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TRANSFORMING CULTURES AND PRAXIS:
Engaging Peoples in the Margins

Wati Longchar

PTCA Series No. 16

TRANSFORMING CULTURES AND PRAXIS:
Engaging Peoples in the Margins

Wati Longchar

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Dedicated to
My Students of
The Yushan Theological College and Seminary
Hualien, Taiwan

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The book is a collection of papers which I presented in different ecumenical forums. Some of the articles have been published in journals like *Yu-Shan Theological Journal, SATHRI Journal, Journal of Theologies and Cultures, Clark Journal of Theology, International Review of Mission* and other publications. I thank the editors for giving permission for publication. Readers will notice that I have made substantial revision. There are repetitions here and there since the papers were presented in different forums. Some papers have been revised substantially to avoid repetition, but I have retained it in some papers for the sake of clarity and also to help readers to see coherency in the argument and articulation.

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Wati Longchar
Hualien, 2017

FOREWORD

We live in a world where material things and money are valued more than human persons. The successive colonization and Christianization followed by the aggressive promotion of consumeristic lifestyle through market capitalism have made immense negative impact upon indigenous people around the world. They have long been forgotten or are at the verge of extinction of their culture and language. Their customs, rituals, sacred shrines, places of worship, sacred music, ceremonial dress, traditions, and handiwork are being commercialized and exploited without respect. Today, the planet earth is under threat. The land, the river and forest that have been the home and life sustaining source of indigenous people for centuries, are being misused and raped to meet the growing demands of consumerism. Forest and fishing resources are depleted for quick profits. Mining companies are exploiting resources with little regard to human persons as well as the environment. The sustaining power of the earth is being destroyed. If we have to save the planet earth, we need to listen and learn from the wisdom of the indigenous people. Unless we rediscover our spiritual connection with the earth's family, it is not possible to talk about liberation, social justice and a community where all people are treated with justice and equality. Abuse of earth is like attempting to liberate oneself after killing one's mother. An authentic theology is possible only in relation to protection of

the land and its resources. Indigenous people affirm progress, development and liberation as important components for human life, but without neglecting their spiritual connection to the earth's family. We need to acknowledge that one of the major roots of today's world crises is the negligence of the spiritual connection with space/earth/creation for human liberation.

The Bible is being interpreted to satisfy the vested interests of the dominant group in their unbridled thirst for wealth, power and pleasure at the expense of the rights of the marginalized community and the earth's resources. But the truth is any economic system that relegates or marginalizes human life falls short of the divine standards and contradicts the biblical teaching. Each person is created in God's image and thus, is worthy and valuable for the Creator. Therefore, in economic life, any individual, class, caste, nature, gender and community, should not be regarded as an object whose value is determined by the fundamentals of the market and who may be bought and sold or dispensed with a whim or will of those who possess economic power; human person should not be treated as a means but as an end. As the author has powerfully reiterated that the Bible demands a more equitable distribution of the world's resources, not the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few. Market competition without respect of humans and God's creation is definitely not the way of the Kingdom. The Bible upholds a community where justice is expressed in equality and sharing, and affirms a community economic system with reciprocal sharing and hospitality. Western theology is shaped by anthropocenrtric and androcentric view of life. Thus, the uncritical acceptance of western culture as superior and normative for articulating theology will further lead to marginalization of both humans and the earth. This book covers many core issues the world is facing today because of concentration and abuse of power with a few privileged people. The marginalized people are always at the receiving end. The people in the margins have to bear

the brunt of the institutionalized unjust structures and system. Such reality negates life and dignity not only of the humans but of the whole God's creation.

The marginalized people are not a homogenous group. There are different layers within the margins. This book, *Transforming Cultures and Praxis: Engaging Peoples in the Margins*, has identified different layers of marginal groups and unfolded the nexus between oppressive culture, colonialism and market culture. Applying "Margin", as a critical theological principle, the author has challenged the reality of structural injustices and domination. God's revelation took place among the margins, and therefore, the people in the power alone cannot define theology and impose upon the people in the margin. The marginalized people have their own wealth of resources to articulate their faith journey in God.

The author has expounded that one cannot understand the good news of Jesus Christ without locating in the context of the margins. God in Jesus Christ opted for the marginalized people including indigenous people, persons with disabilities, people of different sexual orientation, gentiles, widows, lepers not because they are pitiable but primarily because they are created in God's own image to celebrate fullness of life and yet they are denied of the promise of the fullness of life through imposition of unjust power structures, cultures and traditions. Locating in the context of margins, the author has sharpened our theological discourse and come up with new theological paradigm on how people in margins can strengthen God's mission in the world. In the context of growing inequalities, different forms of injustice and conflict under the umbrella of economic development, the author further calls us to promote just trade and economic co-operation on the basis of equality, respect of cultural and religious diversity, and sanctity of human life as well as the entire God's cosmos. A transformed culture rooted in Kingdom's value and just-peace praxis is the only option for building an inclusive community for all and protection of God's *oikos.*

I congratulate Professor Wati Longchar, the Director of Asia-Pacific Indigenous Research Centre, Yushan Theological College and Seminary, Hualien, Taiwan, for this scholarly achievement and I trust that this compelling book will challenge and generate new theological thinking and articulation for furtherance of God's kingdom. We thank The Programme of Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA) for jointly publishing this work. May this book serve as an eye opener for all those who are committed for transformation of world and saving the mother Earth.

Rev. Dr. Pusin Tali
President, YTCS
Taiwan

INTRODUCTION

Cultures are product of human encounter with their environment and it is a collective heritage that binds a community giving a distinct identity. As the environment and historical context varies from one place to another, the cultural practices also differ from one community to another. Its value perception changes as the community encounters other racial and religious groups. In modern world, market capitalism, migration and cyber technology have become forces of cultural change creating global cyber culture especially among the younger generation. Many traditional cultures are being discarded or re-adopted to suit the context of modern environment. However, along with colonization and Christianization, indigenous people's culture, traditions, customs, rituals, sacred shrines, places of worship, sacred music, ceremonial dress, have been demonized and relegated to inferior status. With the booming of tourism industry, indigenous culture is further commodified for commercial purpose. Musicians, dancers and other artists perform, exhibit and sell their creativity to earn some income, at the cost of their self-respect and dignity. The primary purpose of this work is to unmask the interconnection of the abuse of power, wealth, marginality, and to explore a just and life-affirming community exploring biblio-theological and indigenous cultural wisdom locating in the context of the margins.

Asia is a vast continent with many cultures, languages, religions, cultures and races. Although many Asian countries have experienced colonization, their history also differs from one country to another. The economic condition also greatly differs from one country to another. Diversity and plurality is seen in Asian context. Asian theologies also reflect a wide range of diversity but the reality of exploitation of peoples

in the margins reflects the same; the reality of abuse and manipulation of power and the continuing marginalization of the poor remain a serious challenge for us today. In response to Asian realities, we have theologies like Asian Womanist Theology, Minjung Theology, Inter-faith theology, Dalit Theology, Indigenous/Tribal Theology, Theology of Struggle, etc. We also hear theologies of waterbuffalo, bamboo, coconut, han, Christ – the perfect pig, cock/rooster, Christ as dancer, dalit, farmer, warrior, etc. All these are products of Asian theologians' effort to respond to Asian contexts and attempt to indigenize, enculturate and contextualize.

Under the theme, "Doing Theologies with Asian Resources in Asian context", the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA), founded in 1983, under the leadership of Professor C. S. Song from Taiwan, has made a tremendous contribution in doing theology in Asia. Since its inception, the PTCA has been working for the constructions and re-construction of theologies that reflect Asian cultural resources, contexts and experiences. The movement has made a profound impact on Asian theology, giving it a distinct style. It has opened the eyes of the people to unpack the rich resources for theological reflection that are embedded in the stories, myths, folk-tales and poetry in Asian cultures and religions.

The theological unit of WCC, namely, the Programme for Theological Education (PTE) and regional ecumenical movements like CCA, FABC, URM and other theological and social movements have also made significant contributions in doing theologies in Asia. They have created space for theological institutions and individual theologians to articulate theology in their own contexts exploring their own resources. We may summarize the use of Asian cultural resources by Asian theologians into three broad categories:

(i) Indigenization/enculturation Approach (1800-1940s)– This approach was popular during the missionary era. Affirming that the Western culture is superior and the only valid expression

of Christian faith, they adopted mainly three processes: (a) adoption of cultural practices, e.g. names, songs, dances, eating habit, dress, etc. (b) adoption of social structure, e.g. caste and patriarchal structures etc., and (c) translation of the theological ideas formulated in the west by means of adopting local terminologies, idioms and categories. Theologically, it was assumed that Christian faith developed in the west is *the unchanging truth for all ages and for all contexts*, and we should accept without any question. Therefore, native cultures and traditions were never considered valuable resources for doing theology. Christians who participated in traditional festivals or used musical instruments were excommunicated from the church. There was very little or no awareness of the religio-cultural experience of the peoples in the margins. Theology was alien to the people; it spoke an alien language and ideas. Theology was outside of the people's reality. God's revelation was accepted in a very narrow way reducing Asian religion and culture as mere *preparatio evangelii*. Theology was formulated elsewhere, imported from outside and taught in alien language. The church and its theology was a stranger in the society. We can categorize this approach as exclusivist, an attitude that only one particular tradition teaches the truth and constitutes the way to salvation or liberation. In this case, Christian faith alone is true, and thus all other religions and cultures are false. The affirmation of the finality of Christ means closure, and dialogue with other faith expressions is a betrayal of God's revelation in Christ.

(ii) Philosophical Approach – The 1940s witnessed the era of national movement and nationalism. Influenced by renaissance movement, many Asian scholars became critical of missionary theology. They began to use freely the concepts, doctrines and symbols of other religions, especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism in doing theology. They tried to work out theological hermeneutics in terms of Hindu/Buddhist/Taoist philosophical thought pattern exploring Asian elitist philosophical system and thus, theological language

became highly abstract and rationalistic. Unfortunately, like the other dominant theological reflections in the West, such theological approach became abstract and mere intellectual exercises unrelated to the real life situation of the people. A general notion till today is that to have a good foundation one must have a good grasp of western philosophy and Asian philosophical system. Such elitist theological approach did not contribute much to social transformation of the people in the margins. It also gave a notion among Christian thinkers that the dominated indigenous people's culture and spirituality is not philosophically deep enough to articulate theology since they are product of pagan worship and illiterate tradition. People did not think or could not imagine that there is something good to learn from the people in the margins. They never thought that God works among the people at the margins.

(iii) Dialogical Approach – Theology is seen as a product of creative and active engagement in dialogue with people of other living faiths and ideologies. A central theological claim of this model is that without taking into account the unacknowledged riches of God's work with the whole of humanity and other segments of God's creation, Christian theology cannot become authentic and liberative. The advocates of this approach rejected the claim that any one religion is superior to all others. All religions and cultures are activated and created by the saving spirit of God in spite of oppressive system perpetuated by human greed and selfishness. They asserted that Christians and people of other faiths must take their respective faith commitments seriously, at the same time they also need to enter into open dialogue with others with mutual respect for enrichment. In 1970s and 1980s theologians like Paul Devanandan, Raymondo Panikkar, S. J. Samartha, K. Koyama, and C. S Song, to name a few, made significant contributions with the employment of the *dialogical model* in doing theology. Dialogical theology is to be celebrated for liberating God's revelation from the monopoly of Christians. Although the advocates of dialogical method were not always sympathetic

and sensitive to minority tradition, culture and religion, the affirmation of God's revelation and lordship over the world, in all cultures and religions widened the understanding of the mystery of God. In spite of the ambiguous nature of culture, God works in and through all religions and cultures. This understanding has created awareness to appreciate and respect the differences of others and also one's own spirituality, religion and cultures. Though some of the evangelicals are very critical of the dialogical method, arguing that it sacrifices the uniqueness of Christian faith, there is a growing awareness among younger scholars that we should go back to the roots to make Gospel meaningful and relevant. However, majority of the advocates of interreligious dialogue never thought that people in the margins have distinct spirituality. They never attempted to dialogue or learn from the spirituality of the people in the margins.

We discover that all the above mentioned theological approaches were critical of western paradigm of doing theology and rejected the assumption that a theology formulated in Europe or America has universal significance and is relevant for all places and all times. Instead they articulated theologies exploring rich religio-cultural resources of Asia. One will notice that they lack the understanding of the reality of the people in the margins. We need to note that the present social, cultural, religious, economic and political structures and ideologies are created by the people in power, primarily to protect their interest. The organizing principle of society of power structure is that white is superior and civilized, indigenous people are interior and uncivilized. This false presuppositions and beliefs are created by the privilege class and it promotes injustice. Social arrangement and relationship based on higher-lower, civilized-uncivilized thus deny human rights and dignity to a large number of people. Excluded and dominated people are left to live in unbearable misery and humiliation in many ways. Thus, it is imperative that we uncover the structure of violence and injustice from the margins' perspective.

We are aware that "margins" are not a homogenous group, and there are many forces and factors that contribute to marginalization of people. There are different layers within the margins and each group deserves recognition and response as their experiences vary widely. The book has not gone into the deep analysis of different layers of marginal groups. However, the concept 'margin' is perceived as a theological principle that critiques all the dominant value systems that dehumanize, exclude and push some people to marginality. It critiques cultures, traditions and theologies that justify and nurture unjust institutions and it advocates marginality as part of the divine creation. The emphasis on "FROM" *the margins* makes post-modern contextual theological discourse different and significant. Theology is no longer seen from the centre of power to powerless, but from the powerless to power. Powerlessness is not seen as weakness but divine locus. God is already there among the margins and we cannot define God from the centre and import it to the margins, rather we need to discern how God is at work among the margins. The humble work is an attempt to highlight some aspects of theology from the margins.

Justice and Peace are not merely for a life of prosperity, but for creation of conditions so that human life and God's entire creation may have the possibility of life, here and now and beyond. In just-peace praxis the affirmation of the integrity of the goodness of land and its resources is crucial. *Shalom* without land is not *shalom* as it will lead to slavery and destruction. Today's poverty, war, oppression, ethnic conflict and identity problems cannot be understood or solved without relating them to the integrity of God's creation. Justice to God's creation becomes very central to peace and human dignity and fullness of life. We need commitment and dedication to the harmony of God's creation.

Chapter One

COLONIZATION, CHRISTIANITY AND INDIGENOUS CULTURE

The global church has celebrated 500 years of the Reformation in 2017. It was God's intervention in history of the church and it could be compared to the Exodus Event in the Bible. It is indeed a grand Jubilee year for the churches and many related organizations such as Ecumenical Movement, Youth movement, Laity movement and Bible translation societies. This celebration offers a great opportunity to all the Christians to collectively affirm our journey of faith in God looking back to the past to re-evaluate, re-dedicate and re-commit our journey of faith toward a new future. Just like Luther's 95 theses that shook the foundation of the church, we are called to shake the world by speaking the truth of justice and peace in the broken world.

The Reformers' teachings have brought the greatest revolution not only in the ecclesial structure, doctrines and practices, but also in the social, religious, economic and philosophical outlook of the people worldwide. Even after 500 years, their teachings continue to influence the church. The Reformation theology and subsequent development of colonization and missionary movements have made tremendous impact in the life of the indigenous people and their culture.

Colonization of Indigenous Territory, Culture and Language

Colonization refers to exercise of power and control over one people by another. It is both the formal and informal methods (behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economics) that maintain the subjugation or exploitation of indigenous peoples, lands, and resources.[1] In other words,

it is an aggressive, forced, violent activity. It attacks the territorial, cultural, spiritual, social, and political life of the people. The first phase of colonizing process involves land or territory confiscation of others militarily or sometimes through diplomatic dialogue or treaty agreement. In many cases, colonized people are forcefully evicted; sometimes creating fear and tension to drive them away. In extreme case, the whole community is massacred to take over the land. Today almost 70 per cent of the land mass is occupied by the colonizers during last two centuries. The prime lands were the target and they have forcefully confiscated them making colonized people landless. With the loss of land which is the main source of their livelihood they live in abject poverty. Along with the loss of land, they have also lost their culture.

After disarming and controlling the colonized territory militarily, the second phase of colonization process is imposed which is called cultural and social colonization. Robert Odawi Porter expounds the process of cultural colonization as follows:

> Cultural change at this level could be called "acculturation" or "assimilation" but the more accurate term is "social engineering". At first, the colonizer uses violence to force the colonized people to change who are as people. This occurs through the application of new laws and punishments that outlaw traditional behaviors, such as religious practices, dancing, and certain family and marital relations. The next phase is equally as violent, but takes the less overtly threatening form of taking children away from their home and raising them in the colonizer's educational institutions. This "educational" process, often referred to as "promoting civilization," involves beating, hard labor, and psychological abuse. The "benefit" associated with this is that the seeds of the colonizer's culture are planted deeply in Indigenous Peoples at a very early age.[2]

Social and cultural colonization is done in several ways. First, the colonizer will change the name of the native villages, towns and even mountains and rivers. The people will not be allowed to identify by their indigenous names; but the colonizer will

give them a new name. This process was strategically done in countries like Taiwan, Australia, Argentina and many countries. Second, the indigenous names, icons, symbols and cultural practices will be used by colonizer for undignified, demeaning purpose to inculcate feeling of lower self-esteem and negative image of their culture and wisdom to their colonized children.[3] In some cases, people would be forced to change their religious beliefs, educational practices, economic system and political system.

Language is one of the greatest gifts of God. Language gives an identity to a particular community and it is through the language we analyze, express and relate to the world around us. A major function of language is to act as reservoir of people's identity and self-expression. It helps people to dream their future and assists them to articulate their hopes and visions of new society. Language is also one of the most important social agencies that create feelings of community by providing distinct cultural identity.[4] But today many indigenous languages are in the state of deep crisis. In some countries like in the case of Taiwan and Australia indigenous people are punished for speaking their own language. To make students aware of their status of the mother language, I normally ask the students to identify where their communities stand today using Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS).[5]

Level 8	The only remaining speakers of my language are members of the grandparent generation.
Level 7	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it with their elders but is not transmitting it to their children.
Level 6	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.
Level 5	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form through out the community.
Level 4	Literacy in the language is transmitted through education.

Level 3	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.
Level 2	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services.
Level 1	The language is used in education, work, mass media, government at the nationwide level

Majority of the students at Yushan Theological College and Seminary would indicate that their community comes under the Level 8 and 7. Many indigenous languages have already gone extinct and most of the indigenous languages in Taiwan and elsewhere are dangerously close to extinction. With the loss of land and language, indigenous culture would be disappeared. Any community who fail to protect language will lose their distinct identity, ways of thinking, community life and traditions forever. Attempt to eradicate indigenous languages was a strategic colonizing mechanism. This is the reason why in many countries indigenous languages are not only recognized as legitimate language, but also punished for speaking their mother tongue. James Brooke states that within the next century, it is expected that half of the world's 6,000 languages will be disappeared.[6] We are all taught that English is important for our survival in the modern world, while indigenous language has very limited or no usefulness and that their children will be disadvantaged for survival. Protection and recovery of language is thus crucial in decolonizing process. Both the Governments and individuals should take steps to protect indigenous language.

Different Cultural Value System

Over the years, people have developed different cultural traditions adapting to different environment. Indigenous people have developed their culture around the land and its resources, while others have developed in the context of struggle for survival. Their worldview, history, stories, spirituality, community life, and symbols are bound to be different. We can make a random comparison between the Western and Indigenous cultures:

	Western/Dominant Views	**Indigenous/ Dominated Views**
Land and its Resources	Empty space, valuable, to be exploited.	Sacred, life sustaining power, cannot be exploited.
Water	Mere drinking water, to use for washing and to commercialize.	Life sustaining power. Can we sell air,water and land? The spirit indwells in water.
Forest	They are wild. Must be conquered and exploited. There is nothing amazing.	Home of all lives, temple and treasure of food. There are full of masteries.
Rock	Dead object and resources for construction.	Living and God indwells there.
God	Male image, God comes from above transcendental.	Non-human image, God comes out of the soil – immanental.
Sacred Truth	Written scripture. No truth outside of written text.	No scripture, myth and stories. Truth in all realms of life.
Worship Place	Specific place like Temple, Church, etc.	No specific place and whole world is temple of God.
The Spirit	Primarily works in human heart.	The spirit indwells in whole earth.
Ownership	Individual, e.g land	Community ownership.
Value of Life	Achievement, profit and enjoyment.	Sacrifice, sharing and caring.

The Heart of Religion	Religious practices are centred on historical person, e.g. Jesus Christ, Muhammad, Buddha	No historical person but all religious practices are centred on the cycle of the soil.
Creation	Human intellect can understand.	Mysteries and human intellect is incapable to understand it.
Dances	Entertainment and amusement.	Worship, fellowship strengthening community interrelationship.
Costume	Commercialization, beautification.	Identity, not to be commercialized.
Myths, Folktales	Superstition, fiction.	Sacred truth.
Rich	Accumulation, investment, saving.	Sharing, giving everything to the community in the form of feast.
Human Relationship	Individual person. Individual achievement, individual welfare over community.	Family, clan, village and tribe. Community achievement, community welfare over individual.
Elders	Not so respected.	Highly respected and regarded as guardian of the community.

Culture is not static, but dynamic. There is neither inferior nor superior culture. There are both oppressive and liberative potentials in all cultures. As a result of many years of colonization, the dominated or indigenous traditions are demonized and seen as uncivilized while western culture is

held as superior and civilized way of life. But one should know that it is a matter of priority and emphasis. Indigenous people give more priority to protection of environment, because in their understanding the survival of future humanity depends on land and its resources. All the cultural and religious practices are geared toward protection of environment. In other words, contrary to the colonizers description of the land as 'wilderness' or `empty space', indigenous people's worldview is radically related to the land, mountains, rocks, the entire cosmic universe and everything therein. For them, the land is our temple (cathedral), our university, our hospital, our sustenance, the vast hall where we congregate and celebrate, our parent, our life. It is in the land that we worship, heal the sick, educate our children, and feed our people. The loss of land and the destruction of the indigenous people's environment is an affront to identities, the loss of spirituality and self-determining existence. If the land and its resources are not protected, the family, clan and village and the tribe's identity and culture too would be lost. For indigenous people, land is thus more than just a habitat or a political boundary; it is the basis of their social organization, economic system and cultural identification. While in the western worldview, humanity is the ontological basis of all realities, the land is the basis of all realities – human selfhood and identity in indigenous worldview. Even the understanding of God differs between western and indigenous worldviews. In western thinking, nature is something detached or outside of God. But for indigenous people, God cannot be perceived apart from creation; God is in creation. The earth is sacred because God indwells in creation. Manipulation and exploitation of environment is integral part of western ethics. For indigenous people, it is rather adaptation to environment because the earth is sacred and our mother. How can we sell and exploit our mother! Therefore, viewing western culture as superior is wrong and this colonial mindset must be changed.

Christianity and Indigenous Culture

Though colonization and Christianity worked together in spreading and upholding the same ideology celebrating

western culture as superior, one cannot deny the contributions of western missionaries towards the transformation of indigenous people. They were able to create a new sense of identity and dignity by introducing a new ecclesial structure, new faith and providing them with literature to name a few. Modern education and medical services introduced by them are acknowledged by all.

Since missionaries went across the world with the mindset that western cultural values are "superior" in terms of religion, race, political structure, economic system and culture, they saw the `others' as primitive, uncultured, and uncivilized people. Indigenous people were seen as people without culture or inferior culture, with savage life & styles and ways of life. Indigenous people's religion and spirituality was thus derided as demonic, superstitious and evil. They saw the `others' as the world to be conquered by Christian faith. Some missionaries even went on to the extent of banning indigenous people's musical instruments – drum, flute – songs, dances, thus making them rootless and nameless. Seeing that colonial power and Christianity working hand in hand, Waziyatawin criticized the motif of Bible translation. To quote:

> While most invading Europeans never attempted to learn or understand Indigenous languages, when they did them they often did so only to facilitate the conversion of Indigenous Peoples to Christianity. If missionaries could deliver sermons in an Indigenous language, more potential converts could be reached. Among such missionaries, indigenous orthographies were often quickly created so that the Bible could be translated and printed in the Indigenous language. This practice was not developed out of love or respect for indigenous language; it was developed to more rapidly acquire souls for Christianity's kingdom. When indigenous people converted to Christianity, they were expected to learn the colonizer's language, whether it was Spanish, English, or French.[7]

This shows the perception of superiority-inferioriy value

system. The inferiority value system imposed on indigenous people made tremendous negative impact on their life and culture. Indigenous people also internalized inferiority complex in regard to their culture. The idealization of the white culture and religion brought great damage to God's rich blessing of cultures. Even today many indigenous people think that their religion, spirituality, economy and culture are inferior and backward, and thus they aspire for westernization. Young people aspire to adopt western lifestyle.

Internalization of Western Culture

Internalization of indigenous culture as inferior and western culture as superior is very strong today among Christians. I had a privilege of facilitating Training in Mission (TIM), a youth empowerment program of the Council for World Mission (CWM), both in India and Taiwan. Students mostly come from Asia, Europe, Africa and Caribbean countries. Once I asked them to define "beauty" and their answers were – fair, slim, long hair, long leg, good breast, pointed nose etc. All these answers depict western influenced beauty norms. I told them that they have excluded half of the humanity – the black – because their definition reflects "white is superior" mindset. Once I also posed a question "Slaves were taken from Africa", true or false? All ten TIM students including those from Africa said, true. Then, I reversed the quote, "Good and innocent people were forcefully kidnapped from Africa and made into slaves by the colonizer." They said this reverse quote is right. If children were asked to color the pictures of angel and devil, they will color white for the angel and black for the devil. We have several books entitled From Darkness to Light. When I ask students at Yushan to put down words associated with "religion", they would normally write – God, scriptures, temples, prayers, singing, ethical life, Lord's supper, chapel, preaching, etc. Though most of them are indigenous students, they would not mention land, myths, stories, oral tradition, dance, drum, animals, trees, rock, community life, sharing etc. This shows how deeply the colonial mindset has taken root in our way of thinking and perceiption. Theology is also articulated from western lenses. An early believer, during missionary era, encouraged his villagers to receive Jesus.[8]

Hoi, let all people hear ....
25th December Christmas will be celebrated
All persons and families start taboo observance
Prepare to live a holy living
Jesus is coming to enter your home
Welcome him with sticky rice, meat and betel nut
Accept him with love
He will bless you all
I bring this message in the name of Highest God, Amen.

Recently, a pastor prayed this prayer in traditional way. After the invocation, congregation sang "Joy to the World, the Lord has come". The church was decorated colorfully. Inside the church, there were Christmas tree, stars, many balloons, colour papers, Santa Claus and four candles. Outside the church there were again five big Santa Claus portraits and all of them were carrying big basket full of gifts, and in a corner there was baby Jesus in a manger surrounded by shepherd and wise men. After the worship service both young and old started bursting crackers. Interestingly, seeing all those beautiful decoration, a boy who was just 9 years old asked his father, "Dad, are we celebrating Jesus' or Santa Claus' birthday?" Some of the elders of the church heard and they all laughed. But the boy's question was sharp: In whose culture are we celebrating Christmas?

Surprisingly, the prayer created controversy among the members of the church. It was not the content of the prayer that was problematic, but the way the pastor prayed because he prayed it in indigenous chanting way. Some said that it is more appealing and moving, and also can command attention and respect from the people, but our fore-parents prayed in that way to invoke the evil spirit. We should not pray to God like that. The evil spirit will hear and come back again. Some said that if we start praying like that some members will go back to traditional indigenous belief system and start practicing evil customs. We should pray like the way the missionaries had taught us. We are now Christians. I joined them in the debate and asked them, can we pray "Our Loving Mother" instead of "Our Loving Father". They said `No' because people cannot imagine God as mother! But I said God's love is compared

with mother's love in the Bible. I asked them again, can we pray "Our Earthly Father" instead of "Our Heavenly Father" because God became flesh and dwelt among us; God created both heaven and earth. Again, they said that it will not be good. Just pray like the way missionaries had taught us to pray. I asked them further, Have you heard what the boy was asking his father: Is 25th December Jesus' or Santa Claus' birthday? Is Santa's name, Christmas tree, balloons, candles and crackers mentioned in the Bible? Whose culture is this? Are they indigenous culture?

Christians are confused. We often think that western culture is Christian culture. When it comes to western culture we do not question but just accept them as Christian culture even though some of their teachings and practices are one-sided and nothing to do with biblical faith. When we incorporate indigenous cultural elements in worship we question and resist. I posted some pictures of the worship led by Paiwan-Rukai tribes in Taiwan on Facebook a few months ago. One fellow questioned, "Is this worship or cultural performance?" I replied, "We had a very meaningful worship." The fellow replied, "No, pagan way of worship." We need to ask ourselves: Can we worship God by/through western songs alone? We need to understand that Gospel is different from western culture; western culture is not Christian culture. Christians often think that conversion to Christianity means one should abandon our rich traditional culture because they are pagan, evil and demonic. We should follow what western missionaries have taught us. What they said and taught are absolutely right, we should not change, or question but just follow. This is called colonized mindset or mentality. This is called distortion of gospel message and rich cultural traditions. The internalization of western culture as superior and absolute for Christian faith expression need to be corrected. Due to this wrong notion indigenous cultural traditions and wisdom have been forgotten and continued to disappear even today.

Diversity of God's Creation and Culture

Christians need to acknowledge the diversity of cultures. Diversity is God's structure of creation. It is like a rainbow. All

colours are unique and different, and only together they make the rainbow beautiful. It is God who created all cultures whether minority or majority traditions and they are all beautiful and must be respected, protected and also nurtured. Not only the one dominant culture, but also the smallest indigenous community tradition is blessed by God. The world will become richer when we celebrate together different cultures and traditions with respect and love. Christian's life will be more colourful and meaningful when we incorporate indigenous traditions. God can be worshipped in many different styles and forms, and God is present even among "strange people's culture", as the prophet Isaiah believed and declared. The core of religion is doing justice, because God is a just God. The prophet Isaiah said,

> When the time comes, there will be an altar of the Lord in the land of Egypt and a stone pillar dedicated to him at the Egyptian border. They will be the symbols of the Lord Almighty's presence in Egypt. When the people there are oppressed and call out to the Lord for help, he will send someone to rescue them. The Lord will reveal himself to the Egyptian people and they will acknowledge and worship him and bring him sacrifices and offerings (Isa 19:19-21 NRSV).

God will use different nations and they will be a blessing to the world. The prophet Isaiah further prophesied that

> When the time comes, there will be a highway between Egypt and Assyria. The people of those two countries will travel to and fro between them and the two nations will worship together. When that time comes, Israel will rank with Egypt and Assyria, and these three nations will be a blessing to all the world. The Lord Almighty will bless them and say: "I will bless you Egypt, my people; you Assyria whom I created; and you Israel, my chosen people" (19:23-25 NRSV).

The prophets acknowledged God as the Lord of all cultures and spirituality of all nations. The diversity of cultures testifies to the richness of God's creation.

Transformed Culture in Christ – by God´s Spirit

Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law, or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Mat. 5:17). Jesus acknowledged the good work of the Samaritans who were considered as outcast by the Jews. Rather, Jesus was against ritualism, legalism and misuse of power and position. To explain the transformed culture in Christ, St. Paul always connects the "Spirit" and "faith". They are the basis for following Jesus; the observance of traditional laws and ritual practices is not sufficient.

The Galatians were not all Jewish; they were followers of Christ from a Gentile background. They had their own rich cultural traditions. After they decided to follow Jesus some false teachers taught that they ought to be circumcised, adopt the strict observance of the Sabbath, and practice and apply Jewish law and customs. This created conflict and misunderstanding among themselves and also broke their relationship with their fellow brothers and sisters who were not yet Christian. Just as some Christians think that by adopting and following western culture, we become better Christians. St. Paul challenged them, saying "You foolish Galatians! Who misguided you?" He posed several questions further: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law? Did you not receive the Spirit by faith? Do you think that mere observance of the law will change your life? Do you think that religious practices and customs will transform your life? Paul argued that mere observance of laws and rituals of somebody else's culture has nothing to do in following Jesus (Gal. 3: 1-14). It will rather uproot people and make people without identity. St. Paul expounded a transformed culture in Christ.

To help the Galatians recognize God's presence, Paul connects between the `Spirit' and `faith'. In the Old Testament, the `Spirit' is compared with the `wind'. The wind blows wherever it wills. Nobody can control it. It does not make distinction between Jews and Gentiles, male or female, Christians or 'non-Christians', indigenous or non-indigenous. Neither does it make distinction between humans and non-humans. The wind is also compared with the breath of God which gives life to all. The Spirit was working even before

Abraham. God's Spirit was at work even before Israel as a nation came into being. Hence, Paul affirms that God as Spirit was/is present in all cultures from the very creation. Since the Spirit is present in all cultures we should not abandon it, but celebrate it. Galatian culture was also good and colourful because of the presence of the Spirit. One must follow Jesus without forsaking one's own culture.

Paul further argued that "faith" in Christ makes our celebration of cultural diversity different and meaningful. Faith and action always go together, because faith in Christ leads us to transformed action. Observance of law and customs without faith will just make routine ritual observance, and duty for the sake of duty. Works without faith leads a person to bondage and curtails one's freedom. But faith in Christ makes our cultural diversity liberating and transforming. Faith leads us to respect others, and not to condemn them. Faith leads us to value life more than mere ritualistic practices.

We are not saying that all our indigenous cultures and practices are good and we should go back to traditional customs and practices. Paul is urging that we should preserve and practice our customs and culture in a transformed manner because of faith in Christ. Culture is dynamic and there is no fixed culture. Some cultures are destructive to life, and the misuse and manipulation of culture has sometimes led to killing, domination and exploitation of many people. Faith in Christ leads us to discern human limitations and challenges us to resist, reject, and transform those oppressive elements in our culture for the sake of saving life – justice and peace. Paul is challenging the Galatians not to abandon their culture as evil. Instead, they should transform their own culture in Christ Jesus and celebrate diversity in rainbow colours to glorify God.

The celebration of diverse cultures and practices, transformed by Kingdom values, is what we need to affirm today.

Conclusion

Gospel and culture are interrelated. While the gospel is the liberating and transforming power, the culture gives the identity to a community and helps in deepening their faith in God. Cultures are product of human encounter with their

environment and there cannot be superior or inferior culture. However, along with the colonial mindset, the forces of market capitalism and cyber culture, it is disheartening to see indigenous people's culture, customs, rituals, sacred shrines, places of worship, sacred music, ceremonial dress, traditions, and handiwork are commodified for commercial purpose. Musicians, dancers and other artists perform, exhibit and sell their creativity to earn some income, at the cost of their self-respect and dignity. Today indigenous people's sacred music and dances have turned into mere cabaret performances for someone else's enjoyment. It is denial of life. Indigenous cultures have powerful spirituality resources to protect the world from exploitation. As we celebrate 500 years of Reformation it is also important to recognize the unique cultural heritage of indigenous people and work towards restoration of justice, dignity, respect and freedom. It is a divine gift to all beings.

Endnotes

[1] Waziyatawin and Michael Yellow Bird, "Beginning Decolonization," in *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook*, eds. Waziyatawin and Michael Yellow Bird (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 2008, 4th printing), p. 2. Hereafter *Indigenous Eyes Only*.

[2] "The Decolonization of Indigenous Governance," in *Indigenous Eyes Only*, p. 89.

[3] Suzan Shown Harjo, "Just Good Sports," in *Indigenous Eyes Only*, p. 31.

[4] M.P. Joseph, "Introduction: Searching Beyond Galilee," in *From Galilee to Tainan: Towards a Theology of Chhutpthau-thin* (ATESEA Occasional Paper No. 15) by Huang Poho (Tainan: ATESEA, no year), p. 6.

[5] Joshua A, Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages* (Mahawah, New Jersey/London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), p. 204.

[6] Cited by Waziyatawin, "Defying Colonization through Language Survival," *in Indigenous Eyes Only*, p. 116.

[7] *Ibid*.,p. 113.

[8] Unknown source – This prayer seems to have been said during Christmas in Nagaland. It appears to have been said three days before the commencement of Christmas. The word `Hoi' and poetic form suggest that it was said in the traditional way of prayer or chant.

Chapter Two

COMMERCIAL TOURISM: Objectification of Culture and Nature•

Mass commercial oriented tourism is an instrument that intensifies globalization. As a profit oriented industry, it does not respect life, culture and environment because it has its roots in profit making, pleasure and enjoyment. Tourism industry, in particular, as a neo-liberal project denies the right to live in dignity especially to the poor and the marginalized people. Environment, worship places, sacred groves and shrines are being desecrated by profit, pleasure and enjoyment seeking tourism. To attract tourists, sacred music, dances and festivals are commodified and reduced to cabaret performances. Women and children are reduced to flesh market, nature is objectified to mere scenic object, beaches to mere sun-bathing denying its integrity and wholeness. The development of ecotourism is further causing wide-scale eviction of indigenous people and other marginal communities from their ancestral lands leading to breakdown of traditional values, wisdom and identity. Today the continuity of indigenous people and other marginal communities and their spirituality, cultural and traditional way of life is at risk. It breeds injustice and thus contradicts the testimonies of the Bible. Thus it is a ministerial, missiological and theological challenge. It is imperative that the churches and theological education make a critical prophetic stand on this

issue and critique the whole enterprise of tourism industry from the vantage experiences of the people who have been denied of human dignity.

Introduction

Myanmar is fast changing in all spheres of life after the apparent political reform in the recent past. Being a country of magnificent and ancient Buddhist temples, rich cultural heritage, hospitable people, plenty of life-giving rivers, lush mountain forests, and intricately drawn cities, tourism industry is booming very fast in Myanmar. In the coming years thousands of tourists will arrive at Myanmar. The industry is potential of changing the outlook of Myanmar. The Government is pushing hard for fast tourism development. Since 1992, the government of Myanmar has encouraged tourism in the country for economic development. After the military junta transferred power to civilian government, the tourism sector saw increase in tourist arrivals and for the first time in 2012, tourist arrival surpassed the one million mark. In 2013, Tourism Master Plan was created, targeting 7.5 million arrivals by 2020.[1]

Tourism in Myanmar has been promoted by advocacy groups as a method of providing economic benefit to Burmese civilians, and also to avoid isolating the country from the rest of the world. *Voices for Burma*, a pro-democracy advocate group states,

> We believe that small-scale, responsible tourism can create more benefits than harm. So long as tourists are fully aware of the situation and take steps to maximize their positive impact and minimize the negatives, we feel their visit can be beneficial overall. Responsible tourists can help Burma primarily by bringing money to local communities and small businesses, and by raising awareness of the situation worldwide.[2]

However, considering what is happening in tourist destinations in global south, some pertinent questions arise:

will the industry do more harm than good to the people and bring more damage and marginalization? Who would benefit? What do we do? Where do we stand?

Ministerial challenges

- How do we challenge and critique the nexus between the present profit-oriented paradigm of tourism industry, climate-justice and survival of marginalized communities?
- How do we help scholars, church leaders and missionaries identify new forms of violence against marginal communities, e.g. indigenous people, women, children perpetuated by neo-liberal project of tourism industries?
- How do we challenge the dominant paradigm of Christian faith and practices that support one-sided tourism industry and help rediscover new paradigm of God-world-human relationship based on the spirituality and experiences of the people in the margin, especially indigenous people?
- How do we engage in tapping religious and cultural resources to promote just tourism?
- How do we challenge prosperity theology?
- How do we conscientize church leaders, theological educators and Christian leaders engaged in diverse ministries on the interconnection between the issues of environment, marginalized communities and commercial tourism with knowledge, skills and action grounded on justice? and
- How do we evolve a ministerial, missiological and theological perspective as an alternative just tourism?

Globalization and Tourism Industry

Globalization has come to be a principal characteristic feature of the new millennium and it has become an inescapable reality

today. It operates with a basic ideology. The underlying logic is maximum profit, maximum capital accumulation, and maximum exploitation of labour and earth's resources supported by global military hegemony. It cannot attain its objective without exploitation of poor, their culture and resources. This ideology of ever-increasing growth and the thirst for maximization of profit, enjoyment and absolute domination of the earth's resources goes back to the Enlightenment movement with their stress on human reason and independence. The revolution that emphasized the scientific temper was both aggressive and dualistic ideology and has found the answer to all human problems in the domination and exploitation of nature.[3]

Development is measured in terms of the amount of goods and services produced rather than by what is produced and how it is distributed. All human's creativity and natural resources are objectified and human beings are commoditized and exploited, and they are directed to the market for the purpose of commodity production and profit making. It is in this framework that tourism industry is promoted as an instrument to advance and intensify globalization.

A dominant ideology is that *Tourism will boost the economy, the dollars will flow in. It will provide full and varied employment for all the people. Contact with other cultures will surely improve the texture of living*. This is promising but this can happen only when people and their culture are commoditized for market needs. We are bombarded by marketing slogans like "Incredible India", "Amazing Thailand", "Malaysia Truly Asia", "Remarkable Indonesia", "Beauty has an address: Oman", "The Heart of Asia: Taiwan", "Cambodia: The Kingdom of Wonder", "Marvelous Melbourne", "Infinitely Yours: Seoul", "Golden Burma", "Hornbill Festival of Nagaland", etc. However, a critical analysis will reveal that commercial tourism is one of the major factors that lead to marginalization of people.

Globalization as neo-liberal economic project operates in many ways. Tourism industry is one among them and it

is grouped among the four largest industries in the world, with oil and fuels, arms and pharmaceuticals. Tourism's outlays are estimated around 10 per cent of the global GDP, while employing around 300 million, or about 10 per cent of the global workforce. With rising incomes, the number of leisure travelers is increasing, with a billion tourist arrivals in a year globally now, and heading towards 1.6 billion by 2020, according to the UN estimates. Who are the travelers? Obviously, the travellers are rich people. People in the margin are at the receiving end of exploitation.

The policy makers see tourism development as a means of poverty alleviation, because the income generated from tourism is perceived as a panacea for the problems of the poor countries. This perception is based on an assumed understanding that the profits from the tourism industry will trickle down and benefit the poor communities.[4] All over Asia the tourism industry is intensied with a promise of peace and prosperity. It is applauded as a "motor for development."[5] Many people see that it is an engine of investment, employment, growth, and national development and is considered as one of the best industries for the third world countries to earn foreign currencies in terms of Dollars and Euros. It is also propagated that tourism industry will improve airports, local transportation facilities and other infra-structures which will ultimately benefit all the citizens of the country.

As a result of these apparent development and benefits, unlike other issues, tourism has not been a major ministerial challenge and issue. This may be because majority of the people in church and society are co-opted into believing the widely propagated notion that tourism is a boom and a tool of liberation for the poor and the marginalized. The church sees the industry as 'smokeless', costless, clean, green and non-polluting due to the influence of long and dominant theology of prosperity theology. Other claims of benefit include the influx of income, foreign exchange, employment and fostering of cultural exchanges between peoples. In some counties it is

seen as an instrument to explore human rights violation as in the case of Myanmar.

Tourism and Objectification of the Poor

While acknowledging some of the positive forms of tourism that bring beneficial incomes and infra-structural development, we need to challenge unjust tourism structure and practices from a theological and ministerial perspective. We need to raise questions such as: What is tourism development for? For whom? At whose cost? Does tourism protect and respect local communities, their cultures, spirituality and land? Does tourism industry generate employment for marginalized sectors without discrimination? How far local communities are benefitted by golf courses, amusement parks, franchise restaurants, resorts and wild life sanctuaries? What are the/its ecological implications?

As stated, tourism as a tool of a neo-liberal economic project touches all realms of human life and mother earth. To meet the demands of the tourist, the hosts have to sacrifice many things including their culture, bodies, water, electricity, land and a variety of infrastructure. One serious negative impact on the poor people and nature is *objectification*. It is an act of treating a person merely as an instrument of sexual pleasure, making them as "sex object". Objectification more broadly means treating a person as a commodity or an object, without respect to their personality or dignity.

The issue addressed by indigenous people during “The Asian Consultation on Tourism and Aboriginal Peoples” held in Wulai, Taiwan in November 1989, continues to remain or even worst today. It reads:

> We firmly believe that all peoples have their own inviolable and sacred cultural identity. But in many areas of the world today, aboriginal people face the remorseless violence of cultural destruction brought about by tourism. Their culture is sold as commodity, sacred ceremonies and dances are not respected; and

> their culture becomes a form of mass recreation, a tool of government and business to make money, and a plaything for everybody's entertainment. Tourists look with curiosity on aboriginal peoples as some form of exotic animal, even to the point of using aboriginal women and children as tools for sexual exploitation, or collecting aboriginal people as items for photography or research, seeing them as leftovers from history who will disappear soon from the face of the earth.
>
> Tourism should be promoted for the benefit and prosperity of the local residents, but what we have experienced is intrusion and humiliation. We have lost our land and our homes. The resources with which we support ourselves have been stolen, our environment polluted, and our lives disordered and disturbed.[6]

Similarly, Michael Stainton reported how indigenous culture in Taiwan is marketed. Today Mountain People (indigenous people in Taiwan) are a disadvantage group. This group of people is similar to other indigenous people around the world – loss of land, collapse of traditional culture, loss of language, poverty, sense of inferiority, alcoholism, sale of daughters as prostitutes, sale of unskilled labour in fishing, mining and construction.[7]

Stainton further narrated the activities at the Aboriginal Cultural Village at Wulai, Taiwan. The objective is to preserve indigenous culture, and promote economic reliance among the indigenous people. Instead, it was totally misrepresented and commercialized. He wrote that,

> While it (Aboriginal Cultural Village) employs aboriginal girls to dance, the costumes and dances are so tarted up and changed as to be almost unrecognizable as Taiwan aboriginal. Taiwan aboriginal visitors watching the dance program are

> embarrassed or even ashamed of this presentation of their culture, which resembles more a generic "tribal" TV gala which might be designed by some Japanese producer.
>
> One final issue on the loss of cultural dignity to moneymaking, and a question asked by almost every caring visitor to the Aboriginal Cultural Village – Do the girls in the dance program also provide sexual services to these admiring Japanese visitors?….Certainly the very mini shirts worn by the dancers display much of "the goods", and spectators are invited to join the dance at the end of the show.…Sexual service may or may not be sold later, but aboriginal "culture" has been prostituted for everything else that can be sold – by aboriginal people themselves in Wulai.[8]

This is how the poor indigenous people are objectified and commodified as mere objects without respect and dignity. Traditionally, indigenous customs, rituals, sacred shrines, places of worship, sacred music, and ceremonial dress were held with much reverence. Today they are commercialized for tourists advantage. Musicians, dancers and other artists perform, exhibit and sell their creativity to earn some income at the cost of their self-respect. Today indigenous sacred music and dances have turned into mere cabaret performances for enjoyment. The development of ecotourism is further causing wide scale eviction of indigenous people from their ancestral lands[9] leading to breakdown of traditional values and land-centred spirituality. To reiterate, commercial tourism's sole objectives are mere profit, pleasure and enjoyment. It does not respect life, culture and spirituality. It denies the right to live in dignity especially the poor and marginalized people.[9]

Nexus between Poverty and Indecent Employment

Can tourism industry alleviate poverty in the global south? It is a resounding NO. A profit driven industry cannot alleviate

poverty. Maximization of profit is possible only when labour power is commoditized and exploited, and land and ocean resources are privatized and exploited. In modern tourism enterprise one will notice that deliberate attempts are being adopted to make the indigenous people and women remain illiterate, unskilled and that they depend solely on the sale of their labour power. Tourism is promoted with the slogan that it will alleviate poverty, create employment and generate more income. Generate employment for whom and what kind of employment will it create? Local people, especially the poor, are employed mostly for indecent manual labour jobs like watchman, waiter, cleaner in hotels and massage parlors! Will such jobs alleviate poverty? For whom the income is generated? A major portion of income generated through tourism goes to hotels and tour agencies, and thus only a few rich, the stakeholders are benefitted. Many people receive just seasonal and meager wages. Local communities are given only manual jobs, and their services do not get regularization.[10] Most of them are seasonal contract workers. Decent jobs are deliberately denied, promotion curtailed or jobs not regularized to keep the local communities illiterate and economically dependent. This paves the way for more manipulation and exploitation by the rich. To earn their living, women and children have no option than to sell their bodies and labour. Men are induced into drug and other illegal businesses. All these indecent lifestyles feed diseases like HIV and AIDS, TB, and so on. Tourism has also not given indigenous people education or any other skills to live a decent life. It makes people dependent, lazy and unproductive. Poor people just sit and wait for the tourists to arrive to generate a meager income for their living.

Furthermore, indigenous people are forcefully evicted in the name of development from their ancestral places without adequate compensation. In the process of being re-packaged for visitors' consumption, indigenous people's historical and religious sites, rituals, festivals, arts and artefacts, and crafts

are often unrecognized, distorted and commercialized. This creates new form of poverty, indecent living style, identity and spiritual crises. This false promise creates more misery and unemployment for many marginalized people. Being poor, illiterate, and denied of their life sustaining resources, it further aggravates poverty and misery.

Unjust Tourism Structure

Can capitalist structure of tourism promote upliftment of the poor? To what extent will/do the poor benefit from profit driven tourism industry? The Kolkata consultation on "Theology of Tourism" cautioned:

> Mass tourism is marked by the massive diversion of essential resources, including land, water, electricity, a variety of other infrastructure, taxation, revenue, from the local community that sorely needs them for tourism interests. Alongside the displacement resulting from tourism development, most of the employment it supposedly creates in the local community is of low status, low pay, and insecure. Mass tourism treats women as a service or commodity that is in stark contrast to the counter-cultural attitudes and teachings of Jesus. Women and children are trafficked and they have little control over their situation in the face of ruthless forces promoting sex tourism motivated by the lure of money. Major beneficiaries from tourism are owners of capital, and their operators such as the managerial elites, in both the North and South. The income and benefits the local people enjoy is negligible when one considers the residual and lasting cost and impact, arising from the gigantic tourism investment.[11]

There is no balanced share in the global tourism between the rich and poor countries as well as local host and visitors. Globally, it is the rich countries that are benefited from the industry. Europe and Canada, USA, Australia, Japan and South

Korea account for nearly 80 per cent of world tourism leaving a vast majority of the world's population abused and exploited. Since the whole industry is monopolized and controlled by the companies in the wealthy countries, the profit goes back to the rich nations. The host countries receive just a meager benefit out of the tourism industry. Tourism industry thus, increases debts burden of the Third World countries as the profit goes back to the rich countries. For example, most of the five-star hotels, resorts, golf courses and aviation industries in tourist destination are owned by the rich people in the developed countries or by a few rich people in the host countries. What are the use of these facilities when the poor are not in a position to get 1 US Dollar a day?

As the major portion of tourism investment is mostly capital intensive, the poor and disadvantaged are the most exploited ones locally. As stated earlier, the employment opportunity generated by tourism is low order, transitory, and uncertain. Tourism also causes problems for the local people and their own economy. The local economy tends to become a dependent economy rather than a self-reliant one. The local worker, especially the younger workers, assuming an easy tourism income, tend to be less inclined to engage in their traditional industries such as agriculture, fishing, farming, and so on. Jobs like security guards, gardeners, cooks, cleaners, chamber maids, receptionists, lifeguards on beaches do not bring sufficient income to live a dignified life. Moreover they also work under a lot of pressure causing psychological and emotional problems besides not being paid properly. Furthermore, as the market laws of supply and demand come into play, tourists and others capable of paying higher prices inflate the costs of limited vital resources beyond the reach of the local population, thereby impoverishing them even further. The injustice and destruction perpetuated to nature and marginalized people by profit-oriented tourism are massive. Therefore, the promotion of commercial tourism has to be located within the larger structural injustice issue.

The church cannot remain a silent spectator. All these challenges demand urgent theological and missiological intervention because most of the affected people are indigenous people, women and children. God's creation is also groaning due to over exploitation. We can bring a change only when we listen to their cries and take actions to protect them.

A Theological Contour from the Margins

In spite of its negative effects, we also need to recognize its immense potentiality to create global community for peace and justice. Tourism is an important modern activity that can promote interaction among religions, cultures and civilizations, and serve as a catalyst for numerous projects and programs for human development and growth. It has potential to create and promote new social movements, if the present paradigm is directed to a just-tourism.

One cannot deny the fact that unjust tourism is the modern face of suffering and unequal sharing of power and resources; it depicts one modern expression of human affliction. While a few enjoy disproportionate profits, and engage in building hotels, resorts, amusement parks and so on, majority of the people in margin are being denied of their land, sea and mountain rights.

The Bible in one sense is an account of people on the move. There is the constant travel of people – for better quality of life, refuge or sanctuary, missionary purposes, conquest, trade etc. The Bible affirms that travel is essential, but gives a different view from the way tourism in modern day has taken shape.

There is a huge difference between travel in the Bible and modern tourism. Modern tourism is mainly directed to human's self seeking pleasure objectifying marginalized people and their cultures as mere commodity. The Bible challenges objectification and commoditization of poor people, their cultures and reducing God's creation for greed and personal gratification. We can compare today's commercial tourism with the ancient slavery system. Indebtedness was one of the main

reasons for slavery in ancient Israel where minors were sold by debtor parents or adults (Exod. 22:25-27, cf. Deut. 234:19, 24:6,17). Elsewhere in Ancient West Asia, it is mentioned that exorbitant interest rates were the chief cause of slavery.[12] In Israel the rich people were competing to build "winter and summer house" (Amos 3:15) while the poor were "sold for a pair of sandals" (Amos 2:6) focing them to be sold to slavery. Similarly, the profit–oriented tourism development force many indigenous people to slavery.

All human beings are created in God's image, and hence are the subjects of their life and not objects for exploitation. Any practice or system that treats human beings as mere objects for enjoyment by commodifying them is a travesty of human values, and an insult to human beings. Modern tourism operates around such an ideology. With their myths and demands, and the financial power of the tourists, poor people in host countries are regarded as mere instruments and means of service and entertainment. People in the margins are not perceived as human beings with their own dignity and autonomy but are subjected to slavery.

The Bible testifies that in the scheme of God's creative plan, creation belongs to all, shared by all. The Earth is the Lord's, and everything in it (Ps. 24:1). It is entrusted to humanity to be governed responsibly, nurtured carefully, and loved gratefully. The poor people and the rest of creation are not meant to be exploited nor destroyed. Its fruits are a repository bequeathed for the benefit of all humanity. However, inequality is the order of the day. A relatively few elite rich nations have seized a disproportionately large share of the world's resources, consigning a vast majority, especially in the global South, to poverty and subsistence level existence. Such principalities and powers that exist at all levels of human society, determine the structure and priorities of the economy that is fundamentally unequal to most powerless people.

Tourism, a dominant industry, needs to be prophetically challenged to understand that the earth and all its gifts are

created by God, and is to be enjoyed by all, but not just for the investors of the industry, the tourists, the world's affluent, the high and mighty or those who promote a kind of 'development' that does not benefit the poor.

God's gifts have to be enjoyed with care and responsibility by all. We have to acknowledge that God's creation has been violated; the root cause being human's greed and the belief that the market ideology is paramount in society. We must speak out and act in the pursuit of life, justice and peace for all and respect the integrity of God's creation.

The Bible also speaks about Sabbath. The seventh day rest in Biblical tradition does not even come close to the idea of holiday of modern times. The Bible testifies that holiday is a day free from work, just as God rested after the completion of the work (Gen 2:2-3). In Exodus 20:8-11, God commanded the people of Israel that the Sabbath be kept holy. It is not a time for personal gratification as tourism dictates, but a time of contemplation, rest from our daily work to foster a closer relationship with God, within community and the whole of God's creation and be blessed. It is not a time to get away from or forget God but to go nearer to the Creator. The Sabbath is thus rooted in doing justice to the poor and to the entire God's creation. The concept of holiday promoted in tourism is in contrast to the Biblical understanding. The increase of tourism with a profit oriented objective, the understanding of ethics of leisure is driven toward mere pleasure rather than opportunities to meet God. The Biblical understanding of holiday has no place for exploitation and objectification of marginalized people and earth's resources.

Conclusion

Mass commercial tourism industry as we uphold today does not respect life; it objectifies people especially women, children and indigenous people's culture. There is no just sharing of God's resources. It is violation of the God-ordained order and purpose. The God of the Bible is the God of justice.

Oppressive structures and powers are essentially wickedness. The wicked are those who bring down the frail and the needy poor and make them slaves. God intervenes when people and nature are objectified and become slaves of market.

As Christians, we have the duty and the task to provide leadership through our ideas and practice. When creation is under threat and when poor people are commoditized as slaves, we are called to speak out and act in the pursuit of life, justice and peace, for the stewardship and integrity of the whole creation. Churches are called and entrusted to demonstrate prophetic witness to announce God's love for all and denounce the ethic of domination and exploitation. This is a great theological challenge before us today.

Endnotes

- *A paper presented during the seminar on "Contextual Theologies in Asia" on 5-8 July, 2015 at Yangon, organized by Association of Theological Education in Myanmar.*

[1] "Amid Burma Tourism Boom, Calls for Govt. to Aid Development". Retrieved 9 January 2014. It is recorded that in 2010, 791,505 foreign tourists visited Myanmar, with 295,174 foreign tourists entering the country via Yangon International Airport. In 2012, more than 1 million foreign tourists visited Myanmar and that figure is expected to rise to around 1.5 million in 2013. In 2013, the number of foreign arrivals reached more than 2.04 million, counting both air and overland arrivals.

[2] Voices For Burma's tourism policy http://www.voicesforburma.org 20.10.2017.

[3] V.J. John, *The Ecological Vision of Jesus* (Thiruvalla: CSS-BTTBPSA, 2002), pp. 34-35.

[4] The Shillong declaration issued by the participants of the joint consultation on "The North East India Churches' response to development and tourism" organized by the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism, (ECOT), National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), Presbyterian Church of India (PCI), and the Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU), on 29-31 March, 2011 at the PCI Center, Shillong, Meghalaya, India. p. 1. Hereafter "Shillong Declaration".

[5] Caesar D'Mello, "Foreword," in *Disaster Prevention in Tourism: Perspectives on Climate Justice – an Abridged Version,* ed. by Philip Mathew and Jonathan KcKeown (Chiang Mai: ECOT 2010), p. 6.

[6] Yvonne Lin Mei-jung, ed., *Asian Consultation on Tourism and Aboriginal Peoples: Community Control, Cultural Dignity & Economic Value* (Taidong: Huadong Community Development Centre, 1991), pp. 37-38

[7] *Ibid*., p. 44

[8] *Ibid*., pp. 51-52.

[9] For the indigenous people, land is sacred and is analogous to life. It is the land that holds family, clan, village and tribe as one community. The identity of the people is deeply rooted in the soil. It is the life sustaining power.

[10] It is the case in most of the Five-Star Hotels and other sectors.

[11] The Kolkata Statement, from the International 'Theology of Tourism' Writers' Consultation in Kolkata from 22-27 November 2013 organized by SCEPTRE, Serampore (University), p. 2.

[12] A. Philip, "The Law of Slavery, Exodus 21:2-11," *Journal for the Study of Old Testament*, 30, (1984), p. 54.

Chapter Three

CULTURE, CHURCH, DISABILITIES AND MARGINALIZATION

Introduction

Millions of people are pushed to the margins due to injustice. Ableism[1], ageism, patriarchy, racism, clanism, tribalism, casteism and materialism are unjust institutions and structures that perpetuate, disenfranchise and de-humanize person with disability[2], indigenous people, women, dalits as they do not fit into the normative scheme of dominant powers. They are looked down as inferior, incapable, self-imposed, and that they are poor because they are sinners, lazy, not smart and lack intellectual capacity. Persons with disabilities suffer most in the church and society due to ableism.

Theological reflection from the perspective of persons with disabilities is almost silent in all our theological discourses. Persons with disabilities whose voices were never heard in the church, and whose experiences were never considered in doing theology, are raising new theological questions: Are we not created in the 'Image of God'? Is our disability a curse from God? Is our physical impairment the result of our parents' sin? Or, our personal sin? Are we sinners? Why are we excluded from the church which is for all? Why are we not given responsible position in the society? Why do people look us down as inferior? How do we contribute our gifts to the life of the church and society when we are not given any space? All these questions are crucial and Christian theology and ministry of our church will remain incomplete without addressing those issues and concerns. Our society is incomplete without recognition of the gifts of persons with disabilities. It demands

a new way of reading the Bible, doing theology and ministerial practice.

Persons with Disabilities in Society

It is said that about 10% of the human population has some deformity or other, yet they seldom receive any attention. In many societies persons with disabilities are treated as second-class people, objects-of-charity or even abandoned. They are subjected to prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory acts by the able-bodied majority and they do not exercise and enjoy the same basic rights as their non-disabled counterparts. In the context of economic competition, the persons with disabilities experience more discrimination in employment opportunity because employers in both public and private sectors regard them as weak, helpless and incompetent to perform. The persons with disabilities are usually the first to be discharged and the last to be hired in any form of employment.

There is also a close linkage between poverty and disability – disability causes poverty and poverty causes disability. Persons with disabilities constitute a disproportionate number of the poor in the developing countries. 97% of children with disabilities who live in the developing world do not have any form of rehabilitation and 98% do not receive any education, majority of them come from the rural places.

In many families, persons with disabilities are not be given due respect. Even if the person is the eldest in the family and if he/she has disability then he/she will not be allowed to involve in the decision making processes of the family. This is linked to the belief that people with disabilities are inadvertently mentally disabled and therefore unable to make right decisions. Such attitudes create division in the family and is an outright violation of a basic human right of the persons with disabilities. It undermines the persons' intelligence as well. Some of the common and obvious cultural discriminations experienced by persons with disabilities in society include:

a) **Inheritance:** Disabled persons cannot inherit properties of their parents. A disabled person would not be considered when a family gives a share of land to the children especially the male members. In other words, the disabled person is not entitled to any unmovable property rights.

b) **Stigmatization:** Disability connected to superstitions culminates in stigmatization. They are looked down as inferior, sinners or impure/imperfect beings.

c) **Infanticide:** In some societies children with disabilities are killed on the ground that they are possessed by the evil spirit and hence the family's prestige/status needs to be protected.

d) **Abandonment:** In some cases children with disabilities are abandoned simply on grounds of keeping away `the curse', or stigma.

e) **Confinement:** Often as a means of hiding what is perceived to be a disgraceful aspect in the family, a disabled child is kept in seclusion from those who visit the family.

f) **Illiteracy:** Persons with disabilities are not given equal treatment in accessing the right to education. Disabled children are not capable of articulating ideas.

g) **Disease:** Due to lack or denial of adequate treatment many people with disabilities are left to die from disease as a means of getting rid of the handicap in the family.

h) **Denial:** They are denied political, economic and educational rights. Some churches have even denied ordination of the disabled on the ground that a disabled minister may distract others whom he/she is supposed to serve.

Cultural Beliefs and Disability

Among many societies, there is a strong belief that nothing just

happens but that bad things or unfortunate events are caused by evil spirits and good things are the result of the blessings from good spirits. If something happens in one's life e.g. serious suffering, death, accident, disability, even death of an animal or a poor harvest people always consider this as a consequence of bad action, e.g., killing of animals while one's wife is pregnant, giving false witness on land matters, killing of innocent person, telling lies, violation of religious observance, violation of restricted days, taboos, etc. Some societies see disability as a result of children conceived out of incest or wedlock, or an expectant woman doing certain practices that are taboo (e.g. eating certain fish or eating cat, tiger meat, etc), having sex outside marriage; killing animals, and laughing at a person with disability. Others believe that failure to respect and appease one's ancestors results in disability. `Blindness', `cripple', `still born', `mental imbalance', `demon possession', etc. are associated with those evil practices. If such a person is given a place in the community, the whole village community is affected. Thus, society does not give any opportunity for disabled people to live a normal life even though it can. Even today persons with disabilities are not taken in political matters or are not allowed to be involved in religious matters. In some contexts, they are not even allowed to speak in public.

In many societies, having a disabled child in the family is seen as a bad omen. A child born with disability or accidental disability is often viewed with suspicion, as it is seen as associated with the wrongs committed by parents or grandparents against God, the gods or ancestral spirits. Efforts to trace the wrong doer often leads to blame of spouses, usually a man accusing the woman. In some societies, the presence of disability at birth was often considered to be reflective of a broken relationship between the family and God. Often "the child was killed and sent back to God so that the Creator God might send another child without disability. Such children were killed with the full approval of the community and the question of infanticide never arose.[3]"

Such understanding and practices still dominate many societies. Unfortunately, culture colludes with wrong interpretation of scripture, the living condition of people with disabilities degrades and they suffer many forms of discrimination and isolation in society. Let us see how abled people construct of theology brings exclusion and marginalization to persons with disabilities.

Marginalization and Theology

Misconception of God

Theology is God-talk, discourse on God. We construct images of God metaphorically shaped by our culture. Hebrew and Greek thought provided foundations and philosophical resources for construction of Christian theology. We see God hierarchically and dualistically where God is perceived as impassable – beyond change, who is incomprehensible being, omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent and Holy of Holies who dwells above in heaven. Within this framework, able-bodied people formulate patriarchal, success, beauty and perfect-oriented images of God like the male Ruler, Lord, King, Almighty, Father, Master and Warrior. Though God is merciful, loving, compassionate, a comforter, and liberator who shares in our sufferings, we tend to over-emphasize the trimphalistic images of God. K.C. Abraham says that "all these images are constructs of abled people for the abled people."[4] This consciously or unconsciously promotes the following views of Christian life:

a) Prosperity, good health, healing, success are seen as blessings from God to be celebrated. Physical disabilities, sickness like HIV and cancer, poverty and failure in life are seen as punishment and curse from God.

b) We tend to promote a transcendental, holy nature of God who does not come in contact with the world and accepts only the perfect, unblemished ones. Persons

with disabilities are distorted images of God, imperfect, unclean, unholy and sinners who therefore, should not be allowed in the temple service; their presence defiles the holy place. In the name of maintaining holiness and sacredness, we exclude, discriminate and deny opportunities to persons with disabilities, women and persons infected by disease like leprosy (and today HIV). Such discriminatory attitudes and practices are sin.

c) We conceive of God as an all-powerful 'super-magician'. Everything is possible, if we have faith in God. God has the power to heal even terminal disease like cancer and raise people from death. Yes, God is all powerful and there is nothing impossible for him. We need to pray for each other for God's mercy and healing. But the danger is that those who are not healed are considered faithless, and branded as sinners. We often think that persons with disabilities are sick; we want to heal them from their disabilities. But did Jesus heal all the sick people during his ministry? Did he raise all the dead during his ministry? No, Jesus did not. It was not the intention of Jesus. Jesus himself suffered pain and died on the cross. Suffering and death is part of God's structure of creation. No human person can escape death and suffering. Even the innocent suffer, e.g. Job. This expectation of God's `super-magic' healing, leads to the belief that our prayers are not answered due to lack of faith. This brings more pain, anxiety and psychological crisis to people who already experienced physical pain and suffering in life. People die, or suffer not because of sin, or punishment from God; it is the will of God. If we narrowly interpret healing-faith in terms of miraculous 'CURE' alone, then we are mis-reading the biblical teaching. Such one-sided interpretations of God's work will reinforce denial and stigmatization to persons with disabilities.

d) This view of God and reality of life negates the body. The soul is the highest aspect of a human person which finds its true destiny by escaping from this perishable body and world. So, why should we care for the body? Why should we care for people with disabilities or people living with HIV? We do not have to worry for the body as it is temporal and perishable.

Such constructs of God contradict the true message of the Scripture. The Bible affirms that God became flesh; became Immanuel. Jesus is the incarnation of God and gave his life for the downtrodden people. In Jesus, we find fullness of life.

Misconception of Sin and Disability

An important biblical insight that has influenced the life and church is the doctrine of sin and creation of humanity. The presence of persons with physical impairment in society created much debate in church especially on the question of perfect God, imperfect creation and the consequence of sin etc. Two positions of the church may be cited here to show the interconnection between marginalization, disability and sin.

a) *Disability as Consequence of Sin: A Source of Exclusion*– The concept of sin is differently used in Christian circles. Some theologians speak of `missing the mark', others speak of `dethroning God and enthroning self at the centre of one's life' etc. But the most crucial issue is: how does the Christian understanding of sin affect the lives of persons with disabilities? A dominant view of physical impairment was that it is the consequence of sin. Even today majority of Christians would say that it is the consequence of sin, punishment from God and a curse to the family. This belief is further re-imposed by the doctrine of rebirth[5] (*karma samsara*) in Hinduism and Buddhism, and Primal religious belief in evil spirits[6]. This wrong interpretation of disability linking it to sin has caused much damage to persons who live as healthy persons with disabilities. It has become a source of exclusion in society. Classical theologians regarded the "Original Sin" as the

universal and hereditary sinfulness of humans since the Fall of humans. It is accepted that since all human beings are the descendants of the first couples: Adam and Eve, they all inherit the sin of their parents and then all become sinners. Augustine taught that the Original Sin is transmitted through sexual act. The Original Sin has distorted God's perfect order of creation, the consequence of which is imperfect order of creation. Since imperfect creation is the result of sin, they do not come under the scheme of God's grace. It is a direct consequence of sin and the work of demons: it is a curse and punishment from God. Though the offence the persons with disabilities commit is relatively insignificant and most often they are not even conscious of their so-called misdeeds, many abled people take it for granted that their disability is a manifestation of their own personal or parents' sin in the past or in this present life. To this day such understanding still persists. Unfortunately, the church also had not woken up to the fact that discrimination, prejudice and exclusion meted out to persons with disability that have serious consequence in their lives is not considered as sin, rather sin is defined only in terms of smoking, drinking, or going to movies on Sunday etc. We do not recognize corruption, manipulation and abuse of power in public life as sin.

Belittling and neglecting persons with disability is a more serious sin. There are sufficient proofs that Christian theology of (the Original) sin is the root of the denial and exclusion of persons with disabilities in society and church. It gives justification to escape from institutionalized form of social evil. Physical impairment as the work of demons and the consequence of sin has deprived persons with disabilities in church and public life. This wrong notion of the traditional view of sin has not only neglected people's real life situations, but also affirmed the oppressive context that does not give direction for transformation of life. In other worlds, this wrong understanding has contributed to exclusion of persons with

disabilities from an active involvement in the spiritual, social and developmental life of the church.

b) *Sin and Image of God* – Throughout the centuries, the churches have never acknowledged that persons with disabilities are created in the image of God. Some theologians exclude them by interpreting `the image of God' in terms of `perfection' – perfection which was understood in terms of physical and mental endowment. There is no beauty in the disabled. Any form of disability makes a person less than human – they are not created in the image of God. Some understood this in terms of `rationality'. Persons who cannot articulate do not represent God's image. Some interpretations even focus on the exercise of power. God created humans to exercise power and have dominion over the rest of creation, a capacity into which God invites humans to participate. Since persons with disabilities are not capable of exercising power, they do not reflect God's image. Others interpreted this in relation to the human capacity for creativity and freedom. Since persons with disabilities cannot exercise creativity and freedom fully, they cannot be counted as full `being'[7]. These are all able people's interpretations who do not respect life especially of those who live a healthy life endowed with variety of gifts despite physical impairments. Disagreeing with the dominant Christian interpretations, Gordon Cowans argued that none of the above formulations sufficiently takes into account the experience of disability, particularly the experiences of persons born with impairments. Many persons are born with impairments which inhibit their capacity to engage and interact with their environment in the same way as others.[8]

The dominant interpretations of sin and the image of God justified extermination of people born with physical impairments. Killing, apart from "imperfect beings" like persons with disabilities, of any person is considered as sin, because the human person is precious, created by God in his own image. The Reformers who held deliberate discharge

of semen as a crime were negative towards persons with disabilities. Onan deserved to die, (Gen. 38:8-10) taught Calvin, for the crime of the unproductive discharge of semen. Deliberate spilling of semen outside of intercourse between a man and a woman was considered a crime worthy of death.[9] But in the case of persons with disabilities, Luther and Calvin held them in contempt and justified their removal from society by death as "an act well-pleasing to God".[10] A person with disabilities represents a distorted image of God and so they are sub-human, hence it is not considered as sin or crime to kill a disabled person.

Discrimination, denial, exclusion at homes, churches and society is rooted on this understanding of God's structure of creation. It perpetuates people to treat disabled people as inferior not only with respect to their specific physical limitations, but also to their "total being". They are treated like second-class people, objects-of-charity or even abandoned. Some parents do not give them adequate food, medical treatment and some of them never take them out of their homes. Their presence is considered as a shame, disgrace and burden, but never as a precious gift. Society makes them absolutely dependent by denying privileges and opportunities in all sectors, including the church. This is sin and it contradicts the Kingdom values.

Misconception of Suffering and Disability

We often assume that suffering such as unexpected illness, death of a loved one, accident, loss of job etc. are punishment from God. When the tragic disease and death happen to us, we ask why God, why me? When a child is born with physical impairment, we ask why God? We often think that it is the result of some mistakes we committed. Job strongly rejected the idea that suffering is God's punishment and that our suffering is caused by our own personal sins. Jesus also refuted the idea. Jesus opposed making people suffer by unjust system and practices. Nancy L. Eiesland criticized the idea of virtuous suffering and that physical impairments were a sign

of divine election. Such idea gives a notion that "disability is a temporary affliction that must be endured to gain heavenly rewards."[11] She wrote:

> The biblical support of virtuous suffering has been a subtle, but particularly dangerous theology for persons with disabilities. Used to promote adjustment to unjust social situations and to sanction acceptance of isolation among persons with disabilities, it has encouraged our passivity and resignation and has institutionalized depression as an appropriate response to `divine testing'. Viewing suffering as means of purification and of gaining spiritual merit not only promotes the link between sin and disability but also implies that those who never experience a "cure" continue to harbor sin in their lives. Similar to the practice of emphasizing self-sacrifice to women, the theology of virtuous suffering has encouraged persons with disabilities to acquiesce to social barriers as a sign of obedience to God and to internalize second-class status inside and outside the church.[12]

The idea of virtuous suffering encourages passivity that whatever happens is the will of God and that compromise with an unjust system is natural. The idea of virtuous suffering blinds our eyes to see injustice and ignore people who try to struggle for change. The experience of suffering should thus lead us to fight for justice and dignity.

Misinterpretation of Temple Service

The scripture passage like Leviticus 21:16-24 is often interpreted to justify exclusion of persons with disabilities from Christian ministry. It reads:

> [16] The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: [17] Speak to Aaron and say: No one of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach

> to offer the food of his God. [18] For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, one who is blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, [19] or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, [20] or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles. [21] No descendant of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the LORD's offerings by fire; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the food of his God. [22] He may eat the food of his God, of the most holy as well as of the holy. [23] But he shall not come near the curtain or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries; for I am the LORD; I sanctify them. [24] Thus Moses spoke to Aaron and to his sons and to all the people of Israel. (NRSV)

Affirming the holiness doctrine, the Church assumed that "blemish" recorded in Leviticus speaks about the exclusion of persons with disabilities and women from temple service. The Jews believed that disability was a sign of sinfulness and women's monthly menstrual period was unclean and unholy. Does this text suggest disqualification and exclusion of disabled people from the temple service? Walis Ukan[13], an OT scholar, refuted this misinterpretation. He underlined three arguments: The text is speaking about (a) To relieve but not to exclude – According to the Jewish practice of offering, the priest had to offer two bullocks, one ram, seven male lambs without blemish and a lamb as a burnt offering for God. In addition, some grains, oil and wine had to be offered as offerings (minchah) daily. It involves laborious and arduous duty. Every day and night, the priest had to make offering of animals, smoke of flesh and incents and the fire of altar was kept by the priest. Indeed, it was a laborious and arduous work. God's commandment to Moses, "None of your off springs shall come near to offer the food of his God," (v. 21) needs to be seen in terms of "the laborious and arduous process of ritual".[14] A disabled priest could not undertake this hard duty.

This verse does not imply denial or exclusion of the disabled person from serving God. On the contrary, it demands from the abled priests to give physical relieve to the disabled priest from the daily laborious duty.[15] (ii) To support but not to dissociate - After commanding disabled priests to be relieved from laborious duty, it says, "the food of his God, from the most holy and the holy, he shall eat." (v. 22) It has a profound social and religious meaning and it also expresses God's abundant richness and grace upon disabled person. This affirms inclusion and support of the disabled person, and the abled people should offer them the resources they need to lead a dignified and good life. The challenge is that we need to create a social, religious and cultural system that support disabled people.[16] Though disabled priest could not perform the duty of offering, they still deserve the portion of the food of God that is the most holy of holy, just as the normal priest enjoyed. They deserve the welfare and rights regardless of their disabilities. They should not be socially or religiously excluded or marginalized just because they are disabled. They are not to be excluded from the family of priest. Instead, they are active member of the family of priest. Hence, to work for a social, political, religious and cultural support system and network is what God demands from us today. (iii) To honour but not to marginalize – "Because I am the Lord who sanctify them" (v. 24) gives a new perception of disability. It challenges the traditional stereotyped understanding that disability is manifestation of sin and are cursed and hated by God. This verse clearly affirms that there is no room of contempt, discredit or marginalization of disabled priest. God says, "I am the Lord who sanctify them." The passage is reaffirmation that persons with disabilities are created in God's own image.[17] Disability should not be the reason to exclude them from ministry. Every disabled person deserves acceptance and entry into the Kingdom of God. In the eyes of God, the disabled priest is also sanctified by God. In God's Kingdom, Walis Ukan concluded that

> The disabled deserves the dignity and respect just

> as normal people do. God demands us to establish a friendly, just and life-affirming society and environment for the disabled. It is our collective responsibility to create a just and inclusive church and society so that broken and anguished hearts will experience love, care and acceptance in God's Kingdom.[18]

Jesus and Disability

Jesus brought people with disability, the poor and the ones rejected by society into the centre of God's Kingdom. All human beings are precious, valuable and they must be respected. Jesus challenged discriminatory practices and the callous attitude of the abled rich people. Those who were discriminated, excluded, ostracized, rejected others on the basis of disease and disability were challenged by Jesus. For instance, Jesus' act of healing of a shriveled man on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-12) was a challenge to Jewish leaders. They did not want the shriveled man to be healed in the Synagogue on the Sabbath, because for them the observance of Sabbath was more important than saving a life. They were afraid that this man would enter the Synagogue with the ailment which would defile the holy place. Religious rituals, laws and finding faults were more important than saving a life. But for Jesus, life was more important. Jesus broke the religious rituals. Against their ritualism, Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath". Jesus healed that person in spite of all the religious restrictions and the fact that the Pharisees were watching him. In Jesus' view, caring and healing is of prime importance than religious practices.[19] Jesus stood for the cause of the sick and disabled. He defended them against the prevailing attitude that suffering and physical impairment is due to sin. Jesus rather reached out and touched them to bring healing to the sick and disabled. He not only healed them of their physical infirmities, but also restored them to their rightful place in the society. Because of his compassionate love for the disabled and sick, Jesus did

not hesitate to break the Sabbath law (Mk 3:1-6). Jesus' whole motif behind his healing ministry was not to present himself as a kind of healer or super-magician, but his aim was to start a movement of hope for the hopeless; a movement from being a nobody to being somebody. On encountering Jesus, the sick and disabled experienced the worth and dignity of life. In the Kingdom of God, there is nothing such as unclean or sinner that cannot be made clean again.[20]

We can imagine what Jesus would do for persons with disability today in our church and society. Jesus will not take the road of denial, discrimination, ostracization and isolation.[21] He would be there with them to bring healing, hope and restoration to the community just as he did on many occasions. Jesus would certainly condemn the Pharisaic attitude of abled people. Therefore, it is not our duty to pass judgment and undermine them, but accept those with disability the way they are and minister to them with compassion, open-hearted acceptance, love and care. We should allow them to grow and contribute their gifts to the church and society. The stigmatization of people with disability calls the Church to ask what it means, in our time, to be the inclusive community that Jesus envisioned and proclaimed. As a community of disciples of Jesus Christ, the Church should be a sanctuary, a safe place, a refuge, a shelter for the stigmatized and the excluded. The disciples of Jesus are thus called to work for a church of all and for all.

Celebration of God's Gifts

The Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) has drawn our attention to the fact that without inclusion of the gifts of persons with disabilities, we cannot talk about the unity of the church. There is no unity of the churches without acknowledging the gifts of person with disability. All people with or without disabilities are created in the image of God and called to an inclusive community in which they are empowered to use their gifts. In fact, the world will be poorer without the

contribution of persons with disabilities. Jesus thus protected, forgave, loved and cared for them. Jesus strongly repudiated the connection between sin and blindness, saying "It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). Jesus challenged the Jewish's understanding that God punishes sinners by blinding them or their animals (Exo. 4:11).

We need to affirm that diversity is an integral part of God's creation. Society – from its most basic unit (the family) to its broader forms (the church and the community) – has to be a place where everyone, regardless of gifts and abilities, is genuinely welcomed, given every opportunity to participate meaningfully and nurtured toward fulfillment. We need to work together more rigorously so that our common vision for the establishment of an inclusive, affirming and empowering global society may be realized. Let us strive to create a society and church where everyone, regardless of gifts and ability, is genuinely included or else our churches will remain disabled communities without the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Endnotes

1 Imposition of social, cultural and religious norms developed by the able people as normative for disabled people.

2 Disability is a condition that hampers, impedes or prevents a person from performing normal activities which include caring for oneself, doing manual tasks, walking, seeing, standing, hearing, speaking, learning and working.

3 Samuel Kabue, "Introduction of EDAN & Disability Discourse in Theological Education" a paper presented at "Disability Studies Resource Material Writer's Workshop" from 24-28 June 2008 at Mombasa, Kenya, p. 4.

4 K.C. Abraham, "Theological Reflections on the Experience of the Disabled," in *Doing Theology from Disability Perspective*, eds. Wati Longchar & Cordon Cowans (Manila: ATESEA, reprint, 2011), p.169.

5 The doctrine of rebirth teaches the cyclical process of life. The condition of the present life is determined by our past deeds. Disability is a product of past misdeeds and we can do nothing about it.

[6] The traditional primal religion strongly advocates that "bad things are caused by the evil spirits and good things are the result of the blessing of benevolent spirits".

[7] Gordon Cowans, "Towards a Liberatory Theology of Disability; Humanity in Creation, Disability and the Image of God," in *Disabled God Amidst Broken People: Doing Theology from Disability Perspective*, ed. by Wati Longchar and Gordon Cowans, (Manila: ATESEA, 2007), pp.47-48.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 48.

[9] Cited by Adrian Thatcher, "The Virus and the Bible-How Living with HIV Helps the Church to Read it" a paper presented at workshop on "Ethics on HIV & AIDS Prevention," on 8th January, 2008 at Johannesburg, p. 5.

[10] Cited by Adrian Thatcher, p. 6.

[11] Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Towards a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 72.

[12] *Ibid*. pp. 72-73.

[13] Walis Ukan, a Bible study on "Misleading text to disability" (Lev. 21:16-24 and Mark 9:43-47) at Asia-Pacific Consultation on "A Just And Life-Affirming Church & Society: Person With Disability Perspective" at The Yushan Theological College & Seminary, Hualien, Taiwan, December 11-14, 2016.

[14] *Ibid*, p. 3.

[15] *Ibid*.

[16] *Ibid*.. p. 4.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 5.

[18] *Ibid*., p. 6

[19] Razouselie Laseto, "Jesus and Disease: A Search for a Place for HIV & AIDS in Jesus' Approach to Human Disease," in *Health and Life: Theological Reflections on HIV & AIDS*, ed. Razouselie Lasetso (Jorhat: ETC Programme Coordination, 2007), p. 37, see also V.J. John, "Biblical Approach to Understanding HIV/AIDS: Some Insights from the Life of Jesus in the Gospels" in Health, *Healing and Wholeness*, ed. Wati Longchar (Jorhat: ETE-WCC/CCA, 2005), p. 90.

[20] Razouselie Lasetso., p. 40.

[21] *Ibid*., p. 44.

Chapter Four

CULTURE, CHRISTIAN MISSION AND MARGINALIZED PEOPLE

Introduction

> The modern colonizer…believed in the superiority of his religion, race, economy and culture. This superiority called upon the colonizer to bear the vocation of converting and ordering the world toward his own identity. Such an ideology was grounded in the belief of modernity, Christianity, and industrial advancement. The colonized…, on the other hand, were imbued with the belief that their own religion, race, economy, and culture were backward.
>
> - *Musa Dube*

> People, especially the suffering, poor people, are the subject of Christian mission, the subject of the gospel and theology.
>
> - *Huang Poho*

> Mission demands standing with people in pain to ensure people-hood, freedom, hope, peace and justice
>
> - *From They Left by Another Road*

Though Christianity was born in Asia, many Asians continue to regard it as an alien or Western religion. Christian identity in Asia is still associated with colonization, westernization and anti-Asia in terms of culture and religion. Despite many years of Christian involvement in social development and spiritual renewal, Christianity is still not deeply rooted in the

Asian soil. People are still suspicious of Christian activities. If Christian opens a school, hospital, orphanage centre etc. people suspect that it is for the purpose of conversion. Some Christians have been attacked even during Christmas celebration for singing carols and sharing food with the poor on suspicion of conversion. We also need to admit that Christians have been triumphalistic in the past and also some evangelists/missionaries still pursue dangerous triumphalistic mission activities condemning others. Given this situation, the need for a new way of doing mission for transformation of society is urgent in Asia. We need to ask ourselves, what has gone wrong with our mission practice? Considering today's context of continuing marginalization of poor, we also need to ask ourselves: What is the responsibility of the church in the struggle of the people? What does it mean to follow Jesus in the context of the global market capitalism and global empire? How can we make marginalized people's aspirations become central focus in doing Christian mission? How do we liberate people's movement from the bondage of institution?

Context and Subject of Mission

The location and subject of Christian mission is people who are marginalized. It is sad to see that the situation of marginalized people has not changed much even after many decades of independence and development works. The unjust global economic system is deeply rooted and that make the poor to bear the burden of immoral foreign debt, unfair and unjust trade relations that always put the poor nations and the poor communities at the disadvantage position. The global market system has not only turned human beings and their cultural activities and earth's resources into mere commodities for profit, but also weakened the migrant workers, farmers, consumers, small entrepreneurs to name a few and the whole eco-system have been reduced to market needs and supplies. The financial system, ever-increasing ideology of consumerism, materialism, individualism, competition and greed have eroded

life-affirming values, fragments communities and increased poverty; the value system which are driven by the powerful financial cooperations. The poor are deprived of their rights to celebrate life and they are becoming poorer, and their pains and suffering are getting worse. Christian mission will have no meaning if we do not challenge the unjust structure and stand for the marginalized people who have lost their livelihood due to illegal legal system, one-sided development activities and political manipulation, and indigenous peoples who have been forcefully evicted from their ancestral land and the abode of the various spirits they worship, using repressive measures and often without proper compensation.

Furthermore, the violence of cultural nationalism and religious fundamentalism against minority are on the rise. For example, the attack on Christian during Christmas, Easter in several countries and ongoing persecution of minority Christians in many countries in Asia. The anti-conversion ordinances in some of the states in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, etc., are examples of institutional forms of violence, inflected by evangelists of the gospel of cultural nationalism. Genocide and ethnic cleansing of certain communities perpetuated by some fundamentalists today are expressions of direct forms of violence of cultural nationalism.[1]

The subject of mission should be focused on people particularly those in pain due to exploitation. Without addressing the structures that make people excluded and marginalized, Christian mission will be like empty vessel; our theology and mission will remain a stranger and rootless. The future of the church and its mission thus lies in its ability to create counter people's movements against all those oppressive powers and structures located in the margin's affirming life, peace and justice, overcoming violence while upholding the rich contributions of pluralistic communities and traditions.

Participation in God's Mission

Mission belongs to the Triune God. Affirmation of life in all its

fullness in Jesus Christ is the ultimate concern of mission. The God who sent Jesus Christ to the world calls us to bear witness to the vision of abundant life in this world. We are called to resist and transform all life-destroying forces in the world. Also God did not send Jesus Christ only for the salvation of humanity, but also for every segment of God's creation. God's mission thus involves protection of all lives. It is therefore vital to recognize God's mission in a cosmic sense

To realize God's purpose in life, Christians have been involved in mission work for many centuries. The forms and methods of mission work done by Christians may be divided into four categories:

(a) Civilizing mission;

(b) Charitable mission;

(c) Developmental mission; and

(d) Transformative mission

Civilizing mission: During the colonial era, Christian mission was primarily understood as "civilizing people". It emphasized on absolute and exclusivist language. The task of the Christian mission was seen in terms of demolishing native culture and establishing Christianity. Often military and warfare language such as "armies/soldiers", "advance", "attack", "battle/war", "campaign, "crusade", etc. were used as motivational means for missions. Even other words like "pagan", "darkness" and "heathen" have been used to refer to our friends, relatives, neighbours and other faiths. In the process of aggressive evangelization "local people abandoned their own cultures and betrayed their countries in order to follow a foreign mission. Following Christ meant "acceptance of the existence of colonialism and the abolition of local cultures and languages."[2] The civilizing mission approach was responcible for the loss of many indigenous people's land, their mother tongue, cultural and social structure etc. This attitude has also contributed to do mission in an exclusive way, refusing to dialogue with people

of other faiths, and to be obsessed with the expansion of the community in a kind of militant evangelistic approach[3]. This aggressive attitude still continues to keep the Asian churches away from the mainstream of Asian culture and political life as a community. The church is seen as a stranger to many people. Poho has rightly observed this approach of mission in stating thus:

> The traditional views of mission history that centred on ecclesiology saw mission as a strategy to expand a church's territory and made people into objects of missionary activity. Human beings were "commodified" for the sake of mission programs. Christian mission derived from this historical view expresses the mentality of conquest.[4]

The exclusive language that churches inherited from colonial Christianity has very little room for expression of collective and interdependent life and faith in the Divine. Any mission practice that fails to answer the cry of the marginalized people for total freedom and right to fullness of life is not a wholistic mission.[5] The God-talk should be free from the institutionalized-patriarchal-hierarchical religions and be a living reality for people. We need a God-talk where God is perceived as fellow sufferer, a great comforter, divine power not as a dominating or controlling power nor as a dialectical power in weakness but as liberating and transforming power that is effective in compassionate love, care and service. Mission is also to be understood as "servant-hood" in God's liberating act. We need a radical departure from such civilizing mission paradigm to people-centred mission.

Charitable Mission: It is one of the oldest types of mission carried out by the churches. This form of mission involves caring for the poor and sick by providing food and clothing, and the performance of good deeds such as visiting prisoners, distribution of rice to poor families, and establishment of free or less expensive schools or clinics for poor people. Charitable

mission is a product of the era of industrialization in Europe and North America in the 19th century. It was much favored by the aristocrats and middle class men and women in England and elsewhere during the Victorian age, because it provided a warm personal relationship with the recipients of the aid.[6] Charitable mission spread throughout the world during the colonial era. This kind of mission was strongly promoted by colonial administrations for political reasons. Relationships that grew through acts of charity reflects relationship between the giver/provider of aid and the party who receives it; the superior and inferior distance was/is always maintained. Charitable mission has been criticized by people of other faiths saying that its intention is meant to win people into Christianity; it was/is seen as a tool to recruit church membership by people of other faiths though some of the charitable works did not have such intention. It is also criticized for creating dependency and maintaining the status quo of unjust system. Josef P. Widyatmadja has observed the following advantages and disadvantages of charitable mission:

a) It provides direct relief that can be immediately observed;
b) There is no risk, because it will be approved by those in power;
c) It makes the person who does it look good and generous;
d) It focuses on personal relationships, such as sponsoring a child or giving scholarships;
e) It can be used to attract other people to become followers of the religion;
f) It creates a subject-object relationship (dependency) and supports the status quo.[7]

He further cautioned that it will maintain unjust social structure, thus:

a) Poverty is not averted, because of the situation and powerlessness of those who are involved;

b) The belief that through hard work someone can improve their lot, not through social change;

c) Emphasis on the need for the wealthy to take moral responsibility by performing good deeds to reduce poverty;

d) Justification of the use of "a small and limited portion of their wealth" for those who are poor; and

e) Viewing their passion of wealth as legitimate and a gift/ blessing from God.[8]

One cannot deny that the commitment to the poor and needy, and willingness to share must be appreciated. Charitable mission is still required in many situations such as unexpected natural disasters and many social problems that require emergency responses before we can address the root of the problems. However, charitable mission will have little or no impact in the long run if it is carried out without aiming to empower people and build a new relationships amongst people based on love and justice.

Developmental mission: Mission as developing the underdeveloped people is a dominant model till today. It identifies the problems of poverty and malnutrition, and even diseases like HIV and AIDS as the results of 'underdevelopment', lack of skills and resources and therefore it is a mission imperative for the churches to help the poor communities around the world to `develop'. Development hence assumes the nature of a missiological witness of the charity and compassion of Christ expressed through the Body of Christ – the Church. Even the communities and nations who were critical of development paradigm were brought under the grand design of the capitalist development ideology through the committed and uncritical work of the church bodies.[9] Theological assumptions regarding unity, freedom, humanization informed by the values of self-hood, democracy and more directly development became symbolic of the trapping in the project of modernity.[10]

Developmental mission was started in the west to reduce East-West tensions during and after the Cold War. The members of UN from the West and North America agreed on the need of giving special attention to the development of newly gained independent nations to overcome hunger and poverty through economic growth. The 1960s and 1970s were characterized as decades of development. The model and philosophy of development were introduced by the World Bank and IMF in the two-thirds world. Efforts to reduce poverty and mass suffering were undertaken by raising GNP through intensification of agriculture sectors (the green revolution), family planning, industry and tourism development, cultivation of foreign investment, and promotion free markets.

However, after involving in developmental work for more than two decades, it was realized that mere economic development enterprise cannot bring justice, peace and well-being to marginalized communities. The gap between the rich and poor became wider both in the urban and rural areas. Many rural farmers became laborers in farms and in factories. Agricultural development with superior seeds, fertilizer, and pesticides were introduced but were not accompanied by the provision of land for the farmers to cultivate. The progress in agriculture did not provide much benefit to poor farmers; it benefited mostly the wealthy farmers and investors.

Agricultural and industrial production did increase in many countries, but the laborers remain poor. Tens of thousands of new job were created, but hundreds of thousands of traditional jobs were eliminated creating more unemployment and displacement among rural communities. Developments did not usher in healthy life, peace, welfare, and justice, instead it promoted more competition, conflict, poverty and injustice. Unfortunately, in the name of development and progress, human rights and human dignity have been abused and suppressed by imposing martial law in many countries. For the sake of stability and national integrity, social movements were/are also suppressed. The farmers' lands were/are forcefully taken

for industrial projects. Such one-sided developments have deprived and continue to marginalize people, especially the indigenous people[12]. Josef Widyamadja rightly observed that,

> Development became an ideology that suppressed human rights and human dignity…. For development, there must be stability. For stability, all types of social criticism are silence. For development, farmers' land must be surrendered for industrial projects and upscale housing. For development and stability, demand for pay raises and strikes prohibited. For stability, there must be martial law and detention without trial enabled by domestic security law.[13]

Upholding the ideology of development, many Christian NGOs started and many churches stood for development of marginalized people. Money came from the rich countries for such mission work. Sadly, instead of raising prophetic voice, churches acted like faithful NGOs who function as an implementing agency of the projects designed by those who hold capital. Many churches and ecumenical organizations reduced themselves as local agents for development agencies from western economies, banks and governments. Instead of serving the poor, the church was/is caught in corruption and leadership crisis in many developing countries.

People in the margin need development and progress with social security and justice. We can affirmatively say that social, economic and technological progress without peace and justice to the poor has no value. Love towards neighbor must be practiced in human relationships. Love overcomes oppression, injustice, exploitation and subjugation. If development violates human rights, land right, ocean right, and dignity and does not promote peace and justice then it has no value.

Transformative Mission: The church has a responsibility to create just social structure to contribute towards reducing human suffering especially the misery caused by deprivation and violence. Witnessing the Gospel of God in Jesus, the Christ,

involves dismantling the existing systems and institutions that perpetuate systemic injustice to many people.

> Transformative *diakonia* is not just providing money but empowering those who have been paralyzed (Acts 3). It is the act of empowering the lame and opening the eyes of the blind, including through encouragement and awareness raising. The gate of Beautiful (Acts 3:2) in the Temple of God was no long beautiful when surrounded by those poor and paralysed. Peter and John did not leave the paralyzed people in the same condition by just handing them charity but healed them from their paralysis. For the paralyzed, they experienced new humanity and a new world. Empowerment of the poor is not enough if it is only done on individual persons alone.[14]

Josef Widyatmadja further underlined the focus of the transformative mission as follows:

a) The people are the subject of his history, not the objects;
b) Not charitable by preventative only;
c) No motivated by pity but by justice;
d) Encourage community participation
e) Make use of social analysis in order to understand the causes of poverty;
f) Awareness raising among the people
g) Community organizing.[15]

Empowerment of individual person is not enough to bring change. The method used by the urban-rural mission movement is the process of awareness raising and encouraging the people to believe in themselves through empowerment and improved organizational skills. Organizing and empowering people are key in transformative mission.[16]

Transformative mission is not just an ideal and an emotional act or giving some money; it is a continual struggle and

commitment for transformation of the sinful social structure and liberation of the victims. It requires raising consciousness of both the victims and perpetrators by exposing the unjust structure and certain belief systems. Raising awareness provokes people to take critical stand against the oppressive structures and motivates them to take up responsibility not only for personal development but also for the transformation of the whole society. Helping people to raise their consciousness is seen as the first step for transformative mission. Many churches do not appreciate such approach due to long pietistic tradition. We need transformative mission to bring justice in society. Mission in Christ's way is God's mission amidst people in pain. This mission is the one which is transformative. It is giving protection and justice to the weak in the family, in the community, in the nation and also in all creation. This is not a mission by conquest, but mission according to the way of the cross. Mission amidst people in pain means fellowship and peace among communities and nations. This cannot be attained without justice. It involves struggle for transformation of a social system that ensures social, economic, political and cultural justice. This peace and fellowship cannot be realized when people still have to struggle to meet their basic needs. Jesus brought justice to many through organizing people's movement. "Only when people are able to organize themselves for social justice can the oppressed regain their dignity and help secure justice and dignity for all."[17] The churches have to take the position of, and for the poor and become the voice of the poor and the exploited.

People-centred Mission

Churches in Asia need people-centred mission. Jesus' mission was a people-centred mission. Churches can make a difference by turning and rerouting to Jesus of Galilee movement. In Jesus' movement, we see a decisive reversal from the empire to people in pain, from the ruler to ruled, from the oppressor to oppressed. In other words, Jesus' movement was people-centred movement against the power of destruction and death.

He stood for a different value system – peace, love, service and liberation of poor were the message of Jesus, but not the power, sword, military and mammon. Jesus became the voice of the oppressed and voiceless. Thus, his mission involved "reversal of fortunes" between the rich and poor, powerful and powerless, those at the centre and margin. Since Jesus stood for the people against the powers and principalities of the Roman Empire and Jewish collaborators of the Romans, he was crucified, his disciples became martyrs, and his community of faith bore the wounds inflicted on them by the empire. His movement was anchored in the hope of resurrection of all living beings. Hence, resisting oppressive structure for the liberation of the poor is imperative and theo-praxis in our context today.

Though Jesus stood for the universal salvation of all people, he deliberately took the side of the oppressed and liberated and redeemed them from all oppressive system. The option of and for the "people in pain" requires sacrifice and radical departure from the power, institution and mammon. The wise men were asked by the empire to report about the birth of Jesus. But instead of obeying the imperial order, they left through a different route, a route to Galilee to protect the life of Jesus. They choose life rather than imperial order. Churches should become a movement that protects life from death. The disciples of Jesus chose Jesus' way of doing mission. The two disciples of Jesus were walking to Emmaus. It was the place to flee to; a safer place for refuge. It was a time when the disciples of Jesus were under the threat of life. But when they recognized that the one who walked, talked, listened and shared sorrow with them was none other than their Master Jesus, they decided to return to Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified by merciless rulers, the place of the cross, the suffering, the major and minor injuries; it was the place where people were tortured, caused fear, made people sad and lost hope. It was here that people were oppressed, made powerless, discriminated and robbed by heartless rulers through unjust system. The two disciples returned to Jerusalem to struggle with the people in pain. They

chose struggle and hardship rather than comfort and safety. If we want churches to be prophetic, it has to take the position of the wise men and the two disciples of Jesus. They took the position of "people in pain" like their teacher Jesus. We can make a difference in our mission by choosing the way of Jesus.

John England uncovered that the Christian presence in Asia goes back to 2nd century and mission was understood as common sharing and respect of one another[18]; it was a people-centred mission. He further argued that during the first 15th centuries of Christianity in Asia, there was clear signposts of Christian engagement in various secular vocations of public life. There was courageous missionary endeavours, monastic movements, long traditions of state service, education and medical care, a mutual beneficial coexistence with neighbours of other faiths, survival despite repression and persecution, creative biblical interpretation, theology and spirituality.[19] He further pointed out the record of pre-1500 which shows a clear signpost of wholistic mission during that time. Christian communities in many countries at that time were not only co-existed peacefully with those of other faiths, but also happily exchanged understandings of religious faith and life. For example, Buddhist terms and imageries were used freely to present New Testament teaching. There was also clear evidence of Christian influence in Mahayana's teachings. From the earliest period in Persia (pre-400 C.E.), until the later history of Mongol ascendancy (pre-1400 C.E), Christians played key roles in various professions, and their commitment to all that promoted people's welfare, is widely recorded. In all these periods, there was a "non-institutional" Christian presence which was authentically rooted in the midst of secular worlds and a new pattern of Christian community life, study, and prayer.[20] It is imperative that we revisit these early traditions in our attempt to re-root mission in our context.

Christian witness and mission are about bringing healing, wholeness, and new life into the lives of individuals, communities and nations. Breaking down barriers, seeking

justice and dignity for all, building community, enabling reconciliation and peace among all peoples are at the heart of mission. Any mission that builds barriers, divides the world into the `saved' and `unsaved', that makes people narrower, that alienates neighbours, that promotes enmity and rivalry, that is not built on self-giving is not mission. It is a counter witness to God. It betrays God, and in the Christian context, is alien to the spirit and message of Christ.[21]

Conclusion

We have seen that charity and developmental mission alone cannot bring justice to the poor; rather it supports and protects the rich, ruler, elite, master and empire. We need transformative mission listening to the cries of people in pain. Christians can make a difference by turning and rerouting to Jesus of Galilee movement. In Jesus' movement, we see a decisive reversal from the empire to people in pain, from the ruler to ruled, from the oppressor to oppressed. Jesus' movement was people-centred movement against the power of destruction. Though Jesus stood for the universal salvation of all people, he deliberately took the side of the oppressed to liberate and redeem them. The option of, and for the "people in pain" as the locus of Christian mission requires sacrifice and radical departure from the power, institution and mammon. We must reroute God's mission in the context of people in pain and become a movement that protects life from dead.

Endnotes

[1] George Mathew Nalunnakkal, "Mission as if People Mattered: An Indian Perspective," in *Re-routing Mission: Towards a People's Concept of Mission* (Tiruvalla: CCA, 2004), p. 98.

[2] Josef P. Widyatmadja, *Rerouting Mission: Towards a People's Concept of Mission and Diakonia* (Tiruvalla: CCA, 2004), p.23.

[3] Huang Poho, *A Theology of Self-Determination* (Tainan: Tainan Theological Seminary, 1996), p. 28.

[4] Huang Poho, p. 29.

[5] M.P. Joseph, "*They Left by Another Road:* Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism," (Chiangmai: CCA, 2007), p. 219

[6] Josef PurnaamaWidyatmadja, *Jesus and Wong Cilik: Transformative Diakonia – Theology with the Marginalized People of Asia*, PTCA Study Series No. 10 (Kolkata: PTCA, 2015), pp.29-33.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

[8] *Ibid.* p. 30.

[9] M.P. Joseph, *op.cit.*, p. 215.

[10] Josef Purnaama Widyatmadja, *Jesus and Wong Cilik*, *op.cit*.,p. 214.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp.33-37.

[12] *Ibid.*,p. 38.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

[15] *Ibid.*,p. 43.

[16] *Ibid.*,pp. 41-44.

[17] *Ibid.*,p. 104.

[18] John C. England, "Historical Notes on Mission and Ecumenism in Asia," in *The Left by Another Road*, pp. 39-42.

[19] *Ibid*, pp.40-49.

[20] *Ibid*.

[21] S.Wesley Arirajah, "Asian Christian Theological Task in the Midst of Other Religious Traditions," in *Visioning New Life Together Among Asian Religions*, eds. Daniel S. Thiagarajah and Wati Longchar (Hong Kong: CCA, 2002), p. 21.

Chapter Five

CHURCH, HOMOPHOBIA AND MARGINALIZATION

The margins are not a homogenous group. There are different layers within the margins and each of the group deserves recognition and response as the experiences differ from one group to another. Along with persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, indigenous people, dalits, women, migrant workers, the people of different sexual orientation experience many forms of exclusion and injustice. We need to listen to their cries to strengthen God's mission in the world.

Many religious leaders of dominant religions all over the world are in the forefront aggressively challenging the legalization of same sex marriage in the name of protecting culture, tradition, and values although opinions are sharply divided. Churches also hold conflicting opinions and some churches have been divided over the issue, and some of our brothers and sisters who revealed their identity have been ostracized and excluded from the community. Therefore the ostracization and exclusion becomes human rights and justice issue as all human beings are created in the image of God. We hear justice voices in India, Taiwan and many countries in Europe and North America demanding validation and approval of their sexual orientation socially, legally, morally and even spiritually. Different sexual orientation is a reality and it is God given. How then do we address this issue? What is the role of the church and theological education?

Homophobia – A Heterosexual Problem?

Medical professionals and psychiatrists opine that homosexuality is not a disease or a disorder but another expression or an orientation of human sexuality and therefore it is a violation of human rights if we categorize them as criminals, sinners and pathologize them as mental disorder. It is said that a vast majority of human sexuality researchers, therapists, physiologists generally agree that a person's sexual orientation is determined even before a person reaches/attains school age. Some researchers even argue that homosexual orientation takes place very early in the life cycle, possibly even before birth. Still others opine that it is genetically inherited.

Our society is sick of homophobia. Whose problem is this? It has become like a disease which is discriminating many people. Let me highlight how family, church and society marginalize LGBTIQ[1] community by sharing a testimony:

> My name is Sani (name changed) and I was born in a Christian family. As I grew older, I felt different in my behavioural pattern. I became more attracted to men, admired heroes and always wanted to get married to a hero. I started hating my body when I saw hairs in my face and body. Seeing my behaviour, my parents thought that I am possessed by the devil and took me to a Revival camp. My parents even took me to a psychiatrist. I and my parents prayed to God but my feeling remained the same. My parents were worried and thought that I am a burden and shame to the family and openly said that I am possessed by evil spirit. Many people tried to avoid me. I felt very depressed and struggled alone. Since I did not change my behaviour, my parents, brothers and sisters started torturing and abusing me. Sometimes I was beaten and was threatened that I will be sent to jail. I also experienced discrimination in school. My fellow students teased me always. It became unbearable and thus I decided to leave both

> school and home without knowing what future lies ahead of me. I wandered here and there begging for food, sometimes slept in the street, bus and railway stations. After a few days of wandering hopelessly, I met a trans-gender friend. I explained my problem to her. She was kind enough to give me shelter and food at her place and she asked me to work in her beauty parlours. It was a great relief for me. However, I discovered that the work place was also not safe either. The police personnel verbally abused and tried to sexually molest us from time to time; sometimes they would ask irritating and irrelevant questions. Though we had to face such cruel act almost every day, we had no choice since that was the only means of living. When we complained to local authorities, their answer was "you are a man and why you are wearing female attire. Change your lifestyle and after that nobody will harass you." Realizing that God is the only answer for my life, I went to a Revival Camp again. I prayed and fasted for days. The counsellor asked me to repent and, as a sign of repentance, I was asked to return to my parent's home, cut my hair like men, and wear men's clothing. I did as advised and gave testimony to many churches how God changed my life. But my feeling remained the same though I prayed every day. I always wanted to undergo sex reassignment and settle with a man and work in the church.

After speaking in an awareness seminar on human sexuality, Sani raised many questions: I always feel that "I am a woman" – Is this feeling because of sin? Am I possessed by devil? Is my faith in God not strong enough because my feeling as a woman remains unchanged? Did God create only male and female in the beginning? Am I not created in the 'Image of God'? Does 'Image of God' include "feeling"? I want to be a woman – Is it sin if I undergo sex re-assignment surgery? After

my sex-reassignment, will the church accept me for marriage? Can I study theology and serve in the church? Will the church ordain me? Can we say that God intents all human beings to be heterosexual only? Sani's voice represents the experience and cries of the LGBTIQ community who are marginalized by majority heterosexuals.

I asked Sani, "Do you feel discriminated in the society and church?" Sani replied, "Yes, very much. I experience frequent tortures and stigmatization. No one likes me including my parents and friends because they think that I am abnormal, and possessed by evil spirit. Everyday I experience mental distress and sometimes I ask God why He created me like this and at times I even think that ending my life is the best solution." I was in dilemma as I did not know the answer myself. All I could respond was,"You are beautiful, strong, creative and a God's special creation. The world is richer and more beautiful because you are a special gift of God to the world. You are unique and you can make a lot of contributions to the world. Those who discriminate you, abuse you and torture you are doing against the will of God because the Bible teaches about love, compassion and care for one another. Rather, they are sinners because their attitude contradicts the word of God. Your feeling of wanting to be a woman is not because of your faithlessness or sin but because God created you in a special way. God loves you and you are a precious child of God. Give thanks for your special body, your physical and emotional make-up."

Attitudes of Heterosexuals

The testimony of Sani speaks volumes of discriminatory attitude of the many heterosexuals; the confusion of parents, family members and even pastor who are all heterosexuals. Sani's story speaks of ignorance and un-preparedness of the parents, relatives and pastors. She attended Revival Camps, prayed, fasted but God did not change her situation. On the contrary, these attempts further marginalized her, created guilty feelings

deep down because she was told that it is due to lack of faith that she is not getting cured. Since divine intervention did not occur, parents opted for medical/psychological intervention, but the inner affectional orientation of Sani did not change. Human beings do not choose their sexual orientation, but they discover it as something given by God. Prayer, psychological treatment, or even inflicting torture could not change her sexual orientation. It is the heterosexuals who want homosexuals to change in order to fit into their box. The various reactions of heterosexual can be summarized as:

a. Outright denial – Same sex relation is unnatural and unacceptable. It is immoral like prostitution and it spreads HIV which bring curse to society. It is not only against cultural norm, but also against biblical teaching. God created man and woman for the purpose of reproduction, homosexuality will not fulfil God's command because it is contrary to biblical mandate;

b. Expectation of divine intervention – God is the creator and he has the power to change persons, if one comes to him with true repentance. Prayer and repentance are the solution.

c. Attempt for Psychological/medical intervention – Homosexuality is a mental illness and is a product of social environment. Homosexual behaviour can be corrected medically and psychologically;

d. Harassment, rejection, isolation and exclusion usually happen as it is regarded as sinful and it brings shame and disgrace to the family and the society. The last resort is inflicting pain physically or throwing tantrums using abusive language and creating fear psychosis. Sometimes, family cuts off ties to avoid shame and influence on other family members as it is seen as contagious.

Heterosexuals are not prepared to accept them because homosexuality does not come under the "norm" of their

defined marriage and sexual relationship. This irrational prejudice, according to Max Stackhouse, is nothing less than "bigotry, ignorance, repressive authoritarianism, sexual chauvinism ("heterosexism"), or psychological pathology ("homophobia").[2] He further posits:

> It is certainly true that some who call themselves Christian have confused the tradition they confess with ideas that derive from prudish denials of sexuality as a gift of God, culturally established gender roles, arrogant self-righteousness, or psychosocial pathologies….Some versions of the faith have been repressive of wholesome sexual impulses and have wrongly condemned other people to second-class citizenship. These betrayals of Christianity deserve severe condemnation – not only because they have broken faith with the tradition in the name of the faith but also because they unlovingly distort what is true about the human condition.[3]

The church worldwide is divided on the issue of same sex marriage and homosexual practices. To cite some examples:

- The 2003 Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) chose not to make a nationally-binding decision for or against the ordination of persons in same-sex relationships. It made individual presbyteries responsible for any decision. Some UCA congregation, in protest, have declared themselves to be `Confessing Congregations'.
- In 2008 the crisis in the Anglican Communion received much publicity. Upset with the consecration of the gay bishop Gene Robinson in New Hampshire, some in the Anglican community have declined to attend the Lambeth Conference and arranged a conference of their own in Jerusalem (GAFCON – Global Anglican Futures Conference).
- The Catholic Church continues to oppose the ordination of homosexual priests and blessing of the same couples.

Some Catholics have opposed this policy, notably members of the `Rainbow Sash' movement that opposed Archbishop George Pell in Melbourne, Australia.

- The Orthodox churches too opposed same sex marriages.
- Some Lutheran churches in Europe and North American have been deeply troubled by the issue. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, after many years of study is still struggling with the issue. Together with other Lutheran voices in the USA, the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau through its journals, Lutheran Forum and Forum Letter, has for many years opposed gay ordinations and weddings. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod also opposes same sex marriages and ordinations. In Europe, the old and established churches are under enormous pressure to recognize gay marriages, and accept pastors and church workers who have declared publicly as homosexuals.[4]

The presence of LGBTIQ is a reality. They are in our family, church and society and they are our brothers and sisters. They live a life of misery due to the judgmental attitudes of the so called heterosexuals – the majority. They face exclusion, disappointments, rejection from their family, society and friends. They are subjected to many forms of violence including physical, emotional and sexual. Perpetrators of this violence could be anyone on the street, teachers, colleagues, maintenance staff, classmates, neighbours, domestic maids, drivers, parents etc. In some societies, once the family discovers that their son/daughter or sibling is gay, lesbian or bisexual, emotional blackmailing begins. Parents threaten to disown them, threaten to send them out of the home especially when they are still minors and are unable to fend for themselves, threaten them to cut-off from inheritance, force the son/daughter to marry and cajoling. Sadly, the same case is true in the church and society due to the lack of understanding of LGBTIQ by the majority society. We need to accept them with an open mind as our Lord Jesus Christ did. Exclusion and marginalization

of people on the basis of sexual orientation is against God's design of creation.

Exclusion – A Structural Problem

Who are excluded and by whom? Like other forms of marginality, the issue of LGBTIQ is a structural problem of the privilege group. The present social, cultural, religious, economic and political structures and ideologies are created by the majority people. Anything that does not conform to their norms is considered as evil and to be discarded. The society is structured in terms of normal-abnormal, able-disable, natural-unnatural, superior-inferior, holy-unholy and clean-unclean. In this view of life the latter is seen a burden to the society as they are considered as cursed by God; they are wrong and need to be corrected. These false presuppositions and beliefs, created by the majority inflict injustice and misery to many people who do not subscribe to their defined `norms'.

We create social, economic, political and religious norms from the perspective of dominant power. Dominion and unjust social relation are often legalized and supported by Constitutions of the countries or customary laws and practices, traditions and social arrangement and further sanctioned by religion as in the case of LGBTIQ, patriarchy and caste system. Excluded people live in unbearable misery and humiliation in many ways. Today, one of the major marginalized communities who are excluded from dominant power structures is LGBTIQ community. They are seen as psychologically imbalanced, abnormal and indulging in sinful same-sex relations.

We need to understand the reality of structural injustices constructed by dominant power and majority. One can understand the gravity of discrimination vividly only when we see from the experience of the excluded and marginalized, but not from the experience of the majority. That means one has to judge the social dynamics from the perspective of people in the periphery. It is the marginalized groups suffering that provide the criteria to judge the inherited social structures and

eventually struggle for the humanization of the social reality. Therefore, any analysis of social reality has to take the point of view of the excluded and marginalized ones. Similarly, the church needs to listen to the cries of LGBTIQ, if she wants to speak and strife towards creating a just and inclusive community as envisioned by Jesus Christ.

Discrimination is further perpetuated due to patriarchal mindset. In patriarchal society female inferiority is affirmed and a wife is seen as mere 'children bearer'. Discussion about sex is a taboo even between spouses. Same clan marriage is considered as incest in some society. Children outside of marriage are considered as illegitimate. In this kind of society, LGBTIQ community suffers more because parents and elders are not in a position to openly discuss and give guidance on their sexuality. Ignorance of sexuality leads to marginalization.

Re-orienting Our Theological Assumptions

Locating in the experience of LGBTIQ, we need to challenge some of the traditionally held theological assumptions on sexuality. A major reason for exclusion and marginalization of LGBTIQ by the church is that such relationship is not natural, it is not blessed by God, it will not bear offspring, thus it is against God's command to humans to "be fruitful and multiply". (Gen. 1:22). Homosexual relationship cannot transmit the gift of life to the next generation. They also argue that if LGBTIQ persons are allowed to adopt children, they will grow in a dysfunctional family, because children will be raised by two fathers or two mothers, instead of having a male father and female mother. These views represent the dominant interpretation of the Bible. Sani's question raises many theological issues. Does God intend all people to be heterosexual, or does God also intend, and so create, some people to be homosexual? How do we interpret Christian understanding of the image of God, sin, faith, marriage and family, and the right to ministry in the church?

Image of God – Genesis 1:27 speaks of a male and a female

creation in God's image. It was a radical statement. People thought that King alone is created in God's image. So the biblical writer asserted that both male and female, not only the king, are created in God's image. At one point in time, some of the early theologians interpreted that `men' alone were created in the `image of God'. They understood it in terms of intellectual capacity and moral discernment. This one-sided construct of theology is challenged by feminists saying that both male and female together reflect the image of God. Again, upholding the beauty and perfection of God's creation, some theologians interpreted disabled people as distorted image of God. Today, with the rise of disabled movement, the image of God is no longer seen in terms of beauty and perfection, but interpreted in terms of 'giftedness.' Likewise, the LGBTIQ community is asking a new theological question – Does 'feeling' reflect the image of God? How do we interpret 'image of God' in the context of diverse expression of sexuality? It is said that a certain percentage of men and women develop as homosexuals or lesbians – can we deny that they are not part of God's creative plan? Or can we say that homosexuality is distorted creation of God? Christians affirm that all human beings are created in the image of God and thus all must be equally respected by individuals and by laws. Oppression, victimization and denial on the basis of sexuality are contrary to biblical affirmation.

Sin and punishment – The moral teaching of the church towards homosexuals has been negative for many centuries. Homosexual behavior was seen as contrary to the will of God. For example, John Chrysostom, a brilliant and influential theologian of the fourth century, said that homosexual intercourse is sin worse than fornication, worse than even murder.[5] Affirming prosperity theology, some Christians tend to see homosexuality, suffering, diseases, failures, poverty, and disability as cursed by God. They are viewed as a consequence of sin committed by parents or by themselves. Destruction, punishment, suffering and sin are interrelated. To justify this

argument as in the case of homosexuality, Christians often refer to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.19: Jude 1:7). It is often argued that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of the practice of homosexuality (the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are the direct result of the sin of homosexuality). However, biblical scholars today are of the opinion that Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned not because of homosexuality, but due to their selfishness; they failed to practice kindness as demanded by God (Mic 6:8). They were proud of their increasing numbers and the wealth they enjoyed. "They had wealth and food in plenty, comfort and ease, but never help the poor and wretched."[6] They hated foreigners and refused to extend help to others. God punished them because of their arrogant, selfish, unkind and inhospitability towards strangers. In addition, they were also involved in various crimes. In the New Testament, Jesus did not interpret the sin of Sodom as sexual. Not a single verse in the Gospels mentioned Jesus specifically referring to the sin as homosexuality. He did speak of sexual sins, but in reference to all, regardless of sexual orientation. When Jesus instructed his disciples to preach in the towns of Israel, he warned that those who do not receive them peacefully will be judged more harshly than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10: 5-15). Then, do we have the right to condemn homosexuality today? Are they sinners? Are they not part of God's creation? John Mcneill argued that there is no connection between sexual orientation and sin, sickness, or failure; rather, it is a gift from God to be accepted and lived out with gratitude. God does not despise anything that God has created.[7] Abuse and misuse of the gift of sexuality is sin. Sin involves selfishness, pride, neglect of the needy, and inhospitability to strangers. Biblical scholars argue that scripture does not condemn homosexual orientation, but lustful sexual activity of both heterosexual and homosexual which include idolatry, prostitution, promiscuity, violent rape, seduction of children, or violation of guests' right.[8]

Marriage and family – The universal assumption is that marriage is a life-long union only between a man and a woman; blessed by God and together they fulfill God's command to humans "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:22). Are they not fulfilling God's command, "be fruitful and multiply" – Do we have the right to condemn them? Do we have to look upon them as disobedient to God? What about childless couples who cannot have biological children and child free couples who chose not to have children? There are also many same sex couples who have lived together for many years and adopted many children, and their children are making significant contributions in society. With the medical advancement, multiple organ transplant like liver, kidney, eyes, etc., are possible, what about sex reassignment surgery? Can we deny Christian marriage to them? The Bible speaks of God calling different people and community for his service. God commanded them to maintain holiness and do justice. Along with upright morality, commitment, dedication, sacrifice and willingness to serve God are the bases for Christian ministry. Can we deny them from Christian ministry on the basis of same sex marriage? Can we say that sexual fulfillment is exclusively a prerogative of the heterosexual?

Natural and unnatural sexual relationship – Citing scripture passage like Jude 1:7 "Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire; serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire to support heterosexual bias is a common phenomenon." Similarly, Romans 1:26-31 says,

> For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

> And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (NRSV)

What does it mean by "unnatural sex"? The original text in Greek is *sarkos heteras*. In various other translations, the word used is *perverted sensuality, unnatural lust, unnatural sex, lust of men for other men, pursued unnatural desire, sexual sin*. These words refer to desire for unusual sexual intercourse. This desire for unnatural sex should not be limited to homosexuals alone. It refers even to heterosexual relationship. For example, a 70 years old man getting married to a 25 years old girl is unnatural, or European or African tourists seeing the body of Asian women look exotic and tempting, and they would like to try them and enjoy unusual sexual relationship. It is unnatural behaviour. The practice of child marriage is unnatural. The church must stand for the sanctity of morality, but it should not narrow down the issue of morality to homosexual relationship alone.

The Gift of Sexuality

Human beings are inescapably and irreducibly sexual being. It is natural and instinctive. Sexuality is one of the greatest gifts of God. Since human sexuality is a divinely-ordained gift of God, we should not be ashamed and apologetic. It is not inherently evil. God has created the humans with the body which is the temple of God. There is an essential goodness in the creation and God has an affirmative relationship with the whole created order. Adam was incomplete without Eve and vice-versa. This complementarity is not just physiological but it is a true being-with-another. Human beings exist in this self-conscious differentiation. Sexuality is a divine gift, and

hence God intends us to celebrate this divine gift in committed and monogamous relationships, and thus we should challenge any immoral sexual relationship whether heterosexual or homosexual. The Church should not demonize, criminalize and exclude anyone from the fellowship of God on the basis of one's sexual orientation. Rather, the church should be in the forefront to motivate people to be honest about who they are and initiate healthy discussion about one's sexuality.

Negative attitudes towards sexuality and our body-denying spirituality stem from distorted understanding of God's purpose. The embodied God who embraced flesh in Jesus Christ is the ground for loving our bodies and to celebrate life and sexuality without abuse and misuse. Instead of marginalizing, stigmatizing and demonizing, the church is called to be a sanctuary where love, compassionate care and justice are ministered to all. Therefore, with open mind and prayer, let us:

- Affirm that human sexuality is God-given and good. Human sexuality is a good thing and sacred, a gift from God, the Creator, so that human beings become co-creator with God.
- Safeguard respect of diversity in a responsible manner within responsible relationships. Misuse and abuse of sex and sexuality is condemned in the Bible.
- Consider sexuality within a broader framework of understanding of the human being as a relational being that relates to others, and not only in terms of single acts that are evaluated in isolation. Hence, sexuality should be assessed with regard to how it serves and contributes to such relationships.
- Affirm that responsibility and mutuality are basic for how we shape and live in sexual (as well as family) relationships with others.
- Address misuse of sexuality as in prostitution, pornography, promiscuity, trafficking, incest and other forms

of sexual exploitation;

- Affirm all human beings, irrespective of sexual orientation, as created in the Image of God.
- Encourage churches to advocate for the dignity and the rights of those who risk being marginalized and criminalized because of their sexual orientation.
- Continue the open, honest and self-critical talk about family, marriage and human sexuality.
- Given the seriousness of the issues of homosexuality, encourage the churches not to disregard either the issues or the presence of LGBTIQ within the Church.

Endnotes

[1] LGTBIQ stand for lesbians, gaymen, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer community.

[2] Max L. Stackhouse, "The Heterosexual Norm," in *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, ed. Choon-Leong Seow (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), p. 12.

[3] *Ibid*.,p. 134.

[4] Plenary Report #4 and Recommendation on "Same Sex Marriage – A Study of the Biblical Teaching and a Reflection on the Current Theological Standpoints in the Global Debate," *in Symposia Report, Seanolt 2010 of South East Asian Network of Lutheran Theologians* (Puchong Selangor: L:utheran Church of Australia, 2010), pp. 111-112.

[5] Richard B. Hays, "Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality," in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, eds. Jeffrey S. Siker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), p. 11.

[6] Alan A. Brash, *Facing our Differences: The Churches and Their Gay and Lesbian Members* (Geneva: WCC Publication, 1995), p. 36.

[7] John J. Mcneill, "Homosexuality: Challenging the Church to Grow," in *Homosexuality in the Church, op.cit.,p*. 50.

[8] John J. Mcneill, "Homosexuality: Challenging the Church to Grow," 56.

Chapter Six

POWER AND POWERLESSNESS: Mission from the Margins•

Introduction

Traditionally, people in the "centre" decide Christian mission. People in the "margin" have been treated as object of mission. We have been reading history of Christianity from the sender's perspective, but not from the receiver's perspective. However, people in the margin challenge us to locate Christian mission in the context of the marginalized. The CWME-WCC mission document, *Together Towards Life* (TTL), is a ground breaking theological work. The emphasis "FROM" the margins makes this theological affirmation different and significant. Mission is no longer seen from the centre of power to powerless, but from the powerless to the power. This compels us to think and do mission differently. We need to look for a new wineskin to preserve the new wine, a new church structure and ministerial orientation program in order to be inclusive.

God Chose the People Outside of Power Structure

The incarnation of God in Christ Jesus took place among the people at the margins. At the time of the birth of Jesus, people who gathered around him were people outside of the power structure. They were people without any political power, nor religious authority, women, children and the poor people like the shepherds who were landless and who did not have legal protection and from whom the rich people refused to buy even milk and vegetable. The wise men, strangers in Jerusalem, who brought precious gifts to Jesus refused to be subjected to

empire obligation. They were asked by the empire to report about the birth of Jesus. Instead they left by another route to Galilee to protect the life of Jesus.[1] People who welcomed Jesus were those outside of power hierarchy. These people were not allowed to enter the temple and did have any political influence. Jesus was not born in a palace, but in a manger, a ragged cowshed, an open and unprotected place. People who were missing during the birth of Jesus were the rich men, rich women, the king, queen, prince and princes, high priests, nobles and other high officials. The birth of Jesus was astonishing, threatening news for those decision makers. That is the reason why Herod, the king, ordered to kill all two-years-old and younger in the regions of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16). They never expected that God would be revealed among the lowly people. The angel announced the message, "Peace among you", among the marginal people. The incarnation of God happened outside of unjust power structure. God chose the 'margin' – the people on the underside of history – to inaugurate His Kingdom, bringing justice and peace. God was and is encountered among the powerless and in unexpected locations like manger, but not among the privileged and powerful people. If the God of the Bible took sides of the people in margin, then it is clear that God continues to take sides of the marginalized even today, identifying with the oppressed and challenging their oppressors. This is the biblical witness.

The true mission can be understood and experienced when we journey with the people who are on the margins, because that is where God is present. God is with them. God chose them and said "Peace be with you". The agenda from the periphery – the longing for justice, peace, identity and right to resources – is thus the agenda of God. The real future of humanity comes from here and not from the decisions and deliberations of the people who dominate the world. It is from the site of God's visitation – the margins – that a new world has to take shape. It is in this context that mission needs to embark.

In biblical tradition, the socially excluded people are the

privileged spaces for God's compassion and justice. There are several accounts of God's attention and caring love to people in situations of oppression and consequent depravation. God hears the cry of the oppressed and responds by sustaining and accompanying them in their journey towards liberation (Exod.3:7-8). Jesus announced his manifesto as one that liberates the oppressed, opens the eyes that are blind and heals the sick (Luke 4: 16ff). By asserting time and again that he has come to seek the lost and the least, Jesus constantly locates his ministry among the socially excluded people of his time. He rejected abusive power (Luke.1:1-12) and oppressive religious traditions (Luke. 11:37-54), and instead opted to restore the ones who are denied life even if his liberative actions ultimately led him to the cross. Through such an option, Jesus exposed and confronted the forces of marginalization. He worked for justice, peace, equality, dignity and respect for all.

The early Christian communities fought against the prevalent and pervasive evils of the day, such as imperial domination, social injustice, false pride, legalism, hypocritical religiousness, and infidelity to God's Covenant that were oppressive to the poor masses on the margins. Against these evils, the poor Christians, the uneducated, the untouchables from Bethany and the neglected villages in and around Jerusalem and Galilee, empowered by the event of the Pentecost developed prophetic mission against the imperial domination. The experience of the Pentecost empowered them to express their resistance against the power of the mammon and abuse of power in hierarchy, by developing the practice of common ownership of property, sharing of wealth and solidarity. This solidarity among the poor people became a threat to the existing empire and its social, political and economic structures.

No one can understand the biblical testimonies without taking into account the context of the margins. Jesus of Nazareth continued this preferential option for the marginalized not because they are humble, innocent and pitiable but primarily because they are created in God's own image to celebrate

fullness of life and yet are denied the promise of the justice and peace through the imposition of unjust structures, cultures and traditions.

The Margins – A Product of Unjust Power Structure

The power and slavery are intertwined. The present social, cultural, religious, economic and political structures and ideologies are created mainly by the people in power, primarily to protect their interest. These social structures/institutions are collective creations of rich elite, though the dominated people have also contributed indirectly, over the centuries. Here the organizing principle of society of power structure is that women are inferior, dalit/adivasi are unclean and impure, white people are superior, indigenous people are uncivilized, primitive and that they are sinners. This false presuppositions and beliefs are created by the privileged class to protect their interests on the one hand and it inflicts injustice and misery to many people, on the other. It is called a structural sin. In such structures, domineering and dominated classes always exist. Those who are in power exert all the privileges through exploitation of the powerless and the earth's resources to their maximum profit perpetuating false ideology. To legitimize dominating power, unjust social structures are often legalized and supported by the Constitutions of the countries or customary laws and practices, traditions and moreover it is sanctioned by religion as in the cases of caste system, racism, patriarchy, disabilities, etc. Social arrangement and relationship are based on higher-lower, civilized-uncivilized thus it denies human rights and dignity to a large number of people. Excluded and dominated people are left to live in unbearable misery and humiliation in many ways. Today those people who have been excluded from the dominant power structures are:

- disabled people whose presence is seen as a burden to the family and society; whose gifts and potentialities are never acknowledged, while they are seen as objects of charity, sinners and cursed by God;

- LGBTIQ people who are seen as those with psychological and mental imbalance, being abnormal and indulging in sinful same-sex relations and acts;
- people living with HIV and AIDS who are seen as drug abusers, sexual abusers and cursed by God;
- indigenous people who are denied their culture, spirituality and land; being the poorest communities in their own land and whose culture, customs, rituals, sacred shrines, places of worship, sacred music, ceremonial dresses, traditions, and handiwork are commodified for commercial purpose; and who cannot compete within the dominant capitalist market system;
- migrant workers who are exploited for maximum profit and forced to perform dirty and dangerous work without social security;
- farmers, labourers who survive by selling their labours in scorching sun and rain;
- Dalits who suffer socially and religiously as the lowest group of the caste system bearing the stigma of untouchability, and whose touch, shadow and sight pollutes the people of other castes;
- The black people whose colour is seen as cursed by God, inferior beings who are destined to be slaves of others;
- women who are treated as inferior, subordinate beings whose bodies are commodified as mere objects of enjoyment and pleasure for others.

This is structural injustice. We need to understand that the reality of structural injustices can be understood only from the experience of the oppressed. That means one has to judge the social dynamics from the perspective of people in the periphery, but not from the centre of power. Charles Kammer points out, "All our policies, all our social structures must be first judged by their effects on the poor, the powerless, and

minorities."[2] Reflecting on the Black struggle for justice, James Cone, a champion of Black liberation movement, also says that the victim of the power alone can suggest how the world ought to be.[3] Being oppressed, they know what is wrong because they are both the victims of evil and recipients of God's liberating activity, the Gospel of Christ.[4] Similarly, J.B. Metz opines that inherited structures have to be analyzed from the perspective of the oppressed. He says, "We have to judge ourselves and our history with the eyes of the victims."[5] It is the marginalized groups suffering that provide us with criteria to judge the inherited social structures and eventually struggle for the humanization of the social reality. Any analysis of social reality thus has to take the stand of the option for the poor and the integrity of God's creation very decisively. It demands conscious rejection of unjust and oppressive system in society. It is an option against social structures in favour of the victims. If theological affirmation of mission from the margin is to be realistic and command credibility, we have to abandon the idealistic and individualistic views of life and locate decisively the Kingdom's value in the context of the margins. In other words, mission from the margins will miss the real issue and target group, if we analyze social system from the perspective of the rich. "Margin," is thus, the `site' of God's mission. Mission needs to be analyzed, tested ad validated in this site of the margin.

Therefore, 'margin' is a theological principle that critiques all the dominant value systems that dehumanize, exclude and push some people to marginality. It critiques cultures, traditions and theology that justify and nurture unjust institutions advocating marginality as a part of the divine creation and they will inherit the Kingdom of God.

God's Voice from the Margins

Mission from the margins requires listening to the testimonies, pains and sufferings of the people who are outside of the power structure. Their stories become God's voice. There are many

testimonies both in the Old and New Testaments, how people in the margins were used as God's instrument for transformation and change. For example, 2 Kings 5:1-19 presents a story of how people in the margins became the agents of healing. Naaman suffered from leprosy, though he was also a successful commander of the army of the king of Syria and his skillful and dedicated work had won favour from the king and the people. And the nameless little girl – the prisoner and victim of war, displaced from her family, her people and land – was put to force labour, working for Naaman's wife, but she became an agent of healing. We see the following contrasting positions of the two – Naaman and the Nameless little girl:

> Naaman is powerful – the Nameless girl is powerless and helpless.
> Naaman is a ruler – the Nameless girl is ruled.
> Naaman is a conqueror – the Nameless girl is conquered, abused & misused.
> Naaman is an army commander – the Nameless girl is a victim of the army.
> Naaman is a slave owner – the Nameless girl is a slave.
> Naaman is a predator – the Nameless girl is a victim.
> Naaman needed healing – the Nameless girl offered help/healing.
> Naaman has a name – the girl does not have a name.[6]

In her pitiable and pathetic experience of war and dislocation, the Nameless girl knew what Naaman was going through in his life. She knew the pain and sorrow of Naaman. Instead of rejoicing over his misfortune and pain, the Nameless girl offered words of healing.

It was indeed difficult for the ruler to listen to the words of the ruled. The ruler wanted to get healed by maintaining the royal power and offering wealth. First, he obtained an official letter from the king of Aram thinking that the royal authority and power would be respected and obeyed by the subjects. Second, he took huge quantities of silver, gold and garments to impress and to appease the prophet Elisha. As was common

protocol at that time, Naaman expected that the prophet would come out, bow down before him and perform rituals like calling on the name of God, wave his hand over his body and cure his leprosy miraculously. The ruler thought that he would thus be healed. But it happened in quite a different way.

Instead of going and meeting Naaman, Elisha sent a message through a messenger, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and you shall be clean" (v. 9). Naaman felt insulted and took this as disrespectful not only to him but also to the king. He became angry and decided to go away without obeying what Elisha asked him to do. But then another word of healing came from his servant, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, `Wash and be cleaned'" (v. 13). Only when he listened to the voice of his servant, did he finally get healed.

What is the meaning of washing in the Jordan River? The river didn't have, of course, substances within it that could cure leprosy. There is a deeper meaning in the act of washing in the dirty river for seven times. It was the river where the poorest people lived, where they drank and where they bathed. To be healed from leprosy, Naaman needed to wash himself in the river where the poor washed their bodies, too. By washing his body seven times in the river Jordan, Naaman expressed solidarity with the people at the margins. To wash himself seven times in the river would compel Naaman, a General and a fighter, to be humble in front of the prophet, and in front of the Nameless girl and his servant, and become servant of the people he had conquered. In this dirty river that Naaman despised, he could get his holistic healing. It was in solidarity with the people in margins that he could find the power of healing.

We can discern God's voice in every day conversation, songs, stories of pain and joy of the poor. In Taiwan, people were punished by the rulers for speaking in their mother tongue. People were forced to speak and learn only the colonizer's

language. The colonizers also instill an ideology that learning and speaking one's mother tongue is inferior and uncivilized. Last year, a graduate student of Yushan Theological College and Seminary, Taiwan, peached a sermon in his mother tongue. At the end, he urged his fellow students, "Do not feel shy to preach in your mother tongue". One professor commented, "I am very happy that you could preach very fuently in your mother tongue" while another professor said, "you are very courageous to preach in mother tongue." These are voices who have been denied of their basic rights due to cultural genocide for years. Are these voices not like the prophets Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel who challenged their people, "Let us return to the promised land,," "Be coureagous, God is on our side", "Let us rebuild the Wall, Temple." Like in many countries,indigenous people in Argentina are treated like second-class citizens. Indigenous people cry for justice saying, "We want to live as human beings. We don't want to be considered as strangers in our own country, poor or useless. We want to live without discrimination. We don't want bloodshed, we just want to reclaim our community."[7] These marginalized voices represent the longing of the people to dream their future and be connected to each other in one's mother tongue, sing and dance, andcelebrate their cultural values and wisdom together.

We often hear oppressive slogans while promoting development. The dominant power in decision making says:

Minority should sacrifice for the sake of the majority benefits
Development is good for people
Industries are good for people and nation
Governments are doing development for the future generation of the people
People need industries to enhance their economy and living standard
Development alone can alleviate poverty
People are poor because of the lack of industry
Industry will generate more employment, bring more

money and comfort
Development is a sign of progress and civilization

The marginalized people cry out saying:

The land is our mother; how can we sell our land?
The mother earth provides us with crops and food
If we have land, the land will feed us more than 3000-5000 years
When the mountain disappears, what will be our identity?
If we leave our ancestral village, what will be our culture and spiritual identity?
When all the trees have been cut down, where will the animals and birds find a home?
When all the waters are polluted, what will we drink? Do we have to buy water?
When all the air is unsafe to breathe, can we buy air?

An indigenous activist narrates his experience of modern development activities as follows:

> Many unfortunate tribes have already taken farewell from the world. Civilization has squeezed them out of this world. The rest are facing a serious threat of extinction or a life of slavery. Our big brothers want us to be their coolies (bonded labourers); when we refused, they plan to finish us. Ruthless exploitation, deprivation from human rights, alienation from land, suppression of our ethnic identity and derogation of our culture and traditions has been almost paralyzing us.[8]

In whose voice do we discern God's voice? The dominant voice in the decision making power represents the voice of mammon; it is cruel and cold-hearted. The people in the margin are being forced to sacrifice for the sake of the so-called "majority". The dominant voices reflect absolute power of the hegemonic intellect in society. They simply regard marginal communities as non-beings and non-existent and God's gift of the land and

its resources as mere objects to be exploited. The voices of the people in the margins expose evils of the oppressive structural violence and envision their future life which affirms:

- the life of self-sufficiency and eco-friendliness has to be the vision of life; there is no human security without water, air, animals, plants and all ecologically suffering beings;
- the people are the true subjects of the nation; a nation cannot progress without participation of people;
- the land should not be reduced to a mere commodity, it is the foundation of all living beings;
- promote people's oriented development and mana-gement of resources.

God's voice from the margins is distinct. They need to be heard and their vision of life should form the basis of mission. Even if marginalized people do not have much material and financial resources in the way many churches are accustomed to, marginalized people, through their lives and everyday resistance, practice of solidarity, have immense potential to revitalize the mission of the church. They powerfully testify to the sinfulness of the world. God opts for the marginalized people, neither because they are weak by choice, nor because of paternalistic compassion, but primarily because they are created in God's image and they have the right to celebrate fullness of life offered by God to all. Their life under the oppressive structure have testified towards the urgent need for repentance and transformation.[9] Marginalized people thus should not be seen always as those in need of help and support. They have resisted injustice and oppression in their own ways and through their struggles for life, justice, dignity and rights for themselves and for all, unveil the presence and power of God in their lives amidst struggle and pain. For example, people with disabilities are promoting the values of sensitivity and partnership; the Dalits and other discriminated communities are challenging the churches to resist cultures and practices that discriminate

and dehumanize millions of people; the indigenous peoples continue to advocate the spirituality of interconnectedness of life, particularly, in the context of a threatened earth and climate justice; young people in disadvantaged situations are resisting policies that deprive them of opportunities for education and employment; and vulnerable migrant workers, through their struggles for human rights, dignity and justice, are challenging political systems that deny them basic human rights in the name of national interests and market expansion.[10] In all such expressions, in their actions and allegiances towards liberation and transformation, the ecumenical movement today have new possibilities of ecumenical action as well as new ecclesial self-discovery.[11] Marginalized people, through their yearnings for life with dignity and justice offer alternative visions of a world free of forces that abuse and deny life for all. They challenge us to work towards new patterns of inclusiveness, sharing, and transformative action. In a world where people are treated as commodities and are also mistreated on account of their identities such as gender, ethnicity, colour, caste, age, disability, sexual orientation, and economic and cultural locations, we are challenged to build up persons and communities in ways that help them to experience God's gift of life.[12]

Further, mission from the margins demands not only binding the wounds of the victims or offering actions of compassion, but also calls upon the churches to confront and transform the forces which cause suffering and deprivation. It demands a radical spirituality of continual struggle and commitment for transformation of those sinful social structures and for liberation of their victims. Without transformative action, churches would be a mere expression of service, subtly serving the interests of the oppressive and exploitative powers by covering up their complicity.[13] Therefore, it is imperative that we challenge the oppressive system listening to the cries of the people in the margin. Let us

- Advocate and launch campaigns for the causes of justice, dignity and peace for the victims of aggression,

displacement and dispossession.

- Journey, encourage, support and accompany local congregation as they respond to their own issues by developing and implementing *diakonal* work.
- Advocate expressions of solidarity and mutual responsibility among congregations, especially by bridging the divide between urban and rural, and rich and poor communities.
- Address issues of social, gender, caste and racial discrimination and exclusion within the church and our institutions.
- Implement policies and programs of HIV and AIDS, disability, LGBTIQ and environmental stewardship adopted by churches and governments.
- Support, facilitate and accompany prophetic voices and initiatives that strive to uphold the causes of human rights and justice, particularly of the marginalized communities.
- Build networks and partnerships with regional and national level churches and organizations to encourage grassroots, people-based initiatives.
- Encourage and support theological institutions to address the issues of social exclusion for building inclusive community for all.
- Encourage and help churches to engage in prophetic actions for justice with people from different faith communities.
- Produce and prepare biblical resources to enable, encourage and nurture laity for transformative actions.

Endnotes

- *A paper presented at WCC-CWME Latin American Consultation on "Together towards Life" and the World Mission Conference, 30th April - 04 May, 2017, Rosario, Argentina*

[1] For detail see my article "Rerouting mission and Ecumenism in Asia," in *They Left by Another Road*, Wati Longchar, *et.al*., eds (Chiangmai: CCA, 2007), pp. 187-198.

[2] C.L. Kammer, *Ethics and Liberation: An Introduction* (New York: Maryknoll, 1988), p. 156.

[3] James Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1970), p. 192.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 192.

[5] J.B. Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans by D. Smith, (New York, 1990), p. 105.

[6] Naveen Rao Centred on the `Margin. *Clark Journal of Theology*, Vol. V, No. 2, (2015), pp. 8-10.

[7] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/08/indigenous-peoples-argentina-we-are-strangers-our-own-country/, 25.7.2017.

[8] R.J. Kr. Kootoom, "Tribal Voice is Your Voice," in *Tribal Voice of the Persecuted Tribals*, 15, Nov. Premier Issue, 1995, p. 1.

[9] A Draft Document of WCC on Mission from the Margin's Perspective, a study process initiated by Just and Inelusive Community. 2012, p 5.

[10] *Ibid*.,p. 7.

[11] "Communiqué" of the Conference on "Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty First Century," jointly organized by Justice and Diakonia, Just and Inclusive Communities, and Mission and Evangelism programmes of the World Council of Churches in Colombo, Sri Lanka, June 2-6, 2012, p. 3.

[12] *Ibid*, p. 4.

[13] A Draft Document of WCC on Mission from the Margin's Perspective., p. 9.

Chapter Seven

MARGINALIZED PEOPLE AND ASIAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY: Location and Vocation of Theologians•

I consider it a great honour to be invited to this international conference on "Minjung Theology, Liberation Theology and Contextual Theologies" to re-affirm the God of liberator in today's context, retrospecting the great legacy of our leader, teacher and guide Professor Nam Dong Suh. Many people thought that liberation theology is academically reduced to a piece of history after the fall of the Berlin Wall at the end of the 1980s. Looking at continuing marginalization of the poor, one will argue for the importance and relevance of liberation theology. Economic and political poverty continue more under market capitalism due to the one-sided extractive development processes and globalization. Exploitation of the poor and earth's resources continues in a massive scale. Liberation theology needs to challenge the negative impact of neo-capitalism and address new questions: how can liberation theologies make a difference in the context of continuing marginalization? How do liberation theologies unmask the nexus between globalization, climate-justice and survival of the marginalized communities? How do we re-locate liberation theologies in the context of the margins? What is the vocation of the theologians in the context of continuing marginalization of people and God's creation?

"Margin" – the Location of Liberation Theology

As a first generation Korean theologian, Nam Dong Suh

strived for a new identity of being a Christian, in the midst of political and social repression during post-independent era and also respond to the crisis of Asian cultures and religions due to rejection as pagan by missionary theology. A significant paradigm shift in Suh's theological methodology was location of faith confession in the context of the non-beings, the poor, the marginalized and the ones who have no place in the hierarchical structures. Therefore, the subject matter of theology, for him, is people, minjung and the task of theology is reflection on the Divine through the eyes of those who are made as non-beings, the women, the untouchables, and the marginalized communities. By making the marginalized the subject of theology, he rejected the dominant categories in doing theology, especially Western construct of theology. Locating in the context of suffering minjung and realizing that the future humanity lies in its ability to create counter movements and life-affirming theology against the abuse of power structures and unjust market institutions through strengthening and building grass-roots or local movements, involving the Church and the wider community, Suh successfully gave a new shape in doing Asian theology. Location in the context of *minjung* is significant in doing theology.

If we argue that liberation theology is academically reduced to a piece of history after the dawn of neo-liberalism, then we have missed the location; we have missed the site of God's revelation. The distinctiveness of liberation theology is its location – the margins; it is not a mere option, but it is an imperative. The moment liberation theologies detach from the location of the margin it loses its relevance. Liberation theologians speak of hermeneutic of circle because it comes back to location time and again to break new ground. In today's context where do we relocate liberation theology? Revisiting the location time and again is imperative to safeguard from an elitist theology. To re-clarify the location of liberation theology in modern times, let me start with the parable[1] of the Rich Man and Lazarus as recorded in the Gospel of Luke:

> *There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. At this gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores*. Luke 16:19-21 (RSV)

This parable tells about two persons, the rich man, and Lazarus. In whose context do we locate our theology? How do we discern what it means by doing contextual theology in these two contrasting contexts? What does it mean in the context of the systemic denial of justice to the poor and marginalized?

The Rich Man

Notice how the rich man is dressed "in purple and fine linen" (v19a), everyday, not just for special occasions. It is very striking that the rich man is identified with the dress he wore – purple and fine linen attire. He is not identified with his name! But was identified with his wealth. It is true that sea purple was a very precious and rare dye and was scarcely used even by princes and nobles of very high position. In the Bible, purple and fine linen are mentioned in a few places (Rev. 18:12; Prov. 18:12; Ezek. 27:7). This most luxurious fabric is associated with royalty or quasi-royal dignity. This signifies that the rich man is extremely wealthy.

Notice how the rich man eats. Since he had everything at his disposal, it says he "feasted sumptuously everyday" (v. 19 b). Notice the reference to 'everyday'. The diet of the ordinary people was simple and at times the poor passed the day without proper food. For the rich man, every day was a feasting day. A banquet was a daily occurrence. The parable says he feasted lavishly, not just on special occasions. Feasting on special occasions seems reasonable, but everyday? Thus, with all the accompaniments of grandeur, this nameless mighty and rich one lived. We can imagine that his halls were filled with noble guests in rich attire and his ante-chambers with servants. Everything that could make life splendid and joyous

was in profusion and in abundance.

His wealth was certainly acquired at the expense of the poor through the oppressive patronage system of his time. The system was based on wealthy patrons who loaned money to poor clients with heavy interest in return. When the clients failed to pay their loan, their land was confiscated. A rich man like this one would have accumulated massive wealth due to this unjust system.

Notice how he lives. The rich man lived in a `house' with a "gate", not a door. Some New Testament scholars suggest that the gate suggests that he lived in a large ornamental mansion. Here Jesus is alluding to some of the most powerful families of the times who were both rich and corrupt – What does a gate symbolize in today's society? It means the poor people living in streets and slums without protection.

Is there any person without a name? We even name our pets, flowers, fruits, plants, animals, mountains, and more. Not to name someone is an insult to them, especially to a rich person or to someone in a high position.[2] Having no name means that someone is a nobody, worthless, and identity-less. But Jesus does not take account of a person's wealth. Is Jesus' action not radical?

Poor Lazarus

Where does Lazarus live? At the gate of the rich man. "And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus" (v. 20a). To live at somebody's gate waiting for the left-over food or burnt bread is terrible and painful. It is indeed a humiliating condition. He was waiting with the dogs.

In the past, people baked bread in the fire and it is said that nobles and high priests would not eat burnt bread. Eating such a portion was considered to be a sign of impurity. This means the rich man is pure and holy, while Lazarus is impure, unholy and untouchable, associated with stigma. "Covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table" (v. 20b and v. 21a), Lazarus is not only hungry

and thirsty but is covered with sores, carrying a loathsome disease (perhaps leprosy). He was not only untouchable, but was also extremely sick. He is made a sign of impurity, pain and suffering. He is indeed a disabled person.

Apparently he could not get around for himself because of hunger and illness; he was as good as dead. Since he was an impure and an untouchable person, Lazarus would not have had any relatives, friends and helpers. He was left alone, except for the dogs. Some commentators opine that the dogs were wild, homeless stray dogs so common in all Eastern cities, who act as the street scavengers and were regarded as dirty and unclean. The Bible says that things associated with dogs were unclean. This is another sign of this man's outcast condition (see Exod. 23:31; 1 Kings 21:19, 24; Ps 21:16; Matt. 15:26-27; Mark 7:27-28). The story also suggests that Lazarus was defenseless in that he could not even ward off the dogs. The dogs lick the pus that oozes from the afflicted man's sores and ulcers. It appears that the dogs might even have been acting like doctors and nurses for this poor man. Hungry, sick and with dogs licking his sores, he is in a pathetic condition. Lazarus' presence also threatens to pollute others.

Is Lazarus a sinner? Yes, he was a sinner and cursed by God according to some. At the time of Jesus, a beggar would have been regarded as a sinner, and poverty, or indeed incurable disease, was often spoken of as a punishment from God. People were encouraged not to touch or associate with such people. Lazarus is seen as a person cursed by God.

But what happens? Jesus called him by his name! The Greek name 'Lazarus' is derived from two Hebrew words; *Eli-ezer* meaning "God helps/God helped". Naming implies identity which involves recognition, respect and right. With a name a person becomes somebody. Jesus addressed him with a name. Lazarus is no longer a nobody, but somebody with rights, dignity and worth.

God among the Margins

On whose context do we need to locate liberation theology?

Whose voice do we need to listen to - that of the rich man in affluence or of Lazarus in abject poverty? Lazarus represents the excluded people, the poor in the margins who are denied of their rights and privileges in our context today, the marginalized, the afflicted and the oppressed. We often hear and read about the farmer's tragic suicide just because they cannot repay their loans. Parents forcing or selling their girl children to commercial sex work for survival. Mothers killing her child by throwing from a high balcony, or throwing in a pond or river is almost a daily occurrence because parents are uncertain of their future. Such tragic events have become every day affairs in Asia today. Ironically, we hear rich people competing for construction of sky high private buildings with facilities like Olympic size swimming pools, gym with spa, recreational center and helipad at its highest point. In contrary, we have millions of Lazaruses in the world due to unjust economic structures, religious, social and cultural systems which have marginalized the poor – who are part of the whole of God's *oikos*. Market capitalism plays a key role. Market capitalism, rooted in the objectification of nature and people and the inferiority of indigenous cultures, has come to be a principal characteristic feature of the new millennium. It operates with the logic of maximum profit, maximum capital accumulation, and maximum exploitation of labour and earth's resources. This ideology of ever-increasing growth and a thirst for the maximization of profit, enjoyment and absolute domination of the earth's resources goes back to the Enlightenment movement.[3] Development is measured in terms of the amount of goods and services produced rather than by what is produced and how it is distributed justly. Human creativity and natural resources are objectified and directed to the market for the purpose of commodity production and money making. While some rich people have accumulated so much wealth that they do not know how and where to invest their wealth, the poor are dying of hunger on the street. The scenario today is that the top 10 rich Asian get about 5000 US dollars in a few seconds or minutes, while millions of people do not even get a dollar

per day. Asia has 40% of its population living in poverty who cannot afford to have square meal a day. Being threatened of their livelihood thousands of farmers commit suicide. Lack of clean drinking water leads to 5 to 10 million deaths in the Third World countries. Then 'whose context' is crucial in doing theology?

The deliberate option of Jesus to speak for Lazarus tells us that our churches, the ecumenical movement must be located in the context of people in the margins. Our theological reflection will miss the core focus of its vision if we miss this location. There cannot be authentic theology if we fail to locate theology in Lazarus' context.

People who are unable to participate in their political, religious and economic systems due to imposition of unjust ideologies, cultural practices, economic, social, and political structures that hinder them from experiencing abundant life are the site of God's revelation. Much like the time of Jesus, a few rich are in the centre controls and manipulates wealth, finances, public discourses, decision-making processes and deny life to large section of people. Like Lazarus, people in the margins today are the site of doing theology; the site of God's revelation. In Felix Wilfred's word "the space of God's visitation".[4] To quote him:

> The agenda from the periphery is the agenda of God. The real future of humanity comes from here and not from the decisions and deliberations of the centres that dominate the world. This is so because they constantly challenge the established order for its ways of exclusion and strive towards a world of inclusion and justice. In this way they are part of the agenda of God for the future of humanity. It is from the site of God's visitation – the margins – that a new world, a new Asia will take shape. This is our hope.[5]

Lazarus being subjected to miserable inhuman condition knew what was meant to be thirsty, hungry, in pain, to beg in front of

someone's gate without dignity. Therefore, indigenous people, dalit, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups who are in the margins have the epistemological privilege of knowing what affirms life and deny it; what helps communities and what hurts them; what contributes to their well-being and what circumvents it. From the margins, they bring firsthand knowledge of the suffering that accompanies exclusionary practices as well as unmask the forces that work against God's will in the world.[6] Through their lives and struggles for life, they hold forth what God wants in the world while also bringing a reservoir of hope, resistance, and perseverance that is needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God.[7]

The God of the Margins

The God of the Bible is someone who journeys to and with the margins. The Bible testifies that the Divine participates in history to defend those who are victims of power. James Cone writes:

> Yahweh is known and worshipped as the One who brought Israel out of Egypt, and who raised Jesus from the dead. God is the political God, the Protector of the poor and the Establisher of the right for those who are oppressed. To know God is to experience the acts of God in the concrete affairs and relationships of people, liberating the weak and the helpless from pain and humiliation. For theologians to speak of this God, they too must become interested in politics and economics, recognizing that there is no truth about Yahweh unless it is the truth of freedom as that event is revealed in the oppressed people's struggle for justice in this world.[8]

God is the God of the poor and God revealed Godself as liberator who stands against the manipulators of justice. The central question of Western theological inquiry is to counter the challenges posed by secularism and therefore they wrestled with the question of how to prove the existence

of God rationally. Influenced by patriarchal culture, God-world-human relationship is perceived hierarchically and dualistically. Instead of perceiving God as liberator, God is perceived as incomprehensible being, omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent. God is projected as pure transcendental and spiritual being. The world is created out of matter; it is considered as sinful and destined to destruction. Therefore, it was taught that the Holy God does not come into contact with the sinful material world, but separated from it. Within this framework, we uphold a patriarchal, success, beauty and perfect-oriented images of God like the Ruler, Lord, King, Almighty, Father, Master and Warrior. These are all military and success-oriented images of God. This theological construct holds no value for the poor and the marginalized, and pluralistic context. M.P. Joseph argues that today "these false gods come with fashionable names such as economic growth, prosperity and development. The function of the false God's is to legitimize various systems of oppression including patriarchy, class domination, race discrimination and ecclesiastical hierarchies."[9] These images have made Christianity a religion of, and for the rulers, the elites and the upper-class. Any theology that measure life in terms of blessings, money, perfection and success can be called prosperity theology. This is not the teaching of the Bible, but domestication of God. It is equal to the worship of mammon.

The Bible affirms that God became flesh. He became Immanuel. Jesus is the incarnation of God and gave his life for the downtrodden people. He touched, cared, loved and worked for the liberation of people in the margins who have been excluded, discriminated and stigmatized in the society. Any language of God that fails to answer the cry of the marginalized people such as person with disability, wounded women, indigenous people, minjung, dalits, people living with HIV, for total freedom and right to fullness of life is not holistic. God-talk should be free from the institutionalized-patriarchal-hierarchical-dualistic views of life; instead it must be a living reality for people. We need a new theological paradigm in which God is perceived as fellow sufferer, companion, and

great comforter, as a divine power that is not dominating or controlling. Rather than dialectical power in weakness, this is a liberating and transforming power that is effective in compassionate love, care and service.[10] This nature and power of God is effectively revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Vocation of Theologians

One of the primary tasks of the theologians is transformation of the sinful social structure and liberation of the victims. It involves entering into the struggle of the marginalized people for radical change in the system of oppressive structures proclaiming and making known that Jesus Christ is the liberator of all humankind and God's creation. It also involves dismantling the existing systems and institutions that perpetuate systemic injustice to many people and God's *oikos*. In some cases it would demand continuous collective struggle against the misuse and abuse of power in the form of organizing protest movements, non-cooperation movements, campaigns through peaceful means, etc. which requires conscientization of both the victims and perpetrators by exposing the unjust structure and destructive belief systems.

In his life and work, Jesus was involved in and identified himself with people in the grassroots, ground reality. He did not belong to the elite, rich class. He was with, for and from the people. People's problems and predicament were his concerns. He did not understand his spirituality in terms of separation from the people in pain, but in terms of total identification with such people. In Jesus' ministry, there is a reversal of values from the exercise of power to servanthood. In Jesus' teaching, discipleship is always understood in terms of energizing, accompanying, sacrificing, empowering, mobilizing solidarity and transforming people of nobody into somebody.

Theologian's vocation involves risk, travevsing in challenging and lonely road, yet full of joy and fulfillment.

The Gospel writer Mark has recorded the risky terrain of theological vocation.

> They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles be broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me. For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." (Mark 5:1-9, NRSV)

This passage speaks of an uncontrolled man, a very powerful person who has been living in the graveyard. Everyone was scared of him, nobody dared to go near him. No one was able to control him not even with a chain. Even if he is chained, he would break it and smashed the leg with the irons. He was yelling and cutting himself with stones. Moreover, he was living in the graveyard. No one likes to live in graveyard, it is a place where dead were buried. It is the place we do not want to visit or even remember. Our love ones are buried there, it is a place where our hearts are broken.

This passage depicts our society today. It portrays a society totally controlled by unjust political, religious system and economic relation. Corruption and manipulation are so rampant, but no one can stop. Killing, rape, forced labour, arrest of innocent people without obvious reason are a constant

reminder of the reality today. We have heard the abuse of power by army, by so-called freedom fighters, forced collection of taxes, but no one has the courage to speak out. In the name of religion, we have heard killing of many people in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Indonesia, Myanmar, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, etc., but nobody can speak out or do nothing even if we know that it is against religious teaching. In the name of protecting our culture, sometimes we treat women as second-class citizen. Some churches even refuse to ordain women, we do not want to speak about equal opportunity in ministry. Our global economy is controlled by a few rich nations, or a few individuals in the country. But we have no courage to raise justice voices. People/leaders who have raised their voices have been eliminated, killed and tortured. Religious fundamentalism destroys the whole secular fabric, but no one can stop it. Insurgency movement destroys harmony in society, but nobody can chain them. Our society has become uncontrollable like the strong man in the tomb. Our society is becoming like a graveyard where we have many sad memories. The name legion suggests many demons, rather than one demon possessing the man and this meaning is confirmed by the following phrase, "for we are many" (v.9b). A Roman army legion consists of 6000 men; the most powerful and well organized army at the time of Jesus. The Romans became an empire due to their mighty army. Today, evil and unjust system is institutionalized like mighty Roman soldiers. Just like the poor cannot challenge the Roman soldiers during the time of Jesus, it is almost impossible to challenge unjust system in today's society. This is our reality. We cannot run away. It is here that we are called to exercise prophetic role.

What did Jesus do? Jesus named the evil – Jesus asked, "What is your name?" Naming involves personal encounter, it involves personal confrontation. Naming also involves knowing the specific issue and problem, it means identifying the root cause of the evil. Theological vocation includes identifying and confronting life threatening forces. A true theologian is the one who has the courage to name and confront various forms

of exploitation and unjust system. When Jesus asked, "what is your name?", the evil possessed man replied, "My name is Legion". It represents power, authority to attack, control, suppress and oppress others. Legion symbolizes collective power and structure. The most important aspect of this name is that the evil spirit works in group or collectively just as the Roman soldiers. We have many legions in our society. The oppressive system, well-structured and institutionalized military junta around the world, corporate multi-nationals, patriarchy, caste system, tribalism are all legions. Politically, misuse and abuse of religion to gain political powers are legion. Attempt to control political machinery through militancy or manipulation is legion. Gun culture, organized crimes are all legion. Economically, globalization and unending competition of consumerism, excessive exploitation of natural resources are legion. Religiously fighting against each other in the name of expanding one's denomination or religion is legion. Many people who raise their voice against legions were killed and continue to be killed and they have sacrificed their lives because they named the evil. Theological vocation thus involves courage and sacrifice in today's world.

The words of Jesus, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45) should not be understood as submissiveness and in an idealistic way. It is a radical and costly leadership. Jesus' understanding and ministry was radically different from the exercise of power by Pharaohs, Caesars, kings and other non-religious and religious leaders of the time. For Jesus, service involves liberating the marginalized people from the yoke of religious formalism, legalism, misuse of power, and unjust economic structures that oppressed and marginalized people. Theologian's vocation involves struggle for structural transformation of social, political and economic system. There is no theological vocation without subversive action for the marginalized people. Jesus' uncompromising defense of life led him to a life of conflict with the powerful ruling class of his time. This conflict resulted in Jesus' death on the cross. Similarly, the disciples and followers of Jesus

of Nazareth confronted the `principalities and powers' of structural/institutional/systemic empire structures that exploit the poor of their times. They risk their lives for Christ's sake and became martyrs for justice. To protect life against any forces that threaten celebration of life must be resisted. A primary function of the theologian's vocation is thus denouncing and eliminating all forms of oppressions that destroy human dignity and life sustaining God's resources.

Endnotes

- A paper presented at International Conference on "Minjung Theology, Liberation Theologies, and Contextual Theologies," from 23-26 October, 2014 at Songdo International Campus, Yonsei University , Korea

[1] Some ancient commentators were of the opinion that this parable is a "real" story because of the fact that personal names appear in it.

[2] For further detail of the interpretation in the context of indigenous people refer Wati Longchar, *Returning to Mother Earth: Theology, Christian Witness and Theological Education – An Indigenous Perspective*, PTCA Study Series No.4 (Kolkata:PTCA, 2012), pp. 24-55.

[3] V.J. John *The Ecological Vision of Jesus* (Thiruvalla: CSS-BTTBPSA, 2002) pp. 34-35.

[4] FeliX Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), p. xix.

[5] *Ibid*.,p. xviii.

[6] A draft WCC document on "Mission from the margins," a process initiated by Just and Inclusive Community, October, 2012, p. 1.

[7] *Ibid*, p. 1.

[8] James H. Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1970), pp. 57.

[9] M.P. Joseph, "Foreword" in *Doing Contextual Theologies in Asia: Essay in Honour of Huang Po Ho*, ed. Wati Longchar, PTCA Series No. 8 (Kolkata: PTCA/SCEPTRE, 2014), p. xi.

[10] K.C. Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission* (Thiruvalla: Christian Sahitya Samithi, 1996),p. 172.

Chapter Eight

M.M. THOMAS ON MARGINALIZED PEOPLE AND CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES IN ASIA

Madathiparampil Mammen Thomas (MM in short; 1916–1996) was born on 15th May, 1916 and we have celebrated his birth centenary and generated a lot of debate in strengthening contextual theologies. It is an opportunity for us to retrospect on how he discerned contextual theologies in Asia for further theological reconstruction. He was part of the generation of colonialism, independence struggle and nation building. MM's theological thinking was deeply influenced by socialism. He found Marxist analysis of society so appealing and challenging to understand the plight of the marginalized people though he was critical of totalitarian collective society. Bastiaan Wielanga says that "Ideologically MM was moved from Gandhian non-violence and Marxist class-war to Nehruite state-centred development and social justice-oriented modernization and from there to people-centred movement for social justice."[1] As a grass-root ecumenist and theologian, and committed to the victims of unjust political and economic structures, MM strived to search for a new identity of being a Christian, in the midst of political and social repression during the post-independent era and also responded to the crisis of Asian cultures and religions. He was a radical thinker with a prophetic voice that challenged both the church and the society.

Theology and Oppressive Structures

MM was one of the most outstanding Indian theologians, a renowned ecumenical leader, and a brilliant scholar who

made an indelible mark on the twentieth century ecumenical movement. He was a prolific writer both in English and his native language Malayalam, and wrote over 60 books and close to a thousand articles, some unpublished. MM served the World Council of Churches (WCC) as moderator of its Central Committee from 1968 to 1975. Earlier, he was Asian staff member of the WCC Church and Society department, then chair of the departmental working committee and co-chair of the World Conference on Church and Society in Geneva, 1966. He was also secretary of the East Asia Christian Conference for church and society concerns. In India, MM served as associate, then director, of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society from 1958 until his retirement in 1975. Later, MM served as governor of Nagaland, by appointment of the government of India, from 1990 to 1992.

All theologies are contextual but the question is – whose context, source, experience, perspective do we take in articulating Christian faith? The following quotations speaks of MM's understanding of theology and its relationship to context:

> Theology is a living thing, having to do with our existence as Christian and as Churches.[2]
>
> Theology is the World (sic Word) confronting the world. Therefore, the life and activity of the layman (sic) seeking to hear and obey the Word of God in the day-to-day decisions of the secular job is the stuff of living theology. Outside the layman(sic), theology is formal and dead.[3]
>
> The stuff of living theology is the life and witness of the laity in the lay world and the fellowship of the Church's congregation in the lay world and the fellowship of the church's congregation responding in Christ to save the secular neighbourhood.[4]
>
> For Asian Churches to be confessing Churches in the contemporary world of Asia means that they must

> extend their worship of God from the sanctuary to the secular world; their creeds and confession from the liturgy to the life of the whole people of God; and their theology from the study of the seminary to the world of Asian thought, philosophy and religion – the world of Asian renaissance and revolution.[5]
>
> The Churches cannot stand on the side-lines as spectators, but must involve themselves in contemporary Asian existence in solidarity with the human and spiritual struggles of `the world of the Asian renaissance and revolution'.[6]

Challenging the traditional classical dominant understanding of theology, MM called for a paradigm shift in doing contextual theologies: (a) relating to contemporary life situation of the people (b) confronting the secular world by the Word in the day-to-day lives of common people (c) responding to the salvific work of Christ as a Christian, as Christian community in the larger multi-society in contemporary world (d) moving away from dogmatic, ritualistic and other-worldly spirituality to spirituality of justice (spirituality of combat) in today's society, and (e) affirming solidarity for justice amidst Asian struggle.

MM affirmed that Christian theology is God-talk, God in relationship to the world. This relationship is the cutting edge between the Word and the world. The primary function of theology is humanization. The task of theology is not just affirming dogma or performing rituals but one of the transforming praxes.

The subject matter of theology is people, however, MM was very specific that the subject matter and the task of theology is reflection on the Divine through the eyes of those who are made as non-beings – the women, the untouchables, tribals etc. By making the non-beings the subject of theology, he rejected the dominant categories in doing theology, especially Western construct of theology. In Asian context, the victim

of totalitarian government, the untouchables, the poor, the women are the most vulnerable section of Asian society. They are held as inferior to others, subordinated and discriminated against the socio, economic and religious spheres. They are segregated through the notions of purity-pollution dichotomy. Though they work hard, they are exploited of their just wages. In the Market culture they are less valuable than goods.[7] MM struggled to locate theology within this oppressive context.

MM identified that the oppressive structure exists due to human sinfulness. Totalitarianism, casteism, capitalism and patriarchy are the expression of human sinfulness and it is here in this context that theology needs to be articulated to change and bring transformation. He identified "Egoism" as the root cause of unjust structures, systems and practices.[8] First, egoism militates against equality and seeks to perpetuate hierarchy. Second, egoism denies others for one's vested interest by reducing the poor and marginalized people to mere objects to be exploited. Often properties are more important than human beings and economic interests outweigh human concern. Third, egoists attempt religious legitimization of their belief and practice of discrimination. They abrogate to themselves the right to define sin and salvation in such a way that suits their lifestyle and actions against the interests of the poor and oppressed.[9] It is here that Christian faith needs to be expressed in terms of `spirituality of combat'.

Spirituality of Combat

MM articulated contextual theology in terms of "spirituality of combat." His life and work testifies how he practiced and was involved in the spirituality of combat. Influenced and attracted by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and Karl Marx, MM was an activist theologian since his student's days. MM commentators acknowledged that the secular dimension of his spirituality of combat came from the influence of not only Gandhi and Marx but also Nehru, M.N. Roy, Ashok Metha and J.P. Narayan. His spirituality and faith journey is thus shaped

by his involvement in struggle of the people in secular life.[10]

Making a radical departure from traditional, existentialist, pietistic and mystic spirituality, MM called for a spirituality of involvement in the struggles of the marginalized people for justice and human dignity. For him, true spirituality can be experienced and discovered only in the resistance and struggles against the vested interests of the establishments, whether it be the church or the state.[11] He challenged the violation of human rights by the state through his prophetic voice during the political emergency in India in the mid-seventies and called the people to collectively resist the evil designs of the state as the expression of their faith.[12]

The spirituality of combat involves resistance for life; it calls for a radical departure from the power, institution and mammon. He urged the people to take the position of saving life.[13] The spirituality of combat involves taking the position of "people in pain". Protection of life over power and privilege is the essence of spirituality of combat.

The Divine Presence in the Context[14]

The Divine discernment as protector of marginalized in human history is the basis of contextual theology. MM summarized God's presence and actions of the past and present as "action of humanization (salvation)." The God of the Bible is the God of Justice. God's search for justice to the poor and marginalized is intrinsic to God's being and action.[15] For MM, the biblical God is a subversive God and God's sovereignty cannot be subordinated to any earthly power that seeks to dehumanize people.[16] Another nature of biblical God is compassionate.[17] God is sensitive to the suffering and cries of the exploited people. He hears the cries and groaning of the weak. God's love is pain's love, God's heart aches at the pains of the people. The Exodus event and the Cross are expressions of God's pain love. The presence of God in the exodus story and his journey to Galilee were not merely a comforting presence but active presence, empowering and transforming presence

for the realization of justice.[18] Therefore, in a situation of widespread structural injustices like totalitarian regime, caste, class, patriarchy, God takes the side of the oppressed in the concrete historical situation. Without socio-political transformation, humans cannot worship God and without the goal of worshipping God, socio-political justice will remain incomplete.

Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ unfolds that God is redemptively active in concrete human history. Incarnation implies that God is in search of the poor and marginalized for realization of greater human dignity, enhanced human creativity and nurture human living. Incarnation is "the spiritual foundation of renewal and ultimate fulfillment of the struggles of mankind (sic) today for the humanity"[19]

Jesus Christ is the "New Man" through whom a "New Humanity" is created after the image of God. He is the true Adam through whom all humankind is continuously reconciled to God, and all creation is being perfected. Jesus' decisive solidarity with the poor and marginalized brought him to the confrontation with the powerful. The cross of Christ is the manifestation of God's pain love in the suffering of the poor and oppressed, and the Resurrection holds the promise of a future for the dehumanized and disinherited people.[20]

The church is the New Humanity in Christ.[21] MM recognized that the church as the divine instrument is called to continue Christ's work of humanization and as a continuing incarnation. The true being of the church, however, can be expressed only in its relation to the broken people and their struggle for humanization.[22] For MM, all quests and struggles for richer and fuller human life are the works of Christ and the church is called to identify with those deprived of their humanity. He also maintained that participation in the struggles of the marginalized for humanization is an authentic imitation of Christ.[23] The church as a community of proclamation of the Gospel of the crucified and Risen Lord is the basis of true humanization. The Gospel that the church is called to

proclaim is a powerful force to bring into actualization of the new humanity. MM recognized the church's task as one of being involved in reconciliation, a righteous reconciliation. The church is adequately qualified for three reasons: first, we as a member of the church have experienced forgiveness and reconciliation. Second, while the church lives in the acknowledgement of Christ's redemption and his rule over the whole world, the church is also mandated to seek wider *koinonia* with other movements committed to the realization of God's work and salvation. Third, the church is an open church, open to God and to the future. We cannot be open to God in Christ without being open to the world. As it opens to the future, the church has an eschatological character i.e. the church is the nucleus, the first fruit, the sign and the instrument of God's purpose to unite all things in Christ.[24] Hence, the reconciling power of the church is the new cutting edge and the credibility and effectiveness of the church lay in its ability to establish and strengthen Christ centred secular fellowship.[25] MM argued that the immanence of just Triune God in today's marginalized context calls for a paradigm shift in doing theology. Christians cannot support the ruling class, unjust power structure and manipulate and exploit God's creation.[26] Christians can make a difference by opting people-centred movement against the power of destruction and death. The church, thus, must become the voice of the oppressed and voiceless.

Looking Towards Future

Though MM was very critical of mindless mechanistic, material progress and growth, he seems to take a position that there is no alternative to capitalist expansion of modernity, that market capitalism had to be humanized but could not be overcome.[27] Science and technology have to be humanized for enhancement of human life. MM was fully aware of native aspect of economic capitalism, one-sided extractive development processes and globalization which involves exploitation of the poor and earth's resources but lauded the

advancement of science and technology. Gabriele Dietrich has rightly observed that MM "underwent a fairly deep change from a position was very favourable to modernization, science and technology and enlightenment to a position of post-modern critique of development in which he tried to incorporate feminist and ecological positions, though this did not come to him naturally or easily."[28] MM has raised number of existential issues, but did not adequately address the danger of abuse of modern technology that is accompanied by ecological destruction, exploitation and commodification of marginal communities such as women, children and tribals etc. We have to challenge the negative impact of neo-capitalism and address new questions such as how can contextual theologies make a difference in the context of continuing marginalization and objectification of people and their culture? How do contextual theologies unmask the nexus between globalization, climate-justice and survival of marginalized communities? How do contextual theologies re-locate in the context of margins? A few concerns may be underlined here for our common search for a relevant faith journey in today's context.

(1) Location of Contextual Theologies – The relevance of theology is determined by the location. Contextual theologies speak of the hermeneutic of circles because it comes back to location again and again to break new ground. In today's context where do we relocate contextual theology? Revisiting the location time and again is imperative to safeguard it from becoming an elitist theology. The Bible testifies that God is the one who chooses people in the margins (Exod. 3). Blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5). Anyone who wishes to encounter God has to move away from the centre of power. In Jesus' word, "Sell all your belongings and follow me".

It is among the oppressed, impure and excluded people in Egypt, Babylon, and Nazareth that God revealed himself as the liberator, compassionate care-giver, mother and father. Social

injustice, false pride, legalism, hypocritical religiousness, personal immorality, infidelity to God's covenant created unjust systemic structures that exploited the poor. Jesus challenged the rich people who abused power by affirming that the poor are blessed for they are the bearers of God's reign. His condemnation of the rich, the insistence that the reign of God is for the poor, and the location of his ministry among the poor for liberation threatened the oppressors which culminated in Jesus' crucifixion.

Therefore, people who are unable to participate in their political, religious and economic systems through imposition of unjust ideologies, cultural practices, economic, social, and political structures which hinder their experience of abundant life are the "site of God's revelation". During Jesus' time, a few rich in the centre controlled and manipulated wealth, finance, public discourse, decision-making processes and denied life to a large section of the people. People in the margins today are the true site of doing theology; the site of God's revelation. In Felix Wilfred's term "the space of God's visitation".[29] From the margins, they bring firsthand knowledge of the suffering that accompanies exclusionary practices as well as unmask unjust forces that work against God's will in the world.[30] Through their lives and struggles for life, they hold forth what God wants in the world while also bringing hope, solidarity, resistance, and perseverance that is needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God.[31] Bell Hooks has rightly said that "people in the margin offer the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternative, new worlds."[32] This is the reason why Jin-Kwan Kwon, a Korean minjung theologian in his book, *Theology of Subject*, said that the context of the margin is not only the site of revelation, but also "the site of hope" for future humanity.[33] Where do we locate our spirituality of combat today?

(2) Contextual Theologies without Naming – There is a great danger if we do not name the evil(s). Naming involves knowing the specific issue and problem, it means identifying

the root cause of the evil. Resisting against the evil forces for justice includes naming, identifying and confronting them with courage. Great masses of people live in misery due to unjust system and practices. We must have the courage to name the unjust system, such as

- Unjust and unequal distributions of resources, which include land, water, food and money.
- Unequal and unjust concentration of power in the hands of a few.
- Denial of people's rights and dignity in the name of development and national integration.
- Commercial-oriented tourism that contribute to global warming, displacement of people, diversion of resources, trafficking and abuse of women and children.
- The evils of caste system
- The evils of patriarchy
- Arms race at the cost of social security
- Arms culture in the name of justice
- Privatization and commoditization of human, culture and natural resources.
- Extractive and destructive development, etc.

MM and other contextual theologians did not pin-point and name the evil that brought untold misery to marginalized people. For example, except for some passing remarks, we do not see him critically engaging and naming caste system as evil. He is silent on the evil of patriarchy. His book, *The Nagas Towards A.D 2000* speaks of modernity as the solution for all tribal people's struggle for justice.[34]

(3) Contextual Theology Disconnected from Earth – A crucial element missing in Christian theologies today is the spiritual connection with the mystery of the earth's family. Insensitive to the spiritual connection with earth's family in

development activities will be a serious mistake for the future survival of the world. Thomas Berry writes in his book, *The Spirituality of the Earth,* thus,

> In our totality we are born of the earth. We are earthlings. The earth is our origin, our nourishment, our support, our guide. Our spirituality itself is earth-derived. If there is no spirituality in the earth, then there is no spirituality in ourselves. The humans and the earth are totally implicated each in the other.[35]

Unless we rediscover our spiritual connection of people with the earth's family, it is not possible to talk about liberation and a community where all people are treated justly. It is like attempting to liberate oneself after killing one's mother. An authentic contextual theology is possible only in relation to protection of the land and its resources. MM and many Third World theologians have missed this vital aspect in doing theology. We affirm progress, development and liberation as important components for human life, but without neglecting their spiritual connection to earth's family.

(4) Methodological Relocation – All the above mentioned contemporary issues and challenges call us for a radical shift in doing theology. The modernist and anthropocentric development paradigm is limited. We need to seek a theological methodology that embraces the totality of all life, the mother earth. The mother earth and its inhabitants are two aspects of one reality. Human liberation will be void and empty without affirming the integrity of the goodness of mother earth and its resources. The search for humanization/liberation without land is not true humanization. It will lead to slavery and destruction. Therefore, the mother earth and its resources that sustain and nourish all beings and give them an identity and selfhood is not merely a justice issue to be set alongside other justice concerns. It is the foundation of history, existence and identity.[36] Methodological priority of justice to mother earth is crucial because of our contemporary ecological crisis, misuse of resources, market culture, war for land, war for oil and survival

crisis of many people. Theological discourse on contextual theology needs to move away from anthropocentrism to eco-praxis vision and praxis.

(5) Mobilizing Solidarity Justice Movement – The future Christianity lies in its ability to create counter movements and life-affirming theology against the abuse of power structures, misuse of technology and unjust market institutions through strengthening and building grass-roots or local movements. Global capitalist system, patriarchy, caste system and undemocratic political machinery are all part of institutionalized evil forces, and it requires collective resistance. In such contexts, doing prophetic theology is not just an ordinary endeavour. It has to be subversive in character. Individuals have the responsibility according to each one's ability, but no individual person is in a position to deal with unjust social structure adequately. Only through collective solidarity can effectively transform unjust structures and liberate the victims. Resistance here does not mean violence, but saying `No' to unjust system; struggle for justice involves organizing awareness programs, protest/resistance movements, non-cooperation movements, and campaigns through non-violent peaceful means. However, it is to be noted that the reality of structural injustices can be understood only from the experience of the oppressed, not from the perspective of the rich, the oppressors. We must judge the social dynamics from the perspective of people in the periphery. Leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Baba Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi and many others have brought changes in the society through mobilization of people's participation. We need to mobilize people to become a collective force for change. We have witnessed the People's Power in South Korea, Philippines, and through Arab Spring in Egypt, Libya and other Arab nations by overthrowing the dictators. Justice for protection of life has to be the ground for collective solidarity resistance. Can contextual theology be a force in mobilizing solidarity justice movement? This is a challenge for us today.

Endnotes

[1] Quoted by Sunil Caleb from an unpublished article on "Faith, Ideology and Politics: A Contextual Interpretation of the Social Philosophy of Dr. M.M. Thomas". See "M.M. Thomas' Engagements with Social Theories and Ideologies," a paper presented during D.Th National Seminar from 11-13th August, 2015 at Pune, pp.1-2

[2] M.M. Thomas, "Criteria of a Living Theology," in *Asian Expressions of Christian Commitment,* eds. T. Dayanandan Frances & Franklyn J. Balasundaram (Madras: CLS, 1992), p.9.

[3] *Ibid*., p.11.

[4] *Ibid*., p.10

[5] *Ibid*., pp.11-12

[6] *Ibid*., p.9.

[7] V. Devasahayam, "Search for the Last, Least and the Lost," in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy* (Thiruvalla: The Thiruvalla Ecumenical Charitable Trust and Association with Christian Sahitya Samithi, 1997), p.38. Hereafter "M.M. Thomas".

[8] M.M. Thomas, "The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ," in *Readings in Indian Christian Theology*, Vol. 1, Eds. by R.S. Sugirtharajah & Cecil Hargreaves (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002 reprint), pp.94-95.

[9] V. Devasahayam, "Search for the Last, Least and the Lost," in *M.M. Thomas,* pp.40-41.

[10] M.M. Thomas, p.6.

[11] *Ibid*., p.7.

[12] "Celebration of Life Victorious over Death," in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy* (Thiruvalla: The Thiruvalla Ecumenical Charitable Trust and association with Christian Sahitya Samith, 1997), x. Hereafter. "M.M. Thomas", p.50

[13] M.M. Thomas, "The Witness of God's People in the World," in *Contextual Theological Bible Commentary*, No. 13, trans. by T.M. Philip (Tiruvalla: CSS Books & PTTBPSA, 2010), pp.23-25. Hereafter "Contextual Commentary".

[14] I am grateful to Dr. V. Devasahayam for his article on "Search for the Last, Least and the Lost," appeared in *M.M. Thomas: The Man and His Legacy*. His article summarized MM's theological basis for social involvement. See pp.37-58.

[15] V. Devasahayam, "Search for the Last, Least and the Lost," in *M.M. Thomas*, p.46

[16] *Ibid*., pp.45-46.

[17] *Ibid*.

[18] *Ibid*., p.45.

[19] *Ibid*., p.50.

[20] V. Devasahayam, 50. See also M.M. Thomas, "Christ-centred Syncretism," in *Varieties of Witness*, ed. by D. Preman Niles and K.T. Thomas (Singapore: CCA, 1980), pp.9-12,

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] Contextual Commentary, pp.41-43

[23] V. Devasahayam, pp.52-53.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Contextual Commentary, pp.72-75.

[27] Gabriele Dietrich, "M.M – The Activist and Fellow-Traveller," *M.M. Thomas*, p.12.

[28] Gabriele Dietrich, "M.M – The Activist and Fellow-Traveller," *M.M. Thomas*, p.12.

[29] Felix Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), p. xix.

[30] A draft WCC document on "Mission from the margins," a process initiated by Just and Inclusive Community, October, 2012, p. 1.

[31] *Ibid*, p. 1.

[32] Bell Hooks, "Marginality as Site of Resistance," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Russel Ferguson *et.al*. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), p. 341.

[33] Kwon Jin Kwan, *Theology of Subjects: Towards a New Minjung Theology, PTCA Series No. 1* (Kolkata: PTCA, 2011), p.110.

[34] See M.M. Thomas, *The Nagas Towards A.D. 2000* (Madras: Centre for Research on New International Economic Order, 1992).

[35] Thomas Berry, "The Spirituality of the Earth," in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, eds. By Charles Birch, et.al. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 151.

[36] For this insight, I owe a deep gratitude to Prof. George Tinker's article on 'American Indian & the Art of the Land' which appeared in *Voices From the Third World*, Vol. XIV/2 (1981) and 'Spirituality and Native American Personhood: Sovereignty & Solidarity' in K. Abraham and B. Mbuy (eds.), *Spirituality of the Third World* (Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 127-128.

Chapter Nine

INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF LIFE

Introduction

Indigenous spirituality is built around interconnectedness of all life. It affirms that all living creatures are interconnected and interdependent and the Earth is the home of all. Disconnection of humans from other God's creation creates crises in life. The confluence of modern science and technology, and the dominant Christian traditions nurtured within the worldview of dualistic, anthropocentric, androcentric and hierarchical view of life disconnected human life from other segments of God's creation and affirmed their supremacy over the others. Some theologians have attempted to correct this one-sided destructive view of life. Exploring indigenous spirituality, the author posits that the whole of God's creation is an organic, interdependent, coherent and comprehensive whole. The fullness of life, peace and justice is experienced in relation to others and it challenges us to rediscover that all living realities are interrelated and interconnected. Justice to the marginalized people is not possible without justice to God's creation and vice versa. Thus, in God's home, the earth, humans are called to act as stewards whose responsibilities are to protect, sanctify and ensure integrity of interconnected life.

Science and Disconnectedness of Life

The discoveries of science and technology have led not only to the greatest revolution in human history,[1] but also disconnected life in a radical way. Philosophers and scientists like Frances Bacon (1561-1628), Rene Descartes (1598-1650), John Locke

(1632-1704), Isaac Newton (1642-1727) and Charles Darwin (1809-1885) contributed theories to disconnect human life from other God's creature. Bacon strongly felt that the goal of science is conquest of nature, for "knowledge is power." He said, "Let the human race recover the right over nature which belongs to it by the divine bequest."[2] Nature was thus to be enslaved by humans. Similarly, mathematician Descartes had made a significant impact on how we view the natural world. By developing analytical approach to the pursuit of knowledge, he enabled humanity to look upon themselves as "the lords and masters of nature."[3] According to him, humans alone possess rational abilities and this distinctive human capacity justify domination over the other creatures.[4] Humans have got the right to utilize nature in whatever way they wish to. This idea was reinforced by maintaining a sharp distinction between matter and mind. By stressing the differences between the mind and matter, Descartes further reiterates to see the physical nature as an object. This popularizes the idea that animals, humanity and even one's own body are mere objects. A subject stands over against other objects and relates to them as a field for exploitation and manipulation. The world could be understood as a group of independent, separated, competitive objects rather than an intrinsic interconnected and interdependent system. The only difference between humans and other creatures is the mind and ability to think. This duality assigned different values to mind and matter. For centuries, this view of duality, according to David Hallman, has been one of "the most powerful influencers, convincing our societies that we humans are not only different from but also superior to the rest of the creation."[5] This mechanistic interpretation of the world was further reinforced by Isaac Newton. He theorized that nature is constituted by impersonal masses and forces, operating according to deterministic laws. Human reason can explain all phenomena. Thus, there is no mystery in the world.[6]

As the scientific knowledge advances, many scientists view nature as mere objects having no inherent rights of its

own, and humans need not hesitate to manipulate, exploit and use it. Human experience themselves as being the subject of the world. "Subject" does not mean that humans are the centre of the world, and the point of reference for everything in it, but also humans are the ontological basis, its first and all-determining being.[7] The rational humans conceive nature by way of their seizure of power. They have the right to dominate nature through their labour and intellectual power. Such scientific knowledge detach God from nature and regard it as mere objects and the relationship between human and nature is reduced to utilitarian value. Jurgen Moltmann contended that "… the human being is always the active agent, while nature is always passive. Man (*sic*) is the master, and nature is his (*sic*) slave."[8] Therefore, instead of perceiving the nature as a subject to which we are inseparably dependent, nature became an object from which we are totally detached, separated and disconnected. Nature is something "out there" apart from us and apart from God. This detachment and disconnectedness leads to an objective study of all, and then to manipulation and domination.[9] Without any religious restraints, this external material world can be exploited and abused.

This is the reason why many eco-feminists argue that this western science and technology is patriarchal and colonial project. Vandana Shiva wrote,

> Modern science was a consciously gendered, patriarchal activity. As nature came to be seen more like a woman to be raped, gender too was recreated. Science as a male venture, based on the subjugation of female nature and female sex provided support for the polarization of gender. Patriarchy as the new scientific and technological power was a political need of emerging industrial capitalism. While on the other hand, the ideology of science sanctioned the denudation of nature, on the other it legitimized the dependency of women and the authority of man. Science and masculinity were associated in

> domination over nature and femininity, and the ideologies of science and gender reinforced each other.[10]

K.C. Abraham opined that the present disconnectedness of life is the direct product of modern industrial and technological growth, and modern life-style. The western industrial growth model of development is a process whereby we use enormous capital and exploit natural resources, particularly the non-renewable ones. Ruthless exploitation of nature and fellow beings is the inevitable consequence of this pattern of development. Decisions about the kind of goods to be produced and the type of technology to be used are influenced by the demand of consumerist economy where the controlling logic of growth is greed and not need. It thus creates imbalances between different sectors and allows massive exploitation of the rural and natural environment for the benefit of the dominant classes.[11]

Theology and Disconnectedness of Life

Influenced by scientific rationalism, theology too played its role in promoting disconnectedness of life which contributed to the exploitation and abuse of Mother Earth. Theology that has contributed to disconnectedness of life in God's *oikos* can be categorized under three major streams of praxis.

First, some theologians attempted to explain life within hierarchical framework. Thomas Aquinas is one of the greatest exponents of this thought. According to him, God, the Creator, in the beginning, simultaneously created a hierarchy of creatures, ordered according to their degree of perfection. In this hierarchical order, angels are at the highest peak. Angels are created, but purely spiritual beings and they are above human beings. Humans are the highest among the created material beings having ultimate right over the other creatures. This hierarchal order is divine design because "the imperfect beings are for the use of perfect."[12] Imperfect beings are created to serve the need of more noble beings, for instance, the plants

draw their nutrients from the earth, animals feed on plants and these in turn serve human's use. Therefore, those lifeless beings exist for the sake of living beings, plants for animals and animals for humans. Having affirmed that, Aquinas went one step further and said that material creatures were created that they "might be assimilated to the divine goodness"[13] For him, those creatures lower than the rational human creature in hierarchy simply assimilate to the divine goodness by fulfilling the needs of human creatures. The whole material nature exists for humans' needs because humanity alone possesses rationality. Hence, human beings are above all creatures. In other words, the other non-human creatures are protected, preserved, and sustained by God to serve rational humans' needs. This theology not only disconnected humans from other segments of God's creations, but also gives justification for manipulation and exploitation.

Second, many Protestant theologians affirmed that human rationality is the crown of God's creations. Martin Luther saw the whole creation of God as something which exists for the benefit of humans. He recognized nature simply as an existential springboard for grace. The creation is perceived as non-living, valueless; they are merely created so that human beings experience God's grace. In the same vein, Karl Barth asserted that God is the "wholly other", the transcendent Lord, who can be known only when He chooses to reveal himself, as He did preeminently in Jesus Christ. For Barth, the Word is not the foremost principle of creation which gives life to all created things; rather the Word is the first and foremost God's address to humanity in Jesus Christ. God is not known through His creation, but only through Christ. He is very explicit to say that salvation history begins from the incarnation of Jesus Christ, but not from the creation. Barth further argued that this great history of salvation would not have actualized if there is no place or space for it to occur. It needs a "showplace" or a "theatre" outside of God and humans.[14] This is the reason why God brought the created world into existence. It is very clear

that Barth conceived creation simply as a showplace/theatre for the saving works of God. Everything is created solely for the sake of the realization of God's covenant with humanity in Jesus Christ. However, nature is sustained, protected and upheld for the sake of election. Thus, creation is merely a stage. It has no history, not redeemed, but merely used and exploited. For Rudolf Bultmann, God is not to be perceived in the phenomena of nature but God is known and experienced in the `cave of the heart', in the inner personal experience.[15] Such theology places creation in the secondary position and disconnected humans from other God's creation.

The *third* stream of thought is of Greek origin with its dualism of body and soul. The soul is the highest among all created order. The soul finds its true destiny by escaping from nature and the world. Marcion taught that the visible world is the creation of the God of Israel, and created out of matter; it is an evil work destined for destruction. The world is evil because it is created by a lesser god. This view stressed that God is absolutely different and distinct from the created nature. A holy God cannot be related to material world. Gnostics held the view that the world is creation of demonic power from the chaos of the darkness. The created world is purely material and fleshly, a full expression of evil. Origen, the Early Church Father, held that God created the world because of a spiritual rebellion in heaven. Thus, the creation of the world was related to the Fall of human. The world is created for/by the fallen spirits and thereby it becomes a place of purification where fallen humankind could be educated through suffering to regain the pure state of spiritual realm. Origen, thus valued soul over the material world. The influence of dualism is also evident among the Reformers. Nature and other material objects do not take part in the salvation and redemption of Christ. According to Luther, nature is not a witness to the glory of God. Nature is only a supplementary item for salvation drama of human beings. This dualistic view of life influenced humans to believe that humankind is called upon to control

nature and so the function of religion is simply to aid human beings in the execution of their task. This view contradicts the biblical testimony. God's creation is redeemed when human beings respect the rhythm of nature and its integrity.

Most of the nineteenth century Evangelicals[16] lauded this dualistic position. The Evangelicals recognized God's revelation only in Jesus Christ, but not in the total creation. One can know God only through Jesus Christ but not through the creation. The teaching about heaven and hell further reinforced negligence undermining interrelatedness of life. The world is coming to an end, all materials will be destroyed, but only the souls will be saved and live eternally in heaven; all other materials will be perished. This doctrine made people to think that "this world is not my home. I am just a passing through." (Jim Reeves's song) If this world is not our home, why should we take care of it? Such notion leads to total disconnectedness from the created world which is perceived to be evil.

Quest for an Interconnectedness of Life

Affirming the value of the importance of interconnectedness of life, many theologians have attempted to correct disconnected view of life. Just to mention a few:

Irenaeus – One of the church fathers, who continue to influence many Catholic and Protestant theologians is Ireaneus, Bishop of Lyons (130-200 C.E.). He challenged Gnosticism and its idea of an absolute transcendent God, who is thought to be neither the Creator nor the Sustainer of this evil world; God is utterly remote and disconnected from the evil world. Against Gnostic teaching, Ireaneus asserted that the world is good and created by God. Creation is God's given home – blessed, embraced and cared for by the very God who took on flesh in order to redeem humanity and thereby initiate the final renewal of the whole creation. For Ireaneus, the whole creation is a saving history. Everything will be saved. Nothing of the good creation will be lost.[17] He laid emphasis on God's loving relationship with creation, but not on divine transcendence.

According to Ireaneus, the incarnate Word as the ever-present life-giving principle of creation history moves the whole creation decisively toward the goal of fulfilling the original divine intention. Thus, he saw Eucharistic element in creation. He affirmed that the bread which comes from his creation as his body, and he makes it the nourishment to our body. Therefore, the Eucharist bread and wine connects us both with the sacred and with all creation, in an unbroken continuum.

The Orthodox Tradition – Some Orthodox theologians claim that, all through the ages, teaching on creation as one organic whole, integrated, coherent and comprehensive manner is an integral part of the Orthodox ethos. The book on *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights from Orthodoxy*[18] highlights the Orthodox view on the disconnectedness and interconnection of life. A few elements are in order:

(*a*) *The world as God's creation* – the Orthodox tradition affirms that in the beginning, the Holy Trinity created the world, 'out of nothing', but not out of pre-existent matter. Humanity, creation and the visible world, including angels and powers, are equally dependent on the power of God, both for their coming into being and for their continued existence.[19] The whole cosmic order, in the Orthodox tradition, is created out of God's freewill, goodness, wisdom, love and omnipotence. Since creation is the work of God, the Orthodox theologians see the world as a created order having its own integrity. It is a positive reality.[20] It is the good work of the good God. Everything that God had made was very good because "first He conceived and His conception was a work carried out by His word, and perfected by His Spirit."[21] As such, the world is a revelation of God (cf. Rom. 1:19-20).

(b) *The integrity of creation* – The cosmos is a coherent whole, a created synthesis because all its elements are united and interrelated in time and space. All elements in the created universe are directly dependent on God for their very existence

and are also interlinked with each other.[22] Even though the cosmos is made up of opposite elements it finds reconciliation and perfection.

(c) ***The place of humanity in God's creation*** **–** In the Orthodox view, humanity occupies a central place in the total creation of God. It is held that the creative energy of God took a gradual ascending path with humanity emerging as the last stage. The emergence of Adam as body-soul was a terminal event in the evolution of the universe. Thus, the universe reveals its full nature when it brought forth human beings.[23] Though humanity appears at the top of the ladder of the hierarchy of creation, it does not mean that they are unrelated to or independent from the rest of the created world but are inseparably related to each other.[24] It is further affirmed that because of the body and soul in the human person, he/she is a citizen of two worlds; the human person becomes an active participant in both the intelligible and the sensible worlds. Put it differently, humans are members of both families – God and matter; they are made to enjoy both the divine and the terrestrial worlds. This means that humans are part of the material world without which they cannot survive.[25] God has created humans in such a way that they exist only with the help of material world. This is the reason why "Christ became man (*sic*) and assumed a material body. Man (*sic*) in Christ is the Saviour of the world. He restores it to God so that it may truly be filled with his glory."[26] The Orthodox tradition often refers of human microcosm, that is to imply that humanity, created in God's image and likeness, transcends the material world because human person participates in God both spiritually and consciously, unlike other creatures. Humanity stands on the boundary between the material and spiritual worlds as a connecting link. They are directly related to the earthly aspects of created existence as well as uncreated existence of the Creator.[27] Thus, both humans and the created world are intrinsically interrelated.

(d) ***The role of humans for the wholeness of creation*** **–** A basic difference between humans and material world is that while

the material aspect is dominant in other non-human creatures, the spiritual is dominant in human creatures. The Orthodox view is that the material by itself is not whole. Creation labours under the limitation of necessity.[28] Creation neither has the adequate consciousness nor the necessary freedom, to respond to the sanctifying grace of redemption and salvation. It is only the human person who freely responds to the saving work of Christ. It is in this context that the role of humanity towards the wholeness of creation is to be understood. The Orthodox tradition views the role of humanity in terms of the priestly function. Humanity assumes the role as a priest over the material creation. Humanity, through the priestly function, leads creation to its completion and fulfillment in God. Humanity as the microcosm links the material and non-human created reality.[29] God allows the material to participate in the spiritual by making the former the basis for the later. Just as the soul in the human person cannot be located in any part of the body, but pervades the whole of it, so human beings created in the image of God, are "to pervade the whole universe, to regulate it, to harmonize it."[30] Thus creation is called to offer its gift to humankind, and in turn, humanity as priest is called to sanctify the gift of the giver. Humanity thus can assume dominion over creation for its proper utilization and preservation. According to the Orthodox tradition, the dominion by humans over the material world has its ground in "the image of God" received at the creation. However, to exercise dominion over creatures on the earth does not mean exploitation, but to be stewards of God's material world, caring and maintaining in its own integrity and perfecting it by opening up to God through our own deification.

The Orthodox tradition on the interrelatedness of life helps us to discover the whole creation as an organic whole, the totality of reality in an integrated, coherent and comprehensive manner. Both the spiritual and material worlds are not opposed to each other. They have a common origin, a common God, and therefore have a common destiny. They form one total reality of life. In other words, the created world, including humanity

is in a perfect unity, in the same way as the human body is perfectly harmonized. This further leads us to view creation in its integrity as a positive reality, the good works of God. It has got its own intrinsic right and worth. It is through the energia of God that creation continues to be sustained, upheld and perfected. Second, the affirmation of the central and unique role of humanity in the total creation of God is imperative. Being created in God's own image, humanity transcends the material world because the human person participates in God both spiritually and physically which is not the same in the case of other creations. Humanity by assuming the role of priest, creation finds its completeness and fulfillment in God, the Creator and Sustainer of all living being. This idea helps us to reflect on human's ecological responsibility. Third, the dominion by humanity over creation is not only a right, it is also a mission. The relationship between humanity and environment cannot be reduced to mere need and use alone. It demands a harmonious relationship. It includes the responsibility of care, love and respect. This issue needs to be addressed seriously if we want to make our cosmos sustainable.

Process Theologians – Some contemporary "process theologians" are involved in developing a pattern of Christian thought that builds upon a more connected view of relationship between God, humanity and crea-tion. Taking the philosophical framework of process philosophy, the process theologians like John Cobb, Charles Birch, and others have adopted a unified perspective in which God does not live in "second world" above history, but lives and interacts as humans do in the historical realm. In the process theology, it is through the interaction and interconnectedness that the world becomes the body of God. Each organism touches and changes the organism that influences it. Likewise, we act on God and God receives things from us. The process theology by visioning God as "living and even growing God…he is related to the universe of other beings somewhat as the human self is related to its body."

Process theology is an attempt made in the West to

resolve the dualistic view of creation and history, creation and redemption. It is an effort to develop a pattern that builds humanity and creation as one whole. The process theologians deplore that the gifts of science and technology have been misused by humans to the extent of abusing creation and turning today's life on earth into a hell. A serious problem they identify is scientific materialism. It projects the universe as a sum total of particles which could be observed, analyzed and controlled. The process theologians thus opine that unless we build upon a more connected view of the relationship between God, humanity and creation, we cannot make our cosmos sustainable. We need to mobilize resources from different traditions to explore an organic relationship philosophy of life. In spite of their omission of the linkage between the struggle of the poor and eco-justice, their commitment to search for a vision centering on interconnectedness of all things remains relevant in our search for a relevant theology of interrelationship of life in God's *oikos*.

All those above mentioned theological responses attempt to correct dualistic, anthropocentric, androcentric and hierarchical view of life. They have created awareness that the whole of creation is an organic, interdependent, coherent and comprehensive whole and thus call us to view creation in a reverential manner. Disconnected view of life destroys life. Taking a cue from the various theological stances can indigenous spirituality contribute towards strengthening the theology of interconnectedness?

Indigenous People Spirituality of Interconnectedness of Life

The word 'orphan' does not exist among indigenous communities. If one's parents die of unfortunate accident, the visitors will say, "You mother and father are no more, but your big mother (the land) has not left you and will never leave you. The land will feed you forever." This is called spiritual connection with the land. Indigenous peoples' worldview thus

can be best described as spirituality of interconnectedness. For them, everything is organically related to each other. It includes everything, neglects nothing, and values the whole lot. Everything is linked together. All creatures, including the Supreme Being and the Spirit affects each other. Though the Supreme Being and the Spirit(s) are understood as the Creators and Sustainers of all living beings, they are also perceived, though distinct, as part of the total eco-system. For the indigenous people this interconnectedness of life is possible not only because of God but also because of the Mother Earth. The land is the mother of all life. Many indigenous societies maintain a special relationship with the land. For them, land is more than just a habitat or a political boundary; it is the basis of their social organization, economic system and cultural identification. The land is the basis that enables them to co-exist with other living beings, their ancestors and the Creator.

Since the land is the foundation of all living beings, the indigenous people took utmost care of it. The land was protected through observance of ceremonies, rituals and `Earth's Day' or `Mother Earth's Day'. For example, the Earth's Day is observed at least 3 to 6 days by many communities. The earth was given complete rest and treated with much respect by observing restrictions. This provides a vision of life not based on the conquest of nature, people and their culture, but rooted on harmonious relationship with nature, preservation and protection of people and their culture.

Indigenous people's culture, beliefs and practices were geared to maintaining a balance between human and ecological needs. Such a balance was essential to protect nature from the danger of over-exploitation. This balance was maintained through the practice of taboo and totem. These controls were legitimized by giving religious basis through myths.

Taboo – It simply means `prohibition' or forbidden activity, something that is not permitted, something that stands against social approval and is disallowed by norms of behaviour. The

practice of taboo covers the whole activity of the indigenous society. It is applied between sexes, different age groups, households, different clan members and village wise, and even according to change of seasons. A taboo is observed with awareness that it affects the whole community. When the observance of taboo is neglected, it is not only the human community who suffers but even the animals and plants are affected. Thus, taboos maintain interconnectedness of all life.

For instance, a husband is not allowed to kill any animal when his wife is pregnant. He must also abstain from eating honey. A warrior or priest is not allowed to kill any animal while observing restricted day(s); the whole village is not allowed to kill any animal on restricted day(s). It is taboo for a woman to hunt. Women are not allowed to eat fish that have no scales such as the stinging cat fish and the butter cat fish. This prudent use of resources protected the nature from destruction and allowed one group or sex to utilize the resources while the other was restricted from doing so. This culture of restraint protected nature from being overexploited.

There are certain taboos which prohibit the killing of animals at certain stages of their life. For example, hunting and keeping traps are not allowed during the breeding sessions. The same rule is applied to hunting pregnant animals. Fishing and the use of certain poisonous roots and leaves that kill fishes in the rivers or springs during the spawning season are restricted. If a calf is born or there is a new litter of pigs, or chickens are hatched in the house, the whole household observes taboo to preserve, dedicate and welcome the life of the new born calf, piglets and chicken. A period ranging from three to six days is devoted to caring and welcoming the new born to the family as many societies attach great importance to domestic animals. In fact, in many societies, domestic animals are also a part of the family. The observance of taboo is thus applied to all beings regardless of whether they are humans or animals. When it comes to agriculture, taboo is observed to ensure good food crops and bounteous harvests. The land is allowed to

rejuvenate its fertility through the observance of rituals and taboos. In addition, it is forbidden to cut certain trees because they are considered sacred. Trees like the banyan, oak, etc. are protected throughout the villages. Cutting these trees is considered to be a strict taboo by the people. Unless the priest performs the appropriate rituals to gain divine approval these trees are never cut down. Many communities believe that such trees are dwelling places of spirits.[32] Young people are prohibited not only from cutting such trees, but they are also not allowed to remove the outer part of those trees. If they do so, they would displace the indwelling spirit that could cause sudden death or shorten their life span. Young people are even prohibited from transplanting trees like the oak, banyan, etc. believing that these trees would outgrow the good fortune of the planters. Besides, many communities set aside some places as sacred space where community congregates for different rituals, festivals and ceremonies. Therefore, many societies regarded trees/forest, sacred places and animals not as mere objects to be used, but they are alive and active and thus, must be respected and protected. Without taboo with its ample rest, the indigenous people may not have been able to develop a healthy God-world-human relationship. Taboo, therefore, enriches the whole land and community along with the flora and fauna. Such an observance is essential to protect nature from exploitation. This culture of restrain brings harmony with nature and human relationship and thus promotes harmonious and sustainable living.

Totem – The totem is another practice which ensures balance and harmony in society as well as with environment. The indigenous people restricted certain animals and plants from being exploited by maintaining a totemic relation with natural objects. A totem is usually "a species of an animal or of a plant or insect or bird and very rarely a class of inanimate objects, very closely related to a group in that the group of people is believed to descent from the animal or any of the species."[33] Some of the common totem animals are tiger, tortoise, cobra,

monkey, jackal, deer, dog, buffalo, cock, peacock, owl, fish and so on, and the plants totem include rice, cereal, cucumber and mushroom. A common phenomenon of totem belief is that the clan which traces its origin to such a totem sometimes name after the totem and attribute as supernatural power.

The practice of totem reinforces interconnectedness and harmony of life. For example, while some clans kill certain animals and consume, others do not. While one clan eats beef, the other clan is prohibited to consume it. While some clans kill birds, others do not. Almost all the clans do not kill monkeys, tigers, bears, elephants and pythons. Some clans would kill and eat the totem animals and plants without any restrictions to gain blessing and protection from the deity whereas other clans will kill and eat only on certain occasions, which may be followed by a period of mourning. People look upon this eating as re-establishment of the bond between the clan and its totem. For some clan, the totem is so sacred to the clan bearing its name that it becomes the focus of reverence and awe and hence do not kill and eat. This practice is shared by many indigenous communities.

The indigenous communities maintain a very strong symbiotic relationship with the environment because of their totemic roots. The surroundings are personified by attributing personality. Each clan considered it an obligation to protect their totem. Because of this totemic relationship and the myths related to animals and plants, the indigenous communities revere them greatly. In that way, they are interconnected with the whole natural resources which in turn protected and preserved from being over-exploited. This spirituality of interconnectedness of life needs to be affirmed and embraced in Christian theology.

Challenges for Future Theological Discourse

i) The continuing oppression and marginalization of the poor, women and the exploitation of creation are inseparably related. The threat to creation and injustice against the poor, marginalized farmers, women and their

dependent children cannot be separated as they are one issue. Thus the challenge is to re-examine the relationship between human beings and non-human world, between humans and God and amongst human beings.

ii) Redefining our understanding of church and mission is crucial as mission of God is not confined only to conversion and planting of church alone. Mission is inclusive. It involves calling persons to commitment to the kingdom of God, justice and peace, and ecological health of the land.

iii) Review creation in a new way. Creation is not just things to be exploited. Every living creature possesses an intrinsic value and right. Therefore, preserving the integrity of the whole inhabited earth and promoting an ecologically responsible development are a matter of survival for the whole world.

iv) Justice is not an abstract reality to be realized within human community alone, but it is how we live in the web of life in reciprocity with people, other creatures and the earth, recognizing that they are part of us and we are part of them.

v) Search for a new ethical principle. Human comunities must bear a responsibility towards the earth and its wholeness. The earth, with its diverse life forms is functioning as one coherent whole. The whole earth is God's creation and we need to respect its inherent value and rights. A lifestyle of high material consumption is unethical and destructive. Learning to live in a new way not based on exploitation and injustice would allow all to flourish in health and wholeness. In short, it demands a reciprocal life-style.

Endnotes

[1] Julio De Santa Ana, *Separation without Hope: The Church and the Poor during the Industrial Revolution and Colonial Expansion* (Geneva: WCC, 1978), p. 8.

[2] Cited by Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (San Francisco: Harper

& Row, 1980), p. 171.

[3] *Ibid*, p. 172.

[4] Loren Wilkinson, ed. *Earth Keeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), p. 130.

[5] David G. Hallman, *A Place in Creation: Ecological Visions in Science, Religions and Economics* (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1992), p.19.

[6] Charles Cummings, *Eco-Spirituality: Toward a Reverent Life* (Mahwah, New York: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 6

[7] Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1985), p. 40.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 46.

[9] Jurgen Moltmann, "Human Rights, the Rights of Humanity and the Rights of Nature," in *The Ethics of the World Religion and Human Rights*, ed. by Hans Kung and Jurgan Moltmann (London: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 130-131.

[10] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Kali For Women, 1988), pp 17-18.

[11] K.C. Abraham, Eco-justice: A New Agenda for Church's Mission (Bombay: BUILD, no year), pp. 4-5.

[12] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, ed. by the English Dominican Fathers (Burns, Cates, Woshbourne, Ltd., 1922), Part I, QQ LXXV-CII, p. 237.

[13] *Ibid*. p. 59.

[14] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-1961), 3.1. p. 97.

[15] W.S. Ariarajah, "World Religions and the Wholeness of Creation," in *Ecumenical Movement Tomorrow: Suggestion for Approaches and Alternatives*. eds. Mare Reuver, Friendhelm Silms, Gerrit Huzer (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993), p. 163.

[16] Most of the Asian churches are product of Evangelical movements in the West and we have inherited a very strong dualistic theology.

[17] Ireaneus, *Against the Heresies*, Book 5, Chapter 2, as found in A. Ward in *Season III* (Riverdale, Md.: Exordium Books, 1983), p. 97.

[18] Gennadios Limouris, ed. *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation: Insights form Orthodox* (Geneva: WCC, 1987. Hereafter *"Insights from Orthodoxy.*"

[19] *Ibid*., p. 1.

[20] *Ibid*., p. 2.

[21] *Ibid*., p. 1.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 3.

[23] Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Human Presence: An Orthodox View of Nature* (Geneva: WCC, 1079), p. 65.

[24] "*Insights from Orthodoxy*", p. 4.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 3.

[26] Paulos Mar Gregorios, *op. cit*., p. 65.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 4.

[28] *Ibid*., p. 4.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 73.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 70.

[31] "Reality of God," in Process Theology Basic Writings, ed. by E.H. Cousin (New York: Newman Press, 1971), p. 123.

[32] In Christian understanding, the spirit indwells the heart. It is personalized and limited. However, the indigenous people always perceived the spirit in relation to preservation of nature. The spirit works not only in human person but also in whole of creation.

[33] J.H. Thumra, "The Primal Religious Tradition," *Religious Traditions of India*, eds. by P.S. Daniel, *et.al*. (Kottayam: ITL, 1988), p. 51.

Chapter Ten

THE CREATOR GOD
An Exploration of Indigenous Resources

Introduction

Influenced by domineering and success-oriented concept of God, people often think that people in the margin have no experience of God. God is a mystery, and yet a living God who reveals Godself as the creator and liberator. No human language can comprehensively explain the mystery of God. To make God meaningful and intelligible we construct images of God in terms of personal-relational imageries. However, when one aspect of personal-relational image is used undermining or dominating others images, then it become not only irrelevant but idolatrous.[1] In the biblical tradition, it is not only personal-relational images, but impersonal images are also found. Appropriating patriarchal, hierarchical and anthropocentric images of God, Christians have constructed images of God which became a source of exclusion and marginalization of women, indigenous people as well as nature. Therefore, this section attempts to highlight the danger of over-emphasizing personal-relational images of God and to suggest a non-personal image of God which can contribute to eco-theology.

Domineering Images of God

Christian's understanding of God is rooted in monotheistic faith. Many OT scholars affirmed that monotheistic faith among the Jews emerged in minority-wilderness context seeking to safeguard its identity in relation to a larger and powerful majority. In the course of time, the monotheistic faith

got mixed up with the power and splendor of Roman Empire under the Emperor Constantine. This monotheistic view of God was thus affirmed adopting dominant power structures at that time. We may cite some of its continuing influence here:

Hierarchy – Influenced by Hebrew and Greek thoughts we construct images of God in a hierarchical way. In anthropomorphic notions, we imagine God to be in a human form, God to be looking like a man, and an old man. The nature of God perceived as incomprehensible being, omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent. This all powerful, all-knowing God is present everywhere, yet this Holy of Holies is above all. God is a pure transcendental and spiritual being. The world is created out of matter; it is a sinful world and destined for destruction. The Holy God does not come into contact with the sinful material world, but is separated from it.

We also interpret the order of God's creation from this perspective. Angels are at the highest peak, followed by human beings and other segments of creation. The family relationship is also understood in a hierarchical way. Man, the father is the head of the family followed by wife, children and slaves. Similarly, this hierarchy is applied to human–nature relationship. Humans, as the highest among the created material beings, have the ultimate right over the other creatures, for instance, plants receive nutrients from the soil, animals feed on plants and these in turn serve human use. The other non-human creatures are thus protected, preserved, sustained for the sake of human creature.

Dualism – Human relationship is defined dualistically, e.g. female and male, body and soul, black and white, this world and heavenly world. It is always perceived that the former one is inferior and of lesser value and the latter is superior and more valuable. Christian theology is deeply influenced by this thought.

Patriarchal Images of God – Influenced by these traditions, we construct male images of God. We often perceive God in

terms of power/authority-oriented images like the Ruler, Lord, King, Almighty, Father, Master and Warrior. These are all male, military and power-oriented images of God. Such metaphors project man as role-model and women as subordinate role-model. Though God is merciful, loving, compassionate, comforter, and liberator who shares in our sufferings, we tend to over-emphasize on the trimphalistic images of God. These images of God have made Christianity a religion of, and for rulers, the elite and the upper-class. Sallie McFague, an eco-feminist theologian, contends that the Judeo-Christian traditions which project domineering God as absolute, transcendent and omnipotent are patriarchal concepts. It permits no sense of mutuality, shared responsibility, reciprocity and love in terms of relationship between God, human and the world. Such a theology developed in the patriarchal language creates an attitude that God is far away from the world and suffering people.[2] The personal-relational concept of God informed by hierarchical-patriarchal optic has the following implications for the churches:

1. God is perceived as a male God undermining female images;
2. Non-human images are seen as pagan;
3. Power domineering;
4. Perceive God in terms of prosperity, good health, healing and success;
5. Promote prosperity theology.[3]

Therefore, Christian tradition has narrowly interpreted the images of God by appropriating hierarchical, androcentric, authoritarian, anthropocentric images. Though some feminist theologians have made efforts to correct such power-centred images of God by life, love, compassion, mercy, care, peace, parents, friends, gardeners, etc. they are also silent on the non-impersonal images of God – the earth, the ocean, the sky and the whole mystery of creation.

Life-Giving-Impersonal Images of God

The Bible speaks of not only personal-relational power images, but also non personal images of God. God is spoken and experienced as creator, sustainer, rock, fortress, running stream, power, sun, sky, moon, stars, thunder, fresh water, fortress, career, upholder, light, dispenser and benevolent spirit. These metaphors are hardly used in Christian theology. The experience of marginalized people and non-personal images of God are also important and need to be explored to enrich Christian understanding of God-world-human relationship.

Unlike other great religions of the world, the indigenous religion neither has any founder(s) or reformer(s) or guide(s) nor do people dance and sing adoring a divine historical person(s). Instead, people dance and sing along with the cycle of seasons of the land. A distinctive feature of the indigenous spirituality is that the whole religious systems, ceremonies, rituals, festivals and dances are all centred and deeply rooted on the sacred space itself. A large number of indigenous communities in Asia used non-personal images of God. For example, the Creator God, *Tianzhu* (Chinese) is considered as the true Creator of Heaven, Earth and all things. The Creator gives birth to the Heaven, the Earth, human beings, gods and myriad creatures. The Creator rules and sustains them. The Creator is our Great Father-Mother. The concept of *Kami* (Japanese) is a sacred spirit(s) which take the form of things and concepts which directly affected people's lives, such as wind, rain, mountains, trees, rivers and fertility. Indonesians speak of God as *Puang Matua*, the God of heaven and *Pong Banggai Rante*, the God of the plains or the God of earth. There are also many *deata*, or deities that live in rivers, wells, trees, and stones. The Aos and Sangtams of Nagaland (India) call their Supreme Being, *Lijaba*. *Li* means `land' and *jaba* means `real.' It means the Supreme Being is `the real soil.' Sometimes people call the Supreme Being *Lizaba*. *Li* means `soil' and *zaba* means `enter', meaning `the one who enters' or `indwells into the soil.' Many indigenous communities believed that the

God is the one who enters the soil with the seeds and rises again along with the crops. Thus, the blooming flower and fruits signify the presence of the Creator. God is life because God is present in every iota of creation and the whole creation is the manifestation of the Creator. The Bible also testifies that "The whole earth is full of God's glory" (Isa. 6:1-3). The whole creation declares that God is life and dynamic. Therefore, indigenous people cannot conceive "God" without the land; the land and God are inseparably related. God indwells both in human persons and creation and so God is life.

Since indigenous people believe that God is inseparably related to the sacred land or God comes out from the soil! (unlike Christian transcendental understanding of God who descends from above), the blooming flower, bearing of fruits and rice signifies the presence of the Creator. They see the face of God in creation. The whole creation becomes the manifestation of the Creator. In other words, for the indigenous people the land is co-creator with God. God brings blessings through the land, works through the land, and reveals through the land. God reveals the Godself as sustainer, nourisher, and giver of life. Therefore, people called God of coconut, God of fish, God of rice, God of betel nuts etc. God as Spirit indwells not only in human persons, but also indwells in the soil and thus God is always acknowledged and confessed as Earthly God/Spirit. Is not "Earthly Spirit or God" (instead of Heavenly Father) more relevant in constructing Christian theology? Affirmation of Earthly Spirit helps us to reconstruct divine relationship with the world in a new way.

Relationship of the Creator God and Life

If the Christian understanding of God is reconceived as Earthly Spirit, we may avoid imagining God as divine-clockmaker and the world as the clock – an autonomous and self-sufficient machine. Besides, God would not be conceived as the external monarch who rules the world from above imposing his/her divine laws on it. It would rule out the perception of God as

omnipotence, transcendent, the Being in the highest hierarchy, the Holy of holies who is detached from the material world. Indigenous spirituality helps us to reconceive the Earthly Spirit as immanent who not only comes out from the soil, but also comes and dines, drinks, speaks and reveals himself/herself to us in person/water/air/food etc. This spirituality further affirms that God's creativity, his/her active involvement in this world cannot be narrowly limited to the human realm alone. Earthly God works and lives in every being, and not limited to rational beings alone. By hurting the Mother Earth, we hurt the Earthly God as well as human community. The Earthly God suffers pain when his/her creations are hurt, because the Earthly God is present as life giving power in all lives.

This spirituality provides a vision that one can have faith in God even without a historical person, creed and scripture. As noted earlier, indigenous people do not have historical person(s) in whom their religion is centred. Creation is the Holy Scripture and creed. The Mother Earth is a living reality like a historical person. The whole world becomes God's temple.

Though the indigenous communities do not have a historical personage in their religious system, they accept Jesus Christ as the child of the Earthly Spirit and the Mother Earth. Jesus Christ is God because people see in Jesus the true essence of the organic relationship to the God and the earth. The indigenous spirituality informs us that Christ should not be narrowly conceived as the one who works only in the hearts of the believers. The Christ of personalism is a narrow Christology. Christ should not be perceived as a separate being detached from the world, culture and religion; we sometimes narrowly conceive the incarnate Christ as being somewhat distinct from the created order. This has led to a wrong interpretation of the salvific dimension of Christ's ministry. It is not the biblical testimony to reduce Christology to a "merely abstract" or "purely spiritual" entity.

The understanding of the God as Creator and cosmology of the indigenous people enlightens us to conceive Jesus

Christ in a new way. Christ is "Incarnate", meaning, he is organically related to all ecosystems and is inseparably related to creation. Through incarnation, Jesus Christ took a material body and became part of the created order. The Bible clearly testifies that Christ, the "Incarnate One", assumed flesh – *sarx*, human flesh; he was nurtured by air and water, vegetables and nurtured by the Mother Earth. He took matter into himself, and so matter is not alien to him. His body was a material body. Thus, Jesus shares his being with the whole created order: animals and birds, snakes and worms, flowers and seeds.[4] Since Jesus Christ is organically related to all beings, all parts of creation are now reconciled to Christ. Humans, the sun and the moon, air and water, plants and animals participate in the final consummation of the redemption. Thus, St. Paul says that Jesus Christ came for the redemption of the whole creation (cf. Rom 8). The words of Jesus also indicate his organic relationship with the Father. Organically, Jesus said, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). Since humans are an integral part of creation, we are part of Christ's body. This interrelationship with Jesus Christ can be understood as, "I am in my Father and You in me" (John 14:20).

Similarly, it leads us to affirm the work of the Holy Spirit in each iota of creation. There is nothing on the earth that has not been touched by the Spirit. In the OT, the Spirit of God is compared with *ruah*. The Spirit inhabits every creation and gives life. The presence of the Spirit in stones and trees is real. The Spirit makes all living possible. It is through the work of the Spirit that plants are made to germinate, grow and bear fruit. The flowers bloom and animals roam around through the power of the Spirit. In short, the presence of the Spirit makes creation alive and dynamic. The abuse of God's creation is like killing oneself and denial of life to them.

The Bible also testifies that the Holy Spirit works not only at the cave of human's heart, but also works and sustains all creation. The Spirit energizes the collective resistance movement of the oppressed communities. No religion and no

one can have monopoly over the work of the Holy Spirit. It works in every life and inspires everything including animals and plants in different ways. Nothing exists without the work of the Holy Spirit even the primeval waters over which the Spirit was hovering at the time of creation (Gen. 1:2). To put it differently, neither mountain nor river, neither flower nor field came into existence without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the breath that gives life to all. Such a vision helps us to live in an ecologic mystery. By accepting this habitation of the Spirit in all realities, Leonardo Boff says,

> We are submerged in an ocean of life, of spirit, of vibration and communion. We are part of the whole of the Spirit who, like a string of pearls, joins all and attracts all towards the heights, in the direction of perfect communion with the kingdom of the Trinity.[5]

Further, the indigenous people's understanding of the Spirit enables us to affirm that nature and history are integrated as an organic whole through the power of the Spirit. Since the Spirit enlivens the whole world of creation and history, they are dynamic and real.[6] This means the struggle for human justice and eco-justice is one whole. They cannot be separated.

The Creator God and History

Dominant Christian traditions somehow undermine God's liberative act in creation by perceiving God in history, that is, in time. The salvation history is actualized in human history and not in the world of creation. The world of creation is perceived simply as a space for the realization of election. It has no history and is timeless. It need not be redeemed. Apart from the meaning and value of redeemed human community, creation has no divinely bestowed meaning. Indigenous spirituality enables us to see history and time not as something separated from the cosmos but closely interrelated. One cannot conceive of the God of history without affirming the God of creation. There is no history without the land, trees, animals, flowers and spirit. We cannot make a distinction between

the world of creation and the world of humanity. Creation is the basic component of the interpretation of history in the indigenous worldview. In other words, history cannot be conceived without the world of creation. They are inseparably related.

However, this argument should not lead us to assume that history is subsumed under nature. As already indicated, the indigenous spirituality affirms the centrality, responsibility and creativity of humanity. The ethical principle, religious observances, festivals, taboo, totem, customary laws and practices are the expressions of human creativity to preserve the Mother Earth. The point to affirm is that human histories have to be studied within the context of the totality of creation.

The Creator God and Humanity

The anthropocentric, hierarchical and patriarchal images of God alienate human beings from each other, from creation and also from God. We should not assume that in the indigenous worldview humans, animals and plants are the same. It is called romanticization. The indigenous myths, folklores, songs and arts recognize a unique place and the role of humans in creation. Human beings possess a unique quality and the essence of humanity is responsibility and care. It makes human beings different and distinct from other creatures. Otherwise put, in the human nature, the dominant aspect is awareness of collective responsibility and care, but it is not the case in regard to other creatures. However, the possession of this quality does not justify human superiority and domination. This quality is bestowed on them to protect their fellow creatures and other earth's resources from destruction. Through the practice of collective responsibility and care, the humans enter into communion with their Creator and creation.

This indigenous spirituality helps us to grasp that humans and all other segments of creation are children of one family and of one clan or tribe/nation. The totemic relationship of the indigenous people with the plants, animals and stones

reinforces this idea. This mysterious totemic relationship with creation provides a sense of oneness, respect, love, sanctity and sacredness towards plants, animals, spirits and the Creator God. It helps Christians to recognize 'personhood', not in a human sense, but in all things which in return leads us to a deep respect of creation. Every creature is a participant in the divine, and has a measure of sensitivity and enjoys a degree of autonomy, spontaneity and freedom.

This further challenges us to re-examine the place of humanity in the universe. It rules out the notion that elevates the intellectual and rational nature as being superior to other creatures. Humans should not think that they are superior beings based on their intellect and that the material world is subordinate to them. We have also no right to claim that rationality is the basis for obtaining grace and salvation. Humans are not above, but within and in creation. The world is the fruit neither on human desire nor of their creativity. The world came into being long before them and thus it does not belong to them; it belongs to God who created and continues to sustain it. There is a mystery in every being and there is a distinction between human beings and other creatures; but the difference is not superiority because this comes with an awareness of collective responsibility and care.[7]

As the distinction between human and other creatures is made through common responsibility and care, we understand the Christian teaching of the "image of God" in a new way. We see that there is no *imago Dei*, without reference to creation. The "Image of God" can be seen only in a total framework of life. It is through their relationship with creation and God that humans discover their true "image of God".

Furthermore, it encourages us to view ourselves as an integral part of the earth community, but not above or beyond the earth. We are dependent on the land for our sustenance through the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. By hurting the earth and its creatures, we hurt ourselves and above all hurt the Creator God. Humans do not have

the right to make extravagant claims of being at the apex of creation. By virtue of possessing intellectual power, humans are responsible for maintaining harmony among all creatures. Here our relationship to God's creation is not as ruler or master, but as co-workers with Godself. Humans attain perfection by fulfilling their obligations in the world and becoming part of it by being responsible and caring.

The Bible says that through the responsible partici-pation of humans, that is, by assuming responsibility and care in love and justice, the land is kept fertile and productive (Gen. 2:5; 3:17-19). In other words, to affirm that humans are organically related to Mother Earth, to creation and to the Creator God implies pledging a relationship of caring, commitment, and responsibility.

The Creator God and Liberation

Stanley Harakas, an Orthodox theologian, argues that a theology which spiritualized liberation as unconnected with the created world and struggle of oppressed people, contributed to the formation of the two major cultural realities of the West, i.e., a science which perceived itself as detached from creation and treated it as an object, and an economic system that approached creation with an understanding of "dominion" understood essentially as a license for the exploitation of creation which contributed to oppression of certain sections of the society.[8] Thus, there is a need to redefine the whole concept of liberation. In this quest, the indigenous vision of Creator God and life helps us to view liberation in a new perspective. Since the self of the Creator God is evident in creation and human beings are part of it, we are able to affirm that humans attain liberation only in relation to the rest of creation. Justice to creation (in its total sense) and oppressed communities is the basis of liberation. Many indigenous communities do not have myths and symbols where humanity alone is saved while other creations are destroyed. Together with the Mother Earth and her children, i.e. the creatures, the humans attain liberation. On the other hand, indigenous spirituality leads them to view

liberation as a reality which can be experienced authentically in the here and now and beyond. This demands the solidarity struggle for justice. A liberated person is the one who lives in harmony with Mother Earth and her children, creation, and the Creator God and fellow human beings. Further, in indigenous worldview, liberation is more concerned with the protection, restoration, preservation, survival, justice and continuance of the humans and human social processes and creation. It also has to do with physical and immediate dangers – dangers, especially institutionalized unjust systems that threaten individual as well as community survival, good health and general prosperity. Therefore, the violation of mother earth, the trees, flowers, animals and spirits becomes a violation of the very spiritual values that hold the community together. This idea of liberation enables Christians to understand salvation as a reality which we authentically experience in the present as well. It is not just a matter of saving one's own soul in life after death, but living a life of fullness in one's own journey through life.

Indigenous spirituality leaves little room to conceive liberation in terms of personal salvation. It puts forth the view that human liberation can be understood only as an integral part of the redemption of the whole creation. A person exists only in relationships – in relation to other human persons as well as to non-human realities. It is not possible for a person to come to be or to grow without relating to other persons and other segments of God's creation. The earth and the sun as well as other people are essential parts of our existence. Without them we cannot exist.[9] In the OT, we see God entering into a covenant relationship with the whole of creation.[10] In the story of Noah, God re-establishes the covenant with the whole creation (cf. Gen. 8-9). Similarly, the Abrahamic covenant involves the land, given as God's gift to his descendants (Gen. 15 & 17).

The New Testament builds on this foundation which integrates creation into the work of God's redemption. Both

Pauline and Johannine writings strongly affirm the whole creation-cosmic redemption. According to St. Paul, the work of the Spirit extends to the total renewal of creation. The work of liberation brought by Jesus Christ envelops the whole universe. He initiates a process of transformation that moves towards cosmic release (Eph. 1: 1-10; Col. 1:15-20). The work of the Spirit is for the renewal of the whole earth. Similarly, St. John speaks of the redemptive work of Christ as "All things were made though him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (1:3). Thus when the New Testament writers discussed the work of God's redemption in Jesus Christ, the reconciliation achieved through the life, death and resurrection of Christ extends to all creations. This is celebrated in the Eucharist, the feast which acknowledges our belongingness to this new covenant relationship as the body of Christ and opens all life to the promise of a new relationship.[11]

Conclusion

Theology is an ongoing reflective activity of the faith experience of people in a given context. It is written, articulated and constructed by humans to create a community of justice. But it should not be reduced to a mere "talking activity" or "liberative activity" of the poor, the oppressed and women. The scope of theological reflections should also include human's relationship with other segments of God's creation. Equal importance or prominence should be given to "creation" (in the sense of totality) because we cannot articulate a theology without creation as it is the foundation of all life. The affirmation that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen.1:1) is the foundation of doing theology. Thus theological reflections should aim to provide a holistic dimension affirming the interrelatedness of all creation and people's struggle for life. To be precise, a theology that addresses humanity alone and leaves the rest of the cosmos unaddressed is an incomplete one.[12] Theology becomes impotent when it addresses only humanity. Doing theology is to engage in dialogue, listen, feel and live with the whole of creation, and it is not just a function of the intellect.

Endnotes

[1] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp.4-10.

[2] Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 69. She calls for a radical change in human's attitude towards other creatures. Humans should not act as namers of and the rulers over creation, but rather act as gardeners, caretakers, parents, stewards, trustees, lovers, priests, co-creators and friends of the world. For instance, the image of God as the lover of the world gives a different relationship. Being in love does not mean sex, lust and desire. But the crux of love has to do with value. It is finding someone valuable and being found valuable. God as lover is a moving power in the universe. God's love is the desire for union with that which is valuable. God as lover needs the world as the lover needs each other. God as lover is interested in saving the entire cosmos that has become estranged and fragmented, sickened by unhealthy practices and threatened by death and extinction. Similarly, reimaging God as parent and friend of the world gives a feeling of friendship, care and love in a work that is sustained by a common vision. McFague feels that this model would offer new possibilities of revisioning the God-world-human relationship. If we reflect on the characteristics of the lover shown by parents, lovers and friends, the word that come to our mind include `fidelity,' `nurture,' `attraction,' `self-sacrifice,' `passion,' `care,' `affection,' `responsibility,' `respect,' and `mutuality.' These words suggest a power which is quite different from that associated with the models of lord, king and patriarch. It calls for a new way of interpreting Christian faith. This way of looking at the world is to find new meanings that God loves bodies. God suffers and that this world is a sacrament.

[3] Measuring God's love in terms of blessings, money, property, perfection and success alone are called 'prosperity' theology.

[4] Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Human Presence: An Orthodox View of Nature* (Geneva: WCC, 1979), pp. 41 ff. Hereafter "*Human Presence*".

[5] Leonardo Boff, "Ecology and Christology: Christian Pan-in-theism," *Voices From the Third World*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (June 1993), p. 177

[6] Cf. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 39

[7] K. C. Abraham, "A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis," in *Voices From the Third World*, Vol. XVI, No.1, (June, 1993), p. 80.

[8] "The Integrity of Creation: Ethical Issues" in *Human Presence*, p. 20.

[9] *Ibid*., p.39.

[10] For more detail see W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Cape Town: The Paternoster Press,

1984), pp. 15-25, 39-40.

[11] Matthew Fox, *The Coming of Cosmic Christ* (New Mexico: Bear & Co., 1983), pp. 87 ff.

[12] Cf. Charles Birch, "Christian Obligation for the Liberation of Nature," *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, eds. Charles Birch, et.al (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, Books, 1994), p. 61.

Chapter Eleven

RETHINKING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE IN THE MARGINS

Introduction

Theological education plays a key role in the life of the church and society. Along with various theological movements such as the Program for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA), the Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS), etc., there are several ecumenical theological education networks that facilitate and work towards strengthening and promoting theological education in Asia. Most of the theological colleges/seminaries established by the mainline churches come under the regional theological associations such as the Senate of Serampore College, the Association of Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA, now ATU) and the North East Association of Theological Schools (NEATS), Association of Theological Education in Myanmar (ATEM), Association of Theological Education in Indonesia (PERSETIA).[1] It is encouraging to see that various theological institutions and theological movements continue to make serious attempts to respond to the changing demands of Asia by offering various degree and diploma programs, initiating workshops and consultations, and also attempting through their different initiative such as the Commissions on Women, Contextual Theology, etc. to meet the contemporary challenges of the church. Conscious efforts are made to develop new spirituality in ministerial formation, the Asian[2] theological methodologies, Critical Asian Principle (CAP) by ATESEA, theological reflections from marginalized perspectives – indigenous/tribal theology, dalit, minjung, women, and recently persons with disabilities,

sexual minority, people living with HIV etc. The initiative on new pattern of theological education, the promotion of closer relationship between the seminaries and the churches, and the empowerment of women are some of the noteworthy areas. We can see that subaltern and other related fields have brought about significant changes in theological education. How do we integrate margin's voices in theological education? The ethos of education in Asia has drastically changed and is increasingly coming under the influence of market force. Skill oriented education is sought after. Computer technology and other market-oriented education are more lucrative and the best brains are sold in the market. How do theological educations promote life affirming and wholistic spirituality in Asia? How do we broaden the scope of theologizing and integrate with the secular learning? Do Asian theological seminaries adequately respond to fast changing Asian context? In what way can we collaborate with like minded organizations and movements? We need to bear in mind some of these challenges in ensuring quality theological education today.

Ministerial Formation and Margins

The 16th century Reformation led by Martin Luther followed by the missionary movement gave rise to Protestant theological education in the global south. The early theological education inculcated candidates with a vision for engaging in the communities, for socio-economic and cultural transformation as demanded during their time. The Serampore Trio is a glaring example. They were engaged in multi community transformative work.

In general, it was assumed that theological or religious studies are meant to produce exclusive denominational leaders who would act as *poojari* (priest). This narrow orientation of theological study has resulted in unhealthy competition, mistrust and violence among adherents of different religious communities. Currently, the religious studies or theological studies are designed mainly for ecclesiastical positions such as

priest/pastor, but do not give sufficient scope for community development, inter-religious engagement and cultural research to bring about social transformation and change.

Today, theological education programs seem to have lost such community transformative temperament. The theological institutions of historical as well as evangelical churches are becoming more preoccupied in clericalism, immersed in institutional management/expansion, protection of denominational privileges and leaning towards prosperity theology. Serious engagement in pursuit of truth, social transformation and justice to challenge the dominant and enslaving elements of current socio-economic, cultural and political realm have been on decline. The bankruptcy of critical theological voices on national and international issues such as political populism, religious fundamentalism and intolerance, insurgency movement, corruption in public life, growing unemployment problem, abuse and misuse of power by ruling class, corruption in election system, violation of minority rights, women's issue etc. testify the lack of awareness of contextual realities in theological education. Given the multi-cultural, rich-poor, urban-rural and centre-margin divide in global south, a theological education program needs to be designed to address all sectors of communities within and beyond the congregations. Ministerial programs need to prepare and motivate candidates to be catalysts of spiritual formation for social transformation within their congregations and also the larger society for the realization of fullness of life for all.

A few critical references on inherited education system, which we still uphold, will suffice to explain why the present model of theological education and religious studies is not relevant particularly for the rural masses in Asia:

1. The present education system in Asia (also in most of the global south) is an integral part of colonial legacy. It was designed to maintain the privilege and power of the colonizers and the subjugation of the colonized, and to produce generations of people who will never question

or challenge the ruling power but simply accept unjust relationship. Education system was developed in such a way that students were not challenged to think otherwise. They were expected to memorize what were told and were rewarded for reproduction of what we were taught. Thus, it negates creativity and critical thinking.[3] The present education, including theological education is an integral part of colonial heritage and to this day we still follow a modified form yet within the colonial framework giving more importance to classical traditions. This is one of the reasons why graduates seek mainly white collar jobs. Education is designed to make students faithful employer of the master, but not "how many people can I facilitate/empower to make rural people's life better?". The increasing number of graduates unemployed in global south is an integral part of colonial education system.

2. We need to acknowledge the fact that the present crisis of unemployment of young people is the product of colonial education system. Unemployment problem is not so visible in those so-called "developed" countries, e.g. UK 4.8%, Germany 3.9%. Korea 3.6%, Japan 2.8%, Taiwan 3.7% though literary rate is as high as 100%. What is happening in other Asian countries? The higher literacy rate means higher unemployment rate. Students spend 15 years to earn their first degree and parents also spend a large amount of money for children's education. Yet, after obtaining degrees, many join the "depressed club". Young people belonging to this category are alarming. How can we expect people to live in peace and harmony with such high rate of unemployment! How can we expect that there will be no corruption and insurgency movement? Insurgency movement is flourishing and becoming like an industry. Everywhere people are fighting for want of resources and it will continue if we do not change the current education system. We also see theological graduates roaming around without job. Why should we

have a theological college if we do not contribute in solving the growing unemployment problem? A college or a university should contribute towards generating jobs and sustainability.

3. The dominant value system of the present education can be traced back to the Enlightenment paradigm of euro-centric modernity which is deeply rooted on the conquest of nature and the demonization of others, especially tribal/indigenous people. One should maximize all skills to exploit indigenous people and their resources to make the society highly mechanized and industrialized. The booming of economic progress, high-tech lifestyle and urbanization is seen as the goal of education. One will also notice that the secular sciences and humanities hardly impart religious values towards sustainable development and human community in the colonial education paradigm. Is there any scope in the present university system to integrate religious and moral values? Perhaps, no. This is one of the major root causes contributing to today's world crisis. Unending desire of consumerism without ethics and morality is a threat to life. Many educationists have recognized this serious flaw in the present education system.
4. Has theological education corrected or supported this trend? Both the traditional institutions and neo-theological institutions are engaged in marketing theological education justifying that their specific goal is to prepare Christian leaders. We also need to recognize that there is a subtle linkage between the worldviews of the contemporary market capitalism, its message of economic prosperity through free market policy and the independent neo-evangelical and neo-Pentecostal Christianity promoting the gospel of prosperity. There are more than 100 colleges in metro cities like Seoul, Manila, Jakarta, Chennai, Bangaluru and Yangon. Even in Nepal with about 200 thousand (2 lakhs) Christians, there are

about 30 theological colleges in Kathmandu city alone. Dimapur in Nagland is a small city but there are about 45 theological colleges! Is this trend not a serious problem? Who are those people teaching in those colleges? Majority of them are graduates of the mainline Protestant theological schools. Sadly, some of those institutions operate demonizing other cultures and ignoring contextual realities of the people in the margins.

5. The present dominant pedagogy in theological education tends to focus more on cognitive development, giving prime importance to transmitting philosophical and theoretical discourse of elitist traditions and resources. That is why our theological curriculum is overloaded with classical theology, history and biblical interpretations. Subjects on social transformation and change of the rural masses are not given importance. Many people still think that studying theology in the west is superior. Of course, they may have better facilities but that does not mean that they offer more relevant theological education for our context. Western model of education is not a solution in all contexts.
6. Upholding that western university system of colonial era as normative, the other forms of education are relegated as primitive and not important for academic pursuit. Cognitive assessment-examination centred, syllabus controlled, and sheltered/protected campus oriented education is an important aspect of dominant education system and this system alone cannot bring transformation among the marginalized communities. It is a sad reality to see that the present accreditation or affiliation criteria of theological associations or universities are geared towards protecting the interest of elitist system and hierarchy of power.
7. A general assumption is that theology cannot be done without philosophy. The tribal/indigenous traditions are not regarded as philosophical enough to articulate

theology; and are not valuable resources for doing theology and contain no value for doing God's mission. Tribal/indigenous people are looked down upon socially and their spiritual traditions are being branded as pagan, heathen, barbaric, savage, idolatrous, primitive, unnatural, uncivilized, irrational, abnormal, evil, demonic and inferior. Though a significant community of the Christians in Asia and global south are tribals/indigenous and majority of them come from rural places, they are forced to study dominant classical theology which has almost nothing to do in their ministerial context and their lived experiences. We teach our students something which is alien to them. People are enslaved by classical-philosophical model of doing theology. This is the reason why tribal/indigenous ways of being are threatened and we are at the verge of losing ourselves. Can an elite value system that has demonized tribal/indigenous people for centuries transform us? How can such value system give a sense of dignity to our people if we do not make a radical departure from the present education system?

8. One of the major concerns of theological institutions are to equip people to serve the poor, powerless and exploited communities, or the people who are victims of injustice. But many theological graduates are not interested to serve in the rural places; sadly, many young people are not interested in pastoral ministry, and are more interested in materialism. Strangely, theological graduates who cannot get opportunity to work in urban contexts or white collar jobs are looked down as incapable who cannot compete with other colleagues. Rural place is seen not only as backward but also a place of punishment. This is one of the reasons why we have many theological graduates who are not employed and unemployable. Proliferation of theological education in urban places is also an integral part of this education system. Today, graduates of both secular and theology are happier to be unemployed in

> urban areas than being employed in rural places, whereas people in the rural places are facing lack of leadership and service. Majority of the indigenous/tribal people live in rural or semi-rural contexts, but graduates are not given adequate preparation to deal with the problems of rural masses. There is a serious defect in the present education system. Mushrooming of colleges, prayer centres, house churches, NGOs, schools, colleges etc., in urban places are manifestations of such a phenomenon. Theological education and Christian ministry are becoming an elitist urban biased profession. The same is true with secular graduates. What has gone wrong with our theological education and also with general education system? Where is the morality and commitment in today's education system?

The above critical comments should not let us to assume that we should discard the dominant education system altogether. One cannot deny the fact that the dominant university system has made tremendous contribution in doing theological research and praxis in the life of the people and church globally. Its contribution towards scientific and critical thinking drawing philosophical resources is highly commendable and we need to integrate some of those tools in our context. However, western thinkers are highly critical today that the Enlightenment paradigm of imparting scientific knowledge rooted on the conquest of nature, demonization and exploitation of people in the margin at the expense of market expansion has caused much damage to the world. It has brought tremendous pain on marginalized people and natural environment in which we are dependent. They struggle to correct this one-sided paradigm and alternatives have been explored and are gradually overcoming in many countries. But we still follow the old dominant colonial education paradigm. It is a great challenge for us to study religion from transformative perspective and also reverse the education system emphasizing on "transformation" of rural masses and of the poor community. Theological colleges can

take critical steps to decolonize the elitist system of education and it is here that theological education can make a decisive and significant contribution. By way of summary, a random comparison may be made to clarify our alternative vision as follows:

Dominant Paradigm	**Alternative Paradigm**
Degree nomenclature: BTh, BD/MDiv, MTh, DMin, D.Miss, D.Th – religious degrees in nature.	BA, BA (hon), MA, MPhil, Ph.D – secular in nature.
Strong interrelationship between Theology and Philosophy; elitist classical tradition; cognitive development; limited practicum.	Strong interrelationship between Theology and Social work – Development approach; margin's tradition; community development; practicum emphasis.
Compartmentalized/disciplined approach even in basic degree program.	Integrated/interdisciplinary approach in basic degree program; skill development be given importance
Spiritual formation in protected campus – like semi-monastery.	Spiritual formation amidst secular world – committed Christian life in secular world.
Graduates prefer to serve in urban context; rural is seen as a place for punishment.	Graduates prefer to serve in rural context; rural is seen as the place where God has called to serve.
Teaching is restricted to academicians	Non-academicians' experience and expertise to be accommodated.

Graduates are detached from the rural life, but focus more on spiritual formation of the community. Prefer to buy an expensive car for church work and sit under AC comfortably. Comfortable life is the spirituality.	Graduates are an integral part of the rural community; he/she is not only a spiritual enabler, but also a facilitator of community development and organizer in the village. Prefer to buy a Tractor or JCB (or both) for community development work. Hard work and creativity are an integral part of the spirituality.
Advance theological degrees are disintegrated, individual college/seminary takes the responsibility to offer the course; the more degree programs are introduced, fees are levied and the colleges suffer due to enhancement of fee by university.	Consortium will offer the advance degree programs; lesser cost and higher quality because it will be done consortiumly.
Assessment of students' spiritual formation and academic life is done by teachers often limited to campus life	Assessment of students' spiritual formation and academic life to be done both by the members of the church and teachers as the students will be located in the larger public life

Scope of job is mostly limited to church or church related works, especially priestly function to perform rituals. Those who work in secular fields are looked down upon as unspiritual and materialistic church workers. How can a pastor or pastor's wife engage in farming attitude!	Unlimited jobs scope. The scope of the job is not only limited to church and church-related works, but also can serve as community organizers, rural development workers and creative entrepreneurs upholding Christian values and principles. Those who are involved in secular fields and development of community upholding Christian values and teachings are held high and appreciated.
No proper teacher's performance assessment – "How can a student assess me? Who is he/she to challenge my scholarship" attitude! There is no scientific system to help teachers to enhance their teaching ability.	Teachers' performance assessment is done every semester both by the students and scholars. "Thank you so much for the assessment" attitude! Scientific system to be developed for enhancement of teachers' teaching skill.
Teachers are asked to teach a course which is not their expertise; sometimes unfamiliar subjects too.	Teachers will be asked to teach only the subject known best to them. Students must get maximum benefit out of teacher's expertise in the field.

No clear policy of promotion to professorship. The quality of theological education is measured by elaborate curriculum, closed examination and evaluation controlled system.	Clear promotion policies to be adopted: assessment by students, departmental assessment, administrator's assessment, participation in the national and international seminars, publication in Journals, critical theological reflection in print media like newspaper, magazines etc. Promotion to be determined on the basis of quality thesis presentation for each stage of promotion. The quality of theological education to be measured not only by curriculum and evaluation system but also by the quality of the teachers.
Not much or no scope to receive Government support due to religious identity.	Explore both Govt. and NGO support since theology will be studied as an integral part of secular university. Colleges will collaborate and tap all possible resources for promotion of transformative education of the poor, drop outs, unemployed youth and rural masses.
Protected campus, isolated from secular world. Strictly residential courses.	Theological education amidst secular world. Both residential and non-residential courses.

Classes are not conducted outside of campus; working people are not allowed to register for the course.	Some classes are to be conducted outside of campus in dialogue with people's life; working people will be encouraged and classes to be arranged even in the evening for the benefit of laity and working people.
Establishment of new colleges are seen as dilution of quality and a threat to existing colleges; see the urban place as ideal for establishment of the college.	Establishment of new colleges as per the University norms are seen as a blessing because it will speed up and intensify social transformation and promote diverse specialized field of studies; the rural places where sufficient natural resources are available in plenty are seen as ideal place for establishment of the college.
Syllabus controlled system without sensitive to different contexts, traditions and needs.	Syllabus freedom and contextually related – Academic Board will oversee the quality.
Assessment: Closed examination system and essay type model at the end of semester. Centrally controlled question papers and evaluation system.	There will be quiz, comprehensive assessment report writing, open examination, and closed examination. Both controlled and decentralized question papers and evaluation system.

Restriction or even discourage part - time teachers.	Encourage unlimited part-time teachers (at least 25-35 part-time teachers in various fields can be encouraged).
Teachers are mostly theological degree holders.	Not only theological degree holders, other secular experts to be tapped – at least 50%.
Teaching/supervision is limited to 65 years.	Teaching/supervision can be extended even upto 75 to 80 years after retirement at the age of 65, if health permits and can meet the university's requirements.
Discourage dual affiliation or accreditation; students are not permitted to undertake other degree courses.	Encourage multiple relationships, affiliation, accreditation to diverse learning system; and potential students may be encouraged to take other degree or professional courses simultaneously.

Looking at the present reality, we can affirmatively say that the present elitist education system will not bring social transformation and dignity among the marginalized masses. Theological education is to prepare leaders to serve among those people. The leaders need both social and spiritual transformative skills. The people in the rural and semi-urban settings do not need only speculative and grant classical philosophical narrative/construct of theology. In fact, the attempt to co-opt them into elitist paradigm, the minority, rural masses and tribal/indigenous people and also dominant groups assume/think that the rural and tribal/indigenous people are incapable and inferior who need to be integrated/oriented into mainstream society, and that their spirituality and tradition have to be discarded as they are product of inferior

and uncivilized practices. This has been the experience of rural masses, especially tribal/indigenous people all over the world. We need, therefore, an alternative theological education that promotes and emphasizes on:

- spiritual nurturing or spiritual formation for social transformation,
- contextual and community centred transformative Bible reading method,
- transformative theology,
- de-colonizing critical thinking skill,
- multi-economic community development skill,
- community organizing skill,
- social development,
- human capacity enhancement skills,
- protection of land and resources,
- productive and sustainable use of land,
- preservation of the culture,
- peace education,
- gender justice,
- health, healing and wholeness,
- human rights and justice,
- preservation of music and dances from the danger objectification and marketization,
- preservation of identity, customary laws, language and traditional wisdom.

Does the present dominant education paradigm provide this scope? No, it does not and there is hardly scope in the present education system. For example, if a course is designed on *tribal/ indigenous theology*, the dominant community will not register for it unless it is a mandatory course. Also some teachers from the dominant communities who teach the course do not take it seriously. Instead of empowering the students, some teachers

disempower them. People are not interested to learn from the so-called dominated little/insignificant tradition. There is something wrong in the system! Therefore, we need to do it differently and intentionally to protect ourselves. It is time that the marginalized people stand, think and do things together differently. A college/university focusing on alternative model locating in the context of the margin can bring a positive transformation in society.

The Needs of People in the Margins

Marginalized communities need a community oriented and transformative theological education that is *academically, and yet passionately, emotionally, practically, pastorally, and prophetically related to and involved in the concrete problems and needs of the people* who face religious violence, armed conflict, displacement, corruption, unemployment, violation of human rights, and continued oppression of minorities, patriarchy, gender discrimination, violence, stagnation of church, demonization of their traditions, cultural practices, poverty, human trafficking, substance abuse, lack of development or one-sided development, forced conversion and re-conversion, empowerment training for both surrendered and active freedom fighters (undergrounds) and other forms of exclusion and discrimination faced by tribal/indigenous people, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, LGBTIQ, farmers and migrant works. Also people are caught up with many problems and issues due to long years of isolation, for example:

- Colonialization of our culture, history
- Colonalization of our mind
- Identity crisis
- Tribalism
- Racism
- Lack of infrastructure development
- Lack of economic independence and self-reliance

- Poverty
- Political instability
- Prosperity theology
- Spiritual bankruptcy
- Corruption, moral degradation
- Generation gap
- Employment problem
- Environmental crisis
- Urban-rural divide
- Mass migration to cities in search of jobs
- Idleness of young people
- Migrant workers

Though we appreciate the great legacy of dominant theological education, we realize that uncritical acceptance of dominant education system has contributed significantly to the destruction of self-esteem, other-worldly spirituality, detachment from the world, devaluation of cultural knowledge, and imposition of the belief that tribal traditions and ideas are lesser/ inferior than that of the mainstream people. We also realize that the present theological education has not contributed much to economic self-reliance, political justice and social justice, rather it promotes spiritual arrogance, elitist attitude, prosperity spirituality, negative attitude to rural masses and their cultural heritage, power consciousness, unemployment problem, consumerist lifestyle, lack of contribution to social transformation, urban-elite consciousness and spirituality, etc. It is time that we look for an alternative model with global perspective, yet intentionally located in the context of margins where people are struggling for economic justice and rights, struggle to liberate from poverty, land rights, development, dependency on government, identity and cultural preservation and transformation of rural community.

Colleges must design theological curriculums to produce

committed persons rooted in *liberative religious and Christian traditions who are hard-working, self-sufficient, truthful, courageous, skillful community organizers and spiritual leaders*. The present elitist philosophical, meditative and anthropocentric education system – do not address these issues. A paradigm shift from this elitist education system to a transformative movement oriented theological education of the poor and marginalized is thus crucial and imperative for us. This reversal is possible only when theological education is located in the context of the margins. It is here that theological colleges should take the courageous stand and endeavor to make a difference among the people.

A pastor going to a rural congregation with transformative development skills should nurture the community not only spiritually but also generate at least 20-50 job opportunities for the youth. We need to design courses to train committed and skillful:

- Leaders who are committed to transform the country and the world at large.
- Leaders who are committed to serve both in the rural, semi-urban and urban contexts.
- Leaders who are fully equipped to address the problem of rural and urban masses both spiritually and physically.
- Leaders who can be a force for social change.
- Leaders who are capable of various multi-task-skills such as farming, health care, marketing and prophetic preaching.
- Leaders who can enable people for transformation.
- Leaders who can transform the life of rural poor.
- Leaders who can interpret the Bible and communicate effectively to the concrete life situation of the people.
- Leaders who are able to discern and act differently locating in the context. of margin and challenge the dominant enslaving power.

- Leaders who can handle administration efficiently.
- Leaders who can organize people's movement for change.
- Leaders who are equipped to help people in times of crisis – person, family and community.

Conclusion

Theological education must, first and foremost, address the concrete local problem affirming global vision. In other words, we need to train leaders who can discern the signs of the times and be prophetic leaders in the given context. It demands rigorous scientific research and critical thinking, yet it must be pastorally relevant, applicable and spiritually nourishing/ sustaining education. Academic pursuit not from the elitist-dominant perspective but from the margin-dominated perspective is the need of the hour in indigenous/tribal context. Life-engaging and transforming theology is to be done from the experience of colonized people.

Endnotes

[1] Apart from BTESSC, ATESEA, NEATS, we also have other evangelical theological associations like Asian Theological Association (ATA) and Asia Pacific Theological School (APTS) who are actively engaged in various innovative programs in training future church leaders.

[2] When we say "Asian", one should not think that there is one Asian reality. The diversity and multiplicity of the context and experiences of contemporary Asia must be recognized. Asian can never be unified nor be homogenized.

[3] Waziyatawin and Michael Yellow Bird, "Beginning Decolonization," in *For Indigenous Eyes Only*: *A Decolonization Handbook,* eds. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 2008), p. 1.

Chapter Twelve

WAR, CONFLICT AND MARGINALIZATION OF PEOPLE

Introduction

The world is reeling under a culture of violence. Nations, ethnic, racial, religious, economic, environmental, and gender violence continue to go unabted all over the world. The increasing violence, international terrorism, increasing uncertainty and paranoia, and the threat of brutal attacks happening at unexpected times, at unexpected places and through unexpected people has become the order of the day and it is a serious security concern. Religions are misused to wage war and create terror and hatred among various religious communities. Many poor and developing countries are being threatened by the economic, political and cultural hegemony of globalization, militarization and by the terrorist declaration of war, religious fundamentalism, wars of genocide, forced dispersal of people, continuing oppression and violence against women and children. Amidst all these the world is longing for peace.

War, Conflict and Armless People

The world has experienced the ruthless role of imperialism, killing and genocide. Germans have slaughtered about 6 million Jews during the Holocaust under the regime of Adolf Hitler. Asserting the White race superiority, about 80 million American-Indians had been killed and made thousands of people disabled. In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is said that about 209 thousand people were killed in one single day when Americans. dropped atom bomb. Japanese troops massacred

200,000 to 300,000 armless people in Nanjing in December 1937. The massacre of more than 30,000 Taiwanese on 29th February, 1947 is still fresh in their memory. US invasion of Iraq have claimed more than hundreds of thousand innocent lives and more than 500,000 soldiers. Still civil wars are going on in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Palestine and many other countries. We can add many heart rending stories of genocide, mass destruction and unequal distribution of resources in the world today. Some examples include:

- Global military expenditure and arms trade form the largest spending in the world at over US$780 billion. That is about US$2.1 billion every day. The US alone is spending more than $1 billion a day on their giant military machine.
- US invasion of Iraq, which led to the execution of Saddam Hussein, has so far claimed about 110,000 to 460,000 casualties according to official report. Other estimates, such as the 2006 Lancet study, and the 2007 Opinion Research Business survey, put the numbers as high as 650,000 and 1.2 million respectively. The casualty of armless civilians still continues in Iraq.
- Since the Syrian civil war began, 320,000 people have been killed, including nearly 12,000 children. About 1.5 million people have been wounded or permanently disabled, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The war has become more deadly since foreign powers joined the conflict.
- 4.6 million Syrians are refugees, and 6.6 million are displaced within Syria; half are children.
- 20 per cent of the world population consumes 83 per cent of the global resources.
- 5 per cent of the world population consumes 25 per cent of the world's oil.
- Less than one per cent of what the world spends on weapons can put every child into school.

- There are more than 850 million people struggling with food insecurity and its dire consequences in terms of health, education, productivity, and poverty.
- Everyday 30,0000 people die of starvation, (that's 1,250 people every hour, 20 people every minutes and 1 person every 3 seconds).
- Nearly one billion people in our world are unable to read a book or sign their names.
- The amount of money needed to meet all sanitation and food needs in the world for one year is equal to about 12 days of US military spending or 6 days of global military spending.
- The amount of money needed to eradicate poverty in the world for one year is equal to about 37 days of US military spending or 19 days of global military spending.
- Lack of clean drinking water leads to nearly 250 million cases of water-related diseases each year and 5 to 10 million deaths in the Third World countries.

The reality of today's world is that the values of human beings, especially the poor and marginalized ones are treated like a commodity and beast. Power, military, economic and social benefits are so unevenly shared and used that a vast majority of the world's population is left excluded and abused.

Asia's political scenario has changed dramatically after the end of Cold War. Arms race and combating terrorism and building weapons of mass destruction have become the top most priority of many countries in Asia today. China and India are rising militarily. The two countries continue to build both the nuclear and non-nuclear weapons. Pakistan, North Korea, and now Japan have joined the race in escalating the pace of their hi-tech military acquisitions. The military expenditure in all the Asian countries has gone up double in the recent years. For instance, (i) India has the world's third largest military, after China and the United States. Both India and Pakistan have over 1 million soldiers deployed along their tense border and each

nation is armed with dozens of nuclear-tipped missiles. It is reported that the United States has agreed to sell India cutting-edge equipment for its special forces, including technology to pinpoint the location of a target within meters and sensors to detect bomb-laden intruders walking across the mountains.[1] (ii) Japan is rebuilding its military capabilities arguing that Japan should be able to launch preemptive strikes against countries that the government considered to pose an imminent threat. Japan is among world's top five military spenders.[2] China and North Korea see it as a threat to their security. China's leaders have warned on several occasions that Japan's efforts to seek a combat role for its armed forces would greatly impede a genuine reconciliation between Japan and other Asian countries. (iii) Though engaged in diplomatic dialogue, the Korean Peninsula continues to live under threat. The continuing missile and nuclear development program of North Korea is perceived as a security threat to the entire region. It is seen that not only will it directly endanger the security of Japan and South Korea, but it will also jeopardize the strategic goals of the United States in Asia. After the September, 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, the American attitude towards North Korea has hardened. In its list of terrorist bodies, released on 5th October 2001, Washington included North Korea as "a state sponsoring terrorism" describing it as part of an "Axis of Evil".[3] On August 8, 2017, President Trump suggested that the United States would wage a "war of fire and fury" against North Korea if they failed to cease nuclear testing. In response, North Korea issued a series of threats against the U.S. territory of Guam as well as allies such as Japan and South Korea. On November 28, 2017 North Korea fired an intercontinental ballistic missiles claiming that the Hwasong-15 could be armed with a "super-large heavy nuclear warhead" and is capable of striking the entire U.S. mainland. In a government statement, their leader Kim declared with pride, the country has achieved its goal of becoming a "rocket power."[4] To counter the North Korean nuclear attack, South

Korea has already started space program more than ten years ago, launching a three stage liquid fuelled rocket and unveiling plans for blue water navy. (iv) The militarization and counter insurgency operations in the Philippines assisted by the United States have intensified since the "War on Terror" has started. The Philippines and the United States resumed joint combat operations since 2003 renewing their "Balikatan 03-1" (shoulder-to-shoulder) offensive against Muslim rebels in Mindanao.[5]

Similarly, Russia is trying to reassert its presence on the continent by building military power. To defend China's attack, Taiwan is one of the biggest buyers of U.S weapons. It is said that between 1990 and 2001 alone, the island took a delivery of 14.6 billion in U.S arms, making it the second biggest purchaser of U.S weapons next to Saudi Arabia.[6] In 2015, the Obama administration notified Congress a $1.83 billion arms sale package for Taiwan, including two frigates, anti-tank missiles, amphibious assault vehicles and other equipment, drawing an angry response from China.[7]

The proliferation of small arms is becoming a serious concern to Asian countries. Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Nepal, Vietnam, Laos and Pakistan have been accused of smuggling small arms to other countries. Myanmar is now emerging as the main supplier for illegal weapons in the region. The ethnic minority force benefits from a ceasefire forged with the then Myanmar's military rulers that effectively allow it to move narcotics, guns and other contraband along government-controlled roads.[8] The worst affected people are the poor and the innocent people.

Resurgence of Populist Political Leaders

Last year, the whole world has witnessed US election. Donald Trump won! Many people were shocked hearing Trump's victory. All predictions, opinions and exit poll analyses were proved to be wrong. Trump's victory has not only stunned American political establishment, but also the entire world.

With the ideologies of hyper-nationalism, cultural and religious conservatism, we have seen political power capturing in Eastern Europe, the Philippines, Russia, India, China and some countries in Africa and Latin America, and the US. One economist commented that the resurgence of right-wing populist political movement is due to failure of globalization and free market system. A vast majority of working class, farmers are left to struggle for their survival while a few have become filthy rich. All those populist political leaders advocate ideology of protectionism. Our race, culture, religion are superior and we must protect them for foreign invasion. Some communities are branded as killers, criminals, drug pushers, terrorists and other religions are demonized especially Islam. We hear them speaking racist, sexist and exclusivist language. In India, some politicians said, "Christians should go back to the West" and give more importance to cows than humans. Populist politicians try to project that people are poor because of immigration, corruption, wrong policy of the government. People are jobless because immigrants have taken over the jobs. Local inhabitants are denied of their rights. The populist right-wing political leaders project themselves as the "Messiah" and claim that they will fix all the problems by exploiting, abusing religious sentiment of the exploited. We see denial of diversity, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and violation of human rights. Even in the democratic countries dictatorship is coming back. It is a threat for future humanity.

Religion is used and abused by all the populist right-wing political leaders. Human rights are denied to others because of the claim that my religion and my race are superior to others. The denial of diversity and respect of others have caused much human rights violation over the world. The refugee crisis in Myanmar is connected with religious intolerance among majority Buddhists. Since August. 25, 2017, the Rohingya population in Myanmar has been subjected to extreme violence and has been forced to flee their homes after an insurgent group called Harakah al-Yaqin attacked Myanmar

border police posts. The troops have been accused of murder and rape of Rohingya civilians. There have been reports of helicopters firing on civilians, the extra-judicial executions, rape and abuse of women and children, and the burning of entire villages. It is said that about 500,000 Rohingya people, an ethnic minority, have fled their homes creating a major refugee crisis in Bangladesh. India is in talks with Bangladesh and Myanmar about its plan to deport around 40,000 Rohingya Muslims living in the country illegally. The United Nations estimates that $200 million will be needed over the next six months to help Rohingya Muslims refugees who have fled to Bangladesh.

Governments and Abuse of Religions

Religious fundamentalism is on the raise all over Asia. To advance their political agenda of the dominant ruling class, religions are being misused and abused. Religious fundamentalist groups are making serious impact on stability, security and peaceful cohabitation of people. It has intensified violence in the name of religion by militant religious groups. Countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar are experiencing serious religious conflicts. We can categorize them as Muslim–Christian conflicts (Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh); Hindu – Christian conflicts (India and Nepal.) Hindu – Muslim conflicts (India, Bangladesh and Pakistan) Buddhist – Christian conflicts (Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia). As religion plays a major role in politics, different political parties manipulate religions leading to religious conflict. The conflict leaves behind not only physical, but also mental and emotional scars among many people. This religious resurgence in the form of fundamentalism continues to affect millions of life in Asia.

In India, the Hindu fundamentalist militant organizations like the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP), the *Bajrang Dal*, are misusing religion to

ignite communal violence propagating *Hindutva* ideology – a fundamentalist socio-political ideology that asserts a unifying Hindu culture for all Indians irrespective of India's multi-religious tradition and culture. The politics of *Hindutva* is represented by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). All non-Hindus are identified as traitors and treat them like second-class citizens or as foreigners. The speeches and writings of the RSS *Sarsangchalaks* like M.S. Golwalker and K.S. Sundarshan give ample evidence of this attitude. Anti-conversion bills have been introduced in seven Indian states of Madhya Predesh, Chhatisgarh, Odisha, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Arunachal Pradesh and Himachal Preadesh. Just in 300 days of BJP in power, a coalition of minority religious leaders issued a report claiming more than 600 cases of violence – 168 cases targeting Christians and the rest against Muslims.[9] It is deplorable that religious minorities continue to live in fear and uncertainties even in the so-called democratic countries.

Islamic fundamentalists are becoming more powerful in Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh influencing even in areas of law and education. By declaring Islamic state, we hear even banning of music in public places, raids on cable operators on the grounds of spreading obscenity, the decision to introduce traditional uniform after dubbing pants and shirts as "anti-Islam", forbidding male doctors from examining female patients; and ordering civil servants to pray five times daily.[10]

The rise of Islamic political parties is visible in Southeast Asia especially since September 11. Indonesia, for example, is known for its peaceful and moderate political position. But the Islamic political parties that emerged during the last decade are different from those in the 1950s. Those parties in the 1950s did not have a paramilitary wing, but, now almost every party, Islamic or otherwise, has well-trained cadres.[11] The new Islamic political parties are trying to make their presence felt in society and politics by focusing on issues such as the introduction of Islamic Shariah law. Such political agendas are further aggravating religious polarization in Indonesia

especially among Christian-dominated provinces. Indonesia is heading for more turbulence in Christian - Muslim relations.[12] It says that "The Islamic State remains the main driver of attacks in Indonesia, and the threat posed by militants linked to the group is likely to escalate in the country."[13]

Malaysia defines itself as an Islamic country by declaring Islam as the official state religion undermining the Christians and indigenous ethnic minorities. For a short span of time, the Ministry of Home Affairs of Malaysia banned "*Bup Kudus*"[14], accusing that the Bible contained the phrase "Allah Tala", which sounds similar to the Islamic phrase for "Almighty God", which is spelled as "*Allah Taala*".

It is not only Islamic fundamentalism that is on the rise, but other religions are also becoming fundamentalist. In Myanmar, different Buddhist groups under the leadership of monks organized protest against Christian and Muslim communities. As noted, the present Rohingya crisis is part of resurgence of majority Buddhist in Myanmar. Buddhist organizations are also involved in aggressive missionary activities to convert ethnic communities to Buddhism. Non-Buddhist religious minorities are treated no better than second-class citizens in Myanmar. In Sri Lanka, religious tensions and conflict between Buddhists, Hindus and Christians have become a divisive factor in public life. The call to introduce an anti-conversion bill championed by extreme Hindu and Buddhist groups continues to create tension and mistrust. Following the cabinet minister's move to introduce an anti-conversion bill into the parliament some Churches have been attacked and burnt. Religious fundamentalism is thus destroying the whole secular fabric creating chaos.

Ethnic Conflicts and Civil Wars

Wars and violence are taking place not only between different nations, but even within countries among different communities. Ethnic conflicts pose serious threats to the peace and security of countries. India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka,

Myanmar, Indonesia, Philippines, China, Taiwan, etc. have witness the loss of many innocent lives. The Tamil-Sinhalese ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka overshadowed decades and the memory of hurt feelings have not been healed till today. This conflict has not only caused more than one hundred thousand deaths and brought untold misery and suffering to hundreds of thousands of people but also thwarted the social and economic development of the country. To this day people live in fear and suspicion. Nepal has witnessed years of war between the Maoists and government forces claiming more than 15,000 lives. The future of political stability is still uncertain. Myanmar continues to experience series of brutal ethnic wars. Demands for autonomy of ethnic minorities have not been met for years. At least 140,000 more Karen, Karenni, and Mon people from eastern Myanmar are refugees in Thailand.[15] In China, there are demands for independence by Tibetan and the Uighur Muslim continues. Over the issue of control over natural resources, especially land, mining, timber, oil, gas, and fishing resources, the armed conflict between the Communist insurgency – led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its armed group, the New People's Army (NPA), and its political arm, the National Democratic Front (NDF) has been going on for almost five decades threatening national security. It is also said that fighting between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao has claimed hundreds of lives and displaced more than 350,000 people.[16] Pilipino society is more polarized today than any other country in Southeast Asia. All these conflicts emerged as a result of social and economic inequalities.

Injustice and Violence

Violence, whether it is global or local, affects everybody and everywhere and it is inseparably connected to an unjust system and practice. The root of violence is injustice. For example:

a) Unjust and unequal distribution of resources, which include land, water, food and money, have been the

source of violence. It has been rightly observed that "many contemporary wars and conflicts are related to the exploitation of diamonds and oil". In response to ever increasing expansion of the global market and cultural-political hegemony, some people have resorted to religious fundamentalism, which accelerates the spiral of violence. This has further escalated ethnic conflicts into violent confrontation. It is the women and children, and marginalized communities who bear the brunt in situation of violence.

b) Unequal and unjust concentration of power in the hands of a few and abuse of power also leads to violence.

c) Every human being and community needs identity, respect and just participation. Often people's rights and dignity are denied and suppressed in the name of development and national integration leading to violence.

d) In many developing countries, globalization has exerted a disastrous impact on every sector of society, particularly the peasants, workers, indigenous people, women and urban poor. It has also accelerated the devastation of nature and its resources and caused an ecological crisis of unprecedented proportions. That is why the eco-feminists and indigenous people across the world have consistently raised their voices that there is no peace without eco-justice.

To bring a community of peace for all, we need to speak out against injustice, impunity and violence, and offer support to victims, support struggles for human rights and proclaim nonviolence, justice, hope and reconciliation. We need to address and promote the following issues:[17]

a) Trade and economic co-operation on the basis of equality and sharing of life and resources; mutuality of support and respect to one another's life;

b) Respect and protect the rich ethnic, cultural and religious diversity;

c) Sanctity of human life as well as the entire God's creation;

d) Alternative spirituality grounded in the respect of human dignity and in the integration of creation;

e) Spirituality that promotes justice, peace and reconciliation;

f) Cultural co-operation to resist the cultural impact of globalization and to find new ways to overcome the problems of division;

g) To promote respect of human rights in their own cultural context;

h) To spread a spirituality of a common future that respect peace and justice, life for all irrespective of religious and ethnic differences;

i) Policy and values that guarantees the diversity as well as the uniqueness of each culture;

j) Developing a methodology that is critical, parti-cipatory, dialogical, constructive, liberative, con-textual, expressive and holistic.

Role of Religious Communities in Just-Peace

We live in a world of grave contradictions, violence and injustice. Unfortunately, we live in a world where in the name of religion, and religious identity, some of the most heinous acts of violence are committed to the poor and marginalized. We need to uphold the values of journeying together, cooperate, respect and reconcile one another in the spirit of serving, healing, working and sharing together with love and forgiveness affirming the following principles:

1. **Dialogue –** To bring peace and harmony we must be ready to discuss, negotiate, speak and listen to one other. Our religions must teach that violence is short-sighted and the end result is destructive. It only shows which party is stronger, never which is right. We live in a pluralistic context. Plurality must be recognized and embraced as God's structure of creation and protect all diversities. Religious communities must be open to engage in dialogue

for protection of human dignity and common resources of earth for celebration of life. Dialogue in action, therefore involves mobilization of all communities in the local context, regardless of race, religion, caste, ethnic groups, gender, language for resistance. Only through collective action and resistance, an effective change can be realized.

2. **Development –** Peace and harmony will never be achieved so long as great masses of people live in misery, while few others have more than they need. Deprivation leads to destructive act. The religions must focus on effective programs of just development – jobs, education, housing, health – that give people reason to hope for. War, violence and arms race deprive everyone.
3. **People-centred Government –** People all over the world want governments that express and respond to people's crisis and needs. There is no peace and harmony without governments being responsive to the cries of the people and have their demands met. Religious communities can make a contribution to peace and harmony by favoring the process of people-centred and honest and just government for all people.
4. **Human dignity –** Wars and violence affect first and foremost the ordinary people. The innocent people suffer the consequences the most in any violent conflict situation. Any war and violence should never be justified but should be condemned.
5. **Justice –** Although perfect justice will never be achieved in this world, the religions must strive together to defend the victims of systemic injustice and oppression and to build structures that bring greater justice to more people. This commitment must be universal, not simply defending our own group when it is victimized, but advocating and working for justice for all.
6. **Forgiveness –** Justice is not enough without forgiveness. So long as the wrongs and injustices suffered are remembered but not forgiven, the resentment remains and

it serves as a basis for continuing judgments against others, and even at the slightest provocation can ignite into anger, hatred and violence. All religions teach forgiveness. The followers of religions must see forgiveness, not as weakness or indifference, but as the only way to move beyond the past and constructively build a future. The alternative, refusing to forgive, makes us prisoners of our previous history condemned to forever relive and dwell upon our grievances and grudges.

7. **Repentance –** This is the other side of forgiveness; there is no life without repentance on the part of the oppressors. It takes a lot of courage to be self-critical, to admit that we have harmed others or to ask forgiveness. The same is true with nations and religious groups. The natural tendency is to engage in self-justification, to point out how the others have been also at fault. But if peace and harmony is ever to be achieved, our religious convictions must lead us to an honest admission of our own misdeeds.
8. **Simplicity of life –** Advocate a sustainable lifestyle. Greed, competition for markets and control of resources, and aggressive economic rivalry lead to conflict and war.
9. **Solidarity with the human family –** Indifference and rugged individualism allows suffering, victimization, and violence to occur all over the world. Our religions must insist that our deepest allegiance is to the welfare of the human family. Our religious beliefs must lead us to an active solidarity with all our sisters and brothers, the human community but not just those of our religious or ethnic group.

Conclusion

Justice and peace are interrelated. It is not an ideal to be achieved life after death but a concrete reality to be experienced here and now and beyond. As indigenous/aboriginal theologians affirmed in Yushan, Taiwan in October, 2012, that

> Justice and Peace are not for a life of prosperity, but for creation of conditions so that human life and God's entire creation may have the possibility of life, here and now and beyond. However, human liberation will be void and empty without affirming the integrity of the goodness of land and its resources. Shalom without land is not shalom as it will lead to slavery and destruction. Therefore, the land and its resources, that sustain and nourish all beings, and give them an identity and selfhood is not merely a justice issue to be set alongside other justice concerns but the very foundation of history, existence and identity. It means poverty, war, oppression, ethnic conflict and identity problems cannot be understood or solved without relating them to the integrity of creation/land. Justice then to creation/land becomes very central to peace and human dignity and fullness of life. Then, doing justice to creation (in total sense of whole God's creation) is the starting point of the theology. Commitment and dedication to the harmony of creation/land springs forth in love, nurture, care and acceptance. This methodological priority of doing justice to the totality of creation challenges us to re-define our ecumenical vision of "God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace."[18]

Affirmation of life demands conscious rejection of unjust and oppressive system in society. The church has to make a critical option against social structures in favour of the victims and option for justice to integrity of God's creation. We have to abandon idealistic view of justice and peace, but locate Kingdom's value within the social structure, and resist collectively for liberation of victims affirming the integrity of God's creation.

Endnotes

[1] "Editorial" *People's Reporter*, Vol. 28 July 25-August 10, 2012.

[2] *Ibid*.

[3] *Ibid*.

[4] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/north-korea-missile-test-provides-a-fresh-challenge-for-trumps-relationship-with-china/2017/11/29/c35f0880-d4e1-11e7-9461-ba77d604373d_story.html?utm_term=.81b26a22800c, 13.6.2017.

[5] Ninan Koshy, "War and Peace in the Age of Empire," in *Overcoming Violence*, ed. Samson Prabhakar (Bangalore: SATHRI/BTESSC, 2004), pp. 3-5.

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[9] http://www.nagalandpost.com/PostMortem/PostMortemDetails.aspx?p=UE0xMDA1ODc1, 13.6.2017.

[10] *People's Reporter, op.cit*.

[11] Josef P. Widyatmadja, *op. cit*.

[12] Josef P. Widyatmadja, "*Imperial Republic and the People Movement in Asia-Africa," in Glocal in the Market Place*, ed., by Wati Longchar (Jorhat: ETE-WCC/CCA, 2005), pp. 101-103.

[13] http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/24/asia/jakarta-indonesia-explosion/index.html, 13.6.2017.

[14] The Bible in the Iban language in Sarawak.

[15] Josef.P. Widyatmadja, *op.cit.,* p. 102

[16] Renthy Keitzar, "Christian Peacemaking," in *No More Guns! People's Struggle for Justice* ed. Wati Longchar (Jorhat: ETC, 2006), p. 3.

[17] Josef P. Widyatmadja, "*Imperial Republic and the People Movement in Asia-Africa*," pp. 103-106.

[18] Press Released of Indigenous Conference on Indigenous Peoples' Theologies in the Search for Ecumenism in the 21st Century, a conference organized by Just and Inclusive Communities Programme of the World Council of Churches in partnership with Yu-Shan Theological College & Seminary, Hualien, Taiwan, 16-20 September, 2012.

Chapter Thirteen

CULTURE OF JUST-PEACE PRAXIS FOR BUILDING INVLUSIVE COMMUNITY

(a)

Salted Praxis Life for Building Inclusive Community (Mark. 8:27-10:52)

"Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you season it?
Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another"(Mark 9:50)

Mark 8:27 – 10:52 is a self-contained unit dealing with Peter's Christological confession, the transfiguration and Jesus' prediction/teachings on the passion of the Son of Man and their implications on the nature and task of discipleship. In 9: 43-47, Mark says that a disciple should be willing to sacrifice everything to enter the kingdom of God. The last two verses (vv 49, 50), focus on the significance of "salt" and concludes with an imperative clause, which states: "Be at peace with one another". It implies that the community of the disciples should constantly be engaged in peace building for all.[1] Mark presents the words of vv 42 – 50 as sayings of Jesus to underline its authority. Since the underlying focus of the sub-unit, 9: 33-50 is on the Kingdom of God and peace, the passage gives rise to some possible questions. Why did the writer of this passage passionately focus his ultimate attention on the concern of "to enter life" (vv. 44, 45), "*to enter the Kingdom of God*" and conclude with an exhortation to make peace? Who are the people addressed? What is their socio-cultural location?

Why is the metaphorical expression of salt used? What kind of *community* and *socio-political order* did Mark visualize?

Kingdom of God and Marginalized People

To focus our reflection on the concern for building communities of peace for all from such biblical perspective, it is imperative for us to draw out the significance of the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, and its elucidation and demonstration in the entire life of Jesus. It is within that parameter that we can have 'peace-talk', involve and participate in the process of building communities of peace for all. The Kingdom or the Reign of God is a metaphor or symbol expressing God's sovereignty over all. The richness of the symbol makes it difficult to define it by this or that definition. Rather the entire life and ministry of Jesus characterizes its content and its meaning. In the same way, there are different ways of biblical notion of peace according to its situation and context. The fact is that any discussion on the Reign of God inevitably leads to peace and vice versa. They overlap each other and cannot be disassociated. For our purpose of reflections, we may highlight the following points:[2]

The Reign of God

The Reign of God is God's savings acts in history, God's creation and sustaining of the world, God's lordship over the nations, God's promise of ultimate salvation and peace.

- It is the experience of God's salvation/redemptive acts in history. The people in the margins like the slaves, the poor, the defenseless were exploited by the kings and ruling classes (e.g., Exod. 3:7-11). But such would not be the case under God's reign. Hence, it is good news for the marginalized people (Matt 11:5; Luke 4:18).
- It also means bringing healing/wholeness to all dimensions of social and personal/physical 'sicknesses'. This is reflected in Jesus' exorcisms and healings (Matt. 12: 28; Luke. 11:20), which are salvation stories. The sick, disabled and excluded ones are not only cured but

also are given access to the community (Mark. 2:1-12; Luke. 13:10-17).

- Jesus' siding and associating with social and religious outcasts are type of "healing" in that he draws such people into the circle of acceptance and dissolves their alienation (Matt. 11:19; Luke. 15:1).
- Jesus' association with women, Samaritans, Gentiles proclaims and demonstrates the building of inclusive community breaking down gender and narrow divisive barriers, and the in breaking of the reign of God.
- Jesus as the Davidic Messiah ushers in the anticipated reign of God, a reign characterized by forgiveness and reconciliation, by universal justice and peace.
- To establish the Reign of God, which includes building communities of peace for all is the transformation not only of the human heart but also of the oppressive social structures that dehumanize and exclude the poor and defenseless from meaningful and legitimate participation in the human community.
- There is an "already now but not yet" character in Jesus' proclamation and demonstration of the reign of God, hence it cannot be reduced and identified to temporal and spatial categories of fixed realm. It is both qualitative and quantitative experience of healing and reconciliation effected through the grace of God. While the future coming of the Reign of God means a profound transformation of all human reality and is a transcending experience beyond space and time, the in breaking of the transcendent reality through the mission of Jesus enables people to respond to God's offer of salvation and to be affected by it now, within history.
- To enter the reign of God is to experience God. It is to experience God's peace, *shalom*, which denotes the very presence of God. This is reflected in Jesus' *abba* experience (Mark. 14:36).

Peace

- This leads to the biblical notion of peace that implies a right relationship with God, which entails forgiveness, reconciliation and union. It is a gift of God as a saving activity of God leading the oppressed and marginalized people to freedom.
- It is the unity and harmony of the human community, and the restoration of right order among all powerful and powerless and with all God's creation.
- But the biblical notion of peace has an eschatological dimension, a final full realization of God's salvation when all creation will be made whole.
- At the same time, the other meanings of peace, such as an individual's sense of well-being, or cessation of armed hostilities are also to be found in the biblical notion of peace.
- Peace is built upon justice and fidelity to God's law, and hence entails obedience to God's law/covenant (Lev. 26:3-16. Ezek. 37:26).
- A true peace, which is always more than the absence of war, flourishes in a social order that is founded on truth, built on justice, enlivened by love and refined in freedom.

Just-Peace Praxis amidst Conflicts

Why was the concern of building community of peace for all so central in Mark's writing? To understand Mark's struggle for building community of peace, it is important to see his context. Mark was engaged with four major conflicting groups which resulted untold misery among the poor people:

1) The Jewish-Roman war: Palestine was torn apart by the Jewish-Roman war. Once again, the Jewish Palestine became subjected to Roman Empire in 63 B.C.E. Rome remained in firm control over the matters of foreign policy and serious domestic dissent (e.g. capital punishment). Heavy imposition

of tribute to a foreign power offended religious sensibilities, which ignited zealous feelings of revolt, and hopes for divine revolutionary intervention. For example, a war broke out between the Jews and the Greeks in coastal city of Caesarea. In 66 C.E., Florus, under the order from Emperor Nero, attempted to expropriate funds from the temple treasury in Jerusalem. Mass demonstrations resulted in which Jewish civilians were ruthlessly crushed by Roman troops, who also tried to storm the temple. The religious sanctity was violated. Such resistance movements against the Roman power became a threat for people's peaceful co-existence, especially people in the margins.

2) Conflict between Jewish nationalists (Zealots) and Jewish-Roman collaborators: The conflict between Jewish elites who collaborated with the Roman colonizers and Zealots became a threat to common people's peaceful co-existence. Often the Jewish-Roman collaborators became the target of attack everywhere. Like suicide bomber or terrorist tactics in today's context, a popular form of armed resistance was urban political assassination which was called *sicarii* (dagger man). The *sicarii* directed their attacks against fellow Jews, not against Roman soldiers or officials. It is said that they employed three tactics to fight with the collaborators:

a) selective, symbolic assassinations;
b) more general assassinations along with plundering of the property of the wealthy and powerful; and
c) kidnapping for ransom.

These tactics were adopted to create fear among the people. There were also people's movements struggling for justice:

a) Pharisaic resistance – Pharisaic resistance to Herod involved the refusal to swear an oath to the emperor and the removal of the Roman golden eagle from the temple gate;
b) Strike against Pilate's policy – resistance movement

against Pilate's allowance of Roman standards into Jerusalem in violation of the prohibition of image that provoked mass outcry;

c) Agricultural strike – when the Emperor Galus Caligula attempted to erect a statute of himself in Jerusalem temple, the protest went on for forty days. The peasants refused to sow the next year's crops.

Likewise, series of violent clashes and cycles of revenge took place between the Romans and the Jews, and between the nationalists and Jewish collaborators during the time of Mark. This affected peaceful co-existence among the poor people.

3) War of apocalyptic myths: Besides Jewish-Roman war and the Zealot revolt against the Romans, Mark was also caught up in "war of apocalyptic myths" with messianic pretenders. Many bandit leaders, who cultivated a particular loyalty among the poor, presented themselves as messianic, kingly figures commissioned to usher in God's kingdom which was a revolutionary movement against Rome. For example, a Samaritan prophet led an armed group to Mount Gerizim and promised to unveil "holy vessels" buried by Moses. But Pilate crushed the prophet and his followers before they could ascend the mountain. Two decades later, a prophet named Theudas began a movement, promising to part the waters of the Jordan. Though unarmed, this movement was also militarily dealt by the Roman forces. Interestingly, many conflicts between the Jewish and Romans at that time were centered on the issue of temple. But the Romans burned it to the ground and looted it. The city was plundered, the rebel leaders executed, and a great part of the population enslaved. The revolts were mercilessly crushed by the Romans.

4) Mass rebellion: Mark also lived in a world where the poor, farmers and fisher folks were oppressed in various ways. They were made to pay multiple taxes to the Romans, to the local political leaders like Herod, to the temple and to the tax collectors. Increase of debt among the marginalized poor was

one of the key problems that contributed to tension and unrest. The aristocracy increased the capital through usury. The poor who took loans were rarely able to meet the established terms. Peasants were reduced to selling off or forfeiting their farms and becoming part of a rural proletariat of growing size and volatile political ambitions. That was one of the reasons why the rebels led by Eleazer burnt the public archives where the records of debt were kept. Tension between urban and rural communities grew. The more Hellenistic urbanism penetrated in Palestine, the deeper the contradictions and imbalance grew between the different needs of city and village. While the urban elites, masters of the great states consume far more luxury goods and taxes, the living condition of rural masses deteriorated due to various forms of exploitations which ignited mass rebellion.

In addition, there was neglect of persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups. Those lacking bodily wholeness like the lepers, the blind, the lame and the eunuchs were considered unholy, and excluded even if they were Israelites. It is in this conflicting situation that Mark exhorted peace makers that peace is the situation in which God's kingdom is realized. It is characterized by freedom and fellowship, friendship, forgiveness, respect, reconciliation, love and justice. It is an active praxis.

Salted Praxis Life

To make the Gospel of Jesus relevant and contextual to his audience, Mark used the metaphorical expression of salt. In the ancient world, salt was valued as gold in today's usage. The Greeks called "salt" "divine" (*theion*). It is said that the Roman soldiers were given salt as salary because of its high value. Both the words 'salary' and 'soldier' came from Greek root '*sal*'. Jews used salt for purification (I Kings 2: 19-23). When the salt was mixed with incense, the sacrificial elements became pure and holy (Exod. 30:35). During the time of Jesus, people associated salt with four special values:

a) ***Preservation:*** There was no refrigerator at the time of Jesus. The climatic condition of Palestine was not suitable to keep food for a long time. Yet people need to preserve food during wars and famine. Salt solved that problem. It was used as a preservative to keep things, particularly food, from going rotten. The fishing community in Palestine heavily depended on salt to preserve fish.

b) ***Healing:*** As mentioned earlier, both the Jews and the Romans were constantly engaged in war and civil unrest. Soldiers were wounded. There was no medical facility like today. Salt was considered as an antiseptic and they used it as one of the best medicines for healing wounds.

c) ***Purification:*** The Romans held the view that salt was the purest of all things, because it comes from the purest of all things, the sun and the seas. According to Jewish practice, every sacrifice must be salted before it was offered to God on the altar (Lev. 2:13). Sacrificial salt was called the salt of the covenant (Num. 18:19; 2 Chro. 13:5). Salt made the sacrifice acceptable to God. It purifies and makes things acceptable to God. Hence, salt had a strong religious significance.

d) Due to its purifying, sustaining and antiseptic qualities, salt became an *emblem of fidelity and friendship/loyalty* amongst the West Asian Nations (Ezra 4:14). To have "eaten of his salt" and thus partaken of his hospitality, was and still is regarded by the Arabs as a token or pledge of eternal amity. Hence, in the Bible it is used as an emblem of the covenant, thus 'a covenant of salt' (Num. 18:19; 2 Chro. 13:5).

Therefore, presenting the Kingdom of God by using salt metaphor, Mark placed building communities of peace as an imperative social responsibility. He put peacemaking in praxis. Salt must be "in you" to discern divine wisdom. Mark redirected the fervor of his community so that their expectation of God's imminent intervention would encourage a "Jesus"

response of transformative service and sacrifice rather than a "Zealot" response of military engagement. Armed rebellion does not bring peace.

Mark's Model of Just-Peace Praxis

In a context where communities were driven with all sorts of political, economic, social and religious conflicts, a salted praxis alone can bring a lasting peaceful community. Peace with the other is a concrete way of experiencing peace with God. The kingdom community visualized by Jesus and sought to be realized by him is a community of peace for all. It is life marked with abundance and 'taste', shared by the people in this world. It is the peace and tranquility of life, of abundant life. But this abundance, for Mark, does not necessarily mean material abundance, but abundance of life, of freedom, of love, of life, of relationship, of joy, of sharing, of mutual self-gift and service.

Mark challenged the value system maintained by the colonizers, zealots, collaborators and those who claim to be prophets by redirecting the Kingdom of God by comparing the follower of Jesus Christ with salt. Mark challenged them to respond to enmity with love. It is a challenge to use moral force that is more powerful than physical force. Physical force can control and dominate without justice. But it does not ensure freedom of humanity and it cannot change the hearts and transform persons. It also cannot build relationship and form community of peace for all.

While speaking about building communities of peace for all, though Mark recognized God's preferential option for the poor in his liberating act, he did not suggest that once the rich and the powerful are overthrown and the poor and the oppressed take over, there will be peace. Rather, Mark speaks of a radical transformation of society, based on a different set of values – values of the Kingdom of God, namely justice and fellowship, freedom and humility, love and service. His goal was not to make the rich poor and the poor rich, but to create a

society of equals. He stood for the transformation of the unjust and unequal structures of the existing social order of his time based on Kingdom's value.

Mark's assertion "Be at peace with one another" puts peacemaking process in eschatological context. We can start realizing it here though there is no guarantee that we will achieve it here totally. It means that building community of peace for all is a process, a continuing search and engagement. It is a journey that stretches out to an unending horizon. At times the fruits of our labour may not be visible or may be seen partially in divided communities. But the peace of the kingdom is like the seed growing in the ground even when we do not notice it (Mark 4: 26-27). There is hope and the divided communities, especially marginalized communities, will experience peace when we work for the transformation of unjust social structure.

Are we contributing in building a community of peace for all? We cannot be neutral. Certainly, we are either contributing to build up or raze down the community of peace. What Haldford E. Luccock commented during the post-World War II on Mark. 9.50 is relevant even today to make a critical assessment of our contribution to the task of building community of peace for all. He said:

> When Christians and the Christian church have lost the gospel of love, and unreservedly pronounced their blessing on carnage and violence, on things utterly opposed to Jesus' teaching and life, they have lost their salitness. When the church has denied the law of greatness through service, intent on drawing to itself and advantage and prestige, instead of going out in ministry, it is fit to be trodden under foot, like salt mixed with so much sand that its saltness is gone.[3]

(b)

Just-Peace Praxis in Agriculture Fields and Market Places

Mathew 13: 44-46

"*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in the field*" (Matt. 13:44a)

"*The kingdom of heaven is like merchant in search of fine pearls*" (Matt. 13:45)

The Gospel of Matthew 13:44-46 talks about two parables – (i) the parable of hidden treasure, (ii) the parable of pearl, and they are closely interrelated. The parables are said to be the shortest parables recorded in the Bible; two parables in just three verses or in three sentences. Perhaps, it was not necessary for Jesus to elaborate in detail since it was a common usage among the people. May be people were using the "hidden treasure" or "precious pearl" as household conversation. This could be the reason why the other gospel writers also did not feel it necessary to record it. But both parables carry deep theological meanings about God's Reign and the responsibility of the peace makers.

Jesus tried to re-explain the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven (God's reign) specifically to his disciples. Note verse 36. These parables were told only to his trusted disciples, not to others who were following Jesus. So let us imagine that Jesus is telling to Christians alone or more specifically to peace makers. Citing the parables of hidden treasure and fine pearl, Jesus is reminding his disciples – What is God's reign all about?, Why do we need to sacrifice for God's reign?, What and where do we have to sacrifice for God's reign? What are the costs involved in witnessing God's reign?

During the time of Jesus, it was a common practice to bury valuables like gold, ornaments under the ground to protect from the hands of untrusted neighbors, thieves or robbers. They used to bury it before departing for battle or

get on long journeys involving several days, months and even years. If they returned safely, they would reclaim their buried treasure. Unfortunately, if they die in the battle field or failed to return home due to some unknown reasons, the location of the valuables would remain a secret. In such cases the hidden treasure belonged to the person who owned the land. Because of this, there were some people known as "treasure hunters" during the time of Jesus. The one who discovered the treasure must purchase the land to become the rightful owner. If the person takes it without purchasing the land then he/she would be considered as a thief. In Matthew 13: 44, Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, hidden in a field, that a person found and hid. Then because of joy he went and sold all that he had and bought that field.'" For the sake of hidden treasure, the person gave up everything until he had only one thing – the hidden treasure.

Verses 45-46, again, underline the same message. Verse 45: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he found a pearl of great value, he went out and sold everything he had and bought it." Pearl was considered to be one of the most precious things one can own it. For the sake of the pearl, he gave up everything and finally he is left with nothing except the pearl.

In spite of teaching and reminding them time and again, the disciples of Jesus were still thinking that God's reign is an earthly political kingdom where God would establish a mighty kingdom and rule over the nations with great might and power. The King would deliver Israel from all kinds of bondages and make Israel a mighty kingdom. Indeed, they expected God's reign in terms of exercise of power and authority. Jesus refuted the disciples' understanding of God's reign citing the parables of the hidden treasure and pearl. The contexts and the cost of discipleship that Jesus presented here are very exciting and striking.

The parables are presented in two contexts. The first parable is presented in the context of field. Agriculture was

the major occupation of the people at the time of Jesus. It was in the agriculture field that a large number of people were engaged and spent their life, they worked whole day in the field, earned their living, and shared their products. Since agricultural land was so precious for the sustenance of life, the powerful people tried to take away the land from the poor through unjust means. It was the place where farmers were also cheated by the colonizers. The same situation is found among indigenous communities everywhere today. But the message is very clear. God's reign is to be experienced in our daily life activities, not somewhere else in life after death. It is to be experienced amidst daily activities of the people in the present world. The second parable is presented in the context of busy market setting. We all go to market to buy our needs. People buy and sell their goods and products in the market. We cannot imagine surviving without market in today's world. Market is also a place where lot of cheating, exploitation, manipulation, adulteration of food and corruption takes place. It is a place where we think of money, profit and gain only. We also encounter many different kinds of people such as drunkards, drug abusers, sex workers, robbers, tourists, honest people, young and old, men and women of diverse religions, races and cultures in the market. Again this affirms that God's reign is here and it is to be experienced in the daily busy and multi complex public life.

A Latin American theologian namely, Gustavo Gutierrez, said, "We worship God by doing justice to the poor". We often think that we can worship God within the four walls of the church. This is not only narrow, but also wrong understanding of worship. The church is not only the worship place, but the whole world is temple of God. In fact, the true worship place is our agriculture fields, busy market places, offices and our work places. It is in our daily existential places that we are called to testify the message of God's reign. It is in those places that we must act out truth and justice. That is called worship. Here Jesus is reiterating that God is to be found in the midst of the

people especially among the poor who are oppressed, rejected and abandoned. It is here that people are called to worship God by doing justice. *We worship God by doing justice to the poor*.

The focus of the parables is the value or worth of the hidden treasure and pearl. The value cannot be compared with other earthly things that we own. The reign of God which Jesus is talking about is not comparable with earthly wealth, power and authority. If you want to experience or become the bearers of God's reign, we must deny ourselves, empty ourselves, and we must disassociate ourselves from desires of having more and more wealth or desires to become richer at the cost of the poor, and desires to exercise more power and authority for one's self glory. Humility, sacrifice and commitment to justice to the poor are what is require in God's reign. These values need to be exercised in public life.

The second intention of Jesus is more challenging. He is referring here to costly discipleship. By re-explaining the reign of God using these parables, Jesus throws an open challenge to his disciples – Are you willing to sacrifice your wealth and life for the sake of God's Kingdom? Are you willing to stop unjust practices? Are you willing to be humble? We have to face the same challenge and questions even today. Are we willing to sacrifice our wealth, our power and position for the Kingdom's sake? If we are willing to do so, it involves high risk in life. We have to face many oppressive system, well-structured and institutionalized military power, political system, cooperate multi-nationals, patriarchy, tribalism. These are the evil forces that hinder celebration of life among indigenous people and other marginalized communities. We also have to face organized crimes, unending competition of consumerism, and excessive exploitation of natural resources.

For Kingdom's sake, Mark was dragged to death behind a chariot, Luke was crucified, Stephen was stoned to death, James was beheaded, Thaddeus was crucified and shot to death with arrows, Nathaniel was skinned alive and then crucified, Philip was hanged in a column of the Temple, Andrew was crucified

in Egypt, Thomas was speared to death while preaching in India, Simon was sawed to pieces while still alive, Paul was beheaded while he was still talking. They were all murdered in full public view to threaten people not to proclaim the reign of God. They all sacrificed their lives because they valued God's reign more than earthly pleasure, wealth and power. Likewise many missionaries, many church leaders, many aborigines/ indigenous church leaders, ordinary people have been killed, jailed, tortured for the sake of God's reign in Taiwan, US, Canada, India, New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere.

(c)

Just-Peace Praxis Amidst Storms

Text: Mark 4:35-41

He (Jesus) woke up and rebuked the wind,
and said to the sea, "Peace! Be Still" (Mark 4:39)

Jesus from time to time would withdraw from the crowd and go to the mountain or lonely places for prayer. On this particular day, Jesus was tired. The whole day Jesus argued with the scribes on various issues. As usual the crowd was around Jesus and his disciples. He wanted to be freed from the crowd and scribes. Jesus and his disciples went into a boat and went away leaving the crowd behind.

It was on the Sea of Galilee. It is also known as Lake of Gennesaret. The Sea was about 13 km wide and 19 km long so it would take at least two hours to make the crossing. Since Jesus was very tired, he took a cushion and soon went to sleep, then suddenly a violent storm arose. The Sea of Galilee is situated on the foot of two mountains which serves as tunnel to carry strong winds. Often winds sweep down on the lake violently agitating its water. Jesus and his disciples thus faced with a sudden storm in the midst of the sea. The storm filled the boat with water, threatened to drown it. They were all terrified and felt themselves helpless.

But Jesus was sleeping. They shouted at Jesus, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea "Peace! Be Still". Amazingly the storm stopped. Then Jesus turned to his disciples and said, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

The Boat

The boat has a very strong theological significance. Many

ecumenical organizations like WCC, regional ecumenical bodies like CCA, NCCs use the symbol of `ship' or `boat' to signify the Greek word *`oikumene'* or *`oikos'* – the house of all inhabited world. They use this symbol to signify that life is on journey, the ecumenical movement as people's movement for unity, peace and justice is on journey. The boat can be compared with our congregations and institutions too. Boat signifies struggling together. In an airplane or bus, the driver or pilot is in whole control of the aircraft or bus. It is the driver who drives and takes the passengers to the destination. The role of passenger is not to disturb the driver or pilot. Passengers should sit quietly on their respective seats until they reach the destination. But on a boat, everyone is a driver. Everyone has to hold the rowing stick and row the boat turn by turn; while others are rowing some should take care of the mast in the boat so that the boat goes to the right direction. With this collective efforts, they reach the destination. A popular saying goes, "If you want to run fast, run alone, but if you want to reach the destination together, hold each other's hand and run together." "Boat" signifies struggling together.

Sudden Storm

Life is a journey. The community is on the move. In our journey of life, storm is inevitable - sometimes sudden storm, sometimes big storm, sometimes mild storm. The churches or institutions sometimes face the storm of financial crisis, storm of disagreement over various issues, storm of the lack of support, storm of misconceptions and misunderstanding, etc. Today Christian communities all over the world face the storm of war against terrorism and religious fundamentalism. US war on terrorism has created storm all over the world. President Donald Trump's declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and his decision to shift US embassy to Jerusalem has created storm among many nations, especially in Palestine. Many innocent people have been killed, and continue to be killed particularly in the Middle East countries. The storm

of violence continues in Palestine. Many minority Christians are under the storm of attack and persecution in Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and India. Many poor people continue to die of starvation. Some years ago, the world leaders had Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference in Bangkok. For this conference, it is reported that the Thai Govt. spent about 300 million bhat in decoration besides millions of bhat in security arrangement. In the midst of the conference on economic cooperation, a Thai woman delivered a child and left the child in the trash of the Robinson market. She did not have money to feed the child. With the hope that some wealthy persons will see and pick up the child, she left the child in the trash. She wanted her child to live a better life. Some people saw the child and took the child to hospital and gave the name APEC, but unfortunately the child died. This looks like an isolated incident, but we have to recognize that unjust global economic structure make many people starve to death. There is injustice everywhere. We face many storms in our lives. At some point or another, all of us are afloat on a troubled sea. Often experience storm of uncertainty, rejection, storm of failure, storm of lack of necessitates, even physical sickness and many others. How do we know that God is amidst the storms?

Jesus said, "Peace, Be Still'

When we are amidst storm, we often remember the words of Jesus "Peace, Be Still". We want Jesus to wake up and solve the problem. But we often forget the other questions of Jesus, "Are you afraid?" "Have you no faith?" Storm in our lives, in our community, in our church will not stop just by shouting. The storm cannot be controlled just by screaming from the back end of a boat. Faith in God involves three things: pray for peace, speak for peace and act for peace. The biblical understanding of just-peace is not just absence of conflict, war, or having food to eat. But it means justice.

Four Values of Just-Peace Praxis

1. Cultivate the value of respect of others. Christians still struggle to love people of other faiths. We talk about respect of otherness but just within the four walls of the church. History has proved that Christians are one of the most violent communities in the world. It is all because of disrespect of others.
2. Cultivate the spirit of working together. We need to co-operate with other faith communities, different tribes and races. Christians alone cannot bring peace.
3. Cultivate the value of sharing. A Japanese saying goes like this, "Rice in the mouth keeps the mouth shut". If we examine the doctrine of the world economic policies, the rich economic resources are used as weapons against the poor nations. The ruthless dictators make sure that people are fed well, so that people do not resist them. Singapore, Korea and Japan obey all what American says and remain silent against the American oppressive policies because they do not want to lose their economic supremacy in Asia. India, Pakistan, Thailand, Philippines do not want to speak against Americans because they want favour from American and our political leaders fear that speaking against American policies will have negative economic impact in their countries. We deny justice for the sake of profit. The Bible demands a more equitable distribution of the world's resources, not the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few. Market competition is definitely not the way of the Kingdom because it uses human beings as cheap labourers and does not respect humans as person with dignity. The Bible upholds a community where justice is expressed in equality and sharing, and affirms a community economic system with reciprocal sharing and hospitality. A just sharing is required not only in global context, but also in our own local context. Without willingness to share, there is no justice and peace. The storm of violence, poverty, deprivation in the world cannot

be stopped both in the local and international contexts if people do not cultivate a culture of sharing.

4. Promote value of forgiving. We often hear people saying, "Forgive and forget" is the only way if we want to bring reconciliation among different warring groups. Forgiveness is very important, but if we forget certain things then it would become dangerous. In Germany, the Castle Church in Wittenberg where Luther posted his 95 theses on its door in protest against Catholic Church's practice of indulgences, celebrated the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth in 1983. During the 12th century, the Jews were called `pigs' and treated them like pigs. To symbolize the contempt for the Jews, in the back side of the churches there was a curving of pigs made during the 12th century. When the members of the Castle church were renovating the old church, the issue came up whether they should destroy the curving of pigs. They decided to retain it just as it was so that people would not forget that the churches in their history had discriminated against the Jews. Hiroshima holocaust should not be forgotten, so that human beings will not commit another Hiroshima disaster. Bitter history is a powerful living reminder for change and transformation. The power of forgiveness comes alive, when we do not forget the past bitter memories. Forgiveness is the power that binds people together.

In our journey of life, Jesus is in our midst struggling with us although we may sometimes feel that he is sleeping. Sudden storm can be overcome if people in the boat respect each other, work together, care for each other, and forgive each other. We are called to be living reminders of Christ who brings us just-peace on this earth.

Endnotes

[1] J. W. Wenham, '*The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.74, says that the Greek "Present

Imperative denotes a command or entreaty to *continue* to do an action, or to do it *repeatedly*" (Emphasis not mine). (*eireneite* present imperative of *eireneuo* – to be peaceable meaning to keep on building communities of peace for all).

[2] Cf. Donald Senior, "Reign of God," in Joseph A. Komonchal, Mary Collin and Dermont A. Lane, *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Bangalore: TPI, 1999), pp. 851-861: Judith A Dwyer, "Peace," *Ibid*., pp. 748-753.

[3] Halford E. Luccock, "The Gospel According to St. Mark," in *The Interpreter's Bible: General Articles on the New Testament, the Gospel According to St. Mathew, the Gospel according to St. Mark*, Vol. VII (New York: Abingdon Press), p.151.

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