

The Twentieth Century Reformation In India

BY CARL McINTIRE

"They forsook all and followed him." This describes the thoroughgoing reformation now shaking the Christian church in southern India. The historic Mar Thoma Church has seen 25,000 faithful Bible believers walk out, leave everything, and establish the St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India. More than 200 new churches have been organized since January 26, 1961. This company of believers has gone into the fields, under palm trees, to worship. They are meeting under palm thatched sheds and in homes. Already 46 new church buildings have been erected. Everything has been counted loss — everything, save for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Church buildings, schools, Bible institutes, seminary, college, and church property worth several millions of dollars have been lost. There was absolutely no other way to preserve the Christian faith and to have a reformation.

There is one issue — reformation. There is one cause — the preservation of the true Gospel. There is one purpose — obedience to the Head of the Church.

The Struggle

For ten years there has been a struggle in the Mar Thoma Church between two parties, the evangelical and the sacerdotal.

The sacerdotal was led by the presiding bishop of the church, called the Metropolitan, and represented what is called the modernist or liberal wing in the church. Here, in addition to the rejection of the Bible as the sole authority in the church, the Metropolitan was introducing the forms of the Greek Catholic Church, including the Mass.

When the evangelical party concluded that it was impossible to restore the church and to save it for the historic faith, they made the decisive decision to separate. With the new bishops favorable to the Metropolitan and their control of the institutions, it was clear to all that the church could not be reformed from within.

Thus the historic day, January 26, 1961, was set for the formation of a new church, and some 25,000 faithful gathered in an open field to launch the St. Thomas Evangelical Church, standing in true spiritual succession of the church founded by the Apostle Thomas. Tradition, well authenticated, reports that the Apostle Thomas landed on the coast of South India in 52 A.D. and founded the church in Kerala.

Kerala, one of the 19 states of India, today has 16 million people. One out of eleven is Christian. Kerala is more Christian and has the highest degree of literacy of any state in India.

The reformation in India goes deep, very deep indeed. "In This Century of Ecumenism It Thus Came to Pass" is the title of a 16-page booklet the Mar Thoma Church has issued explaining the walk-out of the 20th century reformers.