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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

Jawahar Lal Nehru ushered in India's Independence at the stroke of midnight, heralding a new dawn for a nation free not just of colonialism and its vestiges, but free also from all that was not bright in its feudal past. We celebrate the 74th Independence Day on August 15th, 2020 struggling from one of civilisation's most recent trial, with a dawn still not in sight. COVID-19 has generated a stillness and a silence unheard of in the past, impacting every facet of life, from health, to education of children, unemployment and a near-suspension of civil liberties and justice. Celebrations will be muted, the happiness subdued.

Formal ceremonies, by the Prime Minister in New Delhi and Governors and Chief Ministers in

the states, will lack grandeur. School children, who always have been the centre of attraction during the function, would be absent; social distancing norms would be in force and the number of guests limited. The theme will possibly be of honouring the "Corona Warriors". It is apt to honour our doctors, health workers and sanitation workers as they are on the forefront of battling the epidemic.

Independence Day could be a good time to make a firm resolve to come out of the COVID-19 crisis as a stronger, more harmonious nation. The pandemic may have given us an opportunity to reflect on what other issues ail the nation.

When India became an independent

nation in 1947 and decided to go the way of a democracy, it was looked upon as an almost impossible task. But democracy survived in India despite many odds: communal violence during the nation's birth and afterwards, cultural and linguistic diversity, armed rebellions, the impulse to become a theocracy etc.

We were able to secure a vote for each of our citizens and the Indian elections are still a wonder for many. Diversity in culture, language and religion, instead of becoming stumbling blocks, became the strength of the nation as Unity in Diversity became a guiding mantra and constitutional values were actively promoted.

However, it has all come under attack from various sources through the years. And today, the mirror paints a picture that is not very pretty.

As religious nationalism advanced especially in the 1980s, majoritarianism grew and religious minorities have been targeted regularly. The ideology of Hindutva, seeds of which were sown just about hundred years ago, has seeped in deep in the nation and a de facto Hindu Rashtra, the stated goal of the

ideologues of Hindutva, is being formed. It is not a de jure reality but may be one day if the constitution is amended, say observers.

The nation has seen in the past and in recent years, a steady dismantling of the legislature, judiciary, executive and the media as politics has interfered with each, although a glimmer of hope remains when there are exceptions.

India is grappling with problems of pollution, social problems such as casteism, gender violence, trafficking and the current pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of our economy which has been ailing from far more than COVID-19. According to the International Monetary Fund, India will be worst hit by the pandemic and that our GDP will contract by 4.5%. India's economy has not contracted since 1979. Unfortunately, it is the poor and the vulnerable who pay the highest cost as was painfully visible during the migrant crisis caused by the pandemic in which many lives were lost and uprooted.

Amid all of this, the current Government has made rather ambitious plans. A vision document has been prepared by the NITI

Aayog and the Ministry of Rural Development, with a target of making India poverty-free and corruption-free by 2022, the 75th anniversary of India's independence. The document states that India has succeeded in finding a solution to the problem of poverty and that everyone will have a home by 2022.

We will pray that the government is successful in bringing these plans to reality and would be more than willing to cooperate in this endeavour. But for this vision to be

achieved, it is imperative that the government and the people of India must take cognizance of all the factors that are plaguing the nation and dragging it down and make a comprehensive strategy to address those issues too. Growing religious nationalism, the dismantling of institutions, social harmony, social evils and environment are issues that are essentially related to the realization of this vision document.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal





An Indian Christian Approach to Religious Freedom

Rev. Dr. Vinay Samuel

Introduction:- Religious Freedom continues to be much at risk in most parts of the world. Even in a country like the United States of America, founded on providing freedom of religion to groups persecute for their faith, conservative christian groups complain today that their religious freedoms are threatened and even undermined. In countries where a religious majority controls and directs state policy, minority religions face increasing persecution. Interestingly, it is in such contexts where majoritarian religious nationalism rules a nation that we see the minority Christian faith not just surviving but growing.

Religious freedom is a complex and much contested subject. What is the basis for asserting that all religions are equal and must be treated as equal? If a particular religion

believes that some races are inferior and can be made into slaves, should such beliefs be accepted as particular to that group and harmless? This paper will identify the challenges that the Indian context of religious plurality, of a constitution that identifies itself as secular, of an assertive majoritarian religion and a growing Christian Church, of a legacy of religious communal conflicts and a nation making global leadership claims makes to the understanding and practice of religious freedom. We will also briefly examine the church's own attitudes to freedom for beliefs different from its own in history. Our focus will be on the biblical themes that provide a theological basis for a Christian understanding of religious freedom in a changed world of resurgent religious identities.

A. Challenges to Christians about Religious Freedom today

I wish to focus on the challenges Christian face in India today in the area of Religious Freedom as they practice their faith and share it with others.

1. In Articles 25 to 28, the Constitution of India deals with subject of Freedom of Religion. The Articles provide freedom of conscience to profess, practice and propagate your religion, freedom to manage the affairs of your religion and its institutions, freedom from taxation of religious income and freedom to provide religious instructions in its own institutions. These provisions were never hotly contested in the constituent assembly. While they use the language that originated in Western democracies the framers of our Constitution also drew on some ancient traditions of religious freedom in India. Emperor Asoka's inscription of the 3rd century before Christ is rightly famous as one of the earliest declarations of Religious Freedom when it states categorically, "one must render to other creeds the honour befitting them". Some Islamic rulers destroyed temples, but others did not interfere with them and some even supported Hindu temples. The Sikh kingdom officially built

Gurudwaras, Temples and mosques. So, the Indian constitution's Articles on Religious Freedom were planted in a soil prepared for centuries even before the Christian era. It is not a modern western imposition on India unlike China that often calls Religious Freedom a western concept when confronted with its abuse of religious freedom.

Since Independence, several states have enacted, "Freedom of Religion" bills that have in fact tried to limit the propagation of faith, particularly Christianity. Their main focus has been to prevent conversions from one faith to another. Such bills have become weapons in the hands of anti Christian forces to justify a great deal of persecution of Christian mission and service activities and churches.

1. At the local level, Indian Christian faces the following challenges in relation to Freedom of Religion.

a. The hostility of increasing number of Hindus to Christian evangelistic activity. There is hostility to Christian claims of being the only true religion, of salvation in the Christian God Jesus alone and other claims to uniqueness. There is much greater hostility to Christians

inviting Hindus and people of other faiths to 'convert' to faith in Christ and by implication leave their present faith. It is seen as an invitation to change their religious identity.

The challenge to Christians in India today is whether we can make a convincing case for the claims we make in propagating our faith without those claims being considered "hate speech" explicitly ruled out by our constitution, without our propagation being considered an attack on the religious identity of people from other faiths. Interestingly, even in a country like the United Kingdom, the courts are likely to rule that statements of some Christian evangelists can be considered hate speech.

In addition, any hint that Christian sharing of its faith invites people of other faiths to leave their faith and "convert" to Christianity is seen as an egregious assault on the other faith. What arguments can Christians present to encourage religious choice that does not imply that we are doing a favour by helping people to leave false religions to accept the only true faith?

b. Christian advocacy of religious freedom is sometimes seen as self-serving. It is seen not as religious

freedom for all faiths but for Christians in order to be free to practice, profess, proselytise and convert people from other faiths. There are very few Christian churches and organizations that advocate for the religious freedom of Muslims who now face as much hostility and persecution as Christians if not more. Should the Christian church in India be seen as an advocate and activist for religious freedom and protection for all religions particularly, the embattled Indian Muslims? This will mean that we may offend our western Christian supporters where their support appears to be still essential for us. I am very encouraged to see a change among some evangelicals in the west, who believe that we show both grace and truth in our relationship with people of other faiths. Grace means we see their total welfare including their freedom to practice their faith. Truth demands that we speak the truth to them as we understand it even if it may be seen as offensive.

c. There are other challenges like collaboration with people of other faiths in humanitarian projects, in activities of social change and in political action. There is the area of identifying common grounds between religions as the basis of joint action. There is also the critical

area of how we understand and approach majoritarian Hindu rationalism when we have for centuries not challenged the description of countries like the United States or Great Britain as Christian Nations and in fact rejoiced in the knowledge of the existence of these powerful Christian nations. Should there be a special recognition of one religion in the Indian Constitution? I can add some more areas that need thoughtful consideration and study but our space is limited.

B. I will now briefly consider the Biblical Themes that can provide a basis for a Christian understanding of Religious Freedom.

1. It is the Roman Catholic Church that has done far the most significant work on the Christian basis for Religious Freedom. The Declaration on Religious Freedom called *Dignitatis Humanae* was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965. Drawing on earlier teachings of the Catholic Church, it provided a template for Christians on how to understand and practice Religious Freedom. As 'Freedom' became the most important theme in the world following World War II, the church identified Religious Freedom as the First Freedom from a Christian point

of view and all other freedoms as derivative of this first freedom. For Christians, interested in Religious Freedom, I think one of the first things to do is to read *Dignitatis Humanae* and use it as a guide for biblical and theological exploration. It is also right to concede here that the actual practice of the church through history is not praise worthy for much of the time. 65 years ago, in my teens, I heard many stories of persecutions of protestant missions and churches in South (Latin) America by the Catholic Church using State apparatuses. The justification was the teaching of the Catholic church at that time that 'error' must be destroyed in society and the Church must insist the State banishes all the church considers as 'error'. Evangelical Christianity was obviously seen as a dangerous "error". Times have changed but vestiges may remain. It is possible that some evangelicals also have expressed similar views. So, the churches' record on Religious Freedom is mixed. The United States was founded on providing religious freedom to different Christian groups but continued its practice of slavery and granted no freedom to African people it enslaved.

2. Biblical Themes

a. Paul's teaching concerning

Christian attitude to the State as summarized in Romans 13 recognises and separates two spheres of authority God and the State. Peter's statement in Acts that we must obey God rather than men underscores where our priorities lie. Paul is clear that the state has its distinct role that must be respected. It can make laws for all people in the State it governs and that includes Christians. The laws of the State must be obeyed. But Christians are also a Colony of Heaven for Paul while being citizens of earthly States. They are subject to two different authorities in two spheres and the Bible gives us principles on how to negotiate our lives between them. The State has to accept the independence of the churches and by extension of all religions, their beliefs and practices and should not dictate to them. It can only engage and regulate if religions practices and beliefs go against the common good. The Church must work with the State in defining the Common Good that must be promoted by both the State and the Religions in it.

b. The second biblical theme that is significant for Religious Freedom is the appeal to Conscience. Article 25 rightly highlights the Freedom of Conscience. Paul use of conscience is significant in his letters. He imports the concept from the Greek

thinking of the time. The Stoics made a great deal of conscience as the foundation for human morality. There is also a Jewish background to the idea of conscience but my sense is Paul is drawing on the prevailing sense of that time.

The Stoics taught that one may use reason to shape and justify their faith but must act according to one's conscience. For Paul conscience is the internal faculty that evaluates right from wrong and directs moral action. Conscience is used 30 times in the New Testament and half of its usage is in Paul. It is the ability to make moral judgements (Rom 2:14-16), Paul appeals to his conscience and claims it is clear (1Cor 4:4). In 2 Cor, 5:11) and 4:2, we note an appeal to the conscience of the whole community. In Romans, Paul speaks of God's law written in human hearts and conscience as the witness to that (2:15). Paul links his conscience to the Holy Spirit (9:1).

A Christian understanding of conscience can contribute richly to any discourse on the nature of Religious Freedom in our country

c. The third theme is Love for the Neighbours that the Bible enjoins. The parable of the Good Samaritan shows how Jesus interprets this command to love one's neighbour by

focusing on the identity of the neighbour. The outsider Samaritan with a faith despised by the Jews proud of their status as God's chosen people becomes the good neighbour. The caricatured Samaritan is presented as a figure of respect, and honour and emulation. Again, the Christian understanding of neighbour is unique and a necessary part of structuring religious freedom.

d. The fourth Biblical theme should have pre-eminence in our development of a theology of Religious Freedom. It is the theme from God's creation of Humans as made in God's Image. A Christian view of human personhood is drawn from this biblical truth. The Christian God is revealed to us as personal and our own nature as personal, as beings that are creatures, created by God but also connected with the divinity of God himself. In our redemption, the Bible teaches we take part in Jesus' divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). This capacity for receiving God's own nature is part of every human person made in God's image and so sacred and worthy of Honour and protection.

Biblical anthropology must help us to understand the personhood of human beings that must be affirmed,

accorded the dignity God has endowed it with and protected against all forces that degrade and seek to destroy it. Human agency, human capabilities, human choices, human rights are all predicated on the biblical understanding of human personhood. Nothing else comes close to providing any basis for Religious freedom and human dignity.

e. The fifth theme is heresy and dissent in the Bible. How should we handle religious disagreements as biblical people? The New Testament, particularly Paul has much to teach us. Obviously, most of the material has to do with theological disagreements within the Christian faith. But there are principles here that will help us in our dealing with faith differences with other religions.

How should we address what we consider as religious falsehood, religious error, even false religion? Should we fight it, attempt to eradicate it, ignore it or co-exist with it? In its history, the church has attempted all the above.

At this time in our country, we must develop our own approaches. We recognise the Bible teaches us to test all spirits, identify false prophets and expose error (2 Pet 2:1-22). Paul

even curses the heretic (Gal 1;8-9) But Jesus also taught that tares will grow alongside wheat and we must wait for the judgement day to deal with them. The final judgement is God's.

Jesus accepts a plurality and a coexistence of difference that encourages me to see that living in plural religious contexts is not unchristian. Only the final judgement will reveal and separate the wheat from the tares. I think there is a Christian approach to religious pluralism that is not dominated by prayer for and actions to defeat and eradicate other religions and reign supreme in a country. It is one of drawing on the biblical teaching of Common Humanity and the Common Good.

I have taken for more space than I intended to so I shall stop here. I am preparing a much longer study for a journal and will gladly share it with any who wish to have it.

Meanwhile, it is clear to me that one of the most important acts of advocacy Christians must engage in today in our country is advocacy for Religious Freedom. We must draw on our biblical truths to shape Religious Freedom in India.



Rev. Dr. Vinay Samuel

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And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

- John 8:32

EXALT YOUR COUNTRY

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy



Can Ethiopians change their skin or leopards their spots? (Jer.13:23, NRSV)

The rest of that verse reads, “Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.”

When travelling internationally, I am ashamed to be identified as an Indian. Here are my reasons. While waiting for our flight to be announced, an earlier flight is announcing its “last boarding call” asking Ms. Rukmani Das, Mrs Rani Chatterjee, Mr. Raj Chatterjee and Mr. Deepak Rajsekar to get to the gate immediately as the flight is ready to leave. The “last boarding call” is made several times. After about ten minutes of this, four persons are seen rushing to the gate, loaded with shopping bags of stuff they've bought at the duty-free shops. And this is typical. If it is a

flight to Delhi or any Indian airport there will definitely be such last calls, and 9 times out of 10, the missing people are Indians.

After our flight has been boarded, and we've settled in our seats, there are announcements about switching off mobile phones, laptops and similar electronic devices that would interfere with the aircraft's systems. Close by is a smart young Indian guy with a fancy mobile phone who ignores the announcement and continues to talk to his contact. The flight attendant approaches him and asks him to please switch off the phone. He nods and indicates that he is doing it, but when the attendant moves on, continues to talk. The attendant returns to repeat her request. This time, he raises his palm and indicates that he will do it in a minute. The air hostess hasn't moved

on, and repeats her request. This time there is an edge to her voice. Finally, 7 minutes after the announcement was made the man switches off his phone. This too is typical. In the movie *Love Aaj Kal*, actress Deepika Padukone is shown talking on her mobile phone, and the flight attendant having to repeatedly request her to switch off her phone. The producer of the movie probably wasn't showing that to correct any behaviour but to suggest the intensity of character's relationship with her boyfriend whom she is talking to. Still, the producer did capture an Indian trait. On any flight headed toward India, there are always some Indians who will behave in this manner.

The head attendant makes the announcement that our flight is approaching Delhi. She also adds that everyone is to remain seated until the seat belt sign is switched off. But the moment the announcement is over, two or three men have sprung up from their seats to open the overhead storage bins and retrieve their hand baggage. The attendant makes a strident announcement that everyone is to not open the storage bins and to immediately return to their seats. In one case, a flight attendant had to go up to the person and insist on immediate compliance.

Some may sheepishly grin and make light of it: "We are like that only." But I cannot take this lightly. I say that at the least, this kind of behaviour is inconsiderate, and at the worst it is dangerous—for others.

Admittedly, there are other people of other nationalities too that behave this way. Maybe, I have a tendency to notice Indians misbehaving more than others. Also, on any India-bound flight from anywhere in the world, the majority would be Indians and therefore the predominance of Indian misbehaviour.

Why?

In my view, the reason Indians behave this way is that we are a nation in "civil disobedience mode". India won its independence through Gandhi's non-cooperation movement against the British. It was passive resistance. He called it *satyagraha*. The term literally means "truth force."

The principles of *satyagraha* are:

Sat—openness, honesty, and fairness: Truth.

Ahimsa —refusal to inflict injury on others.

Tapasya —willingness for self-sacrifice.

Gandhi's ideas on civil disobedience were not original, though his attempts gained him more

prominence than the original propagator. In 1849, Henry David Thoreau wrote an essay to explain his reasons for refusing to pay a poll tax that the American government had imposed on citizens in order to finance a war against Mexico and to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law.

Martin Luther King picked up Gandhi's example when he led the revolt against laws that kept blacks oppressed and suppressed in the US of A. Later on, blacks in South Africa along with whites who had a sense of justice resorted to civil disobedience methods to overthrow apartheid. American students stopped the Vietnam War with their non-cooperative sit-ins.

What we need to understand is that civil disobedience involves a conscientious objection to a law. Civil disobedience announces its intention to disobey, and accepts that, as long as the law remains unchanged, such disobedience merits punishment.

As “descendants” of freedom fighters our people are in civil disobedience mode. But it's just a mode. They are just being modish, that is, fashionable.

Our notions of freedom are that we are free from rules. Most Indians have the attitude that rules are not for

them, but they believe that it is for everyone else.

The Bible Says

The Christian's Bible has another take on the law. The Bible says that the law in summary is aiming at everyone loving their fellow humans. What the law does is to prevent any one person exceeding the limits of liberty and intruding in someone else's space. It prevents us from treading on another's toes.

This notion comes from the Lord Jesus who described Himself as having come, not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). Jesus said that all God's law could be “hung” on just two: love God and love neighbour (Matt. 22:40).

Paul followed with an elaboration of this idea, when he wrote that the entire law is summed up in one commandment—to love one's neighbour as oneself (Rom. 13:1-7).

The Bible is clear:

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people (Pro. 14:34).

How shameful it is when, year after year, we read that according to Transparency International, the global civil society organisation leading the fight against corruption, India is way at the bottom of the list.

We are ranked among the most corrupt of the world. Come, let us break the mould. Let us not be “like that only.” Let us show that there is another kind of Indian—the kind that is a pleasure to live with and work with, because we are followers of Jesus, who said, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's (Matt. 22:21).

We have a call to be the most law-abiding people in the country. Peter wrote:

For the Lord's sake, respect all human authority... It is God's will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. For you are free, yet you are God's slaves, so don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. Respect everyone, and love your Christian brothers and sisters. Fear God, and respect the king (1 Pet. 2:13- 17. NLT).

To get the thrust of what Peter said, understand that we are to

- Do good.
- Live free.
- Live as God's servants

Peter spelt out that living as God's

servants involved

- Showing proper respect for authority
- Loving God's faithful ones
- Fearing God
- Honouring those in authority

Between AD 125-200, an unknown Christian wrote to a government official named Diognetus, wrote as follows to explain the distinctiveness of Christians:

Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs.

They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life. This doctrine of theirs has not been discovered by the ingenuity or deep thought of inquisitive men, nor do they put forward a merely human teaching, as some people do. Yet, although they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their own commonwealth. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens, and endure everything as

foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land.

They marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. They share their board with each other, but not their marriage bed. It is true that they are "in the flesh," but they do not live "according to the flesh." They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require. They love all men, and by all men are persecuted. They are unknown, and still they are condemned; they are put to death, and yet they are brought to life. They are poor, and yet they make many rich; they are completely destitute, and yet they enjoy complete abundance. They are dishonored, and in their very dishonor are glorified; they are defamed, and are vindicated. They are reviled, and yet they bless; when they are affronted, they still pay due respect. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; undergoing punishment, they rejoice because they are brought to life. They are treated by the Jews as foreigners and enemies, and are hunted down by the Greeks; and all the time those who hate them find it impossible to justify their enmity. To put it simply: What the

soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but does not belong to the body, and Christians dwell in the world, but do not belong to the world. The soul, which is invisible, is kept under guard in the visible body; in the same way, Christians are recognised when they are in the world...The flesh hates the soul and treats it as an enemy, even though it has suffered no wrong, because it is prevented from enjoying its pleasures; so too the world hates Christians, even though it suffers no wrong at their hands, because they range themselves against its pleasures. The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and its members; in the same way, Christians love those who hate them. The soul is shut up in the body, and yet itself holds the body together; while Christians are restrained in the world as in a prison, and yet themselves hold the world together. The soul, which is immortal, is housed in a mortal dwelling; while Christians are settled among corruptible things, to wait for the incorruptibility that will be theirs in heaven. The soul, when faring badly as to food and drink, grows better; so too Christians, when punished, day by day increase more and more. It is

to no less a post than this that God has ordered them, and they must not try to evade it.

While we may not agree entirely with the theology regarding the relationship between the soul and the body, we can understand from the context, that the author wrote to show that Christians were the breath of fresh air that comes to revive a nation. Our Lord said they serve as salt that preserves and flavours our food (Matt. 5:12), and light that shows the way to those on the inside, but are not hidden from those on the outside, for they are the city set on a hill—the hill of Calvary (5:13-16). No doubt, Calvary is a very small hill, but from the point of view of

human history, there is no higher peak than Calvary. That is why everyone expects more from Christians, and when Christians disappoint them, it is the light in our world that is dimmed.



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*“Live as people who are free,
not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil,
but living as servants of God.
Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood.
Fear God. Honor the emperor.”
1 Peter 2:16-17*



NO WEDDINGS, BUT A FUNERAL

Dr. John Dayal

I lost my eldest surviving sister in law in July, to cancer. Amni Soshamma Thekkeveetil, the 83-year-old widow of the late Kadavil Thomas of Thiruvalla, was the second of six sisters and two brothers, was 83. The eldest brother and sister passed away some years ago. My wife is the second last sibling. Amni's siblings and children are in several states in India, and several countries across the globe.

Covid made her last days so lonely, in ICU in a Kerala hospital and at home, as they shuttled her several times between the two in the last few weeks. None of us will be able to be at her funeral. Not even a sister trapped in the forest district of Wayanad. Her local block is quarantined. The emotional stress of Covid, the

need to internalize deep grief, the cold holding of hands on Internet, gives no solace. Many try to adopt a clinical 'normal' conversational tone in speaking to the bereaved family to keep emotions from bursting. No one knows how to cry or sob on the mobile phone, not even on Face time or WhatsApp. Human emotions, sensitivities, grief are very private though culture, sometimes, as in some northern states, has institutionalised very public grief, including breast-beating, to formalise closure. We do not know if this is the best thing to do. Once upon a time, there were professional mourners to do the job. Even in London, as Charles Dickens reminds often in his novels.

In recent years, since the invention

of low cost small drones that carry small video cameras, the skills of the photography of the big fat Indian wedding and some of its expenses were transferred effortlessly to the filming of funerals, specially Christian funerals in southern states such as Kerala, where they quickly became a status symbol in a very morbid way. Most of us would have, hidden somewhere in a cabinet, a video or CD, or thumb drive of the last journey of a long gone loved one, or one a trifle removed.

But the funereal embarrassment of years past has become a much desired connect with the can in a moment of deep loss, made the worse for the ban on travel, and the lockdown of villages, towns and metropolitan cities. Distance does make the heart yearn stronger. In by case, the funeral next morning in the elaborate Suriyani liturgy, was telecast most professionally over YouTube by the local expert. It cost money, but the extended family in far flung parts of the world could be present. It was a sombre experience, nut barring the Eucharist, one could participate in the prayer, and hope with the children of meeting the loved one once again at the Resurrection. Not everyone is so lucky as the

family of Amni. Covid has gone deep into the psyche, evoking very primitive fears. There are all too many reports from too many places and encompassing all religions and ideologies to show that not just neighbours, but even the children of the deceased and children, refused to participate in the funeral, which was ultimately left to the police or municipal officials. It was a hark back to the Dark Ages, the time of the Great Plague in Europe, or the man-made war time famine in east India, a few years before independence. The victims – if one can call a dead person a continuing victim – were not just poor, or ignorant. A well-known doctor who died of Covid was all but refused a Christian burial. In New Delhi, priests could not be found for another body.

Every human being is guaranteed dignity in life. This dignity extends to the body after death. A decent burial or cremation, depending on the religion, wishes of survivors or circumstances in the situation, is a birth right, so to say.

Civil society was aghast at such reports. Medical doctors, scientists, writers got together to remind people of their humanity, and the need to show it at such a critical time. An

Open Letter and Appeal signed by many, including this writer, said “in the midst of the pandemic, we are witness to the immense silent tragedy of loved ones not being able to say goodbye to those they have lost. For families battling infection and death of loved ones, this is one kind of suffering which is unnecessary, which should not have to further burden bereaved families. The ability to give a dignified farewell to our loved ones is often the starting point in coming to terms with uncountable loss. The process of grieving begins with this important ritualized moment.”

“As we progress through the pandemic, science and scientific understanding will often ask us to do difficult things such as practice physical distancing and wear masks. But a proper and complete understanding of the disease and dynamics is needed along with a strong public campaign to improve our understanding of the disease. In these challenging times, science must guide us in negotiating the difficult boundary between public and individual safety,

misapprehension and stigma. There is no scientific reason whatsoever for the suffering of families and friends who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 to be aggravated by not being able to bid a dignified and loving farewell to the departed.” Signatories included Rajmohan Gandhi, Nayantara Sahgal, Romila Thapar, Sharmila Tagore, Mathew Varghese, Githa Hariharan, Dinesh Mohan, Harsh Mander and Appoorvanad. I also signed the letter.

Covid has reminded us of our mortality. It has also challenged our humanity. While each one's time is appointed, our humanity is within our power to cherish, and to express.



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Climate Change & COVID19: Honoring God's Creation

Rev. Samuel Richmond Saxena

In different eras, world has witnessed diverse views from scientists, theologians, philosophers regarding' the origin of the universe,"the beginning of life on earth,"human origins,' etc. and the supporters of these views attempt to influence others with their theories, beliefs, and philosophies. But for Christians, the writer of the book of Genesis has systematically recorded the sequence of creation at the very beginning of the scripture. Through this we conclude that God is the Creator and Universe has a purpose. Based on this, many Christian scientists and scholars consider the universe as God's handiwork. The two books: The Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature according to these scholars cannot conflict with each other as the author [God] is the

same. Nowadays, there are also several scientists who get influenced by Carl Sagan's (famous scientists and Nobel laureate) view that 'the Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be'.i.e. universe has neither beginning nor end. In such a case, they tend to lose the teleological view of nature. On the other hand, not all Christian believers have a genuine concern for God's creation. Interestingly, it took time for evangelicals to include 'creation care' and 'climate change' in their agenda which was already emphasized by the ecumenical thinkers in the past. Today, the whole world is witnessing the groaning of creation because of the technological advancements, scientific materialism, and the craving of becoming a superpower

nation. Pollution, deforestation, climate change, global warming, the outbreak of deadly viruses (like COVID19) has put humanity under threat. Under these circumstances, we grapple with several questions: 'Who is to be blamed?' 'How long the planet will suffer?' 'How this damage will be repaired?' In such uncertainties, Christians have a strong role to play in preserving and protecting the environment.

COVID19 and Climate Change: Sad State

Climate Change and COVID19 are complex issues that need to be handled intelligently and spiritually. Certainly, we have not yet concluded that the ongoing pandemic is the outcome of Climate Change but its consequence on Coronavirus cannot be ignored. The link between the two, needs careful research and to be addressed seriously by the government, policymakers, environmentalists, Church, and the scientific community. Unfortunately, there have been some incidences in the past that several governments restricted themselves in providing real data related to Climate Change and COVID19. Scott A. Bonar, President of American Fisheries Society in his recent article on 'Coronavirus, Climate Change, and a Bit of Hope'

exposed that US governors and other agencies prevented their employees from using the words "climate change" in government reports, or scrubbed websites or communicate of climate change science information. Similarly, medical professionals were initially silenced in China during the early days of the coronavirus pandemic. COVID19 has brought tremendous health crises, panic, depression, anxiety, pain, and suffering to entire humanity.

Scientists are still struggling to understand the seasonality and dynamics of COVID19. Some research has shown that the variation in humidity and temperature affects the spread of COVID19 disease i.e. the rise in temperature may create less suitable conditions for its spread. Recently, 241 scientists have written to WHO, asking it to accept that COVID19 also spreads through the air at a short and medium distance. Air pollution is considered to be one of the major causes of climate change. Fossil fuel, power plants, industry, agriculture, mobile sources (cars and other vehicles), wildfires, and natural processes occurring in various ecosystems are the major emitters of air pollution. Many people in the past developed chronic respiratory diseases due to the severe rise in air pollution.

Worldwide, about 3.3 million people die prematurely from outdoor air pollution each year, and an additional about 3.8 million due to household pollution, mostly in developing countries where cooking with open fires is common practice. Karin and Felix in their research place strong evidence that people exposed to severe air pollution are more susceptible to infection with the present COVID 19 virus pandemic. In some cases, the severity of the outbreaks may have been linked directly to air pollution in conjunction with a high population density. Other risk factors may comprise overweight/obesity, chronic cough, lung diseases such as COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Researchers at the Harvard University T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that people who have been affected by higher levels of the tiny, dangerous particles in the air in the range of Particulate Matter 2.5 were more prone to this deadly disease. If we had controlled the climate change in the past, then the number of deaths due to COVID 19 would have been reduced. Due to Climate Change, many deadly viruses multiply rapidly when they enter human bodies. In 2005, the WHO stated that over 150,000

people die annually due to climate warming and precipitation trends. Again in 2020 WHO estimates that 2,50,000 per year will die after 2030 due to a subset of effects of human-caused climate change.

Climate during COVID19: A Blessing in Disguise?

According to Matt McGrath, 'We're living through the biggest carbon crash ever recorded. No war, no recession, no previous pandemic has had such a dramatic impact on emissions of CO2 over the past century as Covid-19 has in a few short months.' As per the Global Energy Review 2020 report, countries experiencing full lockdown had an average of 25% decline in energy demand per week and countries in partial lockdown an average of 18% decline. The research was conducted among 30 countries until 14 April to get the right data. Global CO2 emissions are expected to decline by 8%. Interestingly, due to COVID19, the environment has witnessed clear skies in the world's most polluted cities: Los Angeles, New Delhi, Mumbai, Wuhan, etc. A few months back, people of Delhi were gasping for breathing but because of the pandemic, people are now enjoying clear blue sky with fresh air. I hope, we must have learned a good lesson

about the urgent need for a clean environment. Fresh air boosts the immunity system against such a deadly virus. Joanna Slater in The Washington Post commented that in other parts of India, the Himalayan mountain range is now visible from a distance for the first time in years.

Similarly, due to the lockdown effect, many rivers became clean in Italy, Venice, India, and other countries. During the lockdown, the discharge of toxic wastes and chemicals have been stopped because the textile and tannery processing industries have been closed down. It is estimated that every day, almost 40 million litres of wastewater enters the rivers and other water bodies. Rivers like Ganga and Yamuna in the northern part of India have shown a significant downfall in water pollution that led to the improved quality of the water. Paradoxically, there are many African and Asian countries where clean and pure water facilities are still lacking because of the water crises. In such a place, where water scarcity prevails, it becomes difficult for people to maintain proper hygiene amid coronavirus where clean water plays a major role.

The lockdown of humans and their activities gave space to animals and

birds to move around and enjoy the ecosystem. According to P.A. Narayani, many bird species which migrate from other parts of the country – known as partial migratory birds – have extended their stay at bird sanctuaries in India. A.S. Marimuthu, Wildlife Warden, Ramanathapuram, says the lockdown period has helped in reducing injuries to marine animals. “Usually, animals like dugongs, dolphins, and sea turtles sustain injuries after getting hit by the propellers of boats. The lockdown has helped in avoiding such accidents,” Animals like spotted deer, peacock, leopard, elephants, blue bull and varieties of birds were seen freely tottering in those vicinities which are situated near forests and jungles. Now, it is a big challenge for every country especially India to maintain a clean, healthy, and liveable environment for everyone.

Climate Design & Creation Care

When we look at the geology and physiology of our earth, it looks marvellous. For many, it may be a matter of convenience to believe that the whole universe including the origin of life on the planet earth originated by chance as a product of evolution but at the same time, it may be difficult for them to explain

the functionality of minute and invisible particles in the universe. We believe that God created this universe and He created for a purpose. From a minute creature (single cell, protons, electrons, etc.) to the gorgeous large size galaxy, we find beauty and order. God asked Job, "Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7). There is a stunning **i n t e r c o n n e c t i o n** and interdependence among land, water, and air which together provides a balanced environment to the earth. The hydrological cycle which delivers an endless supply of water to the land makes terrestrial life and ecosystems possible. Water's very high specific heat maintains relatively stable temperatures both **i n o c e a n s a n d o r g a n i s m s**. Throughout the ages, many great minds have expressed a profound and deep appreciation for the gorgeous functionality and incredible ingenuity of natural systems. Paul Dirac claimed that "God is a mathematician of a very high order and He used advanced mathematics in constructing the universe." It is said if the resonance level of carbon was 4% lower, essentially no carbon would form. If it was 0.5% higher, almost all carbon would react and become oxygen. Bible says, '...the Lord made the

earth by His power, and He preserves it by His wisdom. With His own understanding He stretched out the heavens' (Jeremiah 10:12). God has also blessed us with His wisdom and we need to act wisely and rationally.

We should know that Climate Change is real and human beings have always contributed towards it. Unfortunately, many Christians think that involvement in Climate Change is a mere waste of time because the change in climate is the result of sin and signifies the coming of Christ soon. Climate Change is a root cause of many diseases that bring disharmony in the ecosystem. As Christian, we have a personal as well as a collective responsibility to take care of God's creation with love, compassion, and justice. Created in the image and likeness of God, we are ought to see that everything should function in harmony. We have a voice of hope and courage to give to the ailing creation. Lockdown due to COVID19 should not be treated as a sabbath for the entire planet but a solution to provide rest to God's creation in the future. Before we are attacked by another pandemic like this which enforces us to have another lockdown, now it's a high time for us to implement some strategies to create a safe and healthy ecosystem. Dave Bookless gives a new vision of living a good life by

using different perspectives from Jeremiah 29:5-7: “5 *Build houses and settle down (social); plant gardens and eat what they produce (ecological).* 6 *Marry and have sons and daughters; Increase in number there; do not decrease (social).* 7*Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile (economic and social). Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper (spiritual).”*



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There are raised fists on the other street calling for justice, there are hungry eyes and sore feet that have walked a thousand miles and more to reach 'home', there are doctors and nurses and frontline workers, fainting and dying in the overwhelming hospitals that are treating the escalating cases of the pandemic, there are politicians taking sides of unethical matters at a time of crisis, forgetting the priorities, there is you and me, still wondering where all this is taking us to.

Where?

Here!!

Right where we feel nothing makes sense, we're called to create a sense of hope like never before.

This fallen world that, on the one side is choking because of an

uncontrollable disease, on the other side is choking because of the prejudice and betrayal of our own kind. This fallen world that witnesses a breed of hypocrites who on the one side preach faith and on the other mock their brothers for their innocence and call it “cheap faith”. This fallen world where nothing seems right, yet at every juncture of lost dreams sees the memory of a broken lullaby and wakes us up and puts us on our feet for a mission to protect our mothers' dreams. This fallen world where everything seems to burn to the ground, God makes us remember His promise and readies us to the love that resurrects like a beauty from ashes.

Why are we compelled to such strong hope? Because as humans, none of us are made by mistake, or

chance, or plan. We're destined by a Heavenly ordeal. None of what we see in this Universe came just by a BOOOOOMMM!! It was an accuracy so scientifically, so ethically, so passionately precise that if we negate His amazing grace to some mere coincidence we are negating all that coherence of the creation that destines with the plan of a Creator to create a beauty through us. Ravi Zacharias asked the audience in one of his speeches to contemplate if it was even possible for us to imagine if a dictionary can be formed through an explosion in a printing press? It's absurd to even think that we came out of some sort of chaotic mumbo jumbo.

We are undeniably and miraculously amazing, because our LORD wanted us to be so, and if that is the master plan of our existence, so should that be for us when we reach out to our brothers and sisters. And if we can understand such perspective, then we'll finally understand... that is why we're born a human! To cherish each other, cherish the plan God has for each other and cherish the way we are equipped to help each other live to the plan God has for them.

And being born a human is not to stay a human confined to this fallen world... but to transcend our being to the unity of the Church for which Christ died and rose and lives

forevermore. This is what we, as Christians, have come to know by grace and grace alone... and living in such a costly grace, is a costly discipleship as Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly noted in his book "The Cost of Discipleship".

"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Corinthians 5: 14 - 15)

That is why when we celebrate The World Humanitarian Day on August 19, we're taken to the conclusion that as Christian believers we have more to give for humanitarian causes. We need to reach out, be there for the helpless, become a voice for the voiceless, do something that matters, feel for the wounded, go the extra mile and dream in the dream of an eternal God for the restitution of mankind to experience a shalom only the Prince of Peace can give.

According to WHO, the COVID19 pandemic will worsen the humanitarian crises across the globe. "Although COVID-19 has rightly captured the world's attention, we must also remember it is not the only crisis the world is facing. Many countries, especially in Africa and

the Middle East, are still reeling from years of conflict and other humanitarian crises. COVID-19 threatens to exacerbate many of these crises,” Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General said in a press briefing on 17th July 2020.¹

According to a recent UN report, over 132 million people will grow hungry in 2020, over 9.2 million children will be forced to discontinue their education forever by the end of this year with millions more falling behind on education. There is occurring more displacement, food shortages, risk of malnutrition, decrease in access to essential services, mental health problems.

Let us not forget that all this is storming on top of the already existing crisis in Yemen where the severe level of malnutrition and economic collapse is now at a larger risk, the devastation in Syria where the conflict still leaves the people utterly deprived of their human rights, Bangladesh with the refugee crisis, Democratic Republic of Congo that witnesses chronic ethnic conflict and a nation where the second highest outbreak of Ebola was reported on 2019,² South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia facing severe food insecurity...

One day I spoke to one of my friends who is serving as a missionary in Ethiopia, and through the conversation, the joy of the LORD was so evident and as we prayed together for the LORD's work across the nations, he told me, “If I'm fortunate to receive from my LORD so many blessings, I need to give more!” It broke my heart to hear the calling of my LORD in more precious clarity. I understood, I couldn't keep this light for myself too. Because Christ's love compels us!

His love compels us to give His light, and his light is transformation. When we imitate the LORD and are moved by the Spirit, we will give more... here, there, everywhere. It will not be bound to a place, a person, a time, a season. When we invest our talents, our hope, our vision to the betterment of the humanity, for the betterment of a human being... people come to know how precious they're loved. Societies will be changed, communities will see a better reason to hold on, nations will rise in welfare, our World will be better, and the Church will be beautified!

“I want to leave my footprints on the sand of time Know there was something that, something that I left behind When I leave this world, I'll

leave no regrets Leave something to remember, so they won't forget I was here, I lived, I loved, I was here I did, I've done, everything that I wanted And it was more than I thought it would be I will leave my mark, soul, everyone will know, I was here”

Well, this was what Beyoncé sang on 2012 World Humanitarian Day.

Those who read me today... remember, I want you to rephrase the song as “I am here...”, you and I are yet to do great things. So, take heart!

Here, as Christians, we have a message of hope and love, greater than what we can say, do, sing or write. We are doubly responsible for what we do with what is given to us. We are stewards of His greatness, and we need to defend the vulnerable, we need to voice out for the voiceless, we need to advocate for the helpless, we need to build bridges, we need to reconcile with each other, we need to live in His love radically and fearlessly! Because when we step out to do His will, the Triune God will be strong to fulfil His purpose in us and through us. And it's going to be miraculous!

Let's stay encouraged. The pandemic, the crises, the chaos, our own mental state has ravaged us and might even continue to do so for a little while longer... but this too shall pass... and the only thing that should keep compelling us to give it all we've got, should be Christ's love! He died, resurrected and is living for us... let the shadows fall away and may He take our hand and lead us forward...so move as a miracle!



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Set an Example

Rev. Dr. David Mende

In 1522, a brief, simple, but expressive eulogy was pronounced by Martin Luther upon a pastor named Nicholas Haussmann who lived in Zwickau. “What we preach, he lived,” said the great reformer. What a great testimony! It's hard to find people who set a godly example. We have a lot of people who talk the talk, but very few people who walk the talk. This world desperately needs more believers who will live lives that are worthy to imitate.

Even as the world celebrates *International Youth Day* on August 12, I want to glean some lessons from Apostle Paul's instructions to a young minister named Timothy and apply them to today's youth. In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul exhorts Timothy to set an example for other believers at Ephesus. The main idea that I

present in this article is: **We must set a godly example for others.**

Although I focus on the young people in this article, the principles mentioned here are applicable to other age groups as well.

1. Let No One Despise You.

The Apostle Paul says, “Let no one despise you for your youth.” Some scholars say that at this time, Timothy was probably about 30 years old. A person was considered to be young until he or she reached 40 years. The phrase “let no one despise you” is a present active imperative (command) with a negative participle which suggests stopping an act which is in progress. Probably, some false teachers were despising Timothy due to his young

age. So, Paul instructs Timothy not to allow anyone to despise him because of his youth. Of course, this exhortation is not just for young people since Paul gives a similar instruction to Titus as well: “Let no one disregard you” (Tit. 2:15).

Young people are often despised by others. For example, when Goliath saw David, “he disdained him, for he was but a youth” (1 Sam. 17:42). Young people, we must be sensitive about how others perceive us. People at our home, school, college, and even church can despise us. We must not allow anyone to despise us. Now this must not be done through self-assertion or by being arrogant. Rather, we must not allow others to despise us by being a godly example.

2. Set an Example to Others.

Paul goes on to say that young Timothy must “set the believers an example” since he is leading them. Again, all believers are called to be an example to others. For example, Paul writes to Titus: “show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works” (Tit. 2:7). Further, Peter writes to the elders and says that they must not dominate the flock, but be examples to them (1 Pet. 5:3). In what areas must we be an example? Though Paul’s list is not exhaustive,

it’s certainly representative of the areas in which we must be an example. Let’s briefly look at each of these areas:

a. In Speech

We need to set an example in our speech. Our tongue is in a very slippery place and we often make the mistake of letting our tongue go free and say whatever we want to say. Dear young people, the people around you are listening to your words. We must ensure that our speech reflects our Christian character. We must learn to bridle our tongues (cf. Jas 3:2) with the help of the Spirit.

b. In Conduct

We must set an example through our conduct. Paul exhorts Timothy to silence his critics by his conduct. William Barclay writes that Plato was once falsely accused of dishonorable conduct. “Well,” Plato said, “we must live in such a way that all men will see that the charge is false.” Barclay concludes, “Verbal defences may not silence criticism; conduct will.” As disciples of Christ, our conduct must be Christ-like.

c. In Love

As we know, love is the greatest virtue (1 Cor. 13:13). The greatest

commandment is to love God and others (cf. Mk 12:30-31). Without love, all our gifts, talents, and abilities are futile (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-3). In a world filled with hatred, we need to be people of love. Let's spread Christ's love to this world which is craving for true love.

d. In Faith

We must set an example in faith. Hebrews 11:6 says that “without faith it is impossible to please him [God].” Our faith must not be superficial. We must trust God even in difficult circumstances. We must rely on God even when we don't understand our situation. Many Christians drift away from the Lord when they face sufferings. But let's be an example in faith.

e. In Purity

We must set an example in purity. In his earlier letter, Apostle Paul exhorts Timothy to treat “older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity” (1 Tim. 5:2). We must be particularly careful in the way we relate to the opposite gender. We must not give place to impurity in our lives. Rather, we must live consecrated lives. But how can we live pure lives? When we live by the Spirit. Apostle Paul writes, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and

you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). We must reflect Christ in purity.

Conclusion

So, we must set a godly example for others. Even as we celebrate *International Youth Day*, may the Lord raise up a generation of God-glorifying young people who are godly examples. Let's set an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. May our lives be a pleasing aroma to the Lord and lead many to the saving knowledge of Christ!



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On August 15, 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, addressed a newly liberated people filled with a sense of possibility and hope to collectively build an egalitarian and democratic nation. The people's aspirations were articulated in Nehru's famous words: "The future beckons to us. Whither do we go and what shall be our endeavour? To bring freedom and opportunity to the common man, to the peasants and workers of India; to fight and end poverty and ignorance and disease; to build up a prosperous, democratic and progressive nation, and to create social, economic and political institutions which will ensure justice and fullness of life to every man and woman." This vision was subsequently enshrined in India's Constitution on January 26, 1950.

Much like Billy Joel's iconic song, "We didn't start the fire", between my parents and their grandchild, we have been witnesses to the vagaries of a colonised country becoming independent, new systems, economic migration to better jobs in a totally different part of the country, three wars, and a massive economic change wrought by the 1991 liberalisation era. They dealt with it using homespun wisdom, deep rootedness in their culture and values and always remaining humane and compassionate. They also reflected the scars of dealing with all of these changes, some scars were present in the way we dealt with our everyday life, others were imparted as life lessons almost in passing.

How are we to follow Jesus in the

face of such disruption as we experience these days ? We could take some cues from Paul's reaction to his own times of involuntary confinement and how he encouraged those to whom he wrote to think of these circumstances which might otherwise cause discouragement and despair, or a time, when many of us are being prevented from gathering regularly and from normal routines of life and work. In the face of such interruption, we could easily put our feet up and numb ourselves by binging on various forms of entertainment to distract us from reality.

Or, we could commit to utilizing this unplanned and forced change in our habits to train ourselves for godliness. Consider how you can use our time of social distancing to draw near to God and “mend our nets” through the reading and study of God's Word and other Christian books. Commit to coming out of quarantine, more Christ-like than we were going in. We should not take a break from running the race. Stay-at-home orders have served to highlight the importance of equipping people to feed on the Word of God for themselves and lead their families and neighbours to do likewise. Long before COVID-19, though, Paul pointed to this aspect of the task. In

Ephesians 4:11–13a, we read, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” Though Paul lists several types of leaders within the Ephesian community, he clearly states that these leaders are not the ones who do the ministry on behalf of the church. Rather, these leaders are given for the express purpose of equipping the saints to do the ministry as part of their role within the body of Christ. Freedom is a big word that often means little. A map and a flag do not really constitute freedom for the people living within any territory. Nor does having a vote. These are beautiful notions. The map is, to repeat a truism, not the territory. The flag is a powerful symbol, but it is only a symbol. To watch the national flag being hoisted at the Red Fort or better still hoist it ourselves in our neighbourhood, can be an emotional experience as the National Anthem plays. It does look that Independence Day 2020 will be observed by a nation still largely under lockdown and “unfree” to even the National Flag in public.

At an individual level, I am still

trying to figure out the spirituality of staying home. Across the country, pastors are delivering sermons online and hosting digital worship services from their living rooms. New ministries seem to have emerged in the last few months just for the purpose of providing good Biblical teaching through Zoom which has entered our everyday vocabulary as much as Netflix. One message I heard drew some analogies between Paul's prison experiences and our own current circumstances of "social distancing," the widespread disruption of our patterns of normalcy, and temporary curtailments of certain individual

freedoms, we've long enjoyed. I am still trying to figure that one out.



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"For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

Galatians 5:13

A plea from a millennial!

Rev. Ashish Hirday

As a millennial I am glad to share my heart with all the great people of God as we celebrate the Youth Day.

India is known for its Guru - Shishya relationship. There are many stories which speak volumes about this great relationship. A majority of great figures across the globe have had someone special in their lives who mentored them and invested in them to become what they are today.

One of the great figures of Indian cricket who is popularly known as the god of cricket, Sachin Tendulkar, also had a guru in his life who tirelessly worked hard to shape Sachin Tendulkar, invest in him and make him what he is today. Tendulkar's guru was Mr Ramakant Achrekar.

In 2019, on teachers' day, Sachin Tendulkar paid homage to his

childhood coach Ramakant Achrekar, who had passed away at the age of 87 in January 2019. On that day Tendulkar stated, "Cricket in heaven will be enriched with the presence of Achrekar Sir. Like many of his students, I learnt my ABCD of cricket under Sir's guidance. His contribution to my life cannot be captured in words. He built the foundation that I stand on." In this statement, Tendulkar expressed his gratitude and confessed that today he is standing on the foundation which was built by his coach or guru in his early days. How true is that! We all need mentors who would shape us, invest in us and most importantly disciple us in our young days. Investing in young people is one of the keys which can prepare the younger generation to take lead in life and ministry.

In 2013 my wife, Rachana, and I

started a small discipleship group at our home. There was a girl who used to attend our fellowship regularly. She used to be shy, quiet yet sincere. We disciplined her for almost five years. And of course, this journey wasn't easy for her and us as well. There were times she felt like giving up, harming herself and even sometimes she felt like committing suicide. But God sustained us during those days.

After five long years, that girl who was tired of her life and circumstances, committed her life to serving the Lord. Today she is serving the Lord in various ways. Just a couple of days ago she called and said, thanks to us for investing in her life. She mentioned "I can't even imagine the misery of my life if you both hadn't walked with me and invested in me." She said, "you have disciplined me and now I am disciplining six young girls. And praying this multiplication will go on and on" We invested in one girl and now she is investing in six girls by disciplining them. The multiplication is underway.

Today, across the globe, many conferences, consultations, think tanks and seminars are conducted to discuss two prominent concerns: a ministry to the young people and disciplining the younger generation. These two concerns are discussed in length and breadth. Many God-

fearing and visionary leaders are continually doing advocacy for disciplining the young people and preparing them for ministry in Church and beyond. Relentlessly the efforts are made to make the Church and mission agencies understand the importance of disciplining young people, investing in them and raising them up for the leadership or ministry. However, it is high time to assess whether this advocacy is really understood by the Church or mission agencies and how practically it is being implemented. There is also a necessity of assessing the hurdles in terms of raising the younger leadership and entrusting the Church or mission responsibilities.

One of the concerns often expressed by the respected seniors about the younger leadership is that the younger leaders lack adequate experience, therefore, it becomes difficult to entrust them with big responsibilities in the Church or mission organisation. At times it becomes risky and challenging too.

Traditionally, younger people have been criticised for various reasons. As He is said, "I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on frivolous youth of today, for certain, all youth are reckless beyond words. When I was young, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the

present youth are exceedingly wise and impatient of restraint.” This statement seems to be contemporary, but the fact is that this statement was not made in the 21st century but 8th century BC. Trusting the potentials of young people has been an old age concern and for many making them leaders is the concern even today. Here the question is why is it challenging to trust the younger generation when it comes to passing on the baton? Is it really because they are inexperienced? Is it because they are not of proper calibre? Is it because somewhere they are spiritually not matured? Or is it because we have not invested in them enough, therefore, we are not sure whether in leadership they will make it or break it? One thing is sure if we have not invested in the younger generation, we will never be sure of their potentials.

One of my friends, Grant Skeldon (a millennial), writes in his book, *The Passion Generation*, “you can't expect what you don't invest. It's pretty hard to grow up without grown-ups.” In my opinion we don't have leadership problem but the discipleship problem. Somewhere the process of discipleship seems to be disrupted.

Most young people got saved when they were young, but very few were disciplined when they were growing. As long as the younger generation is

not disciplined or invested properly, we will continue to face the challenges of having a lack of strong younger leaders or ministers. Today young people are influencing and contributing a lot more in the society than ever before. The outside world has understood the value of them and are using their potential to make our society better. The contemporary young people want to be the contributor rather than just being a consumer in the Church. They have a lot to offer and contribute in the Church.

If the Church realizes the value of the younger generation and starts investing in them, discipling them and giving them space to grow, surely there will be great outcomes and we will never run short of good and Godly leaders.

If we look across the scripture we will find references to both older and younger generations. We find positive statements about youth like “Don't let anyone look down on you because of your youth.” In Scripture, we see more positive than negative things said about young people. Sometimes, young people played a key role in God's plan or made important choices as youth that would affect their later impact. There are, in the NIV version of the Bible, 53 verses in which the words “youth,” “youths,” or “youthful” appear.

Beyond this rather pedantic fact, we know that Joseph was a teenager (17 years of age) when his story begins as a dreamer-and as a misunderstood sibling sold into slavery. Isaac may have been 11-14 years of age when he climbed upon the altar according to his father's firm command. Joshua was a youth when Moses chose him as his aide. We read that David was a mere boy when he defeated Goliath and attracted the attention of the king. Daniel and his friends were probably teenagers when they were led across the Fertile Crescent into captivity. We can imagine them as young men, quite possibly in their late teens, as they stood strong for Yahweh before the great ruler of awesome Babylon.

Ruth was still a young woman when she became a widow and followed Naomi to Bethlehem. Esther may well have been a teen when she won a "beauty contest" and found herself in a pagan harem. Mary herself was a mere youth when the angel appeared to her with unprecedented news of her beatitude. A critical character in the story of Naaman (in 2 Kings 5) is an unnamed slave girl. She had been taken captive by the Syrians and lost everything but her faith in God. To be useful to the mistress of a great house and be called "a young girl" makes us think of her about the age of 13.

Some of the disciples were still

youths, and Mark probably a teenager, when they began to follow Jesus. Throughout the Bible we see that God shaped many young people in the Bible and uniquely, yet mightily, used them to fulfil His plans and purposes. If the God of the universe can take such a keen interest in the younger generation, why can't we follow the footsteps of our Master and start investing in the younger generation.

One thing must that be clarified here is that the discipleship is not just providing content and delivering sermons to the young people because our generation can google content all day. The value of content is at an all-time low in this digital world. This is impacting colleges and the publishing industries. During this pandemic, we all are witnessing that to get the content or sermons we don't need to go to a temple. Today Young people can easily live-stream sermons, download it or watch YouTube video, but there is still no app for genuine connection and life-on-life discipleship. That's what the Church can provide that the world can't. Only the Church can be the source of real discipleship.

Discipleship is not an event or program but a process where we share our lives with the young people. As apostle Paul told the

Thessalonians, “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (1 Thes. 2:8). Here Paul not only shared the gospel with his mouth but also showed it to them with his life. That's where it became more impactful. Today the young generation is longing for people who would genuinely and wholeheartedly disciple them and most importantly who would talk the walk with all transparency. It means first practicing and then teaching or preaching what is actually being practiced. As someone has said action speaks louder than words.

Finally, I confess that our generation is not perfect in many areas. But in this journey called life we need the elders who have already passed these phases of life. There are few fortunate young ministers (including me), who have people in their lives who are faithfully discipling them. However, there are many who need faithful disciplers to shape, mould and build the younger generation. We have the perfect model in Jesus Christ who intentionally discipled the twelve. There were many who followed Jesus Christ, but He discipled only twelve and invested his life in them. He discipled them in a way that they could do amazing things for the kingdom of God.

Today they are remembered for their love and ministry for the Lord. They were not perfect, there were lots of shortcomings in them. But Jesus was kind enough to invest in them. That legacy was carried by Barnabas, Paul and even today there are some who are continuing the great legacy of intentionally discipling the younger generation. However, the task of discipleship is a divine responsibility because, ultimately, we want the younger generation to be raised for the Kingdom of God. And for that, we need the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us, and that same Holy Spirit working in and through our disciples. Our triune God would surely strengthen us as we commit to disciple the younger generation.



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THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE SLAVE TRADE AND ITS ABOLITION

Mr. Chacko Thomas

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favour has come.” (Luke 4:18-19 New Living Translation).

Abraham Lincoln:

“As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master”.

Again, says President Lincoln, “It is the eternal struggle between these two principles – right and wrong-throughout the world. ... it is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says, “You work and toil and earn bread, and I'll eat it.”

No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of the King who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same principle.”

The month of August spells freedom for many people. Here in India we have our Independence Day. So, does Pakistan who celebrate it a day ahead us on the 14th. Singaporeans celebrate their independence on the 9th of August. There are other nations too whose Independence Day is in August. We all celebrate freedom or independence from foreign rule to national or self-rule.

Women might appreciate that it was

one hundred years ago this month (August) that women of the USA got their freedom to vote. For them and the world, it must be very special, if the next Vice President of the US is a woman, the promise Presidential candidate Joe Biden has made, if he wins. It doesn't say anything about the women, but it does say how unfair the world systems have been towards women. (Actually, we in South Asia have had our women Prime Ministers and Presidents. How ironic!)

The month of August has special significance for the abolition of the slave trade. Secular historians highlight the enslaved who revolted against slavery in present day Haiti during the night of 22nd August 1791. The uprising that began that night “set forth events which were a major factor in the abolition of transatlantic slave trade.” Thus, the 23rd of August has become a Remembrance Day.

The Evangelical version of the abolition of the slave trade emphasises Christians campaigning against slavery until they eventually succeeded. We are familiar with the name of William Wilberforce, who campaigned in the British parliament for the abolition of the

slave trade. There are many others who fought against this evil trade including John Newton who was a slave trader, yet after his conversion, he gave testimony in Parliament, for evidence against the slave trade. He became a close friend of William Wilberforce.

The “Great Emancipator”. One of the greatest US Presidents, Abraham Lincoln, is known as the “great Emancipator”. He worked hard for it for more than a decade. The two quotations given above are among the many from the speeches he made against slavery, available on the internet. 150 years later the world would watch the first African American President in US history taking his oath of office, placing his hand on Lincoln's Bible. Now the door is wide open for women or African Americans or Latinos or Asians to aspire for the office of the President of the United States. The world is slowly correcting itself, perhaps.

But enslaving others or slavery is not just particular to the USA or Europe. It is a universal evil. No nation seems to be free from it, then or now. Within a few pages of the first book of the Bible, we read about slavery. Yes, it nowhere condones it in the

whole Bible. In places, we read in the Bible about slaves who were lifted to great prominence, like Joseph, Daniel, or Mordecai. The miraculous escape of about three million slaves from under the most powerful government of the time, Egypt, tells us that God is able to rescue people from the hands of the most powerful person or nation.

However, sadly, most world powers practised it, in varying degrees of cruelty and inhumanity. There is no evidence in the Bible that the perpetrators would go unscathed, in fact the opposite is the case. When the slaves were miraculously brought out from Egypt, it left not only the country short of this free labour but devastated. This is an exception.

It is very sad to note that in the last book of the Bible, which tells us about the future history of our world, it shows slavery being practised. See Revelation 18: 11-13. “The merchants of the world will weep and mourn for her, for there is no one left to buy their goods. 12 She bought great quantities of gold, silver, jewels, and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet cloth; things made of fragrant costly wood, ivory goods, and objects made of

expensive wood; and bronze, iron, and marble. 13 She also bought cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, sheep, horses, wagons, and bodies—that is, human slaves.”

Note that slaves are named among cargos, said to be “bodies” and some translations add “and souls of men.” Even “souls” are not free from man's enslaving, both of those selling and buying. Slaves are mentioned a few more times in Revelation. But thank God that the Bible has a better solution for the followers of the Lord who are trapped in this system, as many are even today in our nation.

Rev. John Stott in his Commentary on Ephesians in “The Bible Speaks Today” series, grapples with the question of slavery. Commenting on the history of slavery he says “To those of us who live in countries in which slavery has been abolished by law for one and a half centuries, it is hard to conceive, how the ownership of one human being by another can have been countenanced in this way.”

He goes on to talk about “a sense of shame that slavery and the slave

trade was tolerated for so long ...” He quotes John Calvin, the French theologian, saying of slavery 'a thing totally against all the order of nature' that human beings 'fashioned after the image of God' should ever be 'put to such reproach'.

The Bible remedy for the situation, a few of them, is dealt with by the Apostle Paul. Please see Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:22 – 4:1 and Titus 2:11-12. These verses deal with the slave and master relationships and responsibilities. A slave has rights as does the master. The slave has responsibility so has the master. And God is the Master of both as well as the impartial judge of both.

Rev. Stott points out three things that is worth our consideration and application in our societies today. They were so radical to the cultures of the day to which it was first given. The believers in Ephesus, Colosse and Crete may have gone “WOW” when they heard these words read out to them. It may be equally radical for us today.

Firstly, Equality of the slaves and masters before God. Ephesians 6:9.

Secondly, Justice. “Masters, treat

your slaves, justly and fairly, ...” Col. 4:1

Thirdly, Brotherhood. “no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother.” Philemon 16.

The Apostle had the words “Brother Saul” ringing in his ears from the time Ananias placed his hands on blind Saul and healed him and pronounced words of acceptance. Acts 9:17-19. Now he extends the brotherhood to gentiles, slaves, women, and all who have God as their Father. In the first Epistle he wrote, he said to the believers, “there is neither ... slave nor free ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus. The Apostle repeated the truth to the believers in Colosse. “Here there is no ... slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” (Gal. 3:26-28, Col. 3:11). May the Lord make all the difference to the downtrodden! This is where Christianity has been at its best.

So, the Lord Jesus Christ is the great emancipator, greater than Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King. His freedom is for now and for ever. Our job is to make this blessing work out for the people of God. The church will be so attractive for the lost world. This was the Apostle's

message to the Believers in Crete. "... slaves ... make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive." Titus 2:9-10. May it be our mandate.

The battle against slavery is not yet over. How would you explain child labour, bonded labour, sex slaves, human trafficking, those bonded for generations by money lenders? These are so prevalent in South Asia. I recently read that a child disappears every eight minutes in India. Please do not close our eyes to these God's children.

Thank God for the Apostle Paul, the Abraham Lincolns, for the William Wilberforce, Martin Luther Kings of our world. Above all, thank God for the Lord Jesus Christ. Let the Spirit of God that came upon Him, may He come upon us and anoint us to bring the Good News to the poor, the captives and the oppressed. "Let My people go" says the Lord.

According to my Bible, the Creator God has not ordained one race to be above another. He has not assigned domination of one caste over the other. He has not authorised one gender to lord it over another. He has not priced one colour more valuable than another. Where these inequalities, discrimination and oppression exist, it is a direct

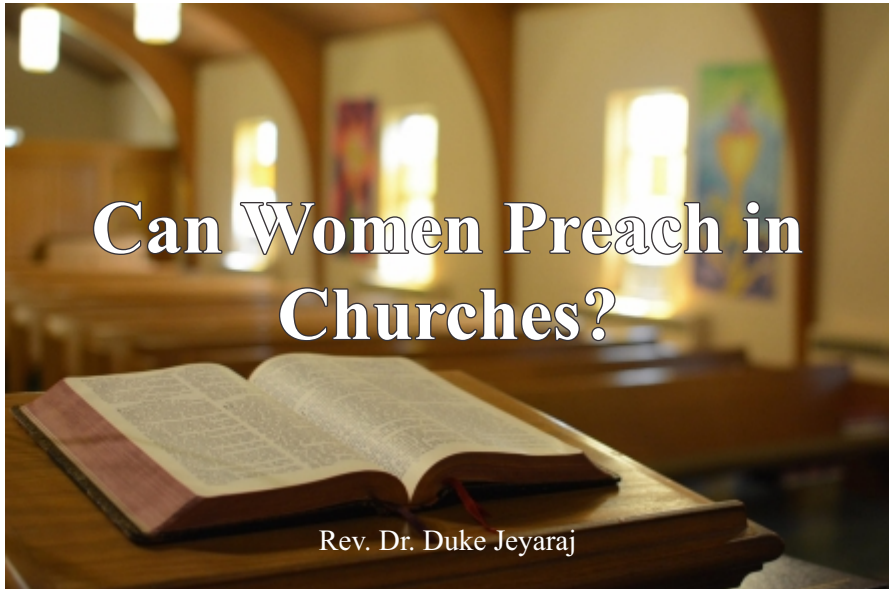
challenge to God's will. It is a clear submission to the will of the Evil One.

The Lord Jesus came to redeem and restore every race, caste, gender of humanity, along with the whole creation. It is time for Christian people to realign themselves with Jesus Christ and join in His redeeming mission. It must begin with a change of mind in me and you about fellow human beings. "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind", thereby transforming the world around us. Be intentional in this march for freedom for (pl see text)



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Can Women Preach in Churches?

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

Since August 26 is Women's Equality Day, this month is a good month to discuss the thorny question, "Can women preach in churches?"

Let me take the names of some women named in the New Testament. And from their names, I will explain the reason in brief as to why I believe women can preach in churches.

Phoebe: She is a 'servant of the church' in Cenchrea, a port in Greece (Rom. 16:1-2). The Nelson Study Bible indicates the word translated as 'servant' was used for the office of deacons (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim.

3:8,10,12). The Bible records that deacons such as Stephen and Philip were involved in proclamation (see Acts 7). So, there is no reason to believe that Phoebe was not.

Junia: She was named as an apostle in Romans 16:7. If apostle Paul and other apostles preached in all kinds of venues, there is no reason to believe also Junia did not. And there is no reason to believe women of today should not preach in churches!

The Mother of John Mark: A church met in her home (Acts 12:12). If the apostles believed that she was only to be a host and never to be a preacher to the people who met in

her home, they could have well mentioned that.

Priscilla: A church met in her home as well (Rom. 16:3-5). She was there with her husband when eloquent speaker Apollos was corrected. Acts 18:26). Luke could have added this note: 'Priscilla did not teach anything; the entire teaching to Apollos was done by Aquila. Priscilla was a mere spectator.' But he did not. I believe there are indications that it was Priscilla who wrote the letter of exhortation called Hebrews (Heb. 13:22). Ruth Hoppins argued that 'Priscilla -- a woman who was a leader in the early church and an associate of Paul -- is ultimately the only suspect who meets all the qualifications for the authorship (of the epistle to the Hebrews).' Women not only preached, but what they preached perhaps became Bible books authors from which we could teach doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16).

Jezebel: This woman false teacher is mentioned as being part of one of the local churches mentioned in the book of Revelation who taught a theology that made people comfortable in sexual sin (Rev. 2:20-22). Jesus could have well said this to Jezebel: "You are making two mistakes here Jezebel. First, as a

woman you should not have taught any Bible truth! Second, even what you taught is wrong!" But the Jesus who promised a sick bed for her stubborn sexual immorality promoting false teaching, did not condemn the same woman for being a teacher of the Word of God! Jesus' message to Jezebel was not this: 'repent, you woman who became a Bible Teacher without my permission!'

In conclusion, we have to ask this question: "What about Bible verses such as 1 Timothy 2:12 who seems to clearly forbid women from the church pulpit ministry?" To answer this question, I present this Bible Interpretation principle, "Clear passages should be a guiding factor in helping us interpret seemingly clouded passages!" And here is one clear passage which says it was God's plan that women should proclaim God's word: "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). To prophesy is to proclaim the Word of God in a way God's people are led to Christian maturity (Eph. 4:11-16). Both, men and women were clearly called for this task!

So, why did Paul write what he wrote in 1 Timothy 2:12? The Spirit of Reformation Study Bible explains:

"Many other Bible passages affirm women in various teaching roles (e.g. Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; Proverbs 1:8; 6:20; Acts 18:26; Titus 2:3). It is best to take this not as a prohibition against the act of teaching, but as a prohibition against the act of improper teaching in conjunction with the improper authority some women sought and perhaps wielded in Timothy's context."

Let us encourage women to preach!

As a seminary-trained man who married a non-seminary trained woman, I have encouraged my wife to preach! And it has been our joy to preach in tandem in different parts of India and overseas together!



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*"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
Because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to captives and
freedom to prisoners."*

Isaiah 61:1

IN SEARCH FOR THE REAL

Rev. Dr. Susanta Patra



The present day is characterized by a great diversity of opinions. There is a widespread agreement that our world is changing rapidly. Humanity is changing in the identity, inner reality, and values that carry the image of God (Genesis 1:27) in this Universe. Furthermore, this change is taking place at an accelerating pace. This change is experienced daily but without the label. We may be like the elderly church member who rose to speak at a church business meeting. The board was proposing the purchase of a new chandelier, and this gentleman expressed his opposition with three reasons. “We can't afford it,” he said. “No one can spell it. Furthermore, what we need is a new light fixture.”

Over the years, Indian Anthropologists have searched to discover the REALITY of the

makeup of a person. They have examined life and culture in the past through archaeological discovery. Others have searched for reality in evolution, genetics, and biological discovery. Still others have studied human societies and the elements of their cultural life. Yet others have examined linguistics to discover the real person.

The Indian Scholars of today classify people as belonging to one of three categories – 'Pre-Modern', 'Modern', and Post-Modern'.

It is said that the **pre-modern** person is predominantly simpler than the other types. They live in remote areas of India. They view the universe as real and logical. They would confess that they cannot fully comprehend the unseen components of this big world that they live in. As

individuals in this large universe, they confess their certainty of the presence of the supernatural which, to them, is inevitable and unavoidable for their survival. Further, they are convinced that there is a bit of the supernatural present in everything, both living and non-living.

The **modern** think they are smarter and more advanced in their understanding. They are a kind of 'open to experience / explore' type of people. Young people often fall into this category. They are believers of immanent laws that govern all that occurs. and therefore, everything that happens is due to a law of nature. The modern point of view is that humans are the highest form of reality and have the highest value. Humanity is the 'be-all and the end-all' of everything that happens in our surroundings today. The scholars would say this is 'Secular Humanism'. The modern person hungers for knowledge which they acquire through observation and experiment. A true human cannot be stagnant or ignorant. Each one must grow; move forward and be knowledgeable of what is happening around us. The modern think that they can discover anything. Therefore, 'I, me and mine' is the highest form of modernism.

The **post-modern** are complex in their mindset, confused in their heart, and hungry for reality. These are closer to being SEEKERS than those who think they have found it or have the ability to discover it. These take the position that reality has no single natural means for discovery as it is uncertain. In the diverse society we live in, how can one be certain who we are? A person is defined by and for their community. The discovery of the real human is to be known through channels like intuition as it is not inherent.

The story was once told of 3 cricket umpires, each one representing their mindset. The pre-modernistic leg umpire said, "A player strikes the ball; I see them as they are". The modern umpire said, "A player strikes the ball as I see them". The post-modernist TV or 3rd umpire said, "As it has been referred to me, a player strikes the ball and he is nothing until I call".

In the post-modern mindset; the truth is that I am the ONE who decides what is real. According to William Blake, the human being of the past looked at an object; 'through the eyes with the conscience'. But today a person sees; "with the eyes and devoid of their conscience".

Bishop John Reed of the Anglican

Church once told the story of two Australian sailors who went to have a drink in a British pub. After having their drinks, while coming out of the pub on a cold foggy evening, they met a British Military General heavily decorated with his medals at the door of the Pub. The two drunk sailors asked the General, “Sir, can you tell us where we are?” The General was upset with their behaviour and told them, “Do you know who I am?” The sailors laughed and said to each other, “Look, we do not know where we are, and he does not know who he is”.

Once a doctor, who was a heart surgeon and had suffered a massive heart attack, told a reporter, “For the past many years I have treated hundreds of patients of different categories of heart attack, but never truly knew how painful it was until the time I suffered the heart attack myself. I was in severe pain. I could not separate the pain from myself. I and my feelings were identical.”

The blurring of the REAL with human imaginations!

In our quest for the real, the real challenge is to change the way we think about a PERSON! We need to catch the imagination of that person as God created them. [Wake Up

Call!] We ought to be relevant to the challenges of discovering every person holistically. We need to realize that the outward appearance of an individual is not the same as the inward realities. This is because of the complexity of people today. In this complexity, people suppress their true inward needs. The outward holistic identity is often fake, not projecting the true inward colours. Hence, the true identity of a person is to be discovered from their inward reality.

The Indian Science identifies the human being with reasoning based on **Evidence – Faith – Proof** in their scientific discovery. What is this reasoning in a person about themselves? It is that faculty in a created being, which makes it possible to think, argue, or debate to accept or reject the revelation of anything absolute, even God, the Creator of the Human Race. The question is; how then do we discover the reality of the human race?

The Historical Biblical Truth clarifies all misgivings and declares that the creation of human beings is wonderful and unique. King David declares in Psalm 139:13-16: “*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;*

your works are wonderful; I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

Genesis 1:27 affirms the words; “Image of God” – “Our image” – “Let us make...”. These words suggest that there was, some kind of firm consultation or final decision in the Godhead before the creation of human beings. The verb 'formed' depicts a potter making his art in an amazingly complex organism. This declares the wisdom of God in designing and the power of God in creating. Hence, human life was created by God and as His creatures, we are wholly dependent on Him. (Act. 17:28) and created in His image. He gave us not only personality, minds to think with, emotions to feel with, and wills for making decisions but also an inner spiritual nature that enables us to cry out to Him. Human life was created to have dominion and not to be under the control of creation.

Therefore, human beings are different from animals because of God-consciousness. While animals adjust to their environment, humans

seek to change it to their advantage. God confronts his created being with circumstances and phenomena beyond their understanding and control, God causes them to become aware of His existence. The Scripture reveals to us in Ecclesiastes 3:11 that “...He (God) has also set eternity in the human heart...”

Religion has existed for centuries, as people have tried to grasp both the vastness of the universe and the uniqueness of human existence. But now, more and more people are taking up yoga, as a way to “free their soul.” Spirituality seems to be overwhelmingly everywhere. Though it may seem that society is currently in an increased state of spiritual awareness, the hunger for something more than this physical world is nothing new to humanity. Both today's explorations of spirituality and the practice of religion stem from the valid human desire to fill the void inside that screams for meaning.

Therefore, it is true to say that when the human being finds their Creator, they find the reality of the human self. King David admitted; “*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?...*”

Apostle Paul in his desperation

uttered in Romans 7:24 – “*What a wretched man I am!*”

If people of this world continue to attempt to discover their real self in different religions, philosophy, and/or science, they will remain in a merry-go-round of knowledge without any stop. Therefore, it is vital for us who have found our true identity to be a model in revealing the Living & Eternal God, the Creator through our lives and lead others to find the same.



Rev. Dr. Susanta Patra
former the General Secretary of India Missions Association, presently serve at National Fellowship which he and his wife Mrs. Asangla Patra founded in 1989



Seva Bharat a National Christian Charitable Organization

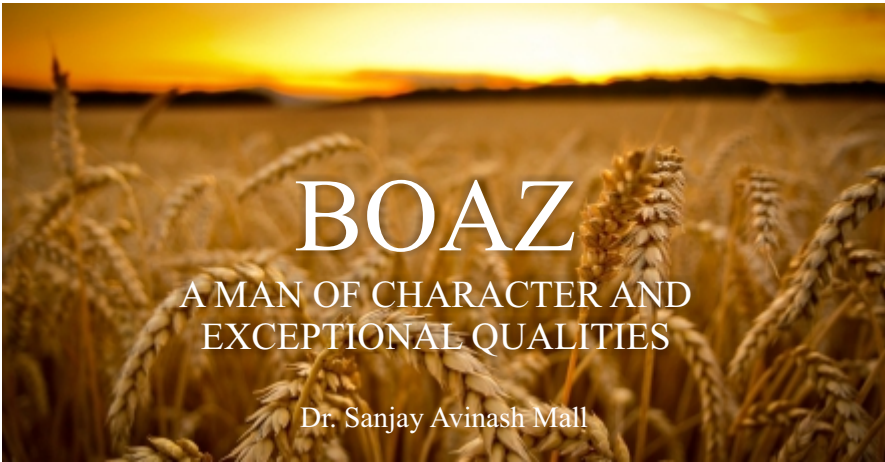
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The Book of Ruth is a very absorbing book in the Bible. It tells us about a family that migrated to a foreign land due to famine in Bethlehem during those days. However, three of the major characters in the story are referred to in the past tense in the book. They are Elimelech, the husband of Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. The circumstances in those days had forced them to take the decision of moving to a foreign land.

The name Bethlehem means the House of Bread. However, even in Bethlehem famine struck, and it caused the family of Elimelech and Naomi to migrate to Moab. For Naomi, the wife of Elimelech the outcome of this migration was extremely tragic. First, she lost her husband and then her two sons also died. Their stay in Moab which was meant to be temporary lasted ten

years. At the end of ten years, Naomi was bereft both of a means of livelihood and a future. The turning point came when she heard that the Lord had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them. It was then that she decided to return to Bethlehem.¹ She finally reached Bethlehem when the barley harvest was beginning.²

The story of Naomi and Ruth can be divided into the following parts:

1. Migration
2. Tragedy
3. Reverse migration
4. Reestablishment
5. Restoration in society and in the genealogy of God.

When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, she did not know what was in store for her and Ruth. God who is the God of the fatherless and

the widow, in His providence had kept a man who would be an immense support to the two women. The name of the man was Boaz and he enters the scene in the second chapter of the book. He would not only redeem the property of Naomi, but would also marry Ruth in due course of time in a very honorable manner.

Boaz is one of the most important characters in this book. Once Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem, we find that the story and the future of Ruth revolves around Boaz. As we read the book, we find that there are several qualities in the man which are as follows:

1. A man of blessing.
2. A man of social standing.
3. A man of gender sensitivity
4. A man of charity and hospitality.
5. A man of integrity.
6. A man of due diligence.
7. A man of genealogy of Jesus Christ:

A Man of Blessing:

In Ruth 2:4, we see that Boaz on his return from Bethlehem goes to the field where his workers are harvesting barley. On seeing them, he greets them with the words, “The Lord be with you”. His workers greeted him with the words, The Lord bless you. Further on, in the chapter in v 12, he blesses Ruth

saying, the May Lord repay you for what you have done and may you be richly rewarded by the Lord. He further continues to bless her when she reveals her identity to him on the threshing floor with the words The Lord bless you my daughter. Thus, we see that blessing people was a part his lifestyle.³

A Man of Social Standing:

Boaz was a successful landlord and farmer. He had employed many people to work in his fields. In the second chapter of the book, we find that though he may not have seen or met Ruth, but he had heard all about her from the other influential people in the city. He knew all that she had done for her mother in law since the death of her husband.⁴ Thus, we see that he was well connected and respected in the society of those days.

A Man of Gender Sensitivity:

Boaz saw that Ruth was a very young woman. He was aware that being a widow she was very vulnerable, working in the midst of many strange men in the field. As she was working in his fields, he ensured that she was not molested by the other men. He also advised her not to go to fields of other people but to stay with the women working in his field.⁵

A man of charity and hospitality.

In our normal life, we do not extend hospitality to people who we may employ. However, this was not the case with Boaz. When it was time for the workers to have their lunch, Boaz shared his food with her.⁶ He also instructed his workers not to stop her from gathering among the sheaves. In fact he also told them to pull out some stalks from the bundles for her to pick up.⁷ So, Ruth returned with a very good amount of the barley that she had gleaned from the field of Boaz and also with what was left over from the afternoon meal.

A man of integrity:

Character is what you are in the dark. This famous quote is of the American evangelist Dwight L. Moody. When Boaz woke up suddenly in the middle of the night, he found Ruth lying near his feet. It was night and he had all the freedom to exploit her knowing fully well that she was a widow who was working in his fields during the day. But he chose not to do so. Instead, he blessed her and allowed her to stay there for the night after giving her the assurance that if the kinsman redeemer did not redeem her then he would do it. While it was still dark he gave her a very good quantity of grain and sent her home.

A man of due diligence:

The next day Boaz went to the town gate with ten elders and told them everything. As it worked out, the nearer kinsman refused to redeem her. Boaz did not try to force his way through the legal proceedings but let the things take their course according to the plan of God. Thus, he not only acquired the property of Naomi's husband and sons, but was also blessed with Ruth as his wife.

A man of the genealogy of Jesus Christ:

Boaz and Ruth were blessed with a son who was named Obed.⁸ Obed was the grandfather of David. So, we see that Boaz's name finds a place in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ.



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1. New Bible Commentary.
2. Ruth 1:22.
3. Ruth 3:10
4. Ruth 2:11.

5. Ruth 2:8 – 9.
6. Ruth 2:14.
7. Ruth 2:15-17.
8. Ruth 4:17

The Holy Spirit: Sent from Heaven

(1Peter 1:12)

Rev. Richard Masih

D. OUR RESPONSE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT.

So far, we have seen- 1. The Person of the Holy Spirit; 2. The various designations of the Holy Spirit; and, 3. The works of the Holy Spirit. Now, we will see-

How should we respond to the Holy Spirit? He has been so good and gracious to us in giving us convictions of our sins, in glorifying Lord Jesus before us so that we were drawn to him, in enabling us to repent from sin and believe on Lord Jesus Christ, in giving us new birth, in giving us the assurance of salvation, in producing in us his fruit and giving us his gifts. There are several ways we are called upon to respond to him. We can't dare to ignore him or be indifferent to him.

1. Be filled with the Holy Spirit.

“...do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...” (Ephesians 5:18). It's a command to be filled with the Holy Spirit, not an option. Unless we are filled with the Holy Spirit, his fruit and gifts will not be operative in us. Also, it's not onetime filling, maybe when we were born again. But it's a continuous filling- be being filled. Someone asked D. L. Moody, the American evangelist, why he needed so much to be filled. He replied because he was a leaking Christian. That is why, we also need daily fresh in filling.

Remember, Holy Spirit is not air that we can fill our lungs with him, or liquid that we can fill our stomach with him. He is a Person, one of the

divine Person. Being filled with the Holy Spirit means, bringing ourselves more and more under his influence, authority and control. He is filling us more and more, bringing us more and more under his control. The more he is influencing us and controlling us, the more we are filled with him.

There are 3 ways we can be filled with the Holy Spirit to the overflowing. One, saturate yourself with the word of God. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). The more we are filled with the word, the more we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Two, saturate yourself with prayer. “praying at all times...” (Ephesians 6:18). “pray without ceasing” (1Thessalonians 5:17). The more we are filled with prayer, the more we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Three, saturate yourself with obedience. “And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:32). There is no need to jump and roll on the floor. Take these three steps always, and we will be filled with the Holy Spirit. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, his fruit will be seen in us and his gifts will be operative in us, as per his will.

2. Walk by the Holy Spirit.

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and

you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). The desires of the flesh (our fallen human nature) and the desires of the Spirit are contrary/opposed to each other. They pull in different directions. The desires of the flesh pull towards sin. The desires of the Spirit towards holiness. There is a kind of life and death struggle and war between the two. There is sworn enmity between the two. If we walk by the Holy Spirit, under his influence, guidance and direction, we will be holy. If so, we will not be gratifying the desires of the flesh.

The story is told of a man who had two dogs- one black and the other one white. He used to conduct road show by making them fight with each other. He used to bet with the spectators as to which dog would win. Naturally, the dog which he fed properly throughout the week would win. The dog which he starved, would lose. In that way, he used to earn money. Now, we all have got two natures- one old, unregenerate nature, and the other new, regenerate, born again nature. Which nature will be prominent in us, will depend on which nature we have been feeding throughout the week. Let's starve the black dog by refusing to indulge in its promptings. Let's feed the white dog by Bible, prayer, fellowship and witnessing, etc. In this way, we will be walking by the Spirit.

3. Be led by the Holy Spirit.

“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Galatians 5:18). We can be led by our unregenerate and unsanctified mind (Romans 1:21, Ephesians 4:18). It's darkened, and does not have the mind, the light of God. It can't decipher the will of God. We can be led by our diseased and deceitful heart (Jeremiah 17:9). We can be led by our worldly and ungodly friends and parents. They do not know God, so how can they safely guide us? Our Lord said that if a blind man shows the way to another blind man, both will fall in a pit” (Matthew 15:14). We can be guided by Satan and his forces of spiritual darkness (John 8:44). All these leadings are destructive. As a child of God, we must be led by the Holy Spirit. He leads us in all the truth (John 16:13). So, if we are taking any path of falsehood or deception, we can be sure we aren't being led by the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit is holy. He can't lead us in paths of un-holiness. We shouldn't be self-deceived.

4. Keep in step with the Holy Spirit.

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). If we want to walk by the Spirit and be led by the Spirit, we cannot but keep in step with the Holy Spirit. See, how the army

people keep in step with each other while doing march past. Their hands swing and the feet march in unison with others. Otherwise, they will be out of step, and not fit to do march past. If we want to go in the same direction the Spirit is going, then we are not to go ahead of him or lag behind him. Otherwise, like novice musician and singers, we will be out of tune with him. How can we keep in step with the Holy Spirit? Just keep your eyes on him through the word and prayer.

5. Pray in the Spirit.

“...praying at all times in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18). “...praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 1:20). Our Pentecostal and Charismatic friends will understand it to mean praying in tongues. But, all do not speak in tongues. In 1Corinthians 12:28-30, Apostle Paul raises several questions Their answers are found in the questions only. The answer for all the questions is a big no. “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” Since all do not speak in tongues, they obviously, can't pray in tongues. So, what does it mean to pray in the Spirit. To my understanding, it means to pray under the influence and by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:26 comes to help in this question,

“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” He helps us in how to pray meaningfully and powerfully.

6. Fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”. (2Corinthians 13:14). We can have fellowship with God because he has intellect, emotions and will. We can have fellowship with our Lord because he too has intellect, emotions and will. We can have fellowship with one another for the same reason, with the added help of the presence of the blood of our Lord. We read in 1John 1:3, “...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

We also (should) have fellowship with the Holy Spirit, as we read in the benediction formula of 2Corinthians 13:14, quoted above, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Most of us shy away from the very thought of having fellowship with the Holy

Spirit. It feels somewhat spooky to us. But that shouldn't be our problem since the Holy Trinity. He has intellect, emotions and will like the first two Persons and us. How can we have fellowship with the Holy Spirit? Spend time with him in praise and prayer, in listening and speaking to him. After all, he is our Divine helper.

We will take up our last four responses to the Holy Spirit in the next issue. Let our responses be real responses, not just mental ascent.



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is residing in New Delhi. He studied theology in All Nations Christian College, England. He served the Lord for 40 years with the Union of Evangelical Students of India and also authored several books in English. He is available for the ministry of the word in Hindi and English on invitation. He can be reached at Mobile: 9958747748 and richardmasih@gmail.com.



Lynching, ostracization in targeted violence against Christians

in first Half Yearly Report of the
Religious Liberty Commission of EFI

The absolute sense of impunity generated in the administrative apparatus of India by the Corona pandemic lockdown, and the consequent absence of civil society on the streets and in the courts, has aggravated the environment of targeted hate and violence against Christians in major states and the National Capital territory, as seen in the data available till June 2020.

The near collapse of the media and the consequent absence of journalists in the field, and the inability of activists to go to distant villages because of the lockdown and restrictions on transport, has severely constrained accurate collection of data of the persecution of religious minorities. Even in normal times, the police were loath to register cases. The situation has worsened. Communally motivated crime is either unreported, or under

reported. The victims have no recourse to the normal systems of reporting to the police, and severely restricted access to courts for relief.

A lynching, community ostracization and concerted efforts to stop worship and gospel-sharing, mark the 135 cases registered by the EFI in the first six momentous and eventful months of 2020.

Uttar Pradesh, ruled by the Bhartiya Janata Party with Mr Ajay Singh Bisht alias Yogi Adityanath, a religious abbot or head of the Gorakhnath sect's main temple in the eponymous eastern city of Gorakhpur, has the dubious distinction of topping the persecution scale with 32 cases of hate crimes. The southern state of Tamil Nadu also made headlines with some very troubling and terrible cases of violence. The tribal

states of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, where the governments changed with the defeat of the BJP in the elections in 2019, saw a renewed spurt of persecution with 24 and 10 cases on our records.

The most horrendous case of lynching and dismembering of the victim's body was reported from Odisha's Kenduguda village in Malkangiri district on 4 August, where a 14-year-old Christian boy was allegedly crushed to death with a stone by a group of people who then chopped the body into pieces and buried in several places. In the FIR, the police noted that the victim and his family including his father had adopted Christianity three years ago. Since then, a few of the villagers have been harassing them. Christians in this village have been facing many threats and are being continually harassed by religious fanatics, Pastor Kosha Mosaki said. "He was earlier attacked in February this year. I have made 4 complaints at the Malkangiri police Station regarding these attacks."

The anti-Christian violence in Tamil Nadu, which reported a horrendous custodial torture and murder of two Christians of the Nadar community by policemen backing RSS elements in a rival community, is traced to caste supremacist attitudes in villages and their linkages with political elements. The state goes for

elections soon. In most of the districts of the state, the police are recruited from the dominant castes, which are inimical to the Christian community and its pastors, a large number of whom are from marginalised castes and economically poor or less affluent sections of society.

The Christian and Dalit communities have demanded a judicial enquiry by a High Court Judge into the police brutalisation of a small shopkeeper, Jeyaraj (59), and his son Emmanuel Benicks (31). The father and son were arrested on 19 June after they allegedly had an altercation with the Sathankulam town police in the Tuticorin district. They had been beaten, brutally tortured, sodomised with rods. Magistrate P Saravanan supported the police which continued to torture till the two collapsed. They were at last taken to hospital on July 22 on the verge of death. Benicks died at Kovilpatti Government Hospital on the night of June 22, Jeyaraj died the next morning at the same hospital. Jeyaraj was accused of keeping his shop open beyond the Covid curfew hours and his son was arrested when he tried to protect his father from the blows of the police. Four police officers have been arrested after the Madras high court passed strictures against the police and the magistrate.

In Chhattisgarh, now at number

three from its earlier sixth position, the rise is attributed to Christians more willing to report violence in the Bastar region where there had been so far a blanket of fear of both underground militant Maoist forces and the armoured police. The state saw six documented cases of targeted violence against Christians just in April 2020 despite the national lockdown being in place. Christians were summoned to village meetings when they refused to participate in religious rituals that violate their conscience. They were pressurised to recant and assaulted when they refused.

In three separate incidents on May 5, May 7 and May 18, in Bastar and Dantewada districts, Christians faced stiff opposition to bury their dead. They were told that since they had not followed village religious rituals, they would not be allowed to bury their dead. There have been 15 such confirmed incidents in these districts since 2019.

Jharkhand, which had seen two cases of lynching of Christians in 2018 during the rash of similar cases against Muslims by cow vigilantes, saw four major assault cases in May alone. Though no one was killed, women were molested. On May 25, local authorities had banned Christians in Pundiguttu village from getting rations from the government outlet. In Jharkhand too

there were cases of Christians were being socially ostracized. The Pundiguttu village panchayat in May ordered the Christian converts to convert to the majority faith at pain of being denied water from the community well and other penalties.

It is important to point out that the numbers of cases recorded by the Evangelical Fellowship of India network and other Christian groups are only indicative, and the actual numbers may be much larger. The reasons for underreporting are fear among the Christian community, a lack of legal literacy and the reluctance/refusal of police to register cases.

The police have been very reluctant and slow to register FIRs in these cases involving cognizable offences despite being duty-bound to do so under Section 154 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Even in the cases registered with the police, most never come to court.

The consummately organized hate campaign against the Muslim population, beginning mid-December 2019, and erupting in mid-February 2020 in the North eastern suburbs of the Indian capital city New Delhi has raised structural questions on the security of all religious minorities in the country, especially in extraordinary situations of social isolation as under

the Covid curfew, with the Christian community questioning how safe they are if the Muslims are so brutally targeted by religious political fanatics structured in seemingly well organised formations on the social media application called WhatsApp, which has a reach of 400 million members in the country. This has been admitted in the charge-sheet present in court by the Delhi police in June, in which it records that groups of young men in East Delhi district were martialled and directed by their handlers to kill members of the minority community.

[In the violence that was unleashed in Delhi, at least 43 Muslims and 10 Hindus were killed. Nine mosques were burnt to the ground, as were academic institutions and the small shops that were the economic stay of the Muslims. Thousands were homeless. Front-line lieutenants of the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party called upon their followers to shoot them, a thinly veiled targeting of Muslims and activists protesting the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed by the government. The violence raged for several days as the police watched and the political apparatus seemed paralysed.]

While attention is on violence, there have been many other indications from the government and the ruling party of changes in laws and many

policies which will impact the Christian community together with other marginalised groups in many ways. Among them are changes in the environment protection codes that open up vast tracts of tribal-inhabited forest lands in central and north East India citing infrastructure development projects. There is also a renewed demand for all-India law against conversions from the Hindu faith.

While the National Human Rights Commission has set up a committee of its experts to suggest implementation of police reforms especially against torture, the central government is contemplating changes in the Indian Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedures (CrPC). Retired judges of the Supreme court have put up red flags, expressing their dismay at the manner in which the Code of Criminal Procedure, or CrPC, is being interpreted by the authorities in the country. In the Covid lockout conditions, there is no possibility of a national debate on such issues, even less so within the Christian community, the poorer of which are hard hit by the loss of jobs, and were among the millions who migrated from urban centres back to their homes in the villages of north and central India.

We are, in particular, disturbed by the Uttar Pradesh state Law

Commission, in November 2019, drafting a controversial report recommending heavy penalties of up to seven years in prison to persons deemed to be violating a proposed new law against conversions. The cover page graphic and illustrations of the 268 paged report are taken from www.hindujagruti.org, the website of Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, whose explicit goal is to establish a Hindu Rashtra.

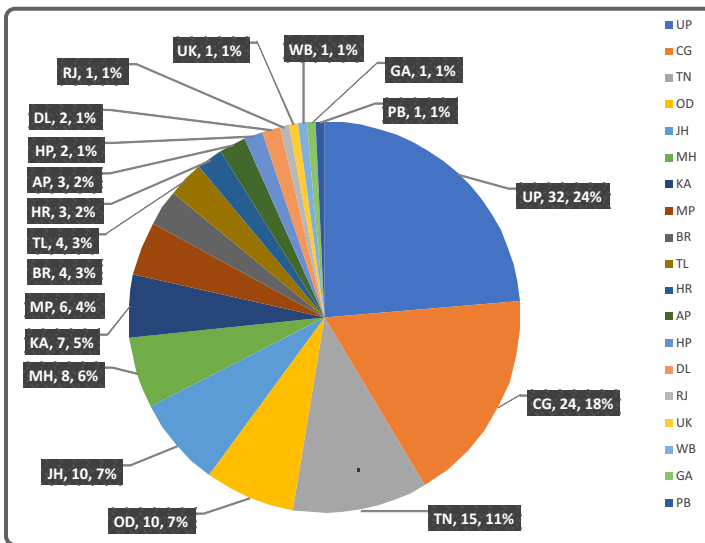
EFIRLC appeals to the Government of India and the respective State

Governments of the States named in the report to ensure the rule of law and the security of religious minorities in India.

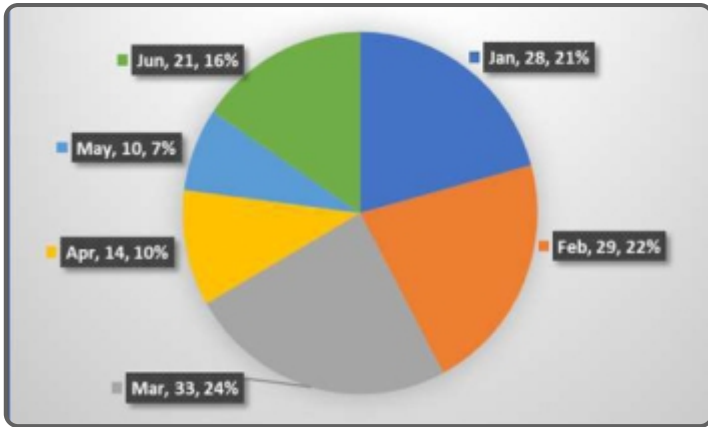
We especially appeal to the State Governments of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, to deal stringently with the various right-wing organizations operating in these states whose primary agenda is to create an atmosphere of fear among the Christian community and other religious minorities.

STATISTICS

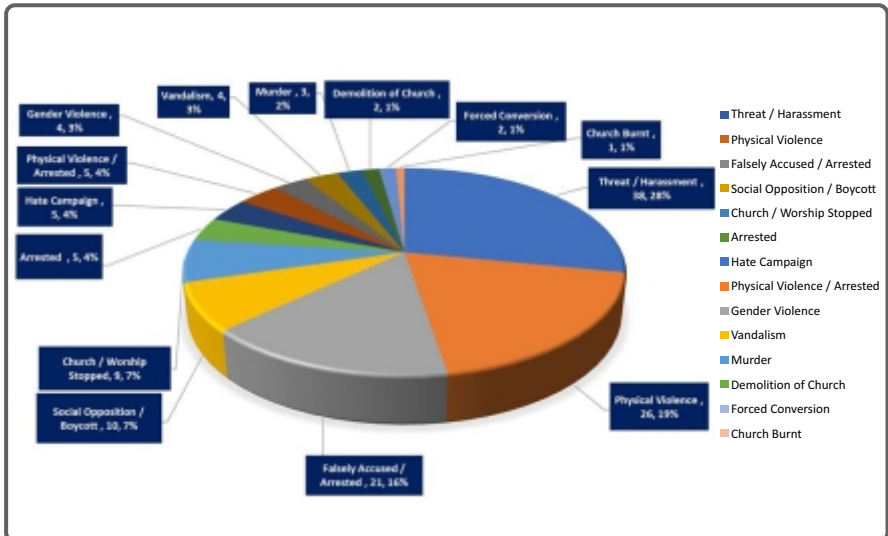
State-wise Number of Incidents



Month-wise Number of Incidents



Types of Violence



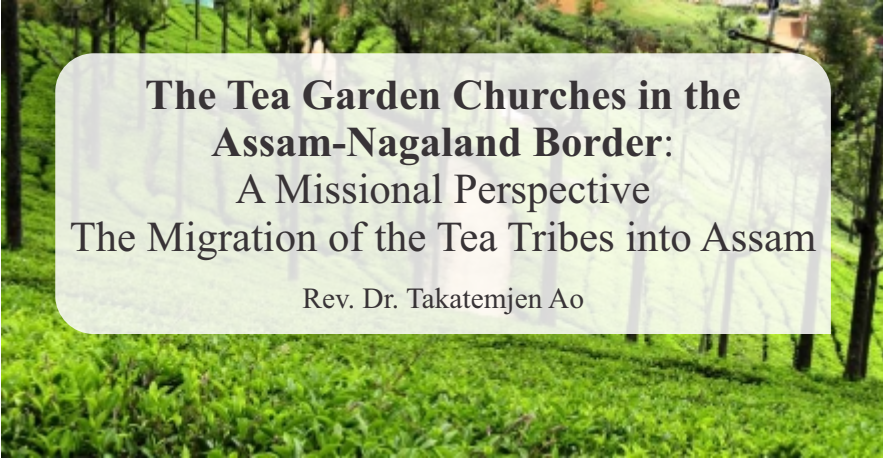
Types of Violence

Type of violence	No. of incidents
Threat / Harassment	38
Physical Violence	26
Falsely Accused / Arrested	21
Social Opposition / Boycott	10
Church / Worship Stopped	9
Arrested	5
Hate Campaign	5
Physical Violence / Arrested	5
Gender Violence	4
Vandalism	4
Murder	3
Demolition of Church	2
Forced Conversion	2
Church Burnt	1
Total	135

For further information, please write to mail@efirlc.org

Released by:

Rev. Vijayesh Lal
National Director – EFIRLC
General Secretary – EFI

A photograph of a lush green tea plantation with rows of tea bushes in the foreground and tall trees in the background. The image is used as a background for the title text.

The Tea Garden Churches in the Assam-Nagaland Border: A Missional Perspective The Migration of the Tea Tribes into Assam

Rev. Dr. Takatemjen Ao

When the British Tea planters started growing tea in Assam way back in the mid-1830s, they encountered an unexpected problem: the non-availability of local workers for the plantations. Though local labourers were sufficiently available in the early years of the tea industry, as the Tea gardens multiplied, it was impossible to maintain the Gardens by employing local labourers because the districts under which the Tea Gardens were developing were sparsely populated and the amount of pay and the conditions of work in the Gardens failed to attract the local people to work in the Tea Gardens. Thus, the *Raj* was compelled to adopt a policy of recruiting indentured labours from various regions of the country.¹ As a result,

both tribal and other backward classes, who are also known as the Adivasis, were brought from the present day Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Telangana and Chhattisgarh into Assam during 1860-90s in multiple phases, for the purpose of employment in the tea gardens as labourers. Today, they are found mainly in the districts of Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Sonitpur, Nagaon, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and almost in all the districts of Assam. The Tea Garden workers are represented by several communities, of which the Santhals, the Oraons, and the Mundas of Bengal are the larger ones. During the last about 160 years of their settlement in Assam, the total population of the community has

grown to around 6.5-7.00 million or about 20 percent of the total population of Assam.

Demography

The population of the Tea Tribe community is primarily rural in nature. They live in almost every district of Assam but their density varies according to the number of tea plantations in different regions of Assam. They are more numerous in Upper Assam and Central Assam than Lower Assam. Some were not brought for tea garden labour. Many tribes such as the Santhals, Kurukhs and the Munda people were forcibly displaced by the British from the Chotanagpur region due to their rebellion against the British regime. They were dumped into Lower Assam regions of then undivided Goalpara and undivided Darrang districts as a punishment for their uprising against the regime during the Santhal rebellion of the 1850s.

They are not a single ethnic tribe but are the people of various origins, composed of dozens of tribes and castes who have now got intermixed and are interdependent to each other and are closely knitted. Major tribes and communities among them are the Munda, Santhals, Kurukh

(Oraon), Ahir/Gowala, Gonds, Kharia, Tanti, Saora, Kudumi Mahato, Bhumij, Lohar/Karmakar, Mahali, Khonds, Ho, Chik Baraik, Teli, Turi and dozens of other diverse groups of tribes and castes.

Language

Nagpuri or Sadri is their first language, and this dialect of Hindi works as a lingua franca among them. But the dialect spoken in Assam is totally different from the tone spoken in Chotanagpur region because the tone spoken in Assam is heavily influenced by the Bengali and Assamese language and to a lesser extent by the Odia. Santhali, Mundari, Kurukh, Oriya, Saora and Kharia are also spoken by few segments of the community. The population of Santhali speakers and Odia speakers are over 300,000 each. With steady rise in literacy level, younger generations are becoming fluent in standard Hindi, Assamese and English.

Socio - Economic Conditions

The working class in the tea gardens of Assam is perhaps the most exploited class in the organised sector of economy in India. Low wages, poor housing and lack of avenues for social mobility have

been a recurring theme since their settlement in the early 19th century. According to Kar, in the Tea plantations in Assam, there is a total of 1,84,160 labour quarters as against the requirement of 3,58,435, the gap being 1,74,275 quarters.ⁱⁱ So, this means that the Tea Planters have exploited the workers by not providing the basic needs such as shelter to the labourers. Even the wages paid to the labourers are below the basic minimum, say Rs.169/- per day per labourer. The tea garden labour lines have a unique identity as it is neither urban nor industrial nor rural. Among the tea garden workers, in each tea garden only 30-40% of the population are permanent employees. During the peak season, each garden employs casual labourers or 'Faltoo labours' as they are called, for the same amount wage, but minus some benefits that are given to the permanent labourers. Amongst the womenfolk, there are no maternity leaves or schemes for the tea garden workers. During pregnancy and post-natal period, women continue to engage in hard works. Besides poor socio-economic condition, illiteracy, over-crowded and unhygienic living conditions in the residential colonies makes tea

garden workers susceptible to various communicable diseases. No wonder, recently the BBC reported that the findings of the BBC team in the tea estates of Assam prompted the companies that own Tetley's, Twining's, Liptons, PG Tips and Yorkshire Tea to say they would work to improve conditions on the estates they buy from in India. The report says low wages and poor living and working conditions for the 155,000 people who live on the vast estates owned by Amalgamated Plantations Private Limited (APPL) are leading to high levels of malnutrition and ill health.ⁱⁱⁱ However, despite the promises made by the World Bank and International Finance Corporation which fund the Tea companies for improving the life conditions of the Tea labourers, it has remained an elusive dream.^{iv}

The literacy rate of the community is one of the lowest in Assam particularly among the girls and women. Due to this, girls are extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation and early marriages are prevalent among them.

Majority of the population of the community live in labour lines, built by the tea planters inside tea-estates.

These estates are located in interior places and this contributes to the backwardness and exploitation of the workers by the tea planters. The labourers in a way have to live with the basic facilities provided by the tea planters. The tea planters usually exploit the workers every possible way. Violence and agitation of labourers against the management is common, where the state machinery normally protects the tea-planters. Non-education, poverty, addiction of males to country-beer, poor standard of living, rising population and inadequate health facilities provided to them are the major problems. There are instances when tea-planters do not even supply the life-saving drugs when workers are dying out of epidemics.

The American Baptist Mission

The American Baptist mission activities started amongst the Tea tribes way back in the first half of the 19th century. It was C. A. Bruce, the

Superintendent of the Tea Committee^v and his wife, who had persuaded Major Jenkins, the agent to the governor general, to invite the American Baptist Missionaries to establish Schools at Sadiya for the benefit of the tribals. As a result, American Baptist missionaries landed in Assam.^{vi}

(To Be Continued...)



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ENDNOTES

- i. Sheila Bora, “The American Baptist Missionaries amidst the Tea Garden Workers in the Brahmaputra Valley (1886-1936) in Sarthak Sengupta (ed.) Tea Labourers of the Northeast India: An Anthro-historical perspective (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2009) pp.11-12
- ii. R.K.Kar, “Anthro- historical perspectives of the Tea Labourers with special reference to Northeast India” in Sarthak Sengupta (ed.) Tea Labourers of the Northeast India: An Anthro-historical perspective (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2009) pp. 6-7
- iii. Justin Rowlatt, South Asia Correspondent, BBC, 12 November, 2016
- iv. Ibid.
- v. See Rajen Saikia, Social and economic History of Assam: 1853-1921 (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000) p.146
- vi. Sheila Bora, “The American Baptist”, pp.11-33

Intercessory
Prayer
Points



August 2020

1 SATURDAY Thank God for His protection over your family during the month of July 2020. Thank Him also for the new month. Pray for His continued provision and protection. Pray also that you will be dependent on God and not be self-sufficient.

2 SUNDAY Pray for Churches that meet online. Pray that the Christian community would be encouraged and strengthened despite not being able to meet personally.

3 MONDAY Pray for Dooars Evangelical Bethel Church Fellowship, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Pray for effective witnessing to reach the unreached people and planting house churches in the interior parts of the Himalayan region including Madesh and Tarai belt.

4 TUESDAY Let us pray for the Senior Citizens in our country. Pray for accessible and affordable medical facilities. Pray for safety, protection and lots of love and healthy environment for them. Pray also for those who care for them.

5 WEDNESDAY Pray for the staff of

EFI in different parts of India. Pray for God's anointing upon them so that they may effectively serve Him. Pray for the ministry of EFI and the financial needs so that the God would accomplish His plans and purposes through EFI.

6 THURSDAY Continue to pray that God would remove Covid19 pandemic soon and restore people's lives. Pray also that our sufferings during this pandemic would not go waste but would bring us good and greater glory to God.

7 FRIDAY Pray for the ministry of CASA-India at New Delhi. Church's Auxiliary for Social Action is a national development and humanitarian organization set up in 1947. Pray for Spirit-led decisions and actions to be made for the benefit of many people.

8 SATURDAY Thank God for the AIM magazine writers who are investing their time and energy every month. Pray for them that their services to the Lord would bring change and growth in the body of Christ. Pray for some who are

struggling with health issues that God would bring healing and restoration.

9 SUNDAY Ask God for the boldness and courage to share the Gospel with your friends. Pray for your friends so that they may have eternal life in Christ Jesus.

10 MONDAY Continue to pray for Union Biblical Seminary that the Lord would continue to use it to train and equip many young leaders for the extension of His kingdom. Pray also that nothing would hinder God's desire and will for this establishment.

11 TUESDAY Let us pray for the safety of the children, especially those who are vulnerable to human trafficking. Pray that God would build a hedge around them and supernaturally protect them.

12 WEDNESDAY Today is International Youth Day. Pray that the youth of our nation would find hope and strength in God during this uncertain time. Pray for those who are working among the youth group that they would understand and empathize and have the ability to deliver the needed message of love, hope and strength to them.

13 THURSDAY Pray for all the Life members of EFI. Thank God for their support in the ministry of EFI. Pray that they may be blessed by God in all the things that they do.

14 FRIDAY Pray for the Holy Spirit's protection, comfort and empowerment

for the persecuted individuals. Pray that they may gain strength from God as they walk their faith journey.

15 SATURDAY Today is the Independence Day. Thank God for the freedom fighters who have sacrificed their lives for our freedom. Pray for freedom for every citizen in our country in every aspect of their lives. Pray for deliverance for those who are in physical and spiritual bondage. May God help us to experience His freedom in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

16 SUNDAY Be a part of the National Day of Prayer jointly organized by Evangelical Fellowship of India and National Council of Churches in India today. Pray for our Nation, Churches in India, Covid19 pandemic, youth, families etc. Pray as the Holy Spirit leads you.

17 MONDAY Pray for “Light of Life” – the magazine for Christian growth. Pray for passion and discernment for the editorial board. Pray that the readers would be renewed and strengthened as they read the magazine.

18 TUESDAY Pray for “Revival & Missions” – magazine for Christian living published by Missions India. Pray for deep insights for the writers. Pray for wide circulation and blessings for all their readers.

19 WEDNESDAY Today is World Humanitarian Day. Praise God for the compassion and bravery of humanitarian workers in India and

around the world. Let us also pray for international cooperation to meet the needs of humanitarian work around the world.

20 THURSDAY Pray for the children who are in orphanages. Pray for their safety and holistic growth. Pray that they would somehow encounter Christ and their lives would be lived meaningfully.

21 FRIDAY Continue to pray for the ministry of North East Centre for Training and Research (NECTAR), Shillong, Meghalaya. Pray that they would train many leaders who would bring change into people's lives.

22 SATURDAY Amidst our struggles and problems, let us pray for His peace to prevail in our lives. Pray that God will give us a persevering heart and strength as we face our problems.

23 SUNDAY Pray for God's will to be done in your church, family, friend circle, community and in every part of our country. Pray for those who are spreading the message of love and peace that is in Christ Jesus.

24 MONDAY Pray for Missionary Upholders Trust at Tamil Nadu. Thank and praise God for leading them thus far. May God be glorified through this thanksgiving celebration.

25 TUESDAY Uplift people who are affected by hospitalization or death in the family due to Covid19. Pray that their sufferings and grief would draw

them closer to our loving God and trust in His perfect will and purposes.

26 WEDNESDAY Pray for inner strength for the women of India. Pray that they would know their rights and worth in Christ. Pray for equality in every field.

27 THURSDAY Continue to pray for the finances of EFI. Pray that the Lord would bless and continue to use it as His instrument for change and growth for the Church in India.

28 FRIDAY Pray for Jesus Calls ministry in Chennai. Jesus Calls is a ministry dedicated to pray for the broken hearted people irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Pray for deep understanding and compassion for the needs of people.

29 SATURDAY Let us pray and ask God for wisdom to handle the various situations that we are in. Let us only look up to the Lord and not rely on our own understanding or on others. Continue to pray that the Lord would take away this pandemic soon.

30 SUNDAY Pray for the teaching and learning of God's Word in your church. Pray that the Holy Spirit may teach the audience and many lives may be impacted. Pray that God may remove Biblical illiteracy.

31 MONDAY Thank God for the fruitful month. Thank Him for His inexhaustible resources that provides for all our needs.

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Evangelical
Fellowship of
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One in God; Together for Good.

Introduction

Evangelical Fellowship of India, founded in 1951, is the national alliance of Evangelicals in India. As a central network of evangelicals and a service organization, it is the custodian of Evangelical faith, movement and values in India, representing the Evangelical voice, building capacity and promoting participation in nation building.

EFI is a charter member of the World Evangelical Alliance. Its membership includes over 65,000 Churches, over 150 Church related mission agencies and organisations and thousands of individual members.

Our Vision

To see evangelical Churches, institutions and individuals effectively witnessing the good news of Jesus Christ in word, deed and transforming nation.

Our Mission

As an evangelical alliance, serve churches, institutions and individuals through strategic initiatives, capacity building and forging solidarity, thus facilitating the mission of witnessing to the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed, and nation building.

Networks

- a. CEEFI (Christian Education Department of EFI)
- b. EFI Publication & Media
- c. EFI National Centre for Urban Transformation
- d. EFI Children @ Risk
- e. Evangelical Trust Association of North India
- f. EFI Micro Enterprise Development
- g. Evangelical Financial Accountability Council (EFAC)

Commissions

- a. EFI Women Commission
- b. EFI Theological Commission
- c. EFI Youth Commission
- d. EFI Religious Liberty Commission
- e. EFI Commission on Relief (EFICOR)

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