

No one can serve Christ and caste!
An affirmation of faith from the
National Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits,
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The Church is called to denounce and resist the 'spiritual forces of evil' (Ephesians 6:12) and repent and realize the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). Today caste divisions, caste discrimination and caste violence have saturated the country and divided the church. In this moment of time we are prompted by the Spirit to repent from our complicity with caste mentality and dismantle its mechanisms, to reconcile all the victims of the system, to restore the fullness of life granted to all children of God and release the power of inherent dignity that has been gifted to all human beings.

Dalits are the worst victims of the caste system.

Caste has fragmented us at all levels. Our tables are divided, our communities are divided, and our cemeteries are divided. Dalits bear the inflictions and injuries of such division. We are ashamed that as Christians we are unable to testify to the oneness of life as members of the body of Christ.

Caste discrimination has corroded our inner being and has borne its bitter outward fruits. It has robbed Dalits of their self-esteem; denied them access to places of worship and sources of water for survival; and curtailed their opportunities for education and employment. We are ashamed that we as Christians have spawned such weeds of discrimination when we had opportunities to sow seeds of acceptance, integrity and justice.

Caste violence has broken the body and bruised the soul. Dalit children are shunned, stunted and have their childhood shattered. Dalit women are beaten, raped, and murdered. Dalit men are dispossessed, locked up, and lynched. The evil confluence of caste, class and patriarchy has distorted human dignity and destroyed human bodies. We are ashamed that we as Christians have remained silent while our brothers and sisters have been violated and killed.

Yet though Dalits have been crushed they have not been extinguished, though they have been brutalized they have not despaired. Dalits resilience and resistance in the face of caste division, discrimination and violence invites the church to join in solidarity to denounce and resist the 'spiritual forces of evil' even as we must repent and recommit ourselves to the good news that the kingdom of God is at hand.

As Christians we claim to reflect the mind of Christ but we are vested in the logic of caste. Jesus says *"no one can serve two masters, for a slave will either love the one and hate the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other"* (Matthew 6: 24). In a context of caste division, caste discrimination and caste violence we announce from the rooftop: "No one can

serve Christ and caste!” We also confess that in our caste-infested world “we have decided to follow Christ.” Empowered by a deep faith in God, who binds us into communion, who frees us for justice and who heals us towards wholeness, we join together to live faithfully as disciples of Christ in India today. This involves public confession of our complicity in the sin of casteism, reaffirmation of our faith in a God of justice and a radical commitment to solidarity with those crushed under the weight of the caste system.

Our Confession

*“We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things to this very day.”
(1 Cor. 4: 13b)*

We confess:

- Our complicity in sharing in the mindset of caste and perpetuating the workings of evil caste system
- Our individual indifference and collective silence in the face of caste division, discrimination and violence
- Our willingness to let our theological and material resources be captured by the dominant caste and class communities
- Our unwillingness to allow the abundance of social, cultural, political and economic resources given by God to be utilized for the empowerment of Dalits

Our Reaffirmation

“The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed...” (Psalm 103: 6)

We Reaffirm:

- Faith in the God of justice who works for abundant life for all human beings. This calls us to name casteism as sin, apostasy and rebellion against God. Caste discrimination is unbelief in God and a crime against human beings.
- Love for God in ‘the Word made flesh’ who links the wounded body of Jesus to ‘the broken ones. ‘This calls us take sides with the Dalits struggling for freedom and wholeness. Casteism is a rejection of Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. Caste discrimination is the extended wounding of Christ among us as the least and crushed ones.
- The communion of the Holy Spirit that brings healing with reconciliation for Dalits and contrition with reconciliation among Dominant communities. Casteism is a grievance against the Holy Spirit. Caste discrimination manifests signs of enemies of the Holy Spirit, whose greatest gift is love. (1 Cor. 13: 13)

- The historical working of God, the liberator, accompanier and advocate, who never fails Dalits, at times through the witness of the Church that protects, supports and nurtures the broken ones. This calls us to deepen our solidarity and further our commitment to God's mission of liberation of Dalits.
- Hope that the reign of God will come on earth as it is in heaven. This calls us to commit to break all walls of separation trusting in the power of Spirit to make all things new in the way of Jesus and for the glory of God.

Our Commitment

"You will know them by their fruits, are grapes gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, in the same way every good tree bears good fruit but the bad tree bears bad fruit...thus you will know them by their fruit." (Matt 7: 16, 17)

We Commit:

- To be faithful to Jesus Christ and to realize that being born again means to be born against caste.
- To put our energies and resources to work to end caste division, caste discrimination and caste violence in our churches and society.
- To make our churches courageous and concrete witnesses to the body of Christ free of caste division, caste discrimination and caste violence.
- To our churches serving as zero tolerance zones for casteism and caste based discrimination and our churches developing policies on social inclusion. That also involves that our institutions become sites that practise preferential option for Dalits in admission, employment and in perspective.
- To designating Lent 2011 as a time of purging caste from our churches. This will be an occasion for developing resources, both theological and liturgical, for use in Sunday Schools, Youth Groups, Women's and Men's fellowships and pastors and bishops retreats with the specific mandate to root out casteism in our mindset and caste discrimination in our way of life..
- To do all that is humanly possible with God as our Helper to save Dalits under attack from the regimes of casteism let loose in our nation. As living members of the body of Christ we will "watch and pray" to prevent Dalit attacks, rapes and murders. Each local congregation and institution will join in God's mission to be defenders of the Dalit right to live in security without fear and be prompters of the Dalit right to live in freedom with justice in our caste violence prone society.