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C.O.T.R. Theological Seminary

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EDITORIAL

It gives us immense joy to introduce JCOTRTS with its first edition of the second volume. We want to thank the Triune God for enabling us to bring forth this edition. It becomes a prerogative to take part in the wider and glorious ministry of God through this journal. “Synergy is energy” as one of the famous sayings goes. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all who were involved in shaping this journal (contributors, editors, press and management).

The articles in this book are contributed by various scholars in their fields of expertise. Mr. Viju Wilson writes about “Christian Witness in the Changing Context of India.” Dr. Jessy Jaison states that Practical Theology is a transformative praxis which brings holistic formation in theological education. Dr. Gladstone Robert gives an overview of Ecumenism from a Biblical perspective. Mr. Abraham Thomas gives a historical perspective on the emergence of Christianity in India with a special emphasis on St. Thomas Tradition. Dr. Ambrose Selvaraj provides a challenge to fight for the transformation of Dalits in contemporary society. Dr. Gladson Jathanna gives an account of the “Zenana Mission” which is a women’s mission wing of Hermannsberg Mission society in the state of A.P., India. Rev. Sunil Kumar portrays the concept of non-human weakness from undisputed Pauline writings.

Finally, the journal ends with a review on P.G.George’s edited work on “Theological Research in the Global South: Prospects and Challenges,” by Mr. Josfin Raj.

The articles in this journal in common leave a note of our responsibility towards the various issues related to church, evangelism, theological education, and social involvement. Our knowledge, relationship and study of God’s word must make us feel responsible for the issues in and outside the church, and lead us to praxis. The more we grow, the more we become

mature; the more we are informed, the more we become responsible. This reminds me of the vision statement of COTRTS: “Transforming the world through anointed and informed servants of God.” Transformation of both church and society can happen when we have the strength of God and knowledge of issues. So, this is our prayer that as we continue to share knowledge, may God fill us with His grace to transform the world through His power.

D. Suhas

Christian Witness in the Changing Context of India

Viju Wilson*

Introduction

Faith communities are placed in the midst of social realities. No faith community can go forward without responding to the issues of the society. Closing the eyes towards the hopes and fears of people, particularly the vulnerable in respective society is tantamount to ignoring the Divine in them. Though the world has come of age in terms of technological and scientific development, the human community has not yet formed as a 'just and humane' community. Challenges in micro and macro level go on increasing day by day. We have religions, ideologies, philosophies to transform the human community into a humane community. Yet anxiety, despair, helplessness, powerlessness, vulnerability prevails in different avatars in the social life. The time has come to re-think the life and witness of faith community within itself and in the larger society. A brief discussion is made in this paper on Christian witness in the changing context of society and Church/Christian community.

1. Society at a Glance

1.1. 'I am high caste therefore I am...; you are low-caste/outcaste therefore you are....'

Caste is the life-line for many, if not the majority of the people in Indian society. In fact, the socio-political-economic-religious spheres are moved by the engine of caste.¹ As Arundhati Roy noted, the role caste can be known vividly, "when you look at India, through the prism of caste, at who control the money, who owns the corporations, who owns the big media, who makes up judiciary, the bureaucracy, who owns the land, who doesn't-contemporary India suddenly begins to look extremely un-contemporary."² It is true that media, politics, business, etc., are controlled by high caste elites. Very few low castes or Dalits/Tribals can be seen in the 'elite club.' In the discourse

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¹ Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2010), 30.

² Saba Naqvi, "We need Ambedkar-Now urgently...", *Interview with Arundhati Roy*, Outlook (10 March 2014, New Delhi), 29.

of caste, it is common that while the Dalits and low castes talk about caste publically to expose its operation, the upper castes cover-up the caste through studied silence on it in public and get benefits and power through it secretly.³ It is shocking that caste even dominates in the political parties which claim to be progressive and revolutionary in thinking and ideologies. A.R. Mollah, CPI (M) leader in West Bengal publicly questioned “why party in west Bengal continues to be dominated by Banerjees, Chatterjees and Bhattacharjees, Brahmins in short.”⁴ It sends the message that the caste factor is a key element in climbing the political ladder in India. In our society, it is not hard to notice that education and technology may bring change in the society, but not in the attitude of people towards caste. The words of Smt. Mayawati, former Chief Minister of Utter Pradesh underline the same, “...today an upper caste cobbler or tea-seller will still be given more respect than a Dalit collector.”⁵ It implies that as long as caste consciousness continues in the minds of people, low caste/out caste will not be respected equally, and Dalitness/Tribalness and backwardness will be perpetuated. When a Dalit groom was dragged down from his buggy by upper caste men and shouted that he was not privileged to sit on a buggy⁶ we are reminded that caste consciousness is not diminished as we claim. The various manifestations of caste-both hidden and open and the absence of low castes/outcastes in various fields loudly proclaims reality that ‘I am high caste therefore I am well placed and respected; you are low-caste/outcaste therefore you are in the bottom of the social-political-economic ladder.’

1.2. ‘She’ has no space in the ‘He’ society

The life of women continues to be vulnerable in the society which is dictated by the patriarchal notion of power relations and outlook. She is a historical victim without voice, power and equal respect and dignity. Her space is restricted and mobility is controlled. Her resistance and self-assertion will invite derogatory comments, physical assault and iniquitous actions. If she challenges the ‘Panchayat of Men,’ the Patriarchal Panchayat, she will be disciplined. In Greater Noida, Utter Pradesh, a woman was paraded in public with a pair of shoes on her neck because she daringly ignored the diktat of Panchayat and filed a molestation complaint against the youths.⁷

³ Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology*, 30-32.

⁴ Uttam Sengupta, “The House of the Upper Crust,” *Outlook* (17th February 2014, New Delhi), 19.

⁵ Sharat Pradhan, “The Jumbo in the Ring,” *Outlook* (24th February 2014, New Delhi), 24.

⁶ *The Times of India* (24 February 2014, New Delhi), 5.

⁷ *Sunday Times Of India* (16th February, 2014, New Delhi), 7.

This is a symbolic manifestation of a social disease thanks to patriarchy. In spite of educational and technological advancement, our society has not come out of the distorted thinking that birth of a girl child is a burden. When she was not able to bear the insults on the birth of her daughter a mother threw her 15 days-old child on the floor.⁸ We live in the larger society where ‘kangaroo’ courts, courts of ‘unwise men’ decide the dignity of women. According to their perverted sense, rape/gang rape is the only weapon or method to punish or correct the so-called ‘errant’ women.⁹ Women’s space in politics is meager even though listed women voters for every 1000 men are 803. They constitute a powerful voting bloc, but they will not be allowed to know their power.¹⁰ Women are welcomed to ‘cast the vote’ but not to ‘share the power.’ Therefore it is not surprise that India is ranked in 73rd position for the participation of women in politics.¹¹ These realities show that our society is a ‘he’ society where ‘she’ has not the adequate space and power. The women of lower caste origin are more ‘spaceless’ than their counterparts in high castes. ‘He’ controls everything and ‘she’ is forced to dance according to ‘his’ tune in domestic and public platforms. This situation demands attitudinal change in ‘him’ to share equal space and power with her.

1.3. They are made Poor...

Two years ago, the Planning Commission of India (now replaced by NITI Ayog) claimed that there was a drastic change in the poverty level. According to their calculation, 137 million people have come out of poverty in 2004-2011. It means the poverty level has reduced from 37% to 22%. This claim of poverty eradication was based on the criteria that those who are able to earn/spend Rs. 33 and Rs. 27 per day urban and rural respectively are not in poverty.¹² But the content and provisions of Food Security Bill which was passed in the 15th Lok Sabha logically contradicts this claim. The food security bill aimed to cover 82 crore people or 67% (75 % rural and 50% urban) of India’s population by providing rice, wheat or coarse grain at low rate: rice and wheat at Rs. 3 and Rs. 2 per kg respectively.¹³ The natural target of this bill is none other than the poor who can’t buy rice or wheat at market price. It proves that poverty still prevails in our nation. For, Gustavo Gutierrez

⁸ Sunday Times Of India (16th February, 2014, New Delhi), 7.

⁹ Suhrid Sankar Chattopadhyay, “Rape as Retribution,” Frontline (21 February, 2014), 22.

¹⁰ Arati R Jerath, “Women Voters: Hard to Get,” Sunday Times of India (9th March, 2014, New Delhi), 14.

¹¹ The Times of India (17th March, 2014, New Delhi), 14.

¹² Lola Nayar, Anuradha Raman and Pragya Singh, “The Line We Cross,” Outlook (5th August, 2013), 20-25.

¹³ The Times of India (27th August, 2013, Delhi), 1.

“Poverty is an expression of a sin, that is, of a negation of love.”¹⁴ The poor remain as poor or becomes poorer because of the negation of love: unwillingness to share the resources properly.

Though unbelievable, it was reported that more than half of Indians (64%) do defecation in the open space.¹⁵ People cannot be blamed for it because they can't afford to have a toilet in the home. Bindeshwar Pathak, founder of Sulabh International, an NGO dedicated to the elimination of manual scavenging is right when he says, “the priorities of the poor are different; food and shelter have greater urgency for them than toilets.”¹⁶ Swatch Bharth Mission may bring changes in this regard. 3.8 lakh households in Delhi (10% of its population) are located in slums.¹⁷ Last year, 11,000 voter identity cards which carried address as ‘homeless’ were issued in Delhi.¹⁸ It is reported that there are 1-1.5 lakhs homeless people in Delhi. While hearing the pathetic condition of homeless people, Acting Chief Justice B.D. Ahmed and Siddharth Mridal of Delhi High Court Bench remarked, “This is India in 2014?”¹⁹ In 2013, there were 37, 059 street children in Mumbai, economic capital of India. Many of them were involved in begging, doing odd jobs, rag picking, construction work etc. while some were addicted to drugs, about half of them had gone through some form of abuse.²⁰ Though in representative form, these statistics reveals the life situations of poor in the society. As per the recent estimate we have 1 NGO for every 600 people.²¹ Still we have poor, homeless, slum dwellers, etc., in the society. They are not faceless or nameless, the majority of them belong to either Dalit or Tribal or other weaker sections of the society.

But the economic disparity between rich and poor is concealed by the exaggerated growth stories and the elevation of a few into the elite economic club. Multinational companies amass wealth by reducing large number of people into the state of poverty. Corporate Social Responsibility’ is a mask to justify the exploitation of human labor and natural resources.²²

¹⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 295.

¹⁵ Uttam Sengupta, “...Are the Taps Working?” *Outlook* (21st October 2013 New Delhi), 36.

¹⁶ Uttam Sengupta, “...Are the Taps Working?,” 43.

¹⁷ *Sunday Times of India* (September 1, 2013, New Delhi), 8.

¹⁸ Saba Naqvi, “That Chill in the Bones,” *Outlook* (3, February, 2014, New Delhi), 31.

¹⁹ *The Hindu* (27 February 2014, New Delhi), 3.

²⁰ Anupama Katakam, “Salaam Mumbai,” *Frontline* (January 24, 2014), 109.

²¹ *Sunday Times of India* (23 February 2014, New Delhi), 1

²² Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology*, 32-33.

The unethical promotion of privatization causes the deprivation of jobs and makes the poor people poorer in the society. For example, attempt to privatize sweeping work in the municipal corporations will force Dalits to work on contract basis with less wage and job insecurity.²³ In short, the poor are created by the pro-rich economic policies of the government, with less implementation of welfare programmes, the apathy to share the resources.

1.4. You are foreigner, black, flat nosed, having ‘unusual’ hair...

Defining and stereotyping people on the basis of their color, dress, physical structure, food, hair style, place of birth, etc., What we call racism, has become a daily reality in our society. The manifestation of this demon includes verbal slur, physical attack, negation of jobs, eviction from rented homes, denying accommodation, sexual harassment, rape, etc. The Africans who are working and studying in India face the racial discrimination which often ends up in physical violence, sexual harassment. In November 2013, Simeon Uzoma Obodo, a Nigerian national was killed in a confrontation with locals in Goa. The racial discrimination is no more an isolated issue or incident. The clash between Congolese students and Indian students in a university in Punjab in last year²⁴ shows that education does not change the racial mindset of students. In both cases, there were repercussions in the respective countries too. People came out and protested against the racial attacks on their nationals in India. In Congo, the protesters attacked Indian shops in the capital, and one Indian was injured. In the context of forcible eviction of Nigerians in Goa after the killing of Simeon Uzoma Obodo, Jacob Nwadia, Nigerian consular official in New Delhi even warned that “Thousands of Indians living in Nigeria will be thrown out on the streets if the forcible eviction of Nigerians in Goa does not stop.” Often the racists define the African nationals as part of ‘sex and drug rackets.’ Dayanand Mandrekar, Tourism minister of Goa, described Nigerians as a ‘cancer.’²⁵ He comments as if Indians are not part of sex and drug rackets! The mid-night raid of former Law Minister Somnath Bharti on African households in Khirki, New Delhi, on 6th January 2014, in the pretext of hounding ‘sex and drug racket’ was racially motivated. It is very much evident in his comment “These people are not like us. All Nigerians girls and men indulge in prostitution and drug trafficking,” posing a threat to “local ma, behen and beti” (mothers, sisters

²³ Saba Naqvi, “*We need Ambedkar-Now urgently...*,” 31.

²⁴ Pranay Sharma and Debarshi Dasgupta, “No Dark Pearls Wanted,” Outlook (10th February 2014, New Delhi), 66.

²⁵ Pranay Sharma and Debarshi Dasgupta, “No Dark Pearls Wanted,” 67.

and daughters)”)”²⁶ This moral policing is, in fact, ‘racial policing’ which traumatizes the African nationals, particularly the children, socially and psychologically.

In India the racial prejudice does not end with the foreigners. People paint their co-nationals racially and treat them as second class citizens. Nido Tania, a student from Arunachal Pradesh, was brutally battered, and later succumbed to death in New Delhi. The only ‘mistake’ he did in the eyes of racists was he questioned the racial slur. The violence against North Indians in Mumbai is also racial spurt.²⁷

Some are stereotyped because of their food habits. It is more common in North Indian cities and villages. If you are a vegetarian you are good, civilized; only welcome to certain localities, flats or apartments, etc. Non-veg are even banned in some flats/residential buildings. One responded that “they (land lords) say the smell makes them want to vomit.” Mangal, 29 year-old M.Phil student JNU from North East India says “we prefer meat but people object to our eating it. When some students cook and bring their food to the mess-halls, others stare or grumble.”²⁸ In this context, one must also notice the irony that some may oppose or ban non-veg in their flats/houses and degrade those who eat non-veg, but they will eat the same in the KFCs or McDonalds or restaurants which are distant to their houses, so that their ‘social standing’ will not be suspected!

The people who are possessed by the demon of racism are blind to the service rendered by the victims of racial insult. The poetic comments of Mr. Kumar Vishwas, poet-turned-politician, on Kerala nurses are best example in the regard. For him, color of skin is the criteria for respect and dignity, not the merit of service.²⁹

Things have gone to such an extreme that citizens of the nation are not able to stay peacefully where they wish to reside. A resident welfare association in New Delhi even decided to evict all renters from the North Eastern States in its locality. But the association had to retract its decision after the interference of police and activists.³⁰ The racialsists do not think that non-north easterners also can be sent out of north eastern states, which can be least expected from the north eastern brothers and sisters who are committed to respect and protect their guests and neighbors who are outside of the territory.

²⁶ Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta, “Properties of Prejudice,” *Frontline* (February 21, 2014), 30.

²⁷ *The Times of India* (15th February 2014, New Delhi), 15.

²⁸ Shreya Roy Chowdhury, “Divide and Protect?” *Sunday Times Of India* (16th February, 2014, New Delhi), 8.

²⁹ Purnima S. Tripathi, “APP’s Day Out,” *Frontline* (February 21, 2014), 32.

³⁰ *The Times of India* (5 March 2014, New Delhi), 5.

In short, racism is a social disease. It must be treated urgently with strong laws, and by teaching and conscientizing the people about the equal value of human life in different colors, shape, life-style etc. Heterogeneity is beautiful, not homogeneity. Africans are not ‘cancer’ but racism is cancer which would demoralize the society and demonize the people who do not share same traits. Racially ‘sick’ people only can see others as ‘foreigner, black, flat nosed and having ‘unusual’ hair.

1.5. Money Rules the Political Space, Not Ideology

A serious analysis on the Indian political scenario will inform us that it is getting criminalized and corrupted day by day. It is a disturbing fact that 162 out of 541 MPs (Member of Parliament) in 15th Lok Sabha were with criminal records, and 76 were with serious criminal records.³¹ Now, it has been common that political parties compete each other to support the corrupt corporates than to defend the cause of poor.³² Except for a few voices of dissent now and then, most of the politicians either keep quiet on particular issue related to the corporates or openly defend it. The words of Vijay G. Kalantri, Chairman and Managing Director of Dighi Port Ltd, gives more clarity in this regard, “Nobody in India has become big without political support or patronage. Also to run a large corporate house you need political patronage and support, otherwise it is difficult in the present circumstances as the system is very cumbersome.”³³ The corporates/business houses get support beyond party lines. The political patronage helps the corporates to amass wealth disproportionately. As long as they enjoy the political support they can go on building up their businesses by getting unfair subsidies, government land at cheap price or freely or by violating environmental laws etc.³⁴ The politicians who extend their support to the business empires will be rewarded either in cash or in kind. Business is always two-way transactions: give and take. The words of Chaudhary Birender Singh, Rajya Sabha M.P. from Haryana, “Politics is the best business in this country”³⁵ speaks a lot in this regard. In the context of the apparent unholy relationship between politicians and business class, when people from corporate sector or business houses

³¹ Uttam Sengupta and Prachi Pinglay-Plumber, “A Dream Died Young,” Outlook (5th August, 2013), 39.

³² Lola Nayar, Arindam Mukherjee and Madhavi Tata, “The Great Gas Heist,” Outlook (15th July, 2013), 32-40.

³³ Sunit Arora, “All Along the Waterfront,” Outlook (10 March 2014, New Delhi), 46.

³⁴ Sunit Arora, “All Along the Waterfront,” 46-50 & Lola Nayar, Free Lunches: Gujarati Thalís, Outlook (10 March 2014, New Delhi), 48.

³⁵ Uttam Sengupta, “The House of the Upper Crust,” 18.

is getting elected to the Parliament, particularly to Rajya Sabha, the role of money can't be completely ruled out.³⁶ It does not mean that wealthy people cannot be elected. Once Chaudhary Birender Singh even revealed the 'cost' of Rajya Sabha seat (Rs. 80 crore).³⁷ The presence of more crorepathis and movie actors and actresses as candidates in the elections again points to the preference of money over ideological position. Moreover, today, 'political prostitution'- switching over from one to other political parties without considering the ideological difference-is not uncommon among the politicians particularly during the time of elections. In sum, developments in the present political scenario shows that ideology has taken a back seat; money has been brought into the driving seat.

1.6. Life on Bribe

It is an unhidden reality that our life is on bribe. Though there are exceptional cases, from top to bottom of the administrative services in different levels are not immune to the culture of 'bribe.' We live in a situation in which common people cannot get their things done from the government offices without facing the reality of 'bribe.' One may meet a few people who have not given bribe in their lives in any form. It implies that our nation still continues as bribe nation. One study says that "Rs. 6, 29, 675 crore was paid as bribe by adult urban Indians each year."³⁸ Quite a lot of young parliamentarians irrespective of political parties are charged under the Prevention of Corruption Act.³⁹ Media also has been accused of burying the corrupt cases. Regarding the alleged nexus of politicians and corporates on gas price-hike, two years back, Arvind Kejriwal of Aam Admi Party said "I wonder if the electronic media is the main culprit in shutting out debates on the issue (Gas Price Hike). There has been no single discussion on such a crucial topic. The media has not turned its attention to the most pressing issue before the people. The pressures are of being owned by the corporates."⁴⁰ Media cannot resist the corporates because it is also a big corporate! For Arundhati Roy, corruption is not the problem, but a manifestation of a problem.⁴¹ Some may say that corruption is the result of economic disparity or greed or imbalanced distribution of resources. The words of Dalai Lama lead to another

³⁶ Uttam Sengupta, "The House of the Upper Crust," 19.

³⁷ Uttam Sengupta, "The House of the Upper Crust," 18.

³⁸ Damayanti Datta, "The Bribe Republic," *India Today* (22th July, 2013), 19.

³⁹ Uttam Sengupta and Prachi Pinglay-Plumber, "A Dream Died Young," 38.

⁴⁰ Anuradha Raman and Prarthna Gahilote, "Lips and Purse-Strings," *Outlook* (15th July, 2013), 35.

⁴¹ Saba Naqvi, "We need Ambedkar-Now urgently....," 33.

aspect of life. He said, "...corruption in a religious country like India is a big contradiction."⁴² It means lack of the orientation of life based on religious values contribute, if not fully, to the perpetuation of corruption in this nation.

1.7. You are Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh....Not Indian

India is a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic.⁴³ Though the original meaning of 'secularism' denotes a complete separation of religion and the state, Indian secularism in a strong religiously pluralistic situation refers to equal support and acceptance of all religions by the state.⁴⁴ Dalai Lama recently said, "...India is a living example of religious harmony and secular ethics. The Indian Constitution is based on secularism."⁴⁵ But today, though not fully, the secular society is polarized in terms of caste and religion. Religious polarization appears to be more disastrous than any other sort of division. In the context of the political use of religion, the very idea of secularism has been distorted. It also has been interpreted in terms of 'minority appeasement.'⁴⁶

Communal polarization in the name of religion and consequent violence is an important threat to the Indian secular fabric. It threatens our pluralistic heritage and destroys communal harmony. Even after 66 years of independence, communal tensions continue throughout the nation. Communal violence in Assam in 2013, took 100 lives, and 450,000 people became homeless.⁴⁷ Since March 2012, there were more than two dozen major or minor communal violence happened in Utter Pradesh.⁴⁸ It is viewed that for Muslims, "communalism is a much bigger issue than corruption."⁴⁹ The communal tensions are the signs of intolerance and mistrust among the communities.

The vote bank politics adds fuel to the fire of communal polarization and violence. The post-Babri Masjid violence in Utter Pradesh (1992), post-Godhra violence in Gujarat (2002), and recent one in Muzaffar Nagar in Utter Pradesh (2013) etc., are examples of the desperate attempts of politicians to keep intact or increase their vote bank through 'the politics of hatred.'⁵⁰

⁴² The Times of India (March 21, 2014, New Delhi), 6.

⁴³ The Constitution of India, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India, 1989, 1.

⁴⁴ Wendy Doniger, "The Hindu Code in Vanishing Ink," Outlook (24th February 2014, New Delhi), 16-18.

⁴⁵ The Times of India (March 21, 2014, New Delhi), 6.

⁴⁶ Wendy Doniger, "The Hindu Code in Vanishing Ink," 18.

⁴⁷ Kaushik Deka, "Extortion Bid Sparked Assam Riots," India Today (15th July, 2013), 48.

⁴⁸ Sharat Pradhan, "Speck of Sand in the Eye," Outlook (19th August, 2013), 30.

⁴⁹ Tanweer Alam, "Top Myths About Muslims," The Times of India (March 21, 2014, New Delhi), 20.

⁵⁰ Aroon Purie, "From the Editor-in-Chief," India Today (September 23, 2013), 1.

According to TRS Subramanian, cabinet secretary of India from 1996-1998, "India's vote banks are still based on religion and community, rather than performance and economic interests. This can be exploited by parties, as seems to have happened in Muzaffarnagar, where SP wants to solidify its Muslim vote and BJP and RLD their upper-caste and Jat vote banks."⁵¹ The communal polarization in electoral politics is blessed and initiated by the politicians. In the pretext of protecting minorities, they create minority vote banks. This often leads to counter-polarization of Hindu voters which mainly benefit BJP and its allies.⁵² It is also to be noted that whether the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 or the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984⁵³ or the Niyogi Committee Report on the Missionary Activities in Madhya Pradesh in 1965⁵⁴ or the reconversion of Christians and the destruction of Churches to build temples in Dangs District in Gujarat in 1997⁵⁵ or ghar vapsi (reconversion) are the outcome of the larger agenda of communal politics which polarizes the society. The continuation of communal riots, tensions, grouping, even on simple or local issues, shows that the forces of communalism have won, to a large extent, in polarizing the people in religious lines. The result is defining people religiously in all aspects of life that 'you are Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh...Not Indians.' Now, it is not national identity, but our religious identity that matters. For instance, in electoral politics, wherever mixed religious communities in equal or slightly different proportion exist, majority religious sentiments of the particular constituency are evoked. In the case of one religious community which constitutes a majority in a constituency, caste or denomination or sect card is used. We are polarized!

2. Christian Community in Changing Context: Quantity, Quality, and Identity

St. Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus, is traditionally believed to have brought the Christian faith to India in 52 AD. Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal missionaries came in different periods, and established their respective ecclesiastical systems and traditions. People from different social backgrounds became Christians throughout the centuries. The missionaries and the native Christians established Churches, schools, colleges, hospitals, etc., as part of their missions in different parts of the nation. Consequently, Christianity emerged as one of the religious traditions/communities in India.

⁵¹ Kunal Pradhan, "Riot for Vote," *India Today* (September 23, 2013), 26.

⁵² Kunal Pradhan, "Riot for Vote," 25.

⁵³ Pavan K. Varma, "A Deeply Sorry Game," in *The Times Of India* (15th February 2014, New Delhi), 20.

⁵⁴ Prem Anthony, "Church, State and the Civil Society," *VJTR*, Vol 78/no 2 (March, 2014): 166-182 at 174.

⁵⁵ Prarthna Gahilote, "Some Old Footfalls?," *Outlook* (24th February 2014, New Delhi), 14.

As it stands today as one of the minority religious communities in the changing context of 21st century India, its condition is not encouraging in terms of its existence and witness, particularly in relation to the advancement of Christians in different fields.

2.1. Quantitative Decline

According to the Census of India 2011, the Christians constitute only 2.3 % (2.78crores) of the total population of India.⁵⁶ 46% of Indian Christians live in five southern states. Seven north eastern states and Goa are home to 30% of Christians. Rest of the country house 24% of the Christian population.⁵⁷ When we analyze censuses of 1981, 2001 and 2011 there is decline in the number of Christians. In 1981, Christians were 2.42 % of total population. In 2001, it came down to 2.34%. In 2011 the percentage remains the same. It means within 30 years, according to government data, there is no growth in Christianity. One of the main reasons for the ‘official’ decline is dual-religious membership. For example, a number of Dalit Christians keep ‘Hindu identity’ in their official documents for getting Scheduled Caste privileges. Many of them have returned back to Hindu fold also.⁵⁸ Of course, the mission organizations can claim otherwise. There may be truth in their claims too. Even if we believe the claims of mission organizations, the present growth does not do justice to the economic and human resources spent till date. The geographical presence of Christianity-more in Southern and North Eastern States and less in Northern States- does not support the growth stories.

But whatever may be the claims and disclaims on the quantity, one can not negate the fact that the growth of Christianity is declining at least in the official records. It has its own ramifications. In a ‘vote bank politics’ context where quantity (number) plays a role for considering the demands and concerns of a community, the decline in quantity may not enthusiastically attract the attention of the political class of any ideological spectrum to the needs of Christian community. The political groups/parties, which mainly

⁵⁶ *Indian Currents* (Vol XXVII/No 36, 07-13, September, 2015): 26.

⁵⁷ *Indian Currents* (Vol XXVII/No 36, 07-13, September, 2015): 28.

⁵⁸ *Census of India* 1981, Paper-4 of 1981 Household Population by Religion of head of Household, P. Padmanabha of the Indian Administrative Service Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, New Delhi, 1984, 4-22 & *Census of India 2001*, the First Report of Religion Data, Jayant Kumar Banthia, Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2A Mansingh Road, New Delhi, 2001, xxvii, xxxiii cited by James Massey, “Christianity to be Renewed? Rethink Theology,” in *Rethinking Theology in India*, edited by James Massey and T.K. John (New Delhi: Manohar and Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, 2013), 29-30. <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/c-01.html> 20/10/2015.

depend on the official data on numbers, are well aware about the quantity of Christians and their inability of becoming a pressure group. The role of quantity clearly reflects in the statement of George Joseph quoted by B.R. Ambedkar in his discussion on 'Does the Indian Christian Community count in India?' "Christians do not count, because they are small in numbers."⁵⁹ It implies that to be counted for anything in India, number is a matter. If one thinks in line with quantity, it can be inferred that the decline of Christians in number at least in 'official records' and consequent lacking of political pressurizing directly affects the prospects of Christian community. Best example is the Scheduled Caste (SC) status for Dalit Christians. The Dalit Sikhs and Dalit Buddhists were able to achieve the SC status because of the political bargaining with numerical strength of respective religious communities. The Christian community failed to disprove the official records on its quantity; if it is to contradict the actual strength and to become a political pressure group in the present context, statistics need to change.

2.2. Decline in Qualitative Faith Life

The quality in life and witness is fundamental to the Christian faith. Here, quality is understood in terms of outlook and action informed by the teachings of Jesus Christ. The early missionaries sacrificed their lives and upheld the quality of Christian faith in word and action. Today, qualitative Christian faith life has been questioned in different spheres. First of all, the Christian community in India is a divided house more than ever in its history. Christians are divided in such way that they cannot unite in the near future. It is not a secret that the denominations are not able to come together sincerely at least in the programme/issue level. This division actually contradicts the idea of Christian community as the Body of Christ. B.R. Ambedkar articulated the division within Christianity long back in this way:

The Indian Christian is a disjointed-it is a better word than the word disunited-community. All that it has in common is a common source of inspiration. Baring this one thing which they have in common everything else tends to keep them apart. Indian Christians like all other Indians are divided by race, by language and by caste. Their religion has not been a sufficiently strong unifying force as to make difference of language, race and caste as though they were mere distinctions. On the contrary their religion which is their only cement

⁵⁹ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol 5, compiled by Vasant Moon (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1989), 448.

is infected with denominational differences. The result is that the Indian Christians are too disjointed to have a common aim, to have common mind and to put a common endeavour... In short, the term Indian Christian is just a statistical phrase. There is no community feeling behind this phrase. Indian Christians are not bound together by what is consciousness of kind, which is the test of the existence of a community.⁶⁰

This 'disjointness' challenges the prospects of Christianity in the 21st century. Secondly, Christians lost their witness in the service sector. Majority of the Christian educational institutions actually serve the elite Hindus and Christians. They are inaccessible to poor in many sections. It reminds us of the life of Jesus who empowered the poor with his teachings (knowledge) freely. With a few exceptions, Christian hospitals are also unaffordable to the poor. This tendency is a blatant negation of the ministry of Jesus who healed the sick freely. It does not mean that hospitals should not charge, but they can be made affordable to the poor. Moreover, the institutions such as schools and hospitals do not serve the mission purpose either. As Ambedkar said,

Even today, hundreds and thousands of high caste Hindus take advantage of Christian schools, Christian colleges and Christian hospitals. How many of those who reap these benefits become Christians? Every one of them takes the benefit and runs away and does not even stop to consider what must be the merits of a religion, which renders so much service to humanity.⁶¹

This is very much true in our context. Thirdly, Christians in the government sector as high officials and administrators are not untouched by the culture of bribe. Fourthly, denominations and dioceses are either formed or functioned on the basis of caste or ethnic origin. Fifthly, gender prejudices prevail in community life and ministerial space. It is against the biblical teaching that men and women are created in the image of God. Sixthly, politicians and representatives of the people belonging to the Christian community are being caught in corrupt cases. Finally, the morality of Christian leaders including Bishops, priests, pastors, etc., is being questioned in the society. In short, the Christian community cannot claim qualitative faith life informed by the teachings of Jesus Christ. Quality of faith is tested in the actions which

⁶⁰ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol 5, 476.

⁶¹ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol 5, 444.

negate discrimination, immorality and stereotyping within and outside the community. The lack/decline of qualitative faith-life prevents the Christian community from becoming a 'just and humane' community in the larger society.

2.3. Caste/Ethnic Identity over Faith Identity

The nature of the present existence of Christian community in India leads to the question that whether faith decides their identity or caste or ethnic origin defines their identity? Logically, the identity of Christians should be defined by their faith. Unfortunately, his/her identity is defined by caste/ethnic origin along with faith. Therefore, at present, we have not Christians as such in strict sense of term 'Christian' but Reddy Christians, Nadar Christians, Syrian Christians, Dalit Christians, Tribal Christians, etc. Irrespective of denominations, this identity formation has been promoted and maintained. In fact, faith identity is being replaced by caste identity. It is also unfortunate that faith identity alone will not work out in terms of genuine fellowship and communion in Christian community today. Amartya Sen is right when he says, "A strong-and exclusive-sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups. Within-group solidarity can help to feed between-group discord."⁶² The caste identity within faith community and the inability to affirm faith identity beyond caste/ethnic barriers place the Christian community in a predicament in terms of identity, witness and unity. The tendency of placing/preferring caste identity over faith identity creates visible or invisible divisions and exclusions within the faith community, and makes Christian witness unproductive.

3. Challenges as New Sites of Genuine Witness

The discussion in the first section shows that caste, racism, gender prejudices, communalism, corruption, poverty, exploitation of global corporations/companies, money-rule, corrupt and criminalized politics, etc., are the common challenges of the larger society in which Christians are part of. In section two, we have seen that apart from the common social problems which have crept into the Church in different forms, the Christian community faces its own peculiar issues such as strong denominationalism, minority syndrome, changing image of the community from pro-poor to pro-rich, lack of interest in the political participation, lack of qualitative faith life, etc. The challenges of the day are the signs of the times or the new sites for the genuine Christian engagement/

⁶² Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (New Delhi: Allen Lane (Penguin Books), 2006), 1-2.

witness in the larger society. The victims of the various kinds of social issues are the sites of new articulation and praxis of faith. According to Gustavo Gutierrez, “The signs of the times are not only a call to intellectual analysis. They are above all a call to pastoral activity, to commitment, and to service.”⁶³ It is implied that apart from the proclamation/propagation of the Gospel message, Christians must be committed to respond to the challenges within and outside the community to build up a just and humane community on earth. This is the crux of Christian witness and its outcome. Therefore, Christians have to be encouraged to support or engage with life-affirming forces in society. This has to be part of Christian witness.

4. Christian Witness and Future of Christianity

In the light of the above discussion, this section focuses on the how of Christian witness in a changing context. Instead of focusing on the ‘Church,’ emphasis is given on the individual Christians in this paper. The structural Church cannot/will not engage constructively either with the societal issues or concerns within the faith community. Now, the only alternative is to motivate the lay people to reorient their faith commitment to take bold steps to bring changes in society and in the faith community. They need to be encouraged to take part in any initiative of change. Some reflections in this direction are given in the following.

4.1. Be God’s People in the World

It is a common claim of Christians that they are God’s children or people. ‘How far’ they are able to be faithful to this claim is still an unanswered question. Often, they forget that they are “not only a useable tool but a powerful and important tool in God’s revolutionary strategy.”⁶⁴ It means Christians, individually or collectively, are called to be the ‘tool’ to implement the plan of God in society. God’s revolutionary plan is to create just and humane society (Kingdom of God) where everyone celebrates the life in its fullness (spiritual and temporal). Therefore, being an instrument of God’s revolutionary strategy, Christians have to strive for just and peaceful life inside and outside the faith community.⁶⁵ This is the primary task of being God’s people in the world. The Gospel must be proclaimed with brave actions. The struggle for justice and peace implies participation in the life-struggles

⁶³ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 8.

⁶⁴ Paulose Mar Paulose, *Church’s Mission* (Bombay: BUILD, n.d.), 2.

⁶⁵ Paulose Mar Paulose, *Church’s Mission*, 2.

of people irrespective of caste and creed.⁶⁶ This participation may be spiritual, economic, social, and personal or communitarian in nature and outlook. Since, it is missional in approach it needs strong faith in Jesus. If the faith is weak, participation also will be weak. Weak faith is not the hallmark of God's people. If the faith is strong, voices will be raised against discrimination, injustice and inequality, and new initiatives will be taken to resist the life-negating powers in the world. Strong faith will denounce caste or ethnicity and will embrace the values of justice, equality and freedom within and outside the faith community.⁶⁷ Thus, Christians of today need to become God's people with a strong faith to confront human challenges.

4.2. Christian life and Mission: Change in Perspective

The propagation of faith is the mandate of the Christian community. Indian Christians are the result of the propagation of Christian faith starting from St. Thomas, to the missionaries and the native Christians till date. The Indian constitution also guarantees religious freedom with propagation of faith. Mission organizations and the missions departments of different denominations spend money and use resources to propagate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our nation. The question which is often raised is, what is prioritized: quality or quantity? It is an undenying fact that the majority of Christian mission activities aim to increase the number of converts, not quality. Quality here denotes the spiritual and social improvement of the converts. It has to be also noted that most of the new converts are coming from socially and economically backward contexts. In this aspect, I question neither the claims of mission workers nor the intention of converts. But one cannot negate the fact that the social condition of the majority of new converts who come from Dalit and Tribal background has not been changed. Still many are in slums or in their old Cheries or tribal hamlets. This is not to negate the contributions of mission workers in the life of Dalits and Tribals, but to say that they have not yet come to the socio-economic-educational standing of other Christians. This failure is the responsibility of all Christians.

Every Christian is called to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ which gives holistic salvation. Some understand it as just propagation of faith and conversion. This is half of the job! Often, Christians do not ask the question, after conversion, whose responsibility is it to bring the new converts into another level of his/her life in the society? If it is asked, the answer would

⁶⁶ Paulose Mar Paulose, *Spirituality for Struggle* (Tiruvalla: CSS, 1999), 29.

⁶⁷ Felix Wilfred, "What Can 'Upper Caste' Christians Learn from Dalit Christians," *Jeevadhara* vol XLI/no 241 (January, 2011): 67-76 at 72-73.

be: the collective efforts of the Christian community in the respective context. They forget their responsibility because of the influence of ‘other worldly’ theological formulations taught throughout the generations. The ‘other worldly’ theologies teaches that Christians should aim for the salvation in another world which is yet to come. This understanding is contradictory to the Biblical vision of holistic salvation. At the same time, proponents of ‘other worldly’ theologies do not refuse any of the worldly privileges. The words of M.M. Thomas are antidote to ‘otherworldly-alone’ thinking of Christian life and mission, “Humanization is inherent in the message of salvation in Christ.”⁶⁸ Saving the lives of the poor also means helping them to live as ‘humans’ with God-given rights and privileges. According to Samuel Amirtham, “Jesus’ proclamation of the Goodnews is evangelization, which means that those who are in various kinds of bondage, in prisons of poverty and powerlessness, under the bonds of ignorance and superstitions and the victims of oppression and injustices are free.”⁶⁹ Therefore, there should be a change in the perspective of Christian life and mission. Christian life itself is mission. It is not necessary that one should officially say that s/he is a missionary worker. The missionary dimension is inherent in the life of a Christian. Christians have to change the old perspective which compartmentalized the Christian life and mission, and approach Christian life with a new outlook, that is enlightened by the vision of a holistic salvation.

4.3. Christian Life: A Life for Others

Strong faith and a right perspective will lead a Christian to live for others. This is the true nature of Christian identity. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Church is the Church only when it exists for others.”⁷⁰ Living for others does not mean that all Christians should die for the cause of others. It simply means, make use of time, energy and resources to empower fellow beings, within and outside the faith community. This is possible if Christians are willing to be baptized in Kingdom values, as Jesus did. Jesus’ baptism in the waters of Kingdom values led him to the people who really needed his touch. He baptized himself in the waters of justice, freedom, equality and liberation. Today, it is ironical that Christians have been baptized in the values of this world rather than the values of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, community-centeredness has been replaced by self-centeredness. What we need today in our faith journey is a baptismal

⁶⁸ M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization* (Madras: The CLS, 1971), 10.

⁶⁹ Israel Selvanayagam, *Samuel Amirtham’s Living Theology* (Bangalore: BTESSC/SATHRI, 2007), 442.

⁷⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1972), 382.

experience of Kingdom values that help us to empower the lives of others. In the light of Jesus' experience we need to re-think the whole meaning of baptism, the ritual that authenticates Christian identity. It does not mean that we need to negate baptism. Symbolically, we might have gone through the experience of baptism, but its challenging implications in our lives is ignored and forgotten. After His Baptism, Jesus entered into the life realities of people and tried to bring them up in all aspects of life. Jesus' Baptism was a commitment to God; a commitment to sacrifice His life for nurturing others life. Commitment to God implies commitment to the people whose lives God is more concerned with. Commitment to God cannot be understood apart from commitment to people because God is for the people. Hence, Christian life is not 'individual centered' but 'community centered,' which demands to go and touch the lives of others who struggle to find meaning in life.

4.4. Christian Community: Not a 'Caste,' but a 'Communion'

In the second section of this paper, we have seen that Christianity in India is facing an identity crisis. Unfortunately, caste consciousness crept into Christianity in India and destroyed its genuine communion. At present, Indian Christianity has been known, and is being functioned within the framework of caste. Christians try to forget that they are not a caste group, but a communion of God's people. In this communion, all are supposed to be equal irrespective of their origin, language, ethnicity, etc. Their only identity is God's people. In this communion, there is no space for separation and discrimination; no upper caste or low caste.⁷¹ Denouncing evil and announcing the good news is core of its life.⁷² The structural Church may not be able to establish this communion. The individual Christian needs to internalize the communion aspect of faith in the community life, and become the channel of breaking the barriers of Castism.

4.5. Re-orient Faith Life with the Life of Jesus Christ

Jesus is the model for Christians to re-orient their faith commitment in contemporary society. One may wonder that Christians have to mold their lives after Jesus! But the issue here is Christians of today are in the bondage of traditions, ecclesiastical structures and missionary theologies. Some Christians blindly follow the traditions and follow Jesus of those traditions. Others don't want to think of Jesus apart from what their denominations

⁷¹ Felix Wilfred, "What Can 'Upper Caste' Christians Learn from Dalit Christians," 71.

⁷² Editorial Board, "Editorial: Christians and Politics," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* vol 77/no 8 (August, 2013):1-8 at 8.

profess. Still others are content with what they know of Jesus from missionaries. People are afraid to think and reflect on Jesus beyond these borders. It is not an exaggeration to say that Jesus has been reduced only as a 'Worship Figure.' The life and ministry of Jesus gives us another image of Jesus: 'A Role Model for Faith Commitment.' His communion with God the Father (Abba Experience) led him to come out of the box of Jewish religiosity and identify with the company of marginalized of his day, such as the prostitutes, the publicans, the sinners, the poor peasants, etc. The common people and their wretched life situations led him to say "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

His approach and attitude towards the religious hierarchies and oppressive systems was molded by the life realities of poor people. Indeed, the life realities of the poor people decided the future course of Jesus' life. In a sense, they decided His destiny, theology and life-style. They decided His ministerial focus-Salvation or liberation of human life. 'The life realities of people' was the driving force behind Jesus' prophetic attack against the power centers of His time. He was rejected and mocked because of His emphasis on the salvation of poor people, who dreamed for a better life against the ritual-centered and structure-oriented life-negating system, which is least concerned about the empowerment of poor in the society. He raised a different voice, an argument for an alternative (Kingdom of God). He offered a different method to change the society: REPENT. He lived in the midst of challenges and faced them courageously. His courage to challenge and dissent was the result of His relentless communion with God the Father (Faith Commitment). He received divine energy from this fellowship to face those challenges in His society. He used the challenges as opportunities to teach His disciples the practical meaning of discipleship. Indian Christians have only one option in the world: FOLLOW THE FOOT STEPS OF JESUS CHRIST.

Conclusion: Future of Christianity

In the context of societal and community challenges, what is the future of Christianity in India? Who is going to decide the future of Christianity? As a minority religious community (2.34 %), what impact Christianity can make today? These are the questions to be addressed by the Christians in the present situation. In the context of religious revival and majority religious nationalism, the efforts of Christianity will be watched and approached with suspicion. If we try to give free education or health care they will be interpreted as efforts of conversion. Therefore, structural Christianity cannot make much

of an impact in society. Though it has contributed a lot to the building up of many communities, it has lost its witness in many fronts in contemporary society. Then, the future and impact of Christianity lies in the hands of individual Christians (lay people). They have to be equipped to take up the vision of transforming Church/Christian community and society. They must be encouraged to engage with religious/political/social movements to bring people within the liberating sphere of Jesus Christ. Their witness as followers of Jesus Christ and involvement in the societal issues must influence the people to think out of the box, and to fight against life-negating forces and practices in society. What is needed today is a re-orientation of the faith commitment by all Christians. It will lead Christians to develop a qualitative faith life which will reflect in our actions. Gone are the days when Christianity was valued for its selfless service to education and health care. Now, other religious communities have taken the place of Christianity. The best hospitals and educational institutions are not managed by Christians. At the same time, they are not accessible and affordable. The service to the poor too has been taken over by other religious traditions. It shows Christian witness has lost its sweetness and dynamism today. The time has come to re-orient the faith commitment for a better future. It is our responsibility to reclaim the legacy of our faith-forebears who upheld the values of Christian faith in Indian society. The Christian community has to come out of its strong denominationalism, minority syndrome, pro-rich mentality, a lack of qualitative faith life etc., to respond to the issues of society Christianly. The changing social context demands of the Christian community to counter anything which prevents the community from becoming a model community in a larger society.

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: A TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION TOWARDS HOLISTIC FORMATION

*Jessy Jaison, Ph D**

Introduction

Practical Theology, as central to church leadership, pastoral practices and missionary contexts, is emerging as a distinct discipline in ‘theological education’¹. Struggles of life analyzed in theological and ethical deliberations often call for a review of our perception and practice of theology. Thus, centrality of context and hermeneutic in the practice of theology inspire educators and ministers to critically analyze the traditional ministerial practices. More over, the rapidly changing socio-economic scenario of the world inspires the believing community to be keen on guidance at the theological and practical issues they encounter daily. On the other hand, Christians serving the secular world with their expertise in behavioral sciences, sociological studies and other humanities disciplines, have key insights, still to be identified, explored and incorporated by the Christian community. Critical dimensions that question the effectiveness of the current training in terms of holistic and lifelong formation of a student are varied. This paper attempts to present the predicament of fragmentation in theological education prior to its advocacy

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¹ Theological Education here takes the definition of Bass & Dykstra as a “place of service to ministry.” Any discussion of Practical Theology is valid in the context of Theological Education if only the latter aims at ministry formation. No doubt, Practical Theology liberates not only the very definition of Theological Education, but also the patterns of learning, teaching and collaboration of historical perspectives, Biblical views, theological reflection methods and contemporary situation analysis. What it recognizes the most is the Scripture-centred coherence that it can undergird in the mission, discipling and theological education tasks of the Christian community.

to utilize Practical Theology as a discipline that integrates the disciplines of theology and the skills training in theological education. Projecting the transformational vision of Practical Theology as a discipline as such for church and society, the paper elaborates on its major approaches.

Practical theology is introduced and advocated as a potential theological construct to facilitate coherence by integrating the philosophy, objectives and tasks in theological education, in view of the lack of consensus in the stated and espoused objectives of training in the church, theological institutions and missions. The burden for theology re-iterated here is that all theological education is/has to be practically grounded theology. Being aware of the dissonances among the formational dimensions as well as the specialized disciplines in theological education, this article attempts to portray Practical Theology as an academic discipline that encompasses the philosophical and practical underpinnings of problem-based and context-oriented learning.

Fragmentation² and Integration Crisis in Theological Education

Churches, theological institutions and mission fields- Christianity in general seems to be embracing division rather than unity on these dimensions. Defining ‘church and its ministry’, ‘theological education and its objectives’ and ‘mission work and its outcome’ become the most difficult task in theological analysis particularly due to its tendency to build walls of separation rather than bridges to connect. Generally, churches express their dissonance with the current theological training; theological colleges fail to show intense commitment to meet the felt needs of the churches or mission fields; missions, in response to this crisis, resort to their own contextual training and plans. The concern here is to highlight theological education on its pressing need of integration by praxis, for which Practical Theology is advocated as a resourceful alternative. Practical Theology’s expanded definition does not divide Theological Education from church ministry or mission field as it says, “theological education, as we use the term, includes not only seminaries and divinity schools but also other institutions that deliberately foster the education and formation of pastors and other ministers, such as teaching parishes, judicatory offices, retreat centres, publications, para church organizations and continuing education programmes.”³

² Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

³ Dorothy C Bass & Craig Dykstra (eds), *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 2.

Many theological schools today are little more than technical, degree granting institutions that often fall under the multiple demands from accrediting bodies on syllabus and academic activities. As a result, large numbers of genuinely committed students are uncertain about the nature, problems and practical demands in ministry. Caught in either of the extremes of overly cognitive orientation or total negligence of academic formation, our training system ends up in the lack of unity and coherence. Often, the content and practice of faith are indiscreetly forgotten while knowledge is splintered into unrelated pieces of information in academic training.

Finding answers as to how far we are able to incorporate the four basic dimensions of formation- spiritual, academic, ministerial and personal- in our practice of theological education is challenging. If a theological institution realizes from its own self-evaluation that it fails to meet the expectations of either the church or missions, the most urgent task is to review its own stated objectives and the methods employed. Analysis of problems by scholars who detach themselves from social interactions and individuals who are directly affected by the situation can be implausibly different. As conflicts arising between stated objectives and felt needs; academic skills and ministry skills; professional knowledge and espoused purpose or curriculum prepared by intellectual experts and outcomes expected by a drastically different constituency, how do we propose Practical Theology in any case as a resolution? For this, Practical Theology itself has to be defined.

Defining ‘Practical Theology’

Practical Theology provides theological foundation for ministry stimulates theological reflection on contextual as well as conventional situations and simultaneously reflects on theology from a ministerial perspective. Pattison and Woodward view Practical Theology as ‘a place where religious beliefs and practice meets contemporary experiences, questions, and actions and conducts dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical and practically transforming.’⁴ It is a critical, constructive and grounded theological reflection by communities of faith, carried on consistently in the contexts of their ‘praxis’, which here denotes a combination of knowledge born of analytical objectivity and distance, practical wisdom and creative skills. “It draws on and responds to people’s interpretations of normative sources from scripture and tradition and helps ongoing modifications and transformations of their practices in order to be more adequately responsive to their

⁴ S Pattison & J Woodward, *A Reader in Practical Theology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, 7.

interpretations of the shape of God's call to partnership."⁵ As a problem posing theology, it specifically deals with life and recovers the theology of the past and constructively develops theology for the future.⁶ In other words, it is the doing of theology that is first informed by the real situation of people and then allowing us, by a careful hermeneutical process, to reflect theologically on those situations and problems and then return to the situation to gently and carefully transform. Therefore, the social horizon and the context of the locus of praxis form the operational base for Practical Theology. Agreeing with Farley's analysis of fragmentation, Joseph C Hough, Jr., and John B Cobb, Jr., emphasizes⁷ the need of "practical thinkers and reflective practitioners". It is about a transformative practice that helps the community of God to preach what they practice and practice what they preach. The call to keep balance is explicitly identified by Duce and Strange, "Practical Theology has the task of interpreting scriptures for the life of the church today, in its structure, in its practice, its ethics and pastoral care. This discipline is often omitted from a modern university or treated as a Cinderella while in fact, it represents the crown of all the rest and the goal of scripture itself, for the aim of God's self-disclosure is the creation of a regenerate community in response to His word.... Practical Theology is application of God's revelation to the individual and the church. It represents the climax, and the final point of theological endeavour."⁸

In summary, the overall approach is problem-based, action oriented, critical reflective, hermeneutical, research-grounded and correlational. This endeavor encompasses the whole of life for the sake of all God's people through its call not to envision, not just preparational, but operational training also.

Towards Integration through Practical Theology

Practical Theology calls the theological education enterprise to face up with the real situation and the challenges it raises and then to translate knowledge into practice, by critically reflecting on theology, culture, sociology, organization, psychology and any other discipline related. It explains the

⁵ James W Fowler, "The Emerging New Shape of Practical Theology", Paper presented at the International Academy of Practical Theology, Atlanta, 4. Copy in the Archives of Edgehill College, UK.

⁶ Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 1996).

⁷ Joseph C Hough, Jr., and John B Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education*, (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1985).

⁸ Philip Duce and Daniel Strange, *Keeping Your Balance: Approaching theological and Religious Studies* Leicester: Inter-varsity, 2001), 76, 77.

theological foundation for ministry, stimulates theological reflection on contextual problems and simultaneously reflects on theology from a ministerial perspective. The task that keeps the hermeneutical vision at its core, therefore, is action-theological reflection-practical contemplation-action. Some of its specific emphases in approach are identified below.

• **Problem-Based, Action-Oriented Approach**

Since it is problem-based, it is action-oriented. It presupposes openness to the fundamental shifts in the society in ways people see religion, sexuality, life and relationships in the multi-cultural, multi-religious and globalized contexts, the theological method also required ongoing reviewing. Prior to addressing ultimate queries such as “what should we do” or “how should we live”, practical theology takes so much of analysis owing mainly to differences in theological hermeneutic and diverse approaches to cultural values. ‘Problem Based learning’ (PBL), as increasingly employed in formal education, helps to develop skills of critical thinking, research, substantive dialogue, clear writing and of practical ministry.⁹ This is crucial in theological education as James Whyte observes, “Since the church’s life and action is related not only to its self-understanding and comprehension of its faith, but also to the changing society in which it functions, practical theology is triadic, concerned with the inner relationship of faith, practice and social reality and is aware that the lines of force flow in both directions [church and society].”¹⁰

Practical Theology is an Action-Oriented discipline, that identifies and articulates a pertinent issue in ministry (openness and commitment to learn and change); analyzes the situation as it is (confidence to tackle pressing issues first-hand); interprets the situation as it should be (biblical/theological centrality); deliberates on and list the tasks and designs specific action plan (contextual awareness and sensibility); reflects on, evaluates and modifies plans; returns to practice (ministry focus). Only when our theological system shows commitment to address people’s questions about the changing social, economic and cultural dynamics that challenge them as a community of faith, it will start to discern and appreciate God’s redeeming activity in God’s world. While the Biblical, Dogmatic and Historical Theology serves as the foundation to guide our steps, Hermeneutics assist in explaining our vision in understandable terms to people and Pastoral Care and Counseling is about

⁹ Hans Madueme and Linda Cannell, “Problem Based Learning and the Master of Divinity Program” 47-60in *Theological Education*, Vol. 43, Number 1, (2007): 47.

¹⁰ James Whyte, in Alastair Campbell, *A Dictionary of Pastoral Care* (London: SPCK, 1987), 213.

providing them with practical assistance in faith and life. Thus the hermeneutical element is highlighted as key in our discussion.

● **Reflective Hermeneutical Approach**

Contextual sensibility is key to our theological attempt in seeking meaning and reading our world and the conventional practices. Practical theology essentially being a hermeneutical theology, seeks answers to ‘what do we do with our theology / how do we understand our theology in this situation?’ Dealing critically with imposing theology and ethics, it encourages keen students of theology to evaluate the inherited understandings that guide the interpretations and actions and to become transmitters of theology into people’s real lives. However, the method is primarily a reflective equilibrium model that facilitates the ministry of reconciliation and hope. “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their sins against them.” 2 Cori. 5:18-19 (NIV). Anderson insists on grace in his definition of the mission of Practical Theology thus, “A theology that does not begin and with grace both from God’s side as well as from the human side is a theology that binds “heavy burdens” (Matt. 23:4) and sets a “yoke of slavery” (Gal.5:1) on those who look for freedom and forgiveness.”¹¹ What Practical Theology suggests is a strategic perspective that links the hermeneutical with the empirical so as to achieve an integrative model that underlies the theological task as a whole.¹² The theological questions that practically challenge people in their daily life presuppose *scientia* and *sapientia*-in other words, theoretical knowledge and practical wisdom. Nevertheless, the theological system, not to exacerbate the theory-practice divide has to enhance its hermeneutical mission to relate.

● **Critical-Correlational Research Approach**

This research approach usually follows social scientific methods because it works by holding the Christian vision for the world and the actual situation in the world in reciprocal relationship. For Heitink, it is a model of interpretation that links the hermeneutical perspective of the Humanities with the empirical perspective of the social sciences.¹³ Contemporary theological system often

¹¹ Ray S Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Illinois: IVP, 2001), 29.

¹² Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 1996), 63.

¹³ Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, theory and Action Domains* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 102-103.

faces up with the lack of a discipline to accommodate specialization on an eclectic topic with complex practical underpinnings since it does not perfectly fit into most conventional disciplines. Practical theology's educational vision offers the correlational possibility to systematically handle this research concern. However, since many theological educators as well as researchers tend to get overly subsumed in social scientific disciplines, Practical Theology has to be intentional in its emphasis on Scriptural centrality. Keeping this balance is a challenge to evangelical theological education today.

The educational vision embedded in Practical Theology seeks to develop this interdisciplinary skill in Christians to read their Bible, the world around them and the traditions and cultural practices they uphold for a much deeper perception of the situation rather than knowledge accumulation confined to classrooms. For Shulman,¹⁴ learning involves one's whole being and therefore, a learning pattern that divides the cognitive, affective and performance dimensions might not equip people for life. The proxy indicators for a holistic educational pattern for Shulman are: engagement and motivation; Knowledge and Understanding; Performance and Action: reflection and Critique: Judgement and Design and Commitment and Identity. No doubt, 'engagement' matters for Practical Theologians, who explore specific methodologies primarily by engaging in the situation. Engagement may indicate a variety of approaches to providing for learning in terms of being cognitively engaged (I understand and want to know more), physiologically engaged (I am paying attention), emotionally engaged (I have a vested interest), or strategically engaged (I am 'in the action'). Evoking engagement in a learning object design is a challenge; each learner may have different ways they are engaged.¹⁵

The Critical Correlational research approach in Practical Theology offers academic freedom and flexibility to choose/explore the best possible methods to analyze the situation and reflect on it theologically, among which, we have ethnomethodology (study on the ways in which people make sense of the world and display their understandings of it), phenomenology (gathering deep information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods) and hermeneutics. Social scientific methods such as content analysis of literature,

¹⁴ Lee Shulman, *The Wisdom of Practice: Essays on Teaching, learning and Learning to Teach* Edited by Suzanne M Wilson (San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

¹⁵ Patricia McGee, 'Learning Objects: Bloom's Taxonomy and Deeper Learning Principles', Department of Interdisciplinary Studies & Curriculum and Instruction, the University of Texas at San Antonio, <<http://edu3.utsa.edu/pmcgee/nlii/LOBloomMcGee.doc>>

life stories, historical analysis, surveys, interviews, quantitative and qualitative questionnaires, participant, non-participant or disguised observations, focus groups, narrative analysis, case studies, structured and non-structures observations, attitudinal tests, opinionnaires are to list a few methods that makes both the learning and teaching interactive, reflective, interdisciplinary and hence, transformational.

• **Call to Transformational Practice in Theological Education**

Overall, the aim is to bring our world into greater harmony with the Creator's intensions as it arises out of practice and returns to practice. Refusing to limit itself to academics or certain areas of pastoral practice, training has to extend to the personal and spiritual needs and queries of people by maintaining the hermeneutical balance in theological reflection. There is a felt need in educational institutions around the globe to liberate teaching and learning styles from fragmentation to integration. More over, concepts like 'hospitality' in learning situations introduced by Nouwen and later expounded by Jane McAvooy, questions the idea of teacher as the sole custodian of knowledge. However, it takes risk to overcome the fear of change in an academic setting as anywhere else.

The relational and praxis-oriented Practical Theological approach includes narrativity, human experience, critical thinking, interdisciplinary and non-hierarchical learning which are essentially in opposition to the 'banking model' of education. The pedagogical models¹⁶ such as, the banking-Model (the teacher owns information and the student is a passive recipient of the knowledge), Expert-Apprentice Model (The teacher is the master who moulds and trains his/her disciple), consumer Model (the student is a consumer and the teacher is a sales person; the student buys whatever interests him/her), and the Therapeutic-Individualistic Model (the teacher helps, gives wise counsel to select courses that would help the student to find satisfaction and personal edification) operate within the traditional patterns of theological education. Even so, students, deprived of an opportunity to gain the skills of practical ministry and reflective learning during their theological education, feel empty within on completion of their courses that they have not deposited anything of practical significance for their life. Practical Theology with its extended openness across disciplines and human problems, offers a new paradigm as problem-oriented, constructively critical, collaborative and

¹⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1987), 54.

dialogical. Contributions of experts such as Knowles¹⁷ (Andragogical Learning), Kolb¹⁸ (Experiential Learning) and practical theologians such as Stephen Pattison¹⁹, Ballard & Pritchard have all been vital. For education to become a holistic process and of life long value, it has to become a 'total experience' that involves the cognitive, affective and psychomotor development of the learner. In Practical Theology this corresponds to a learner-centred, experience-based learning that espouses open-access and is cooperatively oriented so as to echo what Farley terms a recovery of 'Theologia', the reflective wisdom of faith.²⁰ This was the method of Lord Jesus Christ, who, beyond awareness of the existing tensions, conflicts and historically and culturally established boundary lines, went out graciously to make such a theologically sound discourse with the Samaritan woman, brought down Zacchaeus to address his problems. His theology did not place restrictions to deal with human needs and queries, in spite of the socio-religious complexities they entailed. Jesus, the perfect model of Practical Theologian, made thoughtful engagement with practical situations through a well-integrated analysis which was at once fully theological and rigorously empirical.

Summary

Reiterating this burden for theology is simple and straightforward. All theology is/has to be Practical Theology and this is the task of the whole church. The all-encompassing horizon of faith in God and in His unchangeable Word is the hub of the theological practice. Practical Theology is a theological approach but more than that it is a distinct discipline that covers the philosophical and practical underpinnings of theological disciplines. It recognizes the unreserved commitment and intentional work plans to help students to get immersed in local and to confidently address the global situations in which they are to minister, persisting to overcome ideological captivity and irrelevant abstractions. By its essential net-working and interactive style of learning, it attempts to make theological schools and mission organizations envision that the pastoral team is balancing their ministry by interacting with the academia and the theological scholars honoring the

¹⁷ Malcolm S Knowles, et al., *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult education* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1984)

¹⁸ David A Kolb, *Experiential Learning* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984)

¹⁹ Stephen Pattison, *The Challenge of Practical theology: Selected Essays* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007).

²⁰ Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 35.

practical bearing of their own scholarship. Nevertheless, the spotlight is not solving problems but instilling the theological vision and hope for the world. As Practical Theologians, we consistently seek the depths and awesome patterns of God's grace in redeeming and preserving His creation, which is facilitated by the reflective hermeneutic task undertaken in life's struggles of individuals as well as communities.

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF ECUMENISM- AN OVERVIEW

Rev. Dr. N. B. Gladstone Robert*

Introduction

Ecumenism is an endeavor to look at the quest of the entire creation in connection with its relationship to one another and to God. In other words, ecumenism is not concerned only with human beings, but also with all living creatures of the earth-nature and the entire created order. It is a journey of fulfilling the idea of ecumenism where the ecumenical movement confronts complexities due to the irrelevance or inadequacy of the method, meeting, meaning, and goal of ecumenism. Unity is not only a gift but also a task, a task for whose accomplishment Christ has sent his Holy Spirit. It is a vital task for Asians to understand and analyze the implications of the ecumenical movement. The question which arises here is how the ecumenical thought finds a place in the process of doing mission together, which is the core of Christian faith. This essay will try to examine the various biblical concepts of ecumenism. Ecumenical movement is a pursuit for unity in plurality, an attempt to make the church visible and credible. Further, the unity of the church demands the missiological objectives, which is the sign and sacrament of the unity of humankind.

1. The term Ecumenism (Oikoumene)

The word 'ecumenism' comes from the Greek word, *oikoumene* which means 'the whole inhabited world'. The term *oikoumene* describes that portion of the earth which had been brought within the orbit of Greek civilization as opposed to barbarian lands.¹ The word 'ecumenism' appeared even in an early Greek translation of the Old Testament. "Ecumenism is essentially a cosmic vision, which is primarily concerned with discernments of the unitive presence of God in the world."² In the Greek New Testament, *oikoumene* appears fifteen times and it is used in the native story.³ Throughout

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¹ Norman Goodall, *The Ecumenical Movement*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964. p. 3

² Ibid. p. 9

³ William Richey Hogg, *One World, One Mission*, New York: Friendship Press, 1960. p. 85 ("... a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that shall the entire world (oikoumene) should be enrolled (Lk.2:1). The Roman emperors claimed the title "Lord of the Earth (oikoumene). Therefore, the word 'oikoumene' was so familiar)

the whole inhabited world – the *oikoumene* – there are believers who seek to be faithful to God by embodying their faith in situations which differ from each other.⁴ It is prominent that *oikoumene* stands for the central mystery of all being and of all existents. Until now, “ecumenism is essentially a journey into light, from the darkness and emptiness in the inner recesses of (hu)man’s heart and soul, and in the world around, into the liberating light of God’s presence.”⁵ Nevertheless, the word *oikoumene* must be understood in two ways to understand the ecumenical movement of the Spirit of God which are in its life inseparable. “It stands for both the unity of Christ’s Church in the whole inhabited earth and the mission of Christ’s Church to the whole inhabited earth.”⁶ Today, the meaning and purpose of ecumenism have been through a process of evolution from Christian unity to unity of humankind and from unity in witness and unity for mission to a grand reconciliation of the whole creation.⁷ The basic notion of ecumenism is that the world is the house of God.

2. Biblical Foundations of Ecumenical Thought

The unity concept must be evaluated from a biblical perspective where the present-day outlook on life and the orientation of the witness of Israel, and the New Testament community to the one God of life do not have to be regarded in opposition to one another. Here the connecting factor of the two periods is God, the incarnate, of all centuries who speaks to humanity. According to the Scripture, we are the children of Abraham, to whom God promised what was humanly possible. Therefore, the ecumenical movement has affirmed and laid emphasis upon the biblical truth that the Church is the Body of Christ, and that the unity of Christ is the cause and norm of the unity of the Church.⁸ Church as a symbolic expression of Christ’s body needs to maintain its holiness and uniqueness as a single entity. Unity is God’s gift in the life of the Church under Christ and the Spirit. In other words, the unity concept is not a human made condition, but it is the nature of divine personality in whom all creations merge together. This is the covenantal relationship between the entire creation and the creator God. St. Paul says,

⁴ Julio de Santa Ana, *The Commitment to Justice in the Ecumenical Movement* in Marc Reuver, Friedhelm Solms and Gerrit Huizer (eds), “The Ecumenical Movement Tomorrow”, Kampen: Kok Publishing Company, 1993. pp. 283-284

⁵ Mathai Zachariah, *Beyond Ecumenism-A Journey into Light*, Tiruvalla: CSS, 2002. p. 17

⁶ Kenneth Slack, *The Ecumenical Movement in the British isles* in R.J.W. Bevan (ed), “The Churches and Christian Unity”, London: Oxford University Press, 1963. p. 215

⁷ Deenabandhu Manchala, *Preface* in Mathai Zachariah, *Beyond Ecumenism...* op. cit., p. 12

⁸ Bernard Leeming, *General Problems of Ecumenism* in R. J.W. Bevan, op. cit., p. 39

“No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he promised.”⁹ This promise can be seen both in Old and New Testaments where God really wants to create a cordial relationship between the humankind and God.

2.1 The Old Testament Perception

The Old Testament testifies the idea of unity. God created a united and diverse community to be God’s witness to the nations. The Babel episode (Gen. 11: 1-9) is an example of unity in the Old Testament where people gathered together for a common purpose. But this model of unity cannot be considered as the ideal one due to many reasons. This is not the model which God really wants from the people today. Creator God demands the reconciliation of all creations. God doesn’t propagate a divided humanity; instead coming back to the divine fellowship and regaining God’s image of the entire creation are strongly emphasized. This idea of God reveals in God’s Mission (*missio dei*) which is manifested in Jesus Christ. The unity of the people is not uniformity among the people; rather, it reveals itself as a unity in worship of the diverse community as they gather as a single community in the worship of the one God.¹⁰ God is the unifying factor of all creation and the source of *oikoumene*. The fellowship between humanity as well as the cordial relationship with the creator God is the basic foundation of *oikoumene*.

2.2 The New Testament Perception

The New Testament discloses the historical continuity of the Old Testament. What does the New Testament teach about the unity of the believers or the church? One of the best examples is the unity concept experienced on the day of Pentecost (Acts. 2: 1-13) which exhibits a new model in the New Testament. Apparently, the unity of God’s church is at the heart of the Christian faith. It is God’s will for his people. The shepherdic image of Christ emphasizes the nature of one Shepherd and one Flock. The High Priestly prayer denotes the kernel of *oikoumene* where Jesus prayed ...that they may become completely one....¹¹ The New Testament conceives of the unity of the Church, not as sociological, but as having its essential reality in

⁹ Romans 4:20

¹⁰ William G. Rusch, *Ecumenism—A Movement towards Church Unity*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985. p. 4

¹¹ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you loved me. (John 17: 23, NRSV)

Christ Himself and in His indissoluble unity with His people (Acts. 9: 4ff., I Cori. 12: 12, Jn. 15: 1f.). Christ alone makes the many to be one in the Church. New Testament gives the message that unity between Christ and His people is obvious and visible (Eph. 1: 22, 5: 23, Col. 1:18, 2:19). A significant aspect which we recognize here is the diversity within the same faith as an essential element of the original vision of Christianity. Even though many divisions can be seen in the apostolic period, certainly the apostles were out of favour on disintegration, Christians had the fundamental unity as they believed in Christ.

2.3 Jesus Christ – The Model for Unity

The very essence of the unity concept in the New Testament finds its place in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who is the author and master of *oikoumene*. This idea is stressed in the Uppsala Assembly (1968) which states that “the purpose of Christ is to bring people of all times, all races, of all places, of all conditions, into an organic and living unity in Christ by the Holy Spirit under the universal fatherhood of God”.¹² In Christ all believers come together and find their place as His children. “Every Christian, as a member of the church through whose preaching he came to believe in Christ, through whose Baptism he is participated in the death and resurrection of Christ, and at whose table he receives the body and blood of Christ, is certain that he is the member of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.”¹³ This approach determines the ecumenical method which consists in comparing the separated churches with one another in order to discover what is common to all. But today “the Body of Christ is divided and no one can deny the need for a reintegration which will convincingly demonstrate to the world that the Church is Christ’s Body. No dogma, no tradition, no difference in the appreciation of the truth should be allowed to stand in the way of our becoming visibly one community, the household of God.”¹⁴ Yet, Church is the outward expression of this fellowship where dogmas and doctrines have less significance. “Jesus Christ is the center of all Churches. The way to unity is the movement towards the center who is Christ. When all churches move towards the center, they come closer to one another.”¹⁵ That means Church is not static,

¹² The Uppsala Report as quoted by J. Robert Nelson, *The Unity of the Church and the Unity of Mankind* in Groscurth, Reinhard (ed), “What Unity implies”, Geneva: WCC, 1969. p. 103

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 35 (Edmund Sachlink, *The Unity and Diversity of the Church* in Groscurth)

¹⁴ Rajaiah D. Paul, *The Church of South India*, R.J.W. Bevan, op. cit., p. 1963. 235

¹⁵ Kuncheria Pathil, *Theology of Ecumenism in the Asian Context: A Catholic Perspective in “Our Pilgrimage in Hope-Proceedings of the First Three Seminars of the Asian Movement for Christian Unity”*, Manila: CCA/FABC, 2001. p. 30

but moves to the center. The center-periphery idea of mission can be seen in relation with the Church and God relationship. The Gospels portray a Jesus who made fellowship a reality among those who followed Him. The rule of Christ under the Spirit is the source of unity, but it is a unity that presupposes diversity. It was in this context, the beginning of the 20th century the unity concept was “linked with intimate closeness to the Gospel as the revealed truth of God”.¹⁶ However, what should unite us must not be merely a form for study and action, but a forum in which our communion in faith and sacraments which must be discovered, expressed, and celebrated where Christ is in the center.

2.4 Pauline View towards Unity

St. Paul is considered as the first ecumenist in the New Testament who uprooted the Gospel from the Jewish soil for the whole humanity. Unity of the church, based on Christology, is the essential dogma behind his conviction. At the same time Paul does not deny the fact of disunity among the believers. Paul urges his audience to watchfulness, to preserve the unity of the church. Unity with Christ leads to a unity of believers, and in the unity of the disciples is reproduced the unity of believers with the father and son.¹⁷ The first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthian Church proves that disunity among the believers within the church had sprung out during his time. The first Christian community at Jerusalem which included the apostles, disciples, and the first followers of Jesus. Paul does not agree with the various fractions within the believers’ community where he warns them against the divisions within the fellowship. From Jerusalem, Christian faith spread to Antioch, and from there to the Gentile world of Asia Minor, Greece and Rome. Through out these years Christianity had undergone certain changes by the Hellenistic culture/world and later the clash between Judaism and Hellenism. The Council of Jerusalem (ca. 50 CE), for instance, was an organized and official attempt, for settling the dispute between the Hellenistic-Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians (Acts.15). The results of this first council were normative for the entire early Christian church. It can be considered that “the first ecumenical council held with a pluralistic approach to ecclesial traditions.”¹⁸ Even though St. Paul met with people from different traditions, cultures and value systems, he did not favour the breakups within the church.

¹⁶ Neville S. Talbot, *Thoughts on Unity*, London: SCM, 1920. p. 6

¹⁷ William Rusch, *op. cit.*, p. 7

¹⁸ Kuncheria Pathil, *Theology of Ecumenism... Our Pilgrimage in Hope*, *op. cit.*, p. 26

2.5 The Church – An Explanation

The characteristics and structures of the early Church have to be taken into account to comprehend the purpose and meaning of *oikoumene* today. The unity concept cannot be kept aloof from the life of the Church. “A divided church is a scandal and a counter-witness to Christ”.¹⁹ In other words, unity is the basic element for the survival of the community of believers. “Church unity is not a desirable feature of life in the church; it is a condition of the church’s existence. The unity of the church derives from its one Lord. The one Christ is present in every local community.”²⁰ Church as a community of believers has to have the understanding that God’s redeeming activity in the world has been carried out through His calling a people to be His own chosen people. The old covenant was fulfilled in the new when Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, died and was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven and gave the Holy Ghost to dwell in His Body, the Church. God has given to His people in Jesus Christ a unity which is God’s initiation and not human made. The Biblical message on unity of the church can be put as, “one church with a richness of diversity in theology, worship forms, and structures that knows tensions and disputes; but divisions and large numbers of Christians separated from full fellowship with one another are not to be found.”²¹ The Church lies broken, yet in every part it bears testimony to the Grace and mercy of God. “The Church is called to be a visible sign of the presence of Christ, who is both hidden and revealed to faith, reconciling and healing human alienation in the worshipping community.”²² This is the basis for the ecumenical beginning.

Conclusion

Ecumenism, in its basic level obviously is Scriptural. The word of God envisages the unity of the entire created being. Integration of the created world is primary in the salvific act of God. It is not the unity of the Christians or the church which is highlighted here, where as the harmonious life of the creation being promoted through the scripture. In the Asian context, the vitality of human life and the mission of the church expects the fullness of the entire creation. Being a theological community, we have the responsibility of translating the scripture to the present day context in doing mission in unison.

¹⁹ Wesley Ariarajah, Some Basic Theological Assumptions of the Ecumenical Movement in Our Pilgrimage in Hope... Ibid., p. 40

²⁰ William Rusch, op. cit., p. 8

²¹ Ibid., p. 9

²² What Unity Requires, Faith and Order Paper No. 77, Geneva: WCC, 1976. p. 13

An appraisal of the genesis of Christianity in Indian history with special emphasis on St. Thomas tradition – A historical perspective

*Mr. Abraham Thomas**

Introduction

India is a historical nation, it is a place of conquests and movements. Christianity has a peculiar establishment in India, and played a vital role in the history of secular India. Generally, a preconceived idea or opinion of Indians regarding the origin of Christianity is that Christianity was introduced to India initially by Europeans or British recently i.e. 17-19 centuries. But the opinions of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Rajendra Prasad reveal the idea that Christianity in India is as old as Christianity itself. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, writes in his autobiography, “You may be surprised to learn that Christianity came to India long before it went to England or Western Europe, and when even in Rome, it was a despised and proscribed sect. It established a firm hold in South India. Although these Christians had their head in Antioch (Syria); their Christianity is practically indigenous and has a few outside contacts.”¹

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the former President of India made the following observation in his speech at the St. Thomas Day² celebration in New Delhi on 18 December, 1955, “Remember, St. Thomas came to India when many of the countries of Europe had not yet become Christian, and so those Indians who trace their Christianity to him have a long history and a higher ancestry than that of Christians of many of the European countries. And it is really a matter of pride to us so that it happened...”³

In addition to these opinions another former president of India, Giani Zail Singh says, “Christianity in India dates back to the days of St. Thomas, one of the original

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¹ Roger E Hedlund, *Christianity Is Indian: The Emergence of an Indigenous* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 227. Further he writes in his *Discovery of India*, that there were Christians who had reached India probably during the first century after Christ. There were large numbers of Syrian Christians and Nestorians in South India and they were as much part of the country as anyone else. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 236.

² In Western countries St. Thomas feast day is generally celebrated on December 21 and in the Eastern Orthodox Church on July 3 (*The World Book Encyclopedia*, Vol.19, 1982, 200).

³ D. Arthur Jayakumar, *History of Christianity in India. Selected Themes* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), 1.

disciples of the Lord Jesus. Since then it has flourished and added a new dimension to India's cultural heritage. With deep roots in the soil, Indian Christianity has developed an independent personality of its own - Christian in religion, oriental in worship and Indian in culture. This local character has been sustained and enriched over the last many centuries." Here I present the credibility of the nature of Christianity by taking the historical evidences and arguments. The ultimate purpose of my work is to state the existence of Christianity in India throughout the years. It will help the reader to understand the credibility of the Christian religion in the pluralistic context.

1. Traditions regarding the origin of Christianity in India

1.1. Bartholomew Tradition

The tradition concerning St. Bartholomew in India originated from the 4th century with Eusebius of Caesarea, the great historian of the early Church, and St Jerome. According to them around 190 A.D. Pantaenus, a noted Christian teacher of Alexandria, visited India. During his visit Pantaenus found among the Christians, a copy of the Gospel according to St. Matthew in 'Hebrew'. The Christians said that it was left by St. Bartholomew, who had preached to them. Jerome affirms this and adds that he preached to the Brahmins. Finally Pantaenus took the book back to Alexandria.

1.2. St. Thomas Tradition

The tradition concerning Apostle Thomas in India had developed both within and outside India. For our convenience, we would call the tradition that developed outside India, Western tradition and the tradition that developed within India, Indian tradition. C.B. Firth in his book 'An Introduction to Indian Church History' mentioned that it was one of the early eastward movements that first brought Christianity to India. He says that according to tradition, it was brought in the first century by one of the twelve apostles, St. Thomas.⁴

1.2.1. Western Tradition

The Western Tradition seems to have originated from an apocryphal book called Acts of Thomas,⁵ written in the middle of the 3rd century (C.200 A.D.). Incidentally, this is the earliest written source mentioning about Thomas in India. According to it, after the ascension of our Lord Jesus, the Disciples of

⁴ C.B.Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History* (Delhi, ISPCK, 2008), 2.

⁵ The Acts of Thomas was originally composed in Syriac Language by a Syrian Bardesan, native of Edessa in Mesopotamia and it was translated into Greek in the 4th century and then into Latin.

Christ gathered together and cast lots to find out their place of ministry. India fell to Thomas and he was reluctant to go. On the same night Jesus appearing in a dream encouraged him to go to India. The following day, he happened to meet a merchant named Habban who was seeking for a carpenter to build a palace for his king, Gundaphorus. With Habban, Thomas arrived in India. The king giving adequate money asked him to build a palace within six months. Thomas took the money and spent it on the poor. On the appointed day the king asked for the palace. Thomas replied to him that the palace was built for him in heaven. On hearing this the king was angry and in his fury threw him into prison. Meanwhile the King's brother Gad fell ill and died. Being taken to heaven, he was shown the palace built by Thomas for his brother. Gad obtained permission to get back his life and told his brother about the palace and requested the release of Thomas. Thomas was released and both Gad and Gundaphorus received baptism. Thomas continued his preaching with miracles.

At the request of the neighboring king Misedus, to heal the officer's wife and daughter who was possessed with evil spirit, Thomas went to the next kingdom and healed them. His preaching resulted in the conversion of noble women, including the king's wife. They declared their intention to abandon the marriage. The king was irritated by this and ordered his soldiers to kill Thomas and he was killed with spears. After a long time, the king's children were possessed by the devil. Believing Thomas bones would cure the king's children, they opened the tomb of Thomas. The tomb was found empty and it was told that it had been carried away to Edessa. This is a brief account of Acts of Thomas.

According to this tradition, Thomas came to North India first around A.D. 46-49. In 1834 numerous coins have been found in Punjab and in Afghanistan bearing his name in Greek on one side and in Pali on the other; they are dated on palaeographical grounds in the first half of the first century A.D., and their number suggests that his reign was a fairly long one. There is also a stone inscription (the Takht-i-Bahi stone, now in the Lahore Museum, Pakistan) containing his name and a date which is interpreted as 46 A.D.; this is described as the twenty sixth year of his reign. In some of the coins the name of Gad is also found. Thus it is said that though the Acts of Thomas has lots of legendary materials, it is quite possible that it has the nucleus of historical facts, which Thomas came to India. Another 3rd century book *Didascalia Apostolorum* also seems to suggest that Thomas came to India. It seems that the Western Tradition had emerged based on Acts of Thomas.⁶

⁶ K.V. Koshy. *St. Thomas and the Syrian Churches of India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 20.

1.2.2. Indian Tradition

1.2.2.1. The Malabar Tradition

This is known as the Indian tradition which has been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth among the Malabar Christians of Kerala and to some extent among their non-Christian neighbors also.

The content of the Malabar or Indian tradition is that St. Thomas came by sea and landed at Cranganore in about the year 52 A.D. He converted a few high caste Hindu families in Cranganore, Palayur, Quilon and some other places, visited the Coromandal coast, making disciples of the Christian faith, crossed over to China and preached the Gospel; returned to India and organized the Christians of Malabar under some guides from among the leading families he had converted, and erected a few public places of worship. Then he moved to the Coromandal coast and suffered martyrdom near Little Mount on what is now known as the St. Thomas Mount. His body was brought to the town of Mylapore and was buried in a holy shrine he had built. As the tradition goes, Christians from Malabar, west Asia and even from China used to go on pilgrimage to Mylapore and venerate the tomb.⁷

Today's Indian Christianity has its roots deep in the ancient Christianity of Malabar. This early Christian community is known in historiography as Christians of St. Thomas.

1.2.2.2. The Mylapore Tradition

The Mylapore tradition which is also known as "The Coromandal Tradition" was given much prominence as a separate tradition by the Portuguese. According to this tradition, St. Thomas after his fruitful ministry in the Malabar Coast, crossed over to the Eastern coast and preached the Gospel there. As in Malabar, he had converts, especially from the higher castes.⁸ Being infuriated by his success, his antagonists made attempts on his life. On one such occasion when he was chased by them, he took shelter in a cave near the Little Mount,⁹ and when he was about to be captured, he escaped from

⁷ K.V. Koshy, 21.

⁸ According to general consensus of local Indian tradition it is estimated that thousands were converted – 6850 of the Brahmins, 2590 Kshatriyas and 3780 Vaishyas during the ministry of St. Thomas in South India. Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol 1 (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2006), 34.

⁹ At Chinnamalai in Chennai (formerly Madras) there is a rocky area. The story goes that it was here that Apostle Thomas found a tiny cave as his home. He used to go up the hill to pray and to preach. In this cave a small Greek cross is kept which is said to be collected from St. Thomas's prayer home. To the east of this cave, there is an opening, through which St. Thomas escaped and ran to St. Thomas Mount. On the rocks near this opening, there is a handprint and a footprint said to be that of St. Thomas (N.M. Matthew, 70).

that place through a hole in the roof of the cave, and took shelter in the shrine he had built at the top of the St. Thomas Mount (in Tamil Pharangi Malai¹⁰). His pursuers caught him there and speared him to death while he was clinging on to a stone cross inside the said shrine. Later his disciples or followers came and took his slain body away and buried him on the sea shore in San Tome, Mylapore.

The advocates of this tradition point out as evidences a palm print (foot-print) on the rock inside the cave at the Little Mount, the Stone Cross¹¹ (Persian Cross) at St. Thomas Mount (Pharangi Malai) and the tomb in the San Tome Cathedral, Mylapore. It is to be noted that all these three places are in the hands of the Roman Catholic Church in India.¹²

2. Arguments against the traditional view on the origin of Christianity in India

There are different views and arguments regarding the traditional view.

- Scholars like Fr. J. Dahlmann and G.Milne Rae maintained that St. Thomas ministered only in North India and not in South India.
- The Syrian scholars E.M.Philip and K.N.Daniel defended the southern apostolate and deny the apostle's visit to north.
- Scholars like J.N.Farquar, Eugene Card and Bishop A.E. Medlycott believe that St. Thomas visited both the north and south India. These scholars give equal weightage to both the North Indian and South Indian apostolate of St. Thomas.
- Scholars like Tillemont, James Hough and Sir John Kaye opined that St. Thomas never visited India. Now this view is not given much importance because this view was based on the assumption that it would have never been possible for a Palestinian to visit India because of travel possibilities. But with the historical documents surfacing the view is completely rejected.¹³

¹⁰ Indians and Chinese called the Portuguese people 'Parangki'. Parangki + Malai = Portugese + Mountain that means "Mountain of the Portugese" (N.M. Matthew, 70).

¹¹ The inscription on the cross is in the language Nagari Palidu which means, "Through cross suffering, the Messiah - Jesus Christ brought salvation to the world" (N.M. Matthew, 70).

¹² B.Jyakumar 'Indian Church History' (Vengoor: Ebenezer Theological Seminary, 2013), P.8.

¹³ A. Jayakumar, History of Christianity in India: Major Themes (Kolkata, SPACE, 2013), 6.

3. Different sources and Evidences

There are different sources and evidences that show the arrival of St. Thomas in India. These sources can be divided into Western and Indian.

3.1. Western

(a) Early Christian writings: Unfortunately the Church Fathers give us very little information about Thomas. Yet from the third century onwards, they make some vague allusions as regards to the place of Thomas ministry. Most of the pre-Nicene Church fathers like Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius refer Parthia as the place of Thomas ministry. A fragment attributed to Hippolytus, seems to have been written in the early years of 3rd century mentions that Thomas did ministry in Parthia and in many other countries and died in a city Calamene.¹⁴ Unfortunately its value is doubtful. A similar kind of account comes from Dorotheus, Bishop of Tours about the end of the third Century. Whereas the post Nicene Church Fathers like Ephraem, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, Rufinus of Aquileia, Gregory of Tours and Martin of Tours say that Thomas went to India. Only St. Ephraem of Syria gives a little detailed account of this. Such is the tradition that developed in the West. At least from the 4th century, it is generally held that St. Thomas had his apostolate in India.

(b) Doctrine of the Apostles (Didascalia Apostolorum or Teaching of the Apostles) written in Edessa c.250 A.D. points to India as the field of activity of Judas Thomas.

(c) Acts of Judas Thomas: In addition to mentioning his field of activity, speaks of the slain body of Thomas being taken from India to Edessa where it was buried and the observance of July 3, as the day of Thomas' martyrdom.

(d) Marco Polo, the Venetian traveler, gives an account of his visit to the site of the tomb of St. Thomas in India (1292). According to him, the body of St. Thomas was laid to rest in a certain city of the province of Malabar.

(e) John of Monte Corvino, a Franciscan monk, spent some time in India, on his way to China. In a letter from Peking dated 8 January, 1305, he makes a mention of "the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle."¹⁵

¹⁴ The word Calamene or Calamina is a Syriac word meaning Little Mount (N.M. Matthew, 63).

¹⁵ B. Jayakumar 'Indian Church History' (Vengoor: Ebenezer Theological Seminary, 2013), P.10.

3.2. Indian

(a) Folk Songs: The Indian tradition is passed on orally to successive generations and is kept consistent by the Christians of Malabar. Some details of this tradition may be found in a few songs such as the Ramban (Rabban) Thoma Pattu, the Veeradyan Pattu, and Margam Kali Pattu.

The Veeradyan Pattu (Song) is oral. It is in the possession of a particular Hindu caste family which receives gifts/presents, from the Thomas Christians by singing it out on certain social and religious occasions.

The Ramban (Rabban) Thoma Pattu (The song of Ramban Thomas) was in oral form, and it is supposed to have been written down in 1601 by a priest Thomas Ramban Maliekal, the forty-eighth priest of Maliekal family in Niranam. This has similarity with the Acts of Judas Thomas.

The Margam Kali Pattu (the song of the Happy Way) describes how the Margam or the Christian Way and its worship were introduced into Malabar by St. Thomas. This was collected and compiled in 1792.

(b) Families Converted by Thomas : Some of the families who were converted by St. Thomas in Malabar were Pakalomattam, Sankarapuri, Kalli, Kalikau, Koykkam, Madeipur, Muttodal, Nedumpally, Panakkamattam, Kothakali, etc. They very emphatically hold the view that they were converted by St. Thomas in the first century A.D.

(c) The Seven Churches: Travelling in the coastal region southwards, Thomas founded churches in seven places: Malankara (Cranganore), Palayur (Chavakad), Parur, Gokamangalam, Niranam, Chayal (Nilakal) and Quilon (Kollam).

The seven places where St. Thomas was supposed to have established churches were trading centers where Jews from Socotra had come and settled. So it is considered as a possibility for St. Thomas to have gone there in the company of traders, and utilized the opportunity to preach the Gospel to the dispersed Jews and to the local people.

(d) The Tomb in Mylapore is also cited as an evidence for his ministry in India. In Mylapore Cathedral, the following is written near the tomb THIS IS THE TOMB OF St. THOMAS One of the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ, who Came to India in the year 52 A.D., as He landed at Crangannore, preached Christianity and built seven churches there. Then he came to Coromandel Coast. He lived in Mylapore, preached at Little Mount and was martyred at St. Thomas Mount in 72 A.D. and was buried here.

4. Evaluation of the Traditions

As discussed earlier St. Bartholomew tradition has no weight at all. At least since the 4th century, there is general agreement in the sources to the Thomas tradition that St. Thomas came to India. But in spite of the well founded tradition both in India and abroad, historians of the last three centuries like Basnage and Tillemont, James Hough, John Kaye, etc., out rightly denied the possibility of Thomas coming to India and regarded the tradition only as a pious myth. Their main question was how is it possible for a Palestinian Jew to travel such a long distance and come to India, in those days when travel and communication facilities were very meager?

But today the trade connection between India and Roman Empire has been proven beyond any doubt through the golden Roman coins discovered in Calicut, Coimbatore, etc. The Tamil literature calls them Yavanar. The (Muzri) Cranganore was a much popular harbor, as per Sangam age Tamil Literature. Starbo, who lived during the time of Augustus, Caesar makes reference to trade between the Roman Empire and India. Pliny the elder mentions voyages from the Roman Empire to India and the pepper trade. As such it is quite possible for Thomas to come to India.

If we say that it was possible for Thomas to come to India, the question raised is, why the Pre-Nicene Church Fathers refer Parthia, as a place of Ministry? Historians like Heras and A.C. Perumalil suggest that during the first century the Parthian empire was spread across the North Western India. The Middle East writers, on account of that used the term Parthia very vaguely. Actually, the vague name Parthia is used only to refer to India. If we accept this explanation, the next issue to be resolved is to which part of India, Thomas had come.

Taking the Acts of Thomas as the basis of argument, several historians like G. Milne Rae and Dahlmann argue that St. Thomas must have come to North India and deny his South Indian visit. They argue that the numerous gold coins discovered in Punjab and Afghanistan since 1834 bearing the name Gundaphorus in Greek on one side and Pali on the other side, dated to be 1st century and the stone inscription Takht-I-Bahi containing Gundaphorus name and dated 46 A.D., seems to support the North Indian apostolate of Thomas.

But as historian E.M. Philip argues, the North Indian apostolate of Thomas is based on Acts of Thomas. How are we to rely unduly on an apocryphal book? Unlike South India there are no holy places (monuments) connected with the Martyrdom of Thomas. The absence of local tradition and Christians

claiming the apostolate of Thomas seems to only suggest that Thomas could have come to south India.

E.M. Philip and K.N. Daniel argue for the South Indian apostolate of Thomas. The frequent sea traffic between Muziri (Cranganore) and Caesarea must have made it easy for Thomas to reach south than north. The community of Syrian Christians, who claim that they are descendents of the converts of Thomas, the Holy places connected with the martyrdom of Thomas in Madras, strongly favor Thomas visit to South India.¹⁶

There are some historians who believe in the probability of both visits such as North India and South India. F.N. Farquhar finds a favorable clue to the Southern tradition in Acts of Thomas itself. He argues that Thomas first worked in Gundaphorus kingdom and after the destruction of the Indo-Parthian kingdom by the Kushans, might have gone to Socotra. From there he came to the Malabar Coast and then to the Eastern Coast, worked in Mylapore and died a martyr's death. Some of the Indian Church History writers, P. Thomas and K.V. Koshy also agree with this. Historians who hold this view ascribe two journeys of St. Thomas to India. The Apostle began his first journey from Jerusalem to the kingdom of King Gondaphorus. In his second journey he proceeded to Malabar from Socotra, an island in the Arabian Sea. In his first journey, St. Thomas left Jerusalem for Alexandria. There he met Habban, the emissary of King Gondophorus. Both travelled down the Nile to Andopolis and trekking over land reached the Red Sea port of Mios Hormis. Here they caught a ship and reached Patala and thence to Taxila. Subsequently, with the invasion of Kushans, the Apostle left the kingdom of Gondophorus in December 51 A.D., and sailed in a ship for Alexandria. On the way, he landed at Socotra, preached there and established a church. Subsequently, he continued his journey from Socotra to Malabar beginning in June 52 A.D., and reached Muziris five or six weeks later.

It is significant to note that only Madras claims to have the tomb. Moreover historians find traditions in Asian countries to be closer to the facts. Few of the archeological findings, seems to corroborate the local traditions. The remains of old temple, etc., found at Palayur, discovery of crosses at Alangad, Arthad, etc., effigies of the Christian king discovered at Nilampur and at Killiur seems to corroborate with the Thomas tradition. Hence it looks more probable that Thomas had come to South India.

¹⁶ B.Jayakumar 'Indian Church History' (Vengoor: Ebenezer Theological Seminary, 2013), P.11.

From the above discussion we can understand that the scholars and historians had different opinions, while some support North Indian apostolate and others South Indian apostolate. Yet traditionally most of the theologians and biblical writers of history of Christianity in India agreed with the South Indian apostolate of Thomas. Though it lacks contemporary evidence it cannot be disproved because we have every reason to rely on the tradition and believe Thomas had his apostolate in India, perhaps south India. Whatever may be the opinion expressed or views held it is to be admitted that there is no other country in the world which, claims either to have the Tomb of St. Thomas in their midst or such strong traditions and evidences for his apostolate.¹⁷

Conclusion

In this article we have seen the different views regarding the origin of Christianity in India. The analysis of St. Thomas traditions and the different sources from Western and Indian closely suggest that St. Thomas having come to India, perhaps South India. Although, divergent opinions were held among scholars regarding the place St. Thomas had visited, most of the historians believe that St. Thomas came to South India. Some of the missionaries and merchants began to visit India from the third century onwards. In addition to this there were about three to four hundred families who migrated from Syria and settled in Kerala. Therefore, in conclusion we may say that Christianity in India has not been introduced recently by the Europeans rather it is as old as Christianity itself. It is obviously true and believable when our first prime minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and former president, Dr. Rajendra Prasad opined that Christianity came to India even before it went to many of the European countries. For this reason, Nehru further said in 1946, "Indian Christians are part and parcel of the Indian people. Their traditions go back 1,500 years or more and they form one of the many enriching elements in the country's cultural and spiritual life."¹⁸ But unfortunately, most of the Indians do not recognize even the secular historians' opinions like this. Logically speaking they even forgot that Christianity is an Asian religion and it remains so. Therefore, we can say that Christians are part and parcel of the wider Indian Community and not an imported product. Moreover, it is the time to think for every Christian in India, because India has still 2.3% of Christianity though it had 2000 years history.

¹⁷ B.Jayakumar, *Indian Church History* (Vengoor: Ebenezer Theological Seminary, 2013), P.11.\

¹⁸ K.M. George, *Christianity in India...*, 212.

Contemporary Fight for Transformation of Dalits

*Ambrose Selvaraj**

The origins of Christianity in Kerala go back to the earliest period of the Church itself. In fact, there is a tradition among the Christian people of Kerala that St. Thomas the Apostle, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, landed on the Kerala coast in 52 A.D. and preached the Gospel. He organized Christian communities, in several places and established seven churches in Kerala and then at last got martyrdom in Mylapore, Chennai, in 72 A.D. His tomb is venerated by people of all religions even today. In 345 A.D., a Palestinian business man, Thomas Cana, along with 72 families came and settled in Kerala, thereby augmenting the Christian community. A second period of intense Christian missionary activity began with the arrival of European missionaries since the discovery of the sea route to India by Vasco da Gama in 1498. These missionaries sought to improve the condition of the Dalit. However, today, Dalits seek to improve themselves. There is not only a shift in focus but also a shift in emphasis. Today, this emphasis is not on how others view the Dalit but on how the Dalit view others and interpret the world around them. In Christian circles Dalit radical theology has been growing. In this article, we will examine the causes for growth in Dalit theology and the implications it holds for the Christian world in general and India in particular.

The main objective of the missionary was:

- To make known the glad tidings of the Gospel and give everyone the opportunity of learning it
- To maintain an affectionate and watchful care over their congregations
- To organise and educate an earnest and aggressive local church by which agency alone the eventual evangelisation of the State could be hoped for
- To shatter the barriers that obstructed the free spread of the Gospel.¹

By their hard work they achieved their aims because they chose the principles

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¹ K. Wilson, "Political Perspectives of Dalit in Contemporary India", NCC Review, December 1991, p. 1436.

of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Dalit were transformed by education and the spread of Christianity. But the sad part was, those who embraced Christianity to get out of the suffocating grip of Hinduism were once again discriminated against within the Church because of Casteism. There were separate places of worship, separate congregations and separate cemeteries for different castes of the same denomination within a church in various parts of Kerala. Churches were divided by caste. There was a church for the Nadars and a separate church for the Pariars. The oppressive structures existed not only in society at large, but also within the Church itself. "The cases of high caste Christians demanding separation for fear of pollution from low caste Christians were not rare."² As a result we have today Hindu Dalit and Buddhist Dalit and also Brahmin Dalits.

In the light of these, the Christian Dalit activists developed a theology known as Dalit Theology. Andrew Wintage has explained the Dalit predicament well.

Christian education has operated to raise them up educationally. But this has not led either to employment opportunities in sufficient numbers, because they do not have S.C. status, and cannot employ many or to a status equal to their educational qualifications.³

Dalit Theology is a people-oriented theology. It is counter-theology - a radical discontinuity with the traditional Indian Christian Theology, which is essentially Brahminic in character. Dalit theology is not an intellectual exploration struggle for the meaning of salvation in a state of alienation, exploitation and shame. It is an action-centred theology aiming at liberation.⁴

According to Walter Fernandes, Dalit theology is part of liberation theology.⁵ Liberation theology is strongest in Latin America, a poor, backward and exploited area where the Roman Catholic Church predominates. The abject poverty, hard struggles and closeness of Christian clergy to the exploited masses have led to the development of liberation theology. Jose Miguez Bonino says, "Latin American Theology becomes a militant theology, a partisan theology perhaps."⁶ While India faces the evil of casteism, Latin

² M. Azariah, *The Unchristian Side of the Indian Church*, Dalit Sahitya Akademy, Bangalore, 1989, p. ii.

³ Andrew Wintage, "A Study of Conversion from Christianity to Islam in Two Tamil Villages", *Religion and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 4, December 1981, p. 35.

⁴ Arvind P. Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, Edited by Arvind P.Nirmal, (Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and research Institute, 2007), 58-59.

⁵ Walter Fernandes, *Inequality, its Basis and Search for Solutions: Dr. Alfred D'Souza Memorial Essays*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1986, p. 202.

⁶ As quoted by Charles Coleman, *Kingdom in Conflict*, Hodder and Stoughton, Toronto, 1984, p. 201.

America and the Western countries face race differences and class differences, Indian casteism created the Dalit. Arvind P. Nirmal described the term 'Dalit' thus: "1.The broken, the torn, the rent, the burnt and the split. 2.The opened, the expanded. 3.The bisected. 4.The driven asunder, the dispelled, the scattered. 5.The downtrodden, the crushed, the destroyed and 6.The manifested and the displayed."⁷

However, Latin American liberation theology is another theology imported to India because of its relevance to the Indian situation where the majority of India's people face the problem of poverty. The Indian situation is different, while the Latin American liberation theologians used Marxist analyses of socioeconomic realities, Dalit theologians are not doing it. V.T. Rajashekar tells us how caste still exists and operates in the political life of Kerala and in the rest of India. He says the Communist party failed in Hindu India because the party had not come out with any anti-caste programs. The extreme left Communist party came to power in West Bengal and Kerala but in no way has caste suffered any setback. Arvind P Nirmal pictures the need for an exclusive Dalit theology in these words:

My Dalit ancestor did not enjoy the nomadic freedom of the wandering Aramean. As an outcaste he was also cast out of his village. The Dalit bastis were always and are always on the outskirts of the Indian village. When my Dalit ancestor walked the dusty roads of his village, the Savarnas tied a tree branch around his waist so that he would not leave any unclean footprints and pollute the road. The Savarnas also tied an earthen pot around my Dalit ancestor's neck to serve as a spittoon. If ever he tried to learn Sanskrit or some other sophisticated language, the oppressors gagged him permanently by pouring molten lead down his throat. They denied him entry to their temples and places of worship. That, my friends, was my father, a Mang in Maharastra. He was no wandering Aramean. My Dalit consciousness therefore has an unparalleled depth of pathos and misery and it is this historical Dalit consciousness, the Dalit identity that should inform my attempt at a Christian Dalit theology.⁸

The failure of the church has also contributed to the rise of Dalit theology. Alfred de Souza, in his book, *Church and Society*, says,

So far the Church in India has easily come to terms with economic, social and political injustice. The reason is that much of our theology is alienated

⁷ Nirmal, "Towards ...," 54.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

and alienating. We are more aware of the secular world of a Harvey Cox than of the caste and corruption in Indian society.⁹

The church has not taken any dynamic steps to correct divisive nature of society. The rise of Dalit Theology therefore can be traced to disillusionment with the church, which is primarily interested in maintaining the status quo.

Another reason for development of Dalit theology has been that, so far, Indian Christian theology has tried to work out its theological systems in terms of either Sankara's Advaita Vedanta or Vishishta Advaita. Bishop A.J. Appasamy tried to synthesize Ramanuja's Vishishta Advaita with Christian theology. M.M. Thomas' theological anthropology laid the foundation for Christian theology on the basis of karma marga. Chenchiah synthesizes Christian theology with Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. With these in mind, Arvind P Nirmal writes,

Most of the contributions to Indian Christian theology in the past came from caste converts to Christianity. The result has been that Indian Christian Theology has perpetuated within itself what I prefer to call the 'Brahminic' tradition. This tradition has further perpetuated intuition inferiority oriented approach to the theological task in India. One wonders whether this kind of Indian Christian Theology will ever have a mass appeal.¹⁰

In Craemer's book, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, there has emerged a concern for dialogue with other faiths. It again has contributed to Indian Christian Theology's obsession with the Brahminic tradition. However, in the seventies Indian Christian theologians began to take the question of socio-economic justice more seriously and thus emerged a theology known as "Third World Theology." It was in allegiance to Liberation Theology, so it was an imported theology. As this theology also leaned heavily on Western philosophical thought, Nirmal writes, "to sum up then, whether it is the traditional Indian Christian Theology or the traditional ecumenical theology or the more recent third World Theology, they failed to see in the struggle of Indian Dalit for liberation as subject matter appropriate for doing theology in India."¹¹

⁹ Alfred De Souza, *Church and Society: Sociological Perspective on Lay Participation*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1984, p. 1.

¹⁰ Nirmal, *Towards...*, 54.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

According to Azariah, these theologies are not relevant at all for over 20 million out of 30 million Indian Christians today. Between 50 percent and 80 percent of all Christian in India today are of the Scheduled Caste origin. It is another reason to create Dalit theology. It is a theology about the Dalit, a theology for the Dalit, a theology from the Dalit. It is a theology that is faithful to the living God. M. Azariah quoting Fr. Kappen writes

In order to develop a theology that is faithful to the living God, Asian theologians have therefore no other alternatives but to disassociate themselves from the current practices of theologies taught in Asian seminaries which largely tend to legitimate the status quo...they have to make an historic option in favour of the poor and oppressed in other words they have to declass themselves. Like the rich young man of the Gospel, they too are called upon to sell what they have and give it to the poor.¹²

Thus Fr. Kappen asserts “Asian Theology will come to its own only when it will make a complete break with the rationalism of the West.”¹³ Arvind P Nirmal, quoting Professor John Webster says, “That so much was happening on the Dalit front but Indian Christian Theology failed to take note of it.”¹⁴ He further says

Professor John Webster in his article, “From Indian church to Indian Theology,” an attempt at theological construction has seen three stages in the history of the depressed class movement in India. The three stages are somewhat overlapping chronically, but they all have their own distinct characteristics. The first stage is dated from the 1860s or 1870s through the 1930s. The chief characteristic of second stage is the caste Hindu efforts to improve the conditions of the depressed classes. Initially such voluntary organisations as the Depressed Class Mission (1906), the All India Shuddhi Sabha 1909, were involved in these efforts. Later, Mahatma Gandhi and the Harijan Sevak Sangh 1932 expanded the work. After 1937, the Government agencies were used to pass laws and finance and or administer programmes for the welfare of the Depressed Classes. The third and last stage maybe dated from the 1920s to the present day. This stage is characterised by self-reliance on the part of though the Depressed classes themselves.¹⁵

¹² Azariah, “Doing Theology”, pp. 95-96.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Nirmal, “Towards...,” 57.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The need arose for Christian Dalit Theology produced by a Dalit. Nirmal writes about the nature of Dalit theology.

It will be based on their own Dalit experiences, their own sufferings, their own aspirations and their own hope. It will narrate the story of their 12 sufferings and their pathos - it will anticipate liberation which is meaningful to them. It will represent a radical discontinuity with the traditional Indian Christian theology because the dominant tradition in Indian Christian Theology needs to be challenged by the emerging Dalit theology.¹⁶

Like American Black theology, Dalit theology also has exclusivism that the triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is on the side of the Dalit and not of the non-Dalit. The view of Black theology is, let the Black speak for the Black. Not the whites speak for the black. To them, white is sin. They consider Jesus as, the Black Messiah. In Christ, God becomes black. They claim that, the son of God, son of Man, Messiah, Lord, Son of David, were the title given for Jesus in the First Century, which have no value or meaning today. Black Theology questions, "If God is righteous, why he allowed the white to capture the African black for slavery? Then they realised the solution for that question in the book of Exodus 2, and Psalms 68:31, where Israelites were delivered by God. So, God will bring deliverance to the Black."¹⁷

This idea consoled them. This sort of thought is completely adopted for Dalit theology. The ancient creed found in Deuteronomy 26:5-12 has been chosen as the model of Dalit consciousness, Dalit Theology and Dalit identity. For more than 3,000 years with full sanction of Hinduism, and Hindu Manusasthra, Varna-Ashrama-Dharma was established and according to that the Untouchables were born to live and die as slaves. Therefore, the Deuteronomic Creed must first exercise itself in laying bare the roots of the believing community. In his own exegesis of Exodus liberation, Nirmal writes

The Exodus liberation is symbolised by 'a mighty hand,' 'and outstretched arms,' and by 'terror;' 'signs and wonders,' are low in the orders. Liberation does not come only through 'signs and wonders.' A certain amount of 'terror' is necessary to achieve it. In terms of a Dalit theology, this would mean that the Dalit cannot afford to have a fatalistic attitude to life. They must protest and agitate to change their lot.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 58-59.

¹⁷ Mammen Varkey, *Karutha Deivasasttram (Malayalam) Black Theology*, Vichara, Mavelikara, 1990, pp. 81-82.

¹⁸ Nirmal, "Towards....," 60-61.

In his book "Apartheid in India," V.T. Rajashekar Shetty writes.

We long for revolution, we yearn for revolution, we pine for revolution and we are prepared to die for revolution. Let hundreds of Untouchables die so that others may live in peace. This country is ours. Therefore, we love India more than anybody else. We want to liberate India from tyranny and this most gory form of apartheid.¹⁹

Recently, in the neo-Hindu revivalism epitomised by the BJP, party members like Swami Muktanand and Swami Vamadev, who are sadhus, have called for a revival of the Varna system and the reconversion of the Delhi Jama Masjid into a temple.²⁰

Dalit theology is liberation struggle for the right to live as free people created in the image of God. Dalit consciousness is deeper than the Deuteronomic creed and here, Nirmal created his own creed. He says that signs and wonders are not enough for the liberation of Dalit, but they need a mighty hand, an outstretched arm and a certain measure of terror. Therefore he emphasises the need for an activist struggle for liberation.

For Christian Dalit their experience is like the Exodus. So he writes that our exodus from Hinduism, which was imposed upon us, to Christianity or rather to Jesus Christ, is a valuable experience. It has enabled us to recognise our dalitness and also the dalitness of Jesus of Nazareth and the dalitness of His Father and our Father - Our God. A Christian Dalit Theology, therefore, should also be doxological in character. Our struggle is not over as yet but we ought to be thankful for our Exodus experience.²¹

Dr. Donald Mac Gavran feels that as long as the Hindu Scriptures remain, the Caste system will continue without any change. According to Gnanavaram Christian Dalit, who suffers along with other Dalit, suffers four-fold alienation. First, the state does not allow them to receive economic assistance or to secure political representation, even if they claim membership in the Scheduled Caste communities. Secondly, other Dalit look upon them with disfavour when they seek Government assistance, as they are considered to have already been helped by missionary patronage. Thirdly, the so called (upper) caste Christians treats Christian Dalit with contempt. And fourthly,

¹⁹ V.T. Rajashekar Shetty, *Apartheid in India*, Dalit Action Committee, Bangalore, 1978, p. 20.

²⁰ Rajiv Deshpande, "RSS must Restrain Vociferous Sants: BJP Trying to reign in Sadhus", *The Telegraph*, 10 July 1993, p. 4.

²¹ Nirmal, "Towards..." 63.

the Christian Dalit are at odds with themselves, being divided on sub-caste, regional, linguistic and church (Catholic, Lutheran and so on) bases.²²

The implications of Dalit theology are many. Regarding the question of God, Dalit Theology confirms that a non-Dalit deity cannot be the God of Dalit. Nirmal writes

...Rama killed Shambuka a Dalit because Shambuka had undertaken tapacharya, a life of prayer and asceticism. The dominant religious tradition denied the right to pray to the Dalit. Therefore Rama simply killed Shambuka and performed Dharma - a religious act. This is why Dalit have rejected Rama. For Dalit Rama is killer God - killer and murderer of Dalit.²³

In Jesus Christ, the God revealed is a Dalit God. He is God who serves and is a servant God. Nirmal writes

Do we realise that? Let us be prepared for a further shock. Are we prepared to say that my housemaid, my sweeper, my bhangi is my god? It is precisely in this sense that our God is a Servant God. He is a Waiter, a Dhobi, and a Bhangi. Traditionally, all such services have been the lot of Dalit. To speak of a servant God therefore is to recognise and identify Him as a truly Dalit deity. The Gospel writers identified Jesus with the Servant God of Isaiah.²⁴

The writer, though sympathetically examines the rise of Dalit theology, does not validate it as being biblical. While condemning the unchristian side of the high caste Christians, the writer also condemns the unchristian nature of Dalit theology for the following reasons:

1. The concept of Dalitism entails a failure to apply biblical theology. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, insists that our thought and theology should not be conformed to this world, "but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is good and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." The concept of Dalitism in theology is a world-oriented concept concentrating on politicising theology in order to gain temporal power.

²² N. Gnanavaram, "Dalit Theology and Parable of Good Samaritan", *Journal for the Study of New Testament*, Issue 50, 1993, p. 70.

²³ Nirmal, "Towards....," 63.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

2. Dalit theology ignores the concept of biblical charity. Christianity is a religion of love. Paul listed a long write-up on the character of love in I Corinthians. Jesus Christ also says; love your neighbour as yourself. In this context Dalit theology failed to approve love for universal brotherhood and the universal fatherhood of God.
3. Dalit Theology fails in applying the universality of the Gospel. To the Colossians Paul wrote, "...there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor un-circumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, but Christ is all, and in all." The Bible clearly speaks against exclusivism of any kind. The salvation Christ offers is open to all. Dalit theology fails to emphasis eschatology. Christ said, "My kingdom is not of this world". Dalit theology however is very much concerned with this world.
4. So far, Dalit theology has not made any impact upon Christians or upon Dalit Christians. It would appear that Dalit theology has remained a concern of Dalit theologians who are fond of formulating new ideas and ideology. Unlike communism, Christianity is not an ideology but it is a way of life based on inner spiritual transformation.
5. According to the writer's opinion, so far no transformation has taken place anywhere in India for the Dalit, mentally, physically or spiritually, by so-called Dalit theologians or theology. Dalit theology has failed to make any impact on the Government to reconsider the denial of reservations for Dalit Christians or any other Dalit.
6. By creating a Dalit-consciousness Dalit theology has only benefited those who have become Dalit bishops or Dalit Christian leaders, or Dalit pastors. This has resulted in the creation of a spiritual vacuum and material corruption in the church that is perhaps worse than pre-Reformation Roman Catholic Church. There is nepotism and unlawfulness and forging of political alliances in order to strengthen their leadership positions. The so-called Dalit bishops and leaders do not participate in the agony and pains of Dalit but enjoy a good life at the expense of Dalitism.
7. Dalit theology has no universal evangelical vision. They appear to be eager only to create a political order within the church.
8. The writer further would like to say that the early missionaries emancipated the Dalit without a Dalit theology. They were never anti-Brahminic or pro-Dalit. They just preached the Gospel, and the power of the Gospel transformed them. We have to be aware that they had no programs of social service as such, but taught against inequalities in

society. They found that the converts were subjected to different types of oppression and helped them liberate themselves from various bondages. They worked for removal of certain social institutions. It was not through any Dalit theology but through the Gospel. God is no respecter of persons to produce Brahminic theology or anti-Brahminic Dalit theology. God gave His son, Jesus Christ, to everybody to accept Him as Saviour. There are biblical warnings against creating theology of this worldly model, and our theology should be perfect and acceptable to the will of God.

The progress of the Dalit in Kerala came because of the successful missionary effort to spread the Gospel that rescued its hearers from the pollution of belief in Karma and fate. The Missionaries fought against caste system and allowed all the people to get education and jobs in their establishments. This attracted many people of the lower class to Christianity. Though the social reformations were aimed at the converted Christians, it benefited all the people belonging to the lower class. The universal brotherhood of man based upon the fatherhood of God was the basis for the concept of the equality of man. This was the driving force of Missionaries in bringing equality of all people. Even today one of the main reasons of BJP, RSS and VHP's hostility towards conversion is that it raises the status of the lower class and questions their authority. The Brahmins found this system as a source of free labour and exploited the lower class into working for them for generations with very little or no payment. Even in the present times there are many places in India where this system still exists and is protected by the authorities.

The Jesus' principle that is the Biblical strategy will always bring transformation. Anyone who attempts transformation without a biblical strategy will not achieve the will of God. Biblical strategy for transformation is Jesus' call to repentance. It has in view the responsibility of Christians for change becoming and remaining effective. The concern of Christian transformation is a new moral life in the spirit as a Christian obligation.

Towards a Pauline understanding of the concept of non-human weakness in the Undisputed Pauline Epistles

*Rev. Anand Sunil Kumar**

1.0. Subject

The subject of research is a study of the concept of non human weakness in the undisputed Pauline letters. This concept is used by Paul in various ways, and it is interesting to observe the same in the Pauline Literature. Black says that, “The most unified and highly developed concept of weakness in the New Testament is to be found in the writings of Apostle Paul”¹. The topic becomes more research worthy as he also adds that in the Gospels and Acts as well as majority of the New Testament epistles, there is no development of the theme of the weakness into a broad theological motif such as one can discern in the writings of the Apostle Paul.² H.G. Link says that, “The astheneia word group is found in a mere literal sense in the Synoptic gospels and in John, whereas the figurative sense, resulting from theological reflection occurs predominantly in the Pauline literature”³. Interestingly, in the Pauline literature, we can see that the concentration of the concept of weakness is primarily confined to Romans, 1 and 2 Crinthians. Black also says that,

The apostle Paul can rightly be termed as ‘the theologian of weakness’. Yet, Paul’s theology of weakness developed in a dynamic fashion in response to the situations facing him, and his particular formulations are consistently adapted and designed to meet particular issues at hand.⁴

Therefore my aim in this research will be to elucidate the non human weakness amidst the varied usage of ‘weakness’ across the undisputed Pauline letters.

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¹ Black. D. A, Weakness Language in Galatians, GTJ 4:1, 1983, p.15.

² Black, ‘Paulus Infirmus: The Pauline Concept of Weakness, GTJ 5:1, 1984, 77.

³ Link, H. G. ‘astheneia’ in Colin Brown (ed.). Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1976, 994

⁴ Black, Weakness, p. 16.

1.1. Rationale

The concept of weakness especially represented by the *asthen* group of words in the Pauline letters, has evolved into an important theological theme. Link says, “in Paul, the terms in the *asthen* group have undergone far reaching theological reflection and are developed in relation to man’s sinful nature, to Christology and ethics.⁵ However, such a concept which has evolved in the context of theological reflection has been dealt inadequately when compared with its extensive importance.

1.2. Research Questions

Is there a single meaning for ‘weakness’? If not, what are the varied meanings of this concept? For which occasions and purposes did Paul use this concept? How does Paul explain the non human weakness?

1.3. Research Method and Scope

I will first examine the referents of the *asthen* group, that is to what or whom does each occurrence of weakness refer? Subsequently, I will aggregate all the different categories and further refine the scope basing on the frequency of the occurrence of the cognates of *asthen*. Hence, rather than investigating the *asthen* group per letter, we will examine the concept of non human weakness according to category only across the undisputed Pauline letters, 1 & 2 Corinthians (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon.

Sl. No	Categories of Weakness	The frequency of the respective categories of weaknesses across the undisputed Pauline letters					
		Rom	1 Cor	2Cor	Gal	Phil	1 Thes
1	Weak σπουδαία				1		
2	Weakness of the Law	1					
3	Divine weakness		1	2			
4	Weakness in faith	4					1
5	Apostolic Weakness		2	3			
6	General Human weakness	3	1	2			
7	Physical weakness		2	7	1	2	
8	Weakness of conscience		5				
9	Weak social status		4				

⁵ Link, p. 994.

Following are the entries for Weakness referents in the Undisputed Pauline Epistles showing us the aggregate of all the different categories across them.

The following initial observations can be made from the above table:

- a. As we take a superficial glance at the above table, we can see that the major occurrences of weakness are in Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians.
- b. Most of the occurrences refer to physical weakness. Weakness in 2 Corinthians is closely related to boasting. Philippians can virtually be ignored as it simply refers to the physical illness of Epaphroditus.
- c. Two major divisions can be made.
 - i. Weakness related to non human beings (categories 1 - 3).
 - ii. Weakness related to human beings (categories 4 - 10).
- d. Weakness to conscience is entirely confined to 1 Corinthians 8:7-12.
- e. Romans seem to be dominated by weakness in faith and general human weakness, 1 Corinthians by a variety of categories and 2 Corinthians by physical weakness in relation to boasting.

I shall confine the research to one of the two major divisions from the findings tabulated above, i.e., weakness related to non human beings.

2.0. Non Human weakness

Among the challenging passages in the Bible, the parts that speak about the weakness of something which are so strong in our belief we are tough to accept. For instance, none of us would be comfortable to hear that Jesus Christ who is so central to our salvation is weak, and that he was crucified in weakness. Similarly, though on a lesser scale, it is also difficult to accept that the Law is weak. A thorough understanding or the perspective of Apostle Paul on the same should suffice us to come to a formidable understanding.

From the aggregated table, we can see the broad classification of the concept of weakness into non human and human weakness. The first group consists of entries 1, 2 and 3 which speak about weak *stoicheia*, weakness of the Law and divine weakness respectively. To discuss Paul's understanding of the *asthen* group used to describe the weakness related to non human beings, I will follow the order of the table.

2.1. Weak *stoicheia* (Gal 4:9)

The phrase, *ta asthenei kai tw ptoka stoicheia* occurs in Gal 4:9 where the *stoicheia* are described as weak and beggarly elementary things. Before studying about the weakness of the *stoicheia*, it is necessary to know as to

what the *stoicheia* itself refers to. The phrase, *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* appears first in Gal. 4:3.

Black says that the *stoicheia* refers to the elemental stages of religious experience, that are common to all human beings. He says that, “The elements of the world indicate basic teaching regarding rules, regulations, laws and religious ordinances by means of which both Jews and Gentiles tried to earn their salvation”.⁶ Bundrick, speaking on the same lines says that *stoicheia* are the rudimentary teachings of any religion through which mankind tried to earn salvation.⁷

Reid, on the same lines says that the *stoicheia* refers to an inferior form of religious experience prior to coming to Christ. He says that they had a status of minors, which he equates to the Jewish experience under the Law. He further agrees with Schweitzer who opines that they are equated to basic elements like earth, fire and water. It is also interesting to note Reid identifying, Diogenes, Laestus and Plato interpret *stoicheia* to be spiritual powers of some sort, their opinions ranging from star deities to demons, angels and national deities.⁸

On the other hand, Clinton equates the *stoicheia* to evil spirits. He says that the Galatian readers had been in bondage to beings that by nature are not gods. He therefore says that *stoicheia* cannot be equated to the Law and that these evil spirits have exploited the Law and led the people astray from following the divinely intended function.⁹

Its quite interesting to note Page saying that the *stoicheia* were not the pagan gods, and that the slavery mentioned in Galatians 4:3 and 5 is that of being under the Law alone. He observes that they match well with the basic principles of the Law that are unable to make people right with God.¹⁰

From the above discussion, I prefer to identify the *stoicheia* as follows. I disagree with Clinton who excludes the Law and equates the *stoicheia* exclusively with the evil spirits. Paul uses the pronoun *heimeis* which also includes him among those who were in bondage to the beggarly elements.

⁶ Black, Weakness Language, p. 19.

⁷ Bundrick, David R, *Ta Stoicheia Tou Kosmou*, JETS 34/3, p. 353.

⁸ Reid D. G. ‘Elemental spirits of the World’, in Gerald f. Hawthorne, et. al (eds) *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*: IVP, p. 229.

⁹ Clinton, Arnold, E. *Power of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul’s Letters*, IVP, 1992, p, 53.

¹⁰ Page, Sydney, *Powers of Evil: a biblical study of Satan and Demons*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, p. 265.

It is difficult to see how Paul, a Pharisee could include himself among those who had been in bondage to weak and beggarly astral spirits. The opinion of Page who excludes the pagan gods and equates it exclusively to the Law also seems to be superficial because it is difficult to see its application to the Gentiles, who were never under the Mosaic system in their pre-Christian past. On the other hand, along with Reid, I agree with Black, because he equates the *stoicheia* to the religious experience of the Galatians irrespective of any religious experience they came from. Therefore, *stoicheia* is to be identified as any religious experience, whether Jewish or Gentile that had enslaved the present believers in their pre-Christian past.

2.1.1. Identification of the *stoicheia* in the present context

Paul writes to the Galatians in a context where the Judaizers wanted the Galatians to shift from Pauline Christianity to a form of Jewish Christianity, which required circumcision and obedience to the Torah. Examining the status-quo, Betz rightly says that the Galatians would have understood that obedience to the Torah as a part of Christianity was the only protection against evil forces of the elements of the world.¹¹ Therefore the Galatians may have also come to a conclusion that unless they became a part of the Sinai covenant, they never really left Paganism. Dunn says that the Gentiles being Judaized, are reverting to a regime under the weak and beggarly elements.¹² Bruce agreeing on the same lines says, “If the Gentiles accept circumcision, it is for them to return to the concept of local deities and to be enslaved again to the elemental spirits of the universe”¹³. He adds that this should be a radical reorientation of the Law for Paul as it had once been the centre of his devotion, thus including the Law among the elemental spirits, capable of enslaving their followers.

In the present context, Paul is writing to those who were turning back to the Judaizers’ gospel and he equates this experience to a turn around and re-enslavement to the pre-Christian past. I had previously mentioned some scholars who have equated the *stoicheia* either exclusively with Law or with pagan gods, but according to the context and on the basis of the massive support by Black, Reid, Dunn and Bruce, we can conclude that in the present

¹¹ Betz, Hans Dietr, Galatians, Hermenia. A Critical and historical Commentary on the Bible, fortress Press, p. 216.

¹² Dunn, James. The Epistle to the Galatians. Blacks New Testament Commentaries. London, 1993, p. 92.

¹³ Bruce F. F, Commentary on Galatians. New International Greek Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids, 1982, p. 203.

context, Paul is combating the Judaizers' attempt of imposing the Mosaic Law upon the believers as a requirement for holistic salvation. Paul is speaking to those who were on the verge of choosing to be under the yoke of the Law. He admonishes them not to be enslaved to the Law, which would in turn resemble their previous pagan state of bondage. Therefore, it is reasonable to interpret that Paul includes Law as one among the weak elemental spirits that held those captive, who were under its control.

2.1.2. Weakness of the *stoicheia*

At this stage, it is useful to understand the reasons behind the weakness of the *stoicheia*. Hansen aptly says that the pagan religions are weak and miserable principles as they do not have the power to overcome the guilt and power of sin; they are miserable, poor and impotent because they cannot impart a new life.¹⁴ Hansen also points to the Law as saying that the whole world is a prisoner of sin (Gal. 3:22), but it is powerless to set anyone free from the chains of sin. Therefore, to substitute observance of the Mosaic Law for complete reliance on Christ is just the same as returning to pagan worship.¹⁵

It's ironic to say that the *stoicheia* which is termed as weak and beggarly will be powerful enough to enslave those who were under their control. Bruce clarifies this and says that there is no doubt that Christ, the liberator of His people is stronger than the elemental forces. He further says that the *stoicheia* are powerless; they cannot reassert their power over the Galatians unless they knowingly put themselves under their power. These beggarly elements are demonic forces which entice the minds of men and women who follow their dictates, but lose their potency as soon as those minds are emancipated, as they are guarded by the grace of God and by the power of His Spirit.¹⁶ Dunn says that Paul had called these forces as weak because in contrast to the strength of the truth and richness of the divine reality, the elemental forces weaken those who rely on them.¹⁷ Ben Witherington says that they are poor and beggarly because they cannot deliver the benefits that God promised to Abraham. Moreover, they are impotent to provide the inheritance of eternal life or the presence of God's Spirit.¹⁸ Interestingly, Richard B. Hays illustratively says of those reverting back saying that,

¹⁴ Hansen, G. Walter, Galatians. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Illinois, 1994, p. 127.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁶ Bruce, Commentary, p. 204.

¹⁷ Dunn, The Epistle, p. 226.

¹⁸ Witherington Ben III, Grace in Galatia: A Commentary of Paul's Letter to the Galatians. Grand Rapids, 1998, p. 301.

“It would be for a king's daughter, after being rescued by the knight, to choose to go back to the dragon”.¹⁹ Martin Luther also illustratively says that such people who revert back are like Aesop's dog which forgoes the flesh and snatches at the shadow.²⁰ Luther adds that none of the apostles besides Paul gave such names to the Law so much so that Paul equates it to a beggarly rudiment, utterly unprofitable to righteousness.²¹

Therefore, we have seen that the elemental forces are weak, and in this context, refer to the Jewish Law, which is weak when compared to the work of Christ. They are weak when compared to the riches Christ can bestow upon the believer. They are weak as they can only enslave their followers into bondage. We have also seen that at the same time they are powerful enough to re-enslave those who want to submit to these powers by their own will. Therefore it is quite logical for Paul to ask the Galatians not to turn to the weak and beggarly elements, which cannot endow them with spiritual blessings. All these can offer is slavery.

2.2. Weakness of the Law

The next entry in the non-human category is the weakness of the Law. In Romans 8:3, Paul describes the Law as weak. The verse starts with the phrase, *to gar adounaton tou nomou* Dunn says that the *gar* strengthens the conclusions that *nomos* throughout the verses means the Torah. He says that this verse is also used as an explanation of the preceding uses of Law.²²

2.2.1. Law Weakened by the Flesh

Law is described as holy elsewhere in Rom. 7:12 and how is it possible to discuss or establish its weakness? Paul was a zealous Jew to the extent that he previously persecuted the church for the sake of the Law. Therefore it is quite interesting for us to observe the way he would establish the weakness of the Law which he at one time esteemed so high. On careful observation we see how Paul has a high regard to the Law, but yet, since it had to be operated in the realm of flesh, it was unable to fulfill its divine purpose. C. K Barrett rightly says that the Law in itself is good, but flesh was committed to

¹⁹ Hays, Richard B. The faith in Jesus Christ: an Investigation of the Narrative Sub Structure of Galatians. Ph.D Dissertation, Emory University, 1981, p. 249.

²⁰ Luther, Martin, A Commentary of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. Michigan, Baker books, 1979, p. 398.

²¹ Ibid., p. 399.

²² Dunn, Romans 9 -16, Word Bible Commentary, Vol. 38b. Word books, 1988, p. 419.

the law of sin and therefore paralyzed the divine Law.²³ It was weak only because it was not able to meet the pressures of the flesh and yet attain its purpose for which it was instituted.

The weakness or the impotence of the Law is understood as its failure to operate in the realm of flesh. Leon Morris rightly says that Law was weakened by the flesh since flesh was the medium where Law had to operate. He says that Paul sees flesh not as evil, but as weak, so weak that the Law was not able to bring salvation by operating through it.²⁴ Dunn also says that Paul is against equating the Law with sin. He says that the inadequacy of the Law does not lie in itself but in the conditions in which it had to operate. Therefore, it is precisely the interaction between the Law and the flesh, which incapacitates the Law and that the engagement of Israel with the Law too much at the level of the flesh was Israel's disgrace.²⁵

It is clear that the Law in itself was holy and was given for a divine purpose for bringing the people of God into righteousness. If the Law was weak in accomplishing this purpose, it is not that it is weak as far as its context is concerned. It is weak because it had to operate in the realm of sinful flesh, which is the unregenerate nature in human beings. Flesh seemed to be quite a big force for the Law to overcome. God superseded the Law in that He sent His own son in the form of the same sinful flesh, which is a seat of evil in human beings. The sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross vanquished the power of sin eternally and accomplished the task that the Law could not do. Thus Paul says that the Law was weak in contrast to the work done by Christ on the cross.

2.3. Divine Weakness

2.3.1. Weakness of God (1Cor. 1:25)

In 1Cor. 1:25, Paul uses the term 'weakness' in reference to God. It is hard for an ardent reader to accept any term that is used of God in such manner. Nevertheless, we shall see in our discussion as to what Paul means by the weakness of God. In the immediate context of the above passage, Paul is contrasting the worldly wisdom and strength, in which he establishes the superiority of the divine.

²³ Barrett, C. K. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Black's New Testament Commentaries. London, 1971, p. 419.

²⁴ Morris Leon, *The Epistle to the Romans*, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament*. Eerdmans, 1982, p. 283.

²⁵ Dunn, *Romans 1-9*, p. 419.

Barrett says that the abstract noun for foolishness in vv. 18, 21 and 23 is absent in v.25, where the neuter of the adjective is used here. By virtue of the syntactical analysis, he says that it points to a particular act of foolishness and not that God seems to be foolish.²⁶ Thistleton says that the definite article with the neuter singular adjective *moron* in *to moron tou theou* strictly means a 'foolish thing'. He quotes Tertullian who identifies the foolish thing as the cross.²⁷

2.3.1.1. Cross and Crucifixion in Antiquity

The understanding of the cross and crucifixion in the 1st century Roman empire will best define the context in which Paul writes. Richard A. Horsely says that crucifixion was a Roman form of torture, an execution by slow, excruciatingly painful death. As the most extreme form of capital punishment, it was reserved for lower classes, usually inflicted upon slaves and rebellious peasants in subject provinces such as Judea.²⁸ In the first century, the crucifixion and the proclamation of the crucified one was an absolute offence.

Hence the Roman understanding of the cross and crucifixion was far from cordial. Barrett rightly says that what God has done in Christ crucified is a direct contradiction of human ideas of wisdom and power, yet achieved what human wisdom and power failed to achieve.²⁹ Bruce says that 'wiser than men...stronger than men' is a compendious construction, that conveys the meaning, Wiser than man's wisdom....stronger than man's power.³⁰ Grosheide, arguing on the same lines says that the work of God which the world considered foolish, i.e., the work of God in Christ, which is salvation for believers.³¹

Paul speaks of the weak and foolish thing of God in the light of the limits of human wisdom and strength. Human wisdom in all its glory may provide man with all the knowledge he required to be prosperous. It may have given him name and fame, but it was unable to release him from the shackles of darkness and sin. The power of human beings in all its glory may have made them powerful enough to conquer the whole world, but was unable to rule

²⁶ Barrett C, K, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 2nd edn. Black's New Testament Commentaries, A&C Black, 1971, p. 56.

²⁷ Thistleton, Anthony C, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NIGTC, Eerdmans, 2000, p. 173.

²⁸ Horsley, Richard A, 1 Corinthians, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Abingdon Press, 1998, p. 50.

²⁹ Barrett, The First Epistle, p. 56.

³⁰ Bruce, F. F, I and II Corinthians, the New Century Bible Commentary, Eerdmans, 1971, p. 59.

³¹ Grosheide, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 50.

over sin and death. On the contrary, we see that God has conquered sin in the sacrificial death of His only Son on the cursed cross. This may have seemed to be a very feeble and weak act of God, but it accomplished what human wisdom and power in all its glory were not able to.

2.3.2. Weakness of Christ (II Corinthians 13:4)

The phrase, 'Christ was crucified in weakness' has been an impending problem in the history of exegesis. To read and understand the phrase at a peripheral level is quite difficult. It is difficult to understand that Christ went through the crucifixion experience because He was weak enough to escape the cross.

Barrett says that it was because of grace, his primary characteristic, that he became poor, and the weakness which he portrayed on the cross, was a mark of grace.³² Paul at a later stage in this epistle will use the same voluntary assumption of weakness to defend his own weak appearance.

Thrall agrees with Chrysostom who claims that Paul appears to view Christ's death as a demonstration of that weakness in and through which God's power is operative for salvation.³³ Also that Christ was crucified through weakness – living out of God's power was a familiar Christological formula, serving to do away with the offence of the cross for believers. Linda Belleville says, Christ was a weak and frail human being when he was subjected to physical trauma, he dies just as we do, but unlike us, however Christ did not remain in weakness and he came to life; even more he lives by God's power.³⁴ Hughes states that the cross, which is a supreme spectacle of humiliation and weakness, is a focal point of power and purpose of the omnipotent God for the rescuing of fallen people from their utter powerlessness.

We see that the work of Christ, where he assumed weakness in his submission to the cross, is the manifestation of his grace. As Carson says, it was not forced upon him, but it was his voluntary submission to fulfill the salvific purpose of God for the humanity.³⁵ (D. A. Carson, *From Triumphalism to Maturity*, p. 175). Barrett rightly says that it is inadequate for us to say that Christ was not strong to escape such an unpleasant fate, but it was the manifestation of his grace towards sinful humanity for its salvation.³⁶ Paul

³² Barrett, C. K, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 337.

³³ Thrall, Margaret, *II Corinthians*, *The International Critical Commentary*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000, p. 883.

³⁴ Belleville Linda, *2 Corinthians*, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, IVP, 1971, p. 329.

³⁵ Carson D. A, *From Triumphalism to Maturity: An Exposition of II Cor 10-13*. Baker Books, 1984, p. 175.

³⁶ Barrett, *The Second Epistle*, p. 337.

further describes the weakness of Christ in order to complement his own ministry, so that the Corinthians may understand the basis of his weakness.

Finally, Paul's understanding of the weakness of Christ was that in which he took it up for the sake of the salvation of humanity. This act of Christ was not forced upon him, but he did it voluntarily to fulfill the will of God. Paul explains his ministry and justifies his weakness in the light of Christ's weakness. As we have already seen, Christ was not in himself weak, but he assumed weakness for a divine purpose. Similarly, Paul says that he appeared weak for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

2.4. Conclusion

To have a single conclusion about the category of non-human weakness as a whole may be impossible. Nevertheless, we can put the Law and the *stoicheia* under the same epithet. The Law and the *stoicheia* are described by Paul as impotent. Law and *stoicheia* are overshadowed by the redemptive work of Christ. Paul exhorts the believers of Galatia not to turn back to the gospel of the Judaizers, who demand the institution of the Jewish Torah in the Christian Church. He says that the return to the Law will be as bad as going back to the pagan past. It seems to be a very radical re-orientation of Law by Paul as rightly mentioned by Bruce. We observe a point of contact between the Galatian and the Roman context. In Galatia, believers were trying to get rid of the evil taboos by returning to the observation of days, months and years. This explains why they wanted to gain righteousness through the flesh after being saved by grace. At the same time, Paul in Romans 8:3 describes the Law to be weak as the flesh weakened it. The Law with all its meticulous rules, failed to bring humans to righteousness. Therefore, the weakness of the impotence of the Law or the *stoicheia* is purely relative to what Christ has done in his sacrificial death, which is the demonstration of his grace, only through which human beings can be saved.

Paul uses the same word that he used to describe the weakness of Law and the *stoicheia* also to describe the weakness of God and Christ. As we have seen, Paul does not mean that God was impotent or unable as the Law was, but he assumed weakness as a demonstration of grace. Christ took upon weakness to bring to force the divine strategy of the Father for the salvation of mankind. Moreover, Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:4 mainly explains the weakness of Christ to supplement his own ministry. He wanted to prove his apostleship by giving it a Christological authenticity. Therefore, Paul uses the *asthen* group for the divine, not in the sense of impotence, but as a voluntary decision of the Son to accomplish the will of the Father.

Are Omissions Accidents?: Mission Archives between Imagination and Reality

*Gladson Jathanna **

Reading mission archives is always an adventurous experience. They are adventurous because they were not meant for our eyes. Originally written for friends and patrons of a particular missionary society, they generally contain narratives that illustrate the certainty of the writer in the Christian faith and also his/her conviction in the superiority of that faith, constructing an imaginary image of the natives. As a reader, the native, sometimes locates in these pages his/her own ancestors and the beginnings of the communities to which he/she belongs. And based, basically, on these narratives the history of that particular community is constructed. However, such construction of historiographies has, very often, ended up being both mission-society-centered and male-centered, constructing one more saga of European Christian triumphalism over the Indian natives. In this paper, I would argue that such imaginary construction is partially due to the way of handling the mission-archives by the historians. Many historians and cultural scientists have not taken into serious consideration the intentionally omitted texts in the mission-archives and institutionally forgotten actors in the mission field. In order to strengthen my argument I would go back to the archives of a German mission society, namely Hermannsburg Mission Society, in general, and its women's mission wing, which was named Zenana Mission, in particular.

The Hermannsburg Mission Society, founded in 1849 in the village Hermannsburg, Germany, began to work among the Telugus in Andhra Pradesh, a Southeastern state of India in 1864.¹ Though intended from the beginning to have a separate branch for women's mission, it was not materialised until the first decade of the 20th Century. It was Elizabeth Wörrlein, a missionary woman, who tried to press the Mission to establish a branch for women's mission work. Thus Hartwig Harms, a missionary, traces the beginning of Zenana mission to the year 1892, when Elisabeth Wörrlein took the responsibilities of a girls' boarding school in Gudur. He says, "This

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¹ G. Wayne Glick, "Reality of Christianity: A Study of Adolf von Harnack as Historian and Theologian." in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Makers of Modern Theology* (New York: Harper & Row), 1967.

little girls boarding, opened by Peddadora Mylius, is really the very beginning of the Zenana station but it was not called thus.”² However, the beginning of Zenana Mission, a mission exclusively for women, took place much later in 1902. The Mission employed “missionary women” (wives of the missionaries and single women missionaries) to carry out this novel project. When the Mission Society realized that it was not an easy task for a European woman to be mobile among the natives and to reach the ‘dark corners’ of the native houses, they employed native Christian women, called Bible women, to visit other native women in neighboring localities accompanied by the European missionary women. The Mission Society believed that employing these Bible women would eventually help them achieve greater success. The stories of these Bible women, who walked from place to place visiting women in their homes (both Dalit and non-dalit) and talking to them about their religion, documents the difficult and complex transactions that took place between missionaries, missionary women, natives, native Christians and native women.

I base my arguments, specially, on these stories which are found in Mission Archives, some in printed and published form and some yet on the manuscripts. I take a careful look at these missionary documents in order to understand better the social matrix in which the missionaries worked and also the nature of the encounter between them and the natives. I interrogate, specifically, what role did native Christian women play in the encounter between missionaries and other native women? Why very seldom have the native women become the focus of Mission-history? Is it because they do not have a voice in the Archival documents or are they not heard enough? To paraphrase Gayatri Spivak, can these subalterns speak through archival process? And to take this question into a different direction, do these subalterns refuse to speak? Or do the historians refuse to listen to them? What happened or happens between women speaking and men listening in a process of historicising? By making Bible women and the other native women the focus of this inquiry, I hope to gain a different perspective on the missionary enterprise, a perspective shaped by questions rooted in the subjectivity of native women.

Bible women shared a space that was neither alongside women missionaries nor with other native women. It’s important to ask, what kind of mediation

² Hartwig C Harms, *The History of the German Hermannsburg Evangelical Lutheran Mission in India* (an unpublished manuscript available at the UTC Archives, Bangalore)

did the Bible women provide between Indian women and the missionaries with their “good news”? It is easy to idealize the work of the Bible women and to see in them the prototype of the professional woman,³ and it is equally easy to deny their work by imagining that they were simply mimicking their masters and mistresses.⁴ But a careful look at the archival documents, both published and unpublished, would provide us a different perspective than either of these.

Omission – to represent “female agency”

The experiences and the works of the Bible women in Hermannsburg Mission in India are reported since the beginning of the Zenana Mission. These reports are the collections of the accounts of both the Missionary women and the native Bible women, who were employed in various stations of the mission mainly Gudur, Venkatagiri and Tirupatti. As already stated, the difficulty of Missionaries to bring the gospel to the womenfolk resulted in thinking of using native Christian women who could become agents for bringing this message to the non-Christian women. But interestingly, in his short report on the Women’s Mission in Gudur in its first year, missionary J. Wörrlein explains the reason for the establishment of Zenana mission differently. He states that the inspiration for Women’s Mission is “...the desire of the female population of this country, both of the higher and the lower castes to hear something about the wonderful religion which alone could bring Light to the heathen land”.⁵ Here the mission archives depict that it was not the European Mission Society that wanted to have an exclusive mission branch for women rather it was native women who desired for. When this imaginary depiction is questioned, we might gain a different picture of the reality of the past.

The “female agency,” as missionaries called the work of the Bible women, initially seems to have paralleled the work of the catechists. The women employed as Bible women were under the supervision of the women

³ Hartwig C Harms, *The History of the German Hermannsburg Evangelical Lutheran Mission in India* (an unpublished manuscript available at the UTC Archives, Bangalore); Martin Luther Dolbeer, *A History of Lutheranism in Andhra Desa*, New York, 1959; HugaldGrafe, *The History of the Work of the Hermannsburg Mission and Evangelical Lutheran Mission for the South Andhra Lutheran Church*, Chennai: ICSEA, 2010.

⁴ Postcolonial critiques like Chandra Mohanty, Leela Gandhi and the works of Jane Haggis, though not in the context of Hermannsburg Mission.

⁵ “Bericht des Herrn Sup.Wörrlein in Gudur,” in Berichtüber die HermannsbürgerFrauenmission in Indien in Jahre 1903, (hereafter, BHF) Hermannsburg: Druck und Verlag der Missionshandlung, 1904, S.9

missionaries or the wife of a missionary, who often accompanied them in their task of visiting different houses. The Bible women had to report their work to the supervising missionary wife, who in turn would report to the mission agency. In this process of reporting, though the native Bible woman finds a place to represent herself, the legitimacy of this representation is in conspiracy. To give one example: In the year 1910, an account of a native Bible woman called Kakanadu Susanna is reported. Originally reported in Telugu by Susanna, the report was ‘translated’ into German for the purpose of the German readers. However, the legitimacy of this ‘translation’ is not beyond conspiracy. In her report, in Telugu, Kakanadu Susanna raised a very controversial and theological question related to Baptism. She writes, that, if baptism is the only means to reach Christ for the native sisters, it must be admitted that our work is a failure. There are many women who often long to see me entering their house and they listen with an attentive ears and heart to what I narrate to them from the life of our Lord Jesus. However, when I begin to talk about baptism, they begin dispersing. I am deeply convinced in my heart that these poor sisters of mine do have a big faith in my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But our rules of faith stand as a stumbling block to these women to whom it is practically impossible to confess Christ openly, when they believe in Him.⁶

The German version of this report in its published form omits the whole account providing a small translation which the missionaries felt that is ‘necessary’ for a German reader. After this Kakanadu Susanna finds no place in any of the reports. Whether she was removed from the mission-work for her stands or she herself left the mission-work is not clear. But this transit in representation of a native woman worker makes it clear that the native Bible women were creating new patterns of life within the construction of their own faith. But the Mission Society found it important not to bring such narration into its official discourse since it did not fit into their idea of “female agency.” This makes obvious that the introduction of the “female agency” in the mission was part of a larger, idealistic plan for transforming the women of India into the ideal space of European Christians rather than the native women’s longingness for such an agency.

Thus it is important to read the official discourse of an European Mission Society along with the omitted accounts in order to understand how the native women, even in the realm of faith, were capable of a certain kind of

⁶ Kakanadu Susanna, Report in Telugu *ZenanaArbeit*, Berichte der

dialogue with women of other faith communities. Much of the Bible women's ability to achieve these things depended on their instinct for "dialogical imagination."⁷ These women were capable of dialogue, were expected to visit, especially at times of sickness, and were not found to be coercive agents of evangelization. Their dialogical imagination had the capacity to invite their sisters in other faith communities to be listeners, and the ability to be listeners in turn without caring much for theological dogmas.

Omission – to narrate the history of literacy

Pages of history of Christianity in India have said so much about Western Missionaries, portraying them as the agents of literacy and education. However, very little has been said about the natives, especially the Bible women, who played a major role in the early efforts of literacy in India. Adele Schickinz, a missionary woman who worked as a nurse, writes in her report of 1906, "I tried to make her (Tera Hannamma, a native Bible woman) understand her vocation of enabling the native women at least to read the Bible."⁸ The Bible, thus becomes the "meta symbol" of the culture of literacy. However, the Bible women were not only dependent on the written text but it was the context of their conversation, rather than what was written or read, that gained importance. In the report of the very first year, Rahel, a Bible woman in Gudur complains of the small number of women who were literate.⁹ Yet this did not deter either the Bible woman or her superintendent. They took up the task of making their hearers literate. Singing, storytelling, and showing pictures became part of their scheme for work.

In this process of literacy, the native Bible women did not use Bible and biblical stories alone. They used the stories from the mythology and oral traditions. They referred the Telugu poets who propagated brotherly and sisterly love and humanitarian concerns. They also brought in a number of native proverbs and parables to make the native woman understand the core teachings of Christianity within the limits of their cultural backgrounds. Some Bible women, for example Tera Hannamma, gives a detailed description of their literary methods including the proverbs, the stories, pictures and poetries that they used. But these descriptions remained in manuscripts, whereas the other 'most important' things found place in the published version of the report. Perhaps the missionaries might have felt that the overseas readers of such reports are not interested in those details. Or it might have

⁷ Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-biblical World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995), 12.

⁸ BHF, 1906, 22.

⁹ BHF, 1904, 12.

also been thought that the stories and proverbs from the ‘heathen’ world may hinder the mission to be financially supported by the friends and patrons in Germany and wider Europe. The history that depends only on the published reports of the mission, obviously, imagines that the native women participated in this process of literary as mere receivers than mutual exchangers.

Omission- to avoid the complex-interaction among women from two cultures

Martha Drewes, a trained nurse, took over the Zenana mission work at Tirupatti in 1904 along with a Bible woman, Rahel. They had many encounters with the native women. In one of her reports, Martha Drewes gives an account of an old woman who had been visited often by her and Rahel. This old woman was very sick and bed-ridden. Drewes writes,

... when we enter that almost ruined hut, we see an old bright face in the dark corner. Seeing us she joins her hands together and says, *Vandanalu*. We have to repeat the same old story from the Bible again and again since her memory is very weak. Then she repeats with a loud voice all that I tell her. She tells me that she is sure of one thing. That is, she believes that her sins are taken away by Lord Jesus and she now waits until God comes and takes her to heaven. After few days I heard the news of her death. And I am sure that she will have met with the merciful Judge, who will not ask more than the feeble woman was able to give.”¹⁰

Though this is a story narrated by a woman missionary, the Bible woman must have been active participants in this experience. It is quite clear that the old woman was comfortable in the presence of these women who brought stories and messages from the Bible. Here we see her not just responding to the messages of the missionaries and the Bible women but also rejecting their insistence on baptism through her simple faith. There is no reference to the conversion of the old woman and no hint to suggest that she suffered from any sense of guilt. The theology of sin and salvation has been made somehow into a theology of affirmation and faith. The missionary’s belief that the woman “will have met with a merciful Judge, who will not ask more than the feeble woman was able to give” is very important in this narration. The old woman, who believes she will be “saved,” does not see the doctrinal insistence on baptism as a barrier. Many of the missionaries’ reports talk of some women who are very close to “the truth” but are unwilling to take the big step of Baptism. Often we see sympathy toward women who cannot make any decisions on their own. Perhaps it is true that those who listened

¹⁰ BHF, 1909, 10f.

to the Bible women did not intend or foresee any dramatic change in their own lives. In any case, the presence of the Bible women in their midst was not seen as a threat. Moreover this narration leaves a clue to understand the woman missionary's feminine compassion and understanding for her fellow woman. Thus it could be argued that the continued contacts of women missionaries with the native women resulted in moulding their 'strong' theological dogmas that they carried with. This could also be the influence of the native Bible woman and her role played in building communities between those who did and did not insist that religious identity was linked to the acceptance of certain rituals or dogmas. But the Mission Society made it very sure that such narrations of changes in faith position might not find any place in on the published version of these reports.

Conclusion

In the Hermannsburg mission archives the native women do find a place and they do make their presence felt throughout these texts. Their stories of commitment and protest, though presented in these texts in the context of faith and religion, are woven into the fabric of their identity formation and its struggle. Thus it supports and demands different perspectives. This study is one such perspective, a perspective shaped by questions rooted in the subjectivity of native women. This is an engagement in archival exegesis as a way of rememorializing the narratives and voices which have been subjected to institutional forgetting. This has been possible because of considering the act of omission in the missionary discourse not mere accident, but as intentional and institutional act demanded by missionary ideologies and belief. Bibelfrauen, (Folder: A.I. 8 80/e 4)

A Book Review

George, P. G. Ed. *Theological Research in the Global South: Prospects and Challenges*. West Bengal: South Asia Theological Research Institute, 2015. Pp. 1-160.

*Josfin Raj **

This book is a collection of articles presented in a national consultation at South Asia Theological Research Institute (SATHRI) in relation to its Silver Jubilee on 15th and 16th August, 2014. SATHRI, an eminent research wing of the Senate of Serampore College (University) in India, was established in 1989 at Bangalore and in 2010 moved to Serampore. SATHRI is established to promote scholarly, indigenious, innovative, ecumenical, and contextual research informed by the Asian realities (p.157). This edited book also reflects the ethos of SATHRI; reflecting upon the new trends of theological research in the global south. Global south is the center of twenty first century Christianity in which we/they regulate the theological climate of global Christianity. Liberal trends in the global north is diminishing and the evangelical responses from the global south gets new momentum in the global scenario, even capable to provide directions in Christian theologizing. This book must be placed in this particular context.

John S. Sadananda writes the “Forward” to the book by congratulating SATHRI’s contribution to theological research in the global south. Further, P. G. George introduces the articles in the “Introduction”. In addition to Forward and Introduction, the book consists of ten chapters written by noted scholars from India and abroad. The articles reflect the contextual need of a research institute like SATHRI, and at the same time it provides new guidelines for future theological research in the global south.

First chapter (“Every Theologian a Researcher”), Felix Wilfred argues that the revolutionary character of theological research, especially liberative and community-oriented researches. The knowledge derived from research is not to exercise power or domination, but, Felix suggests, for transformation and praxis. Further, Felix promotes theological research in the global south

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will become qualitative, independent from western imperialistic nature of research, when research turns to become empirical, interdisciplinary and compatible with contemporary scientific worldview.

In the second chapter, M. P. Joseph, a prolific theological writer, demands a re-location of contemporary theological research (theology) in the article “Delegitimized Theologies: Challenges for People’s Encounter of God.” He gives a clarion call for the neo-liberal or capitalistic intervention in theologizing of the global south. He debunks Philip Jenkins’s well-acclaimed term ‘global south’ as an occidental epistemological construction. He contends the conclusion that global south is a place with irrational and deontological approach to scripture. Postmodern or postcolonial discourses also do not represent the voice of third world countries, since both derive from neo-liberal frame work. He alerts readers on the issues/dangers involved in the theological re-imagination in the context of neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism follows “the art of domesticate and destroy” (p.47). This situation re-directed theological discourse from justice to rights in a hierarchical society in which they “avoided the question of changing the evils of the hierarchical society” (p.48). Theological re-imagination must be aware of these challenging contexts.

In the third chapter, Simon Samuel, leading figure in post-colonial biblical studies, lucidly explains the need of “decolonising the biblical studies”(It is the title of his article too). He argues for the decolonizing not only from the western dominance, but also from the South Asian regionalism and casteist/tribalist essentialisms. “Dismantling the dominance” (p.56) is the gist of this paper in which he envisions a polyphonic reading of scripture and opposes any voice to be dominated. He discards any essentialist readings and suggests for a space in between these spaces. It is the postcolonial space, in which, he writes, “a space from where the reader accommodates and disrupts almost simultaneously the other spaces” (p. 71).

Joseph Prabhakar Dayam summarizes the history of Indian Christian theology in three theological engagements in the fourth chapter (“From the Banks of the Ganges, through the Dusty Soil to the Beat of the Drum: Christian Theology in India and its Subalternity”). Sanskritization of Christian theology and hectic opposition to western theology constitute the first theological engagement. The second theological engagement happened with “nation building and in the people’s movements that focused on the liberation of the oppressed communities” (p.77). It “addressed the issues of poverty, the denial of human

rights, gender discrimination and caste discrimination” (p. 77). The suffering of the people and the praxis of the liberation movements are the locus of this theologizing. Joseph Prabhakar opines that the second moment of theological engagement neglected the celebrational aspect of marginalised communities, which constitute the third theological engagement, namely “at the beat of the dappu (drum)”. He locates the locus of this theological engagement will be on “the word (the written, the spoken, the heard, the remembered and the collective voice), the beat (which includes the performance, the sound and the sense) and the mood prompted by the collective experiences of the people” (p. 80). Dayam seems to correct the parochialism of contemporary theological articulations and suggests for the integration of theologies of which calls for us to have “an ecumenical accountability” (p.82).

Gladson Jathanna suggests for a careful hermeneutical approach to the archives of mission in the fifth chapter (“Historiographical Re-imaginings: Interrogating Archival Space”). Along with a case study on the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Archives, Hermannsburg (Germany), Gladson argues that mission records preserved in the Archives monumentalizes both history and documents. He discusses the perils that a researcher/historian going through while accessing and assessing the ‘biased’ documents of the past. It is biased in the sense of gender and sexuality. Thus, Gladson provokes readers’ or researchers’ thought to read between the lines of omitted information of ‘monumental mission archives’. This will help to overcome intentional and institutional ‘gap’ and can hear the feeble and unheard subaltern voices. This chapter gives a clarion call to historical researchers to have a healthy space between the mission archives and omitted facts of gender, local and oral traditions.

Y. T. Vinayaraj, in the sixth chapter (“Social Theories for Theological Research”), talks about the relevancy of social theories in contextualizing the theology in postcoloniality. Postcoloniality, here, is a “rhetorical space of hospitality” (p.97). Vinayaraj, primarily, compares two different approaches (M. M. Thomas’ liberation theology and John Milbank’s radical orthodoxy) that dealt about the relation between theory and theologizing in postcoloniality and finds their limitations in articulating theology in the space of postcoloniality. Vinayaraj argues that Christian theology in the postcoloniality must take three radical turns such as theological and theo-political turn, immanence and polydoxy. Current dalit theology, Vinayaraj argues, is “a participation in the experiencing of transcendence...” (p. 106), which fail to attend the immanent and materialistic aspects of dalit. He finds “Ambedkar’s political

theory is significant in the context of postcoloniality” (p.107). He argues that “Dalit theology in the context of postcoloniality has to [re-]locate itself in a ‘de-transcendentalized sacred’ epistemological position” (p. 108). In this space Dalit body can experience “an open materialism or open immanence” (p.108). In this way Vinayaraj succeeded in arguing that social theory in postcoloniality is inevitable for doing theological research in a more contextual and relevant way.

In chapter seven (“Women and Theological Research: Challenges and Perspectives”), Lalrindiki Ralte describes the role of women in Christian theological education and research. She narrates the issues of women and the limited circumstances offered by contemporary South Asian/Indian seminaries. She is in a view that the concern towards women should not limit only to the curriculum revision, rather must be practiced in the community, church and society at large. The method of education must be integrated and interactive/participatory method. Theological education must de-centralise its method and ways to vernacular and laity oriented education in which working women can easily access theological education.

Gnana Patrick offers a “Future of Theological Research in India” in which he argues that the public square must be the location of theological research, since there is no division of secular and sacred. With prophetic voice, he touches three areas in the Indian theological research such as its sites, methodology and future possibilities. There are three sites in contemporary theological research in India. The first site is ‘intra’-church academia, which consists of denominations and their agencies. Secondly, the ‘extra’-church academia in which secular state universities have taken up chairs for Christian studies and theological research. Thirdly, the wider public, created by the cyberspace allows experts in other fields to interact and reflect upon the theologizing in India. In addition, Patrick finds the uniqueness of Indian theological research which is derived from the public life of people, whereas the western theologizing is derived mainly from university framework. “In this sense,” Patrick writes, “Indian theological researches are bound by contextual realities of life and shaped by intentionality of pastoral praxis” (p. 129). In relation to theological research methodology there exist two methodological orientations. The first one is the traditional way of study and reflection. The second one is the contemporary way of integrating modern/postmodern scientific theories to theological research. Looking into the futuristic aspect of theological research in India, Patrick gives new trends in contextual theologizing which focuses on intersecting with contemporary

anthropological and social theories than of Latin American liberation and Marxist tools. With this, he looks positively to the future and writes, “Contextual theologies, as both critical/analytical and performative/proclamatory, will emit positivity and lead us into the future” (p. 136).

Dietrich Werner gives “Memorandum on the Future of Theological Education and Research in Asia” in the next chapter. He directs Asian theological education and research to improve and strengthen the quality from an ecumenical point of view. He argues that theological education is the backbone of the Asian church, therefore it must be informed by the socio-economic-religious-cultural realities of Asia. Division based on denomination, faith, region will not help to improve the quality of theological education, but must have collaboration of theological schools in Asia. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, finally concludes the book with the importance of SATHRI in the ministerial training of Northern and North Eastern States of India.

The theological research wing of Serampore, SATHRI, gives us much reflection to the nature, scope, and method of theologizing in most of the theological discipline from global south loci. The articles in the book clearly show the direction of theological research in the contextual realities of global south. The book covers almost all the disciplines in the theological studies and also provides new directions in theological research. This book would be a basic guide for the people who enter into theological research activities as well as who are interested in the recent trends in theological scenario of the global south. The book also will serve as a corrective tool to Christian theological institutions in global south to strengthen and foster quality in research activities.

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