

The Epistle to the Indian Christians and Churches

Dear fellow pilgrims in faith journey, grace to you and peace from God who created all of us in God's image. We greet you in the name of our lord and savior Jesus Christ, the manifestation of God's perpetual love and mercy. We thank God for you for your earnest participation in the mission of solidarity with the people of God with diverse identities.

We acknowledge that you have always made honest efforts to live up your faith with all its complexities and ambiguities. You have understood that to be in the image of God is to be in love as relational beings, making love in a 'covenantal' relationship, rather than in a 'conventional' relationship.

We, as a community of equals, must continue to engage ourselves in breaking conventional forms of looking at our own self, the other and the divine and thus be an inclusive community. However, you are aware of the fact that there is so much of exclusion in our churches and society, especially on the basis of gender, sexualities, caste, color etc. As a Christian community we must admit that exclusion of any sort is a grave sin and thus we must confess our sins against the image of God which is all inclusive.

We would like to narrate you, dear sojourners, our experiences of being challenged and rightfully condemned by the excluded people and communities that we the sixty from various theological seminaries and schools of philosophies met at SCM House, Bengaluru from 22 - 24 August 2018 in a workshop on 'Philosophy of Radical Inclusivity from Faith and Human Sexuality Perspectives jointly organized by the National Council of Churches in India – National Ecumenical Forum of Gender and Sexual Diversities, Student Christian Movement of India and Aneka and this epistle to encourage you all to have right faith in God.

We heard the horrifying and haunting experiences of exclusion of transgenders, lesbians, gays and queer people from both within the Church and also from the outside. We felt ashamed and utterly guilty of denying life of dignity, for being so brutal against our fellow beings who are indeed the part of the image of God. We confessed our sins of being homophobic, transphobic and discriminative against the range of gender and sexuality communities.

We now invite you, dear sojourners in living an embodied faith, to join us in confessing that we, as a Church and Christians, have developed prejudices for centuries towards sexuality and lived a body-denying spirituality failing to understand the embodied God who embraces all bodies irrespective of their gender, sex and sexualities. Let us confess that through our body-denying spirituality we have put the spectrum of gender and sexuality communities into uttermost misery.

Now let the misery of the victims be our point of departure in affirming our renewed faith in the embodied God who embraced love and passion in Jesus Christ, enabling us to celebrate our sexualities. The misery of the victims should disturb our conventional interpretation of the Scriptures and lead us to a deeper missional and ministerial engagement with the Scriptures towards understanding God's purpose for an inclusive habitat.

Now may the embodied God of love be with you and may your body, spirit and mind be kept whole at the coming of our sojourner Jesus Christ, the epitome for us to love our bodies and to celebrate our life in fullness.

Yours in Christ,

The Participants,

Workshop on Philosophy of Radical Inclusivity from Faith and Human Sexuality Perspectives,

SCM House, Bengaluru,

24 August 2018