkable careers of persons like Pandita Ramabai of Maharashtra who worked passionately for the emancipation of women and Sadhu Sundar Singh of Punjab who preached Christian renunciation, are instances in point. A Scottish Presbyterian said of Sadhu Sundar Singh in

1920: "The Sadhu is perhaps the first of the new apostles to rekindle the fire on dying altars..." Likewise, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi (the former through his poetic composition and the latter through his revolutionary life) greatly impressed and influenced Christian sensibilities such as those of W. B. Yeats, Romain Rolland and C.F. Andrews.

It is often mistakenly believed that the Christian community in India did not join the mainstream of the national movement. The names of John Baptista of Bombay and of George Joseph in Tamil Nadu come to mind. George Joseph, who was originally from Kerala, gave up a lucrative legal



practice to join the non-cooperation movement under Gandhiji. The names of other distinguished Christians such as the Kumarappa brothers, K. T. Paul and H. C. Mukherji need special mention. Rev. Fr. Jerome D'Souza, Principal of Loyola College, Madras, who also was a member of the Constituent Assembly and who played a leading role in securing the rights of freedom of worship, will long be remembered. Not to be

forgotten is the fact that in Free India's very first Cabinet, the important portfolios of Finance and Health were held by two eminent Christians, Dr. John Mathai and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. In later years, Tamil Nadu has had the fortune of having had two leading Christians heading its Legislative Council, the late Prof. M. Ruthnaswamy and the late Dr. P. V. Cherian. There is

a long and continuing list of Indian Christian Governors, Chief Ministers, Ministers of the Union and State Governments, Vice-Chancellors, Judges, officers in the Defence Forces etc. who have enriched the public life of India. In the professional cadres of Medicine, Engineering, Education, Public Administration, Banking, Finance and Industry there have been a very large number of Indian Christians.

The Christian population of the country, as you all know, comprises 2.5 per cent of the total. Smallness of size, however, has made no difference. The Christian community has always been in the vanguard of the nation. The interest which the Churches have taken in and the fraternity, that introduced the concept of 'Justice' communal harmony, reflects a desire to continue the best traditions of Christian service.

As you are all aware, when India gave unto itself a

Constitution before mentioning the political freedoms-liberty, equality liberty, equality and fraternity, it introduced the concept of 'Justice social, economic and political. Justice was to be paramount. The Constitution also brought into operation the unique Directive Principles of State Policy which, though not justiciable, were to be "fundamental in the governance of the country." In pursuance thereof the country embarked upon an era of planned development.

But if Constitutions and Plans are to work, there has to be harmony among the people. The national movement tapped our underlying unity and gave political shape to our ancient genius for blending and synthesizing, despite diversity. The partition of India in 1947 has essentially to be viewed as a one-time departure from this process: the debris of a departing empire. But we have witnessed these tendencies and others to continue to threaten

the unity and integrity of the nation and the stability of its political edifice.

Whenever external challenges have threatened us, such as in 1962, 1965, 1971 and 2000 Indian unity has blazoned. But without such stimuli we should be able to stand and pull our weight together in the war we are waging against poverty. The time now calls for the adoption of shared goals, broad political convictions and attitudes that

address themselves to the task of raising the socio-economic levels of our people. In this task, the distinguished Christian community which can trace its origins from the times of St. Thomas and de Nobili, through the work of blessed souls such as Father Chavara, right up to these times when we are privileged to call ourselves contemporaries of Mother Teresa, will doubtlessly play an important role.

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JULY 15, 2002

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