

Dalit LIBERATION SUNDAY 2015

“Climate, Caste, and Care for the Earth”

The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 marks in one sense the beginning of an important international political response to climate, where the ‘Rio Convention’ included the adoption of the UN Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This convention set out a framework for action aimed at stabilising atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) to avoid “dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.” The UNFCCC which entered into force on 21 March 1994 has resulted in annual Conference of Parties (COP) whose main objective is to review the Convention’s implementation. (cf. <http://www.cop21paris.org/about/cop21>).

The twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP), COP 21, (which has a membership of 195 parties from across the world) will take place from 30 November to 11 December 2015, in Paris, France. It aims to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2°C. (http://unfccc.int/meetings/paris_nov_2015/meeting/8926.php)

A collaborative study, published in December 2013 by the National Dalit Watch of National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights & Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development, states that India is among the ten top disaster prone countries of the world and is vastly susceptible to floods, droughts and other disasters. Almost 58.6 per cent of the landmass is prone to earthquakes of moderate to very high intensity; over 40 million hectares (12 per cent of land) are prone to floods and river erosion; of the 7,516 km long coastline, close to 5,700 km is prone to cyclones and tsunamis; 68 per cent of the cultivable area is vulnerable to drought and hilly areas are at risk from landslides and avalanches. Furthermore the report states that India with its fifteen agro-climatic zones, diverse crop seasons and farming systems is very prone to climate change.

The report asserts that Dalits and other socially and economically vulnerable sections are especially vulnerable to climate change because of their resource location/geographic exposure like land ownership in riverine flood prone areas or rainfed drought prone areas. Their low incomes and greater reliance for their livelihoods on climate sensitive sectors, like agriculture, livestock etc further aggravate the situation. Because of their limited adaptive capacity, Dalits are least able to cope with the most severe climate-related hazards. (cf. [Impact of Climate Change on Life & Livelihood of Dalits: An exploratory study from disaster risk reduction lens](#))

While the climate concern is a relatively newer challenge, the suffering of Dalits has continued for ages because of the socio-economic and politically unjust structure of Indian society. “It is an undeniable fact that Dalits have suffered displacement from land through the ages. . . . The pasture and fallow lands were developed by the labour of particularly the Dalit toilers in the hope that they would at last acquire a piece of land to call their own. However, once the land is developed and made cultivable, however, they are forced off it through various measures, covert and overt, legal and illegal, economic and extra-economic. Debts and mortgages, denial of other vital resources like water and agricultural implements and inputs, social boycotts, upper

caste violence, rapes, mutilations and killings throw them off the land. Their labour invested in the development of land is expropriated, at best at a pittance.” (cf. Goldy M. George, “Caste Discrimination and Dalit Rights over Natural Resources,” <http://www.countercurrents.org/goldy310811.pdf>, p.2.)

It is in such a context that the observance of Dalit Liberation Sunday with our focus on Climate, Caste and Care for the Earth becomes a spiritual imperative for us all.

Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad,
General Secretary, NCCI

Some ideas for worship

Dalit LIBERATION SUNDAY 2015

Theme:

“Climate, Caste, and Care for the Earth”

Entry

Different creative installations showing the pains and pathos of the Dalits could be erected in front of the church/chapel/worship place. A procession could be organised to gather the attention of the common public too in which the Dalit art forms such as beating Parai (Drums can be played) and other Dalit dance forms could be included.

While the procession is in progress, church bells can be rung till the last person enters the worship place.

Enactment of a skit:

Instruction: persons with 3 Placards, each with its captions.

Captions for each placard: 1. Church- insensitive to Dalits' lament, 2. Church-insensitive to Climate change 3. Church- Insensitive to Global warming.

A Dalit, who is denied entry into the temple, is noticed by Jesus. On Jesus' enquiry the Dalit responds saying, "I, being an untouchable, have no right to enter into the temple...." Jesus, surprised by the answer, further questions him about what made him untouchable. The Dalit firmly responds, "Religion" is the factor that made me an untouchable. "If religion is responsible for your untouchability, then there has to be a revival of religion and religious places", replies Jesus. Fumed with the fanaticism of religion and religious centres, Jesus takes the whip and exhorts those who denied the entry of the Dalit into the temple and leads the Dalit into the temple and begins with the worship.

1. Call to worship

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our God of life, love and liberation, commends us to go into the context in which life is under threat, love is hypocritical and liberation is a far future. God commands us to be the channels of life, love and liberation where Dalits are denied a dignified life and portrayed as a hateful community yearning for liberation. Their land which was their livelihood has been encroached by the dominants; the land which was a source of life for the Dalits and the others has been transformed as commodities. As we all know, this commoditisation results climate change and eventually extinction of species. Arise, come, let us

worship the Lord of all life and liberation and be an instrument in the hands of the Liberator God for the mission of life filled with justice, peace and integration of the whole creation.

2. Opening Prayer (by a woman/girl):

God of life and God of all new beginnings, we come unto you praising you and thanking you for the gift of life and the new day that you have bestowed upon us. Thank you Lord for the worship which calls us to remember the most exploited human beings and creation and their contribution in affirming and sustaining life. As we worship you, help us to experience the gift of life in all its abundance and edify us to be channels of life in all its dignity. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

3. Opening Song

A song which has the undertones of Dalits pathos could be used here.

4. Invocation

Leader: Creator God, God manifest in all creation, inter – dependent, inter – connected with all creation, we praise you and worship you for the life in communion and fellowship.

Congregation: Our soul magnifies the Lord and our spirit rejoices in God of fellowship and God in community, who has a great burden for the communion of life between human and all creation.

Leader: God who became vulnerable for the vulnerable, God of pain and pathos, we praise and worship you for identifying yourself with the vulnerability of Dalits and creation, and also experiencing the pains and pathos of Dalits and the creation.

Congregation: Our soul magnifies the Lord of vulnerability and struggle, who empowers the vulnerable and participates in the emancipation of the vulnerability of Dalits and Creations.

Leader: Redeemer God, we praise and worship you for initiating redemption to the groaning creation and lamenting Dalits and envisioning a new heaven and earth which is far from groaning and lamenting.

Congregation: Our soul magnifies the Redeemer God, for the redemption which is centred on the Dalits and Creation that is exploited, oppressed and humiliated.

5. Call to Confession

(During the call to confession, each individual is encouraged to offer a silent prayer pondering upon the crime, and the injustice that they have done in their life against the gospel message of the reign of God).

Leader: Brothers and Sisters, the scripture affirms our image as image and likeness of God. We have failed to recognize the image of God neither in human beings nor in other creations. Thus, we have indulged ourselves in subjugating and suppressing our fellow brothers and sisters. Therefore, it is an inevitable task for us to confess our wrongdoings with a penitent and obedient heart. When we do so, we break our ego, our prejudices and pride and offer our hands to those who have been penalized by the structures of subjugation and dehumanization.

6. Confession

VOICE 1: We were dormant in our attempt, and hesitant to drive ourselves to the hard realities of the marginalized life. We often stigmatized the voices from the brims. When they sing, we thought we can terminate it abruptly since it seems to be a disturbance to us. We are incapable to recognize that the choral they produced are the stories against unlawful possession, manipulation, exploitation, discrimination, abuse of power, torture, and slavery, abuse of the body, violence and slaughter. We were comfortable in our fortresses. We were reluctant to open our ears to their laments and share the manifold blessing of the living God, slow to participate in the liberating act of God, and was keeping inhuman silence all the time, thinking that these life situations of our Dalit brothers and sisters are fate and it will not be changed.

Response: At this time we oblige to take a further step in understanding the pain and suffering of the people in our midst, and boldly say with faith that “For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him”. (Psalms 22:24).

VOICE 2: We were obstinate, divided the church based on caste, we also admit that we categorised the graveyard for high and low, and have failed to broaden the extended body of the reign of God, in which the church would play a role of crossing the confinements of the ‘sin’ of caste. We recognize that the faith practices of the church have become normalcy’s, intoxicated with caste malice, haven’t carried the gospel value of risking the life of the church for the wholeness of creation, in which each of the oppressed have secured abundant grace from God through the doctrinal practices. We do confess that our ecclesia become more or less institutionalized establishment of casteist – traditional entity, where we failed to encounter the sins of today.

Response: What else does the church stand for, if not for the body of Christ? We affirm saying; “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

All: What we say we believe, what we believe we practice, what we practice will envision the very existence of God's Church. Cleanse it, oh God, with your spirit. Blow towards us the spirit of unique oneness. Instil in us the sense of our identities and give us the sights to see that we have fuelled the furnace of discrimination and exploitation on the basis of caste, colour, creed, region, language and gender. We are unsuccessful in seeing Christ in the wounds of our dear Dalit brothers and sisters. We repent that we have sinned against the purpose and uniqueness of your creation and we regret that we failed to see the exceptionality in the lives of our Dalit brothers and sisters.

7. Absolution

Do not be confirmed with the world and the values and the identities of the world; instead be transformed by the renewing faith. May the words and deeds of your renewed mind and heart with the help of God's grace and reviving spirit empower you to transform the stratified caste structure and anthropocentric life and enlighten the world with the values of life filled with equality and dignity. God's grace is upon you and which will be forgiving all your iniquities. The forbearing God is propitiating all your sins through the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen

8. Bible Readings

9. Special Song / Skit

10. Sermon

11. Affirmation of Faith

I believe in God who sees the misery of the creation, listens to the cry of the creation and comes down to identify the Godself with seen and unseen things and commits to challenge the taskmasters of caste and exploiters of the earth and involves in transforming the chaos into peace.

I believe in Jesus Christ, the human, born of Virgin Mary as the only son of God. He lived the life of Human in having a mutual relationship with fellow human beings and creations, caring for them and living with them and for them. He stood against all the evil and inhuman forces led by fanatic religious leaders and Pontius Pilate which denied the humanness of human being and as a result he was killed on the cross by those who were not for human dignity. But God, the one who wanted to implant the Godself image in human being and all creations, raised Jesus from the dead on the third day and continued his mission of liberation.

I believe in Holy Spirit, the sustained spirit of life present in all creation, who confronts the unjust structures of hierarchy especially the hierarchy of caste, and comforts the victims of this

hierarchy. I believe that it is the Spirit which unites us as believers, as brothers and sisters, as comrades in the age-long struggle against all evil forces and empowers us to overcome the bondage of caste to attain life and liberation in God.

I believe in one Holy Catholic Church, the Church in movement and the representative of Christ's broken body, which has been called to break open herself from all barriers and commit herself to work towards bringing the Kingdom of God in the world, not as a utopia or an idea but as an experienced reality.

I believe that Christ is coming again to judge those who discriminate, oppress, subjugate and segregate their fellow human beings and creations. I affirm that his coming will bring back peace from chaos and annihilate all discrimination. I believe that in his coming, the image of God in every human being and creation will be reaffirmed and God's reign of justice and equality will be re-established.

Amen.

12. Offertory Song

13. Intercessory Prayers

Vulnerable God who experienced humiliation and exploitation on the cross, we remember the Dalits who face humiliation and discrimination in their daily life because of caste. Lord, we pray that they may be strengthened to endure the pain inflicted upon them and be encouraged to experience your abiding presence of steadfast love and social justice to move forward in life. Help us to practise a casteless faith in Christ and become a community that proclaims and practices human dignity with the values of justice, peace, love and equality.

Lord in your Mercy, hear our prayers

Response: Through Jesus Christ our Lord

God of compassion, we pray for the Dalits who are gripped by poverty, illness, and oppression. They are pushed to the periphery and they are forced to live in an environment of fear, uncertainty and a sense of unworthiness. Lord, may they experience your love and care, and find in you their true dignity and destiny. Fill us with your compassion, boldness, and selflessness to join them in their struggle for justice so that their dreams for a Just life may be fulfilled. Help us to be tireless in doing what is good, right and Just.

Lord in Your Mercy, hear our prayer

Response: Through Jesus Christ our Lord

God who was beaten up, dragged and numbed by pain, we remember all the Dalit women who survive such inhumane brutality in their everyday life. Lord, we pray that you may strengthen their spirits to resist such oppressions. May the women be treated with dignity instead of humiliation, with equality instead of patriarchy, with freedom instead of isolation and with the access to all their rights instead of discriminations. May your love and grace surround them to actualize your strength within themselves and live a life in its fullness that you have given to them.

Lord in Your Mercy, hear our prayer

Response: Through Jesus Christ our Lord

God, our source of life, we remember the Dalits whose lands are taken away due to industrialization and are forced to live without land which is the source of their livelihood. Lord, we pray that may their rights of livelihood be restored to celebrate life in abundance. Lord, grant your wisdom to the people in power to be sensitive to the cries of the Dalits and act with integrity rather abusing them through corrupt and unfair policies.

Lord in Your Mercy, hear our prayer

Response: Through Jesus Christ our Lord

Almighty God, we thank you for your manifestation in human being and all creation. We commit the church servants, ecumenical servants in India and church at large and pray that they may open their ears to the cry of the Dalits and the creation and demonstrate integrity, seriousness and soundness in their servanthood towards the entire creation without any discrimination. Fill them with wisdom and understanding, pure heart and conscious mind in being truthful and faithful to their calling and participate in creating a world filled with the life of peace and harmony among all creation.

Lord in Your Mercy, hear our prayer

Response: Through Jesus Christ our Lord

14. Lord's Prayer

Our creator who dwells among us, Holy be your name through our lives. Your kingdom be established in the lives of the marginalized people, your will for justice and peace be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Lord, conscientize us daily to be sensitive about Climate justice and encourage us to join the Dalits and farmers in preserving the creation and sustain life on earth. Pardon us for our carbon sin which has destructed the creation and transform us to be sensitive to creations groaning. Keep us away from the temptation of selfishness and greed and help to recommit our lives to be co-workers with the creation being freed from all kinds of exclusion.

For the glory, honour and power are not of caste, gender, colour, creed but yours and yours alone which bring forth New Heaven and New earth forever and ever. **Amen.**

15. Closing Prayer:

God of life, we thank you for the assurance of your presence that gives us hope in the context of hopelessness and life in the context of lifelessness. We thank you for the resources that you have given to the humanity to protect and preserve them for generations to come. We continue to uphold all our brothers and sisters, especially the Dalits, who are forced to bear the brunt of ecological injustices which is the consequence of dominants selfishness and greed. In the midst of injustice done to the vulnerable and the creatures who share the earth with us, we pray that we may learn to respect them and use the scarce resources of the earth without exploitation and domination. Bless and guide us to walk in the ways of justice, peace and harmony caring for the creation and the oppressed. We ask all these things in the one who gave his life so that we may have life in all its fullness, Jesus Christ our Lord and Servant. Amen.

16. Benediction:

May the Creator God, who clothed the human beings with dignity and earth with wondrous grace, the Redeemer Son, who redeems the enslaved humanity and exploited creation, and the life- giving Spirit, who instils a sense of encouragement and empowerment to the Dalits and fills us with a sense of awe and wonder for the aesthetics of the creation, equip us to be wise servants of God's loving earth and humanity, both now and forever more. Amen.