



**Report on the International Conference on Climate Change and the Developing World at Kottayam, Kerala, India in Jan 2015
Representative of the Church of Scotland Rev Norman Hutcheson**

The conference was located at the CMS College, founded 200 years ago at Kottayam by the Rev Benjamin Bailey where it would become a " place of general education whence any demands of the state for officers to fill all departments of public service would be met".

Sitting in extensive land, it offers 14 departments with 47 different courses.

The Conference was arranged by the Church of South India in conjunction with the College and Nilackal Ecological Commission.



The Conference opened with Dr Daniel, Principal, and other State and Church dignitaries lighting the lamp that offers wisdom.

There were many presentations to follow over the next few days, but Sadhvi Bhagawati placed before the audience the following telling story

There were 3 men adrift on the ocean sailing in a single boat. As the times pass, they become irritated by each other and decide to divide the boat into three sections. Their privacy and territory is their sole concern, so they mark in invisible terms the area exclusive to each person. No one must cross over into another's territory. One night, all three wake up discovering that the boat is filling with water, and find that it is holed at the water line. The owner of the section refuses to cooperate with the other two, demanding that the integrity of his space is absolute. While they all argue, the boat fills up and eventually sinks, because no one had the right to stop the flooding. The world argued Sadhvi Bhagawati, was in the same situation as the boat, with no one taking corrective and cooperative action



Her mentor Pujva Swamiji has created a UN affiliated organisation WASH, water, sanitation and Hygiene. 1200 children under 5 years die every day in India due to poor sanitation and impure water, and round the world many more. The inter faith Alliance (GIWA) is the worlds first initiative that is engaging the planet's many faiths to create a world where every human being has access to safe drinking water, improved sanitation and proper hygiene. Part of this project is aimed at the vast number of homes that have no sanitation, and toilet facilities are somewhere out in the bush areas around villages. This contributes in part to poor health and the spread of rural disease

BV Raghunath reported in his paper that meat production in India was poorly regulated, and in a land with water shortages, blood, urine and other waste is often dumped in landfill or in lakes.

Dr Oomen V. Oommen, Chairman of the state Biodiversity Board warned of the dangers of water abuse, and in particular the role that water held in the climate change debate. The Aral Sea had shrunk after scientists and engineers had manipulated the Sea, and similar projects on the river systems of India were in danger of destroying the eco balance.

Mr S S Davidson from the Tribal Foundation, made a plea for the indigenous people of rural India. The Kaani of the South east India, a forest living animist tribe, had lived in the forests for centuries. Their wisdom was to know the value of plants, and their healing properties, and by their own living care for the forests that were home to them. However water degradation in the river system, plus drought created by climate change over the last few years has made life difficult for the Kaani people.

Energy issues are at the forefront of Indian state policy. President Obama was in New Delhi for Republic Day, and Prime Minister Modi and the President discussed the nuclear options for India. Perhaps the most spirited attack on the whole nuclear issue came from Dr S P Udayakumar in his capacity as Convener People's movement against Nuclear Energy. His argument focused on the danger issues of nuclear power, the long lasting effects of disposal of used rods, but his main attack was reserved for the political elite who he saw as corrupt, seeking only their own interests. In a land with 50% illiteracy, and 40% of children undernourished, the question had to be asked for whom was the nuclear industry being extended?



Dr VS Vijayan from the Western Ghats shared his concerns with the audience. The mountain chain of the Western Ghats represents geomorphic features of immense importance with unique biophysical and ecological processes. The site's high montane forest ecosystems influence the Indian monsoon weather pattern. Moderating the tropical climate of the region, the site presents one of the best examples of the monsoon system on the planet. It also has an exceptionally high level of biological diversity and endemism and is recognized as one of the world's eight 'hottest hotspots' of biological diversity. This area is home to wide diversity of plants and mammals, but is

under constant threat from excessive logging programmes and planting programmes. He continued with reference to the wetlands o east Calcutta, which are used to deliver 11000 tonnes of fish per day and 55000 tonnes of vegetables. But at a price, that due to the extensive use of pesticides hospital admissions are rising. He claimed that the umbilical cord of new born infants contained no less than 287 pesticides and heavy metals.



The challenge to us as Christians, and not all present were Christian, was set by the Bishop Thomas K Oommen ,Bishop of Madhya Kerala Diocese. His challenge was based on the missiological call of the Lambeth Conference in 1988 that had asked for under article 5 of the call to Mission that “the churches pursue the integrity of God’s creation and sustain the life of the earth”. This document had built on the work of the WCC at Canberra in 1983.



This is an academic institution with an excellent Botany Department. Students from the Department had produced a book, illustrating over 500 plants that were found on the campus



The students also laid on an evening of Kerala Dance and traditional music....



....as well as being on hand to show visitors to the various meeting places.

There were in total 3 non Indian representatives who spoke at the conference. I presented a paper on the eco Congregational movement in Scotland. Prof Dr Christoph Woiwode works foer the Indo-German Centre for Sustainability at Madras. And Dr David Reichardt spoke on the Murray River Basin of Sydney. David is an eco theologian, working with the Church of North India while on voluntary service from the Uniting Church of Australia



The Conference was challenging and enjoyable. The rich vein of articulate men and women engaging on a complex range of topics, together with high level support from Churches of various persuasions, I believe gives hope for the future. There mains muwork to be done, not least in the field of sanitation and

But as a final thought - on the beach at Fort Kochi on the Arabian Sea stands a crab made out of thousands of recycled plastic bottles. Someone in Kerala has taken recycling seriously

