

Bethel Bible College

(Affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College)

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EDITORIAL

Reformation Within: Youth and the Church towards Just and Inclusive Communities

"The law is for the proud and the Gospel for the brokenhearted."

- Martin Luther

A sense of restoration within oneself arises through the experiences of brokenness and insolvent. This realization broods a wake-up call to the reformation of oneself and society. In this progression of reformation, Youth clench a significant role as the pointers to reformation.

One needs to give a good hard look at the Reformation: often times youth are brought into a Church to be "reformers." The expectation is that they are going to bring radical and noticeable change and development to the Church. The measurement of expectations in reforming the church are through the creativity level of the youth and involvement. The burden of the change and reformation rests on the shoulders of the clergies, and they are expected to jump in and take charge of everything. There is a challenge to be called out as reformers and being overwhelmed by unreal expectations or end up getting burnt out. A reformation starts by reformation within. The experience of undergoing the good, the bad and the ugly reformation phases within exhibits the progressive reformation in both the Church and society at large.

Observing at the early reformer of the Church, Martin Luther, at the time of the Reformation gain a few insights into how we should respond to the call to be reformers of the Church. Firstly, Martin Luther does not focus on popularizing Christianity, nevertheless more on being faithful to the Scripture. Examining on one's own faith and stand point to the teaching of scripture intrinsically epitomizes the juncture of reformation within. Today, Youth have innumerable fields in which to be entertained and amused,

nonetheless a limitation of space and time where they can be challenged is the question. Therefore, Youth today need to be focused more on the reformation within as reformers of the Church and society rather than popularising the youth at face value.

Secondly, the insight is to give ability and voice to the Church instead of being taking it away. The 16th century Church was absorbed on the power and authority of the bishops and the papal leadership. Martin Luther set to give the authority back to the Church, body of believers rather than consolidating it with the so called “professionals.” The notion that all believers have access to God by their Baptism and affirmation of faith have legitimate “gifts” with which to serve others and build up the Church. The impression of reforming the role of oneself in the Church is to allow the fellowship and impartiality of occupying any ‘special’ gifts to be contributed to the Church.

This year, 2017 being observed as the 500th year of Reformation worldwide, the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) as the ecumenical reformed body, partakes the celebration of Reformation and continues to commit and work for the reformation of the Church “Towards Just and Inclusive Communities.”

This month NCC Review focuses on issues surrounding the reformation of the Church at various levels and situation of the Church, and that has been reformed so far examining through the contributions of different sections of Church and society at large. Rev. Dr. S. Robertson, a renowned professor and principal of Bethel Bible college in his article “Recollection of Insights for Diligent Christian Witness in India”, reflect to understand freedom of conscience, freedom to profess, practice and propagate religion giving a way to providing for social welfare and reforms. He further suggests for diligent Christian witness in the Indian context in a way prophetic, to help avoid confrontation and waste of resources on indefensible matters as a call for Christians in India to be good law abiding citizens to bear witness to Christ. Mr. Imtoshi Longkumer, in his article urges the need of new paradigm shift in the understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in a pluralistic

context in the progression of reforming the Church. Mr. S. Manohar Pradeep reflects and recall for the embodied Church in reaffirming the true nature of the Church as a welcoming church by rereading the scriptures and approach through different hermeneutical principles to bring solidarity and to give hope for the minorities. Ms. C.P. Caroline in her article explores the impacts of reformation in the lives of women, their ecclesial and societal involvement and its effects in the contemporary church with the contribution of women reformers in the context of Indian Church.

As we celebrate the commemoration of 500th year of Church reformation from the day Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the Wittenberg Church door, may the God of reformation and Groom of the Church nail the anger and restlessness to strive Towards Just and Inclusive Communities in our hearts.

*“You are not only responsible for what you say,
but also for what you do not say.” - Martin Luther*

- Jianthaolung Gonmei

Executive Secretary

Youth Concern - National Programme Commission



Issues in Mission and Evangelism in a Pluralistic Context: A New Paradigm Inquiry

- Imtitoshi Longkumer*

Introduction

Unquestionably missions today are not what they were in the past fifty years ago. The relation between Christianity and other religions has become one of the most pressing themes for Christian self-understanding today. In a multi-religious context it is important for the Christian mission to carefully re-evaluate the understanding of mission and evangelism, because the older understanding of mission and evangelism which focused on preaching and conversion of the non-Christians has become questionable by both the Christians and people of other faiths. Therefore, a new shift is pertinent in the understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in a pluralistic context.

1. Biblical understanding on Mission and Evangelism

The whole Bible stands on one firm foundation, there is one God, no other. Significantly it is the story not of the creation of the church, or the Christians, not even Israel, but of the cosmos. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This belief that God is the Creator of everything and everybody is basic to the Bible. There is nothing outside God's providence; there is no life, no experience, no worship, no liberation, no salvation that can happen outside the scope of God's love and knowledge. The basic assumption of the Bible, then, is that there is no other provider but God-the one God-who is the creator of everyone.¹

While all others including John the Baptist had concern only to the remnant of Israel, Jesus' mission was to all Israel. The Gospel of Mark contains a sharp message as to Jesus' relationship to people of non-Jewish religion. Jesus is presented as opening his mission activity to a variety of people from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond Jordan, Jesus mission seems to be a service to all.² The Bible presents God as the one who rules over the entire

* Mr. Imtitoshi Longkumer did his Master of Theology in Missiology from United Theological College, Bangalore.

¹ Wesley Ariarajah, *The Bible and People of Other Faiths* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985), 1-2.

² Venceslaus Lawrence, "Mission in the Bible," in *Mission and Evangelism* edited by Somen Das (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 17.

universe. This is the picture presented by all the books of the Bible. It is Jesus who reveals him most fully through his historical incarnation to the world as the father of us all.³

Thus Wesley Ariarajah states that:

Christian theology should not allow God to God; it should not own God, as we own a piece of private property. We cannot fence God in and say: "Well, if you want to know about God, come through this gate." We do not own God; God owns us, and God owns the whole creation. This is the message of the Bible.⁴

Biblical perspectives call for an inclusive perspective in relation to peoples of other faiths in all mission and evangelistic programmes. Today, an inclusive theology, an appropriate life-style and spirituality for combat, should be developed reflecting the Gospel in relation to the present issues. A fresh interpretation of the Bible would evoke larger horizons in our understanding of Mission and Evangelism.⁵

2. Mission and Evangelism: Historical perspective

The Bible was written many centuries ago over a long period of time. It is basically, a history, both mythical and actual, of the Jewish people in the context of the faith that God was actively involved in it. Right from its inception, Christianity has been a missionary religion engaged in preaching and converting. It was primarily because preaching and conversion was understood as a constitutive necessity of the church.⁶ The traditional definition was advocated by Gustav Warneck as, "the total activity of Christendom to plant and organise the Church among Non-Christians."⁷

In the early part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the understanding of the Christian mission was fairly straightforward with a popular theme, 'the evangelization of the world in this generation.' The goals of mission then were dominantly the winning or conversion of the

³ Venceslaus Lawrence, "Mission in the Bible," in *Mission and Evangelism...*, 33.

⁴ Wesley Ariarajah, *The Bible and People of Other Faiths...*, 11.

⁵ V. Premasagar, "Mission and Evangelism from a Biblical Perspective," in *Mission and Evangelism* edited by Somen Das (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 11.

⁶ Somen Das, "Mission and Evangelism: Relationship of Conversion Social Action and Ecclesiology," in *Mission and Evangelism* edited by Somen Das (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 105.

⁷ <http://lunkimjonahkhongsai.blogspot.in/2012/02/christian-mission-in-religious.html>, accessed on 29/11/14.

individual 'heathens' and planting of the churches, so that the Kingdom of God may be extended throughout the world. The major activities of the Christian missions were the preaching of the gospel by every possible means. The attitude of most missions toward other religions and cultures was negative as they were of the devil.⁸ The Christian church no longer has a monopoly on the term 'Mission'; it has become common logo in secular and non-Christians circles. Traditionally, mission meant 'propagation of faith,' 'expansion of new churches' etc. These continue to be dominant features of many mission agencies today.⁹

3. Christians understanding of Other faiths: A Review

To say that we live in a religiously plural world is not new. What is new, however is the increasing awareness that this brings with its serious theological issues for the Christian church. The Christian theology of religions is the endeavour to adumbrate 'some doctrines of other religion', to evaluate the relationship between the Christian faith and the faith of the other religion.¹⁰

Exclusivism is the theological position that holds to the finality of the Christian faith in Christ. The finality of Christ means that there is no salvation in non-Christian religions. Notable among the exclusivists of this century are Samuel Zwemer, Hendrik Kraemer, and Lesslie Newbigin. Based on the Aristotelian concept of truth as one and not many, exclusivists regard all other religious claims as false and invalid since the Christian revelation is accepted as true. Exclusivists hold that salvation is through Christ alone. It is through a personal experience of commitment to Christ that one receives assurance of salvation. The non-believers cannot receive such assurance since they are neither aware of the uniqueness of Christ neither do they acknowledge His Lordship.¹¹ Christian claim of absoluteness often led to an

⁸ F. Hrangkhuma, "Protestant Mission Trends in India," in *Mission Trends Today: Historical and Theological Perspectives* edited by Joseph Mattam and Sebastian Kim (Bangalore: St. Pauls, 1997), 37-38.

⁹ David Udayakumar, "Church-in-Mission Facing Contemporary Challenges," in *Mission Today: Challenges and Concerns* edited by Abraham P. Athyal and Dorothy Yoder Nyce (Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1998), 9.

¹⁰ Alan Race, *Christian and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 3.

¹¹ Domenic Marbaniang, *Theology of Religion: Pluralism, Inclusivism, Exclusivism* in <https://epages.wordpress.com/2010/03/24/theology-of-religions-pluralism-inclusivism-exclusivism>, accessed on 01/12/2014.

arrogant missionary stance which saw evangelism as cajolery.¹² The axioms of 'outside church there is no salvation' emerged initially from debates among Christians. Having some earlier roots, it appears in its well known form of writings of Cyprian who uses against Christians heretics and schismatic's,¹³ despite the fact that since the sixth century exclusivism had become Christianity's default position, there have been theological attempts to soften its harsh implication about the eternal damnation of all non-Christians.¹⁴

Exclusivism, thus, establishes the uniqueness and identity of Christianity among world religions. Such exclusivism can take either an extremist or a moderate viewpoint. The extremist view regards all non-Christian religions as demonic and enemies of Christian truth. On the other hand, the moderate view sees some non-Christian religions as containing elements whereby a dialogue with them can be initiated. The only way to deny exclusiveness of Christ is to deny the veracity of the Bible. However, at the same time, it must be affirmed that the Bible also speaks of God involved in the history of the nations. Therefore, it must not be thought non-Christian religions are totally devoid of virtue. Thus, though being very vociferous in his attacks on Hinduism, Nehemiah Goreh could say that 'Most erroneous as is the teaching of such books as the *Bhagvadgita*, the *Bhagvata*, etc., yet they have taught us something of *ananyabhakti* (undivided devotedness to God), of *vairagya* (giving up the world), of *namrata* (humility), of *kshama* (forbearance), etc., which enables us to appreciate the precepts of Christianity.'¹⁵

Inclusivism in the Christian theology of religion is both an acceptance and a rejection of the other faith.¹⁶ The inclusivist view has given rise to the concept of the *anonymous Christian* by which is understood an adherent of a particular religion whom God saves through Christ, but who personally neither knows the Christ of the Bible nor has converted to Biblical

¹² Alan Race, *Christian and Religious Pluralism...*, 15.

¹³ In the early church 'schism' was used to describe those groups that broke with the church and established rival church, a formal division or split within a religious body.

¹⁴ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Christianity and Other Religion," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations* edited by David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 124-126.

¹⁵ Domenic Marbaniang, *Theology of Religion: Pluralism, Inclusivism, Exclusivism...*, accessed on 1/12/2014.

¹⁶ Alan Race, *Christian and Religious Pluralism...*, 38.

Christianity. This position was popularized by the Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner. Rahner used the term 'anonymous' to denote people who experience the grace of God in Christ regardless to what religion they belong to. Inclusivism is based on two axioms: the first is that salvation is through Christ alone, the second is that God wills the whole world to be saved. Consequently, God saves people through Christ alone;¹⁷ which makes a universal claim as the final way of salvation.¹⁸

One of the most influential inclusivist theologies of the twentieth century is Karl Rahner's theory of 'anonymous Christianity'. According to him, God's universal salvific will encompass every human being, so that God is in fact gracefully present to all. To the extent that non-Christians respond positively to God's grace by acts of faith, hope and love and they are anonymous Christians.¹⁹

Pluralism, throughout its history, Christians theorizing about the relationship between the Christians and the non-Christian faiths has been ambivalent.²⁰ Pluralism is basically the belief that the world religions are true and equally valid in their communication of the truth about God, the world, and salvation. The chief expounder of this view is John Hick of Claremont Graduate School in California, who first propounded it in his book *God and the Universe of Faiths* (1973). His view is not different from the popular Hindu view capsulated in Krishna's saying in the *Bhagavadgita*:

"By whatsoever way men worship Me, even so do I accept them; for, in all ways, O Partha, men walk in My path," (IV.11)²¹

Alan quotes J. B. Cobb statement on pluralism which says, "To be pluralist is not to be neutral with respect to all the values. Further, the high appraisal of

¹⁷ Domenic Marbaniang, *Theology of Religion: Pluralism, Inclusivism, Exclusivism...*, accessed on 1/12/2014.

¹⁸ Alan Race, *Christian and Religious Pluralism...*, 38.

¹⁹ Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Christianity and Other Religion," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations* edited by David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 141.

²⁰ Alan Race, *Christian and Religious Pluralism...*, 70.

²¹ Domenic Marbaniang, *Theology of Religion: Pluralism, Inclusivism, Exclusivism...*, accessed on 1/12/2014.

pluralism does not spring rootless from nowhere... for the Christians it can arise only through a deepening of the understanding of Christ."²² Thus arguing from a Christian perspective, Catherine quotes from Gideon Goosen statement, where he says, "one may still recognize Jesus Christ as the 'apex of revelation', while acknowledging elements of truth in other religions."²³ And today the world religions are increasingly in contact with one another in conscious dialogue and in deliberate attempts to learn about and to learn from one another, and what we are picturing here as a future possibility is not single world religion, but a situation in which the different traditions no longer see themselves and each other as rival ideological communities,²⁴ rather Christians will enter into a living relationship with people of other faiths where we do not lose our identity, but we acquire a new profile in the confrontation with our partner.²⁵

According to Hick, Christianity is not the one and only way of salvation, but one among several. Hick challenges the older view that Christ or Christianity must be seen at the centre of religions. Rather, he says, God must be seen at the centre of religions. The pluralistic contention is that all religions are fundamentally the same though superficially different.²⁶

4. A paradigm shift in understanding Mission and Evangelism

According to J. A. B. Jongeneel and J. M. Van Engelen, a turning point in the history of mission was marked in 1963 by the Mission Conference in Mexico when a negative evaluation of secularization was taken over by a 'yes to secular.' For since then the reality of the world has become the centre of missiological reflection of the ecumenical churches. Over against the earlier models of evangelization of the whole world, modern understanding of mission is most represented by the phrases of 'presence,' 'humanization,' 'dialogue,' and 'liberation.' In Asia, Kim Yong-bock defines God's mission as

²² Alan Race, *Christian and Religious Pluralism...*, 98.

²³ Catherine Cornille, "Multiple Religion Belonging," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations* edited by David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 330.

²⁴ John Hick, "Whatever Path Men Choose is Mine," in *Christianity and other Religions* edited by John Hick and Brain Hennlethwaite (Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks. 1980), 187-189.

²⁵ Jurgen Moltmann, "Christianity and the World Religions," in *Christianity and other Religions* edited by John Hick and Brain Hennlethwaite (Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks. 1980), 93-94.

²⁶ Domenic Marbaniang, *Theology of Religion: Pluralism, Inclusivism, Exclusivism...*, accessed on 1/12/2014.

the suffering people in Asia; Marlene Perera asserts that mission is to inaugurate the reign of God among human beings; and Prakai Nontawase sees mission in terms of different souls and persons, and allowing for the lives of people to be touched by one another.²⁷

Today the churches, whether they professed to be ecumenical, evangelical, Pentecostal or Orthodox, have largely left the model of mission as proclamation and conversion in their literal understanding. All the churches in Asia on the institutional level are coping in one way or the other with the questions of many contexts, many religions, many cultures and systems of values-what we call pluralism or the effects of globalization. Rather than proclamation alone, all churches are exploring in their own ways a different understanding of "Christian witness." Besides preaching they also begin to address human sin in the structural complexities of our world, and start ministering the socially poor and marginalized of our societies in their contexts.²⁸ To be engaged in mission today involves having a prophetic perspective on issues facing church and society. The Hebrew prophets were deeply involved in the political, social, and religious affairs of their nation. The mission of God in Christ and through his people is the restoring of a dialectical relationship between God's grace and the world, and the modern concept of inclusion has its roots in prophetic ministry. The message of every prophet was based on the conviction that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was also the Lord of all the earth and all history.²⁹

Christ ministered even to those who did not acknowledge Him, the Church should be prepared to render service wherever there is unmet need, irrespective of whether or not there is an immediate possibility of preaching the Gospel. This form of service will be a real possibility of the World Council without compromising its character as a council of churches only if at its

²⁷ Wong Wai Ching Angela, "Challenges of Mission in a Pluralistic World," in World Council of Churches, Central Committee. Geneva, Switzerland. 26th August-3 September 2002, in <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2002/challenges-of-mission-in-a-pluralistic-world>, accessed on 29/11/2014.

²⁸ Wong Wai Ching Angela, "Challenges of Mission in a Pluralistic World,"..., accessed on 29/11/2014.

²⁹ M. Mani Chacko, "Prophet insights for Contemporary Mission," in *Mission Today: Challenges and Concern* edited by Abraham P. Athylal and Dorothy Yoder Nyce (Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1998), 153-163.

centre there is an integration of witness and service.³⁰ The church's task is to build the people of God through her ministrations. She attains a correct and authentic self-understanding when she situates herself in a pluralist context and relates to the world around her,³¹ message unrelated to life is no message. Theology develops in the life situations of the people.³² The deep change in the church's attitude towards other religion- an attitude of respect, dialogue and collaboration-is vital for the fulfilment of her mission in our pluralist society.³³

5. Mission and Evangelism: Looking at a New Glance

Wesley Ariarajah, a well-known ecumenical theologian, used to say about the Christian mandate in the pluralistic context of Asia: "The Christian task is to witness, not to convert." The awakening of the marginalized people, the Dalits, tribals, women etc, is an important factor. These are some aspects of our context- the context where we seek relevant patterns of Christian witness. The question before us is how the Christian faith becomes meaningful to our neighbours-Hindus, Muslims, Marxists, also to our Dalit, tribal, women.³⁴

The Hindutva ideology leaves away the essence of Hinduism by politicizing religion, reducing the religion to fascism, challenging the essence of secularism and claiming the identity of one's sect. Hindu fundamentalists always allege that Christians are engaged in coercive conversion activities as part of an international conspiracy to colonize India. Some of the citable instances for the fascist attitude of Hindutva ideology in recent times are: the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6th December 1996. The burning of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons on 23rd January 1999 in Orissa, the killing of Fr. Aruldas and the Godhra carnage in 2002 in Gujarat and many more. Obviously the contemporary India is

³⁰ J. Russel Chandran, *The Church in Mission: Some Reflections* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1991), 48.

³¹ Errol D'Lima, "The Church and Her Mission," in *Evangelizing in the Third Millennium* edited by Gregory Karotempel, Jacob Marangattu and mark Barco (Rajkot: Deepti Publications, 2006), 24.

³² Jesudas M. Athyal and John J. Thatamanil, eds., *Metropolitan Chrysostom: Mission in the Market place* (Tiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithy, 2002), 150.

³³ Joseph Neuner, "The Church's Mission in Pluralistic Society," in *Evangelizing in the Third Millennium* edited by Gregory Karotempel, Jacob Marangattu and mark Barco (Rajkot: Deepti Publications, 2006), 62.

³⁴ <http://lunkimjonahkhongsai.blogspot.in/2012/02/christian-mission-in-religious.html>, accessed on 29/11/2014.

witnessing inter-religious rivalry and conflict at a level unheard of in its past history.³⁵ India as a sub-continent is accentuated by its religious pluralism as well as by its endless cultural, linguistic and regional differences, which had lived in great unity in diversity, but now Hindutva movement is all out to destroy it, in the name of achieving its Hindu Rashtra and thus has severed the roots of that deep unity. So at this juncture how does Christian go about missionizing or witnessing to the people becomes the greatest challenge.³⁶

Hindutva ideology poses a great challenge to every free thinking man of our society, a challenge for the dalit, the tribals, and women and for all the minorities. In the recent past Churches was accused by so many allegations, harassed and persecuted by the Hindutva force. Therefore one of the ways by which the Church can effectively proclaim the Good News of Christ in India is by involving herself in the socio-economic and cultural development of the poor and by striving to eradicate the social evils which have suppressed the freedom of a large majority of the people. In a context like this, the church in order to be true to her mission in India, the Church needs to be ever creative and committed, through her missionary praxis she must be more than ever authentic and credible.³⁷

5.1. Doing Mission in the context of Ecological crisis

The ecological crisis has integrated upon our consciousness with great urgency. In the context of globalization and modernization, the economic policies and the technological culture has created a hell on earth.³⁸ Emerging from the recent eco-theology is an approach to mission, which sees the mission of God in terms of reconciliation at all levels in a reality characteristic by relationship and interdependence. The eco-missiological vision for cosmic redemption is comprehensive and holistic, setting mission and evangelism in a broader context and calling for the pursuit of eco-justice, eco-praxis and this is an holistic approach. The lack of an ecological ministry has been one of the serious omissions in the history of the Church's mission. Eco-mission, therefore, emerges as one of the essential aspects of a

³⁵ <http://lunkimjonahkhongsai.blogspot.in/2012/02/christian-mission-in-religious.html>, accessed on 29/11/2014.

³⁶ Paul D'Souza, *A Christian Response to Hindutva Ideology: A Rethinking of Missionary Praxis in India* (Romea: Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 2004), 94.

³⁷ Paul D'Souza, *A Christian Response to Hindutva Ideology: A Rethinking of Missionary Praxis in India...*, 101.

³⁸ H. Vanlalauva, *Doing Mission in India Today* (Serampore: Department of Research/SATHRI, 2012), 34.

holistic and universal mission response in these days emphasising that the gospel is the good news for all the creation. Interrelatedness and interdependence are the methodological keys for eco-missiology. Christian Mission in a cosmic context must bring justice, peace, prosperity and hope. Creation-conscious mission is the call to us to enter into a genuine relationship with God, with each other and with the whole creation.³⁹

5.2. Doing mission in the context of Globalization and Economic disparity

Globalization as a movement, though neither new nor inevitable, is transforming and shaping the world. Despite hopes that globalization will end poverty, the issues that currently troubles is the disparity in wealth between the developed and the developing nations, between the rich and the poor.⁴⁰ If Christianity is to be relevant and meaningful to the world, it must address the issues affecting the Church and the lives of the people. The Church is missionary by its nature and it takes up this mission by attending to the context of the Church. The WCC is engaged in a study/action process about the globalization called "Poverty, Wealth and Ecology: Impact of Economic Globalization." This process encourages the churches to explore and advocate for alternative to economic globalization. It is an attempt to bring churches and ecumenical partners to reflect and act together on finding new and creative ways to use global wealth to eradicate poverty because it is God's preferential option for the poor.⁴¹

The church is the continuing presence of Jesus in the world today, it should be rooted in love, a church courageous enough to utter a prophetic warning to our nation and to the people. The church must transform itself so as to bring about justice and equality in the life of the nation and in the world. To depart from such a mission is to fail God's purpose of bringing about a transformed society for the whole human kind.⁴²

5.3. Doing mission in the context of the marginalised

Today we face a situation where religious and communal forces fragments our society, this process of fragmentation has been aggravated by the emergence of world market, global media, world market and consumerist

³⁹ H. Vanlalauva, *Doing Mission in India Today...*, 48-52.

⁴⁰ H. Vanlalauva, *Doing Mission in India Today...*, 107.

⁴¹ H. Vanlalauva, *Doing Mission in India Today...*, 112.

⁴² R. Edwin Jebaraj, "Justice and Renewal of Mission," in *Navajeevanadam: A Journal of Mission and Theological Reflection*, vol.1, No.1 (Kerala: Navajeevodayam, 2011): 68-83.

ideology. Many marginal groups, tribals, dalits, women, children and other minorities are increasingly dehumanized and dominated. In the face of this new development we seek new directions for mission and evangelism.⁴³ Thus our present mission should provide hope and help to one's own downtrodden society; to build, lay and strengthen the non-political roots of the oppressed and exploited society in the fields of social, economic, educational, cultural, scientific, trade, commerce and industry which has been completely destroyed by the tyrant class. Our mission should become a perennial source of inspiration for the oppressed and exploited society, by a way of developing moral values for self and by exhibiting those values to the society as a model, to generate, develop and operate direction centres to guide the oppressed and exploited society.⁴⁴

God is someone who dwells with the margins of society and journeys to the margins and is interested in liberating them (Exodus 3). He dwells in the darkness created by humanity and He speaks and educates us through that state of margins inviting our active engagement, mission therefore, must begin at the margins and wrestle with the inexhaustible divine mystery because 'it is the margins and spaces of darkness created by our society, begins a new luminosity which will illumine our world and society.'⁴⁵ Mission is a human response to the promise of a New Life in its fullness in Jesus Christ—a life that overcomes all forces of death expressed as self-centeredness, socio-cultural oppression and economic injustices. Mission is a call to discipleship that is to follow Jesus Christ who through his ministry, life, death and resurrection create and reveal a life in all its fullness and our mission fullness can be experienced only when we engage and be in a relationship with the community.⁴⁶

6. The Need for a New Mission Model

A paradigm is a conceptual organizing tool that is widely used in commercial and managements. We are not using paradigm as a dogmatic concept that

⁴³ Imtinar Imsong, "In Search of a Mission Paradigm from the Perspective of the Marginalized," in *Mission and Evangelism* edited by Somen Das (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 171-172.

⁴⁴ Prakash Louis, "Liberative Mission among the the Marginalized and the oppressed," in *Prophetic Dialogue: Challenges and Prospects in India* edited by L. Stanislaus and Alwyn D'Souza (Delhi: Ishvani Kendra, 2003), 58-59.

⁴⁵ Daniel Tikhir, "Margins: Site of Mission," in *Addressing Contemporary Issues: A Missiological Reflection* edited by N. Toshi Ao and Temjennaro Longkumer (Dimapur, Nagaland: Missiological Research Centre, 2012), 104.

⁴⁶ Imtinar Imsong, "In Search of a Mission Paradigm from the Perspective of the Marginalized,"..., 186.

can be invoked arbitrarily in every context. Rather, we regard a paradigm as something that exists, as realities do, in the mind. A paradigm helps one to develop ideologies and establish social organizations. A social paradigm consists of a constellation of ideologies, values, perceptions, and praxis envisioned and shared by the missionary community. What we today need in our mission work is a mission paradigm that reorganizes and restructures our external surroundings—a paradigm that transforms and enriches the old, or at least gives a heightened realism to the old.⁴⁷

Over the decades, 20th century missional priorities were constantly shifting from denomination to denomination and from culture to culture along the changing political and economic landscape, which often led church and mission leaders to compete for converts and search for recognition in order to satisfy their sponsoring mission bodies. The conversion of the 'heathens' was given more importance than the social needs of the people. The biblical paradigm we need to develop and put into practice in the 21st century has to perceive the problems of society as being connected to the people, so that the messengers of the gospel will no longer compete with one another for converts or recognition. Rather, they all need to labour side by side as authentic ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. By engaging in mission, we profess ourselves to be authentic, unerring, and well informed.⁴⁸ We need to analyse closely and bring out a missiological hermeneutic where mission agencies can engage in the present issues.

Summation

Our mission is the initiative of the Triune God, who calls us to share in that mission. Jesus was sent by God to bring the whole of creation to its fullness, and we are sent by Jesus, to be his partners in mission. The mission of Jesus was a way of self-emptying and humble service.⁴⁹ Thus, the church in a new ways should foster unity and charity among the individuals and even among the nations. Today our mission challenge in a pluralistic society is not to enlarge the members of the Christians nor to focused on the conversion, rather it ought to address to the groaning pertinent issues that we all are facing in our context, thus witnessing the holistic approach of Jesus Christ.



⁴⁷ Glory E. Dharmaraj and Jacob S. Dharmaraj, *Mutuality in Mission: A Theological Principle for the 20th Century* (New York: The United Methodist Church, 2001), 87.

⁴⁸ Glory E. Dharmaraj and Jacob S. Dharmaraj, *Mutuality in Mission: A Theological Principle for the 20th Century...*, 88-89.

⁴⁹ L. Stanislaus and Alwyn D'Souza, eds., *Prophetic Dialogue: Challenges and Prospects in India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), xviii.

Recollection of Insights for Diligent Christian Witness in India: A Study on the Freedom of Religion based on Article 25 of the Indian Constitution -S. Robertson*

Introduction

This paper attempts to recollect insights from the various Supreme Court interpretations of Article 25 of the Indian Constitution and to understand freedom of religion to bear diligent Christian witness. Detailed study of each case is an interesting research, but owing to our purpose I restricted myself to the verdict of cases as interpreted by eminent jurists. Anyone interested in detail may use the foot notes to trace the cases.

Articles 25-28 of the Indian Constitution provide for secularism and “freedom of religion” and article 25 is often read with article 26. I, however, have decided to dwell only on the Article 25 to make it converse with us in some details, though for the purpose of clarity there may be references to article 26. The emphasis in Article 25 is on ‘the practice of religious freedom for individuals’¹ and “Article 26 deals with the right of a religious denomination or a section of a religious denomination.”²

Article 25 comes under part III of the Indian Constitution under the heading “fundamental rights”. However, “the rights conferred by part III of the Constitution are not absolute. They are relative and subject to certain limitations which were considered necessary for the safety and security of the State.”³ In other words ‘the right to freedom of religion is not an unqualified right’.⁴ The freedom of religion is ‘not only for Indian citizens but for all persons in India and to religious groups’.⁵

As all discussions on the freedom of religion, particularly based on Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, begin with a note on secularism, I too have done

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¹ P.M. Bakshi, *The Constitution of India*, 6th ed. (Delhi: Universal Law Publishing Co., 2005), 64.

² Chaudhari & Chaturvedi, *Law of Fundamental Rights*, 4th ed. (Delhi: Delhi Law House, 2002), 800.

³ D.C. Ahir, *Dr. Ambedkar and Indian Constitution*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1997), 90.

⁴ T.K. Tope, *Constitutional Law of India*, 2nd ed. (Lucknow: Eastern Book Company, 1992), 225.

⁵ M.P. Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law*, 3rd ed. (Bombay: N.M. Tripathi Private LTD, 1983), 526.

the same, though it was not my sole concern. My efforts to describe the salient aspects of Article 25, can facilitate a clear understanding for diligent witness in India.

I, to derive at this objective, have discussed the essential aspects of a secular state and the definition of religion as found in the Supreme Court judgments. Graphic but useful insights are highlighted to understand freedom of conscience, freedom to profess, practice and propagate religion. The expression ‘religious practice’ has gone through many lengthy legal considerations to determine the integral, essential, and non-secular aspect of religion. A recollection of these distinctions is helpful to us.

‘Propagation’ is another important word that witnessed huge discussion to decide whether this expression provides for conversion. Moderate endeavor is taken to understand the expressions public order, morality and health to which the entire freedom of religion is subjected to. Freedom of religion can be regulated through legislations by States in matters of economic, financial, political and secular activities associated with religious practices is another area touched upon to help Christians aware of these insights. Another paramount insight helpful for diligent witness considered is that religious practices should give way to providing for social welfare and reforms.

In the light of these considerations suggestions are made for diligent Christian witness in the Indian context. This study helps ‘diligent witness’ is in a way prophetic, to help avoid confrontation and waste of resources on indefensible matters. It is a call for Christians in India to be good law abiding citizens to bear witness to Christ.

Secularism

The word secular is not defined in the constitution but the prevailing definitions that are in vogue are based upon the Supreme Court judgments on various matters related to freedom of religion. The concept of secularism and freedom of religion is implicit in the Preamble and other provisions of the Constitution, even before the word ‘secular’ was inserted in the Preamble by the 42nd Amendment Act in 1976. The amendment is intended merely to spell out clearly the principle of ‘secularism’ in the Constitution’.⁶ Also ‘to make sure what India seeks to achieve as a secular State’.⁷

⁶ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 47th ed. (Allahabad: Central Law Agency, 2010), 323.

⁷ P.K. Majumdar & R. P. Kataria, *Commentary on the Constitution of India*, 11th ed. 9 (New Delhi: Orient Publishing company, 2014), 494.

Secularism in India means respect for all religions and it does not mean irreligion.⁸ It 'is not indifference to religion' and 'does not behave hatred on any religion'. 'Secularism conceptualizes peaceful co-existence of different faiths' and considers each individual citizen as a free normal person in his/her own right'.⁹ The essence of secularism is non-discrimination on the basis of religious differences.

'Secularism can be practiced by adopting a complete neutral approach towards religions or positively making one section of religious people to understand and respect religion of another'. The Supreme Court has held that 'study of religions in school education is not against the secular philosophy of the Constitution'. It can help avoid 'mutual distrust and intolerance'. This approach is called positive secularism'.¹⁰ It is 'positive in its meaning in as much as it is an active instrument to prevent followers of different religions from perpetrating violent acts and atrocities against each other'.¹¹ These principles are to be practiced by a secular State (India).

Secular State

India under the Constitution is a Secular State which means, the State observes an attitude of neutrality and impartiality towards all religions. There shall be no "State religion". The State will neither establish a religion of its own nor confer any special patronage upon any particular religion. 'Every person is guaranteed the freedom of conscience and the freedom to profess, practice and propagate his/her own religion'.¹² However, 'the religion of the individual or denomination has nothing to do in the matter of socio-economic change'.¹³

Further, under secular constitution, 'the State will protect all religions but interfere with none, and no person is to be discriminated against on the ground of religion. And it treats all religion equally'.¹⁴ It is not an 'atheistic State' but it is 'neutral' in matters of religion.¹⁵ In a secular state "the state

⁸ M.P. Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law*, 526.

⁹ Charles Prabhakar and Paul Mohan Raj, ed., *Rights & Responsibilities of the Minorities* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1999), 55-58.

¹⁰ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 323-24. [AIR 1994 SC 1918]

¹¹ Charles Prabhakar and Paul Mohan Raj, 55.

¹² Durga Das Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, 19th ed. (Nagpur: Wadhwa and Company, 2003), 114-15.

¹³ P.K. Majumdar & R. P. Kataria, *Commentary on the Constitution of India*, 481.

¹⁴ V.D. Mahajan, *Constitutional Law of India*, 7th ed. (Lucknow: Eastern Book Company, 1991), 274.

¹⁵ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 323.

does not identify itself with any religion."¹⁶ It is opposed to intolerance¹⁷ but it regulates the secular activities connected with religion 'by enacting law'¹⁸ without interfering with 'things which are essentially religious'. It can interfere if a particular religious practice offends public order, morality, health and contravenes any law of social, economic or political regulation'.¹⁹ No doubt, many questions arise in our minds but let us wait a while for more clarity.

Religion

Like the word "secular" the term "religion" is also not defined in the constitution,²⁰ and therefore one has to rely upon some of the definitions given in the Supreme Court Judgments. It is also true that the term 'religion' is beyond any form of convincing definition.

The Supreme Court has held that religion is a matter of faith with individuals or communities and it is not necessarily theistic. A religion may only lay down a Code of ethical rules for its followers to accept, it might prescribe rituals and observances, ceremonies and modes of worship which are regarded as integral part of religion, and those forms and observances might extend even to matters of food and dress.²¹ Further "religion is not merely an opinion, doctrine or belief; it has its outward expression in acts as well. Hence, religious practices or performances of acts in pursuance of religious belief are as much part of religion as faith or belief in particular doctrines."²²

The courts have made distinction that "religion in its doctrinal and ritual aspect is a private purpose while the administration of property dedicated to the public for religious purposes is a public purpose."²³ Also, the court is competent to decide whether 'doctrines and practices' of each religion are essential or nonessential'.²⁴ These wider definitions of religion help understand 'freedom to practice religion' in the context of many religions and even ideologies.

¹⁶ M.P. Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law*, 526.

¹⁷ Charles Prabhakar and Paul Mohan Raj, 57.

¹⁸ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 323. [AIR 1994 SC 1918]

¹⁹ Durga Das Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, 116.

²⁰ T.K. Tope, *Constitutional Law of India*, 225.

²¹ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 325.

²² The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India* (Madras: The Madras Law Journal Office, 1970), 259.

²³ The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 260.

²⁴ P.M. Bakshi, *The Constitution of India*, 63.

Before entering into detail aspects of religious freedom in India it is worthwhile to recollect some of the limitations. They are: (1) it is subject to public order, morality and health, (2) subject to the other provisions of Part III of the Constitution, (3) subject to any existing law regulating or restricting an economic, financial, political, or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice, (4) subject to law providing for social welfare and reform, and (5) subject to any law that may be made by the State and regulating or restricting the activities aforesaid or providing for social welfare and reform.²⁵

Freedom of Conscience

To begin with, “freedom of religion under the Indian Constitution means freedom to have any religion, freedom to convert to any religion and freedom to have no religion.”²⁶ The first step towards right to freedom of religion is freedom of conscience. Although Art.25 (1) provides for freedom of conscience²⁷ to every person, whether citizen or non-citizen,²⁸ the constitution has not defined the expression ‘freedom of conscience’.²⁹ Thus here too for definition one has to rely on the judgments of the Supreme Court.

Accordingly, the term ‘freedom of conscience’ connotes the right of a person to entertain beliefs and doctrines concerning matters which are regarded by him to be conducive to his spiritual well-being. The freedom of conscience is the inner freedom of the citizen to mould his own relation with God in any way he likes’.³⁰

Article 25 guarantees “freedom of conscience” to every citizen, and not merely to the followers of one particular religion. Hence, if a person purposely undertakes the conversion of another person to his religion, as distinguished from his effort to transmit or spread the tenets of his religion that would impinge on the “freedom of conscience”, guaranteed to all the citizens of the country alike’.³¹

²⁵ The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 259.

²⁶ P.K. Majumdar & R. P. Kataria, *Commentary on the Constitution of India*, 493.

²⁷ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 325.

²⁸ The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 259.

²⁹ T.K. Tope, *Constitutional Law of India*, 225.

³⁰ V.D. Mahajan, *Constitutional Law of India*, 274- 75. [AIR 1954 SC 388: 1954 SCR 1055]

³¹ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 323-26.

One can, of course, voluntarily adopt another religion, but ‘force, fraud, inducement or allurement’ takes away the free consent (freedom of conscience) from the individual’.³² The constitution gives full freedom to individuals ‘to develop inner life in their own way and in accordance with the dictates of their conscience’.³³ Freedom of religion begins at ‘internal’ or conscience (psychological) level. And hence the decision to accept or change over to a religion is personal in the first place. Does India really provide for ‘freedom of conscience’ in the present situation?

Profess

When freedom of conscience becomes articulate and expressed in outward form it is ‘to profess, practice and propagate religion. Art.25 (1) guarantees freedom to profess religion.’³⁴ It means ‘to state publicly one’s creed or faith’.³⁵ It also means ‘to declare freely and openly one’s faith and belief’.³⁶ Further it means, ‘to avow publicly and to make an open declaration of one’s belief. A declaration of one’s belief means, it would be known to those whom it may interest.’³⁷

The constitution has envisaged that the first level of freedom of religion is personal, internal or at conscience level and the second stage of the freedom of religion is public declaration of a person’s belief and faith. Every person who has decided in his/her conscious to follow a particular religion has the freedom to publicly declare his/her beliefs and faith.

Practice/ Religious Practice

The third stage of the freedom of religion guaranteed in Indian constitution is ‘to practice’ one’s religion. It is outward expression of one’s inner conviction and public profession. The expression ‘practice religion’ is complicated and has been subjected to rigorous legal scrutiny. Here comes the issue of essential and nonessential of religions; and religious and secular aspects of practices.

³² Durga Das Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, 117.

³³ Charles Prabakar and Paul Mohan Raj, 55.

³⁴ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 325.

³⁵ T.K. Tope, *Constitutional Law of India*, 225.

³⁶ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 325.

³⁷ The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 260.

Art.25 (1) guarantees a person freedom to 'practice' religion.³⁸ It means 'the freedom to perform certain acts in pursuance of the faith',³⁹ 'religion, religious belief,⁴⁰ and 'practical expression in any manner'. In simple sense, 'practice religion' 'is concerned primarily with religious worship, ritual and observations'.⁴¹

These acts are prescribed by religious order in which one believes and they are 'as much a part of religion as faith or belief in any particular doctrine'.⁴² These practices are subject to 'State regulation imposed to secure order, public health and morals of the people'.

The first criterion to consider whether a religious practice is integral to or essential part of a religion, that practice 'must be regarded by the said religion as its essential and integral part'. Secondly, whether the 'community following the religion' accepts such acts.⁴³ Thirdly and mainly it has to be decided by the courts.⁴⁴

In conflicting situations, 'the Court may have to enquire whether the practice in question is religious in character and if it is whether it can be regarded as an integral or essential part of the religion'.⁴⁵ These are not to clearly distinguish between religion and religious practice, but only to resolve conflicts.

Integral

In a case related to a temple in UP the Supreme Court said 'Right to manage temple is not an integral part of religion. It can be regulated by law'.⁴⁶

In Jammu and Kashmir, in a case related to a Hindu temple, "the Court made distinction between 'religious service' and the person who performs service'. The performance of the religious service according to the tenets, customs and usages prevalent in a place of worship is an integral part of the

³⁸ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 325.

³⁹ T.K. Tope, *Constitutional Law of India*, 225.

⁴⁰ The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 260.

⁴¹ P.M. Bakshi, *The Constitution of India*, 64.

⁴² V.D. Mahajan, *Constitutional Law of India*, 275.

⁴³ The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 261.

⁴⁴ V. N. Shukla, *The Constitution of India*, 8th ed. (Lucknow: Eastern Book Company, 1990), 162.

⁴⁵ The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 261.

⁴⁶ P.M. Bakshi, *The Constitution of India*, 65.

religion's faith and belief and it cannot be regulated by the State. But the State has powers to regulate the appointment of the priest and can fix his emoluments. The Government can also abolish his customary share in the offerings to the deity."⁴⁷

Another significant judgment was 'a disposition towards making gift for charitable or religious purpose may be a pious act of a person but the same cannot be said to be an integral part of any religion'.⁴⁸

'Khursheed Ahmad Khan filed a petition against the Uttar Pradesh government's decision to remove him from service as Irrigation Supervisor for contracting a second marriage when his first marriage was still in existence. Khan challenged that it violated his right to freely practice his religion. The Court held that 'what was protected under Article 25 was the religious faith and not a practice which may run counter to public order, health or morality. Polygamy was not integral part of religion and monogamy was a reform within the power of the State under Article 25'.⁴⁹

Essential

In a significant case the Supreme Court held that, 'State can in exercise of its sovereign power acquire places of worship like mosques, churches, temples etc'. 'if it is necessary for maintenance of law and order'. 'While offer of prayer or worship is a religious practice its offering at every location where such prayers can be offered would not be an essential religious practice', unless the right to worship at a particular place is itself an integral part of that right'. A mosque is not an essential part of the practice of the religion of Islam and Namaz (prayer) by Muslims may be offered anywhere, even in open'.⁵⁰

"After the Babari Mosque was demolished on December 6, 1992 at Ayodhya, the Union Government acquired the whole property surrounding the mosque. This was challenged by the petitioners on the ground that it was violative of Arts. 25 and 26 of the Constitution as they were deprived of

⁴⁷ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 330. [Bhuri v. State of J. & K., AIR 1997 SC 1711]

⁴⁸ P.M. Bakshi, *The Constitution of India*, 62. [John Vallamattom v. Union of India, AIR 2003 SC 2902; (2003) 6 SCC 611; (2003) 3 KLT 66.]

⁴⁹ "Right to Religion not Above Public Morality: SC," *The Hindu* (Vijayawada) 10 February 2015, 10.

⁵⁰ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 328. [(1994) 6 SCC 360.]

their right to worship in the mosque but Hindus were allowed to worship therein. The Court held the Act valid as it does not interfere with the essential element of religion.”⁵¹

The Commissioner of Police in Calcutta refused permission to the use of a loud-speaker five times a day for calling the Azan (call for prayer) as several residents of the locality complained against the practice.⁵² The Calcutta High Court said, restrictions imposed by the State on the use of microphones and loudspeakers at the time of Azan is not violative of right under Art. 25. Azan is certainly an essential and integral part of Islam, but use of microphone and loudspeakers are not an essential and integral part. Traditionally and according to the religious order, Azan has to be given by the Imam or the person in charge of the mosques through their own voice and this is sanctioned under the religious order.⁵³

In the *Church of God (Full Gospel) in India v. K.K.R.M.C. Welfare Association*, in KKR Nagar, Madhavaram ‘the Supreme Court has held that in the exercise of the right to religious freedom under Arts. 25 and 26, no person can be allowed to create noise pollution or disturb the peace of the others’. The custom of religious prayer through the use of loudspeaker is not an essential element of any religion.⁵⁴ It was also said, “no religion prescribes that prayers should be performed by disturbing the peace of others nor does it preach that they should be through voice-amplifiers or beating of drums.”⁵⁵

“One of the prescriptions of religious rites introduced from the year 1966 for daily performance by an Ananda Margi is Tandava dance of Lord Siva. This dance is to be performed with a human skull, a small symbolic knife, a Trishul, a Lathi and a Damroo.”⁵⁶ The commissioner of police prohibited such practice in public. The Court, after going into the religious books and practices of the Ananda Margis, held that tandava dance in public is not an essential part of Ananda Marga.⁵⁷

⁵¹ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 328. [(1994) 6 SCC 360.]

⁵² The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 261.

⁵³ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 329. [AIR 1999 Cal 15.]

⁵⁴ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 329-30.

⁵⁵ P.M. Bakshi, *The Constitution of India*, 64. [Church of God (Full Gospel) in India v. K.K.R. Majestic Colony Welfare Association, AIR 2000 SC 2773: (2000) 7 SCC 282: 2000 SCC (cri) 1350.]

⁵⁶ V.D. Mahajan, *Constitutional Law of India*, 276.

⁵⁷ V. N. Shukla, *The Constitution of India*, 162. [(1984) 4 SCC 522.]

In a case related to Bihar, the Supreme Court held that the sacrifice of cow on the *Bakrid* day was not an essential part of Mohammedan religion and hence could be prohibited by State under clause (2) (a) of Article 25’ though the practice was enjoined by the Koran. Art. 25 exempts only the essential religious practices from State regulation.”⁵⁸

Secular/Non-Secular

In the case of national leaders, when calamity or tragedy overtakes them the State is obligated to arrange for their funeral in a manner befitting their status and in accordance with the pursuits of the particular religion to which the departed personality belonged. The performance of such duty by the State can, by no stretch of imagination, be characterized as non-secular activity.⁵⁹

In judgment of far reaching importance in the *National Anthem* case, where three Jehova’s Witnesses children were expelled from a school for refusing to sing the National Anthem, ‘the Supreme Court has held that no person can be compelled to sing the National Anthem “if he has genuine, conscientious religious objection.”’⁶⁰ The court upheld the prohibition of the religious order that prevented the children to sing the National Anthem.⁶¹ Having delved deep into ‘religious practice’ let us move to another interesting aspect of freedom of religion.

Propagate

The third level of religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution under Article 25 is to propagate a religion. The original expression used by Ambedkar was ‘right to preach and to convert’.⁶² Propagation is transmitting one’s religious conviction and practices (tenets) to others⁶³ for edification. It only means persuasion and exposition of one’s religion without an element of coercion. The propaganda may be done by a person in his individual capacity or on behalf of some church or institution’.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 335-36. [AIR 1958 SC 731.]

⁵⁹ Chaudhari & Chaturvedi, *Law of Fundamental Rights*, 787.

⁶⁰ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 326. [Bajoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala, (1984)JSCC 615.], [three children]

⁶¹ Charles Prabakar and Paul Mohan Raj, 59.

⁶² D.C. Ahir, *Dr. Ambedkar and Indian Constitution*, 83.

⁶³ T.K. Tope, *Constitutional Law of India*, 225.

⁶⁴ V.D. Mahajan, *Constitutional Law of India*, 275.

The right to propagate religion does not include the right to 'insult the religion of other persons'. Anyone who propagates the benefits of his religion is likely to extol his own and, to some extent, dispute the truth and efficiency of another religion. Propagation of religion cannot otherwise be carried on and within limits, regard being had to the law of blasphemy, profanity, etc.⁶⁵ Only 'the aggravated form of insult to religion is penalized' under IPC but 'insult to religion offered unwittingly or carelessly or without any deliberate or malicious intention to outrage the religious feeling of that class are covered under the freedom of expression'.⁶⁶

Propagation does not include 'a right to forcible conversion'.⁶⁷ Plainly, there is no fundamental right to convert any person to one's own religion. Hence legislation prohibiting conversion by force, inducement and fraud to one's own religion is not violative of Article 25 (1). In *Rev. Stanislaus v. State of M.P.*, the Court laid down that Article 25 (1) grants only the right to convert another person to one's own religion by an exposition of its tenets.⁶⁸ The appellant argued that right to 'propagate' one's religion meant the right to convert person to one's own religion and was a fundamental right under Art. 25 (1) of the Constitution. Secondly, he argued Parliament alone had the power to make the law and not the State Legislature. Rejecting the contentions of the appellant the Supreme Court held that impugned Acts were meant to avoid disturbances to the public order by prohibiting conversion from one's religion to another in a manner reprehensible to the conscience of the community.⁶⁹

Public Order, Morality and Health

These expressions have wide connotation as they are not exactly defined in the article. Our freedom of conscience, freedom to profess, practice and propagate religion can no way disturb public order, morality and health. 'Our history is witness to this'.⁷⁰ For example, slaughter of cattle or indecent exposure of one's person in a public place cannot be justified on plea of practice of religious rites. Of course, "Morality in this context, has reference

⁶⁵ The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 262.

⁶⁶ P.K. Majumdar & R. P. Kataria, *Commentary on the Constitution of India*, 482.

⁶⁷ P.M. Bakshi, *The Constitution of India*, 64.

⁶⁸ T.K. Tope, *Constitutional Law of India*, 225. [*Stanislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh*, AIR 1977 SC 908: (1977) 1 SCC 677:1977 Cri LJ 551.]

⁶⁹ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 333. [AIR 1977 SC 908.]

⁷⁰ P.K. Majumdar & R. P. Kataria, *Commentary on the Constitution of India*, 479.

to that morality which the law has concerned itself to maintain."⁷¹ Likewise, in the name of religious practice, 'untouchability or traffic in human beings' e.g., system of *Devadasis* (as prevalent in South India) cannot be tolerated. The freedom to practice religion cannot affect the exercise of the other freedoms under this part.⁷²

Conversion by prohibited means can lead to breach of public order.⁷³ Prohibition of Tandava dance is done with the same spirit. On the one hand 'the right to take out religious processions through the public streets subject to such directions as a magistrate may lawfully give is guaranteed by Art. 25, on the other, the right to take a profession along the highway is not a fundamental right and the Magistrate can impose restrictions if he apprehends a breach of the peace.⁷⁴ This is done to protect public order, morality and health.

In Bombay, under Provincial Municipal Corporation Act, 1949, the Municipal Corporation had ordered the demolition of some parts of the two mosques situated in main road of Surat district of the State of Gujarat to widen the road. The Court held that the acquisition of a religious place or a part thereof is not prohibited by the Constitution and therefore can be acquired in the public interest for widening the road. However, the court categorically suggested that before such acquisition or demolition all other options are to be thoroughly examined.⁷⁵

Graves in unauthorized and illegal places can be shifted.⁷⁶ In *U.P. Varanasi*, two graves belonging to Sunnis were in the vicinity of Shias. The Supreme Court upheld that the shifting of two Sunni graves to avoid clashes between two religious communities or sects does not affect religious rights being in the interest of public order, though the Shariat Law is against shifting of graves. Again "the ecclesiastical edict or right not to disturb an interred corpse is not absolute as will be clear from Sec. 176 (3) of the criminal Procedure Code which permits its exhumation for the purpose of crime detection."⁷⁷

⁷¹ Chaudhari & Chaturvedi, *Law of Fundamental Rights*, 791.

⁷² J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 333.

⁷³ V.D. Mahajan, *Constitutional Law of India*, 276.

⁷⁴ The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 261.

⁷⁵ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 329. [AIR 1998 Guj. 234.]

⁷⁶ Chaudhari & Chaturvedi, *Law of Fundamental Rights*, 799.

⁷⁷ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 334-35.

Having elaborately analyzed the aspects of freedom of conscience, freedom to profess, practice and propagate religion subject to public order, health, morality and the other provisions of this part, let me take you through the areas in which States can legislate laws and regulate religious practices.

Economic, Financial, Political and Secular Activities Associated with Religious Practices – Clause (2) (a)

Freedom to ‘practice religion’ extends only to those activities which are essential to religion. It does not cover secular activities connected with religion. ‘The legislation contemplated under Article 25 (2) (a) can modify even the personal law’.⁷⁸

Article 25, clause 2 (a) saves the power of the State to regulate or restrict secular activities associated with religious practice. What is the dividing line between religious and secular activities is difficult to decide and it is for the court to determine. But subject to that, the religious denomination is entitled to lay down its rites and ceremonies’.⁷⁹ In the case of determining whether a matter is religious or secular, ‘each case must be judged by its own facts and circumstances’.⁸⁰ For example, “Service of a priest is a secular activity and can be regulated by the State under article 25 (2).”⁸¹

The religious missions have freedom to spend their money as they deem necessary. The Government is concerned, (i) to inquire how much foreign money has come in aid to a foreign mission.; (ii) to see whether money is being used in a way which may promote breach of public order, morality and health; (iii) to see whether there has been any attempt forcibly or fraudulently to convert a person from his own belief to another.

The Government also may initiate, (i) an enquiry into the political activity associated with religion; (ii) inquiry into the attitude of foreign missions towards Indians; (iii) inquiry into social relations between Christians and non-Christians, (iv) inquiry into the operations of foreign missions, particularly to see whether such operations extend to areas largely

⁷⁸ Chaudhari & Chaturvedi, *Law of Fundamental Rights*, 795.

⁷⁹ P.M. Bakshi, *The Constitution of India*, 62-63.

⁸⁰ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 335.

⁸¹ P.M. Bakshi, *The Constitution of India*, 62. (*Bhuri Nath v. Stae of Jammu & Kashmir*, AIR 1997 SC 1711: (1997 2 SCC 745.)

populated by scheduled Castes and the aborigines; and (v) inquiry into whether the *pracharakas* of any mission adopt methods offending public order, health or morality.⁸²

Providing for Social Welfare and Reform

Under clause (2) (b) of Art 25 the State is empowered to make laws for social welfare and social reform. The State can also eradicate social practices and dogmas which stand in the path of the country’s onward progress. Where there is conflict between the need of social welfare and reform on the one hand and religious practice on the other, religion must yield.⁸³ Therefore, a law enacted for introducing social reform cannot be challenged as violating the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.⁸⁴

For example ‘polygamy is not an essential part of the Hindu religion, therefore, it can be regulated by law’.⁸⁵ A prohibition of the same by law does not contravene the freedom of religion because providing for compulsory monogamy and prohibiting bigamy is valid as a measure of social reform.⁸⁶ Further, ‘marriage is a social institution’.⁸⁷

Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 disqualifies persons having more than two children from contesting election for the post of Sarpanch and Panch in panchyat does not violate Article 25 of the Constitution. The court held ‘the Muslim law permits marrying four women but does not anywhere mandates it as a duty to perform four marriages. Such practices which encourage bigamy or polygamy can be regulated by making law’.⁸⁸

Under this sub-clause the State is empowered to throw open all Hindu religious institutions of a public character, to all classes and sections of Hindus’. But the State cannot regulate the manner in which the worship of the deity is performed by the authorized *pujaris* of the temple or the hours and days on which the temple is to be kept open for *darshan* or *puja* for devotees. Similarly ‘the right of Sikhs to carry *Kirpans* is recognized as a religious practice in Explanation 1 of article 25. ‘This does not mean that he

⁸² Chaudhari & Chaturvedi, *Law of Fundamental Rights*, 792.

⁸³ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 337. [AIR 1953 Bom 84.]

⁸⁴ The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 262.

⁸⁵ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 337. [AIR 1953 Bom 84.]

⁸⁶ The Madras Law Journal Office, *The Constitution of India*, 260-63.

⁸⁷ P.K. Majumdar & R. P. Kataria, *Commentary on the Constitution of India*, 474.

⁸⁸ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 335. [AIR 2003 SC 3057.]

can keep any number of *Kirpans*'.⁸⁹ Therefore, legislation in the area of personal laws cannot be challenged on the ground that it interferes with religious freedom.⁹⁰

Recollection of insights from Article 25 through an almost thorough discussion has helped obtain broader, but not complete, understanding of freedom of religion in India within the frame work of Indian constitution. Now it is possible to consider 'diligent Christian witness'.

Diligent Christian Witness

The word 'diligent' broadly means industrious, meticulous, conscientious, attentive, careful, etc. It has been deliberately chosen to convey that there is a need in India for the Christians (Church) to labor hard with much prudence in the light of the freedom of religion guaranteed under fundamental rights.

It is so because we are faced with the challenge of our secular principles of non-discrimination on religious grounds and religious neutrality of the State are under constant threat and pressure from communal ideologies that are lurking behind political organizations. There is a possible and legitimate apprehension that efforts are on to replace non discrimination and neutrality of the State with religious discrimination and partiality. Noted writer Nayantara Sahgal said 'people were being killed for not agreeing with the ruling ideology' and 'in this rising tide of hatred, India is being unmade, being destroyed'.⁹¹ Our witness can become part of rebuilding and remaking India.

The secular State of ours cannot fail providing same constitutional protection to all the religions in India. She is expected to fight 'religious intolerance' among different religions. She is beautiful and fascinating as long as not wedded to 'identify with one religion'. However, the concern for our witness is that the government might consciously protect one religion, identify with one religion and become intolerant to other religions. That is why 'Nayantara Sahgal has returned the prestigious Sahitya Akasemi Award in protest against what she called "vanishing space" for diversity'.⁹² Can Christian witness ignore these concerns?

⁸⁹ J.N. Pandey, *The Constitutional Law of India*, 337-38. [Venkataramanu Devaru v. State of Mysore, AIR 1958 SC 255., Vaguapurushcdji v. Muldas, AIR 1966 SC 1119.]

⁹⁰ T.K. Tope, *Constitutional Law of India*, 226

⁹¹ Smriti Kak Ramachandran & Anuradha Raman, "Nayantara Sahgal Protests Dadri Lynching, Returns Akademi Award," *The Hindu* (Vijayawada) 7 October 2015, 1.

⁹² Smriti Kak Ramachandran & Anuradha Raman, 1.

It is too early but often we are overwhelmed, because of the new developments around us, to question the sincerity of the government to maintain the credibility of the principles of secularism. President Pranab Mukherjee said 'India's core civilisational values of diversity, tolerance, and plurality have kept it united for centuries and that cannot be wasted'.⁹³ These principles are bedrock to our witness at all times and at all situations. To continue this blessed privilege we should be vigilantly diligent and our witness too should be relevant. It is said, "rarely do foundational threats to Constitutions come as sudden events, they often build up as liberties and freedoms are incrementally compromised."⁹⁴ We have to raise contextual voice that can synchronise with other similar voices.

The identification of 'positive secularism' within the frame work of Indian Constitution is encouraging. It implies conscious attempt to coexist with each other (religions). It is hard to find any such effort from the power centers. Rather, what we see is a clear effort to exclude the other irrespective of their potentials and contributions towards nation building and transformation. These naïve signs call for continuous struggle and prudent witnessing. Our sustained engagement in dialogue is a fruitful consideration.

Although the Supreme Court has time and again attempted a broader and inclusive definition of religion we are to be conscious of the jurisdiction of courts in deciding essential, integral and non-secular aspects of religion. Only worrying concern is whether the same yard stick and speed is applied for all the religious practices in India. Referring to the many recent killings (rationalists, etc.) it is said "in all these cases, justice drags its feet. The Prime Minister remains silent on this reign of terror."⁹⁵ What is law to one religion should become law to all the religions, including Christian.

Freedom of conscience is expected to be free from influence. The reality is that psychological threats are created. It prevents from freely deciding for oneself without coercion. Often terrorizing and fake circumstances are engineered to influence people's conscience. There is a tendency to dictate what an Indian should say, respect, and practice. Failure to do so is

⁹³ Smita Gupta, "Pranab Warns against Letting Go of India's core Values," *The Hindu* (Vijayawada), 8 October 2015, 1.

⁹⁴ Anup Surendranath, "Beefed-up Curbs, Feeble Resistance," *The Hindu* (Vijayawada) 10 October 2015, 10.

⁹⁵ Smriti Kak Ramachandran & Anuradha Raman, 1.

threatened with dire consequence of exclusion. Ensuring our careful attention to such developments can be part of our witness.

Subjects that are considered non essential, non-integral and secular aspects of religion have to be carefully handled to eliminate artificial doubts about our commitment and contributions to the constitution and Nation.

It is healthy that courts can interfere in 'freedom of religion' and regulate matters when abuse is apprehended. If partisan consideration is perceived, we have a responsibility, as a part of our witness, to make available such data to the public.

States' power to legitimately acquire or alter religious structures for the purpose of public order and social welfare has to be complied with. The advice that such acts should be the final consideration is appreciable. Doubt is whether property, structures and practices of numerically powerful experience similar situation. Why could not an idol illegally placed in a mosque removed and the situation is allowed to spiral up leading to constant tension while even Muslim and Christian tombs can be exhumed or shifted. We may need to show our solidarity, as a part of our witnessing, towards acceptable solutions.

It is true that "the exercise of our rights should not infringe the rights of others."⁹⁶ But a seeming presumption is that Muslim's Azan (five times a day) and Christian prayers with loud music are restricted while the noise pollution and public nuisance caused all through the year are not regulated by the States. The increasing number of bans on certain practices and the newer presentation of Hinduism in contrast to British, Nehru and Indian intellectuals are worrying. It is unheard in the recent past that communal programs and social evils of numerically powerful are banned in India. Our plans of witness can include some lawful awareness programs.

Leave alone the apprehensions and make clear that fixing a grave or religious structure in disputed places is not the alternative to law abiding. Being law abiding citizens and avoiding unreasonable conflicts can be a form of witness. Hence it is said "if we seek justice from the State and the law, we have a moral obligation to act with justice within our churches, communities and families."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ VK Kuriakose, "Religious Pollution," *Indian Currents* XXVII/38 (21-27 September, 2015): 39.

⁹⁷ Sarasu Esther Thomas, *Law for Christians in contemporary India* (Bangalore: BTESSC, 2014), 150.

The State honor accorded to public personalities in accordance with their particular religious rites cannot uncharitably be accused as non-secular. Even the court had respected the religious sentiments of people who did not participate in the singing of national anthem. It is to be respected that although force, fraud and allurements or inducement is not accepted in the process of propagation (religious mobility), exposition of one's religious tenets and disputing one's faith with others without causing insult is accepted. In spite of freedom of religion Acts being legislated, we may work out our diligent witness keeping these opportunities in mind.

Although Indian constitution is 'human rights based document', it is often contended that the freedom religion Acts enacted in various states of India, with the objective of curbing unfair religious mobility is against the freedom of religion enshrined in the international human rights documents and against freedom of conscience. The objection to this position is that even international human rights documents are against 'coercion'⁹⁸ in matters of accepting religion of a person's choice. It is debatable whether all the religious conversions in India are questionable, in spite of the cognizance that incriminatory methods were used in conversions. The concern that these Acts might affect individuals in decision making at conscience level requires substantial verification to fix the burden.

Even when our personal laws are intervened, our witness can be focused and supportive to the health of the society (social welfare) at large with the responsibility that state can regulate our financial, political and secular activities.

Conclusions

To conclude, "hatred begets hatred. In the modern world, there is no place for chauvinism. How could anyone forget the noble contribution of the Christian Missionaries as pioneers in the field of education and Medicare extending to the remote interiors of tribal areas? The role of the Christian in presenting the image of a united and integrated India cannot be lost of."⁹⁹

No religion seems to be non-missionary. Love your enemy has no parallel, nor 'do unto others what you would expect them to do for you' found any alternative. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, to God the things that are God's, for diligent witness.

⁹⁸ Durga Das Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, 118.

⁹⁹ Charles Prabakar and Paul Mohan Raj, 61.

Recalling the Embodied Church

- S. Manohar Pradeep*

Introduction:

God created every individual with different kinds of mentality, morality, perception, thought, conscience, and doctrine. In Christian religion they all worship God together in one accord in one place and that is Church. Church cannot be defined in a single phrase or sentence as it is a correctional institution for some, it is a holy place for some, it is a training institute for some, it is a place to receive blessings, it is a social club for some, and for some it is a place where people receive spiritual nourishment. The Church has different dimensions and connotations in its affirmation. We notice the meaning of Church is constantly changing from time to time basing on its historical background and denominations. Church' definition is dynamic in nature and it is constantly changing its functions, roles duties and tasks to address contemporary sociological issues. For example, many contemporary Churches are addressing issues like LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender), oppressed communities and ethical issues which are not present in early Church traditions. Another fine example for Church response is organ donation, where we don't find direct scriptural evidences. 21st century Church should be in a position to address such kind of issues to nurture the "Body of Christ," basing on the scriptures. So, we need to reread the scriptures and approach through different hermeneutical principles to bring solidarity and to give hope for the minorities.

Emerging theologies: The emerging theologies like Dalit theology, eco theology, black theology, feminist theology and mingjung theology is bringing new hope in the lives of the people when we approach scriptures and read it through different lens. Jurgen Moltman said "Hope transform structures." For example rereading of psalm 22 through Dalit lens. This poem give strength and courage to the oppressed communities and give hope for their future. These emerging theologies strengthening the vision and mission of the Church and equipping saints for cosmic purpose. Without

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proper hermeneutical approach to the scriptures in any context the role of Church will fade and diminish in its ecclesial confession. On the other hand Charismatic teachings and prosperity gospels diverting the body of Christ and Church is slowly losing its advocacy nature.

In this article, I would like to focus on the Church' origin, history, teachings and doctrine through the lens of depressed communities. One of the sources of theology is "experience" and through experience we can build up our faith in the community. Body of Christ is comprised of different realistic values in its ability to motivate, encourage, nurture and to give hope. This should be our ecclesial affirmation and it should not be distorted through any kind of theological errors. Church should be in a position to contextualize societal issues basing on the scriptural evidences. Different parts of body perform different tasks and the muted body part will cripple other parts also. I would say, emerging theologies are all the parts in the body of Christ. Empirically, several churches are not in a position to articulate and address emerging theological and societal issues. No wider ecumenical affirmation, No solidarity with the depressed, and No advocacy nature. Many Churches are not observing Dalit Sundays, environmental Sundays and no feminist concerns. Along with the apocalyptic hope which is the main crux of the church it should also reflect on contemporary societal issues which will bring hope and liberation to the oppressed communities. Ironically waiting for the new born and neglecting carrying mother.

Praxeology:

Wolfgang Pannenberg expressed his views on Kingdom of God. In his book "Theology and the Kingdom of God," he says "The aspiration for the other world should inspire us to have a concern for this world." The bible says in (1 John 3:18) "Let us love, not in word or speech but in truth and action." Churches are camouflaged concerning poor but do not analyze and fight against the socio-economic structures which are responsible for it. Churches are not only a place for teachings and preaching alone but it should put it in praxis to bring transformation. Walter Rauschenbusch is well known as the father of the Social Gospel movement says, the kingdom of God is not transcendent but transformation of history. Jesus Christ in his

ministry crossed social barriers (built by society and religion) by dialogue with Samaritan woman (John 4), healing the sick on Sabbath day (Matthew 9) and by visiting rejected places. His disciples challenged the existing system, culture and tradition and Jews witnessed “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too” (Acts 17:6). As an ecclesial community we should challenge the dominant power structures, where the roots of our challenging nature lies in the scripture.

I was impressed by a poem entitled ‘listen Christians,’ and rewriting this poem with my own experiences. It poses a question to the existing ecclesial community and it describes the very nature of the church which is the grass root reality.

I was hungry and you discussed my state of weakness and sensation and few thanked God for not being hunger

I was imprisoned in bondage and you jumped to a conclusion saying that this is the consequence of sin and punishment from God. And few thanked God for their liberty

I was naked and you debated the morality of nudeness. And few thanked God for their branded low waist apparel

I was sick and you prayed for healing and deliverance. And few thought of visiting after discharging from hospital

I was homeless and you preached “even son of man don’t have shelter.” And few thanked God for their second storied building

I was lonely and you criticized my neighbors for not being helpful. And few thanked God for their big families

I was hopeless and you said “God is the hope to the hopeless.” And few sent me “top quotes on hope” though social media

I was in pain and you followed pagan traditions to relieve my pain. And few visited me except on Tuesdays and Fridays

I was in deep crisis and you taught me “how to reap blessings.” And few thanked God for their materialistic blessings.

My question to the ecclesial community, is this our confession? I remember famous quote “Helping hands are better than praying lips.” How can one speak about the Church as the body of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, when people are so healthy and well fed and have no broken bones and disrupted bodies?

Our passion should equip churches to return to concrete social reality of our existence, so that we may move to next level of AGAPE love. Church community should be transforming community and this is our calling (Luke 15:19). I still believe in the transcendent foundation of the Church. Roles and positions are being changed but the transforming nature of the Church should not be changed. For example early church tradition meaning of sexton is, an official of a church charged with taking care of the edifice and its contents, ringing the bell, and sometimes burying the dead (grave digger). But the role of the sexton is completely changed in our present day context. The entire scenario of sexton has been changed and roles are being attested to different persons/positions. The transcendent origin of the Church has been used as a camouflage to cover up the gross shortcomings of so called Christian Churches. My bold theological affirmation is that the Christian Church is the Church of Jesus Christ and becoming human in Jesus, it is the incarnation that necessitates our sociological starting point.

‘Peter’s Church’:

Nazareth manifesto (Luke 4:16-21) is people’s proposal for Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, so that they can bear witness to Jesus’ lordship by participating with him in the struggle for freedom. It means, the definition of the Church is not its confessional affirmation rather its political commitment on behalf of the oppressed community. The task of the Church is more than preaching and teaching about justice, poverty and oppression

and praying for the liberation of all. The church must be the agent of justice and liberation about which it proclaims. When the Church makes its political commitment on behalf of the oppressed, the historical and social actions of the Church bear witness to an ultimate hope grounded in the resurrection of Jesus (II Cor 8). Scholars opine that Jesus thought of establishing “Kingdom of God,” on earth but Church emerged. Matthew 16:8 says “And I tell you, you are peter and on this rock, I will build my church.” The dictionary meaning of ‘peter’ is (1) to diminish gradually and stop (2) to tire and exhaust. Empirically church’ vision is slowly diminishing, gradually fading and exhausting from AGAPE love. In this theological articulation I would like to make 3 points. 3 C’s of Church.

Recalling the embodied meaning of Church:

Jesus’ birth, resurrection and ascension was a private event, Jesus ministry and crucifixion was a public event. The cross where Jesus died with open hands is a symbol of public calling (Matthew 11:28). Contemporary Churches are emerging with same caste identities, same group identities and same class identities. Diverting people to ignore disadvantaged and unskilled. Church’ roles are diminishing from the call of discipleship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was so much concerned about people those who are settling for cheap grace. As a re-envisioning community we should stretch out our hands to the whole community irrespective of caste, class, creed and geographical entities. We should stretch out our hands to the minorities who are exploited and marginalized.

Recalling the embodied fellowship in Church:

God cares for us (I Peter 5:7). I would say we are the carriers of Gods caring and nurturing. The cosmic purpose of Christ is Nazareth manifesto (Luke 4:16-21). Caring, sharing and nurturing are not only attested to pastoral ministry but also to the whole community as such. It is the main agenda of fellowship. Fellowship with God and believers. One of the reasons behind weekly church activities is fellowship which leads to friendship and that friendship give solace in the time of hardship. Church should have theonomous conscience which is God sensitized conscience which transforms structures in order to make it human. Koinonia ethics is

concerned with relations and functions but not with the principles and precepts. Koinonia expresses a new fellowship between Christ and body of Christ in which one find solace in their oppression.

Recalling the embodied Christ Centered Church:

To address several contemporary issues, hermeneutics and exegetical approach through rereading and reinterpreting the text is very much appreciated. I Corinthians 11:2 says “In everything.” The hermeneutical approach to this scripture through the perspective of ecological concern makes sense in dealing with the ecological crisis. Gen 1:28 speaks ‘dominion’ which can be translated as ‘to take care of.’ During the building of Church infrastructures, people use water, mud, sand, cement, wood, iron, rock and several other raw materials which are derived out of mother earth. My point is, in return what we are giving back to nature to maintain bio diversity and to maintain equilibrium? It is the God who structured everything in its time and place and we have disrupted in the name of religion. As a responsible, re-envisioned, ecclesial community, we should join hands to safe guard our nature. Apart from building up spirituality, we should also address ecological concerns which is inevitable.

Conclusion:

Let us dream for the liberation of humankind and for egalitarian society. Dream of Justice, human dignity, peace and for ecumenical church. Let us affirm with humility, joy, faith and courage in our liberator God Jesus Christ. Let us go back to scriptures with our affirmation that Church is not a physical structure but you and I.



Commemoration of 500th year Reformation: Women in Contemporary Church

- C.P. Caroline*

Introduction

The Protestant Reformation was one of the major events in Church history. On the 31st October 1517, Martin Luther's' Ninety-Five Theses was nailed on the Wittenberg Church door. It was not an abrupt revolution but the protest against the abuses and corruption of the Western Church. This particular event was a greater movement and it is the release of the human spirit, which led for freedom of thought and action. Reformation movement also increased the awareness for a personal relationship with God which gives a new revelation and strength to stand against the evil systems, both in the church and society. In the Reformation movement, the political, socio-economic, cultural, scientific as well as theological factors were intermingled to produce a complex situation. Even though it could not bring greater level of structural changes (hierarchy in the church and its administration and gender equality), reformation had a significant effect in all spheres of society including the lives of women. Therefore, we cannot concisely the reformation movement in a smaller circle as it broadened to many areas which Martin Luther would not have expected. Changes in the lives of women, is one of the impacts of reformation; initially it enlightened the mind and spirituality of women those who were in nunneries and in the noble families. This article explores the impacts of reformation in the lives of women, their ecclesial and societal involvement and its effects in the contemporary church.

Women and Reformation

During the reformation era, there were numerous monasteries and nunneries which mostly involved in the daily religious rituals. Both, Martin Luther's and John Calvin's historic changes within Christianity greatly impacted women's life. Many convents in the sixteenth century became convenient repositories for superfluous daughters of the aristocracy and wealthy urban classes.¹ Reform movements in the sixteenth century

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¹ Women in the Reformation Era, web.clark.edu/afisher/HIST253/lecture_text/WomenReformationEra.doc

influenced these women and they were prominent in these movements because most of them advocated for the equality of women, which the Catholic Church failed - to treat women equal with men. Later the middle-class women who were not in the convents were also inspired by the movement. While, changing the status of women was not the intention of the Protestant reformers, the changes they advocated and made, had a great significance for women. Foremost positive effect was that the literacy rate of women increased; many educated women expressed their thoughts and experience by writing hymns, poems, and also theological reflections through devotional books.

There were two groups of women who made a decisive impact upon the reformation; noble women and wives of the Reformers. Noble women had much to do with shaping the events of the reformation era. Few of the reformers' wives' work and ministry are really challenging to us. At the beginning of Protestantism, women were encouraged to join, but it excluded the women in the institutionalized system. Few noble women expressed their thoughts and opinions through letters and preaching. Mostly they joined only with the company of their male kinfolk.² Katharina von Bora, Katharina Schütz Zell, Argula von Grumbach, Marie Dentièrre, and Olimpia Morata were the prominent women of the reformation era. Their service and ministry challenged the reformed church and society in reformation era. The life of Katharina von Bora and Katharina Schütz Zell will give a clear understanding of women who followed Protestantism. Both were married reformers, when the clerical marriage was not accepted/strictly prohibited.

Katharina von Bora

Katharina von Bora, wife of reformer Martin Luther was a Cistercians nun, fled from the convent with group of nuns who were inspired by the reformation movement. Luther's reforming message penetrated into their convent which lead them to flight from the cloister. Three of the escaped nuns were taken in by their families, nine of them brought to Luther in Wittenberg where he managed to find families they could live with or husbands to marry. Only Katharina von Bora was left. She married Martin

² Women in the Reformation Era, web.clark.edu/afisher/HIST253/lecture_text/WomenReformationEra.doc

Luther and bore him six children. After the marriage, Katharina was responsible for household work, cultivated three garden plots, brewed beer and had established her own student boarding house business.³ Few accounts say that she took part in the table conversations regularly and even expressed her opinion and was borne only with difficulty by some admirers of Luther. It also said that Luther's wife did not succeed in establishing herself as an independent personality.⁴ Yet, Katharine von Bora was such a good provider and the excellent administrator which made Luther to leave everything to her, in his will.

Katharina Schütz Zell

Katharina Schütz Zell was the wife of Reformer Matthias Zell who was one of the first preachers of reform in Strasbourg, a city on the border between Germany and France. Katharina Schütz Zell is one of the few women of the reformation era to have left a written record. Initially she joined her husband's ministry and worked among the people of his congregation who are in need; this led her to face challenges and criticism. She made wonderful theological justification based on the golden commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ, "Love your neighbor...." Luther's treaties influenced her and she saw that the love of neighbor is an important means of spreading gospel, and helping those around made her to understand their suffering in terms of the gospel.⁵

Her writing work started with an 'Apologia' in which she defended clerical marriage in general and her own marriage in particular. She continued her writings by short reflections on Psalms, meditation on the Lord's Prayer and consolation letters in different circumstances. She made a conscious effort to reflect theologically, in her works. One of her remarkable writing works with a range of biblical descriptions of suffering and fear helped to console and encouraged the women in Kentzingen whose husbands had fled to Strasbourg after a disastrous conflict between the town's Protestants and

³ Martin Treu, Katharina von Bora, *The Woman at Luther's Side*, *Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol XIII, 1999, 166.

⁴ Martin Treu, Katharina von Bora, *The Woman at Luther's Side*, *Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol XIII, 1999, 166.

⁵ Charlotte Methuen, *Preaching of the Gospel through Love of Neighbour: The Ministry of Katharine Schütz Zell* (Cambridge University Press: *Jnl of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol 61, No.4, October 2010), 709.

their bishop and civil overlord.⁶ As a woman, Schütz Zell was unable to become a pastor; she described herself as a 'church mother' and an 'assistant' to her husband.

Her ministry was not confined to the Christian believers alone, but was broadened in many ways. She gave shelter to the refugees in her home, which was prohibited at that time. She defended her act arguing that all the expenses to help the poor and refugees are taken care on her own and that she didn't collect taxes from anyone. Her work with refugees is not a private initiate; it was a public ministry which was recognized by the city council later. Her ministry continued till her death. Few months before her death in 1562, she preached at a funeral of sisters Felicitas and Elizabeth Schel, whom none of the pastors in Strasbourg was prepared to bury, because they supported believers' baptism rather than infant baptism. She encountered all sorts of accusations and criticism during her life time. "She claimed that she had done as much for the cause of gospel as many of those who preached from the pulpit."⁷ Despite her claiming, her life and ministry were defined by the possibilities for and expectations of the women of her time.

Reformers and Women

Although there was a great impact in women's life in the reformation era, the reformers recognized and celebrate the value of women's status only as wives and mothers. Nevertheless, the Reformation had mixed results for women. The reformers promoted education for girls; education was available only for boys and higher social or economic class girls in the sixteenth century. The reformers emphasised the need of literacy for everyone and encouraged communities to establish and support schools. Luther urged the parents to send their children to schools, rather keeping them at home to work.⁸ Research shows that the overall literacy rate of Protestant women was higher than of Catholic women, apart from their nunneries. The positive result is that there is some progress for women in the reformation of sixteenth century which helped them to read the Bible

⁶ Charlotte Methuen, *Preaching of the Gospel through Love of Neighbour: The Ministry of Katharine Schütz Zell* (Cambridge University Press: *Jnl of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol 61, No.4, October 2010), 720.

⁷ Charlotte Methuen, *Preaching of the Gospel through Love of Neighbour: The Ministry of Katharine Schütz Zell* (Cambridge University Press: *Jnl of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol 61, No.4, October 2010), 719.

⁸ Kathryn Kleinhans, *Women and the Reformation: Then & Now*, <http://www.livinglutheran.org/2015/09/women-reformation-now/>

and teach the faith to their children.⁹ Both Martin Luther and Calvin never advocated the equal status of women in the church and society. It is hard to accept that the great reformer Martin Luther who framed 'five sola' (Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola gratia, Sola Christus and Sola Deo Gloria) was not convinced about the gender equality in the scripture (Gen. 1:27 & Gal. 3:28). His commentaries on Genesis describe the subordination of women to men as part of God's created order. At other times, he identifies subordination as the result of sin. It shows the ambivalence in his writings.¹⁰ In Calvinism, women belonged neither to the bottom nor to the top of society. Later, the situation gradually changed; women were allowed to preach from the pulpit and participate in the mission activities. But most Protestant areas were alarmed at this change. This situation is still prevalent, even in this 21st century; many churches and also societies are not ready to give equal status to women. Particularly, in the church scenario, though women are more religious than men and regularly participate in all the church activities, they are still under-represented as worship leaders in many traditions. During the reformation era, women like Katharina Schütz Zell, Argula von Grumbach, Marie Dentièrre, and Olimpia Morata paved a way for freedom to women in both church and society. The result of reformation, the protestant mission, spread all through the world. It reached India only in the eighteenth century, but it made tremendous changes in the lives of individuals, particularly those who were in the margins.

Protestant Mission and Indian Women

The protestant missionaries were brought to India by the European trading companies for ministry among their people in India, but the missionaries extended their mission activities to the Indian society also.¹¹ The early missionaries moved forward and took part of the social activities with the Indian reformers from different faith background in order to eradicate the evil practices which oppressed the poor and the women. In the middle of the nineteenth century, they started to give education even to women, who were triply oppressed in terms of caste, religion and gender. The wives of the missionaries, particularly Mrs. Marshman of Serampore (1818) and Mrs. Wilson of Bombay (1819) took an initiative to educate Indian girls and made

⁹ Women in the Reformation Era, web.clark.edu/afisher/HIST253/lecture_text/WomenReformationEra.doc

¹⁰ Kathryn Kleinhans, Women and the Reformation: Then & Now, <http://www.livinglutheran.org/2015/09/women-reformation-now/>

¹¹ C.B. Firth, An Introduction to Indian Church History, (ISPCK: Senate of Serampore College, 2011), 131

remarkable changes in the lives of Indian women of that time. In the beginning, the missionaries reached to the women in the Zenanas. This led them to move into schools and many women were graduated by the end of nineteenth century.¹² The same method was followed in the medical and health system also. The success of these mission activities led the missionary societies to send more women missionaries to India. No one denied this, that each denomination has its own women missionaries' history. The Schools, Colleges, Hospitals, Orphanages, Boarding Homes for boys and girls, Destitute Women centres in our denominations are still witnessing their outstanding ministry among the marginalised.

Apart from the Christian missionaries and their wives, there were native women who contributed equally in the reformed work among the women. The tremendous work of Savitribai Phule (1831-1897) and Pandita Ramabai (1858 – 1922) who took the inspiration from the model of Christian mission activities, showed a brighter way to the oppressed women. Both experienced the darker side of the Indian woman's life. Savitribai Phule was a social reformer and a Poet who challenged the casteist patriarchy through teaching and writing. Along with her husband she fought against the injustices of untouchability, child marriage, widowhood, subjugation of women and also worked to abolish discrimination and unfair treatment of people based on caste and gender. In 1863, they started a 'home for prevention of infanticide' in their home, to ensure the safety of widows. She opened 18 schools for girls and for mahar and mangs, who were deprived of education in terms of caste.¹³

Pandita Ramabai was one of the pioneer workers for the emancipation of Indian women; brought up in a Maratha Brahmin family, encouraged by her father to learn Sanskrit, took part in the recitation which was forbidden for women. She converted to Christianity in 1883 and equipped herself in English education with the help of missionaries. Her mission activities focused to empower women through skill development such as dairy farming, weaving, sewing, rope making and so on.¹⁴ There has been an impressive change in the lives of women during her life-time which

¹² C.B. Firth, An Introduction to Indian Church History, (ISPCK: Senate of Serampore College, 2011), 192

¹³ Nupur Preeti Alok, The Life and Times of Dnyanjyoti Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule. <https://feminisminindia.com>

¹⁴ C.B. Firth, An Introduction to Indian Church History, (ISPCK: Senate of Serampore College, 2011), 193-195

continued. The bitter experience of both these Indian women reformers moulded them to stand against the evil system in the society and their empathetic act was remarkable.

Women in contemporary church and society

The women missionaries and the women reformers made an extraordinary effort to liberate the women from the social and religious clutches. They also took part in the church administration and worked as heads of the Institutions. As a result of their conviction and commitment towards Indian women in church society, there are women workers, teachers, nurses, doctors both in church and secular institutions. There are native women missionaries and women pastors, however, their involvement in the administration and decision making is less in the Christian scenario.

The church is still in the bondage of maintaining power structures and of continuing gender based discrimination. Particularly in the Christian arena such as churches, theological colleges and institutions, the role of women is still intricate. It is very difficult for women to get a decision-making role, even though they are excellent in ministry and administration. Though a majority population of the church is comprised of the women, yet, their work is confined to fund raising, women's fellowship, Sunday school teachers and cooking for the fellowships. There is no equal participation of women in the church council and in pastorate committee; only one or two women get opportunity to be in the committees since it is mandatory. This is the reality of lay women's participation in the church activities of most of the churches. The theologically trained women's situation in Indian church is more pathetic than the lay women. Many theologically trained women who come from church denominations that have a legacy of ordaining women do not get deserved opportunities.

All through the Bible, there are so many instances of women leadership and participation in the liberative work of God. In Acts and in Pauline letters we can see female missionaries, teachers, apostles, fellow workers, widows and elders who contribute to the mission of early Church. There are some women as patrons in Paul's ministry, to support him.¹⁵ Elizabeth Fiorenza, a feminist theologian, opines that such instances are important resources for us to reconstruct early church women's history. Apart from deacons, missionaries and apostles, elderly and widowed women were in the church

¹⁵ Pheme Perkins, *Ministering Pauline Churches*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 52-53.

ministry. To pray, to serve the community, to care for the sick, to do good works, the widows were called to ministry. Women were slowly restricted and prohibited from the ordained ministry in the Church. Church fathers like Tertulian and others were against the ordination of women. The council of Laodicea had prohibited women from joining the ordained ministry in the Church.¹⁶

In the late 20th century, the churches got an approval for ordaining women and in 21st century Churches like Baptist Church, Presbyterian Church, and United Church of Scotland started to ordain women. Church of England approved ordination of women in the late 21st century; there are 600 ordained women priests in the Church of England. The faith and order movement also discussed and approved the ordination of women in church. In the later period, the World Council of Churches played a vital role in the ordination of women.¹⁷ In India, Church of South India (CSI) ordained first woman for the ordained ministry, Rev. Elizabeth Paul in the Diocese of Madras in the year 1976. Except few, many dioceses in CSI still do not ordain women. Likewise, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) keeps on encouraging its church bodies to ordain women all through the world. Seventy seven percent of the church bodies are ordaining women in their denominations.

Although there are women bishops in major denominations, women lay leaders and priests, from the local parishes and also in the World Council of Churches, still the patriarchal power structures in the church take over the control. Women bishops are only a minority in the greater forums. In her article on reflections from 45 years of ordaining women, Kaari Reiersen's,¹⁸ pointed out few reasons for the exclusion of women from ordination, such as culture, historical legacies, gender and power. She argues for ordaining the women, based on the biblical record of resurrection of Christ; all four gospels recorded the women witnessing and proclaiming Christ's resurrection. She concludes saying, "It's not just for the sake of our gender that women should be ordained. It's for the sake of the gospel. It's for all that women bring to the church, and all that is lost when prohibiting them from entering into the public sphere."¹⁹ Ordination of women in the church

¹⁶ Mary T. Mallone, *Women and Christianity: The First Thousand Years*, Vol. 1, (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 75.

¹⁷ Crawford, Janet "Women and Ecclesiology" in the *Ecumenical Review*, vol. 53 No. 1. Geneva: WCC, January 2001.

¹⁸ editor of the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*

¹⁹ Kaari Reiersen, *Reflections from 45 years of ordaining women*.

shows the equality of men and women. It also affirms that both the male and female are created in the image of God. At this juncture, churches that restrict women should reform and accept women leadership and ordination and thus, demonstrate the commitment towards justice and equality.

Conclusion

We are living in a global culture, where the differences in terms of gender, race and socio-economic status are gradually fading out. In the secular arena, men and women are equally handling the leadership roles. But the 500 years old reformed churches still adhere to their patriarchal tradition. We cannot boast that Luther completely reformed the church without any partiality, but we have a responsibility to move ahead and act beyond the Luther's reformation ideas and thoughts. Luther continued the reformation activities all through his life; his doctrinal thesis, Bible translations and faith affirmations are still witnessing. One of the authorities of that period said 'reformation is the working of God and His footsteps are not always known.'²⁰ Reformation is not a one-time event in the history; throughout the history of humankind, whenever there was turmoil or tribulation, God intervened and redeemed and gave a new hope to the creation (both nature and humans). The sixteenth century reformation is one such an act of God.

However, as a reformed, protestant Christians, Churches and different forums, we are in such a situation and need to retrospect the history of reformation, where the reformers strived hard to bring about the changes in church and society. We have to accept the failure of the protestant church in taking the reformation to the next level. We have ample inspirations from the lives of the reformers and reformation activities both in church and society. As a part of commemorating the 500th year of reformation, churches and ecumenical forums have been conducting seminars, worship services, symposiums, conventions, etc., Our celebrations and activities should surpass our own comfort zones. We are also living in a different kind of imperial and oppressive regime - the globalization, which pushes more people to the peripheries. There are innocent victims of war and disaster, hunger and poverty, political oppression and injustice, social violence and suppression, cultural desertification, communal riots in the name of religion and caste and the abuse of women and children. In this scenario of the world, once again we are reminded to move out of our comfort zones, to the

²⁰ H.C. Lefever, *The History of the Reformation*, (Madras: The Christian Literature Society for The Senate of Serampore, 1954), 5

places where people need our voices and actions; the good news of new hope and peace. Our contemporary church and society need to reform its ideologies of power and authority; there are no much changes all through these 500 years. Our spirituality should be rejuvenated and we need to affirm our commitment and take the reformation activity forward to establish equality and justice. This will be a great blessing to Church in the generations to come.

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