

THE CHRISTAVASHRAM

MANGANAM

- A QUEST FOR COMMUNITY -

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Community is the product of love,
the dynamic way to live love.

* * *

Love generated a revolution in the corporate life of
those who followed Christ in the Early Church.

About them it was said,

“Look how these Christians love one another”;

“They are turning the world upside down”

* * *

Gandhi said,

“For humanity to reach its goal.....

A society based on the practice of the law of love
is needed — a society in which not individual
gain but service of one's fellowmen is the essential
motive of all activities”.

Love — dynamic non-violence—

creates Community, as a Cell

on earth, of the Divine Commonwealth.

A Quest for Community

—The Christavashram —

K. K. Chandy, Christavashram, Manganam

The primary aspiration of humanity, we of the Christavashram Community believe, is ‘Community’ consummating in the Kingdom of God on earth—a classless society. The term ‘Community’ has a very wide connotation. We speak in terms of a ‘College Community’, of a ‘Village Community’, of a Brahmin Community’, of an ‘Indian Community’ etc. But the term ‘Community’, is used here in a special sense. In an ‘Intensive Community’ there is intense mutuality and sharing in a total way of life—in all its values and responsibilities. In such a community, there is an intense commitment on the principle, “Each for all and all for each”, a commitment involving for every member unlimited liability under God to each other, and to the Group. Such a Community, could only spring from faith in God as Father of all mankind irrespective of race, class, caste, nationality or culture. Each member of such a Community should seek to practise in his personal life and the corporate life of the Community the New Testament injunction not to, “conform themselves to the pattern of this present world” but to “pursue the things that make for peace.” “Each... must consider his neighbour”, develop a concern for him and seek to “build up the common life” —(Rom. 15:2). The concern for ‘Community’ and ‘social justice’ felt by the Christavashram—the community to which my wife and I belong may be seen expressed in the ‘Preamble’ of the original *Constitution of the Christavashram* passed 43 years back in 1940.

"A world based on greed and competition is tumbling down. All man-made securities are being blown off. 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.' At a time like this, a turning back to the experience of the Apostolic days, when, 'the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul, neither said any that ought of the things that he possessed was his own but they had all things in common' gives the Church the answer to the challenge of Bolshevistic Communism, and of all totalitarian systems. And if there was some flaw in the economics of the early Church, it is up to the present generation to correct the same and to re-awaken the Church to the real implications of the Gospel."

'The moral re-armament of the nations' was the theme of a 'House party' held at the Christavashram in the same year 1940. The purpose of that Conference as stated in a brochure issued in connection with it was, 'Spiritual revolution for a new world order.' It carried a call from Jawaharlal Nehru, "Our final aim will be a classless society with equal justice and opportunity for all, a society organised on a planned basis for the raising of mankind to higher material and cultural levels, to a cultivation of spiritual values, of co-operation, unselfishness, the spirit of service, the desire to do right, good-will and love—ultimately a world order."

The Ashram Movement in India—Origin :

The Ashram movement is of hoary tradition in India. For the Hindu, life was divided into 4 stages, Brahmacharya (student), Grihastha (house-holder), Vanaprastha (forest dwelling) and Sanyasa (mendicant). During the third stage of his life in his late fifties he went to the forest along with his wife for meditation, in search of

the Eternal Soul. As more such couples joined, a community of hermitages grew up. Among them would be experienced people well versed in arts and sciences. Kings and peasants used to send youth for training to such communities, some of which under an outstanding Guru (teacher and spiritual leader) developed as Gurukula Ashrams. They were centres of study, research and experimentation. India's philosophical writings (Upanishads) such as the Gita, medical science (Ayur Veda), Veterinary science (Mruga Sastra) etc. had their origin in the Ashram Gurukulas. Some of these like Nalanda, developed as universities of ancient India to which students from abroad—China, Tibet, Ceylon etc.—came for study and research. In the Ashrams, barriers of caste, class, race and creed broke down. They played an outstanding role in the integration between the ancient Dravidian population and the incoming Aryans, between Buddhism and Hinduism etc. A crowning example of the harmony they wrought among Hindu, Buddhist, Jain cultures may be seen in the marvellous blending of architecture, sculpture and painting seen in the Ajanta and Ellora Caves.

Ashrams—Modern Developments :

Mahatma Gandhi and *Poet Tagore* revived the Ashram movement. They brought the Ashrams from the forest setting to the villages to serve as centres of service right in the midst of the community. Tagore started Shantinikethan which has since developed as a rural university of which Mrs. Indira Gandhi is now Chancellor. Gandhiji found in the Ashrams, a spontaneous and fitting vehicle for translating his vision of a Sarvodaya Society. Pyarelal, his Secretary wrote: 'for humanity to reach its goal of a higher psychic evolution is needed a society based on the practice of the law of love—a society in which, not

individual gain but service of one's fellows ... is the essential motive of all activities.' 'To provide a working model of this type of society Gandhiji instituted the Ashram way of life, or community living. It was the means he used to introduce among the people the leaven of basic spiritual disciplines which provided the energy and drive for the Satyagraha campaigns (in the liberation movement). It was the Ashrams that sprang up all over the country which helped Gandhiji to organise and sustain his non-violent campaigns during India's fight for freedom... they set not only the pattern of the type of the worker that was needed for organising his non-violent mass movement but of the non-violent type of organisation too.' It was in the wake of this that the Christian Ashrams also came into being, beginning with the Christukula Ashram Tirupathur, and the Christa Prema Seva Sangh in Poona. The Christavashram, Manganam also finds in the Ashram way of life a spontaneous and indigenous expression of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

It is love—dynamic non-violence—that can create Community. It was agape, the love which Jesus enjoined, that created the early Christian Community—Koenonia—a Community of the Holy Spirit. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; not a man of them in that Community, "claimed his possession as his own but everything was held in common...; they had never a needy person among them"— (Acts 4:32-34). Love broke down barriers—social, economic, racial and national—expressing itself in a Communism of love, a Sarvodaya society. The Community thus formed may be described as an 'Intensive Community'—a Cell of the Kingdom of God, the divine Commonwealth.

They pledged themselves to work out the 'Nazareth Manifesto of Jesus'. Committing themselves to Christ's new Commandment of love they tarried in Jerusalem till they received the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus Christ. The agape in them—dynamic non-violence—started breaking down barriers. Jew and Gentile, Roman and Greek, Negro and White, Slave and Master all became one in this family of Christ. It was a casteless, classless, supra-racial, supra-national Community that was thus formed. It was characterized by a hungering and thirsting after justice. That revolutionary Community spread in Cells all over from Jerusalem to Antioch, to Rome to Ephesus. At Thessalonica, enemies of the movement shouted, "These that have turned the world upside down have come here also"—(Acts. 17:6). It was the Holy Spirit that inspired this movement. It was dynamic non-violence which generated this revolution. The masses around gazed at it with amazement exclaiming, "Look how these Christians love one another". These were people who heeding the call "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand", surrendered themselves to Christ and became reborn in Him as children of God. The Community thus transformed, began transforming the community around, generating a revolution towards a classless society.

Francis of Assissi, a man filled with this revolutionary love, sought to build an intensive community in which they surrendered all areas of their lives under God to each other. Gandhiji also, as Pyarelal his Secretary wrote, "instituted the Ashram way of life or community living as a leaven to introduce among the people the leaven of basic spiritual disciplines which provided the energy and drive for the Satyagraha movement. The Ashrams thus formed set not only the pattern of the type of the worker that is needed for the non-violent liberation movement

but also served as a fitting vehicle for translating Gandhi's vision of a Sarvodaya Society".

Is Community practicable? The question often is raised as to whether 'Community' is practicable. The answer is, yes, Community is practicable and is the way to a new social order where 'justice and peace would kiss each other'. 'Community' is the product of love, the practical way to live love. But was not the 'Community of goods' of the Early Church just a passing bubble, a short-lived effervescence which led to extreme poverty in the Jerusalem Community and caused St. Paul to collect funds for them from churches elsewhere? Those who raise such criticism do not seem to realise that, that poverty was the result of a widespread famine which spread through all Asia Minor affecting not only the tiny Christian community but also all sections of the people—(Acts 2:28-30). Jewish historian Josephus also has recorded of this wide-spread famine. It should also be seen that Christians were a persecuted community at that time who had not had the respite or opportunity to engage themselves in production. But in the efforts of Paul and others in organising relief may be seen a clear expression of the spirit of Christian communism—of 'community'. Paul's words are telling: 'At the moment your surplus meets their need, but one day your need may be met by their surplus. The aim is equality..' (2 Cor. 8:14-15). It may also be mentioned here that as S. G. Wood pointed out, the 'Common fund' maintained by the weekly subscription, the relief of the necessities of the poorer members, the expression of the spirit of fellowship in the Agape meal became normal features of church life throughout the Roman empire. Though the organised churches started accepting the doctrines of 'Private property' and 'Just war' there has been through the centuries groups and

communities which have been living and witnessing to the Community way of life. As Kagawa wrote in his 'Brotherhood economics', the Church today has to recapture the spirit of brotherhood of the early Church and of the Religious Communities of the Middle Ages such as the Benedictines and the Cistercians with their emphasis on love and prayer, on labour, production and distribution to meet their own needs and of the wider community around them. The Mercantile Guilds which sprang out of their community life proved to be the fore-runner of the Modern Trade Union movement. Such Communities can help to promote the 'Socialistic pattern' to which some countries including India, have committed themselves. They can help organise each Parish to be a living working brotherhood where production and distribution are done on lines of 'Gram Swaraj' communes. The late Bishop Westcott of Durham wrote, "I cannot express too strongly my conviction that communities of families bound together by common principles of living ... and united by definite obligation, which habitually connect devotion with labour is one of the most urgent needs of the present age." In a situation where spiritual values recede more and more from life, and where even some theologians hold that truth and love are 'impossible possibilities' in history, these Communities seek to declare with God's grace the relevance of the Sermon on the Mount and the non-violence of the Cross in the work-a-day world.

Mahatma Gandhi, during one of his visits to Woodbrooke College, shared some of his thoughts and experiences on 'Community'. That was a time when Britain began facing the problem of unemployment. Bearing that in mind, Gandhi, urged Woodbrookers, "to adopt the principle of 'community living' in our

struggle against unemployment.....He believed that the true solution of unemployment apart from courageous government action, lay in the creation of members of small communities consisting of both intellectuals and unemployed, and engaged on working on land — on productive work.” (Minister of reconciliation) — J. S. Hayland. Emphasising the importance of a right attitude to personal property as basic to a life in community, Gandhi spoke “of the night in 1913 during which he had made the resolve never again, all his life long, to hold any property of his own.....From that night of decision I began to know what freedom, power and joy mean; if you would know these things you must tread the same path”. Gandhi also spoke about the three Communities which he helped to build Johannesburg, Durban and Ahmedabad, and how “the difficulty of bringing up children in a Community might be turned into great advantage—by having a school as the integral part of the Community— and how community living may become the nucleus of wide reaching activities on behalf of justice and freedom” —(Ibid).

The aim of the Gandhian Gramdhan movement launched by Acharya Vinoba Bhave and promoted by Jayaprakash Narayan is to build village based Communities. Vinoba said, “In Gramdhan you surrender all your land to the village community. There will be no ownership of land either by the individual or the State. In a Gramdhan village a programme of production and distribution is to be agreed upon by the members themselves. They could cultivate the whole village as one or more units, or even divide it for each family to cultivate, and have the proceeds shared as per agreed programme.” If it is a town Community they could work out a system of production and sharing — as for instance the Barbu

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Communities in France. I have visited some of them. They are industrially based as against the village based Bruderhoffs. In his message to the World Council of Churches Assembly, New Delhi, Vinoba stated that he considered the Bhoodan movement as “the only effective way out” in the tension between the Communist and Capitalist confrontation. Despite all the criticism against the movement, it may be pointed out here that it helped in no small measure to bring about a change of heart among people in their attitude to land and capital. It helped to precipitate land legislation in the country. It is significant that till 1971 surplus land made available in India through land legislation was only 10 lakh acres as against forty-one and a half lakh acres received through Bhoodan. The challenge that Vinoba gave, and the practical demonstration of the Communism of love the Gramdhan movement is a significant pointer regarding dynamic non-violence in the quest for Community.

The Jesus Family Community in China: It is significant that about the same time (or a bit earlier) as the communities of Johannesburg, Durban etc. of which Gandhi spoke at Woodbrooke, the Jesus Family Community was started in China under the leadership of Mr. Chiang. I met a Quaker Relief worker in 1952 at Minneypolis, U. S.A. who had visited this community during his 5 years stay in China. Dr. Vaughan Rhee in his book on ‘The Jesus Family in Communist China’ wrote that there were over a 100 Communities of the Jesus Family during his visit and stay in China. There was a strength of 500 people in their Mother Community at Machuang. From the outset, the Community had accepted the principle of common ownership. Their attitude to land and the scientific

way of cultivation had offered a challenge to the Communists. The production from their 43 acre land was more than enough to support their 500 people. The Communists were amazed and said, "Less than one tenth of an acre (per head)! How could it be?" In Shantung, Communists had allowed one acre per person as the minimum.

The Community's various departments of work included carpentry, book-making, bakery, smithy, machine shop, electrical department, stone-masonry, schools, printing, book-binding etc. While emphasis is given to self-support the community primarily live for others. They started by setting apart the tenth of their income for the needy and for the development of the neighbourhood. They kept on raising another tenth each year, following. The year when Dr. Rhees was with them, they were giving away nine-tenths of their income. What the Community raised by their hard work they gave away to the needy after meeting their own bare needs. Instead of laying up treasurers for themselves, they trusted in God for the morrow. Seeing that the Jesus's Family farms are generally better than the best run Government farms, the Communist government wanted to take over one of the Jesus Family farms as a demonstration centre. In a statement to the authorities who thought the Community would be reluctant to part with it the Community wrote, "As regards the Family's understanding of the Communist Party (Communism), with us this is more than theoretical comprehension. We have there many years practised the true spirit of Communism in our actual living. Because we belong to the class of proletarians and have personal experience of the life of the poor and of the stand-point of the common man, we received the orders of government with the greatest of pleasure. Naturally we are the more willing, at the call of the the government, to give all our

strength to the activities for the enrichment of the masses" — ('Jesus Family...', Vaughan Rhees). Mr. Chiang, the founder said, "love is the organizing principle of the home of Jesus." He believed that what was needed was not more power but deeper death. It indicated a courageous faith in Jesus's words, 'who ever cares for his own safety is lost, but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self'. Chiang said, "Truly, our aim is Thy Kingdom come, Thy will on earth be done".

Kibbutzim in Israel:- (1) *Degania*; I would now bring to our notice the greatly expanding Community movement in Israel—the Kibbutzim. I had the opportunity to visit some of them in 1953 including one of the earliest of them—the Degania Kibbutz. I stayed with an Indian Jew, a member of the Community who has married the daughter of Mr. Bharat, one of the founders of Degania. Bharat was at that time a member of the Israeli Parliament. About the year 1971 there were about 300 Kibbutzim in Israel with a membership of 75,000 people. The movement which began about 1911 has become world famous as one of the most successful functioning of democratic socialism in action. It should however be mentioned here that many of them are not religiously based and none of them as far as I know on non-violence. Jayaprakash Narayan, after a visit to Israel said that "what struck him most was their life in Community. They have land and properties held in common. Each member of the Kibbutz works not for himself but for the Community. They maintain the Communistic principle regarding consumption of the products of their work; food, housing, medical aid, education etc., are planned in 'common'. Distribution is not in accordance with the volume of work done or quantity of produce, but based on the principle of need — 'from

each according to his ability, and to each according to his need'. What for centuries remained as a slogan of some liberal democrats or Utopian 'Saints' has expressed itself as the basic principle of a major section of the Israelis in their life together in the Kibbutzim". J. P. said, "They looked at Socialism not merely as a movement but as a way of life: this was what attracted me most regarding Israel. We in India who are at building up the nation from the ground are very much interested in Israel which is transforming sandy rocky, desert into a smiling garden"— (Arunodayam May 1971).

(2) *Merhavia Kibbutz*: The late Prime Minister Golda Meir of Israel was a member of the Merhavia Kibbutz. She joined the Community from the U. S. A. In an article (reprinted in the Arunodayam) she wrote reflecting on her experiences as a member: of her working in the kitchen, in the farm, planting trees on rocky ground etc. "Since I have been accepted as a member of the Kibbutz with such reluctance (being one who had come from a luxurious U. S. background), I took pains to prove that they have been wrong about me, and like the other girls, I insisted on doing any job that the men did". "The care and worry of working mothers in looking after children", she wrote, "are more than halved in Kibbutzim... My son Menachim was born in Jerusalem, but when he was 6 months old, I went back to Merhavia Kibbutz with him. In the mean time two or three other babies were born in the Kibbutz. At that time we had two room houses—one big room and one small. So we put all our babies in the big room and I slept in the small room, for I told the comrades: "Why should we have a girl stay up all the night with each of the four babies?" and so, I took care of all the babies at night and the Kibbutz did without a night-watch girl".

Bruderhoffs: Another type of Community which is international is the Bruderhoff Inter National Community. They are evangelical emphasis. It was started in Germany by Dr. Eberhard Arnold who was a Secretary of the Student Christian Movement. Because of the Community's non-violence, communistic living and emphasis on Christian values, they had persecution under the Hitler regime, and had to leave Germany. I had the opportunity of visiting them in 1948 and 1952 in England and later in 1963 in the U. S. A. where they have now three branches. While they were in Paraguay, Francis Hall visited them. Giving his impressions, he wrote, "the Community reveals the finest quality of corporate life closely approximating in both spirit and form to the primitive Christian Church. I feel that I have come back from the visit able to speak with authority, it is possible for men to live together as brothers". Every man on earth is called to share this brotherhood. The door is open to all—rich or poor, brilliant or simple, stable or disturbed, coloured or white.....Everyone feels loved, wanted and needed, and every task is treated with equal respect, whether it is washing dishes or going on world missions. Every person gives fully of his labour in love and everyone shares the same standard of living with all the others.....".

But the question often is asked whether the Bruderhoffs are not escaping the world to build a new Utopia. The truth is that they were forced to leave Germany only because they sought to live out the standards and values of the Kingdom of God in the work-a-day world. Their life is never self-centred. Their deep concern for the whole world and a remarkable knowledge of what is happening everywhere is evident during their daily intercessions at some of which I had the privilege of being present. They not only pray for those in trouble round

the world but also, living a simple life themselves, they save up to help those in need. They train their children also to grow in this concern, who through the sale of their handicrafts help children in need in developing countries like India. Answering "What influence can a Community of 800 people in the world wield on society, even granting that there are a few thousand others also in other such Communities around the world", Francis Hall said, "The answer seems to lie.....in the principle of the lever and its application by Archimedis; 'give me a place to stand on, and I will move the world'. A small group of completely dedicated people living a life of love and peace in the spirit of God can exert a power that moves the world. This is the work of the leaven in the loaf, to use yet another metaphor".

The Christavashram—a quest for Community.

As mentioned already about Christ-centred communities generally the Christavashram believes that the primary aspiration of humanity is 'Community' consummating in the Kingdom of God on earth—the true classless society. Jesus Christ urged to 'Repent', and to follow him seeking first that Divine Commonwealth and its justice. The motto of the Christavashram is 'Thy Kingdom come'. The New Testament reminds those that seek the Kingdom not to conform themselves to 'the pattern of this present world' but to be re-born in Christ pursuing the "things that make for peace". "Each of us must consider his neighbour and think what is for his good and will build up the common life"—(Rom. 14). In the conflict between a totalitarian Communism and an enslaving Capitalism, both the products of self-love, the Ashram finds the answer in Community, the product of agape—self-giving love which Jesus enjoined. But is

Community practicable? The answer is, yes. Community is the product of love, the practical way to live love. The Bruderhoff International Community which began in Germany is in their eighty-second year of life now. The Ayetoro Community in Nigeria, the Jesus Family in China, Ashrams in India and several other intensive Communities round the world believe that Community is not only practical but that it is the most abundant way of life. When each begins to "consider his neighbour and think what is for his good" there will be revolutionary change in the attitude to property. This may be seen in the 'community of goods' of the Early Church where "Not a man of them claimed any of his possessions as his own, but everything was held in common"—(Acts 4 : 32—33). About the 4th century when some Christians began to argue for private property, the Church Fathers like John Chrisostom reminded them of Jesus' command, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth' and warned, "Are we still Christians if there be no longer community among us?" He continued, "Community of goods is a far more suitable mode of life for us than private property and it is natural".

The Christavashram has about 175 full-time residents including men and women of different denominations, married and unmarried, lay and ordained. In a context where atheistic materialism is challenging religion as opiate, and prescribes a 'policy of blood and iron' as the way to justice and liberation, the Ashram seeks to bring home to people the reality of the Eternal, and of the way of the cross—non-violence—as the only power that can achieve justice and peace. The members of the Christavashram (otherwise known as the Society of St. Thomas) are committed to each other as a family of Christ, and have 'all things common'. We work toward becoming a

productive, self-supporting Community, and under God are progressing towards it. We feel that the way of love and identification with the poor calls upon us not only to give up private property rights, but also to have a programme of production and distribution according to need. We are aware that identification also involves limiting our personal expenditure to a minimum. This means accepting no more, but less than our share of the economic goods available to the human family. This step involves a declassing of ourselves which we are striving to do. Such a step helps give us courage to speak a word of justice in the 'Class war' situation where we are called to render the ministry of reconciliation so as to break down divisive walls, and to work towards world-community. In order to be 'all things to all men' we seek the enabling Grace of God to function as catalytic agents on either side of the conflict—whether the conflict be personal, social, racial, caste, economic, cultural, national or international. In order to fulfil Christ's commission to "Make all nations my disciples" and to teach them to "observe all his commandments", the Ashram Community is aware that they should, as St. Peter reminds us, declare in their personal and corporate lives the virtues of Christ—truth, justice and non-violence — (Matt. 28 : 19 — 20, Isaiah 53 : 3—9, I Peter 2 : 9). We have to function as World Citizens of the supra-racial, supra-secular 'holy nation' — the Divine Commonwealth.

Activities :

1) *The Kerala Balagram* (Boys' Village, Kerala—for destitute children).

A Home for 'waifs and strays' was one of the first activities started by the Christavashram Group from the

time of its founding in Alleppey in 1934. Twelve children were selected from a street boys' club which was organised there. The need was felt for a country site for developing the Ashram and the Boys' Home. With the aid of a friend a plot of jungle land was bought on a hill at Manganam. Two buildings—an Ashram Bhavan (for the three of us founding members) and a retreat house—also used for dialogues and seminars—were put up. The home for destitute children was also shifted to Manganam, and the children were put up in three cottages. An Industrial School was also put up for cloth weaving, tailoring and soap-making. The children are given general education up to school final normally, besides craft training in agriculture, cattle farming, poultry farming, cloth weaving, printing, composing, book binding etc. A number of boys have graduated themselves from the university securing post-graduate degrees, diplomas in teacher training, pharmacy, polytechnic courses etc. One boy who grew up from his 4th year now serves as an Inspector of Police in Kerala. Some old boys in technical jobs in India and outside draw four figure salaries Monthly. There are two Colonies—at Kallar and Attapady, where on the 2 to 5 acre plots given to some old boys, some of them produce over Rs. 30,000 worth of pepper, coconuts, coffee, tapioca etc. from their respective plots. Some of them have been able to put up pacca buildings themselves, replacing the earlier katcha structures. The post office started in the area is known as the Balagram Post. A number of old boys take an active interest in civic affairs. Their children receive good schooling and some are in colleges including one who is doing her third year medicine.

The Ashram from its inception was concerned about helping government and the people in tackling the

problem of juvenile destitution and delinquency on a state-wide basis. A children aid society was formed at a conference held in Balagram in 1950 with the Chief Minister of Kerala as President. At its initiative the Kerala Children Act was passed in 1972 to tackle the problem on state-wide basis.

2) *The Gurukul Ecumenical Institute :*

Started in 1958, the Ashram Gurukul helps educated young people, in an atmosphere of prayer, study, community life and work, get a vision of the Kingdom of God. It helps them in the light of the Gospel message to choose their life work, subjects taught include, the scriptures, comparative religion, outline of theology, ecumenism, Church and society, social justice, non-violence and Christian ethics, Communism and Gandhism (Sarvodaya). Classes are taken by an ecumenical staff, consisting of, besides some Sevaks of the Ashram, honorary visiting lecturers from the different Seminaries in Kottayam. There are regular discussion periods on current affairs in Church, State and Society.

The students along with the Ashram Community get involved in Seminars, such as on 'Transformation of society in Kerala,' 'Housing for the needy' organised at the Ashram, and also in practical social action projects. Leaders of churches, other religions, or cultural bodies and of political parties, both of extreme right and left, participate in such seminars.

The Gurukul have a daily programme of productive manual labour in the Ashram farm. Their common life within the life of the Ashram Community with its programme of common worship, study, productive work, common meals, games etc. is enriched by visiting groups and individuals from India and abroad. Each student

writes a thesis on the Kingdom of God. After training, the students go out, some of them to pursue their studies in theology, or in arts or sciences. A number of them serve as ministers and Church workers in various denominations; others work as teachers, social workers etc. Some have felt a call for the Ashram way of life and have joined as members or probationers.

3) *The Ashram Press and literature work:*

The Arunodayam, a socio-religious magazine was started in 1937. It served also as organ of the International F. O. R. in India till it has been in suspense from the 'Emergency' days in India. It sought to bring home to people the social implications of the Gospel and to bring to bear the standards and values of the Kingdom of God in social, political, national and international issues. It promoted dialogue with men of other faith and with movements such as Communism, Sarvodaya etc. During the liberation struggle for India's freedom it had to undergo suppression for 7 years. The Ashram Press besides facilitating the direct literature work of the Ashram does printing work for the Bible Society, the Christian Literature Society, the C. I. S. R. S. etc. The Press also offers opportunity for the young people of the Balagram to learn a useful trade and to support themselves. Among books printed are the 'One Volume Bible Commentary', the first such in any Indian language.

4) *Co-operation with ecumenical movements for justice peace and unity :*

The Ashram co-operates actively with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Indian branch of which took formal shape at the Ashram in 1950 with its head-quarters at the Ashram and a Svak of the Ashram as its first General Secretary. The Ashram takes its share in the ministry

of peace-making in situations of conflict and tension. A sevak was released for a peace tour of India during the Sino-Indian war situation and kept in touch with the national leaders like Nehru, Jayaprakash Narayan, Vinoba Bhave, Dr. Radha Krishnan most of whom had visited the Ashram. He also joined the Delhi-Peking Peace March, and had peace tours round the world. The Present Acharya Rev. P. T. Thomas had a speaking tour of the Anglican Theological Seminaries in the U. K. in 1982. The Ashram also co-operates with constructive national movements such as Sarvodaya, Bhoodan, Shanti Sena (Peace force) etc. There was a Bhoodan (Land-gift) Squad of about 25 young people functioning in the Ashram campus for about 3 years. The unity of the Churches was from its foundation in 1934 a topic for daily prayer at the Ashram Group. The Ashram rejoices and thank God for the coming into being of the C. S. I., the C. N. I., the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement in general from Pope John's time.

5) *Land and housing for the needy* has been early concern of the Ashram. It played a humble role in organising study of the land problem and in creating public opinion resulting in land legislation in the State. The Ecumenical Pastoral letter issued by the Kerala Bishops of all demonstrations in 1968 urging each parish to put up houses for the needy in their areas resulted in a few thousand houses thus to be constructed and given away. It was in the wake of this venture that the Kerala Government itself took up major projects for housing the needy.

6) *Retreat House and Chapel*: The Retreat House was the first building which was constructed at the Ashram campus. It is opened for retreats, conferences and

dialouges, and is made use of regularly by Church and non-church groups, families and individuals. The Ashram Chapel constructed in indigenous style is appreciated by Christian and non-christian friends. It is there that the daily study cum intercession hour (followed by the common meal) and the Sunday services including Holy Communion are held.

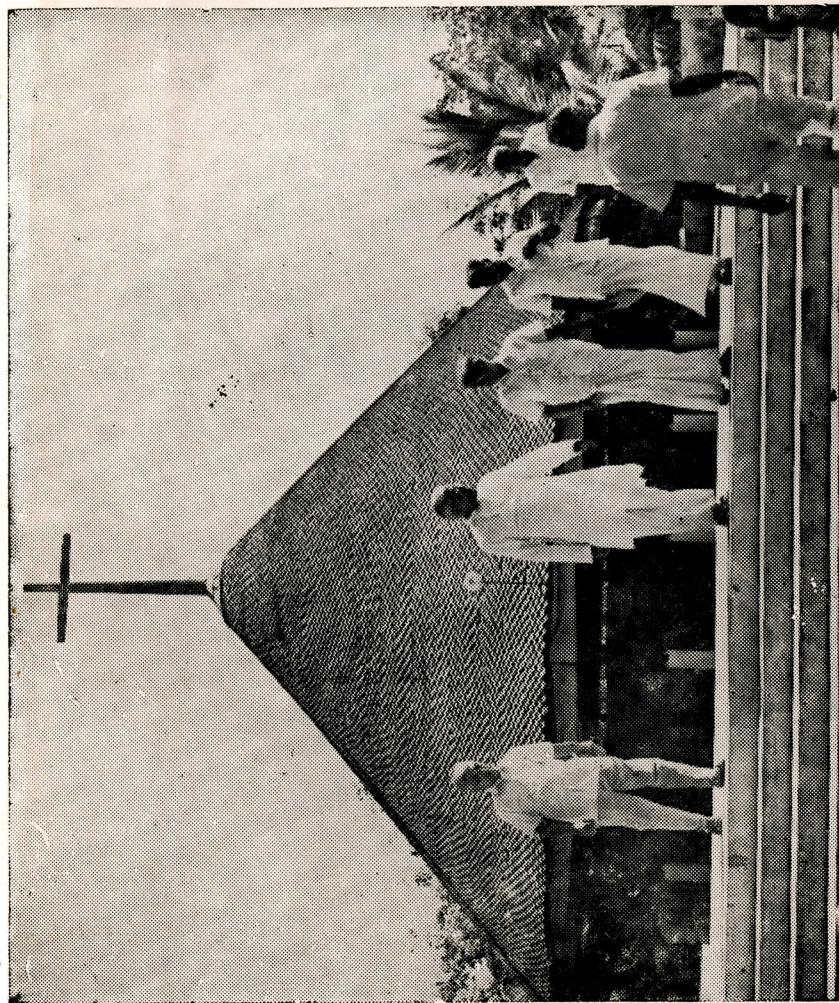
Conclusion :

We of the Christavashram remind ourselves of our calling as an 'Intensive Community' committed to God and to each other in unlimited liability, with the responsibilities for our own children and the children of the Balagram (once destitute) to live out among ourselves in the world the life that Jesus Christ our Lord desires for society based on the standards set in the sermon on the Mount, the values revealed through his life and the Koenonia of the Spirit-guided 'Community of goods' expressed in the Early Church. We are aware that we have to be a Community, sharing not only in the matter of consumption but also in production according to need. It is with this end in view that we are engaging ourselves in farm work, agriculture, dairy etc., in printing and press work and in domestic industries. We wish above all, that we deserved what Sri C. Achutha Menon, Communist leader, had written in the Visitors' Diary when he was Chief Minister of Kerala, "The attempt to harmonise all religions, and to integrate the most essential *values of life* (made here) specially impressed me". The deep springs of any such harmony and integration we believe is Christ who said, "I am the way, I am truth and I am life". We have fallen far short of our calling, but counting on the grace of Him 'who strengthenth us to do all things', we press on. The climax of this quest, we believe, is the

Kingdom of God. To realise this end, we all, young and old alike, have to repent from where we have strayed away from agape, the nonviolence of the cross. "If any one" thus "is united to Christ there is a new world, the old order has gone, and a new order has already begun"- (2 Cor. 5:17). They will seek to live love, and to 'make disciples of nations, teaching them to observe all Christ's commandments till nations 'break their swords into ploughs' and their atoms for peace. (Matt. 28:19-20). And then 'all nations shall come streaming to it 'and the 'Kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ'" - (Isaiah 2:2, Rev. 11:15).

**The
Christavashram
Chapel**

**Manganam,
Kottayam,
Kerala,
India**



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