



## LEGACY INSTITUTE

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My Friends and Fellow-servants,

I am writing this letter in two parts because there is a lot to write about. This first part is about my trip to southern India. I will continue the second part about Sri Lanka in the next letter.

Chennai, India

January 31, 2001

I arrived in Chennai (Madras) early Sunday morning January 28, on an Air India flight from Bangkok. Chennai, with a population of over of 4.5 million people, is one of India's four major metropolises. Fort St. George is located here. From this fort, the famous (or infamous depending on your perspective) East India Company ruled India before the creation of the British Raj under Empress Victoria of England. Located on the southeast coast, it is considered the "gateway to southern India."

I was met at the airport by Michael Hubert, an Indian Tamil and a member of the Church for more than 20 years. Over the next 3 days, he would act as my guide and sourcebook about the history of the Church in India. Mr. Hubert had met my family and me only once before – in 1984 at the Feast in Sri Lanka – so we had a lot of catching up to do. Traveling from the airport we could see many historical buildings that had been built by the British during the colonial period and the rule of the Viceroy.

I was particularly excited to visit Madras, because it was here that the Apostle Thomas Dydimus was killed and buried in 78 AD. We can all remember Thomas, the doubter, who didn't believe that Jesus had risen back to life. He told the others that he wouldn't believe until he had touched the nail holes in Jesus' hands and thrust his hand into the spear wound in Jesus' side. That attitude quickly changed after meeting Our Risen Lord. Upon inspection of the wounds, Thomas fell at Jesus' feet and exclaimed, "My Lord and My God"!! Interestingly enough, 40 years later, Thomas was also killed by a spear.

When I arrived, the papers were filled with the tragic news of the terrible earthquake that devastated Gujarat. Each day the papers came out with new estimates of the death toll. Locals in Chennai told me that the government only releases a small percentage of the actual death figures in order to prevent panic. India continued to experience aftershocks during the several days I was there. What a terrible tragedy!

Michael Hubert is married to Terencia from Sri Lanka. They have one son called Ben. Hubert is President of a small charitable foundation called *Shabnam (Early Rain) Trust*. He works primarily with abandoned street children. He explained to me that these children are enslaved in a vicious cycle of poverty, exploitation and death. Abandoned by their parents when they are very small, they grow up on the streets. They have no education. They smoke cigarette butts and sniff solvent before they are

10. They are drinking and stealing before 12; enter prostitution before they reach 14; and are dead by age 25. They are the forgotten in a society where poverty and death are commonplace.

The Huberts' small organization provides some food; shelter when possible, and holds classes to give rudimentary education. He currently works with 150 street kids, only a small fraction of the homeless children in Chennai. He also visits and provides vocational classes to children in the hospital with TB and cancer. *"If they live,"* Mr. Hubert explains, *"we can prepare them for their futures. If they die, then, we have given them hope and benefit for the World Tomorrow."*

Recently Michael Hubert taught a group of the older boys to paint buildings. These young men are now earning enough money to rent a small apartment and purchase their food. He is also Secretary-general of the Yonathan Friendship Association - an organization established to foster good relations and promote friendship between Jews and Indians scattered around the world. (There have been colonies of Jews in India along the Malabar Coast dating back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD).

The Huberts' Christian example is something we can learn from. Even with only limited resources, they believe they can and should do something for the poor, sick and homeless. In the prophesy of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25, Jesus says,

*"Then shall the king say unto them on the right hand, come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For,*

*I was hungry and you fed me.*

*I was thirsty and you gave me drink.*

*I was a stranger and you took me in.*

*Naked – and you clothed me.*

*Sick – and you visited me.*

*In prison – and you came to me.*

*Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, " ' Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked or sick?' " The king answered, " 'Truly I say to you, Inasmuch as you have done these things to the least of my brethren, you have done it to me.' "*

We must remember WHY we are here – WHY we were called. WE are chosen in order to make a difference in the world. Our Christian responsibility to the rest of humanity is not limited to praying, paying tithes or sending out literature. While all these things are very important, we must not forget that Jesus did not only preach the Gospel, He also took care of the physical needs of the people as He could. We cannot just "write these people off" as the unconverted masses or make excuses for our inactivity. We must do something. Jesus did. Michael Hubert and his wife are. And the lives of 150 children are changed forever.

The Hubert's invited me to their modest home. They are very active for the Work of God. They had built a special room on top of their house. It is constructed of pipe framework with a well-made roof. The walls consist of heavy plastic sheets that can be rolled down during monsoon. It can hold 60 persons on plastic chairs and wooden benches. Mr. Hubert even built a very nice lectern for speakers. It was very impressive.

It was in this "upper room" that 30 people gathered to observe the Feast of Tabernacles for 8 days last year. Mr. Hubert saw a need and he filled it by organizing the Feast for scattered brethren in his area.

It was the first *real* Feast held in Southern India in 3 years. Legacy Institute was privileged to help sponsor this Fall Festival site. Mr. Hubert explained that 9 of this group are already baptized; about 6 are seeking baptism and the others are very interested in the Truth of God's Word.

I encouraged him to organize "house church" services every Sabbath to provide this remnant group with a regular place to meet and worship God. Legacy Institute will also support his plan to translate COG literature into Tamil and Tegalau, the 2 main languages of the south. Translation of material is very necessary. Most of the Church brethren and others interested in the Truth in southern India do not speak English at all. (There are over 400 languages spoken in India!) Is the True Gospel only for the English speaking peoples of the world? Of course not! If we are to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the whole world as Christ commanded in Matthew 28, we cannot expect them to learn English first. We **MUST** take it to them in their own languages. This is why Legacy Institute's support for translation efforts is so important. We are busy preparing literature and bible study courses to be translated into Karen, Burmese, Kachin; and now, Tamil, Tegalau and possibly even Hindi. This is quite an ambitious undertaking since, not only are these spoken languages quite different; they all use an *entirely different alphabet!* But, by doing this, God's *TRUE* message of the Gospel becomes available to millions more who would not be able to receive it otherwise.

Michael Hubert and others of this small group are eager to do an evangelistic work among their own Indian people. There are several who are educated, speak 3 or 4 languages, and are quite eager and capable of translating God's Truth. Mr. Hubert told me that the fields of India are *ripe for the harvest*. The Indian brethren are ready and willing. We in the West must have the moral courage and *FAITH* to back up their efforts in India. But India evokes fear and wonder to the Western mind. We envision teaming masses speaking unintelligible languages and worshipping strange, many-armed gods. We think of city streets filled with sewage, stinking carcasses and legions of poor beggars grabbing at our clothing. We hear stories about wild-eyed Hindu fanatics hacking Christians and Muslims to death with machetes. So we are afraid of India.

I have been to India many times. It is true that India is a big country of many millions of people with many different languages, religious beliefs and customs. It is true that violence is perpetrated against people of other religions. It is true that there are millions of poor. It is also true that there are beggars in India.

I have been to Calcutta several times. Calcutta is considered to have the worst cases of poverty and disease. It was the center of the Catholic nun Mother Theresa's projects. If any of you have seen the movie *City of Joy*, it gives a good portrayal of life on the streets of Calcutta. In Calcutta I saw many poor people living in shacks or sleeping on the streets. Beggars followed me around. I even saw a few dead rats and bloated dog carcasses. But legions of beggars did not emerge from darkened alleys to tear at my clothes; no one attacked me with a machete; and, while the gutters did stink, I didn't catch the plague.

I have been around for a while. I have heard all the arguments why we cannot do a major Work in India. And I have an answer for every one of them. Here are some of the best (or worst!):

*"We can't go into India. What if God starts calling thousands of people? We have no one to take care of them."*

Brethren, I thought that was the whole idea – that God *DOES* call people! If he chooses to call thousands, then that is *His* business! And if He does choose to call thousands, then it becomes *HIS*

responsibility to *raise up* leaders to pastor HIS new flocks. We have to STOP thinking of the Church of God as a human-run corporation limited by our meager human resources and start understanding that it is a SPIRITUAL entity empowered by the MIGHTY and OMNIPOTENT God! We need to humble ourselves and ADMIT that Jesus Christ is the Head and calls the shots!

Another good (or bad!) cop-out is:

*“If God wants to call these people, He can do it without our help.”*

This is true. God doesn't need our help. But this is true about any place in the world, not just India. Just because God has the power to do it with or without us, does that give us an excuse to do nothing! If God intended to do it all Himself, why build His Church? Why train disciples? Why command the Apostles to go into all the world?

My favorite excuse for doing nothing is this one:

*“We cannot send free literature like the Plain Truth magazine into India because Indians will take anything free. It will be a waste of money because they will cut out and paper their bare walls with the color pictures from the magazines.”*

You have no idea how many times I have heard that one! What is incredible is that I *still* hear it!!

My friends, I have traveled for many years all over Asia. I have lived and worked in some of the poorest nations on earth; India, Burma, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. In all my travels, I have *NEVER, EVER* seen anyone's walls- *no matter how poor*- papered with any pictures from our literature!

God has called us and commanded us to do the job of reaching out into ALL the world. He has given us the resources; the Holy Spirit being the most important. We need to be doers. If we are afraid or lack faith to obey Him, then He will find servants who will. We will be left behind.

Mr. Hubert took me to visit the sites where the Apostle Thomas was killed and buried. The Catholic Church took over these sites hundreds of years ago when the Portuguese came to India. It is very interesting to note that both shrines are now not only dedicated to St. Thomas, but also have been dedicated to the worship of Mary. The Mary cult is growing in strength all over the world. Of course, this is nothing new, but dates back to Nimrod and Semiramis. It is, however, interesting that even in southern India, Mary is superceding even the worship of the local patron saint.

Thomas arrived on the Malabar coast where there was a large 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish colony. The tradition is that he raised up seven churches and then traveled east to Madras. It was here he was martyred by jealous Brahmin priests and buried. There are a lot of traditions and superstitious stories surrounding his evangelizing of southern India. But fables aside, most scholars agree that he did reach the shores of India and people were called and converted, including a famous local poet and members of royal houses, because of his preaching.

We also paid a visit to Bishop Thomas Mar Timotheos of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar who trace their roots back to the Apostle Thomas. He gave us some basic information and recommended some sources for further research on Thomas' evangelistic efforts in southern India.

Is God taking the gospel to southern India again? Time will tell.

Well, that is all for now. In the meantime pray for Michael and Terencia Hubert. Please pray that God gives them the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit to go forward with spreading the Good News of the Kingdom of God among their own people in southern India. Perhaps it is now time for us to pick up where Thomas left off nearly 2000 years ago.

### **Thailand Feast of Tabernacles**

The Feast of Tabernacles will be held once again this year in Thailand. If you are considering attending this year in Thailand and are interested in learning more about it, please email us or drop us a line and we will send you more information.

I will write more next time from Sri Lanka. Until then, God be with you all!

In humble service to Our Lord Jesus Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leon Sexton', written in a cursive style.

Leon Sexton

#### **WHAT IS LEGACY INSTITUTE?**

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