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C.T. Abraham

A Great Vision for an Overwhelming Task

by Elmer L. Towns



In May 1976 C.T. Abraham graduated from Liberty Baptist Seminary and returned to his home in India with a super-aggressive vision of evangelizing the 700 million in the second most populous nation in the world. To accomplish this task, Abraham wisely concluded that the biblical way to "capture India for Christ" was to do it the way his pastor, Jerry Falwell, was evangelizing America. He said, "The way to biblically present the gospel to every person in India is through super-aggressive local churches." Abraham organized the India Baptist Association under Priority One India, and by 1983 he was responsible for planting 83 Baptist churches. He has organized a pastor-training school in Kerala, South India, that currently has 13 full-time students. He is establishing a Christian college and seminary at Brahmavar, where there is already a 30-acre campus in development. He has a vision of offering preschool child care through college

and seminary. Abraham has a newspaper, *What?*, and is considering a weekly radio broadcast beamed from Sri Lanka into South India. His vision is big, his heart is big, and his country has big opportunities. Someone must evangelize India, a seemingly insurmountable goal. The question remains, "Is C.T. Abraham the man God will use to do it?"

C.T. Abraham was born in Kerala and came to know Jesus Christ at age 14 when an evangelist preaching in cottage prayer meetings stayed in his home. After an evening meeting the evangelist prayed with the family, and C.T. accepted Jesus Christ as his Saviour.

After conversion C.T. Abraham remained with his family in the Mar Thoma Church, a semi-Conservative denomination church lacking soulwinning zeal. He taught Sunday school and tried to preach, using his father's sermon notes. His father was principal of a local Mar Thoma grade school.

C.T. received his bachelor's degree from the University of Travancore in 1952 and his master's degree from Nagpur University in 1962. He taught science in high school, then became an instructor of teacher education at the university. Between 1969 and 1972 C.T. Abraham attended the University of Maryland, outside Washington, D.C. He finished his doctorate in education in 1972 and returned to India and taught at the university.

The following year, C.T. Abraham was interpreting for William Bebee in India when God called him to full-time Christian service. Bebee told C.T. about Liberty Baptist Seminary and he decided that was what he needed. C.T. was given a ticket to come to Maryland for a visit. From there he called the dean of Liberty, but found they did not have scholarships for foreign students. But C.T. Abraham knew God wanted him to train at Liberty Baptist Seminary. He paid his way to Lynchburg and while there was given a professor's rank to teach in the college and study in the seminary.

C.T. was baptized at Thomas Road Baptist Church and ordained into the ministry May 12, 1976. The following Sunday, Jerry Falwell asked C.T. to share his testimony on the Old-Time Gospel Hour. He told the audience, "I am going to start hundreds of churches in India."

Because of his evangelistic fervor, many churches closed their doors to him.

Nearly \$38,000 was mailed in for his ministry because of that two-minute testimony.

C.T. Abraham returned to India, trying to work with the churches of South India to revive and change them. He confessed, "I was not bold enough to start a new church." His family did not want him to start a Baptist church. Among their reasons was the fact that he had two relatives who were pastors in the Mar Thoma Church and CSI church. He organized an evangelistic ministry to the



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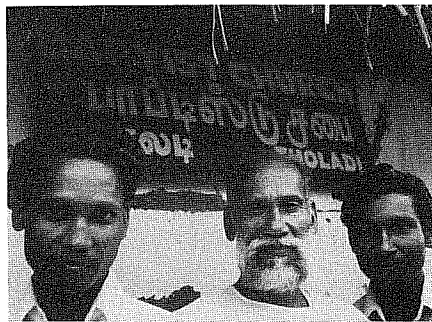
firsthand the work described in this article.

Mar Thoma churches that included a singing group of young people, such as he had seen at Thomas Road Baptist Church. The meetings were successful. One evening in his mother's hometown, there were 80 decisions for Jesus Christ.

Because of his evangelistic fervor, many churches closed their doors to him. At the same time C.T. Abraham saw the futility of trying to reverse bureaucratic machinery. He decided to become independent, not relying on denominational officials. In 1977 he resigned, remarking, "I didn't want to be excommunicated, because it would harm my future ministry in South India."

C.T. Abraham began a Baptist church in his living room, and the third Sunday his wife came forward to be baptized. Two years later he baptized his 76-year-old mother. From this church he began planting other churches. Then he formed the India Baptist Association.

He used the \$38,000 to build the Jerry Falwell Building, a concrete four-story structure that houses a printing press, the Bible Institute, the office for those in charge of church-planting, and one local church. The printing press is a crude, old-fashioned letter press, type is set by hand, and only a few copies can be printed per



minute. C.T. began the magazine *What?* in 1978, which circulates 1,200 copies. He also prints facts and booklets for mass distribution.

Work was slow in the beginning with only 14 baptized believers added to the church the first year. (They do not speak of members but of baptized believers.) When they find a mature believer, C.T. testifies, "We train him to pastor a church. If the person has education and is already trained, we encourage him to begin a church. If not, we encourage him to come to the Bible Institute to be trained. After a person is trained, he is sent to his home village to preach the gospel to the lost." C.T. encourages each church-planter to

rent a building where he can live with his family and hold meetings.

C.T. Abraham raises money through Priority One India, USA, a missions organization in the United States that supports the work in India. He gives each church-planter a living allowance of \$30 to \$50 a month, depending on the number of children and the cost of renting a building. The money is not given outright to the church-planter but is deposited in a bank from which he can write checks for the work.

The churches depend heavily upon visitation for evangelistic outreach. The pastor goes door-to-door inviting people to come to a prayer meeting, usually held in the evening. The evangelistic team of C.T. Abraham holds crusades in the village squares with musical teams where people gather each evening. As soon as possible, C.T. encourages the pastors to begin Sunday services. Usually, only baptized believers and new converts considering baptism will come to the Sunday services. The unsaved come to the evening prayer meetings but will not come to the Sunday meetings. When the church is stabilized, C.T. Abraham and the pastor begin looking for land, approximately 1/20 of an acre. Usually they build a shed, normally a pole building with just a roof, without walls.

At the present time, Priority One India has 83 churches, the smallest with 10 baptized believers and the largest with approximately 40 baptized believers. However, some have almost 100 people attending their prayer meetings.

C.T. Abraham receives support from several graduates of Liberty Baptist College and Seminary who studied with him, plus several Southern Baptist churches and other individuals.

In February 1983 there were 181 new converts baptized at the second convention of the India Baptist Association. Twelve pastors entered the river at one time to baptize the converts. John Houghton, from Clay Baptist Church, Clay, West Virginia, was baptizing at one end of the line and David Overton, pastor of Mitchell Hollow Mission Church, at the other end.

C.T. Abraham has a goal of establishing a total of 100 churches in India in 1984. He is building a Christian college facility in Brahmavar for training people (Bible college and seminary). The first Bible college in Kerala was closed because

of a confrontation with political parties and militant Communists who made it impossible for it to continue as a recognized college. However, it continues to operate as a pastoral-training institute, not a degree-granting institution. Currently there are 13 men being trained in residences.

The new Bible college and seminary in Brahmavar is not yet in operation.

The key to reaching India is planting an independent Baptist church in every town and village.

There is a grade school and dormitory on a 30-acre campus, called Little Rock Indian School. The foundation and walls are in for the college. There are three large wells for drinking, a rock-lined fish pond, rice fields, and cattle stalls. C.T. is building a home on adjacent property. A hospital and orphanage is also under construction. There are 130 people working full time in India under the supervision of C.T. Abraham. His son-in-law, an administrator of a local recognized college, will give C.T. help in getting his Christian college established and recognized.

The pressure from political parties and Communist groups forced C.T. Abraham to move to another state. In spite of this the original work in Kerala has gone forward, not backward. Churches are prospering; more people are being baptized.

At age 51, C.T. Abraham says that the key to reaching all of India is planting an independent Baptist church in every town and village. That is a formidable task, for there are almost a half-million villages. He explained, "The New Testament church went forward in the Book of Acts as new churches were planted wherever the gospel was preached." Abraham says, "Radio, newspaper, and—one day—television will all help reach India for Christ, but God's plan is planting local churches that will evangelize the lost and teach the saints."