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EDITORIAL

In the past couple of weeks, two incidents have made us think where the world is going to. One is of the Rohingya fleeing Myanmar and the second is of the killing of Gauri Lankesh, a senior journalist from Bangalore, by extremists. Considered by the United Nations as the “most persecuted minority group in the world”, the Rohingyas are a stateless group of people concentrated in western Myanmar, and facing brutal assaults from the Burmese state and military. Since October, frequent reports have come in of the Burmese army burning down Rohingya villages, rapes and murders of the nature of ‘ethnic cleansing’. Faced with the savagery, about 10,000 Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar have rushed into Bangladesh for refuge. This is not the first time that this group has been seeking shelter from the Bangladeshi government on account of being brutally persecuted at home. Last time a mass exodus of the Rohingyas happened was in 2012 when communal clashes erupted between them and the Rakhine Buddhists who were later represented by the Burmese Army. While Bangladesh remains their favourite destination for decades now, they have been seeking out refuge in other neighbouring countries as well. While Human Rights Watch has called the military crackdown on Myanmar a case of ‘ethnic cleansing’, the UN’s office of Human Rights has declared that the crisis in the South East Asian country ‘could tantamount to crimes against humanity’. State counsellor, Aung San Su Kyi, who was awarded Nobel Peace Prize 1991 for her non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights has not taken the side of this oppressed rather she has claimed that those attacked were Jihadists and that the military lock down is a means to ensure state security against extremist organisations in the region.

His Holiness Pope Francis said that he is following the “sad news of the religious persecution of Rohingya community and has asked that the members of the ethnic group be given full rights.” The Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu has called on Aung San Suu Kyi to end military-led operations against Myanmar’s Rohingya minority, which have driven 270,000 refugees from the country in the past fortnight. The 85-year old archbishop said the “unfolding horror” and “ethnic cleansing” in the country’s Rakhine region had forced him to speak out against the woman he admired and considered “a dearly beloved sister”. In an open letter posted on social media, he said that “the images we are seeing of the suffering of Rohingya fill us with pain and dread” and has urged Suu Kyi to intervene. However, as of now, she has

not taken heed of his words. Plight of the Rohingya continue to augment. In India, the government has decided to deport the Rohingya citing security reason as they are vulnerable to recruitment by ISIS and other extremist groups.

In Karnataka, Gauri's killers and those who planned her assassination may never get unmasked, but the objective is evident create the fear of retaliation among those who dissent and question majoritarianism. They succeeded, at least momentarily. And this is not the first time it is happening. On August 30, 2015, M M Kalburgi, a rationalist and free thinker from Karnataka was shot dead at his residence. Two years later, Gauri was killed, once again within the confines of her home, spaces they would have thought were safe.

Any democracy will stand strong only when it is built on the foundation of free speech, and holds onto the essence of it. Debates and disagreements are a part of democracy, and for a country which prides itself on being the world's largest, the acid test for its democratic ideals lies in how it treats those who dissent. Today, however, the space for dissent is shrinking in India. An influential echo chamber of self-proclaimed nationalists and protectors of religion nudged along by a despotic leadership - are trying to silence every independent voice which chooses to disagree with them. How many more deaths are we going to witness? How many voices are going to be silenced?

In Kerala too, there have been multiple examples in the past where rationalists, free thinkers and journalists have been threatened. The threats caused outrage, but never fear. With Gauri Lankesh's murder, fear has become much more tangible.

As Dhanya Rajendran says "the collusion between political parties in enabling political violence needs a strong response from us, as citizens. When young women in a pub are attacked, when people belonging to two faiths are assaulted for being in a relationship, or even for travelling together, the condemnation needs to be unequivocal and unanimous. It is when the society gets divided into Gauris and Kalburgis on one side and the bigots and their supporters on the other, that many among us become wanton enough to justify a murder. We cannot be divided into left-wing and right-wing when we are faced with violence for just having an opinion."

Murder of Gauri Lankesh should not frighten us in having an opinion or take away our freedom of speech or expression. It is a democratic right. Democracy lies in the hands of the people and the right to freedom of expressions plays a vital key role in the proper smooth functioning of the state. If the state does not function properly and is distracted from what it is obliged to do, it is the duty of the common people to make them remember. Freedom of speech is a medium given to us to live with dignity than merely existence. "Democracy is no democracy without free speech and expression". Many times this freedom of expression and speech has been used by the corrupted people to lure the poor people and bring communal tensions. Freedom of speech is the expression where one conveys other what their views on a topic are. These views are sometimes revolutionary as in the case of the Great Martin Luther King where his famous speech 'I have a Dream' had a huge impact on the whole community, whereas on the other side the Nazi Party of Hitler had a different side. Hitler's speeches provoked the people of the Nazi party to kill Jews and rest is the history. As George Washington said "If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter." Therefore, it our moral duty to defend our freedom of speech for fullness of life and this is the prophetic mission of the church.

These two incidents speak of the hate that is growing beyond boundaries. Hate is tearing societies along racial, ethnic, gender, and religious lines. For all their "patriotic" rhetoric, hate groups and their imitators are really trying to divide us; their views are fundamentally anti-democratic. True patriots fight hate. They counter hate with acts of goodness. Sitting home with our virtue does no good. In the face of hate, silence is deadly. Apathy will be interpreted as acceptance — by the perpetrators, the public, and — worse — the victims. If left unchallenged, hate persists and grows. All over the world people are fighting hate, standing up to promote tolerance and inclusion. Let us join them and bear witness to our Christian calling.

- Kasta Dip

Director, India Peace Centre
Nagpur



Democracy: Debate, Dissent, Discussion and Decision

- P.C. Singh*

In the life of States, organizations and movements decision making is an ongoing life process. History has witnessed many forms of governance and decision making. Kingship, autocracy, oligarchy, and democracy are some of them. The world has suffered from tyrant kings and reckless autocrats. Kingship has disappeared from many nations though many of the Middle Eastern countries are even now ruled by Kings and Sheikhs. For that matter, our own country emerged as a union of many small kingdoms.

Of all the forms of governance, democracy has been tested and found the best form of government. Democracy is government of the people by the people for the people. Our country is world's largest democracy.

However, early church had a much simpler form of governance. They gathered together spent time in prayer and made decisions in one mind, probably guided by the elders. Their appointments and nominations were by casting lots. As the church grew up most of the mainline churches adopted democracy as their form of governance. Now CNI, CSI, MarThoma and many other churches are fully democratic. Yet, we cannot boast that our democratic process is without flaw. In many cases we fail to observe that salient features of democratic decision making process.

In order for us to make well informed choices, we need to be able to:

- engage meaningfully in open dialogue and debate, respecting and listening the views of others even if they are in the opposition.
- access relevant and objective information so that our views are well informed.
- feel safe and protected to express our own views. No one's life should be threatened while making free expression of views including dissent.
- making a free decision without suffering or fearing harm to our lives.

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Sri Pranab Mukherjee in his farewell speech as the President of India said,
 "With the heightened complexity of administration, legislation must be preceded by scrutiny and adequate discussion. Scrutiny in committees is no substitute to open discussion on the floor of the House. When the Parliament fails to discharge its law-making role or enacts laws without discussion. I feel it breaches the trust reposed in it by the people of this great country."

"...both Houses of the Parliament used to reverberate with animated discussions and illuminative and exhaustive debates on social and financial legislations. Listening to the stalwarts for hours and days in Parliament sitting in the Treasury or Opposition Benches, I felt one with the soul of this living institution. I understood the real value of debate, discussion and dissent. I realized how disruption hurts the opposition more than the government as it denies them the opportunity to raise the concerns of the people."

Amartya Sen says,

We must not identify democracy with majority rule. Democracy has complex demands, which certainly include voting and respect for election results, but it also requires the protection of liberties and freedoms, respect for legal entitlements and the guaranteeing of free and uncensored distribution of news and fair comment. Even elections can be deeply defective if they occur without the different sides getting an adequate opportunity to present their respective cases, or without the electorate enjoying the freedom to obtain news and to consider the views of competing protagonists. (Sen, 1999, pp.9-10)

In Democracy Debate, Dissent and Discussion are inevitable parts of Decision making.

Now let us examine two cases from the Bible where discussion and debate have helped to make decisions.

1. Let us look at an instance of discussion. *Mark 8:27-30*.

²⁷Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

²⁸They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

²⁹“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

³⁰Then Jesus warned them. “Do not tell anyone about me.”

This is a short summary of a discussion among Jesus and his disciples. Theologians say that this was an occasion of developing Messianic consciousness in the mind of Jesus. Probably he wanted to use his disciples as an echo-board and hence this question to them. The Biblical narrative is limited in few words. We are sure that there were long discussions about this issue before Peter made his famous faith declaration. The disciples were free to make their opinions and Jesus listened to all of them. Then, Jesus elicited his own disciples’ opinion. This discussion helped to conform the messianic consciousness in the mind of Jesus and to share that great truth with his disciples.

2. Let us take another case of debate, dissent and discussion which led to a very meaningful decision in the life of the Church. It is the **Jerusalem Council**. Acts 15:1-35. The Church had to make a serious theological decision and a change in their “constitution” regarding membership of the church. We all know the context. It was about *circumcision*. The Jewish converts in the Church insisted that even if the gentiles want to be members of the Church they have to be circumcised first. Peter originally was with them. However, after the vision of the *big basket* from heaven and God’s admonition that he should not consider anything *unclean* which God has cleansed, Peter changed his view and faith. Paul from the beginning preached that salvation is not by circumcision but by grace and for that matter gentiles had direct access to salvation through faith, not needing circumcision. This issue would have broken the church.

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. They expressed their dissent. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. They travelled to Jerusalem.

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are. The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

When they finished, James spoke up: “Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.” Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. With them they sent the following letter: “The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul – men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.” The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.

Here, we see how dissent was contained amicable through debate and discussions which ensured the participation of all concerned. It resulted in changing attitudes, reaching agreements and resolving a complicated problem.

The Lessons we need to learn

In the administrative bodies of our churches and institutions we must make best use of the four Ds” – Debate, Dissent, Discussion and Decision-making. These four “Ds” are based on the dignity of all people, space for all people, freedom of expression for all people and conscious participation of all in making decisions that affect our lives. It will be ideal to reach consensus and not to engage in divisive voting. We must recognize the fact that “dissent” help us to understand the “other side” of the issue. Consensus is now practiced in all meetings of WCC and other international organizations.

Why do we fall in our democratic process?

1. Lack of information and awareness. We can actively participate only if we are well informed. Information is power. Those who want to manipulate always withhold vital information and keep people in darkness.

2. Personal agenda and greed. Those leaders who come with their hidden agenda and greed prohibit people from debate and discussion. They would use all kinds of pressure tactics to keep people silent.

3. Money and Muscle power. Members of the decision making bodies are often threatened by money and muscle power of a few. Many are bought with money. Those who do not fall to such temptations are kept under pressure of various kinds of threats. The list can go on...

The Challenge before us

We have to train ourselves by practicing these three “Ds”. For that, we need to have some pre-requisites in our leadership. They have been mentioned earlier. Respect for all people, willingness to listen to the opinion of others, especially those who hold opinions different from ours and above all, a just, truthful and transparent approach. Let us make a new commitment to practice and develop a leadership which is pleasing to God and beneficial to all God’s people.



Dialogue and Justice are not abstract ideas, we are living them everyday

-Suzanne Sangi*

So much has happened. And as I join my friends and communities in difficult conversations about our society and the politics of our times, I also find myself disagreeing intermittently. More nuanced arguments are arising everyday as we struggle against hate narratives and violence, both systematic and those that mercilessly tear up the world as we know it.

I shall start with the murder that shook my city this week. Bangalore has been my home since birth and like any other urban space populated by people differing in culture and politics, it has seen brutality both up-front and the kind that lurks in shiny spaces offering economic progress. And we best pray progress trickles down fast enough before the next wave of children die in the same hospital in another part of the country.

As a fellow occupant of the same city loved and cherished, set apart from other cities for the relative peace and freedom of the human spirit — I went to protest the killing of Gauri Lankesh, a woman journalist, activist and thinker.

The night she was shot dead outside her home in the city, I dug into her story, her work, and her writings. It seemed to me she was the forefront champion in challenging fascism and fundamentalism, culminating in her stubborn denouncement of all violence. Reports flooded in about her life’s work: she was currently trying to stop the Indian state from deporting Rohingya immigrants back to Myanmar where they suffered terror and mass killing in the hands of state military forces. Gauri advocated for adivasis and tribals who took to weapons to protect their lands and resources, she was instrumental in helping them negotiate with the state’s military and legal forces to end some of their armed struggles. She was fearlessly vocal about Hindutva fundamentalists and their communal ideologies, and consistently spoke for regional movements like those led by

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Basavanna who spoke for dignity of labour and stood against the caste system centuries before Karl Marx spoke about class struggles. She was truly rooted in people's movements for justice and peace; we lost a great mentor and path leader.

Now I want to draw attention to what happened at the protest:

There were political parties present of course, but most of us were hundreds of people who came there because we believed in her work and that justice must follow her murder. For me, the speeches were powerful not only because people spoke bravely and honestly about issues that Gauri struggled against, but also because they insisted that **more dialogue was the answer and not more violence**. It wasn't an angry mob demanding the blood of the killers, it wasn't people heading out to attack the nearest ideological opponents. Scathing tweets were thrown around by bigots, as horrible as this one:

But people stood their ground and continued to address the heart of the matter, the heart of Gauri's work — that we should engage in dialogue and address our differences, that we should be friends and love one another, as daunting as that may seem in the current situation.

What exactly is this dialogue? Asian theologian Edmund Chia calls dialogue an encounter between people from different faiths (or ideologies) that promote better understanding of each other and nurture (positive) **relationships** with each other.

Now this definition could pass off as a vague idea, much like something you would preach in public forums but really has no strong application in the 'real' world. A lot of people in my circles believe that violence is inevitable and physically fighting the right foe is heroic even. To be honest, a few months ago, I would have been very skeptical about how such messaging of 'positive relationships' is really going to get us any far in undoing deep-seated hatred and internalised thought processes that lead to violence and oppression. Of course I'm not advocating positivity as a rosy picture as I've written about before, but it need not be understood as necessarily utopian. I remember what professor Vijay Prashad, journalist and Marxist intellectual, said at a lecture at Max Mueller Bhavan. Somebody asked him whether a

world of socio-economic equality was rather utopian, to which he answered that it is more utopian to think we shall continue in the same world of oppression and violence, *how much longer can the killing go on, until the entire human race is wiped out?*

I recently attended a conference on inter-religious dialogue organised by the World Council of Churches, in Indonesia. It began primarily to explore how my Christian spirituality can be expanded and realised in other faiths. Instead what I experienced was learning (theological, social and political) layered on many levels of dialogue and encounters in the midst of communal violence. And I share these experiences in the light of what's happening in India because **there is hope in stubbornly insisting for dialogue between the most extreme ends of ideology or religion, there are real outcomes**.

Lian Gogali, a woman activist and pastor spoke to us about her work during the Poso conflicts in Indonesia, a place that is slowly making it out of the Christian-Muslim aggression that shook the country from the late 1990s to much of the early 2000s. She told us many things that were profound because they were so real and lived.

What stuck with me most was the time she was surrounded in a room full of Muslim men who questioned her about certain Christian women rumoured to wear burkhas while passing through Muslim neighbourhoods. This progressed to larger theological concerns many of which were the bone of contention during the height of the conflicts. And she answered them all, *one wrong word and they would have finished me. She told us, when engaging in dialogue you cannot put up any pretence in thought or words or ideologies which you haven't lived or aren't real to you personally*.

At a time when one forwarded SMS could incite the next massacre, she saw how women began the first rounds of dialogue that led to the current peaceful situation majorly initiated and maintained by local folks and activists. And where did it begin? In the market places. Because if human beings have one common ground, it's that we've all got to eat.

One of my greatest learnings from Indonesia also came from student movements in the city of Bandung. They told us how it all started with a film screening that was immediately closed down by fundamental groups. From

there they started organising and formed youth movements, one of them was called KOIN (coin) *because money does not discriminate anybody*, the said. At the forefront of challenging institutional oppression and communal violence, the young leaders told us something that completely changed the way I engage with opposing ideologies: **approaching people as friends is the only way forward for real peace and love inspite of our differences.**

They told us how they began conversations and became friends with somebody who roamed from street to street attacking religious minorities. The guy took a complete U-turn and now advocates for peace and communal harmony. *Some religions (or ideologies) have sharper swords than the other, but we have to be friends and start from the things that we share in common to get anywhere close to real peace*, William Aribowo told me after sharing how each day he received multiple death threats from extremists. *I was thrown out of my house for few days because I embraced the Ahmadi faith and engaged in social movements with friends from other religions*, Asifa Khoirunnisa told me about her early days with the student movements. Throughout our conversation, the group would pull each other up (in a nice, comical way) whenever somebody risked sounding preachy.

So **friendship, common concerns, grievances and joys** were the starting point of dialogue for our communally inflicted neighbours. Here in India, the nature of our issues are different but just as complex, interspersed with the socio-politics unique to our land. What is the starting point for us?

I believe that while most of us who are vocal about human rights and justice movements are well in sync with each other despite differences in certain areas, **we mustn't close the doors to conversations with those whose views are on the other end of the spectrum.** In a recent chat with a friend of mine whom I admire very much for his brave work in addressing various socio-political issues, we were talking about fascists, the RSS and other Sangh outfits. He told me out rightly that there was no debating with *them*. I must confess that about a year back or so, I was saying the same things.

But we must realise that **people are the real work.** Everybody's opinions are formed by some thing or another. It could be that we have internalised harmful thought processes through a myriad of experiences some of which we don't even fully recognise. We need to challenge this not only through debates, but *through dialogues of daily encounter.* The simple conversation

on the streets, meetings in both public and private spaces, the effort to go over and wish somebody at a religious or cultural festival, or invite them over for celebrations. We can tread cautiously since such are the times but nevertheless we need to start those dialogues.

A Buddhist monk once told me that traditionally Buddhism doesn't allow for debate — the moment Gautama Buddha felt a discussion was turning into a debate, he would end it right there. Initially I thought this was an act of cowardice and wouldn't really help address any burning issue. But in retrospection, perhaps this could teach us a thing or two about dialogue.

I am aware that this narrative could be accused of being apologetic, but I have seen many times that somebody's support of a harmful ideology could be misplaced or misinformed, or that they essentially have a very different idea of the same issue based on experiences which you cannot access or understand without having deeper conversations. My only contention is that our liberalism shouldn't turn into sharp lenses where we cannot see anything between foes or allies, *there are nuanced in-betweens.* Perhaps we are more willing to open our minds through channels where we don't feel threatened by sheer spite, and then we could go on to having more difficult conversations.

There are friendships to build even in uncomfortable spaces, if we are indeed struggling for real peace. My call is to all sections of people, especially the young who have more potential to evolve in perspective: Let's use our discernment and continue to forge new dialogues with each other, *In all our differences.*



Peace Leadership

- D John Chelladurai*

Leader is one who guides people towards their commonly identified destination. Leadership is a capability to inspire people to translate vision into reality, towards an outcome desirable / beneficial to the people s/he leads. The outcome, by nature, may be social, economic, political, religious, environment, scientific, technological or ideological.. It may be the goal of a specific people (tribal welfare, for instance), section of the people (rights of Women), or a part of their aspiration (health and sanitation). Leader is identified accordingly as social leader, economic leader, political, tribal, women leader and so on.

A leader is distinguished as peace leader when s/he upholds certain universal principles and masters the art of translating these principles into action. In the context of humans, Peace leader is one who upholds the most fundamental principle called 'Life' and 'living' and one who has mastered the art of translating 'life for all' into a reality, without negating, in the process, the interest of any others.

In the Biblical times, we find quite a few heroic leaders like Moses, David, Solomon, prophetic leaders like Samuel, Elijah, Daniel... The overarching purpose of their leadership was to sustain the chosen people, the Israelites. It was Jesus Christ who for the first time put Life above everything else and enjoined people to strive to preserve it, and offered himself for it saying, "I am the way and the truth and the life". That is why of all the leaders, He alone is termed as the Prince of Peace. There is no peace except concerning life.

As peace is an experience of life, peace leader is one who protects promotes and preserves life. One may work in the realm of society, in the sector of economics, politics, environment or religion, and yet s/he is called peace leader if s/he strives to uphold life by serving humanity through that particular sector.

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Peace Leadership behooves conscious construction of certain knowledge, behavioral traits and skills and a set of capabilities: understanding of what constitute life, what are its conditions and contexts, and ability to inspire people to understand the context of peace, be in accordance with the conditions of peace, and preserve its constituents.

I. Fundamentals of Peace Leadership

Universal Vision

Life on earth is a miracle by itself. Life is unconditional. This holds more relevance today than before. As the world has become a global village, it becomes more evident that not only humans but every life on earth is bound by common destiny. Life is so integrally inter-related that we sail together or sink together.

Peace leader believes in the primacy of every life, that no life is dispensable, no life is superior than another to assume that the other can be subjugated. S/he believes in the welfare of All; believes in the law of universe, the law of nature, the law of God, all of which mean the same – Life be upheld.

Peace leader believes in the universal oneness, not only among lives, but among everything that exist in the universe, in the tangible world functionally. Reverence for nature, natural resources is part of the belief in the universal oneness.

A leader who understands the foundational needs and strives to ensure that every life is sustained fairly is called Peace Leader.

As life is the most precious of all on earth, the foremost prerequisite of a peace leader is to understand what is life and how it exists, what is the best way to uphold life.

Belief in Peace

Peace leader understands that Peace and Life are convertible term; in the process of living alone one experiences peace. Peace and absence of peace are experienced subjective to the prospect of life and in the absence of it respectively.

As s/he understands that peace is experienced through living a complete life, s/he strives to translate his/her belief into a reality, it means, s/he strives to promote life.

In the functional sense, promoting Peace (life) means, striving to ensure fulfillment of needs of life and guiding them to contentment; it may mean, creating a situation that enable individual to procure or avail of these needs, particularly without hampering the fellow beings' pursuit of their needs in any manner; it may mean endeavoring to ensure that the systems and structures in which life is socially set, function smooth so that they serve its purpose of fulfilling individual needs, thereby peace.

Belief in peace means being consciousness of the possibility of peace in every situation and never wavers from it. Even in a situation of war and violence, peace leader visualizes scope for peace and strives to bring the parties to actualize it.

A leader who understands and strives to uphold these foundational needs and the structures associated with, and serves the life of all aiming at life for all, is called Peace Leader.

Culture of Peace

Peace leader is one who understands the necessity of the culture of peace, and is able to promote it in society.

Culture of peace is comprised of a number of social principles identified as the basis of life. Love that binds and enables people live together and sustain mutually is the foremost of the principles. All social values are termed as derivatives of Love. Love sustains (I Cor. 13). Unity, sharing (concept of Dan), forgiveness, tolerance, trust, mutual aid, cooperation... are values that sustain life. As the social arrangement is a prerequisite for securing individual life, it is stated that protecting the unity and integrity society too is called social peace.

A fair distribution of such primary principles in the form values among members is termed peace. The presence and practice of these principles as integral part of people common sense, (their consciousness and behavior) is called culture of life and culture of peace.

Similarly, the presence and practice of fundamental rights as integral part of people common sense, (their consciousness and behavior) is called culture of peace. For example, freedom (of speech, expression, faith, mobility, habitation...), equality (of status, identity and opportunity to life and pursue life), justice (social, economic, political and environmental), self-respect fundamental Rights etc. These principles are preconditions to the fulfillment of basic needs. For instance, prevalence of equality ensures that every individual gets equal access to the five sets of basic needs (as enumerated by Abraham Maslow¹); freedom ensures individuals search / ask for their need and move towards places where they feel convenient fulfilled.

Fundamental rights are seen as the privileges of every individual. While it is true, privileges of individuals accrue out of the concomitant behaviors of fellow individuals. For instance, one gets food only when others provide the same to him; one enjoys equality, only when neighbours treat (accord) him / her equally. A society where every individual is self-seeking will have only cut throat competition or conflict of interest, and there is no peace of life. That is to say, rights flow out of responsibility. A self restraint exercise of individual rights, overwhelming recognition of the primacy of every life (life of others) and their needs, become an essential attitudinal component of a peaceful society. This consciousness has to be first learnt, understood, realized and actualized in the form of spontaneous behavior. That is also called culture of peace.

Peace leader is understands the culture of peace, and is able to promote it in society.

Empowered state of fulfillment

Peace leader is one who understands indispensability of life skills for all, and promotes skills as part of empowering humans uniformly, in his/her society.

Individual needs skill to perform one's role. As a seeker of one's need fulfillment from society individual requires various skills and knowledge. They are economic / professional skills, social manners and etiquettes, competency over political governance, efficiency to deal with its systems

¹ Physiological Need, Safety need, affiliative need, self-esteem need and self-actualization need.

and methodology, environment consciousness, etc. Individual's performance emanates from collective exercise of all the above, without contradicting the common purpose (welfare of all, welfare of the least). All these are constant learning experience of individual and society together. Equipping every individual to become one like this is an essential precondition of a peaceful society.

Empowered state of recuperation

Peace leader is one who understand the intricacies of conflict and able to help people come out of it.

The first and foremost threat comes to humans in the form of physical ailments, health issues.

The other forms of ailments are on account of interpersonal altercation. Society is all about relationship and mutual and multi lateral give and take. The great paradox of life is while we are destined to live together, no two individuals are identical; not even identical twins are alike. Because we come together (socialize) despite inherent differences, we are likely to cause friction and frustration, leading to setbacks, failures, loss and mutual discordance.

Violence: against the purpose of life; nonviolence for it: Individual defects or deficiencies may cause imbalance in one's behavior. Humans more often are likely to err. As 'to err is human' we have certain amount of tolerance and accommodation for human error. However, when a wrong is committed consciously or excessively at the interpersonal or social level, it becomes violence. Intentional/ careless wrong too is violence if the person does not care to correct oneself but continues to violate (other) individuals' fundamental rights.

A wrongful interaction offends the other person and that leads to corresponding reaction leading to escalation of violence. This disturbs the smooth conduct of life. Such violent behavior is against the purpose of life and we experience a state termed as peacelessness.

Absence of conflict (war) is termed as peace. While it is true, the presence of a system that facilitates smooth handling of friction and strife, disputes and grievances towards a mutually agreeable position is called dynamic social peace.

Peace is an experience of that society which is equipped with essential arrangements to over come all these challenges. Medical, therapeutic arrangements, dispute settlement mechanism, counseling provisions are part of that arrangements.

Peace is an experience of that society which nurtures among individuals appropriate attitude and behavioral orientation to withstand, negotiate and encounter these frictions and violence, for mutual / collective benefit. It is an experience of a society that possesses systemic and structural arrangements that are workable and accessible to individual to settle their disputes and achieve compatibility.

Peace leader is one who is convinced of the futility of violence, and upholds the above stated physical, behavioral and social arrangements for restoring life, and improving life situation by reducing violence to a minimum.

II. Qualities of a Peace Leader

There are some personal qualities that are identified as general leadership qualities: Vision for the welfare of his people, ability to comprehend and to take decision, intuitive, creative, initiative, zeal, oratorical, persuasive, organizational capacity, orderly, disciplined, ready to take risk, sacrificing, energetic and healthy. These qualities are common for all be they leaders of military, politics, governance, business, community or peace leaders.

There are, however certain qualities that distinguish one as Peace Leader. They are universal vision of life, holistic objectivity, Compassionate, non-selfish and welfare of all attitude, appreciation for plurality, ability to discern, uncompromising adherence to fundamental principles, introspective, readiness to suffer, compromise, optimized perspective and contextual excellence.

Compassion

In a diverse society there is always a possibility of a section or few individual left at the bottom to languish, or they fall into a miserable life (on account of poverty, health deterioration, moral decay...). As life is primary, it is essential for a peace leader to see the life in them and be able to associate with them with the purpose of bringing them out of their misery. It is

possible only if the leader is compassionate. Religions say 'every life is a manifestation of God'. Seeing God's child in every one is the way compassion is nurtured and brought into service. It is an attitude of seeing others through his/her eyes, an attitude akin to that of Abraham who pleaded with Yahweh, "Will you consume and not spare the place for the fifty righteous who are in it?"

Compassion is an ability to see every one oneself, as 'our people'. It is meaningful only when upheld in times of crisis and enmity. That is why the height of compassion is exemplified as 'love thy enemy', 'pray for those persecute you', for they know not what they do, and give them 'your cloak too'. Cloak, nay, Christ gave his 'life'. Christ by saying these expects us not to nurture enmity, not to see anyone as enemy, and more importantly, to see in everyone a brother / sister.

Compassion heals, it gives us salvation, both to the practitioner and the recipient, protagonist and the opponent.

Belief in plurality

God created the universe with diverse elements. There are 94 basic elements that are different from one another in their properties. The combination of them made millions of salts and acids, their combination further led to the evolution of millions of lives each different from one another. Even within a species, say humanity, science says, no two individuals are alike. Diversity is the norm of nature.

It is also a norm of nature that these diverse elements come together to cooperate to form higher life, with higher purpose.

Peace leader understands this fundamental, form it part of the basis of his/her whole ideological construct.

Communication

Society is all about relationship and relationship is all about communication. Society survives on its communication. When individual ceases to communicate, society ceases to exist.

The same communication has the ability to break the society as well when it is wrongly or insufficiently employed. It is essential therefore Peace leader masters the art of communication, and sharpens it in a manner it serves to heal, unite and sustain life.

Command over words, control of emotion, conscious of timing and other contexts of articulation are part of the art of communication. However a communicator is distinguished as peace communicator, only when s/he integrates life as the purpose of all his/her communication, allow compassion to determine the course of his/her act, public or private. It is an earnest endeavor for collective actualization or collective salvation.

Communication is not just a physical or verbal act. It takes place at the constructive and transactional level too. Educating people righteous living, helping them learn sustaining skills, constructing systems and structures that enable people to gain life fairly, distributing life possibilities too are communication. Such communication is called peace communication.

Dialogue

Form of the communication is dialogue. In a diverse society, it is stated, if the neighbours are not having sufficient communication, that deficiency foment into a potential conflict. 'No communication' (between neighbours) is negative relationship. Therefore for a healthy relationship, it is essential that the neighbours communicate with one another sufficiently. Belief in dialogue and cultivating the art of dialogue and promoting it between various sections of society, are essential qualities of a peace leader. Dialogue is preceded by a desire to go close to the other and followed by an urge to share with them for mutual good.

Democracy

As peace is an experience of life which in turn is experienced only in the format of society, it is essential that a peace leader adopts pro-people methods of dealing with them. Democracy is therefore an essential spirit of public life, of a peace leader.

Listening, respecting opinions, being participatory, non-discriminatory are some of the basic democratic traits. Considering oneself as a

representative/guardian and not an owner when it comes to power, position and possessions are the nature of democratic leadership.

Secularism

A peace leader may belong to a particular religion and follow it with faith and devotion, S/he would however recognize equally the faith of his fellow beings whatever be their religion. As diversity is the norm of nature, as humans belong to diverse culture, it is inevitable that they belong to diverse religion.

Strangely Belief in one God, one People and one purpose are the same reasons for belief in various religions. For, the One God appears to people in the form and manner understandable to them, as diversely as they are. As people are diverse their divine experiences are diverse and their religions too. However the effect, God realization, is the same whatever be their religion.

Belief in one religion, respect to all religions and dedicated promotion of inter-religious relations are part of peace leadership qualities.

Appreciation for plurality

As diversity is the intrinsic quality of manifest Nature, peace leader is one who is convinced of the legitimate space of diverse members in society as well as ecosystem. S/he would search for solution within diversity, and not at the expense of it. Homogenization is not a remedy for human ills. Even the tower of Babel was brought down by Yahweh, just to nurture plurality.

Ability to discern

While a Peace leader upholds equality among humans, s/he is able to distinguish diversity from discord. Diversity and disparities do not necessarily lead discord. In reality, diversities play essentially complementary role in life.

In a dispute situation, peace leader is able to distinguish the wrong from the wrong doer; evil from the evil doer. The mandate of peace is to redeem the sinner (wrong doer) while eliminating the sin. He would not 'throw the baby with the bath water'.

Peace leader would be able to distinguish the opponent. Opponent in a conflict is not an enemy, s/he is a partner to us in a problem that is common between us and the opponent.

Peace leader would recognize the human in the opponent while taking note of the wrong perpetrated by the person. S/he would constantly strive to educate the opponent of what is his/her humane strength, how s/he can come out of his/her erring.

This surgical approach is scientific and logical. Patient and sickness come as one body, Doctor is able to distinguish the sickness from the sick, strives to eliminate the former, saving the later at the same time.

Consistency

Peace leader is one who maintains harmony between his/her word, thought and action. S/he would say only what s/he thinks, and only what s/he can do. Anything beyond this would be untruth and sin. S/he also maintains harmony between oneself, fellow beings and nature.

Peace requires compatibility between the goal and the means. Only a righteous means leads to just goal. Wrong means cannot lead to fair goals. We cannot serve a section of the people by damaging the prospect of others. We cannot earn life by destroying nature. We may make a fortune polluting the nature, only to end up getting an inhospitable environment to live in. Consistency between ways and goals is essential.

In a conflict situation this consistency appears in the form of constant communication with the opponent, which ensures the parties move towards greater truth, betterment for all.

Objectivity

Peace leader would constantly strive to uphold life and its noble inclusive purpose: the welfare of all. As everyone is a child of God, no one can be lost.

In a tussle, Peace leader would ever attempt to undo the wrong, and only that. Defeating the enemy, or to achieve success over the opponent would never be his/her objective. While s/he would strive to eliminate wrong, s/he

would ever be conscious not to cause the fall of the opponent. For, the fall of the opponent is a fall of a human by which life is defeated anyway.

Introspection

Peace leader is constantly engaged in an inner search, to see God within, to protect the child of God within, from human fallibility. Introspection helps the peace leader to understand one's strength and weakness so that one can position oneself in a conflict appropriately.

As introspection enable the person to understand one's erring (mistakes and value inconsistencies), one is able to improve upon them. It also helps one to get mirror image so that s/he would no longer look down up on those who are erring.

Part of the introspection is confession. Peace leader does not hide from his/her people the wrong s/he has committed if any. Nothing cleanses the heart like confession. It also endears people to him/her as people get to understand everything about their leader. As confession exposes one's fallibility, one becomes conscious not to get into a position of repeated confession. This makes a leader less erring and more infallible.

Readiness to suffer

Peace leader is always ready to walk the extra mile, to give away the cloak too, and to take the cross for the sake of the innocents and sinners equally. Suffering is the way life is gained.

'If there be bloodshed, let it be mine' is the clear message of the Cross. Giving up life is the way to gain it. Peace leader is always ready to suffer the pain of walking the extra mile.

This suffering is not just a mute suffering. The suffering of a peace leader goes hand in hand with persuasive message of righteousness and appeal for repentance and redemption.

It is a suffering that makes everyone to take the cross, so that the suffering is equitably distributed and it ceases to be a suffering, but a joyous part of life enriching experience.

Meeting opponent midway

One of the strengths of a peace leader is his/her unflinching adherence to fundamental principles. Upholding life is primary, hence s/he would ever be ready to meet the opponents and get engaged in constant dialogue with them to explore the possibility of upholding what is right and just.

In the effort, s/he would ever be ready to meet the opponent mid way. In fact if the opponent is ready to come one step ahead, s/he would precede them by going two steps ahead. Meeting the opponent midway, is not just physical, it is objective too. Peace leader would be willing to compromise his/her claim for the sake of mutually agreeable give and take. This is the way, s/he would encourage erring opponents to move towards righteousness.

Optimized Approach

Optimization is the most conducive way to achieve best possible outcome. Optimization involves many sub principles. Important among them are middle path, appropriateness and harmonization. Peace leader is not in favor of anything extreme, be it ideology, philosophy, ism or faith. S/he would go for moderate, middle path. Life in Nature works this way. While there is life on the polar regions too, it is in the tropical (middle) zone we find 80 per cent of the flora and fauna exist on the globe. Extreme temperature or pressure is anathema to life. Extreme behavioral expression such as enmity, anger, hatred, or their counter parts, excessive love, pampering lead to destruction on the one side and spoiling on the other side. While a peace leader understands the highest possible manifestation of noble Truth, s/he would cultivate behaviors of moderate expression as well as expectation (one step at a time).

Life is sustained by this principle of middle path, being moderate. Neither too little, nor too much would sustain life, be it intake of food, period of work, hours of rest at the individual level; or be it too much of talk or too little expression at the interpersonal level; or be it too much of hoarding (power, material property, information) or too little possession at the social level are found to be jeopardizing life. It is at the moderate level of these expressions we find life thriving among social beings.

Social relationship and exchanges are nurtured by appropriate approaches. We saw, being moderate is an appropriate approach. Acting on a right time, context and situation, with right person employing right language and emotion are appropriate that maximize the chance of desirable result. What is appropriate is subjective to the time, context and the persons involved in the action. Speaking mild is appropriate when two people are sitting in a quiet place. Whereas, speaking loud is appropriate if the other party is hard of hearing, or the place is cacophonous.

E. F. Schumacher talked about appropriate technology in the context of economic production / employment. Large machineries help produce in bulk, but they eliminate human labour from the process of production, causing uncontrollable unemployment thereby putting life in difficulty. We need to use a technology that would help human overcome drudgery, without losing any job. Global poverty today is attributed to inappropriate technology, mega machines, automation, mass production are the reasons for unbridgeable gulf between rich and poor, haves and have-nots. Bicycle, tricycle, sewing machine, spinning wheels, bullock cart, animal driven plough are termed as appropriate, for they not only help humans overcome drudgery but not polluting environment, neither deplete natural resources in the process.

Harmonization is another principle of optimization. Peace leader is one who harmonizes his/her word, thought and deed. Gandhi would say, a Truth seeker is one who would harmonize one's head, heart and hand. In his personal life which was one of the finest peace leadership, he did employ harmonization a great deal. He harmonized the eternal principle of Truth with pragmatic principle of nonviolence. He said Truth is God, and Nonviolence, which serves life as against violence, is the means. And, Truth and nonviolence are convertible terms, they are two sides of a coin, two sides of an unstamped metallic disc. You be nonviolent and you see the Truth.

Putting it in different words he said, if Truth is the end, nonviolence is the means. End and Means are one and the same as much as one cannot reach the end without passing through the means. Prof. Johan Galtung postulated this idea saying 'the way is the goal'. Thus Gandhi harmonized the end and the means.

Jesus Christ said the 'Kingdom of heaven is at hand'. And he said Love is (I cor. Ch.13) the way to salvation. If Kingdom of heaven is the end, love is the means and they are one and the same as much as love leads to heaven.

Optimization principle helps us design a comprehensive approach to life. It helps us optimize our economy in a manner that suit our life, without exploiting fellow beings or nature, it enables us to formulate a social order that is just, equitable, fair and progressive, it helps us evolve a political order that is democratic, secular, inclusive and non-oppressive. Peace leader is one who masters the art of optimization.

Healthy and energetic

Peace leader is one who cares for personal health, hygiene and maintains a disciplined physical regime. Physical health enables the person function optimally. It empowers the person walk an extra mile, and is able to be exhaustive in his/her engagement with the opponents. Peace within is a prerequisite for peace without. Health is an integral component of peace within. Peace leader adheres to it.

Contextual excellence

A person is not expected to be a master of all, a panacea for ailing humanity. Peace leader is one who must understand one's zone of expertise in which one is comfortable and confident. It may be political rights, economic or social justice, ecological harmony, it may be communal harmony, dispute settlement. One should master the system and structures associated with the zone and be fluent in the language and behavior of the zone. His/her command over the zone would project the person among his/her people as a stalwart. Information is strength; opponents would not be able to take him/her for a ride, on the contrary would be found wanting in the presence of a well informed leader.

Summing up

Peace leader is one who understands the primacy of life, masters the art of upholding life, without discriminating any. S/he is one who is able to see the larger goal and move oneself and helps others as well to move closer to what is just, righteous and life sustaining. There is no hatred against any,

there is only a fervor to right the wrong, better what is right, to move what is best for all. S/he is one who constantly strives to improve pertinent qualities that make him/her an instrument of peace, without being a cause of destruction or death to any.

Peace leader is one who understand the systems and structures of society and strives to improve its function towards greater good of all. S/he mends, improvises, protects and promotes the system in a manner that would make life easy for everyone.



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God is “Love or Knowledge”

- Anish K. Joy*

Life in this earth is totally in a floor of confusions like: what is right and what is wrong. As we all know some rights in front of our knowledge may be wrong in front of someone else’s knowledge. So, basically a question arises ‘Are we receiving right knowledge in everyday life?’ It points to one essential phrase “true/right knowledge”. In my small life experiences and readings I feel that Knowledge about God is true to higher percentage though knowledge about Him is finite due to human limitations. All other knowledge about living and non living things in this universe changes from time to time.

Our society is saturated with a lot of groups that try to enlighten the people and elevate them from their problematic life situations. Some examples for those groups are teachers, gospel speakers, motivational speakers, mentors, psychologists, priests and some are politicians. These groups try to educate the people through Religion, Psychology or Politics. Sometimes they try to mix these three formulas and spray into the people and give some solutions, knowledge or skills and raise them. In fact, there is no limit for the energy these groups spent in one’s life time to bring to the fore the people and society. The results to these are the innovation of different types of ism’s that get born in each time period.

Each group has its own “modus operandi” and their own target group to work on. As part of this there arises uncountable sects, groups and movements with have their own ideologies. Each group has their own way of explaining the truths keeping their ideologies as the basement. These may or may not be right in the eyes of others depending on the situations. It is even true that each sects/groups move up at least one person from their problematic life situations. This does not imply that they are fully right or fully wrong. But society attributes these groups to a high standard seeing

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some positive case and also degrades them by seeing any one negative case. This is typical for human nature and I am sure many might have experienced this in all through our life.

If the above mentioned can be viewed in a secular aspect then the number of groups formed in religious view point can always compete with the secular sects. We can also find uncountable retreat centres and Gospel conventions being organised by religious sects/movements. Gospel mentioned here is used in an inclusive manner irrespective of different religions.

If ignorance is the reason for problem in one's life then knowledge should be a solution for our happiness. Each day people are running for the fulfilment of their hunger of knowledge and we don't even know what we get is the true knowledge. No human being can be filled with 100% knowledge. Our life is an ongoing process of attaining knowledge for all available things and non-living things in this universe. During the quest of this knowledge we really forget what type of Knowledge is primary in one's life. One main question can be raised in order to find an answer for this. Are we able to bring any radical changes in ourselves or society by earning all these common secular knowledge?

If the answer is "Yes" then there is no point in reading the balance as you are self sufficient to live in this Universe without the help of anyone. If the answer is "No" then I would say reading Religious-Holy Books can surely bring at least one radical change in one's life which in turn will surely help the society. Life is always challenging in one way or another for each and every person. When we don't find a solution for our problems in life with our knowledge then we lose our "Aura". Traditionally aura in a human being is the sum total of his Psychic & Spiritual Energy. Spiritual Energy fills in our human body during one's conscious state. Conscience is the basement of one's conscious state. The aura percentage in a person increases if that person works along with his conscience. Lack of aura reduces a person's self-confidence too and lack of self confidence creates evil character which in turns leads to a sinful society. Using one's secular knowledge for his existence always tends to act against one's conscience.

Spiritual Reading helps to create Spiritual Energy within a person and it boosts the aura and creates a meaningful personality. Spiritual Reading

gives knowledge about the Eternal truth who is our Lord God. Knowledge of God is the right knowledge and there is no limit for it. Each second of our life in this world should be used to gain that true knowledge, no matter which path we use to know that Eternal Truth. Each religion's Holy Book/writings has always a good news/gospel to share for the people and society. Lack of that good news/gospel is called ignorance and trying to know the gospel is really the knowledge. A basic knowledge about the Love of God even creates a loving personality. In short we come to know that God is Love through the right knowledge about God. There is always a misunderstanding among the society that secular knowledge is everything and it can save every person from their problematic life situations. If this is true then in an educated society or in a place where the literacy rate is high the crime rate should be the lowest which is never a visible fact.

There is always an unanswered question in everyone's heart – Who am I? When one is in the path to find an answer for this question a shift is visibly seen slowly in one's life and work from 'Ego' to 'Truth' which is our Creator God. Gaining knowledge is really problematic because it should be right knowledge and from right source. Being a Christian, I am focusing to answer this through our Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture is always a visible truth and a right source. May be the translations of the Holy Scripture might have created some questions and doubts in one's view point. But ultimately it reveals a fact that God is the Creator; HIS Love can be visible through Jesus Christ whom HE sent to this earth to guide us with His "WAY of LIFE" and support us eternally with HIS Holy Spirit.

My article is solely written from a personalised view point which may not be fully true from other person's knowledge and I totally agree with it. But I can summarise my idea into one sentence that "Knowledge of God helps us to realise the truth that God is Love and that Knowledge is gained only through Spiritual Holy Reading which may vary from person to person depending on his/her religious believes".



Prophetic Role of the Church in Inter-Religious Peace Building

-Rajendra K Sail*

At the very outset, let me make a few propositions that would develop clarity of perception and perspective on the theme and the issues we are dealing with.

I

Peace is a pregnant term, an inclusive concept that presupposes prevalence of human existence in reconciliation with God, Nature, Fellow human beings and inner self; Peace is concerned with the total well-being of humanity, and all living beings/things.

The concept of Peace has been well defined in the Hebrew word: **Shalom**, meaning peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquility. Thus, the Biblical concept of **Shalom** is about God's vision for the emphatic goodness of all relationships; encompasses both "justice" and "peace"; includes "wholeness" i.e. everything that makes for people's well being, security, and restoration of relationships that have been broken; relationships both with other people and to structures.

The deep Biblical perception of **Shalom** is socio-economic-political; it deals with criminal justice system and legislations regulating various aspects of civic life; employer-employee relationships (master-slave or owner-worker relationships) and correcting all that is unfair, unjust and exploitative in all forms of productive and non-productive activities; economic and social systems, structures and interactions can be brought under its purview by judging how they serve or destroy healthy human relationships; even governments and its institutions can be reviewed by their policies and programmes dealing with problems and basic needs of the people facilitating better and healthy relationship between citizens of a society.

II

After having drawn a basic parameter for Peace, understood within the Biblical perception of **Shalom**, let us now reflect on the term "Inter-Religious".

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The term "Inter-Religious" is misleading, misnomer, and misconstrued. **Firstly**, it presupposes that various religions have common ground to interact for a common cause like establishing "peace" and "communal harmony". This is true to some extent if interpreted from the radical perspective. But, religion as propagated and practiced primarily by the religious heads and institutions, it hardly has any scope to serve this purpose. On the contrary, religions in the present form and content are more likely to be "closed" and "segregated". **Secondly**, the "inter-religious" efforts at building "peace and harmony" are limited to bringing together the religious heads or prominent personalities on a platform to celebrate/observe certain religious festivals like Deepavali, Holi, Christmas, Id, Baisakhi, etc., and/or national events like Independence Day, Republic Day, Gandhi Jayanti, etc. Hardly have they gone beyond these rituals and enter into the social reforms, justice and peace issues, leave aside raising their "inter-religious voice" on issues of social and political significance. **Thirdly**, religion and religious activities being confined to the four walls of religious institutions, basically **mandir, mazjid, gurudwara** and **girjaghars**, common people and public-at-large is left outside of such "ritualistic acts of building peace and harmony" however symbolic these may be.

Thus, the very premise of "inter-religious peace building" is faulty and superficial, not even touching the basic and fundamental issues of "peace" and "justice" both ideologically and theologically.

BUT, there are other forms of "inter-religious justice and peace" initiatives that can be witnessed in the midst of various people's struggles not only in the country but all over the world. These people's struggles for creating a better world for themselves, their children, their fellow-humans based on values and principles like freedom, equality, dignity, justice and peace etc., are all inclusive, where the barriers such as caste, religion, gender, age, region are broken, and in unity and solidarity, communities of human beings fight the forces of death and destruction for "a new heaven and a new earth" (to use the Biblical term) or "a socialist-secular-democratic society" (to use the political/ideological term)!

This JUSTICE AND PEACE BUILDING can be seen in various people's movements. I would like to refer here to only a few that I have been associated with: Chhattisgarh Movement for "Sangharsh aur Nirmaan" (struggles and reconstruction), *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save Narmada), Bhopal Gas Victims Movement for Relief and Justice.

In the midst of these struggles for justice and peace, we witness and experience the true identity of people as people; citizens as citizens; humans as humans without any labels and demarcations. Though, it may require another article to share the unity of humanity experienced in a holistic manner expressed in day-to-day life and happenings such as celebrations as one community at the time of births, baptisms/*naamkarans*, marriages etc., not to speak of “sharing in the suffering and pain” – *SAMVEDNA* – in sickness, calamities, accidents and deaths etc.

Suffice to say here that building Peace and Justice needs coming together as one human community – suffering and struggling. And, that pre-supposes secular-democratic-socialist vision of both the present and the future society. Even the identities based on religion, caste, community, gender and region are dissolved (to a great extent). Just see the composition of their leadership, which has demonstrated real unity in diversity (both ideologically and theologically) and, in turn, maintained the people’s united action for Peace and Justice.

Interestingly, we find the obvious absence of religious leaders in these people’s struggles leave aside the so-called “inter-religious organisations”. Of course, once in a while one may come across religious heads and institutions paying the lip-services on issues and concerns related to people’s movements, but ideologically and historically, the religious institutions have stood against the people’s hopes and aspirations as expressed in their struggles for freedom, justice, peace, equality and dignity, including that of their own congregations/believers/followers who, basically, constitute the poor, marginalized and oppressed of the society.

III

Similarly, the “Prophetic Role of the Church” is no longer a slogan or a reality. Ironically, it does not find place even in the discussions in the Churches today. It too is becoming a ritual to have such themes and subjects for Conferences and Consultations. But, in preaching and practice the “prophetic role of the Church” has almost vanished from its strategy and agenda.

As I see it, the Church exists at three levels:

a) Establishment; b) Congregations; c) Small groups practicing Faith in Action.

a) The Church as an Establishment: highly institutionalized with all its power, pomp and glory, hierarchy, property, various institutions like health, educational and other service institutions, power politics and hobnobbing with the “elite” and, very often than not, be on the side of the Empire! The Church as an Establishment was/is, in its nature and content, a replica of the Corporate Sector, even practicing its values and depicting its culture – in living and working both.

b) The Congregations, almost all of them could be easily identified and classified as poor, oppressed, exploited, *dalits*, *adivasis*, women, unemployed youth, marginal farmers, landless, unorganized workers, fisher folks, etc. In India, the true identity of the Church is that it is the Dalit Church, the Adivasi Church, the Women’s Church, the Working Class Church, The Toiling Masses Church, etc. These Christians exist at another level of the Church, totally separated from the ‘Church as an Establishment’. There is hardly any interaction, leave aside dialogue in words and deeds, between these two levels of the Church.

There is an inherent contradiction between the ‘*Church for the Poor*’ and ‘*Church of the Poor*’. In thoughts and actions, it is almost like: *Church for the Poor* Versus *the Church of the Poor*. Thus, the identity crisis in the Churches in India!

Once we begin to take seriously the true identity of the Church, there would be tremendous transformation of the Church into a People’s Movement. But, this will be a long journey; that too if and when the congregations of the poor and marginalized (workers, women, adivasis and dalits etc.) take over the Church by storm and restore its original identity and purpose as the “chosen people of God”!

c) Third level of the Church is small groups of Christians struggling to relate creatively and critically to the people’s suffering and struggles, and practice their Faith in Action. They are scattered, sometimes emerge as spontaneous response to the situations have no well defined constitution or boundaries both in terms of social and religious/ denominational identities.

Very loosely, these have been called the Christian Social Action Groups. Nevertheless, these groups began to pave the way for the Church’s

transformation into a people's movement, with its strengths and weaknesses/limitations! It is definitely not a replacement of the Church as the "chosen people of God", but bears marks of the crucified Christ in identification with the suffering and struggling humanity.

In the seventies, at the initial stages of social activism, a step forward from "social work", and the transformation period from "mission" to "movement" (in the Urban-Rural Mission), the emerging theme was **"Church, as a People's Movement"**. In 1975, during the Emergency Rule in India, the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) held its Assembly on this Theme. Canon Subir Biswas¹ was the key-note speaker, and I was one of the respondents.

Since then, several efforts and experiments have been carried out to transform the Church into a People's Movement, but with no success, literally. On the contrary, the Church with all its institutions, properties, prestige and power, bureaucracy and hierarchy has become more of an Establishment; in the process, leaving behind the Congregations, who are literally constituted by the poor and the oppressed; the dalits and the marginalized.

Today, (after 42 years), I believe that people's movement is the Church! It has not only been my experience but that of many who took their faith seriously in action-reflection process of participating in the struggles of the people for justice, peace, freedom, equality and dignity, etc.

In the midst of suffering and struggling people you experience the true fellowship and unity of humankind interwoven by one thread of solidarity, breaking all humanmade barriers and boundaries, passionately driven towards the goal of creating a new heaven and new earth' for themselves, their fellow humans and their children. I have no hesitation in proclaiming that the *Koinonia* and the *Diakonia* – two basic functions of the Church as a called and chosen people of Christ – are experienced more intrinsically, intimately and interactively in the people's movement than in any of the institutionalized Church congregation. If the Church is a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, than it is the people's movement that would stand the test

¹ Canon Subir Biswas was a priest of the Church of North India, based in Kolkata for several years. He was associated with the Urban Rural Mission, and later became the President of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI)

of all times! If the Church is defined as the chosen people of the Christ, bearing his abuse outside the camp, then it is the people's movement where we could experience the suffering Christ in action, sanctifying the people through his own blood. Even the Eucharist as a sacrament and a sacrifice, we believe in the real presence of Christ who died for the collective sins of humankind, the source and summit of Christian life, becomes alive in the midst of people's movement.

From this position, the natural call would be to take the congregations out of the Churches, what we call as: EMPTYING OF THE CHURCH. Take all the dalits, adivasis, toiling masses, women, fisher folk, child and bonded labourers, etc., out of the Churches to become integral part of the People's Movements as it is where they belong; it is where the Church becomes alive in reconciliation with the suffering humanity and crucified Christ.



Empowering the Least, the Last and the Lost

- Roger Gaikwad*

Meeting in the context of the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran reformation, we are here to thank God for the blessing of 10 years of the life and work of Lutheran World Service India Trust (LWSIT).

The Reformation of Lutheran World Service- India

Lutheran World Service - India was in fact serving as the India Country programme of the Department of World service of the Lutheran World Fellowship (LWF) since 1974. However there came about a “reformation” in its life on 4th September 2008. First, it was nationalistic administrative reformation. LWSIT became an autonomous Indian Board of service in 2008, taking over all the assets, liabilities, projects and programmes of LWS-India. Second. LWSIT developed an ecumenical character. It was not to be exclusively a ministry of Lutheran churches in India, but it was going to be an ecumenical ministry of several church traditions in India, represented through the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). Thus UELCI (United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India) and NCCI became the founding settlers/partners of LWSIT. Third, it asserted a stronger commitment to the service of the country. The Settlers, “inspired by God’s love for humanity and their own commitment to justice and dignity for all, with the vision of people of India living in just, secular and peaceful societies with dignity, empowered to achieve their universal right to basic needs and quality of life.” Created and established LWSIT as a Public Charitable Trust. And so, the motto of LWSIT is, “Empowering the Least the Last and the Lost!”

The Least, the Last and Lost: Their Pathos and Challenge

The gospel lesson for this morning affirms God’s solidarity with the least, the last and the lost:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God (Lk.6:20)

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled (Lk.6:21a)

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh (Lk.6:21b)

According to a World Bank Report (October 1, 2016), India has the most number of people who live below the international poverty line of USD 1.90

*Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad is the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India and President of the Lutheran World Service India Trust. Message delivered at the Thanksgiving Service on LWSIT Day, 4th September 2017.

per day – 224 million people. Another report, that of the Asian Development Bank says “In India 21.9% of the population lives below the national poverty line.” In other words 1 in every 5 Indians is poor. Perhaps we who live in smart cities are not so conscious about the poor in our midst. Because 80% of the poor live in rural India, those affected by floods and drought, those living locales which are not connected by road and rail, those who are homeless, and those who are either forced to migrate from place to place or are trafficked.

When it comes to hunger, according to the data of World Food Forum published on July 26, 2017, India is home to 194.6 million undernourished people. It is also said that India is home to over one-third of the world’s stunted children. The much hyped India’s economic growth has not been fully translated into higher food consumption, let alone better diets overall, suggesting that the poor and hungry have not had any beneficial access to adequate, nutritional and growth facilitating food.

When it comes to the state of joy and satisfaction in life, a WHO Report published on 24th February 2017 stated that in 2015 over 5 crore Indians suffered from depression, and another 3 crore Indians suffered from anxiety disorders. In 2012 itself India as a country accounted for the highest number of suicides in the world. Coming from the Vidarbha region, pictures of lean bony bodies of humans and animals, with sorrow writ large over their faces, squatting on the barren broken earth, which has not sipped water, crumbling under the burdensome responsibility of paying back the money lenders without any hope of ever coming out of the vicious debt-trap ., are rather graphic pictures of sorrow.

We need to learn from our neighbor Bhutan, where the government has to consider every policy for its impact, not only Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but also on Gross National Happiness (GNH). There are 9 dimensions of GNH: (i) Health; (ii) Education ;(iii) Economic Security or Living Standard; (iv) Use or Balance of Time; (v) Good Governance; (vi) Community Vitality; (vii) Ecological Diversity and Resilience; (viii) Psychological or Emotional Well-being; and (ix) Cultural Diversity and Resilience. Such aspirations of life could well be discerned as arising out of a Buddhist spirituality of well-being in Bhutan.

The Spirituality of Well-Being

This brings us to the first text of this morning's meditation, particularly Isaiah 58:6-7.

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Authentic spirituality finds expression not primarily in the practice of religious rites and rituals, but in addressing responsibly the needs of our neighbors in society. God therefore seeks that humans respond to the needs of the least, the last and the lost, as very well presented by Jesus in his parable on the Judgment in Matt.25:34-40:

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for **I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.**' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, **'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'**

Luther and Social Well-Being

LWSIT, as we are well aware, has a Lutheran heritage. As we are celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, while we are reminded about the theological and religious reformation which Luther sought to bring about. But what about his concern for economic and social well-being of people in society? Luther's biographers narrate that Luther was born to parents who struggled financially early in their marriage. Luther grew up in a

household where food seemed to be scarce at times. Receiving a mother's harsh discipline for taking a nut or a cookie from the common table would impress upon young Luther the insecurity associated with food scarcity. As a grammar school student, Luther used to sing in the streets along with his classmates, begging for coins.

Mendicant orders and roaming beggars were a common sight for Luther in his days. Without children to care for aging parents, the elderly were left to fend for themselves on the street or to beg for lodging from relatives. Only a minority of the population could afford medical treatment. The majority relied on home remedies and prayers to the saints for their recovery from sickness and disease. It is said that the Peasants Uprising (also called Peasants' War) found Luther at first in sympathy with their demands for economic injustice, but when his writings were used to justify murders, he urged the nobles to put down the uprising with lethal force.

Luther decried the economic abuse in the form of rice gouging and price fixing, which he experienced in Wittenberg, the city in which he began the reformation by nailing his 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church. He decried economic abuse in the form of the price gouging and price fixing he experienced in Wittenberg, the growing power of international corporations to dictate government policy, the unwillingness of political leaders to regulate banks and industry, and the alarming increase in begging and homelessness as peasants flocked to cities in search of work. (cf. Samuel Torvend, "Martin Luther's Teaching and Practice of Charity and Social Ethics," <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-366>) While his many theses called into question the sale of indulgences and their approval by the papacy, they also reveal Luther's awareness of the poor multitude living in Germany, who could not afford such spiritual favors or, out of fear, purchased them and thus suffered the loss of funds needed to sustain domestic life. Luther was therefore telling the leaders of his times, "Do not abuse religion!"

In Thesis 27 Luther states: They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.

In Thesis 43 Luther emphasizes: Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences.

In Thesis 45, Luther asserts: Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives his money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God's wrath.

Since the church authorities of his times sought to raise funds through the sale of indulgences for colossal construction works, in Thesis 86, Luther challengingly asks: Again, "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?"

Rather than spend one's life and energy working to gain the reward of immortality "in heaven," Luther argued that the Christian can direct those energies toward life "on earth," toward the amelioration of suffering and the diminishment of injustice.

Making Space and Living: The Endeavors of the Least, the Last, and the Lost

As the LWSIT we have been committed to the cause of the least, the last and the lost in India. The struggle of the people on the margins goes on for life and space in a society that crushing them, making them all *dalits*, the crushed ones. The latest book of Arundhati Roy is entitled The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. This fictional story tells us about a person born as a female trapped in a male body, whom the family wanted to bring up as a boy, named Aftab, in society. As the story unfolds, Aftab, who became Anjum, leaves her Hira House of dreams and lives "like a tree" in a graveyard near a hospital mortuary in Delhi. It is only in the graveyard, which society shuns in fear, that Anjum finds space. She builds a shack in the graveyard, then adds room for guests, and makes it Jannat (Heaven) Guest House. It opens a funeral parlour with the arrival of the mortuary attendant, a dalit called Dayachand who takes the name Saddam Hussein after he saw his father lynched for carrying a dead cow. Gradually Jannat Guest House becomes a commune of hijras, dalits, Maoists Sufis, orphans, and animals. (cf. V.S. Jayaschandran, "Song of the Graveyard" The Week, June 11, 2017, pp.41-46)

Is Arundhati saying that utmost happiness, an ideal world, could be found only in the company of the dead, in the graveyard? No, it is just the opposite! "In that space of the dead, the border between life and death is also being

challenged. It is not a submission to death. They (Anjum and her compatriots) are standing their ground and living their lives." Like trees in the graveyard! **The Least, the Last and Lost are rising up! We should be committed to be with them and be mutually empowered!**

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
(Luke 4:18-19)



REFLECTION

PUT YOUR GOD'S WORD TO ACTION

The focus of this topic is not for self-improvement, but for the inner transformation for the power of God so that a person in Christ may shine to their fullest brightness as God's treasures in the jars of clay.

It's all in our thoughts that one lives, ultimately determine character. Solomon said, "For as he thinks within himself, so he is '(Proverb 23:7). An old well-known verse puts it this way:
SOW A THOUGHT, REAP AN ACT;
SOW AN ACT REAP A HABIT;
SOW A HABIT, REAP A CHARACTER.

It is because of the importance of our thought lives that Paul said, Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, ---- if anything is excellent or praise worthy --- think about such things." (Philippians 4:8)

The meaning of UTSAH : ENTHUSIASM in English. (Its about a seed sown FAITH PROJECT for our son; as his life being compared to a candle blowing in the wind ; showing me a way to my life. I am going to let it shine through all the children and women of the darkness.!) Enthusiasm has a powerful meaning, as, "GOD IS IN YOU, AND YOU IN HIM." There is joy in experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit within you." But to experience this joy, we must make some choices. We must choose to forsake sin, not only because it is defeating to us , but because it grieves the heart of God within you. Once we are born again, we must choose to count on the fact that we are dead to sin, freed from its reign and dominion, we can now actually say no to sin. We must choose to accept our responsibility to discipline our lives to obedience.

God has provided all we need for our pursuit of a healthy, better life of holiness. He has delivered us from the reign of sin and gave us His in dwelling Holy Spirit. He has revealed His will for holy living in His Word, and He works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. He has sent pastors and teachers to exhort and encourage us in the path of holiness; and He answers our prayer when we cry to Him for strength against temptation. TRULY THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

WORDS ARE POWER CONTAINERS: SAY WHAT YOU WANT, GOD'S WORDS ARE LIFE. The word that God speaks is alive and, operative full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective;] it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the breadth of life(soul) and [the immortal spirit, and of joints and marrow [of the deepest parts of our natural], exposing and shifting and analyzing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart. (Amplified Bible, Classic Edition)

As God says *in consistency lies the power*. The key was not the thing a person says as a single request but those things he continually says. Gradually we (me and my husband) found that our words were bringing to pass in our lives from what we had right then. While during the baptism classes, the pastor who was teaching us, "Now you put in the offer what ever amount, for our finance, promotion, or health going to be guaranteed that our money is going to be doubled, within 6 weeks time. Before being born again I had no idea about tithe and offering. Though we may have forgotten our offer God didn't sleep but worked for our wish.

We saw that if we wanted to change our lives----- change the lack, change our finances, change our home---- we would have to change our words and start saying continually what God's Word says about us and our situation.

In consistency in speaking the right words lies the power of God to deliver you. Your word based on God's Word, open the door to abundant life. That was revelation God was speaking to me, and He's speaking it to you today.

If you want change in your life, you have to make a change. Changing your word is the place to start. What you and I say day in and day out is what will come to pass in our lives. We have to set ourselves to speak words that are of God, that what we want to come to pass in our lives. To release faith, we have to have confidence that our word will come to pass. We have made extreme changes. We agreed that we were no longer going to speak any word except those we wanted to come to pass. We agreed to quit talking about lack, defeat, sickness and disease. Instead for the word regarding healing, abundance and well- being. We choose to talk faith words and our lives turned around. We could see change instantly. Soon we could turn our heads around. Did so to help each other hear.

We had to work at it and helped each other. If one of us said something we didn't want to come to pass, the other one would say, "That's your confession and I am in agreement with it." We did so to help each other hear what we were carelessly saying. That sounds extreme, but it really helped us change what we were speaking. It made us conscious of what was coming out of our mouths.

As believers we are to live our spiritual lives on the offensive side, not on the defensive side. We shouldn't be just reacting what the devil does, we should be applying pressure on him by obeying the word, walking in faith, and speaking right words out of our mouths. For one to succeed in life, the Word has to be in two places, in your heart and in your mouth. The Word that is alive in you is the Word that talks to you. When you are in a hard place, what is inside you is what will come out.

This topic is to help you turn your thoughts around. Hope its going to help you renew your mind ---- and consequently your mouth ---- to speak the power of God into your life.... to speak what you really want to come to pass. Helps you change you life, the power is in you!!

The bottom line is, if you keep your words obedient to God's Word, you'll come out on top every time...with CONFIDENCE .

IF GOD IS FOR YOU THEN WHO CAN BE AGAINST, BLESSINGS!! Amen

By:

Mrs Gorky Pal runs an NGO, named **Utsah**, looking after the weaker section of the society. Currently she is based at Nagpur, Maharashtra.



REPORT

Lutheran World Service India Trust (LWSIT) Celebrates LWSIT Day

Lutheran World Service India Trust (LWSIT) celebrated LWSIT Day in Kolkata on September 4, 2017. The following were the key segments of the celebration:

Inauguration of the decennial year of LWSIT

A Thanksgiving Service, A theological reflection on the theme, "Building Just Communities," A video film on the life and work of LWSIT,

Testimonies from beneficiary stakeholders of LWSIT's ministries, A ministerial reflection on "Church and Civil Society" Launching of documents and programmes

A musical presentation by a youth band

The celebration began with the **inauguration of the decennial year** of LWSIT's ministry. After Mr. Shaju Joseph, Executive Director of LWSIT gave a brief narration of the formation of LWSIT on 4th September 2008, the Rt. Revd. Ashoke Biswas, Bishop of Calcutta Diocese, CNI pronounced the blessing on LWSIT as it enters its decennial year.

As indicated above the celebrations began with the **meaningful Thanksgiving Service** led by Rev. Dr. Sunil Caleb, Principal, and facilitated by some of the students and faculty members of Bishop's College. During the service, the Bishop's College Choir gave a beautiful rendering of "*O for a thousand tongues to sing*", while the LWSIT Choir sang a very touching special song in Bengali: "*Aguner poroshmoni*." The preacher was the Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad, President LWSIT; General Secretary National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). Based on the Gospel lesson Luke 6:20-31, Dr. Gaikwad's homily had interpretations, in the context of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, from the perspective of the contemporary issues confronted by the poor and groaning people of the land. The eloquent message by the preacher was followed by a special song:

Beauty for Brokenness by the LWSIT Choir in which the assurance of the Risen Lord Jesus was evident in the following verse:

*Beauty for brokenness, Hope for despair
Lord, in the suffering, this is our prayer
Bread for children, justice, joy, peace
Sunrise to sunset, Your kingdom increase
God of the poor, Friend of the weak,
Give us compassion we pray, Melt our cold hearts,
Lets tears fall like rain, come change our love
From a spark to a flame.*

The well thought-out intercessory prayers were offered by several delegates including those who had come from distant villages of the states of Orissa, West Bengal, Jharkhand & Assam. The inspired delegates prayed for the blessings of the Lord Jesus as they read the response after each of the intercessory prayer: *Lord in Your Mercy, Hear our prayer.*

The 1st part of thanksgiving the morning session concluded with the singing of the hymn: Great is Thy Faithfulness, followed by prayer and benediction by Bishop O. Michael Benhur.

The pre-lunch session was reserved for **Reflection on Building Just Communities**. Rev. Dr. Chandran Paul Martin, Regional Representative for South/South Asia – Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shared his views and perspectives on the subject. Dr. Martin, with his world wide ecumenical experience and commitment to the cause of people on the margins, (those denied justice in life) enlightened the gathering about the deeper implications of the concepts of justice and righteousness. He also pointed that the word justice is in the very nature of Jesus' Good News. Further the speaker stressed that the number of people whom God offers free gift of salvation become the builders and partners of just communities.

Following a very delicious fellowship lunch, **visibility** was another significant action oriented initiative shared by way of **a short video film** under the able direction of Mr. Shaju V. Joseph. In the same session – **the feedback and the testimonies** were narrated by the local beneficiary stakeholders from their respective areas as in the states of Assam, West Bengal, Orissa and Jharkhand. Two ladies, one transgender person and a male member shared their experiences of as communities of young and old men and women and

transgender persons, boys and girls, even as they acknowledged the compassion of God given to them through the good offices of LWSIT which has been focusing on six result areas namely, Sustainable livelihood; Community Resilience; Education; Health; Peace; and Gender.

The academic session in the afternoon was led by the Rev. Dr. Sunil M. Caleb, Principal, Bishop College on the subject **“Civil Society and the Church”** along with a slide show. It was chaired by Dr. Mrs. R. Manorama. A number of doubts regarding the terms ‘civil society’ and the ‘church’ were clarified. As God’s people we are to be the church in the locality and of the people in the locality where we live.

The concluding session chaired by Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad had **important launches**. Five members of the LWSIT Board participated as follows:

- Release of Strategic Plan - Bishop O. Michael Benhur
- Release of Decennial Logo - Dr. (Mrs.) Ruth Manorama
- Release of Decennial Programme - Mrs. Josephine Joseph
- Release of Commemorating of 500th anniversary of Reformation - Mr. Shaju Joseph
- Launching of LWSIT website - Mrs. Basanti Biswas

The above mentioned documents and the website with their colourful motifs were eye catching. The credit for these innovative creations should go to the creative and talented staff of LWSIT. In conclusion Mrs. B. Biswas, member of the LWSIT Board warmly thanked all distinguished dignitaries, honoured guests, all participants and staff, LWSIT and volunteers who labored hard to make all the arrangements and demonstrated their hospitable and courteous treatment to each one present - surely one remarkable quality of Kolkata – City of Joy! This joy was further reflected in the musical presentation by a **youth band** from Kolkata.

To conclude, there was animated interpersonal communication among the delegates having imbibed new interpretations and directives at the one day celebration of the thanksgiving to the ever present Lord Almighty and having blessed by His presence.

By:

Dr. James S. Murthy, a Photo-Artist and Journalist.



NCC Review Subscription and donation

NCC Review is published eleven times a year. In 2016, the overarching theme of NCC Review is the NCCI quadrennial theme *“Towards a Just and Inclusive Communities”* which provides orientation to its content. The subscription rates are highly subsidized. Further discount is available for bulk subscriptions and for Pastors, students and theological educators. Please refer to the table inside cover page of the journal.

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COURSES OFFERED FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2018-2019

	Graduate Studies/Diploma Courses	Degree/Diploma	Duration
1.	Bachelor of Divinity Degree Course of the Senate of Serampore College	B.D.	4 years
2.	Diploma for Proficiency in Counselling	D.P.C	1 year
3.	Diploma in Women's Studies	D.W.S.	6 months

Master of Theology Degree of the Senate of Serampore College in:

1.	Old Testament	M.Th.	2 Years
2.	New Testament	M.Th.	2 Years
3.	Christian Theology	M.Th.	2 Years
4.	History of Christianity	M.Th.	2 Years
5.	Christian Ministry (Counselling)	M.Th.	2 Years
6.	Missiology	M.Th.	2 Years
7.	Women's Studies	M.Th.	2 Years

Doctor of Theology Degree of the Senate of Serampore College in:

1.	Old Testament	D.Th.	
2.	New Testament	D.Th.	
3.	History of Christianity (Subject to the availability of Faculty)	D.Th.	
4.	Christian Ministry (Counselling)	D.Th.	
5.	Missiology	D.Th.	
6.	Women's Studies	D.Th.	

	B.D.	M.Th.	D.Th.	D.P.C.	D.W.S.
Cost of Application Form	Rs.400	Rs.450	Rs.500	Rs.250	Rs.250
Last date of submission	17.11.2017	17.11.2017	17.11.2017		
Late fee	Rs.500	Rs.550	Rs.600		
Last date with late fee	24.11.2017	24.11.2017	24.11.2017		
Entrance Exam & Interview	11-12 Jan., 2018	15-16 Jan., 2018	18 Jan., 2018		

Please note that no application will be entertained after the last date as mentioned above.

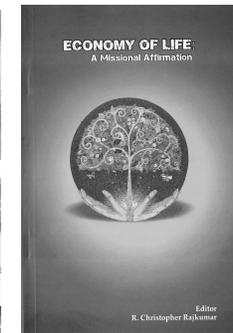
Scholarships: Limited scholarships are available for needy candidates after the successful completion of their first year for B.D./M.Th. studies. Two scholarships are reserved every year for women, and four for candidates coming from North India, in order to encourage theological education in North India.



Kindly address all enquiries to:
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 63, MILLER'S ROAD, POST BOX 4613, BENSON TOWN,
 BANGALORE - 560 046, INDIA
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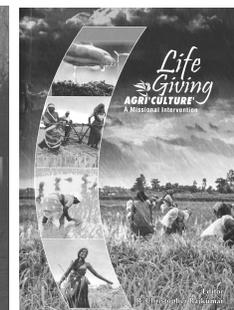
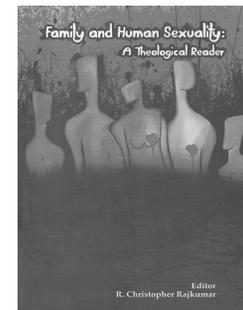
NCCI PUBLICATIONS

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 R. Christopher Rajkumar (Ed.)
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