

PRESENTATION:

PEOPLE MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH INDIA: AN ASSESSMENT

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The Christian mass movements in South India constitute a significant phenomenon in the non-Christian world. It is estimated that one half of the Roman Catholics and more than 80 per cent of the Christians in that area are mass-movement converts or their descendants.

But numbers do not tell the whole story. The transformations wrought in the lives of these converts has belied the charges of those who say such movements lack spiritual depth. This is not to say that the movements are without their problems, but it is true that the result in many, if not most cases, has been the birth of vital churches that are adapted to the Indian cultural context.

The mass movements, sometimes referred to as people movements or as multi-individual movements, are of particular significance for us today. They provide valuable insights into the way God works in and through sociocultural processes to build his church. Also these movements are continuing to take place in our day. It is important, therefore, for the churches in North America to understand their dynamics in order to know how to relate to the churches in South India most effectively.

A brief sketch of the history of these movements, particularly as they relate to American Lutheranism, can help us to understand their scope and nature. We can then look at some of their strengths and weaknesses.

## A HISTORICAL SKETCH

It is impossible to say when Christian mass movements began in India. There are many indications that suggest the ancient Syrian Church in India was the result of such a movement. Certainly the Roman Catholic Church in South India is largely the product of widespread conversions within caste groups that included in many instances two or more castes in one or several villages. In 1532 a movement occurred among the fishermen of near Cape Commorin, and Father Miguel Vaz led a band of priests who instructed the people and baptized 20 thousand persons in 30 villages. In 1543 and 1544 Francis Xavier founded 45 churches among these fishermen in Travancore. Force was not used in these areas as it was in Goa, and there were no counter movements away from Christianity.

The first Protestant mass movement began in Tinneveli among the Nadars or toddy-tappers. As the movement spread to South Travancore, it attracted the Sambavars, a caste of untouchables, although some low clean castes were involved. The leader in Travancore was Vedamanickam, a Sambavar who had an overpowering desire for a personal experience of God. Forbidden to enter the main temples of Hinduism, he nevertheless made a pilgrimage to many of them in hopes of finding inner peace. Then in a vision he saw an old man who told him to return south where he would learn about God. On his journey home, he visited Christian relatives who directed him to the missionary at Tranquebar. There he heard the gospel for the first time, and was convinced of its truthfulness. He returned to plant the church among the Sambavars. In 1818 alone, three thousand were baptized.

### The Lutheran Churches in India

Protestant missions in India began in 1706 with the arrival of two Lutheran missionaries, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Plutschau from Denmark. They were commissioned by King Frederik IV of Denmark, a pious man who felt it his duty to care for the spiritual welfare of the non-Christian subjects in his colonies. For many years the mission struggled on, short of staff, and often opposed by the local colonial administrators.

It was a century and a half later that the Lutheran churches in Europe and North America began their extensive mission programs. The result was the establishment of a number of Lutheran denominations in the subcontinent. (See tables at end of article.) Mass movements occurred in the first four of these churches. In two cases, in the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Northern Lutheran Church (formerly the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church) the movements took place within specific castes. In the other two instances the movements occurred within tribal societies.

### Origins of the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church

The Lutheran Church in America began its mission in India in 1842 when the Pennsylvania Ministerium through its synodical missionary society sent Rev. C. F. Heyer to India. Heyer, who was almost 50 at the time, began the work among the Telugus of what is now Andhra Pradesh, and served there for three terms (16 years). The last of these was when he was in his late 70's.

During the early years, there were many difficulties. The missionary force was small. Rarely were there more than three or four on the field at one time. And sickness and death took a very high toll. Artman died at the age of 27 after four years in India, Carlson at 36 after four years of service, and Dietrich after six years. Matthews had to return after one year due to severe illness, and Swenson after five years. This despite the fact that the missionaries worked in the cities where modern medicine was more readily available. When a number of families responded to the gospel in some of the remote villages of Palnad, Heyer moved out into the district despite the extreme heat and the greater dangers of sickness. Drach and Kuder report,

It is related that, realizing the danger of death in the district, he had a coffin made in Guntur and sent to Gurjal, and that soon after his arrival in that village he had a grave dug near his house. (He was unmarried and alone in the village.) At times, when the roof of his house leaked badly, he slept in the coffin. Strange to say, he was not sick a single day, and on leaving Gurjal to return to Guntur he burned the coffin, filled in the grave and, standing over it, triumphantly exclaimed: "Oh, death, where is thy sting? Oh, grave, where is thy victory?" (1914:81).

There were other difficulties. There was a chronic shortage of finances and often little money was sent for the work. Despite this a number of schools were started, often financed by Christian British colonial administrators or wealthy Indians.

Growth in the first 50 years was painfully slow, and on several occasions the missionaries and board considered closing down the work. The mass movements began only after 1890. In part the movements were precipitated by a widespread turning to Christianity among Telugu-speaking untouchables that had begun earlier in the Baptist field to the south. It affected a number of denominations working in that region.

The American Baptists had opened a work in Nellore in 1835 and after 28 years, there were only 30 converts. They too on several occasions were on the verge of closing the work. In 1866 the missionaries heard of Periah, a rural convert who wanted them to come to the vil-

lages where he had been preaching, and where there were many seekers. After much persuasion, Dr. Clough went. After five days of instruction he baptized 28 people. The movement spread rapidly. By 1869 hundreds came for baptism. By 1878 thousands were being converted.

To the north of the Lutheran work the Church Missionary Society began to experience the same thing. Mr. Darling had worked for several years without winning a single convert. Like most missionaries of that day, he was seeking to win high caste converts in the hopes that they would evangelize the lower castes. But they had remained unresponsive. When Venkayya, a leader of a band of robbers, was converted, he won his relatives and neighbors. In his old age he became blind, but he sat beside his mud hut and bore witness to those who passed by. Venkayya was converted in 1848. By 1901 there were nearly 30 thousand Christians in Krishna District. By 1911 the number had grown to 50 thousand. By 1928 membership in the Church of England in that region had grown to 122,500 (Pickett 1933:50).

Figures for the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church are similar as can be seen from the following table.

	1848	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1912
Christians	20	160	335	1056	6159	16,953	19,751
Communicants	11	70	216	978	3000	9,926	10,845
Missionaries	2	2	4	4	5	12	21
Indian Workers	2	9	16	90	142	347	411

(Drach and Kuder 1914:78, 386)

The movement spread largely among the Malla and Madiga castes. Although both were considered untouchable, the former ranked a little higher than the latter. In villages where the Madigas became Christians, few Mallas did so, but where Mallas were the first to come, Madigas often followed.

At first there was considerable persecution. Where the mass movement took place opposition came primarily from the higher castes who claimed that the untouchables were no longer performing their customary caste jobs and were claiming a status higher than assigned them in the caste system. But such persecution only strengthened the new converts in their resolve.

The Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church experienced a similar movement, only this time among a tribal group. As we shall see later, there are important similarities and important differences between mass movements among caste and tribal groups.

Four missionaries arrived in Chota Nagpur in the end of 1845. In the next five years 15 other missionaries joined them. Six died within the first five years and others left in broken health. The people were so unresponsive that the missionaries urged Father Gossner, their director, to move elsewhere, but he refused. In 1850 the first four converts were baptized. By 1857, the year of the Mutiny, 900 had been baptized. During the Mutiny the missionaries had to flee to Calcutta. The Christians were severely persecuted but none recanted. Thereafter the movement grew rapidly and by 1972 the Lutherans numbered 17,000. Anglicans and Roman Catholics entered the area and by 1931 the total number of Christians in Chota Nagpur was close to 400 thousand.

### Sudra Movements

With few exceptions the people movements of South India took place among the untouchables. This picture changed in the 1920s and 1930s when Sudras in sizeable numbers turned to Christ. In 1932 a United Lutheran missionary wrote, "In this district we have baptized about 1,500 Sudras in the last five years, more than half of them within the last 12 months." Similar reports came from the Church of England, and the Methodist Church. While some of these came as individuals from the higher Sudra castes the movements took place among the Erukalas (wine tappers), Waddars (stone crushers) and Gollas (shepherds) who rank low in that varna.

The Mass Movement Study Commission led by Pickett links the Sudra movements directly to the earlier movements among the untouchables. Of 187 villages in which the Sudra movements took place, 170 were villages in which mass movements had occurred among the untouchables (Pickett 1933:289). Like the latter, the lower Sudras were marginal to the society and barred, for the most part, from participation in orthodox Hindu worship. Having seen the changed lives in the untouchable converts, and their greater attention to worship and education, many of the Sudras began to respect the new Christians.

In some ways the Sudra movements strengthened the churches in the Telugu-speaking regions. The Sudras, while often poor, did add significantly to their economic strength. They also added considerably dignity to the Christian community.

On the other hand there were problems. In places where the Christians met together, the Sudras often sat apart from their untouchable brothers and sisters. A Lutheran missionary noted that where the churches were built in neutral places the two groups would meet together, but where they were in the untouchable hamlets, the Sudras often met in their homes.

The sacrament of the Lord's supper raised more difficult issues since people are forbidden to take food from the hand of those from lower

castes. Sudra converts, almost without exception, were willing to take the sacraments from the hands of the ministers, even though the latter generally came from the untouchable castes. But the use of a common cup created some objections. The Sudras often partook first, although some reportedly consciously partook with the Malas and Madigas as a symbol of the unity of the church. Little conflict was reported between the groups, but there was little visiting between them, and most of the marriages continued within their respective caste communities.

Conversion of Sudras raised other problems within the church. Among the untouchables the family relationships were often loose and divorces were common. Among the Sudras there were problems with prostitution and polygamy. It was and is not uncommon among the Sudras for a man to have more than one wife, often in order to provide additional help in his caste profession.

While the greatest influx of Sudras occurred from 1928 to 1935, Sudras have continued to enter the church in a small but steady stream. There are indications in the last decade that large numbers are again joining the church, particularly in areas where the church is strongest.

The Current Lutheran Scene

The impact of the mass movements upon the church in India can be seen by comparing the current statistics of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India.

TABLE 2  
THE UNITED EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN INDIA: 1980

Church	Begun	Congs.	Adults	Affiliated
Andhra Ev. Luth. Church	1842	3,000	96,060	288,461
Arcot Lutheran Church	1861	109	9,792	18,267
Gossner Ev. Luth. Church	1844	2,478	122,908	256,174
India Ev. Lutheran Ch.	1895	416	15,803	41,107
Jeypore Ev. Luth. Church	1885	819	30,245	53,324
Madhya Prad. Ev. Luth. Ch.	1887	34	3,612	6,275
Northern Ev. Luth. Church	1867	327	18,435	42,069
South Andhra Luth. Church	1865	253	6,000	14,970
Tamil Ev. Lutheran Church	1706	497	36,835	69,793
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>7,933</b>	<b>339,690</b>	<b>790,440</b>

(Barrett 1982:379)

Of the above churches, the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Jeypore Evangelical

Lutheran Church were largely the products of people movements. The South Andhra Lutheran Church and the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church were affected to some extent. It is clear that well over three quarters of the Lutheran churches in India are the result of such movements.

A distinction needs to be made here between the Gossner church and the others affected by the same mass movements. The former is primarily a tribal church found among the Mundas and Oraons. While many of the dynamics which will be discussed below apply equally to tribal societies where there is a strong sense of group, the analysis will be confined to movements within the caste societies of India's rural villages and towns because the external factors influencing these movements are much greater. The Gossner church is best understood within the broader framework of tribal movements which are common around the world.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE PEOPLE MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH INDIA

People movements are the work of God through his servants in the lives of unbelievers. They are not purely social phenomena. Consequently the social sciences can provide no simple explanation for their occurrence, and no easy formula for reproducing them. God works through his Spirit in ways that we do not fully understand. But God often does work through the human order as he created it. By examining the dynamics of multi-individual movements we can learn much about how churches grow and what should be our responses when such movements occur.

#### Issues Arising at the Beginning of a Movement

As we look at the mass movements that occurred within the Lutheran churches in India, several principles emerge, no one of which can account fully for the development of the movements.

1. The sacrificial ministry of the early missionaries and their incarnational identification with the people. As we have seen, the first years of missionary service were often filled with hardships, sickness, and deaths, with apparently little results.

Another example is enough to make the point. Between 1880 and 1891 the Hermansburg-Ohio mission sent out 10 couples. By the end of this period, seven of the men, nine of the women and 32 of the children had died. The remaining men had to leave the field because of illness.

This early period of difficult labor, however, built trust in the missionaries and planted the seeds of the gospel that were to germinate and bear much fruit.

2. The emergence of native leaders who were not marginal to their communities and who continued to identify with their people. For the most part in mission reports we read about the work of the missionaries. However the heroes of the people movements are almost without exception the native leaders, men and women, who inspired and led their people into Christianity.

An example of this is the work of John, an early convert in the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church who won and instructed a number of converts in the Palnad District. He then invited Dr. Heyer to come and baptize them. In January Heyer baptized 22 persons, more than he had baptized in Guntur during the first six years of his ministry. Twenty of these converts belonged to five families, all from the Malla or weaver caste, and residents of one village.

The subsequent movements in Andhra were largely the results of Indian itinerant evangelists such as Nerlaprolu Paulus, Tota Joseph, P. Venkataratnam and Jeriprolu William. Regarding the first of these Dr. Schmidt wrote:

"He was a remarkable man and one of the most influential native pastors in these parts of India. He dated from olden times when education was at a low ebb in India, especially among his class of people. He could not write English well enough to compose glorious reports, else the journals would have printed them and not forgotten the record that this native pastor in little more than eighteen years baptized close to five thousand persons, not to speak of other ministerial acts." (Drach and Kuder 1914:325)

The same pattern of strong indigenous Indian leadership can be seen in the other Lutheran mass movements.

Similar stories can be told of most of the people movements in South India. As we have seen Vedamanickam was largely responsible for the movement in the early nineteenth century among the Sambavars of Cape Comorin.

Ditt, a non-literate lame convert in the Punjab, returned to his home where he faced ostracism and ridicule, but eventually he led 500 of his relatives and members of his caste into the United Presbyterian Church.

In the Baptist region of South India it was Periah, a non-literate man with a strong character and deeply religious nature who sparked the movement that survived severe persecutions and led thousands into the church.

In the Krishna District it was Venkayya, a former robber, who led a movement that brought some 30 thousand into the Anglican church.



An equal word needs to be said about the role of Bible women. They are the unrecognized leaders who often carried on the movements through their work in the homes among women. Unfortunately, even less has been written among them than about the Indian men. Here a great deal of research needs to be done in order to complete the picture of the early growth of the movements.

Several things characterizes these Indian leaders, men and women. First, they were not marginal members of their societies. In any group there are those who are rebels. When these become converts they often leave their caste groups and attach themselves to the mission station. The leaders of the people movements, however, were respected members in their groups.

Second, these leaders returned to work within the groups despite ridicule and fierce opposition. It was their persistence and the testimony of their changed lives that won them an audience.

Third, they often were unable to read, but they were excellent communicators using the traditional oral communication methods common to the village. Several of them were converted village bards. Others were known for their abilities in preaching and singing.

Finally, they worked in harmony with the missionaries. Here commendation is due on both sides. The Indian leaders were willing to be instructed. In fact, they often prepared their people and invited in the missionaries or ordained Indian pastors to perform the baptisms. On the other hand, the missionaries did allow them a considerable amount of freedom in the way they exercised their ministries.

3. The movements followed corporate decision-making processes in which there was a widespread discussion of Christianity in localized kinship groups and an initial exploratory investigation of the new way.

Raised as we are in a society that places a high premium on the development of the individual and sees the individual as the locus of decision making, it is often hard for us to understand the dynamics of decision making in societies that stress corporate life. These include many of the world's tribal societies and the caste system in the Indian setting.

Unlike modern urban societies in which the focus is on the individual and in which organization is based on the articulation of individuals by means of role identities, the Indian village society focuses on the caste group. An individual without a caste identity and belonging to no caste group is in essence a nonperson. As villagers often say, such a person is as good as dead. No one will come to their defense or help them in times of trouble. No one will marry their children or dine with them. To be a person, one must belong to a

caste group.

In such a society all important decisions must be made in consultation with the other members of the group. To make them alone is to deny one's participation in the group and to face the possibility of ostracism. Whom one associates with, works for, and marries is determined by the parents and caste elders. So too is one's vocation. In such societies only unimportant decisions are left for the individual to make.

This corporate nature of decision making is true also in the area of religion. Each caste has its caste deity which is propitiated in caste rituals. To be efficacious, all families of the caste are expected to participate, at least on a token basis. There is some flexibility within the system for individuals to have their own personal gods (ishta devata) and to follow their own personal gurus. But they are allowed to do so only if they do not compromise their participation in the caste rites.

In view of the fact that all major decisions must be made in consultation with the community of which one is a part, it should not surprise us that the decision to become a Christian involves community decision making processes. In fact, to encourage individuals to become Christians without processing the decision in the community is to alienate them from their group.

In corporate decisions does the individual have no say in the outcome? And are such decisions valid bases for becoming Christians? While family heads and caste elders have a strong influence on the outcome of decisions, they rarely have dictatorial powers. Rather, they must work toward consensus within the group. Their authority rests not on an inherited or an elected office, but their reputation as wise and fair leaders and upon the willingness of the caste members to follow them. They have no power to enforce their decisions except ostracism, and this breaks down if there is no general consensus among the followers. Decision making, therefore, is a dynamic process in which a great deal of decision precedes the choices. All members of the group have a right to speak although all are not given equal weight. If one segment of the group disagrees, the decision may have to be delayed until some consensus is reached, or the group may split.

Corporate decisions to become Christian often involve several stages. At first there is widespread discussion among those who have heard the gospel and are open to exploring it with their friends and relatives. In time a consensus may be reached within a major section of a caste group (the members of a caste located in a single village) and it may decide to become Christian. At this stage the people are often examining what it means to be Christian and are open to instruction. After this initial exploratory period, people begin to

make more permanent commitments. Many decide to remain in their new faith, but some individuals and families may decide to return to their old ways. It is at this stage that lasting decisions are made.

Because decision making in strong groups involves both corporate and individual decision making, Tippett and others have referred to mass movements as "multi-individual movements." After the initial response, individuals often do exercise their personal choices in the matter.

The multiple stages in people movements have significant implications for mission planning. In the past many missionaries have rejected seekers in mass movements because they believed such decisions were not valid. As a result, the seekers returned to Hinduism. Other missionaries have sought to encourage people movements by baptizing the people after their initial acceptance of the gospel, only to find that later some drop away. It appears advisable, given the nature of the decision making process, to encourage such movements and to follow up initial responses with intensive teaching. Baptisms should follow after a shake-down period during which people decide to conform or reject their earlier decision.

In this approach it is very important that the church follow up preliminary explorations of the gospel with strong teaching in Christian beliefs and practices. It is during this early period that people make their final decisions and form their basic beliefs about what is involved in becoming Christian. Mass movements have been weak primarily where the church has not been able to follow up early inquiries with solid instruction.

But follow-up involves a well-trained leadership that has mobility and the capabilities of dealing with new converts. In a rapidly growing church this is generally the greatest bottleneck in the continued growth of the church. Leadership must be developed to handle people movements if they are to continue to spread once they have started.

4. Often when a decision is made to become Christian, it is symbolized and reinforced by a power confrontation in which there is a destruction of the objects of worship of the old religion. This occurred in the Lutheran churches more often in the movements that took place within the tribal settings.

5. Persecution by oppressing castes and those in power often drove the Christian community together and reinforced its commitment and sense of fellowship. In movements among the untouchable castes, the opposition often came from the high land-owning castes and took the form of social ostracism. Where conversions took place in ones and twos or in small numbers the Christians often could not stand the opposition and returned to their Hindu ways, or they had to leave and

join the Christian community that often developed near the mission compound. But where whole communities came, it was possible to withstand the external opposition and retain a Christian stance.

In tribal settings the movements often faced the persecution of money lenders and outsiders who exploited the people. Here, however, it was generally easier for Christians to hold their own.

Converts in both caste and tribal settings often faced opposition from members of their own communities. The movements generally took place when members of a caste or tribe within a single village became Christians together. This enabled them to withstand opposition from the other localized groups within their communities.

6. The motivations to become Christian in people movements were, for the most part, genuine. Hindu leaders including Mahatma Gandhi charged that the untouchables and tribals became Christians for secular reasons, for economic and social gains. Research has shown that this is not the case.

A study of the lives of the native prophets who lead the movements shows that for them conversion was a profoundly religious experience. Many of them had sought peace in Hindu shrines but found none until they turned to Christ.

In the conversion of their groups, the question of motives is more complex. In corporate decisions, the people take a holistic approach to life. No sharp distinction is made between religious, economic, social, and political reasons. All of these enter discussions. This is true for the most part among common people everywhere. It is largely among modern educated elite with their specialization and analytical compartmentalization that a sharp distinction is made between various types of motives. In the village religion is tied not only to ultimate concerns, but to life here and now. Consequently, inner peace with God, deliverance from evil spirits, liberation from oppression, and economic gain are all seen as evidences that validate the truthfulness of a religion.

Certainly one of the central motives in the mass movements of South India was the longing for human dignity. The converts came largely from the untouchable and marginal castes who were despised within the Hindu social order. They are assigned to occupations—such as cleaning the village, handling dead animals and tanning their leather, making palm beer, and scavenging—which branded them as unclean and unfit to enter the Hindu temples or clean caste areas of the village. Limitations were placed upon their use of the roads and they were required to perform certain tasks for the village and its elders for little or no reward. In the market places they had to stand aside until customers of other castes completed their purchases. Then they had to buy the articles without examination for their very touch

polluted the goods and made them unreturnable.

In such conditions, Christianity offered a sense of dignity that attracted the untouchables. Nor were their hopes unfounded. The transformations that took place in the Christian villages and their new-found religiosity generally won the begrudging admiration of the higher caste.

For many, conversion was also a deeply spiritual experience. This can be seen with the intensity with which the new converts held to their faith even in the face of great opposition. Many of the caste groups were ostracized by other sections of their castes. But the fact that the Christians remained part of local groups that remained Christian provided them a refuge and a source of encouragement.

Finally, it is clear that sometimes the motives were purely secular. Movements sometimes began when Christians were exempt from certain taxes or in order to gain entry to schools. However, it must be noted that the missionaries were fully aware of such dangers and, if anything, guarded excessively against their happening.

#### Issues Arising during the Development of the Movement

1. There is a great need for follow-up and disciplining if the Christians are to grow and the movement is to continue. The oral methods of communication such as songs, catechisms, rituals, dances, and drama are of particular note.

A study of the Lutheran movements impressed me again with the need to use effective indigenous methods of communication in the spreading of the gospel and in grounding the new believers in their faith. The Lutheran missionaries made extensive use of catechisms, a method of oral memorization that fit the traditional village education patterns. They also had a sense of ritual, often lacking in other denominations, that was readily adapted to village society where rituals are a means for expressing religious meanings by performances rather than merely by speaking. Furthermore, some of the leading Indian preachers were converted village bards and knew the traditional Indian methods associated with bardic performances.

2. The development of leaders and leadership structures that fit the culture is of crucial importance.

As we have seen, movements generally began where natural Indian leaders arose. In the later stages of the development of the church it became crucial that indigenous forms of church polity emerge. Where movements grew rapidly, the missionary often could not impose foreign organizational structures. The result was the emergence of more traditional forms of church organization based upon the principles of panchayat, or the council of elders recognized by all for their wis-

dam and judgment. Where such councils emerged, the churches developed and grew.

3. The changes affected by people movements were deep, extensive and lasting. The churches that emerged out of people movements were more indigenous than those based on individual decisions alone.

At times the charges have been made that the mass movements were superficial, that in fact few changes were effected other than a change in the name of the people's god. In 1928 the national Christian councils of India, Burma, and Ceylon authorized a study of the mass movements which was carried out by the Institute of Social and Religious Research of New York. The findings, published in 1933, showed that in fact profound changes did occur among the peoples converted in the mass movements. Moreover, they showed that these changes took place most generally where Christian worship was firmly established, and least generally where regular worship was neglected.

Among the changes most evident were improvements in cleanliness and in the role of women. Throughout Andhra Pradesh, even today, the Christians are known for their clean villages and homes, and the orderliness of their worship. Together with this was a sharp decrease in the use of drugs and liquor and of the meat of animals that had died without being butchered. All of these are considered unclean in the Hindu tradition. Moreover, their women, unlike those in Hinduism and Islam, take active part in the worship programs of the churches.

Relationships with other castes often improved. Because Christians in mass movements generally have a revolutionary sense of mission, they are conscious that they must relate to those who once were their rivals if they are going to win them. Christians frequently sought to bridge the gaps that separate the castes. For the most part they gained respect among their village neighbors.

The full impact of conversion on a community can only be seen in the long run. Christians turned to education wholesale. Despite the fact that most mission schools in the 19th century aimed at winning high caste converts and Muslims and were open primarily to students from these sections of society, the untouchable Christians managed to get their children educated. Consequently, while the first generation converts were mostly poor non-literate servants and workers, their children became grade school teachers and office clerks. Their children in turn became college and high school teachers and government officials. The fourth generation Christians were often doctors, lawyers, and prosperous businessmen. Together with the rest of the Indian Christians, those who were products of the people movements have been the most upwardly mobile community in India.

While individual converts who separate themselves from their communi-

ties often emulate the Western ways of the missionaries, churches that have emerged in such settings are more indigenous in character than those formed by individual converts extracted from their social groups.

4. The full effects of the people movements must be seen in the hundred-year span. These movements begin processes of change that lead to theological maturity and to "redemption and lift." They also lead to institutionalization and, unless renewal takes place, to a growing nominalism.

As we have seen, the full sociocultural impact of the mass movements upon the Christian communities can only be seen by looking at them over a long period of time. The same is true of the spiritual and theological developments. The first generation of converts generally have a deep spiritual commitment and the church is characterized by warmth and fellowship. But the theological understandings of the converts is naive. While they learn biblical truths, the religious categories in which they think, such as the concepts of god, incarnation, and sin, are still essentially Hindu in character. Their children, however, grow up under the instruction of the church and acquire a more biblical worldview. By the time the third generation of Christians arise, there are seminary graduates and theologians who can translate the scriptures into the vernacular and interpret it to the people. They are the ones who can and must guard the orthodoxy of the church in the long run.

But generationalism also leads to institutionalization in the church. What starts as a warm fellowship of believers in time ends up as a bureaucracy. Vision gives way to routine. Attention moves from people to programs. Outreach is replaced by self maintenance. And flexibility is lost with the increasing hardening of the organizational categories.

Institutions are needed to carry on the work and to provide continuity over time, but where they are not renewed periodically, they become prisons that deaden the ministry and effectiveness of the church. One of the greatest dangers in any Christian movement, including the Christian mass movements in South India, is the rise of rigid institutionalism and nominalism. One of the continuing questions is how to continually renew the church in its ministry and mission.

5. Mass movements raise difficult theological issues related to the relationship of the gospel to human institutions. Where mass movements occur, they generally take place within one segment of the society. The question then arises, how can we evangelize the remaining segments of that society. Even though the church is present in a village, it does not necessarily mean that the whole village has been evangelized. In fact, the church may become so identified with a

particular section of the society that other groups are largely closed to evangelism. How then does the church evangelize the other communities?

Equally difficult is the question of what one does with converts from other communities if they do respond in faith to the gospel. If they are required to join the church identified with another (often untouchable) community, they often return to their old religion. On the other hand, if a separate church is started for them, the question of Christian unity arises. Here it should be noted, that missionaries and church leaders in the older, more mature churches, are often harder upon new converts than they are upon their own churches. We have too often tried to impose a unity upon the young churches abroad that we ourselves have not manifested, particularly in our relationships to other ethnic groups in our countries.

### CONCLUSIONS

It is difficult to summarize in brief the nature and processes involved in the South Indian multi-individual movements. Some things, however, are clear. First, these movements are the work of God in building his church. No amount of research in the social sciences will enable us to replicate them. We can only respond to the work of the Holy Spirit. There are many castes in India, but only a few have been responsive in a particular way to the gospel, and these primarily in a few regions of the subcontinent. People in one village may respond, and those of the same caste in the next village may not. Furthermore, it is God who spoke in particular ways to those seekers who later became the leaders in the mass movements. It is also clear that mass movements have played an important part in the growth of the church in South India, as they have in the church in Northeast India and in other parts of the world.

If building the church is ultimately the work of God, he has chosen to do his work in part through human agents and human processes. It is here that we have much to learn from an examination of the people movements. There is no simple formula, no cost-free method that we can use to replicate them. They are the products of much prayer, sacrifice, and labor in difficult places. But there has been much fruit.

What are some of the lessons that can be learned from such movements? A few of them are as follows:

1. Mass movements occur among people who have a strong sense of corporate identity and of corporate decision making. In such societies it is important that people be able to hear and discuss the gospel and to respond as groups. It is equally important that they be instructed in faith and that a time for reaffirming their commitments be granted.



2. Leadership plays a vital role in people movements. Here it is important to recognize that the leaders of the movements are part of the local social structures and are primarily responsible to their people rather than to the missionary. The missionary must encourage the development of indigenous leadership and allow it the freedom to operate. The missionary's role is often that of instructing the leaders in Christianity, and of encouraging them rather than of directing their activities. The development of village level leaders who are mobile and can follow the movement to new areas is essential to its ongoing progress. Failure here can stifle a movement.
3. Mass movements often depend upon the use of oral methods of communication in the spread of the gospel. The use of stories, songs, Bible memorization, and dramas are important in instructing non-literate converts in their newly found faith. Luke and Carmen found that the source of theology for most village Christians is in their songs, in what the two call lyric theology.
4. Mass movements aid evangelism by preserving the influence of converts upon their relatives, caste associates, and neighbors. The church takes root in the village and expresses itself in indigenous forms. This raises some difficult questions. Should Christian young people marry non-Christians, even though the non-Christians are often willing to be baptized in order to be married? And should baptism sometimes be delayed in order for wives or husbands to win their spouses or for converts to win a community of friends and relatives?
5. Movements generally take place within particular caste groups. It is easiest for these to reach other caste groups within their kinship networks. But what about evangelizing other caste groups, particularly in castes that rank considerably higher or lower than the first? Should converts from different castes be encouraged to join the same church even if this means that evangelism in one or both of them is slowed by the unity of the church? Or should separate churches be built in each of the caste communities for the sake of outreach? If so, where is the unity of the church that Christ and the early church stressed, and does this not reinforce the caste system and the evils it brings? This is probably the most difficult question facing those working with mass movements.
6. Because mass movements are strongly indigenous in character, they may underestimate the prophetic call of the gospel for change, not only in beliefs but in life. Indigenization must always be balanced by the revolutionary nature of the gospel or we are in danger of planting a civil religion that serves to justify the sociocultural status quo.

Far more research is obviously needed in order to understand the place of mass movements within the outreach of the church. Such research is both urgent and relevant to us today for mass movements

continue to play an important part in the growth of the church in India and in other parts of the world.

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**THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN INDIA**

CHURCH	MISSION AGENCY	YEAR BEGUN	PEOPLE IN MVT.	BAPTISED MEMBERS					
				1850	1870/80	1900	1950	1980	
Andhra E.L.C.	E.L.C in Amer.	1842	Mala & Madiga castes	24	335 (1880)	6,159	239,887	288,461	
Gossner E.L.C.	Gossner Luth. C.	1844	Uraon tribe	4	20,000	48,000	180,000	256,174	
Jaypore E. L.C.	Schleswig- Holstein (Ger)	1885	Dambar caste	-	-	2,000	28,035	53,324	
Northern E.L.C.	Scandinavian churches	1866	Santal tribe	-	1,592 (1874)	?	27,000	42,067	
South Andhra E.L.C.	Hermannsburg & Ohio	1865		-	401 (1876)	?	10,884	14,970	
Madhya Prad. E.L.C.	Swedish Luth. churches	1877		-	0	1,241 (1906)	3,433	6,275	
Arcot Luth. C.	Danish Mission Society	1861		-	?	979 (1897)	8,736	18,267	
India E.L.C.	Missouri Synod	1895		-	-	45	16,302	41,107	
Tamil E.L.C.	Danish govt. & Leipzig E.L.M.	1706			4,846 (1860)	13,720	42,825	69,793	
<b>TOTALS</b>								557,380	790,440

# LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN INDIA

