

CHRISTIAN FRIEDRICH SCHWARTZ – by Mrs. Sheila Dinakar

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Phil 1:21

Born on 8th October 1726 at Sonnenburg, in the then country of Prussia, Christian Friedrich Schwartz was one of the earliest Protestant missionaries to arrive in India. He was sent out by the Danish mission representing the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK). He was a man of unusual ability and insight into the cause of Christ in foreign missions. Seeing the need for trained leaders, he started some of the first Christian schools in India. He trained national evangelists by precept, example, and in the school of prayer. A brilliant man, he could preach fluently and effectively in English, Tamil, Portuguese, and German and was an accomplished scholar in Hebrew and Greek. Having learnt Tamil in order to assist in the translation of the Bible into that language, he was led to become a missionary to India. He received ordination at Copenhagen on 8th August 1749, and, after spending some time in England to acquire the English language, embarked early in 1750 for India.

He arrived at Tiruchirapalli (present day Trichy) on 30th July via Tranquebar and was initially appointed as chaplain to the garrison in Trichy. Schwartz's direct success in spreading the gospel exceeded that of any other Protestant missionary in India. He secured the friendship of the king Raja Serfoji, who, although he never converted to Christianity, became his trusted friend and helped him in every way possible. Raja Serfoji built a church to show his affection to Schwartz and before his death, he committed to Schwarz the education of his adopted son and another pupil named Vedanayagam whom Schwartz taught using the gurukulam approach, where both teacher and taught live together.

Schwartz was not discouraged by little fruit in his early days but frequently called to mind that a time for sowing precedes that of reaping. His ministry extended beyond that to the nationals. There were many

European government officials, military personnel, and merchants in India with whom he had contact and extensive correspondence.

To one he wrote: My dear John, examine your heart and whatever you find in it that is not agreeable to the will of God-and you will find much of that sort-acknowledge it, bewail it before your God, entreat Him to wash and cleanse you from all your sins. Rest not till you find rest to your soul.

And to another: When I consider all, high and low, rulers and the ruled, I am struck with grief and a variety of passions. What blindness, insensibility, obstinacy, greediness, and rapaciousness. A thousand times I think withinmyself "Oh, my God, must all these people die? Must they all appear before the tribunal of Jesus, the Mediator and the Judge? How little do they mind their end and the consequences of their lives!" Still I am happy to be made the instrument of Providence to instruct some and to warn others. Who knows but there may come a time when others may reap what we have been sowing.

To another he penned: The atonement of Jesus Christ is the foundation of my hope, peace, life, and happiness. Though I am covered all over with sin, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses me from all my iniquities and sets my heart at rest. But if, instead of trusting in Christ and in His consummate atonement, we rely on our own virtue and consequently try to stand upon our own foundation, we shall never enjoy one moment's peace of mind. Let us, therefore, seek for pardon, peace, and joy in Jesus.

He was tactful and tried not to offend caste, but ministered to all - both high and low. Schwartz never married, but he loved children. He started a home and school for orphans. He was of the mind of Paul. He wrote: If a new missionary comes out, his first work, besides an attention to his personal religion, is the learning of languages, which requires great attention and unwearied application. I will not say that a married man is unable to learn languages, but I know from experience in others that the work goes on very slowly. Besides, a missionary who comes out in the

married state wants many things to maintain his family decently, which may distract him. If one should enter into that state after he had become qualified for his office, the difficulty would be less and even then he ought to be well assured of her real piety. Otherwise, she will be a sore impediment to him in the discharge of his duties.

Schwartz continued voicing his own sincere desires: But to win Christ and to be found in Him in life, in death, in the day of judgment was St. Paul's wish, has been the wish of all genuine Christians, and shall be mine as long as I breathe.

In his almost 50 years of missionary service in India, there is no record of his ever having returned to Europe. He died at the age of 71 in 1798. His legacy: a large Christian community of all castes and ethnic backgrounds. He said, "Let the cause of Christ be my heir." A few years before his death, he wrote "Let me not flag. May my last days be my best."

(Sheila and Dinakar and their children Shedin and Shirley attend BMC and are a part of the Marathahalli area fellowship).