

# Fellowship of St. Thomas



## NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2011



Livingston.  
January 2011

My dear friends

By the time this letter reaches you, you will probably be thinking about preparing for Lent, Holy Week and Easter. Certainly I have just been on my annual bookshop crawl to look at potential Lent study material - and what a variety there is this year. We can reflect on the 'I am' sayings in John's Gospel or look at the Ten Commandments and their relevance to our day to day living; we can relate experience of people overseas to the challenges of living a Christian life here in UK and think of issues of justice, peace and ecology.

And that latter crop made me start this letter in this way. On my recent visit to South India, I was struck by the emphasis by State and Church on looking after our planet. It seems as though there has been a major move in this direction, with stringent directives, if not actual laws. There's a strong push against the use of plastic bags. The cows which roam the streets eat them and become ill; they clog the drains and cause even more difficulty in the monsoon floods. Whereas bags made of newspaper and old exam texts were once a necessity, now even the up-market shops are using them and redesigning them with fancy logos imposed on pictures of politicians or articles about finance. There's a conscious move to ban the plastic and get back to disposable material, and it is considered fashionable to carry bags which show this.

There was a similar stress on the use of 'green' fuel and a strong campaign mounted on the hoardings along the roadside. And those hoardings offered detailed and helpful comments on the why and the how, all set out in both words and pictures. They were geared to reach as wide an audience as possible. They were attractive, witty and got the message across.

Churches too were looking at such matters. Madras Diocese has long had a Sunday set aside for green issues. Special services are prepared and folk are urged to give time over to thinking and praying about their involvement. Some organisations, both church and state, are looking at manufacture involving recycled goods. These range from boxes and dishes made from plastic to the couple of sermon books I was given

which proudly announced the covers to be made from recycled rag and the pages from, and I quote ‘elephant poo’.

It’s becoming a community concern. I was told there are teams who go out to clean the beaches where folk gather in the evening - and woe-betide anyone who is caught dropping litter in that area.

We sometimes berate the countries of the sub-continent for not being concerned. That has changed. As we reflect on our own involvement with the planet and its use of resources - and perhaps that will be your Lenten discipline - let’s thank God for the way parts of India are taking up the challenge.

All good wishes.

*Eileen*

Rev. Eileen Thompson

President

### **Madras Christian College.**

The Principal, Dr. R.W .Alexander Jesudasan and six other members of staff – mostly heads of departments – visited Edinburgh in November 2010 for 4 days and held a lunchtime meeting with the Fellowship of St. Thomas on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

The group were invited by Liverpool Hope University with which they have a link for computer and Christian studies. The college was founded in 1835 by two Scottish chaplains and achieved autonomous status in 1978 as one of the top colleges in India with 31 departments and 5,581 students cared for by 245 faculty members. Just one half of the students are government aided and 43% of them are girls. Since 1982 they have had active Alumni chapters.

The students are involved in Social work and run a college Farm of 100 acres and a leprosy medical centre. The centre includes an Institute for advanced Christian Studies, a Centre for International Social Work – operating in Korea and Africa – and a Centre for Medical Studies. The hope of the staff is that they will shape the future lives of their students.

**Fellowship of St. Thomas**  
**Annual Celebration in September 2010.**

About 60 members of the Fellowship of St. Thomas met in Dunblane Cathedral for the Annual Celebration on Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2010. The morning communion service was led by Rev. Mathew Bicket and the preacher was Very Rev. David Lunan. Rev. Ken Ross spoke in the afternoon on Edinburgh 2010.

**Extracts from the sermon by Very Rev. David Lunan.**

John 20: 21 *As the Father sent me, so I send you ... breathed on them ... Receive the Holy spirit.*

Psalms 63: 7 *In the shadow of your wings, I sing to you, I cling to you and your right hand keeps me safe.*

I want to thank the Fellowship of St. Thomas for the invitation to preach at this service, especially when it is in the context of the liturgy of the Church in Bangladesh. It is in itself a visible expression of the invisible reality of the World Church, a sacrament of the Church Militant, a celebration with the angels and saints in heaven, the Church Triumphant of all that Christ has accomplished: all that he is doing for us today, all that he did for us long ago. For all our differences of theology and experience, of nationality and church practice, in Christ we are one, within a new covenant that breaks down all barriers. The God who makes all nations of one blood, unites us with himself and with one another through the blood of Jesus Christ.

I am honoured to be in your company for you are people who have given years and years of your lives to mission in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan: and your labour has not been in vain: your sacrifices, and those of your fellow-missionaries of your and previous generations, have planted the seeds of the church. Which still bears strong witness even in adversity, the like of which we in Scotland today have no experience of whatsoever. From appalling natural disaster, to religious persecution, from the experience of being a minority to the experience of material poverty, the church in that burgeoning sub-continent has held firm.

But the Church of Jesus Christ is in essence a sending church, outgoing, outward-looking, going forth, reaching out.

The rhythm of the Christian life is ‘Come to me’, ‘abide in me’, ‘go for me’.

‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ It’s in our blood, or as we say now, in our DNA.

And even if Thomas was not present when these words were said, he heard them, and responded: and was blessed from believing; and his believing brought blessing to the ends of the earth.

And we have heard these words, and believed them, and been blessed; and Christ has breathed on us the same Holy spirit.

And if we are being sent, what is it we are sent to do, what is it we are supposed to say? To preach the saving love of God. The cross of Christ. The good news of the Kingdom.

We may understand these terms, but they have to be re-interpreted for every generation, and every culture. Which is what missionaries have always done.

We do not convey primarily a set of doctrines, or a moral code, or an institutional loyalty, or a self-styled piety. Essentially what we offer the world is communion with God. A relationship with God: even as daughters and sons of the Spirit behind the universe.

It is no less than that. So we can be at one with God, at one with ourselves, at one with our neighbours; united through the blood of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God – right relationships based on love. It actually boils down to the fact that we are being sent into the world, to teach people to pray. In the beginning, and in the end, that’s all we can offer.

The good news is that God loves us, we don’t need to back off from him, we don’t need to get it right in our behaviour – we’re all sinners: or in our belief – we’ve all had doubts. All we need is the humility to know we need help.

Lesslie Newbigin described preaching as a starving man telling others where to find food.

That yearning, that longing can only be met by God. It is our privilege to have discovered that, and being invited to tell others.

How the things that spoil our lives can be dealt with; Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Paul says he took our sin – whatever is making our lives unmanageable – and he nails it to the cross. That we might be free. That’s what we long for. To be free. To be at peace.

And without prayer we never will be.

We are being sent to teach the world about how to pray, to this God who is like a Father. How to talk to him; how to listen to him; how to love him.

Of course, a thousand things follow from that relationship: and it’s all about grace, it’s all about love; it’s all about forgiveness.

The first thing Jesus says, ‘If you forgive people their sins –they’re forgiven. If you don’t, what are you going to do with them?’

Our salvation depends on our forgiveness, literally. It’s on what God has done for us, nothing to do with what we might have done for him. It’s all of grace, all forgiveness. If we’ve been forgiven, how are we not going to forgive others? If God loves us that much, how are we going to withhold his love from others?

If we’re not praying, we can’t forgive. Nor can we be forgiven.

And he breathed on them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’ We can’t do this on our own. We need a new and right spirit within us. And that’s what’s given.

What a transformation came about in the lives of the disciples, between the Last Supper and Pentecost. The risen Christ – see my hands, see my side – breathes into them the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you.

## **Edinburgh 2010 – Rev. Kenneth Ross**

I don't think I need to lose time on the reasons why Edinburgh 1910 is worth remembering. I turn to Andrew Walls for one sentence to sum it up: "The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910, has passed into Christian legend. It was a landmark in the history of mission; the starting point of the modern theology of mission; the high point of the modern Western missionary movement and the point from which it declined; the launch-pad of the modern ecumenical movement; the point at which Christians first began to glimpse something of what a world church would be like." For people whose lives have been lived in the great stream of missionary and ecumenical commitment for which Edinburgh 1910 was a fountainhead, there is no doubt that its centenary is a notable milestone. Less predictable is the extent to which the centenary has energised not only the direct heirs of the original participants but a much, much wider spectrum of world Christianity. Why has it been so energising for so many? I think the answer lies in two essential features of the life of the church: mission and unity.

As regards unity, the strong memory of Edinburgh 1910 is one of unprecedented coming together of different strands of the missionary enterprise. Of course, at that time it was only the Protestant churches and mission agencies whose representatives were assembled in Edinburgh. Nonetheless, so fragmentary had been the missionary movement hitherto that this was remarkable enough. Furthermore, through intense diplomacy on the part of J.H. Oldham it proved possible to include the high Anglican SPG and UMCA among the participants at the conference. Friendly communications with Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox correspondents hinted at still wider scope. Somewhat to its own surprise, since it had forsworn doctrinal and ecclesiastical questions in order to focus specifically on the challenges of mission, Edinburgh 1910 has proved to be the much-acclaimed birthplace of the modern ecumenical movement.

This memory has struck a chord in today's fragmented situation. Despite significant progress in regard to church unity in several parts of the world during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is arguable that Christianity is more

divided than it has ever been, with reportedly more than 41,000 separate denominations, albeit many of them very small. In this context there is something of a replay of the question which brought together the Edinburgh conference 100 years ago. Can we come together for the sake of mission?

The memory of Edinburgh 1910 echoes far beyond its original constituency and has motivated leaders from such diverse streams as Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Seventh-Day Adventist and African Independent to come together to learn from one another as they grapple with the question of what mission means today. It has also transcended the deep division between the “ecumenical” and “evangelical” camps in the Protestant world as representatives of both sides realise that they have been divided by 20<sup>th</sup> century questions which have decreasing relevance today while new questions arise which need the distinctive emphases of both camps in order to be answered. Whatever may have been its failings, Edinburgh 2010 can claim to have brought together the most widely representative spectrum of world Christianity ever to have engaged in a common mission study project. This is something far short of the visible unity which has been the expressed goal of the Ecumenical Movement but nonetheless far-reaching in its significance and potential.

Both the study process and the conference have been ground-breaking in the range of participation which they have achieved. They have brought together not only people from across the ecclesiastical spectrum but from every race and many nationalities, women and men, old and young. The Common Call issued by the Edinburgh 2010 conference is a much more substantial statement than many had dared to expect. In terms of theology of mission there is a surprising degree of consensus across the different streams of Christian faith flowing across the world today. This underpins a growing commitment to common witness, i.e. that the different streams of Christian faith should reach out not in competition with one another but in ways which affirm, and strengthen one another. All this is on the credit side of the ledger.

There is also a debit side. It has to be acknowledged that the goal of visible unity which shone increasingly brightly in the follow-up to

Edinburgh 1910 seems to have markedly receded in more recent times. The Common Call is serious about facing the biblical call to unity but the most it can say is that “We are challenged to welcome one another in our diversity, affirm our membership through baptism in the One Body of Christ, and recognise our need for mutuality, partnership, collaboration and networking in mission, so that the world might believe.” These are all fine aspirations but well short of the visible unity for which earlier generations have hoped and prayed. A poignant moment in the discussions has been when representatives of south Asian united churches have stated: we went ahead and fulfilled the vision of Edinburgh 1910 – what happened to the rest of you? Much as Edinburgh 2010 has been a unifying force, it has not produced any very convincing answer to that question.

### **Who or what causes mission to happen?**

The prevailing understanding at the Edinburgh 1910 Conference was that mission was the responsibility of a dedicated corps of full-time professional missionaries. As Anne-Marie Kool has written: “The image of a missionary (in the report of Commission Five) is one who is trained for a lifetime career on the mission field, bringing Christian civilization hand in hand with the Gospel message. The impression is that the task of evangelizing the world largely depends on Western missionaries, and on the quality of these people. The missionary is *the* agent of mission.” Those assembled in Edinburgh in 1910 were confident that their model of the professional missionary provided the answer to the great challenge of world evangelisation.

In principle, the Conference welcomed another agency which was fast emerging – the “church on the mission field”. There were many “native agents” to whom it was anticipated that a growing level of responsibility would be devolved. In practice, however, there was much resistance among missionaries to handing over responsibility “too soon”. “Native agency” was taking the initiative much sooner, much more extensively and much more profoundly than most missionaries had imagined possible. It has to be recognised that, whether directly or indirectly, the Western missionary movement often acted as the catalyst but it is to agents who emerged within the local context that decisive influence must usually be attributed. This, in turn, created the

possibility of a very different pattern of missionary sending and receiving.

### **Missionaries Today: from Everywhere to Everyone**

Today the “from the West to the rest” pattern of missionary sending has given way to a movement which is “from everywhere to everyone”. Even when the definition of a missionary is restricted to someone who crosses national borders in the interests of propagating the faith, there has been a dramatic change in missionary sending since 1910. The proportion coming from the Global South has increased exponentially. The pattern of missionary sending and receiving is markedly different from the “one-way traffic” of 1910. As Jehu Hanciles remarks “Within the emergent non-Western movement ... each nation sends as well as receives missionaries. Never before has the course of missionary movement been this multi-directional, disparate and global.”

“A century ago,” observes Dana Robert, “India and China had the largest foreign missionary presence, with ‘foreign’ defined as mostly European. Today their governments keep out foreign missionaries through visa restrictions. But within their borders tens of thousands of ‘home’ missionaries evangelize other ethnic groups... A century after Edinburgh 1910, missionaries are more diverse than in any previous era of human history.”

Certainly in the popular mind, and to a considerable extent in reality, missionaries of the Edinburgh 1910 era were working hand in glove with colonialism and imperialism. This complicity of Christian mission with Western imperial power sealed its foreign character and made it unappealing as a faith option, particularly in Asia. By contrast, today’s missionaries are ever more likely to share a similar racial, cultural and economic background to the people among whom they serve. Pachau remarks: “If the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh represents the high point of the modern missionary movement from the West to Asia, Edinburgh 2010 marks another high point, namely Christian missions from Asia, by Asians, in Asia and around the world.”

This change in the course of a century would be dramatic enough were it simply a matter of the missionary movement extending its “home base” and continuing to operate on exactly the same basis. In fact, it goes much further. It presages new forms of Christianity and new forms of missionary engagement. As Philip Wickeri observes: “...the most dynamic sections of Christianity today are in movements emerging outside its established centres: The African Initiated churches (or AICs), Pentecostals all over the world; the rural churches of China; new indigenous Christian communities throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America. They represent a popular oral tradition, lay leadership and maximised participation confront historic Protestant churches with our carefully scripted, over-clericalised approaches to church life...” The missionaries of 2010 bring a different life experience, a different skill set and very different expectations from their 1910 predecessors.

### **The Church: Missionary by its very Nature**

The church is the proper agent of mission and must have the missionary function constantly at its heart.

### **Local church Takes the Initiative**

Whereas in Edinburgh 1910 it was the Missionary Societies and Mission Boards of the Western Protestant Churches which were regarded as the primary actors in the task of world evangelization, in 2010 it is the local congregation with which imitative lies. “The primary centre of evangelism ..,” stated Lesslie Newbigin, “is the local congregation.” The growing churches of the Global South have amply demonstrated the strength of the local congregation as agent of evangelism. In context after context the story is that congregations have grown to the point where they have been able to split or plant daughter congregations which in turn undergo the same process. They have energetically taken up the missionary mandate within their own locality.

The “go-structures” which once were the preserve of specialist missionary societies are now being built into the life of the local church.

The explosion of Independent churches worldwide has taken place with a minimum of central organisation and is one of the most effective movements of evangelism and church growth in today’s world. Will

this kind of local-led movement constitute the new mission paradigm for our time?

### **Migration as Highway for Mission**

There has long been close connection between migration and mission. People moving whether voluntarily or involuntarily, to a new place often take their faith with them. They plant congregations which may initially be expatriate in their composition but which, as they become established in their new environment, often have a missionary impact which extends far beyond their original constituency. In the context of the early 21st century it is strikingly apparent that there are large numbers of economic migrants and that the routes of migration predominantly lead from global south to Global North. This brings Christians from centres of renewal to the old heartlands of the faith where the fire is often burning low.

This large-scale migratory movement has already brought a new dimension to church and mission in such centres of economic power as Europe, North America or the Gulf states. Jonathan Bank observes that: “Much contemporary evangelization is part of a vast migration surpassing in scale and potential import the one that saw Europeans sweep the globe... A great majority of (the migrants) are deceptively inconsequential, profoundly Christian and explicitly evangelistic.

### **Mission by the Poor**

The missionary movement represented by Edinburgh 1910 was no stranger to vulnerability and relative poverty. However, by and large it was a movement resourced and funded by prosperous societies which undertook its work in much less economically developed societies. Hence the close interconnection between mission and what was then called “civilisation” and perhaps would now be called “development”. Today the identification of Christianity with the powerful is increasingly a thing of the past. More and more the agents of Christian mission come from among the weak, the broken and the vulnerable. It is a new kind of agency but is it not one which has greater affinity to Paul – and to Jesus – than the form of missionary presence which often appeared to be allied to imperial power and economic exploitation? A

new (or recovered) pattern of missionary activity is emerging in which the poor take the gospel to the rich.

### **Mission and Business**

New mission dynamics are also emerging on what might be regarded as the opposite side of globalization from that represented by the poor. Several powerful trends have coalesced to promote a reconfiguration of the relationship between business and mission. In the classic Western missionary paradigm the role of business was to generate the income which could be used to support dedicated mission agencies. Many missions drew their financial resources from the support of successful business people. The change of paradigm now being proposed is that the business people themselves might be the missionaries. In a post-colonial world the missionary visa is increasingly becoming a thing of the past. On the other hand businesses, which are willing to invest and to offer employment, are welcome in many contexts.

New currents of connection between business and mission bring to fruition thinking about the role of “kingdom professionals” in a post-missionary context which has been emerging since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The One and the Many: Agency in Mission Today**

The waning of the model of the full-time, life-long specialist missionary has opened the missionary vocation to many others. The inversion of the power-weakness dynamics so that the base of mission is less among the powerful and the prosperous and more among the vulnerable and the poor is a movement which restores Christian witness to a situation more akin to that of the New Testament – a development with incalculable positive potential.

In an age of glorious plurality of agency, a key challenge for Christian mission may be to find the chemistry which secures the singularity of purpose needed for the sake of its frontier-crossing character while maximizing the opportunities presented by the variety of missionary engagement currently taking effect.

Underlying a kaleidoscopic range of missionary initiatives has been a growing awareness that, ultimately, the agent of mission is God.

Whereas in 1910, missionary work was understood as something undertaken by human beings in response to the command of Christ, in the course of a century the conviction has grown that God is the primary agent of mission and that the role of human beings is to participate in the mission of God. There is mission because God loves people.

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### **Practicing the Politics of Jesus: Church and Nation.**

*This is a small part of a paper by Priscilla Papiya Durairaj in the North India Church Review of August 2010.*

What is the role of the Church? – has been a question from the church’s very inception. It is in a turbulent and peaceless context that one needs to understand what it means to practise the politics of Jesus. In the early Church with the entry of the Gentiles in the Jewish Christian community, there were strife and tensions concerning socio-cultural traditions. There were tensions and divisions even among the Jewish community as a result of the delayed parousia. The church at that point asked “What is our role in the midst of a greater world in which the interests and ethos are so diverse and different from those that were required by the followers of Christ?”

Jesus was not going to give the disciples company the way he did during the few years of his earthly ministry. Preparing the disciples implied that individually and corporately they were to confront and deal with the challenges that lay outside the boundaries of their team or community and without Jesus’ physical presence. Each one, Jesus envisioned and was going to be a significant witness and pillar in the life of the Church. These not so literate disciples were to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the nations and with the latter’s hard pressed issues/concerns. It was a responsibility of immense gravity and dynamism – it was after all, *a divine responsibility*.

## *Edinburgh 2010*

### COMMON CALL

As we gather for the centenary of the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910, we believe the church, as a sign and symbol of the reign of God, is called to witness to Christ today by sharing in God's mission of love through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Trusting in the Triune God and with a renewed sense of urgency, we are called to incarnate and proclaim the good news of salvation, of forgiveness of sin, of life in abundance, and of liberation for all poor and oppressed. We are challenged to witness and evangelism in such a way that we are a living demonstration of the love, righteousness and justice that God intends for the whole world.

2. Remembering Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and his resurrection for the world's salvation, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called to authentic dialogue, respectful engagement and humble witness among people of other faiths – and no faith – to the uniqueness of Christ. Our approach is marked with bold confidence in the gospel message; it builds friendship, seeks reconciliation and practises hospitality.

3. Knowing the Holy Spirit who blows over the world at will, reconnecting creation and bringing authentic life, we are called to become communities of compassion and healing, where young people are actively participating in mission, and women and men share power and responsibilities fairly, where there is a new zeal for justice, peace and the protection of the environment, and renewed liturgy reflecting the beauties of the Creator and creation.

4. Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures. We are called to find practical ways to live as members of

One Body in full awareness that God resists the proud, Christ welcomes and empowers the poor and afflicted, and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in our vulnerability.

5. Affirming the importance of the biblical foundations of our missional engagement and valuing the witness of the Apostles and martyrs, we are called to rejoice in the expressions of the gospel in many nations all over the world. We celebrate the renewal experienced through movements of migration and mission in all directions, the way all are equipped for mission by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and God's continual calling of children and young people to further the gospel.

6. Recognising the need to shape a new generation of leaders with authenticity for mission in a world of diversities in the twenty-first century, we are called to work together in new forms of theological education. Because we are all made in the image of God, these will draw on one another's unique charisma, challenge each other to grow in faith and understanding, share resources equitably worldwide, involve the entire human being and the whole family of God, and respect the wisdom of our elders while also fostering the participation of children.

7. Hearing the call of Jesus to make disciples of all people – poor, wealthy, marginalised, ignored, powerful, living with disability, young, and old – we are called as communities of faith to mission from everywhere to everywhere. In joy we hear the call to receive from one another in our witness by word and action, in streets, fields, offices, homes, and schools, offering reconciliation, showing love, demonstrating grace and speaking out truth.

8. Recalling Christ, the host at the banquet, and committed to that unity for which he lived and prayed, we are called to ongoing co-operation, to deal with controversial issues and to work towards a common vision. We are challenged to welcome one another in our diversity, affirm our membership through baptism in the One Body of Christ, and recognise our need for mutuality, partnership, collaboration and networking in mission, so that the world might believe.

9. Remembering Jesus' way of witness and service, we believe we are called by God to follow this way joyfully, inspired, anointed, sent and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and nurtured by Christian disciplines in community. As we look to Christ's coming in glory and judgment, we experience his presence with us in the Holy Spirit, and we invite all to join with us as we participate in God's transforming and reconciling mission of love to the whole creation.

Edinburgh, 6 June 2010

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### **CNI Mission Conference for the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at Nagpur 2010.**

*The statement issued contained the following extracts:-*

We understand that our unity is not uniformity; we acknowledge and affirm the richness of our diversity; we are one but we are not the same. While we celebrate our common unity that is expressed in our common worship and in our common mission towards working among the marginalized and dispossessed, we also recognize that being a united and uniting church implies that we continue to name the sin of disunity among us even today. We name the sin of caste and patriarchy that continues to divide our church.

We affirm that our response to a God of justice, that our faith in Jesus who calls us to be one, and the work of the Holy Spirit who grieves when the people of God are divided, demands that we recommit ourselves to solidarity with Dalits, adivasis and tribals and the empowerment of women. We are committed to working with children as being integral to our understanding of both ministry and mission.

We acknowledge that we live in a broken world and we commit to working towards a mission and ministry of reconciliation and healing.

## **Christian Persecution in Asia.**

“The sentence against Asia Bibi is a veritable incitement to crime. There was never any insult to Islam in the case and the judge did not take into account how the blasphemy law is being abused. So he came down with a harsh sentence,” said Peter Jacob, secretary of the Church’s Justice and Peace Commission, as he spoke to *AsiaNews* about the death penalty inflicted on a 37-year-old female farm worker by a court in Punjab last Sunday. “We absolutely condemn this way of doing things; we call on the government to intervene and stop the law from being abused,” he added, Asia Bibi, mother of two, is the first woman to be sentenced to death for blasphemy. She has been in prison since last year. The trial judge accepted the prosecutor’s contention that she insulted Muhammad in a heated discussion with colleagues. In fact, all she did was to object to her fellow workers’ name-calling (infidel) and their attempt to get her to renounce Christianity. For this, Asia was beaten and reported to police in Ittanwali (Punjab) who arrested her on false blasphemy charges.

For Nazir S. Bhatti, who heads the Pakistan Christian Congress (PCC), Asia’s case is a clear attack on inter-faith dialogue because she was sentenced to death for her comment on Muhammad, not for any insult to the prophet.

“According to the constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the President of Pakistan or the Interior Minister have the power to withdraw any case,” Bhatti said,. “There are examples of cases of terrorism withdrawn by the government of Pakistan. Why then the Pakistani administration is silent on Asia Bibi’s sentence?”

“In Pakistan, some 2.8 million Christians are treated as second class citizens, whilst Islamic government feel no shame to release Muslim criminals and terrorists,” he said. Yet, despite the authorities’ silence, many figures in Pakistan’s civil society, both Christians and Muslims, are mobilising on Asia Bibi’s behalf as well as calling for the repeal of the blasphemy law.

Source: [www.asianews.it](http://www.asianews.it) November 2010.

**Comment by Dr. Shailendra Awale of CNI  
on the Persecutions: Kandhamahal and Beyond.**

Attacks on minority are not ‘news’ in India. But silence of church and Christian community during attacks against Muslims and Sikhs is quite disturbing and painful. Gujarat 2002, Delhi 1984 and Orissa 2008 are interrelated cases of campaign launched by fundamentalist promoting majoritism as a value, enforcing culture of violence based on misplaced notion of patriotism and nationalism. We, the Christian community at large, have been sensitive towards the rights of the majority when it comes to religious freedom like conversation or when our institutions are targeted. We need to marshal our resources with courage to be in the service of humanity, promoting rights and entitlements of the vulnerable in the pluralistic worlds. Our fight is against the forces of darkness. It cannot be selfish and limited to ourselves. We need to be in solidarity with those who are in pain and suffering.

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**Ewing Smith 1928-2010.**

A crowd that would have filled the chapel at West Lothian Crematorium twice over gathered for the final farewell to Ewing Smith, conducted by Rev. Dr. Margaret Stewart on Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> January 2011. This was followed by a service of thanksgiving in Boghall Parish Church which was filled to capacity with Ewing’s family, friends and colleagues. Tributes were paid by several who had known him well. His brother Finlay spoke of his early years and Chris Wigglesworth of his India days. Reference was also made to his contribution to church life in Boghall after his retirement. The mood was one of thanksgiving for the full life that Ewing had enjoyed and for the many people he had helped on his journey and who expressed their love for him by attending this gathering of his friends and family. All present enjoyed refreshments provided by the ladies of Boghall Parish Church. Everyone could echo the words of Rabindranath Tagore printed on the hymn sheet –

“Death is not extinguishing the light, only putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.”

*(See also the Obituary written by Dr. Stewart on our Obituaries Page)*

**The Fellowship of St. Thomas  
Annual Celebration  
on Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> September 2011  
in Dunblane Cathedral.**

10.00 am: Tea/Coffee in Cathedral Church Hall.

10.30 am Presentation on the Theme:  
The Persecuted Church – Dr. Balaraman

11.15 am Panel and General Discussion

12 .15 pm – **Buffet Lunch at India Gate Restaurant**

2.30 pm: Communion Service in Sri Lankan Liturgy  
in Dunblane Cathedral  
Celebrant – Rev. Paul Watson

3.45 pm: Tea/Coffee in Cathedral Church Hall.

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**The Friends of the Church in India  
FCI Day  
Indian YMCA, Fitzroy Square, London  
Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011 at 10.30 am**

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For information about the Fellowship of St. Thomas contact the  
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