

Southern Asian Regional Consultation on the Christian Understanding of Health, Healing and Wholeness in New Delhi, India, 25-29 August 1980, 1. 68 (CMC/81/4).

Introduction

Fourth in a series of regional consultations called by the CMC in the past two years, a meeting was held in New Delhi between 25-29 August, 1980 for the Southern Asia region. The previous three consultations, for the Caribbean, Central American and African regions were described in CONTACTs nos. 51 and 54. In keeping with the previous meetings, the theme of this consultation was “The Christian Understanding of Health, Healing and Wholeness”. Each of the meetings contributed richly towards deepening understanding of this basic theme of the CMC Study/ Enquiry.

The over-70 participants at Delhi were drawn from the Southern Asian countries of India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan and represented a wide range of interests and disciplines: pastors, doctors, theologians, nurses, psychiatrists, social workers, health educators, development workers, hospital administrators, government officers, national coordinators of church-related health services, community health workers, lay church workers, charismatic healers, practitioners of indigenous systems of medicine (Ayurveda, Unani, Yoga and Homeopathy). The participant group was very ecumenical in being composed of Protestants, Catholics, Hindus, Moslems, Humanists, Seventh-Day Adventists, etc. Also present were Dr Sylvia Talbot, moderator of CMC, Dr Martin Scheel, vice-moderator, CMC staff members Dr Stuart Kingma, Dr Eric Ram, Mr Victor Vaca and Ms Heidi Schweizer as well as several commissioners and friends from different continents who attended with the idea of sharing experiences from, and to, other regions.

For many, it was the first time they had come together with others from totally different backgrounds to reflect on and interpret the concepts of health, healing and wholeness within the socio-cultural and religious context of the region. The consultation also provided an opportunity to make new contacts with neighbours and share each other's experiences and concerns.

The inaugural speech was made by Rev. Zarine Rolston, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of India. Rev. Rolston introduced a number of issues confronting the church in carrying out its healing ministry. The participants identified several additional issues and formed five working groups to discuss these in detail. The topics thus identified were: “Church and Health”, “Financing Community Health Programmes”, “Development”, “Human Values and Human Relationships” and “Charismatic Healing”. The highlights of the groups' reports are included in this report. |

Conclusions

The participants felt that the concept of wholeness is not alien to Asia but in fact characterizes much of what is known about family life and indigenous systems of healing in this region. Health tends to be viewed as an integration of all aspects of the person in relation to the whole cosmos, and a fulfillment of one's potential for creativity; it can emerge when a person has been healed, forgiven or changed and is open to continuing growth. Healing may require some kind of enlightenment or inner conversion, and conveys a sense of peace.

Wholeness in the Asian context can best be described by listing some of its elements:

- It is an experience of “Shanthi” in God.
- Forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God are important steps in achieving wholeness.
- It means having a sense of belonging, being accepted, understood, cared for and comforted, being a part of the sharing of joys and sorrows.
- It is not limited to individuals, but extends to the family and community.
- In terms of joint family and community, wholeness means having “common wealth”, sharing talents, gifts, love, joys, sorrows. This is disturbed when family relationships are broken by selfish actions.
- It means being “open”, allowing oneself to be a part of the larger family, living with a sense of community, where justice for all prevails, where basic needs such as for food, water, clothing, shelter, education, employment, etc., are met, and where brokenness is restored.
- Relationships, “ruralness” and a sense of simplicity and inner peace are important.
- Wholeness also means having self-dignity and self-confidence.
- Persons with disabilities can also experience this same sense of wholeness.