DALIT LIBERATION SUNDAY

November 10-2024

National Council of
Churches in India
Commission on Dalit Concerns
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Foreword

Egyptian captivity of Moses' times and the Babylonian captivity are well known contexts to Christians. Most proponents of free worship also talk about the liturgical captivity of the Church. Captivities to doctrine and dogma are less recognised, and when divorced from the political contexts of their formulation, still tie us down to such practices that are feudalist and far from having any place for a dynamic interpretation of faith - Jesus', " .... but I say to you, ... ".

Little is said or spoken, except in rare or annual contexts such as these, about the casteist captivity of communities as well as the Church, the Church both in India and in the rest of the world. This captivity to the casteist ideology and mindset has often led to justification of the system leading to arguments - 'not to upset the apple cart'.

I salute the likes of Dr. A P Nirmal, the Rt. Rev. Dr. M. Azariah, Dr. K. Rajaratnam and such others who belong to our times for their tireless preoccupation with the theological, pastoral and diaconal tasks of 'upsetting the apple cart' to make the Indian and Global Churches fight casteism and dismantling the world's largest structural oppression.

In 2010 and later in 2014 again, the National Council of Churches in India through its Commission on Dalit Concerns made renewed attempts to address the issue of stratification of ethnicities/ castes ranking them high and low, as well as as 'out-castes' based on work or decent (see appendices for summaries of both documents and the NCCI website for the full documents). Ten years down the line we realise that we need to do more.

Observance of the Dalit Liberation Sunday (DLS) is a reminder every year of this missiological task. This year we come out with a blatant call to commit ourselves to 'set the captive free' - be it the contexts and mindset of who are made captives or the hegemonic mindsets of the captor needing liberation.

We begin with the DLS worship this year committing ourselves to a yearlong task of addressing caste. Join us in this mission as we join in your initiatives. Let us together with all those working on this in the political and social arena as well as those working at the country and global level address this menace and rid the world of this hegemonic oppressive sub-human hierarchy of peoples.

Now, in the context if the DLS, as well as beyond this date, my colleagues Rev. Asher Noah, the Executive Secretary for the NCCI Commission on Dalit Concerns, and the Rev. Charles Sundarakumar, the Program Executive for the NCCI CoD Dalit Christian Support Program will be in touch with you to design these joint global interventions. Please encourage and support them. We have sought the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Y. Moses as the Chair of the NCCI Commission on Dalits to guide us in this quadrennium. We have vibrant Commissioners nominated by the Churches. Together we will make the difference.

Please encourage every Christ-community in your locale, and all such communities that you can influence, to observe the Dalit Liberation Sunday.

Rev. Asir Ebenezer

General Secretary, NCCI

Preface

The Commission on Dalit Concerns recommends the use of this specially prepared liturgy to celebrate Dalit Liberation Sunday on 10th November 2024. The liturgy focuses on God's mission of liberation and redemption.

It is our Christian obligation to proclaim Christ and to free people from all kinds of oppression. This involves not only evangelising people but also evangelising the systems and structures of the world. In other words, engaging in social transformation is an equally important role as bringing people to the saving knowledge of Christ.

We are called not only to be transformed individuals with sound ethical values but also to transform the world with sound societal principles. We are called out to be the salt and light of the world by bearing witness and participating in the affairs of the world. Challenges of the world should be met within the arena of the world. The right thing for us to do is to be engaged, involved and participate in the processes that shape the world.

In the Old Testament period, there were prophets, priests and rulers. All of them had equally important roles to play in building their community. While the rulers were to maintain social order, dispense justice and promote the welfare of the people, the role of the priest was to assist the people to draw closer to God and lead them in true worship; the prophets not only forecast the future but also monitored their contemporary social and religious institutions. And when things went wrong and abuses noticed, especially when values of equality, freedom and social justice were abandoned the prophets rose to the occasion and reformed their society. They did this by word, deed and prayer. It is important to note that our Lord Jesus also donned the role of a true prophet. Not only is he the Christ, cleansing our sins but also the reformer, cleaning our social institutions.

Wherever we may be, whatever responsibilities we may hold, we are called as Disciples of Christ to set free the less privileged and marginalized people from all kinds of bondages, much of which is socially constructed. Caste system and the oppression of Dalits is one such enduring bondage in India.

The DLS Worship Order also points to failures by the Church and within the Church with regard to caste oppression and hence calls us to collectively confess our sins of commission and omission. For instance, we assume that Dalit issue is divisive and that unity and harmony of the church has to be preferred over against the demands of a section in the church even if their demands are just. While the reality of the practice of the principle of inequality is tacitly admitted we make no serious effort to rectify the wrongs.

Let us worship God, glorify him for his mission of liberating the oppressed and let us proclaim and practise the Good News that no human being is less than another.

Rev. Dr. Y. Moses
Chairperson, Commission on Dalit Concerns
National Council of Churches in India

Introduction

The National Council of Churches in India-Commission on Dalit Concerns observes every 2nd Sunday of November as Dalit Liberation Sunday. Dalit liberation Sunday is observed on the Sunday nearest to International human rights day commemorating the importance of Dalit rights as human rights. Dalit Liberation Sunday has become an important feature in our Church calendars and ecumenical movements.

The theme for Dalit Liberation Sunday 2024 is "Proclaiming the Good News: Setting the Captives free" *Luke 4:18* which speaks on Jesus Christ's mission during his early ministry on earth. Church as it reflects the values of Kingdom of God and the theme reminds us and reflects on the primary mission of God—**missio Dei**— to the local churches to proclaim the Good News to all, especially those who live on the margins of society. In this mission, we are reminded of God's heart for justice, liberation, and human dignity. This year, we focus on the freedom and restoration that the Gospel brings, particularly for the Dalit communities, who have historically experienced oppression, exclusion, and dehumanization.

To proclaim the Good News to the Dalits is not only to speak words of liberation but also to embody Christ's love through acts of justice, reconciliation, and solidarity. It challenges us to actively dismantle systems of discrimination, both within society and within the Church, and to participate in God's mission of building communities of equality, peace, and hope.

Therefore let us uphold the primary mission of the church to proclaim the Good News to our neighbours who are captivated by the multi-faced structural injustices in the society, in church and outside the church. May we be empowered by the Spirit to proclaim the Good News with courage and compassion, and may our worship inspire us to become agents of liberation, justice, and hope. Let us worship the God who sets the captives free and brings new life to all!

Rev. B. Asher Noah
Executive Secretary-Commission on Dalit Concerns
National Council of Churches in India

National Council of Churches in India
Dalit Liberation Sunday
10th November 2024
Worship Order

Theme
Proclaiming the Good News: Setting the Captives Free…*Luke 4:18*

PREPARATIONS:

Include any symbols of oppression and symbols of celebration of Dalit lives according to the context of the worship Place.

Ex; Parai as Instrument of Liberation in Tamil Nadu, Dappu in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Tamate in Karnataka, Chenda in Kerala.

ALTAR ARRANGEMENTS:

Church as the Altar: The Presbyter/Deacon to lead worship from among the people among the symbols of oppression and celebration which are part and parcel of Dalit Lives

PRELUDE:

Place the Portraits of those who have lost their lives for the liberation and the empowerment of Dalits in the worship place context

For Ex: Savithri Bhai Phule (Pioneer of Women Education), Immanuel Sekaran[1] (for the Dignity of Dalits), John Thomas[2] (For the Panchami Lands)

Invocation:

O God of Freedom!
We gather today to proclaim the Good News of your kingdom,
A kingdom where the chains of oppression are broken,
Where the poor discern the words of hope
Where the Dalits and oppressed are set free
We open our hearts to you and praying for courage to proclaim the good news of justice and freedom for all your children.

Call to worship
Leader: O come, let us all together in union with our fellow beings to worship God our Creator.
All: O Lord, we are here together overcoming our differences of caste to worship You our Creator

[1] https://www.thenewsminute.com/tamil-nadu/remembering-immanuel-sekaran-brave-dalit-leader-who-lost-his-life-savarna-brutality-49168
[2] https://dalithistorymonth.medium.com/understanding-the-history-of-the-panchami-land-struggle-b56f6b950c7c

Leader: O come; let us all keep our prejudices away to worship God who does not discriminate.

All: O Lord, we have come together to embrace everyone as they are, as you have demonstrated through the life and ministry Christ Jesus.

Leader: O come with joyful singing into God's courts, for God the Immanuel is with us.

All: O lord, we come to your presence for you are our Liberator and you have set us free.

Leader: O come and worship God with dancing, for God dwells among us.

All: O Lord, we come with dancing in your presence for you have delivered us from dominion.

OPENING PRAYER:
O Lord Our God, Creator of this universe, we gather here, this day, to worship you and celebrate you for your deliverance and liberation. We seek your presence as we worship and glorify you. Lord, open our hearts and minds to understand the beauty of your works. Lord, help us to seek your liberating words and to act for the freedom of all the creation. O Lord quench us with your Spirit, so that we may seek the truth and proclaim it. Inspire us day to day to overcome all tyranny and oppression, to gain strength from your word, Church and all who are with us. Be with us and lead us into thy reign of Love as we worship you. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn:

Title: O Church of God, United – Written by Fredrick B. Morley (1953)

1. O Church of God, united
to serve one common Lord,
proclaim to all one message,
with hearts in glad accord.
Christ ever goes before us;
we follow day by day
with strong and eager footsteps
along the upward way.

2. From every land and nation
Thy children like thee aspire;[3]
to serve one loving creator
they come from far and near.
They chant their one confession,
they praise one living Lord,
and place their sure dependence
upon his saving word.

[3]Words changed to the context for freedom from caste, following Christ, who we Christians aspire to become.

3. Though creeds and tongues may differ,
they speak, O Christ, of thee;
and in thy loving spirit,
we shall one people be.
Lord, may our faithful service
and singleness of aim
proclaim to all the power
of thy redeeming name.

4. May thy great prayer be answered
that we may all be one,
close bound, by love united
in thee, God's blessed Son:
to bring a single witness,
to make the pathway bright,
that souls which grope in darkness
may find the one true light.

RESPONSIVE READING

Leader**:** Sing to the LORD, Praise the LORD! For God has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers. *(Jer. 20:13)*

All: You liberate us, O Lord; we will sing praises unto your name

Leader: For freedom, Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. *(Gal. 5:1)*

All: You have set us free from bondage, O Lord; we will glorify your name

Leader: Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (*Isaiah 43: 18-19)*

All: You have prepared a way for us O Lord; we will exalt your name.

Leader: For our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. *(Ephesians 6:12)*

All: You strengthen us O Lord; we will proclaim your salvation.

Scripture reading:

Psalm 146
Ephesians 6:11-20
Luke 4:18-19

CONFESSION
Leader: confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective*. (James5:16)*
Therefore, let us confess our to each other sins.

(*Keep a moment of silence introspecting oneself*)

Leader: O God your word says, we are the temple and you dwell in us. We have wavered in our ways many times, consciously and unconsciously we have incited injustice over our fellow beings in the name of caste. We have driven you out of our family, lives, church and ministry by practising caste within ourselves. We have been futile in our calling to be a church of freedom and liberation; we have kept ourselves silent when casteism was disseminating our fellowship with our fellow beings. Lord, we confess our silence over caste and it's evil.

All: **God of All, forgive us all, for we have sinned against your love.**

Leader: O Lord**,** we confess that we have habitually failed to acknowledge your presence amongst us. We have failed to realize that loving you is loving our neighbours and being with them at time of atrocities. We have not stood in solidarity with our neighbours or shared our resources. Instead, we have used our power, authority and resources for our own selfish interests and have disregarded the pain and agony of our fellow human beings. We have been happy over our privileged lives than being empathetic over their sufferings.

All: God of All, forgive us of our self-centeredness.

Leader: We confess that we have not cared for those who are fighting against caste and we have washed our hands off when violence of religion and caste was unleashed. We confess that we have been complacent and chose to remain ignorant of things that are meted out on our brothers & sisters.

All: God of All, forgive us for choosing to be in comfort zones

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Leader: Our God is a merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, one who relents from doing harm*. (Jonah 4:2).* For those who yearn for God's mercy and truly confess with a contrite heart and repent, they find forgiveness. May God pardon us for things we have done knowingly and unknowingly, and grant us strength through Christ our saviour to carry forth God's love over caste amongst us. **Amen.**

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH
We believe in One God, the creator of the universe, who created human community to be united in surpassing all differences of caste, colour and creed, we believe that from age-to-age God has raised leaders for liberation, emancipation and blessed them with courage to proclaim the Good News to those people, who cry out in suffering, and that God has been the pillar of hope and strength to all those suffering.

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only offspring who was born of the Virgin Mary, and in God's divine and human nature by which God taught us that all are equal, and through God's words and deeds and did set before us an example to live and love everyone beyond differences. We believe in one baptism and descending of God's Spirit upon Jesus to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free. We affirm that he suffered, died and was buried for the liberation of those who are suffering due to oppression of casteism and its evil schemes and on the third day he rose again in fulfilment of the scriptures to set us all free. We affirm his ascension to heaven and await for his second coming and judgment. We affirm that Christ is with us who have been denied of basic human rights and dignity by the evil practise of caste.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, who is with us now to empower and urge always, for the welfare of all, who guides us and help us in doing God's will, who strengthens us in our weakness, grants peace in turmoil and courage to all people in distress.

We believe in the community of believers and believe that God called the Church into being in that community, who practices respect and equality, who breaks the walls which divide the human community based on caste. We believe that this called-out community of God pledges to strive and be in solidarity for justice and peace of Dalits. Amen

INTERCESSION

Leader: I drank water for my thirst in a village and ended up in hospital, for I was abused for my caste with the mixing of human feces in the water tank, I was denied justice when I raised my voice for finding the one who polluted the water.[4]

Response: Maranatha[5], let our cry come unto you**.**

I'm a minor Dalit girl, who was ill-treated and was ripped off my right over my body by those in power. Whose pleas for justice were ignored by the police and those in authority for the love of caste and pride and money.[6].

Response: Maranatha, let our cry come unto you**.**

Leader: I am an elderly Dalit man who was beaten for seeking shelter during a rainstorm. I was disrespected and disregarded in spite of being old and weary, I was beaten blue and black for taking shelter in a storm. The storm would have been merciful over me than these humans who quenched the caste pride by beating me.[7]

Response: Maranatha, let our cry come unto you**.**

[4] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/trichy/feces-in-water-four-member-panel-to-visit-vengaivayal/articleshow/96898621.cms

[5] Maranatha, An Arabic word means.. O Lord, Come

[6] https://article-14.com/post/a-dalit-minor-was-gang-raped-twice-up-police-ignored-the-first-time--647d4581610d1

[7] https://english.varthabharati.in/karavali/dalit-elder-assaulted-in-kokkada-case-filed

I am a Dalit youth who was violently assaulted by a group of caste men, for I dressed well and posted a picture on social media. The picture, which featured me wearing a traditional headgear and sunglasses made them intolerant to incite as they could not tolerate me being well dressed.[8]

Response: Marantha, let our cry come unto you**.**

I am a six-year-old Dalit child, a class one student, who was forced to clean the school toilet by my teachers and later locked in the school classroom after hours. For I was menial in their sight and inconsiderately dealt student in the school.[9]

Response: Maranatha, let our cry come unto you**.**

We are students who faced caste slurs which included "Chamar Quit India," "Dalit Quit India," and "Reservation Quit India," as we fared well in our education. We are students who are called rice bags for our conversion.

Response: Marantha, let our cry come unto you**.**

Leader: We pray for all those who are petitioning for the rights of us Dalits through Policy making, supporting our apprehensions and being in solidarity with us. God, help us to find courage to stand with those who advocate for what is true and just. Grant us wisdom so that we will discern the needs of your people and lend helping hand to them.

Response: Marantha, let our cry come unto you**.**

Closing Hymn

The world stands in need of liberation, my Lord,
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpqDPWBRUis)

Chorus: The world stands in need of liberation, my Lord,
It still has to feel your power.
The rude and the proud the wicked and vice[10]
All need to feel your healing touch
The world stands in need of liberation, my Lord,
It still has to learn to love.

1. There are those who have eyes but refuse to see
The inhumanity that's done
There are those who have ears but refuse to hear
The cries of those in agony.

2. There are those who have mouths but refuse to speak
Against injustice done to some.
There are those who have hands but refuse to reach

[8] https://m.thewire.in/article/rights/dalit-youth-assaulted-in-gujarat-for-uploading-picture-on-instagram-wearing-safa-and-sunglass
[9] https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/dalit-boy-6-forced-to-clean-toilet-in-up-school-later-found-locked-in-classroom-6284312
[10] Words changed to the context of Liberation from the original.

Them out in love and charity.

3. There are those who have talents they do not use
To build a true community;
And we know that we all have the talent to love
But leave it buried in ourselves.

Lord's Prayer *(Modified version of the Lord's Prayer)*

All: Our creator God, who is with us, for us, Holy be Your creations, may your reign come, your will be done amongst us and in us and through us. Give us our daily sustenance. Forgive us our Sins as we forgive those who incite violence, injustice and cruelty upon us. Lead us not into humiliation and subjugation, and helplessness. Deliver us from injustice, exploitation and discrimination for yours is the power to liberate everyone who longs for your liberation forever and ever. Amen.

LITANY OF FREEDOM

Leader:
We proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ:
The oppressed will be set free, and the chains of injustice will be broken.

Response:
Thanks be to God! We proclaim the Good News of freedom.

Leader:
We proclaim the Good News that no human being is less than another,
That in Christ, all are equal, loved, and precious.

Response:
Thanks be to God! We proclaim the Good News of equality.

Leader:
We proclaim the Good News of justice:
That the caste system will fall,
That discrimination will end,
And that the Dalits will walk in dignity and freedom.

Response:
Thanks be to God! We proclaim the Good News of justice.

Leader:
We proclaim the Good News that God hears the cry of the oppressed,
And that God's kingdom is breaking forth, bringing hope and restoration.

Response:
Thanks be to God! We proclaim the Good News of liberation

Let us COMMIT ourselves:

We are called to speak out against the systems that perpetuate oppression
To challenge the caste system, and to demand dignity for all
In the name of the God who set the captives free
We commit ourselves to this sacred task

RESPONSE:

We commit ourselves to justice
We commit ourselves to freedom,
We commit ourselves to proclaiming the Good News and setting the Dalits free

Closing Prayer
O God, who sent Jesus Christ to liberate us, helps us to be planted in you so that we will ever seek your ways and do your will. O Lord Christ our redeemer let Justice run down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream as we pledge to proclaim your freedom. O Holy Spirit, our sustainer and guide, may your Spirit disturb us until your creation is freed of differences of caste and creed in family, church and society.

Strengthen us, so that we will be co-workers in establishing your love in us and amongst us. God of All, join our hearts, so that in union we may fulfill your word, enrich us with your love and courage. Lead us in the way of justice and peace. All these we ask in the name of the liberator Jesus Christ. Amen.

Benediction: (A modified blessing of St. Teresa of Avila Prayer.)

May we be Christ's Body as "Christ has no body now but yours. May our actions reach out to the suffering and oppressed as Christ has No hands, no feet on earth but yours. May we seek the world through the compassion that Christ taught us. May we tread to the path of liberation as ours are the way with which Christ leads us to do good. May we join together in Solidarity as ours are the lives through which Christ blesses all the world, together we are the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit lives among us on earth, we the church as the embodiment of the triune God, let's Proclaim the good news, and set the captive free. **Amen.**

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