

Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission by K. C. Abraham

Rev. Dr. K. C. Abraham is a presbyter of the Church of south India and a leading Third World theologian. He is director of the South Asia theological Research Institute, Bangalore, India and director of the board of theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College. The book was published by Christava Sahitya Samithi, Tiruvalle, April 1996, and is used by permission of the publisher. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

(ENTIRE BOOK) Traditional patterns of mission fail to see the emerging needs and challenges of the Third World -- endemic poverty, marginalisation, ecological destruction, and globalisation.. The author suggests new paradigms to do theology and to formulate response in mission in the face of these grave realities. He shows that commitment to life affirming values and structures are integral to obedience to Christ, who lived "in solidarity" with the oppressed humanity.

Introduction

The perspective on mission is still a point of debate. There is need for a careful assessment of the style and purpose of mission in the emerging context of a pluriform society. The praxis of mission is closely related to the discovery of who Christ is among us and who he is for.

Forward by James H. Cone

Although Rev. Dr. K. C. Abraham writes to and for the people of India, his message has meaning for all Christians and other justice seeking people who are committed to creating a global village that protects the rights of the poor and provides space for the affirmation of their dignity.

Chapter 1: Perspectives on Mission

A discussion of models of mission that have emerged in the modern period as the Church responds to the challenges of other faiths and socio-political realities in India. These models include Church Discipleship, Proclamation, Liberation, and Dialogue.

Chapter 2: Mission and Ministry as Celebration and Sharing of Life

In India there is an awakening among the poor in all the religions to their dignity and selfhood which has been suppressed by age-old traditions and culture. They are demanding a critical review of the fundamentals of their faiths from the perspective of liberation.

Chapter 3: Towards a Theology of Mission in Asia

When mission is directed towards the organization of the poor or when it has resulted in creating a new consciousness among the oppressed about their rights, then in India it is accused as being anti-national. We have two choices: to take seriously the subversive character of mission and face its consequence, or to carry on with activities -- charitable, developmental, and others -- which will not cause any tremor in the existing system of things.

Chapter 4: Liberative Solidarity: Church in Witness and Reconciliation

In order to evolve an alternate form of development which is wholistic and more humane, we need to listen to the experiences of the indigenous and tribal people -- their communitarian life and their bond with the earth. But, by and large, our churches are mere spectators, incapable of responding to their needs.

Chapter 5: Peace And Justice In Indian Context

The religions of India should see the relevance of the new secular framework that is emerging. It is based on certain values which they all together can affirm -- the values of justice, equality and participation.

Chapter 6: Mission in the Context of Endemic Poverty and Affluence

We need a spirituality that is inclusive rather than exclusive, active as well as receptive, oriented to the coming of God's Kingdom of righteousness and freedom throughout the world. We need a spirituality of liberation that will open us increasingly to a life of solidarity with others, especially with the poor.

Chapter 7: From Diakonia to Political Responsibility

The Church is called to strengthen the secular/civil base of politics, to deepen its commitment to the poor and marginalised, ensuring justice for all, especially the weaker sections, to give a prophetic criticism against the government when it perpetuates violence and oppression, to join with others in evolving a paradigm of development that is ecologically sound.

Chapter 8: A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis

1. The connection between economic exploitation and environmental degradation is seen clearly in the deforestation issue. 2. Unjust treatment of the planet by humans is one of the principal causes of the ecological crisis. 3. The uneven distribution, control and use of natural resources are serious justice issues. 4. The fast depletion of the natural (non-renewable) resources today raises the question of our responsibility to future generations.

Chapter 9: Praxis and Mission - Implications for Theological

Education

Mission is now understood in a holistic sense. It is participation in the transforming and liberative work of God in God's creation. How can theological education help the church's participation in God's mission?

Chapter 10: Globalisation and Liberative Solidarity

An analysis of the phenomenon of globalisation and the facing of some issues that are pertinent in facing its challenges. The author provides a model of Christian response, namely liberative solidarity, that is rooted in the experience and spirituality of the poor.

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[return to religion-online](#)

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Introduction

Numerous articles and books have been written on mission. To add another book on this topic is to run into the risk of repeating all too familiar ideas. But the attempt can be justified for many reasons.

First, the perspective on mission is still a point of debate. Some of the traditional patterns of mission are becoming irrelevant to meet the emerging needs and challenges of our situation. In this collection of essays many such issues have been analysed. Developments in science and technology communication systems economic policies and practices, the emergence of market as the altar at which all are required to offer their sacrifices and the globalisation process -- all

these have tremendous impact on the lives of our people. We are also aware of other issues such as the ecological crisis, marginalization of weaker sections and communalism that distorts the essence of all religions. Organized movements of people for identity and justice also raise challenges to the Church's mission. Therefore the questions that are raised on the proclamation of the Gospel directed exclusively to the renewal of individual souls is also inadequate. A wholistic message that brings all our relationships into the orbit of divine reality alone will be meaningful for today

Second, there is need for a careful assessment of the style and purpose of mission in the emerging context of a pluriform society. In fact mission is no more a Christian word. It is widely used by people of other faiths and secular strategists. A few years ago when Rajiv Gandhi started his campaign on science and technology he constituted a body called technology mission. When the U.S.A. launched its war against Iraq it described it as a mission to liberate Kuwait. We are also familiar with the Ramakrishna Mission and missions in other faiths. In these usages mission is conceived as an activity designed to achieve a result. It is a programme to win

others to your point of view or to your side by persuasion and even by coercion.

Unfortunately this prevailing notion of a propagandist mission has failed to capture the authentic message of the Gospel of Jesus. It has distorted the message. This is not a biblical concept either. The word is from the Latin version of the biblical word "sending." Missionary is 'apostle' and mission is "apostolate." We are called to be messengers of God. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:27). The New Testament also uses the word "witness" to denote the outward expression of the life of the Church. The emphasis is not on activity -- although activity is not totally absent -- but on life and its relationships.

A recovery of this New Testament meaning of mission is necessary to ward off much of the distortions that have come into our understanding of the Church's mission. In other words, Christian mission is not so much what we do as who we are as God's children. It is a life lived in response to God's purposes for us and for all his creation. "Mission is as concrete as the life of a people" (Legrand, p. 144). I believe that a reformulation of mission as faith response alone can give an authentic basis for pluralism. One's response to

one's faith is not directed towards denying other faith responses; rather it is always concerned with building a world in which all God's children with their different gifts could praise God the Creator.

Third, the praxis of mission is closely related to the discovery of who Christ is among us and for us. Thanks to the emphasis of liberation theologians, we see Jesus in his social and cultural environment and not as part of a doctrinal formulation. As Dorothy Solle writes,

If we look at the paradigm of liberation theology, we find there an understanding of Jesus which strives for neither objectification of the mystery in dogma nor for subjectivising in personal appropriation. The liberation theologies mention the mystery of Jesus in his historical existence. They say of him that he was poor, hungry, forsaken, subversive, and out of his mind; that he was a worker, a nobody without papers, a carpenter, unemployed, a political prisoner, tortured. They attempt to begin where Jesus began, where he lived, where the people met him-not in churches but in everyday life and that

means in misery He is not recognisable by his halo. (Solle :An Introduction to Theology, p. 114).

It is this discovery of Jesus that is at the centre of our discussion on Mission in this book. To respond to this Jesus in the concrete is to embark on a costly form of discipleship. In fact, there is simplicity about this Jesus. But that simplicity is offensive to our life-style.

The papers in this book have been presented at various occasions, and published in various journals. They have been edited to avoid obvious repetition. But some of the ideas are repeated and I ask the reader to bear with me. A wide range of concerns are raised and the reader may miss a coherent presentation of a theology of mission. The first four chapters may provide a theological basis for mission. Included in them is a discussion on different paradigms of mission with the first chapter giving a general framework to it. A selected number of issues have been dealt with in the rest of the articles. Two themes that run through these inflections are "Life" and "Solidarity." Mission is celebration of God's gift of life. "I have come in order that you may have life - life in all its fullness." (John 10:10). Ours commitment to life-affirming

values and structures are integral to our obedience to Christ.

The solidarity with people, especially with the suffering, is the way to live out mission.

“Jesus also died outside the city... Let us, then, go to him outside the camp and share his shame” (Heb. 13:12,13).

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[return to religion-online](#)

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Forward by James H. Cone

K.C. Abraham is uniquely qualified to write about the new developments in mission, ecology, theology and their interconnectedness. As the President of the Ecumenical Association of the Third World Theologians (EATWOT) and Director of the South Asia Theological Research institute Bangalore, he has traveled throughout the Third World (Asia, Africa, and Latin America), participating with grassroots people in churches and other activist groups as they struggled to create a new future for themselves. He has also traveled widely in the First World (Europe and North America) where he has participated in conference and workshops, visited churches and theological schools, debated with theologians

and economists, and dialogued with lay people and pastors about issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. This book is the result of many years of reflection, defined by his solidarity with the poor in their struggles against local elites in the Third World and the corporate rich in the First World.

Although K.C. (as we have come to know him in EATWOT) writes to and for the people of India, his message has meaning for all Christians and other justice seeking people who are committed to creating a global village that protects the rights of the poor and provides space for the affirmation of their dignity. His main theme is mission -- the very heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But K.C. provides new insights into its meaning, derived primarily from the God of life whose liberating presence knows no bounds. For K.C., mission is not just what has been traditionally called evangelism or the proclamation of the Gospel to the unbeliever. Neither is mission simply dialogue with people of other faiths in the hope of bringing them to Jesus. Mission is making solidarity with poor people in their flight for justice. To proclaim Jesus Christ without bearing witness to the justice he brings is to distort the emancipatory power of the gospel. We must not forget the

words Jesus took from the prophet Isaiah as the definition of his mission: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lords favor’ (Luke: 4:18-19 NRSV).

Liberative solidarity, justice and peace, ecological crisis, loving mercy and spirituality -- these are the themes that resound throughout this text and in the life of K.C. Abraham. They tell us where he stands -- what the bottomline is for his perspective on the Gospel of Jesus. Since the poor have been the main victims of development, K.C. calls for an alternative vision of society one in which the rights of the poor are protected and their voices are heard.

Although these essays were written over a span of time and for different audiences, they are held together by K.Cs deep and passionate concern for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, This is a book that should be read and studied by churches, grassroots people, policy makers, theologians and others who are seeking to create a world that is safe for all.

[return to religion-online](#)

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Chapter 1: Perspectives on Mission

David Bosch, in an admirable book, Transforming Mission, has provided different paradigms of mission that have emerged in the life of the Church: Discipleship, Proclamation, Liberation, Dialogue and others. A paradigm shift takes place as the Church responds to the new situations and challenges. In India too we have evolved many different paradigms of mission as the Church seriously faced its task to respond to the specific challenges of the Indian context. The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of these paradigms and indicate the need for newer paradigms as we face newer challenges.

Proclamation of the Good News: Evangelism

Perhaps the earliest paradigm of mission may be characterised as evangelism; the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Missionary enterprise was guided by this model. When the Church of South India was formed, it declared that:

It is the primary duty of every member of the church to witness by life and word of Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners. This work of evangelisation may be done both individually and by groups, and should include special methods, such as lyrical preaching and the distribution of the scriptures and other evangelistic literature (Constitution: Ch. IV, Rule 1 and 26).¹

Even today this continues to be a model widely accepted by the members of the congregations. To act in obedience to the great commission, and to give money and time for direct evangelism is considered to be the primary duty of every Christian. While acknowledging the importance of proclamation in our work of evangelism we endeavour to keep an integral relation between work and deed. Although in the early pronouncements on mission a great deal of stress is placed on direct evangelism, a broader

framework for interpreting mission is discernible as the church faced new challenges.

Nationalism: Challenge of Hindu Renaissance

The nationalist movement, a movement whose specific purpose was the removal of foreign domination, provided a new context for the Church to rethink its mission. Nationalism was linked with a reassertion of Hinduism and its values. A response to the Hindu Renaissance was therefore, an integral part of Christian witness in modern India. A social issue that was widely discussed in regard to this is the attitude of Christians to other faiths and the relation of the Gospel to the claims of other religions. P. Chenchiah, who was committed to this task, articulates the need for a change in the Christian attitude to Hinduism in these words:

There was a type of convert in the past who hated Hinduism and surrendered himself wholeheartedly to what he supposed to be Christianity. The convert today regards Hinduism as his spiritual mother, who has nurtured him in a sense of spiritual values in the past. He discovers the supreme

value of Christ, not in spite of Hinduism but because Hinduism has taught him to discern spiritual greatness. For him, loyalty to Christ does not involve the surrender of reverential attitude towards the Hindu heritage.²

People like Chenchiah, V Chakkarai, A. J. Appasamy and others made the affirmation that the living forces of Hinduism could be “a positive key to the still inaccessible riches of Hinduism.”³ They were not content with a mere intellectual approach to Hinduism but wanted to enter into the spirit of Hindu religion with a desire to learn new things about their own faith and to express them on the basis of their encounter.

A positive attitude towards Hinduism and other faiths was based on the faith in the universal Lordship of Christ. The conviction widely shared by many Indian theologians was that God is already at work in whatever area of life the Christian is speaking to make the Gospel effective. P. D. Devanandan has expressed his conviction in the following words:

Is the preaching of the Gospel directed to the total annihilation of all religions other than Christianity? Will religions as

religions, and nations as nations, continue characteristically separate in the fullness of time when God would gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth?

Christian faith distinguishes between the Gospel of proclamation of the fulfillment of Gods promise of the Kingdom, and the hope in fulfillment of all religious faith, wherever it is found. Fulfillment in the second sense would mean that all sincere humans striving to reach out to God will indeed find favour with him.⁴

Paradigms of Mission Inculturation and Dialogue

The new-found theological conviction and a positive attitude towards other faiths have made distinct impact on the mission praxis. All have agreed that the missionary era directly or indirectly associated with colonial rule has come to an end. Mission was no more foreign mission, directed towards the conquest of a pagan culture and satanic religions. Mission, it was affirmed, is the witness of a community of faith to God's transforming act through Jesus Christ. Mission is not an aggressive propaganda but a way of life. Further, the Church became conscious of its alien

character and the need for becoming rooted in the soil of this country. The mission model that evolved during this period is **indigenisation** or **inculturation**.

Attempts were made to adopt Hindu symbols, architecture, and thought forms for worships and liturgy and also for communicating the Gospel. Amalorpavadas, a Roman Catholic theologian, has done some pioneering work in this area. He describes inculturation as:

The process by which the Church becomes really incarnated in every human group, society, culture and sharing, humble service and powerful witness to the Spirit of the Lord at work in the universe and dwelling in our heart. Having no culture of her own, she communicates with others and expresses herself through the human and social, cultural and religious signs of the people among whom she is incarnated.⁵

Inculturation for him and other theologians is incarnational. Culture has a broad meaning here. It stands for all aspects of life of people in a given context. The attempt at inculturation met with several criticisms. A majority of

Christians in India refused to accept this uncritically, with the result such attempts remained esoteric without the church owning it. Recently a fierce controversy was generated in the Church of South India over a prayer used in its Synod meeting that attempted to interpret the Christian Gospel through Hindu symbols and forms of worship used by the exponent of inculturation, taken from the higher forms -- Hinduism and Sanskritised Culture of the dominant community. They argue for a process of inculturation that takes seriously the symbols that emerge from the life and struggles of the oppressed. While inculturation is an attempt at rectifying some aspects, of the missionary era it has not sufficiently taken into account the class association of mission with colonial power. The cultural distortion of Christianity is to be seen as power distortion as well. Church and mission are closely associated with the dominant groups and their interest, the colonial powers in the past and the capitalist forces in the present.

Closely related to inculturation is the dialogue model. It is a process in which Christians with sensitive awareness of the religious heritage of others try to listen, share and to cooperate with them in building a common humanity, based on the values that are

germane to these faiths. The focus of inculturation model is on the life and worship of the Christian community. But in dialogue the emphasis is on shared values and on mission. Theological convictions that underlie dialogue are important. There is the affirmation:

a) That plurality and differences are God's gift and integral to the structure of God's mission. Differences should not divide us. They enhance the beauty and harmony of our life.

b) The centre of faith is a mystery we know only in part. Christ is ultimate for Christians. But the way they apprehend the meaning and interpret it are influenced by different cultural and social backgrounds. Only when these different perceptions are allowed to be in dialogical relationship can we begin to see the fullness of truth.

c) The Church is only an agent and a sign of the Kingdom of God. This presupposes that there are other signs and instruments. A report on a consultation on "Dialogue and Mission" held in Tambaram, Madras, clearly articulates this:

The mission of the Church,
Gods active purpose in
world history being carried
out by the Christian

movement, need not be,
and in fact we can see is
not, God's only mission in
the world.

This is theologically
certainly, more valid. For
it is truer to the God whom
we know, whom Jesus
Christ has revealed to us,
to recognise that he is
constantly and everywhere
at work; that his mission to
humankind cannot be, and
has not been, and is not
now, confined within the
limits of one geographical
segment or one
ecclesiastical organisation
or one historical or one
religious movement. The
mission of the church is
worldwide; but it is not
god's only mission. It is
not even his only
worldwide mission.
Anyone who accepts the
doctrine of the holy spirit,
without setting
ecclesiastical frontiers to
his activity already admits
this is theory, though many
have yet to see and feel it
in their hearts.⁶

An attitude of humility and
openness is the starting point for
genuine dialogue. We need to
listen to the other and be willing
to learn from others.

There are different forms of

dialogue. A comparative and critical examination of different perceptions of the religious faiths, is one of the earliest attempts at dialogue. This has not borne much fruit. A more creative form of dialogue is expressed as cooperative action. In solving the problems of poverty, communalism, environmental destruction and others, all religions should unite. There is nothing like Christian hunger or Hindu hunger! The hungry have to be fed. To protect our environment is a task in which we all join together. If we want to plant more trees or clean the area in which we live, should we not ask all people to join in?

A question is often asked : Is mission unnecessary when dialogue is practised?

Yes, we are asking for a new way of understanding and doing of mission. Mission is still important. In fact, if we do not have a mission we have no right to exist as a Church. But our mission is not an aggressive crusade directed to condemning other religions and enlisting everyone in the Church. We are committed to sharing through our lives and action God's liberating and transforming presence in the world. When we participate with people of other faiths in love and mutual trust there are plenty of opportunities to share the source

of our inspiration for our life --
Christ the giver of New Life.

We attempted a detailed discussion on dialogue as mission model because it has challenged many presuppositions of the traditional understanding of mission and opened a way for a meaningful form of Christian witness in a pluralistic context⁷.

Nation Building: Service, Development and Justice

The struggle for independence and the process of nation building have also brought challenges to the churches with regard to its social and political witness. The question was posed as to how to witness to Christ in the midst of socio-political changes? A conviction widely shared at this point was that Christ was present in social and political realities, judging and transforming them. Witnessing to the Gospel in the social and political context was a theme developed by the synod of the Church of South India that met in 1962. A resolution passed by this synod was a landmark concerning Indian church's thinking on social questions.

The Synod believes that the social revolution now taking place in India is a manifestation of the eternal purpose and judgement of God in

human history. It believes that the Church is created by God to be a people wholly unto the Lord and to seek the establishment of Righteousness, Mercy and Love in human society. It therefore calls the members of the Church of South India at this critical time to a series and prayerful consideration of the implications of this belief for their worship, work and witness in a changing India.

The synod called upon all Christian institutions, congregations and individuals to take seriously their responsibilities in relation to:

- 1) The need to offer the love and compassion of God in Christ to all sorts and conditions of men;
- 2) The need to establish within the life of the Church a fellowship transcending distinctions of caste and class;
- 3) The need that each Christian should be a politically conscious and responsible citizen;
- 4) The need to witness to the kingdom of God, to set forth and establish in

society both the love and the righteousness of God in Christ;

5) The need to make Christians in 'secular occupation' realise that their occupations themselves which supply the physical and economic needs of society are also in the plan and purpose of God for the total redemption of society.⁸

Several paradigms of mission have emerged at this time. One of the traditional modes of the Church's participation in national situation is service, The Church in India did pioneering service by establishing medical and educational institutions. Many charitable institutions like orphanages and relief operations through the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), have provided help to the needy regardless of their religious affiliations. Some of these programmes are well-known and there is no need to describe them elaborately But the churches moved to a new phase in this when they started developmental projects with the help of foreign donor agencies They are directed towards self-employment for the poor and to creating the infrastructure that is necessary for community based development in health and other areas.

It is important that in a situation of extreme poverty and continuing misery of millions in rural and urban areas the churches have to provide service for the needy. Sometimes such actions are powerful witness to churches solidarity with people, breaking its isolation.

In their study of the churches in North India, J.P. Alter and H. Jaisingh make a pointed reference to one such moment in the life of the Church in Delhi. In 1947 there broke out the worst communal clash between Hindus and Muslims and thousands of refugees streamed into Delhi. Christians took the lead in ministering to the needs of victims and this was widely acclaimed:

This service to refugees was of profound significance for the life of the Church. It demonstrated that Christians, though neutral in the communal struggle, were not indifferent to the sufferings of their neighbors. It created a fund of goodwill which proved to be of great value in subsequent discussions concerning faith. Above all, it helped to draw the Christian community out of its isolation and to identify Christians as

responsible citizens of the
new Democratic
Republic.⁹

However, laudable and necessary such charitable and developmental activities are, they seldom challenge the existing system and structures of injustice that perpetuate poverty and unequal distribution of resources. In the long run they do not provide an answer to the search of the poor for their dignity and justice. It is this critique that led to the awareness that the poor have to be organized to fight for their rights and they should not be mere objects of charity but subjects of struggle for a new, just order. That mission of **struggle for justice** is the paradigm that emerged very clearly at this time. An awareness that the struggle for justice is the context of Christian mission and a new vision of Christ as Liberator,¹⁰ both these have contributed to the emergence of this new paradigm of mission. Justice is a dimension of the saving act of God. To participate in the struggle for justice is to participate in God's mission. This paradigm is also based on the critical analysis of the economic and political situation in India, and the phenomenon of poverty.

It brings, to our awareness the importance of organized struggles of the poor for justice. During the past decades several groups of

young men and women have gone into organizing the landless, marginalised groups. They are certainly Christ-inspired, but not necessarily controlled by ecclesiastical machinery.

Moreover, the team of workers in each group is multi-religious and they work with people of all faiths. There are many clusters of these groups -- prominent being the Urban Industrial Rural Mission (UIRM) and Programme for Social Action (PSA).

Initially the action group started to evolve among the marginalised sections of society with the specific intent of raising their critical consciousness against oppression. In this process they have linked with the groups which are not Christian and become part of wider movements of people such as tribals, Dalits and workers. This partnership influenced their style of functioning.

What is disheartening in the development of action groups work, however, is the apparent conflict between them and the church organisations. The style and structure they have developed, which were necessary for their expression of solidarity with the marginalised, have moved them further and further away from the institutional Church. The dialogue between them has not proved very

constructive. The churches keep on raising questions, sometimes legitimate, about the style and structure of action groups and people's movements, without showing any readiness to face the challenge posed by the vision and strategy (justice and collective action) for the Church's ministry and mission. Can we truly say that in a situation of poverty linked with unjust economic and political structures, justice oriented ministry should be the preponderant form of Christian mission? If we face this challenge honestly then the present forms of ministry and the church structures that support them will also undergo drastic changes. For one thing our preaching and worship will authentically reflect the cries of the people for justice and our church structures will become catalysts for strengthening the struggle for all people and not just ghettos that preserve our narrow parochial interest -- they truly become the salt of the earth.

Before we close this section a brief mention of one other point is necessary. Questions are raised in the discussion on mission about the relation between proclamation of the Gospel and the Church's involvement in politics and society. Some maintain that evangelism should be distinct from other forms of witness like dialogue, development, service and struggle for justice. But

others reject this separation and affirm an integral view of mission embracing all aspects of life and its relationships. One has to proclaim the Gospel through one's words, deeds, and life. They are inseparable. However, we cannot ignore the fact that on programmatic level the Church has been making some distinctions and it is difficult to obliterate them. But we need to ask how each can be informed as well as critiqued by others.

For example the justice oriented approach raises critical questions to all developmental and service endeavors of the Church. If service projects and institution do not lead to the removal of unjust structures, they should be viewed with suspicion. All institutional forms of service in which significant resources of money and personnel from other countries are even now involved, come under critical scrutiny especially as some of them provide subsidised service to the middle and upper middle class sections of society. In this section we will mention some of the contemporary challenges to Christian mission. They will be discussed in detail in the later chapters.

a). The Struggle for Identity and Justice

The struggle by different ethnic

groups for their identity and justice has brought serious questions to the mission of the church. Identity is a way of asserting one's place in society. Culture and history provide a framework for people's self-understanding, the source of their identity. These elements in the life of marginal groups have been totally suppressed. A conscious recovery of them is essential for their struggles for dignity. Reflection on mission should be related to this newly gained awareness of marginalised groups.

In the past the Church has been ambiguous with regard to this response to the identity question. Christian mission for sure has enormously contributed to the social transformation of Dalits and indigenous people. But it has been insensitive to people's struggle for cultural identity. The Church has often projected a view of uniformity that suppresses all differences. But plurality is the principle of creation.

If the struggle for Dalit and tribal identity is a demand to secure the rightful space for indigenous people in the wider human discourse and relationship then it should be accepted as integral to God's purposes for them. The theological link between Christian faith and the struggle for identity should be strengthened and that

should be the basis for a pluriform community. The missionary obligation should be reformulated as the church's solidarity with the marginalized that seeks its identity. The struggle for identity is also a struggle for justice and participation. This gives a concrete and distinct focus for our struggle. Here the biblical tradition of faith can make a significant contribution. The prophets were uncompromising on their stand on justice. They rejected any pattern of relationship that fails to ensure justice as contrary to God's will. I believe that this focus on justice in our identity struggle gives us a concrete direction as well as a new theological meaning for it.

The relation between Gospel and culture should be considered in this context. Many things are written on it and several insights are today widely shared. It is clear that the Gospel comes to us in a cultural medium and for most of us in India it has come through western culture. We need to be sensitive to these cultural trappings. We also know that the Gospel fulfills as well as judges the cultural aspirations of people. It is this dialectic that makes our task daunting.

b) Ecological Crisis: God's Cosmic Mission

Ecological crisis raises a host of

new questions about the concept and practice of mission. There was a time when we thought this was not a Third World problem. But today we are convinced that preserving the environmental integrity and promotion of an ecologically responsible development are a matter of survival for the whole world. Fast depletion of natural resources, pollution of air, land and water, the global warming and other atmosphere changes have catastrophic affects. A consultation on ecology and development has correctly observed that while all are affected by the ecological crisis, the life of the poor and marginalised is further impoverished by it. Storage of fuel and water add peculiar burdens to the life of women. It is said that tribals are made environmental prisoners in their own land. Dalits, whose life has been subjected to social and cultural oppression for generations are facing new threats to them by the wanton destruction of the natural environment. What we witness today is a steady deterioration and degradation of the biosphere all life and physical environment.

The biblical insights on our dependence on nature and our responsibility for nature bring new challenges to our understanding of Church and

mission. The Church is cosmically oriented (Moltmann) and participates in God's cosmic mission. "The mission is not for humans alone, but for the whole of God's cosmos. Its aim is not geographical, territorial and numerical expansion, but transformation of the whole cosmos"¹¹ God's saving activity has a threefold dimension calling persons to commit to the Kingdom of God, justice and peace in society and ecological health in the land (Amos 9:14-15). All three dimensions are integral to the cosmic mission of God and they should be expressed together. "*The* environment will continue to deteriorate if we pay attention only to evangelism and social mission."¹² How concretely should we participate in God's cosmic mission?

It is no mere coincidence that the root word OIKOS is the same for ecology economics and ecumenics. We are committed to preserving the living space that is common to humans and all other living and non-living things. At the World Convocation on "Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation" which met in Seoul in March 1990 the churches covenanted together to renounce "all idols of wealth, power, race and gender superiority and security which cause people to suffer and the earth to be dominated, plundered and

destroyed.” Further they made a commitment to build a just economic order on global, national, regional and International levels of all people. Ecologically oriented mission is expressed as a commitment to a set of values that are wholistic and humane. Perhaps, the scale of values may be summed up as follows,

Need against greed.
Enabling power against dominating power
Conservation against consumerism
Integrity of creation against exploitation of nature.

Unless the values which we consider important become part of our life-style, they remain vague and empty. Justice, freedom, human dignity, enabling power, all these should be made readily recognisable in our corporate life of the churches.

c) Is the Church Credible?

The Church proclaims and lives by the mystery of Christ. Specific challenges from the situation provide an occasion to delve deep into its meaning and to formulate appropriate response to it as mission. Thus the parameter of mission expands with the ever-widening horizon of the Gospel.

But the institutional church by far prefers to remain in the security of the familiar and the traditional. Members often get entangled in the power struggle of the caste and communal groupings. Self-aggrandisement of the leadership further distorts the vision and the message of Christ.

Every religious organisation, including the church, possesses ritual power as well as institutional power. Both can be easily misused by the hierarchy and others in leadership positions. They use their ritual and institutional power to manipulate people in order to perpetuate vested interests and to maintain the dominance of ecclesiastical functionaries. Blatant forms of corruption, misappropriations, nepotism and other forms of misuse of power have become a rule and not an exception.

Can this church be trusted with mission? How can the Church be a community where different identities can flourish without fear of domination because of its overriding commitment to the values of the Kingdom? How can the Church truly bear the Cross of Christ? The call is for fidelity to the Lord of the Kingdom in everyday practice. Schillebeeckx, the Dutch Catholic theologian, developing the theme “The New Testament Churches as Exodus Communities”¹³ points out that

N.T. Churches were not “activist” churches. But they have developed a paradigm in regard to their witness in the world. They wanted to express in their life and relationships the vision of the Kingdom with which they impact the society.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to discuss important models of mission that have emerged in the modern period as the Church responds to the challenges of other faiths and socio-political realities. We have also indicated some of the new challenges we face today. They will receive further attention in the following chapters. A question remains : Is there a new paradigm of mission being evolved? It is perhaps too early to make a definitive formulation. But one may venture to describe mission as

Celebration and Sharing of Life. This will be the theme in the next chapter. It is an attempt to express holistically our mission embracing all our aspects of life. Mission is an endeavour of the Christian community to celebrate and to enhance God’s gift of life. The essential character of this life which the community shares with other human beings and nature is interrelatedness. In responsibility to one another and to nature life is preserved and God’s purpose for it is fulfilled. The demand for life

abundant. “Where Jesus is, there is Life”.¹⁴ To follow Jesus is to witness to the abundant life. More concretely it means to support values, practices and institutions that affirm and enhance life and to denounce systems and structures that diminish and extinguish the lives of so many. Further, commitment to life-affirming values should be expressed in the life and relationships of the community of faith.

Notes:

1. Tiff Book Christian Literature Society, Madras.
2. Rethinking Christianity in India,
- 3 *Ibid.*
4. Preparation for Dialogue (Bangalore: CISRS. 1964), p. 192
5. Quoted in JAG Gerwin Van Leeuwen, Fully Indian and Authentically Christian (Bangalore National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, 1990), p. 241.
6. “Tambaram Revisited, Papers and Reports of a Consultation on Dialogue and Mission” *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXVIII, No. 307, July 1988, pp. 366-367.

7. A helpful and comprehensive discussion on the concerns relating to this approach is given in S.J. Samartha's One Christ-Many Religions, (New York: Orbis Books, 1991) and Indian edition, SATHRI, Bangalore, 1992.

8. Rajaiah D. Paul, Ecumenism in Action, p. 100

9. James P. Alter et. al., The Church as Christian Community, p.35

10. This model can also be appropriately called Liberation model. Liberation and justice are interrelated concepts.

11. Quoted from a study guide of the Presbyterian Church (USA), 1991.

12. *Ibid*

13. Christ, (New York Cross Roads, 1988)

14. Jurgen Moltmann, The Passion of Life (Philadelphia Fortress Press), 1978, p. 19.

[return to religion-online](#)

Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission by K. C. Abraham

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Chapter 2: Mission and Ministry as Celebration and Sharing of Life

Our study is an attempt to see the relevance of the Gospel to the many struggles of our people in India. In a situation of abject poverty which is being perpetuated by unjust economic and political structures the concern for liberation has a sense of urgency. The poor in our country are religious, but the majority are not Christians. There is an awakening among the poor in all the religions to their dignity and selfhood which has been suppressed by age-old traditions and culture, and they demand a critical review of the fundamentals of their faiths from the perspective of liberation. We should also be sensitive to the fact that in the present-day contest in

India religious faiths continue to be used by dominant groups to legitimise their control over the masses. In the secular sphere, although the so called development process has brought many gains to certain sections in our society, the control of the economic elite over our political process and the increasing marginalisation of weaker sections like tribals, Dalits and women raise serious questions about justice and corruption that are embedded in our system. This is the context we reflect upon. It is a context where life is continuously threatened, vitiated and destroyed by many forces of death. We need God's life-giving mission in our midst.

In an attempt to evolve a theological frame work for Christian mission and ministry, I suggest a brief consideration of three fundamental biblical insights about God in our midst and our response to him, and draw some implications for mission and ministry in the Indian context.

1. God is a God of life and to believe in him is to participate in his life giving activity.

Mission and ministry are endeavours of the Christian community to celebrate and to enhance God's gift of life. The essential character of this life, which the community shares with

other human beings and nature, is inter-relatedness. In responsibility to one another and to nature life is preserved and God's purpose for it is fulfilled.

Faith in the God of the Bible is faith in a living, life-giving God. The phrase "living God" is an expression commonly found in the Old Testament (I Sam 17:26,36; Judges 8:19; Kings 17:1) 'The realisation of life, in all its fullness, including the material basis of life, is the primary mediation of the approach to God' (Sobrino)¹. For Jesus, God is a God of life. St. John testifies that the word of life is manifested in Christ. God's own mission is giving life (John 10:10, 14:6). Sobrino observes that God as a God of life is "a primary and generic horizon". This is a helpful concept. The "genetic horizon" is common to all humanity and not an exclusive domain of the people of a particular faith. It takes us to the very root, the earth-base, of our experience. In this we see a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamar) between us and that of the ancients. This has to "become historicised and concrete in the life of Jesus himself" (Sobrino)². When Jesus speaks of "bread", he is using it as a symbol of all life: the generic horizon and concrete horizon coming together.

Bread and food

are.....primary mediations of the reality of God. This is why Jesus favours and defends them. This is why he eats with publicans. (Mark 2:15-17 and parallels)...This is why the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves (apart from the Christological and liturgical intention of the evangelists) emphasizes that those who are hungry must be fed, and stresses that they ate and had their fill (Mark. 6:30-44 and parallels, 8:1-10; Matt. 15:32-39). This is why the one who feeds the hungry has encountered both man and the son of man. (Sobrino).³

Messianic signs are signs of life in its fullness (Matt.11:2-6). The Kingdom which Jesus preaches is the Kingdom of those who are deprived of life. Jesus' uncompromising defence of life has led him to a life of conflict with the powerful, ruling class of his time. This conflict resulted in Jesus' death. "His passion for life led him to the suffering on the cross" (Moltman)⁴. The one who defended and proclaimed life was put to death. Resurrection is the affirmation that God's "last word" is not death but life.

To believe in the God of life is to

affirm the supremacy of life over death. This also means “any assault on life -- hunger, destitution, squalor, oppression, injustice is an attack on God, on God’s will for the life of humankind. A denial of life, therefore is a rejection of the God of life (Gutierrez, quoted in Araya, *God of the poor*, p. 73) The demand of the God of life in Christ, the rationale for Mission, is a demand for life abundant “were Jesus is, there is abundant life vigorous .life, loved life and eternal life” (Moltman)⁵. To follow Jesus is to witness to the abundant life in words and deeds.

We live in a situation where this sacred gift of life is threatened, vitiated and destroyed. Our willful resistance to God’s demand to choose life and our refusal to participate in God’s life-giving activity are expressed in many ways. From dowry death to nuclear disasters one could draw up a long list of violence we commit to one another and to nature. Our tendency to reduce all these to sin and selfishness is often an abstraction. In the modern world, sin and selfishness assume corporate and structural character; greed is a personal sin but is operative in organised form in our economic system. Caste oppression cannot be simply reduced to “personal” factors. Caste-structure like other evil structures, has a logic of its own.

That is why our faith in a God of life has to be expressed as affirming values, practices and institutions that affirm and enhance life and as denouncing the systems and structures that diminish and extinguish the lives of so many voices.⁶ Mission is a response to the demand of God that life be abundant, the demand for humanisation “The mission of salvation and the task of humanisation are integrally related to each other even if they cannot be considered identical” (Thomas, *Salvation and Humanisation*, p. 8).

2. The God of the Bible is a liberator God and faith in the liberator God calls for struggle against all forces of oppression.

Life is not an abstract, but an historical reality. As we have noted the “God of life “ provides generic horizon for our faith and its practice. But the living God in the Bible is a liberator God, the God of the Exodus experience. Liberation theology, particularly that from Latin America, has developed this theme on the basis of biblical insights and the experiences of new ecclesial communities of poor Christians.

Aloysius Pieris of Sri Lanka points out that the concept of “liberation” is not new and mentions various perceptions of liberation found in ancient

philosophy, Roman theology, religions of Asia, and Marxism.

“The stoic perception... sees liberation primarily as spiritual/personal/interior. It does, however, tolerate an individual’s search for freedom from external social structures that are oppressive -- as exemplified in the case of slavery. But it does not envisage any radical change of social structure” (Pieris).⁷ He adds that this is the “ideological substratum” of the Roman theology (one may add, Protestant theology as well). Further he observes that classical Buddhism (one may add Hinduism as well) also has similar views of liberation. It holds that structural change is a consequence of interior liberation.

“The Marxist?’ restricts liberation to a class struggle of the poor (proletariat) aimed at socio-economic justice.

In contrast to these three positions, “biblical revelation” seems to advocate a unitary perception of all these aspects social, spiritual/material, internal/structural -- whenever these are predicated of “sin” and “liberation from sin.” (Pieris).⁷

Another distinct and important aspect of the biblical view of liberation is the pivotal role played by the poor in it. God has entered into a pact with the poor. “The poor in the Bible are dynamic group who are not the passive victims of history but those through whom God shapes his history” (Soares-Prabhu).⁸

Biblical liberation is more than a class struggle. It is a “religions experience of the poor” (Pieris). Thus to affirm the biblical faith in the liberator God is to affirm a life in solidarity with the poor.

Pieris constantly reminds us that the poor in Asia are non-Christians, and Asian reality is an interplay between religiousness and poverty. So in affirming solidarity with the poor in Asia / India, an inevitable consequence of the faith in a liberator God is to enter deeply into the religious (non-Christian) experience of the poor. The liberational thrust helps us to enter into a dialogue and cooperation with people of other faiths.

An EATWOT consultation on “Religion and Liberation” states that all religions, Christianity included, “are in various ways and to various degrees both oppressive and liberative. They are oppressive because they legitimise unjust social systems like apartheid, and caste, and

because they create their own special forms of religious unfreedom... But history shows us that religions can be liberative too. They have inspired powerful movements of social protest (like Hebrew prophetism in monarchical Israel, or the bhakti movements in mediaeval India) which have attacked both the oppressive rigidity of the religious systems themselves, as well as of the unjust socio-economic and political structure of the societies in which those religions flourished” (Voices).⁹

It further states that In the Third World, where all religions together face the challenges of enslaving social and cultural systems and the need to struggle for justice, religions should meet each other, exploring and sharing their liberative elements. It calls for the development of a “Liberative ecumenism, that is, a form of inter-religious dialogue which is concerned not so much with doctrinal, insights or spiritual experiences that different religions can offer one another, as with the contribution to human liberation that each can make” (“Voices,” Vol. II No. I 168). This is mission, from a liberational perspective.

Mission is to share the gift of Jesus, God’s way of liberation; but at the same time it provides an opportunity to learn from others.

A genuine dialogue is not manipulative, not a strategy for conversion but a form of witness on the basis of trust and respect. Participation in issues such as human rights, minority problems, social and economic injustice which we commonly face, give a basis for fruitful dialogue. It must also be pointed out that today we are discovering the dynamism of people's tradition distinct from elite's sophistication in our religion and culture and its potential for liberation. People's tradition is often maintained in protest movements within dominant religions, in myths, stories and legends. This dynamic heritage and its humanistic, liberative revival have set the stage for a more meaningful dialogue and cooperative action among the religions.

The liberation that we experience in God through Christ is cosmic. The biblical vision of "new heaven and new earth" (Rev. 21:1) and our confession that Christ is renewing the cosmos (Col. 1:15 -20) compel us to the earth and to its liberation and transformation. The creation's "groaning in travail" (Rom. 8:22) together with our own groaning is audible in the ecological crisis we face. The marginalised groups in their struggle for freedom and human dignity have discovered the close link between environmental crisis and

exploitation: tribals, fishermen, landless people and women. They are pleading for an alternate form of development which is ecologically responsible and meets the basic needs of the people.

How do we witness to the God, the liberator of cosmos in a situation of increasing crisis of ecology and in the context where the people are forced to search for a responsible relation with nature? That should be an agenda of mission. Too long we have been preoccupied in our theology with the dimension of history in isolation from the cosmos. We can never set the plane of human history and nature in opposition. It is in the search of liberation of all aspects of human life, cultures and natural environment that we can truly affirm that salvation is the wholeness of all creation.

3. “To know God is to do justice”

The God of life, the liberator God orients the struggle of his people in a precise direction toward the establishment of justice. In the Hebrew faith, Yahweh appears as the Goel the defender of the vulnerable groups from whom all rights are taken away -- the widow, orphans, aliens and the poor. God is the “near relative”, the protector and avenger of Israel. This is affirmed in the

covenant which Yahweh has established with his people -- and the clear expression of that relationship is justice. It is in justice done to the weak and helpless that Israel's true national identity is to be found.

Gutierrez writes:

Indeed, Israel's identity, the meaning of belonging to the Jewish nation, is the rendering of justice to the poor, rescuing their rights trodden under foot. And when the Jewish people fails to do justice to the poor, it is false to itself as a people. That is, it not only does evil, does wrong, but in violating the pact of the covenant, it goes directly against what identifies it as a people and always has : the liberative act of the exodus, the historical experience of having come up from Egypt thanks to its alliance, its covenant, with God. ¹⁰

To know god is to enter into this covenant-justice-oriented relationship. So for prophets to know God is to do justice (Jer. 22:13-16). This is the basis of mission. as doing justice.

In an interesting study of missionary activity in the later

nineteenth century in India G.A. Oddie has brought out documents about missionaries' involvement in agitation for social reform. I was interested in the account of the missionary involvement in the indigo disputes. The opposition was against the indigo cultivation by the European planters, their own country men. The system was such that the poor ryots had to yield to the pressure of the zamindars and cultivate indigo. This cultivation was not profitable and it led to the neglect of rice and other crops. European planters working through the zamindars with the support of police and other government machinery had thus designed a system which exploited the poor ryots. Missionaries organized a heroic fight against this system and at enormous cost: imprisonment, threat, loss of job and so on and succeeded in changing it.

One or two aspects of this involvements stand out. Response to the gospel of Jesus Christ in a given context and the fight against unjust structures are integrally related. Some of the missionaries criticises their fellow workers who are involved in such social issues. But those who led the fight were clear about this integral relation with the gospel and the transformation of unjust structures.

We should also notice how in their fight they were in solidarity with all victims regardless of their caste or religion. It is true that they were led to the fight when they saw the hardship of some of the poor Christians. But when the fight was directed to a system they had to broaden their base and include every one who was subjected to the evils of the system. A deeper involvement in social issue borne out by our commitment to the gospel takes us to an open arena of human sufferings. It is also interesting that when they stood by the exploited people they had to oppose their own fellow “Christians”. In a context like that an alliance for the sake of perpetuating a so-called Christian identity was not so important as establishing solidarity with the suffering masses who were not necessarily Christians.

The practice of faith in a God of life, liberation is our mission and ministry Theo-praxis. Where life, liberation and justice are denied in praxis God is denied. To believe is to practice. To believe in God is to turn from oneself and to commit one’s life to God and to all men and women in concrete practice. This is conversion, an essential dimension of mission. Although it occurs in the realm of the personal, it is not privatistic; it is a process translated into the socio-economic, political and

cultural sphere in which the converted lives. It is to participate in God's mission. Concrete forms of it in the context in which we live were mentioned earlier. Commitment to life-affirming values, and structures, solidarity with the poor in their struggle for justice and for their forests and land, and dialogue with other faiths directed towards a liberative ecumenism are some of these.

Perhaps one may issue a word of caution here. The experience of the ultimate which is concretised in our struggles for justice and liberation is not the ultimate in itself. The Gospel has the character of givenness, a mystery, if you will, the meaning of which is not exhausted in our response. 'It continues to expand our horizon, judging and transforming us. One of the perennial problems in Christian understanding is to keep in tension these two dimension -- the ultimate and concrete. But the issue is never simply either one or the other, although accent may be placed on a particular aspect in view of the urgency of a given situation.

I have not said anything specifically about ministry. In fact I do not want to make any separation between mission and ministry. It is argued that ministry is about caring of the "faithful" and mission is what the faithful

do in response to the faith. This division is artificial when we acknowledge that Christian ministry is our total response in faith and action (praxis) to Christ and his message in a given situation. Ministry cannot be reduced to what the minister does as a poojari or guru but what the community of faith together do and how they live out the faith. In this sense Christian ministry is a community endeavour. Mission and ministry are signs and instruments of God's life-giving, liberative act. Elsewhere, I tried to suggest that there are three moments in Christian ministry (Wilson C. ed. J, *The Church*, 110). First, there is a critical awareness of the situation, particularly the factors and structures that influence the life and struggles of people. The second moment is the faith-reflection. Here the scripture as well as the heritage of faith is studied and interpreted in the light of the experiences of people. In this faith-reflection Christian community should sink its roots into the life and culture of all people. The third moment is action which is an interaction between the other two moments. In a situation of injustice we need collective action directed towards generating life-affirming, humanising values, altering unjust structures and building new alternatives. Ministry in this sense becomes part of God's mission.

A question that keeps on coming is, “Can the present church be trusted with mission?”. This demands a new look at the shape and structure of our congregations, and the administrative bodies, the leadership pattern and the Christian community’s relationship with people of other faiths . It is not enough if we just introduce Kuthuvilakku or add a few Indian Lyrics to our service. The challenge is to express our solidarity with people of other faiths in common quest, action, shared values and spirituality. Indigenisation and liberation should be the same process. The church in its mission and ministry is called to be a community who make ‘Jesus’ theo-praxis, their own.

Notes:

1. Jan Sobrino, The Epiphany of the God of life in Jesus of Nazareth” in Richard Pablo, *Idol Of Death and the God Of Life*, Maryknoll N.Y Orbis, 1983, p. 70.
2. Sobrino, op. cit., pp. 73-74
3. Sobrino, op. cit., p. 73
4. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Passion For Life* , Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983, p. 22.

5. Moltmann, op. cit., p. 19

6. *Voices From the Third World*,
June 1988, p. 91.

7. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of
Liberation*, Maryknoll, Orbis,
1988, p. 123.

8. Soares-Prabhu, in *Vidyajyothi*,
New Delhi, p. 320

9. *Voices*, June 1988, p.152.

10. Gustavo Guitierrez in Victoria,
Maya, *The God of the Strategic
Covenant*, Maryknoll N.Y Orbis,
1994. p. 69

[return to religion-online](#)

Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission by K. C. Abraham

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Chapter 3: Towards a Theology of Mission in Asia

Today the very concept and purpose of Christian mission is called into question not only by Christians themselves but also by non-Christian thinkers who are sympathetic to the good news. A mere consideration of the problem of missionary personnel and finance or methods of missionary involvement does not settle the present crisis in mission. The crisis is partly connected with upheavals in theological thought and partly related to our fresh appreciation of the profound changes that are taking places in society at large. The Church's understanding of its witness to the gospel of Christ as that of the crusader and the inquisitor, and the goal of its evangelistic activity

as proselytisation, was admirably suited to the theology of the colonial era, and conformed to the practices of imperialist expansion of the major western powers in Asia. Today we reject this crusading model on the basis of new insights into the gospel of Jesus Christ and our growing awareness of the revolutionary upsurge of submerged peoples in Asia to affirm their humanity.

People who reject this model, however, are driven to all sorts of social action projects, development goals and humanist ideologies -- all, in the name of Christian mission. Missionaries have become project holders and mission funding agencies. This to my mind is an easy option out of a complex situation. The mission of the Church has to be rooted in Jesus Christ alone. The prime need of the church today is to continue its search for new forms of obedience to Christ in the given situation in Asia.

In this paper I want to suggest that serious attention should be paid to a life-style that is appropriate to the Gospel for developing a relevant form of Christian witness. I would further suggest that the life-style we develop should be the life-style of a community that is open to the power of its Lord and Master. John R. Mott once asked Gandhi about his views on Christian

mission. Gandhi replied, “you can only preach through your life. The rose does not say, ‘come and smell me’. There is no truer or other evangelism than life’.

It is more important for the church to realise that the true basis and form of its witness in society is God’s transforming work in Christ, which has cosmic and social significance. Biblical faith also affirms that the witness to this reality is a community endeavour or a people’s movement, true to its origin in a covenant relation. Of course, the dynamic of the movement is not of our making, generated and released from within ourselves, but the transforming power of Christ himself. Our witness is a response to this. Its form and style are that of the Suffering Servant, the self emptying love of Christ. The Church’s witness is to conform to this style of life in the given context

A Theological Interpretation

In modern time it is Bonhoeffer who has forced upon theological thinking the question about life-style. A consideration of the main thrust of his views will be helpful. It is basic to a right understanding of Bonhoeffer to realise that this radical interpretation of the Christian gospel in secular terms, non-religious language, is only half of the Church’s task in the

modern world. The other, and more difficult half, is “the raising up of Christians who witness to their Lord in the midst of the world through an appropriate style of life.”²

Bonhoeffer has given serious thought to this. John Godsey, in his interpretation of Bonhoeffer’s thought, has stated this clearly. The whole question of man’s language and its ability to express meaning -- the hermeneutical question has been raised in a decisive way, and for the Church it has become acute with respect to the translation of the meaning of the biblical language into the language of the twentieth century. Many consider this an altogether academic problem. But for Bonhoeffer, it was not merely the question of finding the proper language, although obviously it is important when one wants to express oneself non-religiously that is without making religion the precondition of faith. The more basic question for Bonhoeffer was whether our lives authenticate or belie our words.³

The radical character of Christian life as envisaged by Bonhoeffer can be brought out by a consideration of his concept of conformation. In his *Ethics* he sets forth the idea of conformation and there he advances it as the key to a genuinely Christological ethics. “The way in which the form of

Jesus Christ takes form in the world “is the central concern of his ethics:

The Holy Scriptures speak of formation in a sense which is at first entirely unfamiliar to us. Their primary concern is not with the forming of a world by means of plans and programmes.

Whenever they speak of forming, they are concerned only with the one form which has overcome the world, the form of Jesus

Christ....Formation comes only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ. It comes only as formation in His likeness, as conformation which the unique form of him who was made man, was crucified, and rose again.⁴

The form of Christ is not a “religious” pattern; rather it is the pattern of true manhood, the man for others.

To be conformed with the Incarnate -- that is to be a real man. It is man’s right and duty that he should be man. The quest for superman, the endeavour to outgrow the man within the man, the pursuit of the heroic, the cult of the

demigod, all this is not the proper concern of man, for it is untrue...

...To be conformed with the Incarnate is to have the right to be the man one really is. Now there is no more pretense, no more hypocrisy or self-violence, no more compulsion to be something other, better and more ideal than what one is. God loves the real man. God became a real man.⁵

To be conformed to Christ is also “participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life.”⁶ The participation in suffering is not the self mortification of an ascetic. It is *metanoia*.

Again, Bonhoeffer rejects a religious definition of *metanoia*: “That is *metanoia*: not in the first place thinking about one’s own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up in the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event.” Christ in the messianic event is the Suffering Servant who fulfills Isaiah 53. Bonhoeffer lists examples of a variety of people in the New Testament who were caught up into the messianic suffering. They were not “sinners” in the conventional sense: the call to discipleship, Jesus’ table-fellowship with sinners, the

“conversion” of Zaccheus; the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet (Luke 7:36-50); Jesus’ healing of the sick; Jesus’ acceptance of children, the shepherds, and the wise men who were present at Jesus’ birth; the centurion of Capernaum; the rich young ruler; the Eunuch (Acts 8), and Cornelius; Nathaniel, Joseph of Arimathea and the women at the tomb. “The only thing that is common to all these is their sharing in the suffering of God in Christ; that is their faith”.⁷

That faith is described thus:

We throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world -- watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith, that is *metanoia*; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian (cf. Jer. 45). How can success make us arrogant, or failure lead us astray, when we share in God’s sufferings, through a life of this kind? ⁸

This is *metanoia*, the life that participates in the sufferings of God or the mode of existence of the servant. It is a life that is freed from the false securities of individual as well as collective life. No more does the burden of

the past weigh down on the person who is in this life.

Accepting “vicarious action”⁹ as the controlling principle, it eschews an absolutising of one’s own ego or of the other person, either of which would deny its origin, essence, and goal of responsible life in Jesus Christ.¹⁰

Moltmann calls this style of Christian life a “messianic life-style”.

The Christian life-style is characterised and shaped by the Gospel. ‘Let the manner of your life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ’, says Paul in Philippians 1:27. The life of the Christian is messianically qualified by the Gospel, for the Gospel is the call into the freedom of the messianic time.¹¹

Freedom is characteristic of this life-style. It is not determined by prohibitions and restraints and the desire to “be someone other than who we really are”. A life in conformity with the Gospel “liberates us to be ourselves and fills us with the power of the Spirit”.¹²

Messianic life-style is marked by tension as it assumes the responsibility for the world and enters into its conflicts. Moltmann points out that Bonhoeffer

rejected easy alternatives in regard to a Christian's orientation to the world. On the one hand he rejected "the world-denying piety" and on the other he also resisted a "banal secularity".

The orientation of the beyond which wants to have God without his Kingdom and the salvation of the soul without the new earth, ends up basically only in establishing an orientation to this world which builds its Kingdom without God and wants to have the new earth without a new heaven. The worldless, God of the one and the Godless world of the other, the faith without hope of the one and the hope without faith of the other, mutually confirm each other.¹³

Church as People's Movement

The messianic life-style or the form of the servant is the *life-style of a community*. That has been the assumption all along. Bonhoeffer says "The Church is... Christ himself who has taken form among us".¹⁴ So the form of the Servant in a real way characterises the life and witness of the Church. Concretely it is the life and witness of a local community --the congregation.

The Church in a real sense is a people's movement and the Christian witness becomes a community endeavour, through its origin in a covenant relation -- with this difference: that the dynamic is not of our making, generated and released from within ourselves. "Christian life-style is created by the Spirit when we personally and in community bind our life with the life of Christ and understand our life-history as a small part of God's great history of the liberating world."¹⁵

The Church in Asia should consider seriously the implications of the idea that the Church is a people's movement for developing this life-style. Moltmann has made a useful distinction between "the Church *for* the people" and "the Church *of* the people".¹⁶ This is helpful for our discussion. Underlying much of the programmes, administrative structures and even the mission of our churches is the view that we are the Church *for* the people. "The church wants of course to do something *for* the people. But precisely in doing this it proves that it does not belong to the people."¹⁷

The messianic life-style, however, is different. Jesus was a man *of* the people. Moltmann asks, "Did Jesus become.... the saviour *for* the people or the Messiah *of* the people?" Jesus moved with the

disqualified *ochlos* and he saw himself in this people. They were not *objects* of his love, but *subjects* of his messianic Kingdom. That gives the direction to the life and witness of the Church.

Where is the true Church?
The true Church is where Christ is. Christ is present in the mission of the believers and the suffering of the “least of these”. His community is therefore the brotherhood of the believers and the poor, the losers and the imprisoned, the hoppers and the sick. The apostolate says *what* the Church is; “the least of these” say where the Church belongs. Only if the Church realises in itself this double brotherhood of Christ does it really live in the presence of the crucified and exalted Christ.¹⁸

This new perspective of the Church *of* the people takes the Church along the messianic path, and the Church in Asia, the congregation, should reorder its life and witness in this style, truly becoming a Church of the people. That is the crux of its social witness.

As an example of this way of witness, a concrete experience of

a congregation may be mentioned here. St. Marks Cathedral (Church of South India), Bangalore, started a programme of social action in one of the slums in the city. The slum had all the usual problems -- poverty, unemployment, poor housing and lack of sanitation. Besides these, the community was divided along caste groupings, and *clashes between them* were a daily occurrence. At first, the work was carried out by trained social workers and other paid workers. Soon it was obvious that as a result of the church's work, a group was being created which was dependent on a richer institution. The emergence of this new group was only adding fuel to social and communal antagonism. The people were the objects of charity and there was little or no effect on the overall development towards a new community. After some time it was discovered that there was a small Christian congregation in the area. The presence of the congregation created a problem as well as an opportunity for a meaningful witness. Their life-style caused embarrassment as it was not different from that of the other sections of the community. And progress which had the label "Christian" was immediately associated with this congregation's life-style, which was nothing commendable. Realizing this problem, the strategy for witness had to be changed. It was clear that an

awareness by this congregation, of its loyalty to Christ and the life and action corresponding to it alone were the ways by which one could speak to the larger community. The congregation was challenged to consider seriously the implications of its commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ for its responsibility to the society. Then the dynamic of our involvement changed. The members of the congregation became the real actors and communicators of the Gospel. Certainly, they needed guidance support, and help in reinterpreting the meaning of the Gospel in terms of their needs. But their participation in the joys and problems and plans of their slum-mates and a style of life appropriate to their faith made a big difference.

Some of the early missionaries who were sensitive to the questions of the style of life bear witness to the same experience. The young C.E Andrews, when he joined St. Stephen's College, Delhi, as a missionary interviewed many "leading Indian converts" and enquired of them "the special causes which had led them to become Christians..." Here is what Andrews found:

One after another omitted that cause which I should have imagined to be

primary -- namely the longing for personal salvation... Many replied that it was the freedom of Christian life compared with the bondage of caste -- the attraction of the Christian brotherhood. Others stated that it was the thought of Christ uniting all the divided races and peoples of India into one -- the ideal of the Christian Church.¹⁹

The Christian fellowship was considered the basis of Christian faith. It is true that in later years the Christian Church in India got itself isolated from the larger community into “mission compounds” and denominations, and began to rust and indeed, turning into an exclusive Christian caste or closed communal group, instead of being an open, outgoing fellowship in the larger society. But the moment the Church broke this isolation it made a significant impact on society. In the first chapter we have already referred to the study of J. P. Alter and H. Jai Singh on the church in Delhi. They pointed out that in providing refuge to the victims of communal dashes during the partition the Church broke its life of isolation and found a way to be in solidarity with the suffering.²⁰

The same study gives a description to the life and witness

of the Church in the rural areas of the Punjab:

Evangelism as we have been using the term has referred to the formal concept, the programme of the Church, the behaviour of the organised “Ecclesia”, the programmes of district staffs, of church councils, conferences, diocesan committees and the life. But there is another; perhaps deeper and more significant, level of evangelism and witness. This is the level of individual and small group encounter with the world and its response at the level of Koinonia. This level of encounter is organised, informal, non-ecclesiastical. In the Punjab, the hope and despair of the organized church lie in the fact that this “Koinonia” is the active level of rural Church “mission” rather than the “Ecclesia” level.²¹

The point is that the life-style of the congregation assumes crucial significance for the Church’s encounter with a society which is ridden by casteism and other problems of community living. Already such encounters are taking place at the informal

“Koinonia” level. The Church in India as a whole should be challenged to consider the significance of the life-style of its congregations for a genuine encounter with the society

We are by no means suggesting that the Church should be confined to the institutional boundaries of a particular religious organization. There are those who do not belong to the visible community but are part of the Church as the community of Gods people. But we hold that only in relation to a community that acknowledges its Lordship to Christ and lives together in fellowship can we speak of the Church, even about the invisible Church. That is why the local congregation assumes a central significance when we speak about Christian witness.

Speaking to a group of theological students in India, a layman has voiced this concern of taking the congregation seriously:

We in the secular world are learning that an organization is as strong as -- not its weakest link, but its smallest unit. Is there any reason why this should not be true about the Church as well, definitely in the sociological sense, and possibly also in the spiritual sense? If so, the

renewal of the Church in India can come only in and through its thousands of local congregations. In fact, my growing conviction is that the only real Church is the parish congregation held together in common worship..... So to make the Church related to the world is to make the parish related to its locality. To develop a social concern for the Church is to sensitise the parish to the society around it? ²²

This can be done only by living among people as people, sharing in their joys and sufferings, entering into their perplexities and anxieties and understanding their achievements and failures, and also their goals and plans.

Today many of the local congregations in India have the appearance of in-grown communities, closed enclaves which bear more resemblance to “castes” than to “churches” in the real sense of the term. They often live in a ghetto-type of community, not simply because they themselves wish to live in isolation from the wider Hindu society

We assume that the servant model, the messianic life-style, with its emphasis on being with

the people in all struggles, will provide a new direction to the Church in India. And this may well be true of churches in other parts of Asia.

Some Specific Concerns

We have discussed in general terms the significance of the messianic life-style for providing direction and content for our mission. Some specific concerns ought to be raised in this context. Here again I can take examples only from India.

(a) Mission is Solidarity with the Poor

There is no denying the fact that the overwhelming problem in many countries in Asia is poverty. Poverty, economically understood, is the deprivation of certain basic necessities of life -- chiefly food, shelter, and clothing. It has also to do with a certain minimum level of economic security -- reasonable assurance that the basic necessities of life will continue to be met in the foreseeable future.

What strikes us as the most disturbing feature of the present situation is the continuance of mass poverty in spite of all the talk about socialist development. The following statement adopted by a Christian consultation is somewhat typical of the present

trends in economic development in India.

An evaluation of the performance of the economy during the past quarter of a century presents a sordid picture. It is officially recognised that over 40 percent of our people, i.e., some 250 million, still live in dire poverty without having means to satisfy the basic necessities of life. It has been established also that inequalities in income have increased with the gulf between the rich and the poor becoming more pronounced. In spite of many land reform measures in the statute books, land still remains concentrated in the hands of the landlords who exert tremendous political influence in the rural area. The hold of monopoly power over economy has increased. Unemployment has been increasing and unemployment among the educated youth has reached alarming proportions. Prices have been soaring, providing high profits for a few and misery and deprivation for many. By no stretch of the imagination can it be said that we have been moving

in a socialist direction.²³

Such faulty developments clearly mean poverty cannot be understood purely in economic terms. The richness and poorness of man cannot be measured in terms of the quantity or variety of goods he produces or consumes. Personal and group egoism, lack of concern for the poor, failure to struggle for justice and for the freedom and dignity of all -- these are manifestations of spiritual poverty.

The struggle against poverty has thus to be gauged on both fronts simultaneously. On the economic level, all have to unite to assure a minimum standard of living to all people everywhere, so that all can meaningfully and with dignity participate in the production and distribution of goods and so that all are assured of the necessities of life. It is in the struggle for economic justice that one can begin to grow to the fullness of one's moral and spiritual stature with freedom and dignity, created in the image of God to be creator of the good.

At another level there is need for challenging the false values that undergird much of the present-day economic development. No section of a society has the right to go on increasing its own standard of living without at the same time contributing in the

measure of its economic and political strength to the establishment of a just order. This requires a change in one's perspective and is in that sense a "spiritual" struggle.

A noted economist in India has voiced the same concern in the following words:

It is essential to introduce a desirable minimum and a permissible maximum into an economic system. There is generally wide support to the need for a desirable minimum for all. But this would be incomplete unless it is linked up with a permissible, maximum... The logic of such a minimum/maximum would be a simplification of life-styles, a reduction of wants, and a dethronement of the materialism that governs economic and social decisions. That would be in consonance with, the ethics of love that tends to be articulated and affirmed in principle by Christians, but *is still to become the basic determinant of a new way of life.* ²⁴

It is significant that a style of life that will help give a new direction to the economic development is

envisaged as the form of Christian witness in economics. This is the style of the servant.

Here it is not a question of idealising poverty, but rather of taking it on as it is -- an evil -- to protest against it and to struggle to abolish it. The Church's tradition regards poverty voluntarily chosen for spiritual ends as a virtue. The poor in spirit have consciously detached themselves from possessions in order to be free to be available for service of others. Gutierrez has rightly stated that "Christian poverty an expression of love, is *solidarity with the poor and is protest against poverty*"²⁵ In fact, this is the essential character of an ethical posture of the servant. -

(b) Mission is Empowering the Powerless

Solidarity with the poor means entering into their struggle for justice. The cry of the poor is for justice and not for charity. As we have noted earlier, there is a system that produces and perpetuates poverty -- a system of exploitation which makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. Only when there is a radical change in this system of exploitative structures can we expect to have any justice for the poor in India. The question which assumes great significance is how to transform the exploitative structures into

instruments of greater justice?

A two-fold answer can be given to this. First, this will be possible only when there is a subjective readiness on the part of the people victimised by the society at large to engage in a struggle for the removal of exploitation. Their consciousness has to be awakened to the necessity and legitimacy of such a struggle.

A concomitant concern is for the poor to have more power by organised action to exercise control over the process of decision-making in society. Speaking about modernization, M.M. Thomas has correctly observed.

While technological advance, agricultural and industrial development and modernization of social structures are necessary, they accentuate the pathological exploitative characteristics of traditional society while destroying their traditional humanizing aspects, if the traditional power structures and the social institutions in which they are embodied remain unchanged.²⁶

In other words, unless there is a change in the existing power relations in favour of the

powerless, no justice will be achieved. It is essentially a sharing of power so that counter-power is built up against internal and external forces of domination.

Both these steps are directed towards a process by which the poor acquire power for justice. This may raise a question in our minds as to whether the power-acquiring process is in conformity with messianic life-style. The model of submissive suffering has often been taken as a basis for exhorting the oppressed to patience. It has less frequently been taken by those groups which are in power, including the church, that the model of suffering servant, if applied to themselves, would mean a relinquishing of power in the service of the oppressed.

Perhaps what we need is a correct perspective of power itself. In a consultation of Asian Christian leaders on development, power is defined as “energy controlled by man and utilized by him to achieve freely chosen ends”²⁷ This is a helpful definition. The sources of power are many -- economic capacity knowledge and skill, political rights and the physical, moral, and spiritual forces of people. In this sense all power can be considered as a gift from God.

But when power is used in a way

that creates, supports, or promotes injustice, or tramples upon the freedom and dignity of persons, it is evil. One may agree with the findings of the Tokyo consultation on development:

Power is best used when it serves justice in the forward movement to the full liberation of man. All men have the need and the obligation to participate not only in the struggle for the liberation of man from all forms of oppression, exploitation and ignorance, but also in the positive effort to master all wisdom and power in love so that all may attain to the fullness of the liberty of the children of God.²⁸

Power should be understood as an essential ingredient of a mature, responsible life. In that sense there is no conflict with the lifestyle suggested. As we have seen in the discussion of Bonhoffer, the life of participating in the suffering *metanoia* is an existence in which power is transformed for responsible human relationship. The important point is how power, when it is acquired, is used. There should be a movement from the egoistic concentration of power to the power that is transformed for service.

(c) Mission is Subversive

The foreignness of the missionary enterprise has been a source of embarrassment to the churches in Asia. Being sensitive to this, the churches endeavour to be more indigenous in their worship, structure and outreach. Today, the churches in many parts of Asia are being accused as anti-national and subversive because of their missionary work. This new charge against the churches has to be faced seriously.

Understood rightly, Jesus' mission was subversive in character. He was committed to the task of turning the most cherished values and laws of his society upside down. He saw in them so many fetters that held people's consciousness in bondage. He wanted a new set of values, a new consciousness to be replaced by them. Jesus was nailed to the cross as a subversive. The religious and political authorities did not kill, by regrettable error, a good man. They knew Jesus was dangerous, although he never used a sword; he used language and symbols that challenged and threatened the validity of the world sustained by the dominant powers.

The Church that re-enacts the message of Jesus the subversive should not be subservient to the privileged sections of society. It

stands for the invalidation of values and system that keep people in bondage and to be willing agent for the ushering in of a future of total freedom and joy

Recently, there has been some discussion on Christian mission in the secular press in India. This was in connection with the political agitation that caused virtual breakdown of life in Assam and the North Eastern border states of India. This area is predominantly Christian and the centre of missionary activity. The government openly stated that the agitation was engineered and sustained by none other than foreign missionaries. In the discussion that followed many were led to believe that mission (any Christian activity whether by nationals or foreigners) was responsible for political disturbances. There is, however, enough evidence to believe -- and objective reporters testify to it -- that the agitation came out of legitimate economic and political grievances of the people who have been neglected and treated as second-class citizens by the majority for a long time. There is an upheaval in their consciousness of this injustice and their due rights. Definitely the foreign missionaries contributed generally through their educational and other activities in creating self-awareness in these submerged

sections about their rights. The government is finding a scapegoat for their omissions in the foreign mission. It is true that such an upsurge and heightened consciousness of the people would not have been possible without the work of mission. In this sense, and not government says, mission is subversive and the Church should own it and face the consequences.

It is interesting that in a neighboring State, Mother Teresa is conducting a mission of charity, looking after the dying and discarded human beings. Her work is acclaimed by one and all, and she has received honours from the government. However laudable and Christian her work is, it does not challenge the system and therefore the powers - that - be are happy. But if mission is directed towards the organization of the poor or resulted in creating a new consciousness among the oppressed about their rights, then it is accused as anti-national. In many countries in Asia we are increasingly facing these two alternatives -- either to take seriously the subversive character of mission and face its consequence or to carry on with activities -- charitable, developmental, and others -- which will not cause any tremor in the existing system of things. Yet we know that the messianic

life-style is a call to live dangerously, in the path of a subversive. Can we take this life-style seriously?

One may go on raising other areas of specific concern. But my main objective in this paper has been to suggest a way of looking at mission, not necessarily concentrating our attention on programmes and projects and methods. When we discuss mission can we take seriously the question of the life-style of the congregation that is true to our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

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[return to religion-online](#)

Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission by K. C. Abraham

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Chapter 4: Liberative Solidarity: Church in Witness and Reconciliation

December 6, 1992, rightly described as a black day” for India is still fresh in our memory. The wild religious frenzy displayed on that day has no parallel in our history except perhaps at the time of partition. The total destruction of a structure associated with a minority religious group and the communal carnage and bloodshed that followed it have inflicted a deep wound in our national psyche. It cannot be healed easily

The incidents that happened on December 6th should not be taken in isolation. There is a fundamentalist upsurge in all religions which threatens the very fabric of our social and collective

life. A fundamentalist ideology in any religion generates hatred, suspicion and fears, in the minds of its votaries, towards other religions. At the slightest provocation of hurt to the religious sentiments of a given group, violent conflicts arise, causing untold destruction of lives and property as we have witnessed in the recent riots in Bombay

Organised in a militant way, the fundamentalist groups are determined to capture political power. This has vitiated and distorted our political process. When, blind, religious passion rules the people, they cast aside all norms of justice and the rule of law. Politicians of all parties dabble with communal forces and succumbing to their pressures deviate from the path of secular politics. The virtual collapse of the very foundation of our political life caused by fundamentalist forces and the politics of opportunism creates a serious situation which inevitably raises fresh challenges to the churches in India.

Reflecting on the present situation it is now evident that there is a striking link between the marginalisation of the weaker sections and the rampant forms of communalism. It is not surprising that the slums in our cities, where there is an intense struggle for

basic necessities, have become scenes of violent conflict, M.N. Srinivas, the eminent sociologist, observes “The richest soil for communal frenzy to build on is poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and slum -- like conditions -- all of which are in plenty in urban India” (India Today, January 16-31, 1993). While speaking to a group of Muslim families who had lost all that they had in recent riots in Bangalore, they told us that the fault was not that they were Muslims or Hindus but they were born poor. The poor in our society are always vulnerable. Violence committed on them is on the increase. They are looted, their women are raped and their hovels are burned.

We have taken many things for granted, especially the idea of Hindu tolerance and the Indian peoples predilection for harmony and non-violence. All these notions are shattered. We are a violent nation; we have become callous to the cry of the weak and defenseless. Rajani Kothari’s incisive analysis of the changes taking place today is worth nothing. He speaks of the threat to the composite culture that India has always been, its community life-style, the whole Indian identity which was the basis of a very decentralized notion of living together, working together, having respect for each other’s diversity, not have a sense of

anything being alien. It is that which is under threat. He further states there is the threat to the Indian personality.

“I think the Indian personality is a very fine balance between the aggressive component of human endeavour and the more feminine, soft and cultured conception which tends to integrate various dimensions rather than push along one dimension. That I think is again going to be very difficult.”¹

In this situation of worsening communal disturbances, increasing violence and marginalisation of the weaker section and disintegration of Indian culture and personality, we try to reflect on the tradition of our faith. I believe that the search for a meaningful form of witness to the gospel of reconciliation is of paramount importance for the Church’s mission. Recently, speaking to the new graduates of Sempore College, Dr. K. Rajaratnam in his Master’s address affirmed, “moments of history of this kind have great opportunities for the Church to witness to her faith in Jesus Christ the Reconciler and his concern for the nation.” I should like to reflect with you on different dimensions of this faith tradition and its relevance to the difficult situation we are facing in the life of the nation.

The Church, A Reconciling Community

The word “reconcile” has come to mean, “to make peace.” Literally it means to restore, to bring back to friendship or union. In accordance with the root of the Greek word *Katallaso*, it means “to make other” or renew. Reconciliation is more than justification: it makes us friends instead of enemies, new human beings.² “To be reconciled” means to appear sinless before God’s judgement (Col. 1:22), to live in peace (Col. 2:20, Eph. 2:15) a new human being (Eph. 2:15), a new creation (II Cor. 5:17), finally in Col. 1:20 even the reconciliation of the heavenly beings with God. It envisages a totally new relationship that transcends personal and corporate structures of hostilities.

St. Paul in all his letters develops this theme. N.T scholars agree that reconciliation is an interpretative key to Paul’s theology “If we are pressed to suggest a simple term that summarizes his (Paul’s) message, the word reconciliation will be the “chief theme” or centre of his missionary and pastoral thought and practise.” T.N. Manson writes, “The driving force behind the Gospel is the love of God”. The *modus operandi* is reconciliation.”³

Reflecting on this theme in Paul, I am struck by his intense awareness of the many conflicts, and problems of divisions and fragmentations, that prevailed in his time, and his conviction that they can be overcome by the message of reconciliation of God in Christ. The conflicts are many and varied but there is a contemporary ring to them: irrational prejudices, ethnic tension, cultural crisis, social discrimination and economic domination were all present in all the conflicts of the time. Jewish Gentile relationship is the immediate context within which Paul reflects on his faith. It was fraught with these conflicts. The “wall of partition” in Ephesians stands for the whole system of Jewish piety and legal observances which constituted a barrier to fellowship between Jew and Gentile. This impregnable fortress was supported by Jewish self-righteousness, or religious fundamentalism.

We cannot attempt an exhaustive study of the concept of reconciliation. But permit me to mention some of the salient points which are particularly relevant for our discussion:

i) Reconciliation is the power that transforms all aspects of human relationships. Although Paul addresses himself to the Jewish Gentile conflict, he places the

reality of reconciliation in the larger setting of God's purposes for a cosmic renewal. This includes the defeat of demonic principalities and powers; breaking the barriers of separation that divided the ancient society -- Jewish-Gentile; slave-free; and male -female and the well-being or healing of persons who are afflicted by inner conflicts.

Paul's concept of reconciliation should be seen against the background of a broad biblical vision of God's reconciling and peace making mission. This vision is best expressed by the beautiful Hebrew word, *Shalom*. It is the vision of a new heaven and a new earth, the eschatological projection of perfect order where all people live as a single family. The relationship among humans and between humans and nature enhance the quality of life and it becomes the primary focus of God's transforming activity. When there is a rupture or distortion in this web of relationship, then peace is denied. I believe that the centre of our faith is this vision which was made a concrete reality in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To live by this vision and to affirm its dynamic relevance in this conflict ridden situation should be the starting point of our reflection.

ii) Reconciliation is a process of reversal and subversion. It is not a “patching up” of differences between people. Unless there is a radical change in the mode and the logic of existing relationship, there cannot be reconciliation. Relationship based on patronising or even tolerating the other is not reconciliation. It should come about by an active engagement between peoples and groups. Paul is clear on this, when he argues against imposing Jewish ceremonial laws as a condition on the Gentiles for becoming Christians. That would have meant one community accepting the dominance of another. But he was convinced that God’s reconciliation invalidates the logic of the system that maintains division and separation. Paul knew very well that human proneness for self-justification is what maintains them. Like Jesus, he too saw the sin of self-righteousness as that which keeps us far from God’s mercy and love. It is self-righteousness that breeds fundamentalist ideologies and makes religious groups impervious to change. A new relationship based on a new logic of faith alone can bring about the necessary change. It is in this sense that we talk about subversion and reversal.

iii) The affirmation that the ground of peace in this world is God’s reconciliation of the world

in Jesus Christ. He is our peace (Eph. 2:14). God in *solidarity* with all humanity is the source of renewal. There is a sense in which this reconciliation precedes all our consciousness of it. The power of Christ is greater than our sin. The new reality is already offered to us in his calling. It is precisely this new reality which makes us aware of our division and of the false pretensions of the system of peace we have established. Only when we have confronted our neighbour no longer within a framework which lets us explain him away, but in all of God's promises for his peace even when they conflict with what we think is ours, and in all his claims on us, does reconciliation gain its proper urgency "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of two, so making peace" (Eph. 2: 13-15).

iv) Jesus, the Universal peacemaker; is inaugurating a new humanity. The dividing wall set up by enmity is broken down and the divided community is made one through reconciliation with each other. This reconciliation is only possible through the love

which Christ showed on the cross.

The reconciled community is again set within the larger framework of God's work of peace-making.

Some scholars see Eph. 2:14-16 as part of a Christian hymn whose first two strophes have been preserved in Colossians 1:15-17 and 18-20

Strophe I The unity of all things in creation Col. 2:15-17

Strophe II The unity of all things in redemption Col. 1:18-20

Strophe III The unity of the races in the church Eph. 2:14-16

The new community is the "paradigmatic instrument in the unification and pacification of the world". Breaking down the walls of division has reference to the conflict between the Jews and the nations, but it could apply to all the groups in society. When a communal clash arose between Hindus and Muslims in Kerala in 1947, Mahatma Gandhi sent a cable to people who mediated saying: "Pray Muslims show a Christian attitude to Hindus". What a mix up of terms! But Gandhi understood the essence of the Christian Gospel. In Christ we

can no longer define ourselves in terms of our opposing interests, our communities that exclude each other, our caste securities and the like, but only in relation to one another and as members of the household of God.

The Church Witnessing to Reconciliation

The Church is called to participate in the mission of divine peace making. But, by and large, our churches are mere spectators incapable of responding to the situations of violence and communal tension. Many of them are divided among themselves and preoccupied with narrow communal or group interests. We have lost our moral credibility to be peacemakers in God's world. How can we be inspired by a new vision for peacemaking? How do we find means or patterns of Christian life and practice that are faithful to the call for peacemaking in an increasingly violent and divided situation?

I do not pretend to have answers to all these. But I want to mention some of the models of peacemaking that emerged in the Church and commend some broad direction for our corporate action.

Service as the Ministry of Reconciliation

Inspired by the love of Christ, the

Church has moved into situation of need, providing service to the victims of society. The service institutions and programmes of charity of the church have been and continue to be a source of comfort and succour to the needy regardless of caste or religion. As we have noted in the first chapter, in times of communal clashes, between Hindus and Muslims the church took care of refugees from both sides.

It is not surprising that Mother Teresa is being loved and respected throughout India by all sections of people. She speaks the language of love and compassion and her act of love is not motivated by selfish gain. If we accept the love of Christ as the basis of reconciliation, then the expression of it through charitable and service programmes are important form of reconciling mission.

We are today called upon to be in solidarity with many other groups who are made helpless in modern society. The needs of the handicapped should receive serious attention. Children with multiple handicaps are now about 2% of the population and in the slum the proportion is higher. With special training some of them can be helped. But the mentally disabled most often have to be cared for. One of the problems created by urbanisation

is the care of the aged.

Institutional care of the aged and handicapped is the model that has come from the West. But they need to be modified and the participation of communities is essential.

Reconciliation and people's movements

In service the church is committed to the care for the victims of society, but the church has the responsibility of creating just structures that are necessary to reduce many forms of suffering -- especially the suffering that is caused by deprivation, inhumanity and violence.

We need to be aware of the structures and forces that shape our attitudes to and relationships with one another. Poverty, for example is not an accident, nor the result of fate, laziness or drunkenness. There are structural causes -- faulty economic developments, political decisions, and policies that favour the rich and a cultural system that excludes the poor. Only with an awareness of such factors can we think of meaningful strategies of change. The movements that focus their attention on such structural questions have helped us to redefine our mission priorities. The marginalised Dalits, tribals and women -- and their struggle for dignity and

justice have raised the question of power that influences our relationships with different groups who control power whether it is economic, political or cultural. Which are the groups that have been excluded from power?

These questions are necessary for bringing about a just relationship. Without justice, reconciliation can be a temporary truce. A systemic change is envisioned by these movements. In this they stand in the tradition of the prophets. Walter Brueggemann notes,

The prophet Amos is known for his strictures against the distortion of justice. We usually have not understood that Amos concerns are not with incidental acts of injustice, but with the systematic economic distortion in which the royal-urban managers participate.⁴

A question is often raised about the relation between reconciliation and the struggle for justice, especially since the latter generates conflicts. The struggle for justice creates conflicts with the powers of establishment that are against change. We need change in accordance with the demand of justice. This inevitably means instability and disorder. As S.L. Parmar has pointed out, disorder in itself is not bad, but if

it is not directed towards the struggle for justice, it can be destructive. Traditionally Christian thinking has favoured order over justice and hence we are unable to relate meaningfully to situation of change. But faith in the God of the Bible necessarily means accepting a preference for justice over order. This will generate conflict. In such a situation the basic question is not whether we support conflict or not but how the conflict, disorder can be directed towards peace with justice.

Conflict was very much part of Jesus' ministry of Shalom. That seems to be the experience of people who follow Jesus. They are at odds with the inhuman and unjust values and structures of dominant society. Jesus was able to bear up the conflict not by retreating into a spirituality that is preoccupied with his own security but by committing himself totally to a God who is present in the midst of his people for their liberation. In this sense Jesus knows that peace is a gift of God. It is also a task. Justice gives concrete orientation to our task but every struggle for justice can only be an approximation and there is an ever expanding horizon to our task in the coherence of justice and faith.

iii) Liberative Solidarity: While we affirm the centrality of the

struggle for justice for our mission we need to be sensitive about a danger to which the movements for justice are exposed. To gain more justice the powerless should have power. But if the structure and Orientation of newly gained power follow the same pattern as that of the dominant groups, then today's oppressed will turn into tomorrows oppressors. History bears this out. I believe that reconciliation is Jesus' way to avoid this.

Jesus identified with the aspirations of the people for a new age, but his strategy was different from the political messianism of his day There is a difference between Jesus' messianism or messianic servanthood and ruler-messianism or political messianism.

Both the terms, "messianism" and messiah often indicate a certain "fanaticism" and describe a hero or elitist cult. Such kind of messianism is present in all histories. But the true messianism emerges from the suffering people and identifies with the sufferings of the people. The crucified messiah is on the side of the people, posing a radical challenge to all forms of political, royal and power messianism. Hence all powers must be under the rule of Jesus, the messiah, who came to be a servant of the people, who

died for them, and who rose from the dead that we may rise from the power of death historically and not just at the end of time.

It was hard even for his own disciples to understand his concept of servant messianism. They shared with others the expectation of a political messianism which can be achieved by striking an alliance with political rulers or by a head-on dash with them. Jesus seems to have rejected both these options. He thus differed with the Zealots on the nature of the Kingdom and the power by which it comes. "Jesus chose the power of God's weakness over against the ultimate weakness of coercive human power. He chose sacrificial love over revolutionary violence not because he was anti-revolutionary but because the revolution of God which he represented was radical and total."⁵

His identification with the powerless was total as it is revealed on the cross. All who cry from the depths of suffering and despair find an ally in him.

According to the gospel, Jesus willingly surrendered himself to the will of God and even in the darkness of death he trusted God. Easter faith proclaims that God vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead, thus declaring him

to be the expression of God's own life and Kingdom.

The meaning of the resurrection of the crucified Jesus for our understanding of God is this: God was not a distant spectator but was decisively present, speaking, acting and suffering in all that Jesus did and in all that happened to him. In Jesus' acts of solidarity with the poor and lowly, God acts. In the suffering of Jesus, God suffers. The full force of human alienation, hostility and injustice are experienced by God in the passion and death of Jesus.

This is the liberative solidarity that reorients our value system and power constellations and ushers in a new order. It is possible only if we enter into the life of others, especially the suffering with openness and compassions. For the spiritual resources for a new orientation should emerge from the collective experience of the poor and the marginalised. Liberative solidarity is the channel of those resources. This is the only option left to us in this difficult situation of conflict and blind fury of religious passion.

The emphasis on the poor is not new. But often they are the object of charity or they are being managed and manipulated by social engineers. In liberative solidarity model, the poor become

subjects. Values embedded in their collective life and in their struggle for survival will be decisive for shaping a new order.

This model comes with poignancy when we try to respond to the ecological crisis. In order to evolve an alternate form of development which is wholistic and more humane we need to listen to the experiences of the indigenous and tribal people -- their communitarian life and their bond with the earth. They are for science and technology, but not for a neutral kind of scientism that willingly allows itself to be used by the elite for producing armaments. They are for industry but not industry that destroys the ecological balance and causes pollution. In short, they are asking for a system that accepts the interest of the poor as the central concern. For this we need to question and reject the accepted policies and the logic of the present economic order. That requires tremendous moral and spiritual courage. But then the Jesus who rejected the dominative power in solidarity with the poor beckons us to do it. Our task is critical, as well as pointing to new directions.

Conclusion Personal Testimony

In keeping with the purpose of this lecture, I want to share with you a personal experience that

helps me depend my own commitment to liberative solidarity as a mode of Christian witness.

Both my wife and I have the responsibility of caring for our brain injured child. It is difficult and demanding but the insights we gain from that experience are spiritually uplifting. One of the difficulties We face when we try to relate with brain injured children is the problem of communication. They do not follow the normal pattern of discourse and there is no use trying to make them conform to it. They have a world of their own. The only way in which we can communicate to our daughter is by finding the 'right code' to enter into her world. My wife is able to do it but not others. In order to communicate with our daughter we have to change. With sensitive awareness and sympathy her world becomes our world. Liberative Solidarity is a process by which we see reality as the poor see it and in togetherness build new community.

Note:

1. Rajani Kothari, Beyond Darkness, (CIEDS Collective, 1990).
2. Edward Schillebeeck, Christ,

(New York: Cross Road, 1988).

3. Quoted in Ralph Martin,
Reconciliation, (Atlanta: John
Knox Press, 1981).

4. Walter Brueggemann,
Interpretation and Obedience
(Minneapolis : Fortress Press,
199), p. 273

5. David Miglior, Called to
Freedom, (Philadelphia :
Westminster Press) p. 55.

[return to religion-online](#)

Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission by K. C. Abraham

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Chapter 5: Peace And Justice In Indian Context

I shall begin by reflecting on my Christmas vacation in Kerala. In December we frequently encounter groups of pilgrims on their way to Sabarimal for their darshan of Lord Ayappa. Devotees come from all South Indian states and they travel in small groups intermittently chanting “Lord Ayappa Sarnam”. It is reported that every year the number of devotees is higher than that of the previous year. The devotees undertake this pilgrimage after a long period of preparation which includes growing a beard, wearing beads and a special dress, observing certain dietary restrictions, fasting and prayer. Many of them undertake this long journey by

bus but at the foot of the hill they start climbing hundreds of steps to the temple for the final darshan of Lord Ayappa. For most of them this pilgrimage is a way to fulfil the vow they would have made for favours received. But they are inspired by a sense of power of the divine. Peace is inner tranquility achieved by rigorous discipline and ardent devotion to Lord Ayappa.

In some sense this pilgrim's view of peace is not uncommon among religious people. The emphasis of this spirituality is on the interior life, or the motive of the actor. There is no spiritual significance or necessity for effecting any change in the social structure. The external situation becomes complex and one may retreat to the safe haven of the inner soul for peace.

Kerala has witnessed another popular celebration. Marxist volunteers in thousands from all over Kerala marched into Trivandrum to participate in the concluding celebrations of the National Congress of the Marxist Party. Clad in red clothes and caps they rent the air with their slogans. One of the dailies described the final rally as "Red Sea Roaring". The Marxist movement, as we know, represents a way of realising peace by the struggle of the workers for justice. For them

economic justice alone will ensure peace. There are other marginalised groups -- Dalits, tribals, unorganized workers and Women -- who also approach peace through the road of justice. Marxists have no use for religion in their search of peace. For them all religious spirituality is other-worldly and narrowly communal. It is significant that the National Congress of the Marxist Party expressed its commitment to fostering the unity of all secular forces and rejecting any alliance with so called religious/communal forces.

These two approaches to peace -- one found in the recesses of our inner life and the other in the concrete historical struggle -- are very much present in our context. We need to discuss the perspectives on peace and justice against this background. However one of the main assumptions of this paper is that Christian faith advocates a unitary perception of different aspects of peace -- personal/social, spiritual/material, internal/external, and there is an integral relation between peace and justice in our concrete areas of relationships and action. Let us examine some of the biblical insights on peace and justice.

Biblical Insights

1. The biblical view of peace, Shalom, is a vision of wholeness

that is being translated into concrete relationships and actions.

The Hebrew word, Shalom, inadequately translated as peace, is not just an inner feeling but a dynamic reality that is expressed in human relationships and actions. The abundance of harvest, physical and mental healing, harmonious relationships between humans and beasts and a new stewardship of all resources of earth (Lev. 26:3-7, Isa. 35:1-10) are all part of Shalom experience. The harmonious growth that is indicated by Shalom makes no dichotomy between so-called spiritual and material realms, and it embraces all aspects of life. The vision of a new heaven and a new earth is a utopia, of a perfect order where all people live as a single family. The relationships between human and nature enhance the quality of life and that becomes the primary focus of God's transforming activity. When there is a rupture or distortion in this relationship, there peace is denied.

2. Peace and Justice are integrally related to each other

Shalom is a political community based on justice. There is no Shalom if there is economic inequality, judicial perversion and political exclusiveness. This is the message of prophets in the Old

Testament. There is no peace without justice. (Jer. 7:5-7, Mich. 2:1-12, Amos. 4:1 and Psalm 34:14).

In the Hebrew faith; Yahweh appears as the God the defender of the vulnerable groups from whom all rights are forcefully taken away -- the widow, orphans, aliens and the poor. God is the “near relative”, the protector and avenger of Israel. This is affirmed in an agreement which God has entered into with his people (Covenant). The clear expression of that relationship is justice. To know God is to enter into a covenant with God. A covenant that is justice-oriented relationship. So for the prophets “to know God is to do justice” (Jer. 22:13-16). To worship God is to “seek justice” correct oppression, defend the fatherless and plead for the widow (Isa. 1:17).

Justice is not an abstract concept, but the perspective from which to judge the total system and structure of political and social relationship-the perspective of the poor and the weak. The prophets have a wide range of concerns : commercial exploitation (Hos. 12:8, Isa. 3:14, Amos 8:3, Jer. 5:7, Mic. 6:10-11); hoarding of land (Micah. 2:1-3, Eze. 22:29); dishonest courts (Amos: 5:7, Mic. 3:5-11, Isa. 5:23); violence of the ruling classes (II Kings 33:30,

Micah 3:1-12, Amos 4:1); slavery (Amos 2:6); unjust taxes (Amos 4:11, 5:11-12); unjust functionaries (Amos 5:7, Jer.5:28). How contemporary they all sound! We cannot leave out any aspect of human relationships. In recent years we have become concerned about eco-justice, that is the just way in which we use natural resources and the environment. Here too how can we allow a section of society to consume a majority of resources when many have no access to it.

3. Shalom experience of a person is to live a caring, sharing and just life in community.

We have already pointed out how Shalom is linked to a political and even a cosmic (nature) reality based on justice. But it is experienced as our personal responsibility to the wholesomeness of Gods community. So, covetousness is a self-seeking act that destroys Shalom.

Isa. : 57:17, 19-21 may be quoted here:

“Because of the inequality of his covetousness I was angry, I smote him, I hid my face and was angry. Shalom, to the far and near, says the Lord and I will heal him. But the

wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot rest and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no Shalom, says my God, for the wicked.”

Selfishness becomes the root of evil that disrupts our relationships. In society it becomes organized in a large scale and we need to fight them on the structural level, but we need to counter them on a personal level -- the question of life-style, attitude, irrational prejudices against others and other areas. More positively we need to be “sensitive” to values that, helps enter into the struggles of mothers. “The biblical vision of Shalom functions always on a firm rejection of values and life-styles that seek security and well-being in manipulative ways at the expense of another part of creation, another part of community, or brother or Sister” (Brueggemann). I hope it will be possible for us to give serious thought to a life-style appropriate to our commitment to peace and justice. However we should avoid the danger of setting the personal responsibility in the area our struggle for peace against structural and corporate dimensions of it. Both are necessary and there are situations where one is emphasised more than the other.

4. Jesus is the embodiment of Shalom.

The heart of Jesus' preaching is the proclamation of the Kingdom of God -- a reality that is present in the world but whose fulfillment is yet to come. The sighs of the Kingdom are the same as the experience of Shalom in the Old Testament -- the life in all its fullness, the concern for community based on equality and mutual acceptance and freedom from self-seeking security. John the Baptist, the elder cousin of Jesus who had initiated Jesus into public ministry sends messengers to ascertain whether Jesus is the Messiah or not. The reply is poignantly relevant to our discussion (Matt. 11:2-5) "Go and tell John what you hear and see; the blind receive their sights and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them". These are all indications that Jesus adopted a new scale of values, that was different from the value system of the dominant society in which he lived. He valued persons over systems (Sabbath is for man, not man for Sabbath), he affirmed the value of persons over things (His concern for children, women); he rejected any custom or system that marginalised people (entered into solidarity with the poor and the weak); he was harshly critical

against the self-seeking leaders (Pharisees) and excessive dependence on mammon -- the commodity mentality -- was abhorrent to him. His own uncompromising commitment to the values of the Kingdom and his solidarity with the victims of society made himself an enemy of the powers that be. Conflict was very much part of Jesus ministry of Shalom. That seems to be the experience of people who follow Jesus. They are at odds with the inhuman and unjust value and structures of dominant society Jesus was able to bear up the conflict not by retreating himself into a Spirituality that is preoccupied with his own security (Gethsemane) but by committing himself totally to a God who is present in the midst of his people for their liberation. In this sense Jesus knew that peace is a gift of God. It is also a task. Justice gives concrete Orientation to our task but every struggle for justice can only be an approximation and there is an ever expanding horizon to our task in the coherence of justice and faith.

5. The struggle for peace and justice generates creative instability

If our concept of peace is integrated with justice then an uncritical acceptance of status quo is not tantamount to achieving peace. We need to change the

system in accordance with the demand of justice of the poor. This inevitably means instability and disorder. As S.L. Parmar has pointed out, disorder in itself is not bad, but if it is not directed towards the struggle for justice, it can be destructive. Traditionally Christian thinking has favoured order over justice and hence we are unable to relate meaningfully to the situation of change. But as we have seen God of the Bible is a God of justice and to believe in God of Bible necessarily means accepting a preference for justice over order. This will generate conflict. In such a situation the basic question is not whether we support conflict or not, but how the conflict, disorder can be directed towards peace.

There is a slogan that became popular in SCM circles at one time. In situations of conflict we are called to be peace makers, but in a situation of false peace we are called to create conflict. As young people we raise questions to the patterns, and systems of our society for the sake of better equality and justice and that is our Christian vocation.

6. In a pluralism situation the struggle for peace and justice should be a cooperative effort of the liberative elements in all religions.

Commitment to peace and justice

is the essence of religious faith -- this is a conviction shared by many people in all religions -- not Christianity alone.

An EATWOT consultation on “Religion and Liberation” states that all religions, Christianity included, “are in various ways and to various degrees both oppressive and liberative. They are oppressive because they legitimate unjust social systems like **apartheid**, and caste, and because they create their own special forms of religious unfreedom... But history shows us that religions can be liberative too. They have inspired powerful movements of social protest (like Hebrew prophetism in monarchical Israel, or the **bhakti** movements in medieval India) which have attacked both the oppressive rigidity of the religious systems themselves, as well as of the unjust socio-economic and political structures of the societies in which these religions flourished” (*Voices from the Third World*, p. 153)

It is further stated that in the Third World where all religions together face the challenges on enslaving social and cultural systems and the need to struggle for justice, religions should meet each other, exploring and sharing their liberative elements. It calls for the development of a “liberative ecumenism, that is a form of inter-

religious dialogue which is concerned not so much with doctrinal insights or spiritual experience that different religions can offer one another, as with the contribution to human liberation that each can make” (Ibid. p. 168).

Here I would like to mention the experience of a contemporary Hindu Swami, Swami Agnivesh. I heard him narrating his search for a dynamic form of spirituality that is meaningful for involvement with the untouchables. He started his work among the poor who had become Christians with a view to reconvert them. Let Swami speak:

As we started working with the people we saw elements of exploitation. In poor farmers houses there was not enough to eat and we would ask ourselves what happened? He is producing all the food, the milk and honey and his children are eating coarse food and the milk is being sold in the market. They produce cotton and not enough clothes on the bodies of their women and children. So this simple question started working on our minds.

But when I came to Haryana and started asking these questions and in the

same vein a simple question again came up that we want to fight against Christian missionaries who were among the tribals, untouchables, landless labourers. Why are they forced to accept Christianity and then we knew that the whole society is up against the poor, they are at the bottom of the whole structure of this exploitation and unless and until this exploitation is removed there is conversion into Christianity. And so why not strike at the root? Unless and until untouchability, disparity, exploitation are wiped out we will not be able to fight.

We analysed religion, here is a religion, where the idols are washed in milk and there is no milk for the children to drink, the rich being overfed and the poor starving and yet the religious leaders have no feelings, why are these big temples empty, why cannot poor people take shelter in these temples. This was the whole system of religion and we hit at the fundamental principle

of Hinduism -- that is the karma theory of Hinduism. We are born into this life as we had worked in our previous lives. According to the fruits of our karma. Poor people as you see them poor yes, but they have done very bad things in their previous life and that is why almighty God has given them birth in such a place. That is why you cannot do anything. It is their karma, written on their forehead which we cannot wipe out. If it was written on fingertips or toes it would have been wiped out but it was on their forehead and nothing could be done. So everything is neatly planned and set. We started questioning where is it written?

We had to trace the entire vedic literature and find out who was the enemy of the *Arya*? It was never a Christian, Hindu, Muslim or a Sikh battle. Struggle is always between *Arya* on the one hand and *Dasyu* on the other. What is *Dasyu*? One who does not toil and lives on the wealth of others is *Dasyu* or robber and now the lines are drawn. And on the one hand are those Hindus,

Muslims or Christians and who do not subscribe to any religion or God but are toiling and on the other those who are exploiting the battle has to be between Arya and Dasyu and not between Hindu, Christian, etc. So this was a clear case of class struggle. (*From an unpublished statement*).

Similar testimonies and efforts at reinterpretation are found among Muslims, Buddhists and tribal religion. We need to encourage cooperative action for peace and justice what is emerging today is a non-communal face of religious faith which is liberative. As youth, we need to cross over action for peace and justice.

Issues Faced Today

In the light of the perspective on peace and justice outlined above, we need to discuss some of the concrete affirmations.

a) No to Communal Rights but Yes to Human Rights

An exclusive emphasis on minority rights is a denial of our vision of Shalom, the wholeness. We are committed to human rights, the right of the poor and oppressed everywhere and not to communal rights.

When we fight for religious freedom, it is not for the right of Christians alone, but the right of everyone to follow and practise his or her religion. The plight of Christians from Scheduled Castes has assumed a special place in the Church's agenda now. There is injustice done to them and we need to build up pressure on the government to reconsider its policy. But if we fail to take up the cause of the struggle of all the Scheduled Castes for basic justice, then we appear communal. In a situation where inter-group rivalries are intense, and the entire body politic is considered as a balancing of communal power, it is difficult to keep this perspective alive. But there seems to be no other way by which we can live true to our Christian vision.

b) A Pluralistic, Secular Framework

The traditional culture in India has been a religious culture in which there was an unbroken unity between society, politics and region. In fact, religion provided the integrating principle and the social structure and political authority were legitimised by it. The break-up of this traditional integration has been the significant aspect of modern awakening of people to the ideas of justice and freedom and technological rationality, the

foundation of a secular framework.

Two types of reaction to this are evident. One is the so-called traditionalist approach. It is characterised by a refusal to accept this break-up of traditional integration and the relative autonomy of society and politics and a desperate effort to bring them again under the tutelage of religion. The RSS and other communal ideologies are following this line. This kind of revivalism fails to see the personalistic and dynamic elements of the emerging situation and very often ends up as a struggle to preserve the interests of the elite which had traditionally enjoyed all the privileges.

The other extreme mode of approach is from the modernists. They find the emerging secular society as absolute and reject the past totally. Often it equates modernisation with radical Westernisation. The effort is made to accept uncritically the Western technology, Western politics and Western style of life. From our experience we realise how inadequate and unrealistic this approach is. No people can forget their cultural past.

What we need is a dynamic reinterpretation of the past, taking seriously the new elements of

change. The religions should see the relevance of the new secular framework that is emerging. It is based on certain values which they all together can affirm -- the values of justice, equality and participation. Of course, what is sometimes dangerous is a kind of secular attitude that is closed to religion. Any absolutising elements in politics can be termed inhuman and oppressive. A pluralistic outlook is necessary as a viable form of relating one religion to another on the basis of shared values and goals. "We work not for Christian culture but for an open, secular, pluralistic culture informed by and open to the insights of many faiths, including Christian faith."

Christians have a special role to play. Whatever be the interpretation of the modern change, it cannot be denied that the presence of the Gospel has awakened the humanistic elements of modern secular movements and ideologies. That presence should continue even for the preservation of their integrity.

[return to religion-online](#)

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Chapter 6: Mission in the Context of Endemic Poverty and Affluence

Poverty in Asia

The most disturbing aspect of the condition of a majority of people in Asia is that they not only continue to be poor but have become poorer even after considerable developmental activities. The pattern of economic growth in all the countries in Asia favours the rich and creates imbalances in the relationships between different sections of people.

The bulk of capital investment is concentrated in the industrial or advanced sector in the belief that rapid industrialisation would create conditions for wider utilisation of the abundant labour

available and reduce inequalities in income distribution. But what has really happened is that the advanced sector has achieved considerably more expansion and led to the impoverishment of the traditional sector. The gap between two sectors had widened. In other words, the majority of the population are left outside the development process.

Poverty thus is not merely an economic problem. There is a system that produces it and perpetuates it. Broadly defined, such a system is one in which the decision-making process and control are concentrated in the hands of persons or groups whose interests are so fundamentally inimical to the well-being of life as a whole. Not only do they keep the masses away from the centres of power but also fail to solve the basic problems of mass poverty glaring inequalities, growing unemployment and rising prices. When there arises any organized effort by the masses to redress their grievances it is brutally suppressed. Imposition of authoritarian and repressive regimes, denial of human rights and excessive dependence of foreign elite. “A culture of silence is imposed upon the people, thus choking their cries for dignity, self-respect, right to life and right to food.”

Poverty disrupts the very fabric of

human relationships. It brings new forms of cultural enslavement. M.M. Thomas points out, “While technological advance, agricultural and industrial development and modernisation of social structures are necessary they accentuate the pathological exploitative characteristics of traditional society by destroying their traditional humanising aspects, if traditional power-structures and the social institutions in which they are embodied remain unchanged.” In this way the problem of poverty is social and cultural as well as economic and political. Careful analysis of seemingly concealed working of the forces and consequences of it is highly essential. The fundamental concern is the quality of life, the life in all its fullness. What is the good news of Jesus Christ to this situation?

Biblical Perspectives

Let us look at some of the biblical insights that are relevant for our consideration of the relation between the rich and the poor.

1. The Hebrew word Shalom which suggests a vision of the Hebrew people, of good life is translated inadequately as “peace”. But it refers to a social reality which brings the whole common life to a new fruition. When the Hebrew says that God

wills Shalom, he visualises a life which encompasses prosperity of the earth and people and their happiness, even at times victors over enemies.

If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase and the tress of the field shall yield fruit. And your threshing shall last to the time of vintage; and the vintage shall last to the time of sowing; and you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land securely... and you shall chase your enemies and they shall fall before you by the sword.
(Leviticus 26:3-7)

Or again, another passage:

For the lord your God is bringing you in to a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines, and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity in which you will lack nothing, a land whose

stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. (Deut. 8:7-10)

2. The old Testament is quite unashamed of material abundance; in fact it is taken as a mark of God's blessings. But it is not an unconditional blessing. The good life (Shalom) is dependent upon Israel remaining faithful to the covenant relationship, and this requires living sensitively with both God and the neighbour. Always Israel reminded that material abundance is a gift from God in nature and history. At the same time, those gifts are not given for us to do what we like. They are to be used responsibly for the neighbour's good.

If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and shall lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be (Deut. 15:7).

3. As Israel grows in its covenant

relationship with God, so also is this sensitivity to the responsibility to the neighbour extended beyond their own kinsmen. A body of legislations to prevent exploitation of all has been build up. Gustavo Gutierrez points out:

The Bible speaks of positive and concrete measures to prevent poverty from becoming established among the people of God. In Leviticus and Deuteronomy, there is very detailed legislation designed to prevent the accumulation of wealth and the consequent exploitation. It is said, for example, that what remains in the fields after the harvest and the gatherings of olives and grapes should not be collected, it is for the alien, the orphan, and the widow (Deut. 24:19-21; Lev. 19:9-10). Even more, the fields should not be harvested to the very edge so that something remains for the poor and the aliens (Lev. 23:2). The Sabbath, the day of the Lord, has a social significance; it is a day of rest for the slave and the aliens (Exod. 23:12; Deut. 5:14). The triennial tithe is not to be

carried to the temple, rather it is for the alien, the orphan, and the widow (Deut. 14:28-29; 26:12). Interest on loans is forbidden (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 23:20). Other important measures include the Sabbath year and the Jubilee year. Every seven years, the fields will be left to lie fallow “to provide food for the poor of your people (Exod. 23:11; Lev. 25:2-7). Although it is recognised that this duty is not always fulfilled (Lev. 26:34-35). After seven years, the slaves were to regain their freedom (Exod. 21:2-6) and debts were to be pardoned (Deut. 15:1-18). This is also the meaning of the Jubilee year of Lev.25:10ff. It was...a general emancipation...of all the inhabitants of the land. The fields lay fallow; every man reentered his ancestral property, that is the fields and houses which had been alienated returned to their original owners.¹

4. But in the writings of the prophets one's neighbourly responsibilities is crystalised. They affirmed that without the inclusion of the powerless in the

promise of the covenant, without
a movement of justice that
redirects the riches of the
prosperous toward the needs of
the poor, the people are at war
with their God.

It is as though the righteous God
of Israel were showing a curious
bias towards all who are weak and
oppressed, towards the down-and-
out who cannot help themselves,
the fatherless and the widow the
deaf and the blind, the stranger
and the poor. Consequently when
Israel is called to imitate this
righteous God, it too shall care for
those who cannot take care of
themselves; it shall not “trample
the head of the poor... and turn
aside the way of the afflicted”
(Amos 2:7); it shall not oppress
its slaves nor its hired servants, be
they fellow citizens or foreigners.

The ringing challenge of the
shepherd from Tekoa; Amos,
reverberates through all history as
a passionate plea for justice for
the poor.

Let justice roll down like
water and righteousness
like an ever flowing
stream.

The prophets were not against
prosperity but they were
concerned about the irresponsible
ways in which riches were being
misused, and that is the denial of
Shalom.

5. It is in this line that at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus is said to have received the scroll of Isaiah (a prophet) in the Synagogue and to have applied to himself to words of (Isa. 61:1-2).

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has appointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of Sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus' proclamation includes the full dimensions of a truly human life -- physical and mental healing, bringing new life to the poor; a new stewardship of all resources of the earth and the gifts of the grace of God for the flowering of human life, and to enable the principalities and powers on earth or in the air to perform their true political function.

But there is a difference between Israel's understanding of the working of God's power and Jesus' ministry. Formerly God's power was completely allied to the political structures of Israel's life, now instead the link is with the ministry of the suffering servant which has been embodied

in Christ and which should be continued in the Church. Those who follow Jesus will have to take this ministry seriously since this is the ministry of a suffering servant. Its strategy is not based on the concepts of prosperity and power of the surrounding society, but rather it views the present age in the light shed upon it by the power of the coming Kingdom. It is in keeping with this that we find in the Gospel of John, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27).

6. Three aspects of the Kingdom of God which Jesus preached are : a new consciousness, a new set of values and a new relationship. All these are inter-related.

Consciousness is a loaded word. What I have in mind by this is Jesus' unconditional commitment to God the Father and his constant awareness that his life and ministry is God's gracious gift. The sources of Jesus' freedom is in his child-like trust in the gracious father. This ultimate trust releases him from all fears and false securities that are characteristic of our human existence. It is certainly not following a set of codes or laws but in the realisation of what one is by the gift of God. That is why I call this consciousness or awareness. Jesus' life-style is being sensitised and/have

continuously been transformed by this consciousness.

After all it is not difficult to understand the value of gift dimension for people who know the growing experience, for example of a child. It grows in the awareness of being loved, or having received the love of those who care for him. Without this awareness he is less human.

What Jesus therefore knew about God was that not only is He free and sovereign but he acts in love. Omnipotence is often described as a limitless power and might. Certainly there is all aspect of it in our consciousness of God. But it is equally if not more important for us to realise how Jesus' God is limitless in his compassion. The limit sets to all acts of mercy are broken by Gods rule. The signs of the Kingdom therefore are "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matt.11:5).

The fundamental values this consciousness brings are freedom and justice and love. All these are not mere abstractions or a matter of balancing interests between persons or groups. They are manifested in relationships. Therefore we cannot speak of our commitment to God and our

adherence to values and the building up of new relationships in separate terms.

Kingdom of God enters into the lives of men by transforming human relations. In this process all institutions and structures are included. The controlling principle of this change is the radical demand of love. The disciples had to abandon all their goods (Mark 1:18-20; Matt 1:20-22) all that they had (Luke 5:11). The rich man who wanted to follow Jesus was asked to sell all he had (Mark. 10:21). In response to Peter's comment: "Lo, we have left everything and followed you" Jesus replied with a promise which widens the horizon. It is addressed to everyone who for his sake, has abandoned his home, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or possessions (Mark 10:28-29). In other passages Jesus had made the absolute demand: whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matt. 16:25; Mark 8:35).

The purpose of these sayings is not to idealise poverty. In the New Testament poverty is considered neither a virtue nor an ideal. Disciples are asked to renounce all material possessions for the poor as a mark of their readiness to participate totally in the life of the community of those who hope only in the

manifestation of the love and justice of God. The emphasis is on One's unconditional openness to serve others in love.

In this connection it is useful to refer to the life of the early Christians who heard the call of discipleship. Their life is described in the Acts of the Apostles in these verses:

All whose faith had drawn them together held every thing in common: they would sell their property and possessions and make a general distribution on the need of each required.
(Acts. 4:32)

This is often referred to as the early Christian "Communism". But this is not correct. Obviously, it is not a political,... in fact, it has nothing whatever to do with the production of economic wealth. Indeed, its failure to provide for this has been seen as the cause of its later breakdown. It was a spontaneous expression of Christian love and fellowship - a deep sense of responsibility for one another.

As Gutierrez says, Jesus does not assume the condition of poverty and its tremendous consequences with the purpose of idealising it, but because of "love for and solidarity with men who suffer in it. It is to redeem them from their

sins and to enrich them with his poverty. It is to struggle against human selfishness and everything that divides men and causes them to be rich and poor; possessors and dis-possessed, oppressors and oppressed.... If the ultimate cause of Man's exploitation and alienation is selfishness, the deepest reason for voluntary poverty is love of neighbour.”

Thus Christian love expressed in solidarity with the poor, by the acceptance of poverty is a protest against poverty. The rejection of riches, and brotherly love for one's neighbour in need is the sign of the total acceptance of Jesus and openness to the Kingdom which is to come.

The point I want to emphasise is that the interiority and exteriority of the Kingdom can not be separated. We express the interiority of the Kingdom as we grapple with the issues of our daily social existence. Conversion means changing our modes of thinking and ordering our priorities in accordance with the will of God. It is conversion to God and his Kingdom and therefore to his brother and the world. “It is a choice for total change of life from self-concern to love of neighbour; from getting and accumulating to giving, from exploitation to mercy, from love of dominating power to service, from pride to humility; from

injustice to justice; from seeing the world as man's to get the most out of it, to living in it as God's world, destined by him for total human liberation in the life of the person and in human community”.

Jesus' Response: Conflict, Solidarity and Suffering

The concern for the Kingdom is concretely expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus. Three dimensions of it are: conflict, solidarity and suffering. The social situation of the first century Palestine was unusually complex. Power and wealth were in the hands of a religious aristocracy comprising of the families of priests and a secular aristocracy which included the merchant princes and land-owners in Jerusalem. There were also artisans; small peasants and others who formed the middle class. A large number became unemployed and economically marginalised. The cultural dominance of the pure Israelites over those of mixed ancestry (Samaritans and Gentiles) created caste conflict. Jesus' response to such a situation of economic exploitation and social oppression as part of his good news is important for us. They provide direction for our mission. We will briefly look at those three dimensions.

The demands of the Kingdom of

God create conflict. “I have not come” said Jesus, “to bring peace but a sword.” (Matt. 10:34).

When the structures of society have come to dominate and explicit human beings the action of God creates.

In the Old Testament as we have seen, God confronts the people with his Sword of Judgement. The faithfulness of Israel is tested by whether the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger are cared for and God makes their cause the basis of his condemnation. The same is true about the New Testament. The disciples are being continuously challenged to re-order this life and relationships to the extent of creating a virtual break from the traditional securities of family and religion.

As Prof. West observes:

This is still the dynamic of divine peace-making. It uncovers violence that hides beneath the structures of earthly peace, espouses the cause of the poor and oppressed -- but at the same time transforms their revolutionary messianism by the power of suffering service -- and undercuts the security of the comfortable, the powerful and the rich. Its pattern is the surrender of self for

others, the acceptance of suffering and death because resurrection and new creation are in Christ, the world's reality.²

The second dimension is Jesus' **Solidarity** with the people, especially the poor and the oppressed. He proclaimed good news to the poor, calling them blessed. All four Gospel records reflect the profound concern for the poor. His compassion for the harassed and helpless cannot be discussed. The Gospel certainly is not neutral.

His table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners vividly expresses his solidarity with the victims of established powers. Eating is a symbol of fellowship. Jesus got into trouble for eating with social outcasts because for the Jews, meal is also a symbol of fellowship with God. This is why Jesus used the meal as a picture of the Kingdom.

He had compassion for the hapless victims. This compassion was not a mere feeling of charity, or made him work for some reform. Rather it led him to a ministry for their release as part of a larger vision for the transformation of man and society in a process of total liberation.

Harvey Perkins, formerly of the Christian Conference of Asia

has given us an interesting Bible study with the theme of “Yoke”. He shows how the conflict and solidarity motifs are characteristically present in the Gospel. In Mathew’s gospel the dominant theme is the conflict with the powers that be and in Luke we have a picture of Jesus on the side of the poor and other marginalised groups. He analyses the birth narratives in each of these Gospels to illustrate his points.

The Kingdom is in conflict with the dominant consciousness and power structures; Kingdom in solidarity with the poor; the Kingdom is also of the Messiah, the suffering servant.

The very concept of Kingdom is closely related to the messianic Kingdom which Jesus had been expectantly waiting for. Has Jesus shared their vision? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that Jesus identified with the aspirations of people for a new age, but his strategy was different from the political messianism of his day. There is a difference between Jesus’ messianism or messianic servanthood and the ruler-messianism or the political messianism.

Jesus has given a radical reorientation to the concept of messianism. Often messiahs are those rulers or heroes who

crusade for domination and suppression of people. But the crucified messiah identifies himself with the suffering people. Jesus the messiah became a servant of the people, died for them and rose from the dead that we may rise from the power of death, even in this world.

People who rise with him historically are the messianic people, a sign of the Kingdom of God. Gutierrez says this people make known the kingdom through what has been called the “messianic inversion”. This is explained as follows:

The messianic inversion finds expression in, for example, the statement of the gospel that “the last shall be first” (Mt. 20:16). Such an assertion contradicts the value system of this world, in which the poor and the little folk do not count. The ecclesial community, the messianic people, show forth the gratuitousness of God’s love precisely in the measure that they promote in history the creative presence of the poor. The freely given and unmerited love of God is proclaimed by speaking of the poor and their needs, their rights and dignity, their culture,

and, above all, of the God who wants to place them at the center of the history of the church.³

His identification with the powerless was total as it is revealed in the Cross. All who cry from the depths of suffering and despair from the freedom find an ally in him.

According to the Gospels, Jesus willingly surrendered himself to the will of God and even in the darkness of death he trusted him. Easter faith proclaims that God vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead, thus declaring him to be the expression of God's own life and Kingdom.

Mission Our Response

The mission is our response to God's liberating action in the world. "The mission which is conscious of the Kingdom will be concerned for liberation, not oppression; justice, not exploitation; fullness, not deprivation; freedom, not slavery; health, not disease; life, not death; No matter how the poor may be identified, this mission is for them." Some of the implication of this for our task may be mentioned here:

1. The Mission is Radical Involvement.

This may be saying the obvious. But one or two dimensions of it should be reiterated. Any radical involvement that is directed towards changing the structures of injustice becomes political. In this sense mission is another name for political action. Conflict is inevitable. One may not consciously advocate violence, but disruption and disorder surround any process of restructuring of society. Very often, emphasis on reconciliation has in effect meant a way of maintaining the **status quo** against necessary radical changes. Many of the action groups feel, for this reason, that they should speak more of conflict and less of reconciliation. We should not ignore the criticism implied in this position. The message of reconciliation that does not take seriously the nature of differences and also see the positive value of conflict for social change will not be meaningful for the struggle of different groups for justice. It is now widely recognised that legislation, public opinion and other apparatuses of democratic machinery alone cannot bring about the desired social justice for the weaker sections in India. They should be strengthened by the militant, organised struggle of the poor.

On the other hand, it is true that we cannot absolutise conflict. That will, end up in creating a self-

righteous and de-humanising order as was shown in the history of revolutions. How to keep the conflict in any struggle for social justice and for giving love in creative tension?

2. *Cultural Resources*

Jesus knew that his people were being crushed under the weight of a heavy yoke of social and political oppression. He was also conscious of their cultural enslavement. Therefore his attention was turned to unveiling their cultural propensities for liberation. He spoke of the lilies of the field, the birds of the air, salt of the earth, the light of the world and so on. All symbols are taken from their life situation. The elemental realities thus drawn are all life-affirming. This closeness to one's roots and soil is expressed in one's culture. In Asia our religions are integrally related to our cultures. Therefore, in proclaiming the Kingdom of God in our context should mean taking seriously the cultural and religious symbols and traditions which embody their vision of life and wholeness.

The EATWOT, a fellowship of theologians of the Third World who are heavily influenced by the liberation theology of Latin America, met in Delhi in 1981. They were compelled to take a positive look at the liberative

potentialities of Asian religious tradition. The final statement has given a pointed expression to this:

To be committed to the people's struggle for social justice and to contemplate God within this involvement, both form the essential matrix or theology. Without this prayerful contemplation, God's face is only partially seen and God's Word only partially heard within the participation in God's liberating and fulfilling action in history.⁴

Of course, we are aware of the ambiguous nature of our cultural and religious heritage. We are not romanticising the ancient religious and accepting them uncritically

Seers and saints of our land have made important contributions to the heightened awareness of man about himself and the world. But we have also seen the worst of these religions. They were used for exploiting masses, for protecting the vested interests of the high and mighty. The very idea of contemplation and silence was used to suppress the masses and they were made to accept passively their suffering making other -- worldly flights from realities.

There were positive elements in them. Sometimes they are prominently expressed in the protest movements and traditions within the dominant religions, in myths, stories and legends. We need to rediscover the dynamic heritage of ours. The heart of Asian religious tradition should be found in its response to human pain and suffering. The genius of Buddha for example is in that he provided a new perspective on the creative meaning of suffering. Great saints and gurus were on with the people in their anguish. Theirs is not a spirituality of manipulative power and strength, although there is a lot of it in Asian tradition as it is present in every other religious tradition. But, they knew that the power of the Ultimate is expressed in the strength of the people, in their sacrifice, love and truth.

C.S. Song of Taiwan has given expression to this concern in his theological interpretation of Chinese folk tale called “The faithful Lady Ming” and ends his reflections with these poignant words “Our political theology is located in the spaces created by the spiritual power of Asian people in suffering. And our power ethic is the ethic that believes in the ultimate victory of God who lives with people and gives them the power of true love, and justice. If this is God’s it should be ours also.”⁵

3. A New Spirituality

Most of us have been nurtured in the pietistic tradition and our understanding of Christian life is influenced by it. This tradition has been negative in its influence to the formation of any meaningful relationship with the concerns of society. Its reduction of the meaning of Salvation to the relationship of the individual soul with God and its refusal to open itself to the liberative act of God outside the familiar work are problematic. Even in circles which are open to the new evangelical thrust for social action, there has been no critical look at this theological framework. What emerges from this action is a style of engagement that is directed towards converting individuals to become “good men and women”. Social involvement becomes a matter of giving moral advice to people with the hope that moral men will lead immoral societies.

We need a spirituality that provides a basis for meaningful involvement in society and the struggles of people. It should guide us and sustain us. We may agree with Migliorie when he says:

We need a spirituality that is inclusive rather than exclusive, active as well as receptive, oriented to the

coming of God's Kingdom of righteousness and freedom throughout the world. We need a spirituality of liberation that will open us increasingly to a life of solidarity with others, especially with the poor.

M.M. Thomas in one of his early essays, when he was responding to the challenge of Gandhian spirituality speaks of the need for a "spiritual aristocracy" that accepts prophetic vocation as their communal style.

The practices of traditional spirituality -- Bible reading, prayer meditation, fellowship around the Word and Sacrament, service of the neighbour -- are all still valid provided they have a new orientation and new meanings. They will be linked with the "praxis of Christian freedom in solidarity with the poor".

One of the important points about the new spirituality is how to read the biblical materials in terms of a dominant concern of our times namely the removal of present oppressive structures. Biblical symbols, stories and narratives are peculiarly relevant struggles in concrete situations. They describe the agonies and joys of the people, they articulate people's questions and answers. Today this

“people character” of the Bible is made obscure by professionals. There should be a process by which the Bible should be reappropriated by people to be used by them for their faith articulation.

Not only the way we read the Bible but also the practice of our prayer should be considered in the light of new challenges. People are taught to mechanically repeat the Lord’s Prayer and the prayer has become a way of asking favours from God. But the prayer should be a recalling to ourselves God’s concern for righteousness and his solidarity with the oppressed. Is this not the real meaning of the model prayer which our Lord has taught us? We pray for his Kingdom his will to be done and His name be hallowed. Of course within that framework we place before God our needs and the needs of others. But primarily it is a way of entering into the liberative action of God which he is accomplishing through Jesus Christ. It is a form of protest against all forces that thwart the purposes of God and his kingdom. That become the primary focus and not something that is tagged on to our prayer by way of vague intercessions for the needs of the world.

This prayer can be a passionate encounter. When we involve in a situation of oppression we are

baffled and frustrated by the force of opposition. The landlord who is a pious Christian becomes the enemy if you are on the side of the landless labourer. The upper caste Christians despise you if you move closely with the Harijans; you will be harassed by the police and government machinery when you try to express your solidarity with the victims of violence. In that situation, prayer, the recalling to yourselves of the presence of God who listens to the cry of the crushed will be reassuring.

Seen in this way the other elements of spirituality meditation, participation in sacraments, worship -- all become a source of strength for the liberative experiences. Eucharist is an anticipation of the new humanity which God creates. The table Fellowship transcends all man-made barriers. In love and sharing a divided humanity is made one.

It is important to realise the material context from which the eucharist has evolved. St. Paul gives the words of institution after a critical appraisal of some of the discriminatory practices on the basis of economic status that prevailed in the church. It is then as a great symbol of sharing, the practice and meaning of eucharist was endorsed. Of course the material context and the human

universal reality which it embodies are seen to be forgotten. Instead, like other rituals, it has become a cultic act which reinforces a narrow communal solidarity.

A spirituality of liberation of course, cannot be a theoretical construct. It has to be evolved in mutual practice of solidarity with the poor. A new openness to the cries and aspirations of the marginalised groups alone is the basis of it.

The mission is God's work as well as our responsibility. What God is offering is fullness of life and our responsibility is the defence of that fullness. Such defence entails conflict and suffering. In our struggles, Jesus is present always beckoning us to the New

Notes:

1. Gustave Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (Mary Knoll: Orbis Books, 1973) P. 366

2. Charles C. West, "Reconciliation and World Peace", in Reconciliation in Today's World, Ed. By Allen O. Miller (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969) P. 109

3. Gustavo Gutierrez, The God of Life (Orbis New York 1991), P 208

4. Melbourne Conference Report, Section I (Document No. G. 09. WCC)

5. C. S. Song, the Tears of Lady Ming (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981), PP 65,66

[return to religion-online](#)

Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission by K. C. Abraham

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Chapter 7: From Diakonia to Political Responsibility

What are the issues important for a consideration of Church's political responsibility in the present-day Indian context? This paper attempts to highlight some of them.

1. A Brief Historical Survey

We will begin with a historical survey of the Church's efforts to relate itself with the political situation in modern India. The struggle for Independence and the emergence of a new nation together form a watershed in the life and witness of the Church of India. There emerged a strong national consciousness in the Church which is reflected in its theology and witness.

“Participation in nation-building,” was the phrase that summed up the political witness during this time. The Church participated in nation-building as a partner through its service institutions -- educational, health and developmental programmes. Diakonia (service) was the principal form of witness. Many development projects with the help of funding agencies have their origin in this period.

The Church in India did pioneering service by establishing medical and educational institutions. Many charitable institutions like orphanages and relief operations through CASA have provided help to the needy regardless of their religious affiliations. Some of these programmes are well-known and there is no need to describe them elaborately.

It is important that in a situation of extreme poverty and continuing misery of millions in rural and urban areas, the Church provides service for the needy. Sometimes such actions are powerful witness to the Church’s solidarity with people, breaking it isolation.

In their study of the churches in North India, J.P. Alter and H. Jaisingh make a pointed reference to one such moment in the life of the Church in Delhi. In 1947,

there broke out the worst communal clash between Hindus and Muslims, and thousands of refugees streamed into Delhi. Christians took the lead ministering to the needs of the victims and this was widely acclaimed:

The service to refugees was of profound significance for the life of the church. It demonstrated that Christians, though neutral in the communal struggle, were not indifferent to the sufferings of their neighbours. It created a fund of goodwill which proved of great value in subsequent discussions concerning faith. Above all, it helped to draw the Christian community out of its isolation and to identify Christians as responsible citizens of the new Democratic Republic.¹

However, laudable and necessary such charitable and developmental activities are, they seldom challenge the existing system and structures of injustice that perpetuate poverty and unequal distribution of resources. In the long run they do not provide an answer to the search of the poor for their dignity and justice. It is this critique that led

to the awareness by some that the poor have to be organized to fight for their rights and they should not be mere objects of charity but subjects of struggles for a new just order.

For them mission is “struggle for justice.” They are critical of some aspects of nation-building and work towards altering the structures and practices that dehumanise people. This form of witness is more readily found in the fringes of the Church, especially in the so-called action groups. The mainline church is predominately satisfied with service projects. There have been notable pronouncements by the churches, but they remained as rhetoric.²

The emergence of national consciousness is linked with a reassertion of Hindu religion and its values. A response to the Hindu renaissance was therefore, an integral part of Christian witness in modern India. A rethinking on the Christian attitude to other faiths was clearly evident. Christian thinkers like Chenchiah and Devanandan argued for a more positive attitude towards other faiths. Inter-faith dialogue with an attitude of humility and openness and with a willingness to learn from others is thought to be the best form of witness. Today the issue of inter-faith dialogue is more complex.

There are economic and political factors that affect the relationships between religious communities. We will deal with this in the next section. But we notice that an aggressive crusading attitude towards other faiths is giving way to a more tolerant attitude.

It is necessary to start with this brief historical note in order to understand the present. In fact, the basic components of the Church's witness are present in this period ('50s and '60s). Service has been the predominant form of witness, with a peripheral interest in prophetic witness and dialogue. Perhaps today many are convinced that we are in a situation where prophetic response should be deepened. To understand this we need to analyze the contemporary challenges the Church faces.

II. Present-day Challenges

The '70s and the '80s have seen many changes in the national scene. The domination of a rich and powerful elite over the masses, religious and caste groups organizing to usurp political power, a virtual collapse of the secular framework of the Constitution, continuing misery of the poor and their exclusion from all decision-making process, new ethnic identities and their struggle for justice -- these are some of

them. More recently we have seen the globalisation and liberalisation in economic policies which create a new culture that destroys indigenous communities and traditional values. All these have to be evaluated. But we may focus our attention on three issues which exert considerable pressure on our political process.

a) The Impact of Modernism on Religion and the Fundamentalist Upsurge

The traditional culture in India has been a religious culture, in which there was an unbroken unity between society, politics and religion. In fact, religion provided the integrating principle and the social structure and political authority were legitimised by it. The break-up of this traditional integration has been the significant aspect of modern awakening of people to the ideas of justice and freedom and technological rationality, the foundation of a secular framework.

Two types of reaction to this are evident. One is the so-called traditional approach. It is characterised by a refusal to accept this break-up of traditional integration and the relative autonomy of society and politics and a desperate effort to bring them under the tutelage of religion. The RSS and other

communal ideologies are following this line.³ This kind of revivalism fails to see the personalistic and dynamic elements of the emerging situation and very often ends up as the struggle to preserve the interests of the elite which had traditionally enjoyed all the privileges.

The other extreme mode of approach is from the modernists. They find the emerging secular as absolute and reject the past totally. Often it equates modernisation with radical westernisation, with uncritical acceptance of the Western technology, Western politics and Western style of life. From our experience we realise how inadequate and unrealistic this approach is. No people can forget their cultural past.

What we need is a dynamic reinterpretation of the past, taking seriously the new elements of change. The religions should see the relevance of the new secular framework that is emerging. It is based on certain values which they all together can affirm - the values of justice, equality and participation. Of course, what is sometimes dangerous is a kind of secular attitude that is closed to religion. Absolutising elements in politics can be termed inhuman and oppressive. A pluralistic outlook is necessary as a viable

form of relating one religion to another on the basis of shared values and goals. “We work not for Christian culture, but for an open, secular, pluralistic culture, informed by and open to the insights of many faiths, including Christian faith.” (M.M. Thomas).

In a pluralistic context religions should cooperate in strengthening and secular/civic basis of politics. Christians in India are called upon to accept this responsibility and not to pursue communal politics that is preoccupied with their own interests.

b) The Struggle for Ethnic Identity and Justice

The struggle by different ethnic groups for their identity and justice has brought serious questions as to the nature of a pluriform community we are committed in build. It has to be discussed against the background of two conflicting developments. Threatened by the emergence of modern Nation-State and the ideas of secularism, some sections in all religions assert a fundamentalist posture in the major religions. Under the guise of identity struggle, the fundamentalists, particularly in major religions, are creating a volatile situation. The majority community wants to perpetuate its dominance by controlling the political process through its

militant organisations. The Hindutva philosophy of the BJP-RSS-VHP⁴ combine is the best example. The process has created a sense of insecurity among the minority communities and marginal groups. This form of resurgence will only strengthen the oppressive forces and we should reject it.

At the same time marginal groups like Dalits and tribals are seeking a new identity for themselves based on their past religion and cultures which had been suppressed or destroyed by dominant communities. In their struggle against historical as well as contemporary process of domination, the Dalits and indigenous groups become conscious of their identity as people. Reflection on mission should be related to this newly gained awareness of marginalised groups.

The Church in the past has been ambiguous in regard to its response to the identity question. Christian mission for sure has enormously contributed to the social transformation of indigenous people. But it has been insensitive to peoples struggle for cultural identity. The Church has often projected a view of uniformity that suppresses all differences.

We need to affirm that plurality is

God's gift and diversity is in the very structure of God's creation. We are called upon to celebrate God's gift of plurality and diversity.

If the struggle for Dalit and tribal identity is the demand to secure the rightful space of indigenous people in the wider human discourse and relationship, then it should be accepted as integral to God's purposes for them. The theological link between Christian faith and the struggle for identity should be strengthened.

The struggle for identity is also a struggle for justice and participation. This gives a concrete and distinct focus for our struggle. Here the biblical tradition of faith can make significant contribution. The prophets were uncompromising on their stand on justice. They rejected any pattern of relationship that fails to ensure justice, as contrary to God's will. I believe that this focus on justice in our identity struggle gives us a concrete direction as well as a new theological meaning for it.

From a Christian perspective, identity, however, is not an absolute category. We are for an open identity and not a closed one. Moltmann in his discussion on the doctrine of creation points out the significance of *oikas*, living space for our understanding

of group identity He says any living thing needs a space, a boundary for its secure living; but if that boundary is absolutely sealed and closed, the living thing dies. "Every frontier enclosing the living space of a living thing is an open frontier. If it is closed, the living thing dies." (Moltmann)

A renewed community which allows space for different identities to flourish should be our common goal. We need to mobilise the humanistic and liberative vision of regions for building a just and participatory community. Fundamentalism is the very denial of the essence of religion.

Commitment to peace and justice is the essence of religious faith -- that is a conviction shared by many people in all religions not Christianity alone.

An EATWOT Consultation on "Religion and Liberation" states that in the Third World all religions together face the challenges of enslaving social and cultural systems and the need to struggle for justice, religions should meet each other exploring and sharing their liberative elements. It calls for the development of "liberative ecumenism." That is, a form of inter-religious dialogue which is concerned not so much with doctrinal insights or spiritual

experiences that different religions can offer to one another, as with the contribution to human liberation that each can make.⁵

c) The Pressure of Global Economic System on National Politics and Culture

With the disappearance of the socialist world, the Third World countries have entered a new phase in their development saga. They are now totally and completely dominated by the financial institutions and global market engineered by the First World. The gap between the “rich” and the “poor” countries has become greater, and this gap is no longer a relative surmountable gap, but absolute in terms of access to key factors of production such as capital (including technology).

Globalisation and modernisation through technological growth have brought many serious problems. Increasing marginalisation is the inevitable consequence of a capital intensive urban-centered model of growth. The new economic policies introduced in India, allegedly at the behest of IMF and World Bank, will not alter the basic pattern of development that has been inimical to the marginalised. There is no doubt that we need to link ourselves to the global market system and that we should

clear the rot that has set in the public sector. But an unfettered growth of multi-nationals and the emphasis on foreign trade are not conducive for a pattern of development that is oriented to the needs of the poor.

A concomitant problem that model of growth has created is the ecological crisis. Fast depletion of natural resources, pollution of air, land and water, the global warming and other atmosphere changes have catastrophic effects. A consultation on ecology and development has correctly observed that “while all are affected by the ecological crisis, the life of the poor and marginalised is further impoverished by it. Shortage of fuel and water adds peculiar burdens to the life of women.” It is said that tribals are made environmental prisoners in their own land.

The Dalits whose life has been subjected to social and cultural oppression for generations are facing new threats by the wanton destruction of the natural environment. As the Chernobyl and Bhopal incidents show, ecology knows no national boundaries. Climatic changes and related environmental consequences are globally experienced. What we witness today is a steady deterioration and degradation of the biosphere, all

life and physical environment.⁶ The consultation further notes that “the enormity of the problem is caused by the wasteful life-style of the rich and irresponsible use of the natural resources and the degeneration of environment by the profit oriented industry. In this sense, the problem of ecology is closely linked with the pattern of development which continues to create imbalances between different sectors and allows massive exploitation of rural and natural environment for the benefit of dominant classes.⁷

In this connection we must be aware of a more far-reaching and perhaps the most devastating impact this model of growth has on our culture. The tendency is to create a mono-culture that encourages consumerist and profit-gaining values, destroying whatever infrastructure is indigenously available to people. Ashish Nandy’s words are pungent:

As this century with its bloodstained record draws to a close, the nineteenth century dream of one world has re-emerged, this time as a nightmare. It haunts us with the prospect of a fully homogenised technologically controlled, absolutely hierarchical world, defined by polarities like the modern

and the primitive, the secular and the non-secular, the scientific and the unscientific, the expert and the layman, the normal and the abnormal, the developed and the underdeveloped, the vanguard and the led, the liberated and the savable.⁸

While the elite-controlled government in most of the Third World countries follow the logic of the technological growth model which inevitably leads to the erosion of values germane to indigenous culture and religion, serious questions are raised by some concerned groups about an alternate model of modernisation. M.M. Thomas calls for a “philosophy of modernisation which goes beyond the materialistic world-view and respects the organic spiritual dimension of human community life.”⁹

Actually, all religious and cultural traditions of the Third World are quite sensitive to these dimensions through their reverence for nature and concern for the primary communities like the family, and therefore, any emerging new society needs to assimilate some of the traditional spirit and values in their renewed form. This will also help to give modernisation indigenous cultural roots, without which it often

brings demoralisation. In other words, Third World development should go beyond the classical capitalist-socialist models to develop “a society appropriate for the multi-faced nature of human beings and their social and transcendent dimensions.”¹⁰ From the foregoing analysis it is clear that participation in nation-building involves a more complex responsibility. The pressures that impinge on us are political, cultural and religious. They point to the urgent task of building an alternative view of society where all human beings live and experience as “persons-in-community, in various forms of daily social life.”¹¹ Diversity is the natural state of a society like ours. Plural identities should be the basis for the State. What we need is new “confederative perceptions of unity from bottom up.”¹²

III. Rethinking on Church’s Witness -- Liberative Solidarity

The Church proclaims and lives by the mystery of Christ. Specific challenges from the situation provide an occasion to delve deep into its meaning and to formulate appropriate response to it. A holistic vision of the Gospel which overcomes all dichotomies - - spiritual and material, personal and social, history and nature, sacred and secular -- should be affirmed as the basis of God’s

freeing and creative act. God's liberative work is towards the strengthening and renewing of relationships among humans, and between humans and nature. Life is sustained by interconnectedness. Fragmentation and exclusiveness are ways of denying God's purpose for God's creation. Justice is the concrete direction of God's transforming and liberative work in our midst. To participate in the struggle for justice is to participate in God's mission.

Questions are raised in the discussion on mission about the relation between proclamation of the Gospel and the Church's involvement in politics and society. Some maintain that evangelism should be distinct from other forms of witness like dialogue, development, service and struggle for justice. But others reject this separation and affirm an integral view of mission embracing all aspects of life and its relationships. One has to proclaim the Gospel through one's words, deeds and life. They are inseparable. However, we cannot ignore the fact that on programmatic level the Church has been making some distinctions and it is difficult to obliterate them. But we need to ask how each can be informed as well as critiqued by others. For example the justice-oriented approach raises critical questions

on all developmental and service endeavors of the Church. If service projects and institutions do not become instruments for the removal of unjust structures, they should be viewed with suspicion. All institutional forms of service in which significant resources of money and personnel from other countries are even now involved, come under critical scrutiny, especially as some of them provide subsidised service to the middle and tipper class sections of society.

While we affirm the centrality of the struggle for justice for our mission we need to be sensitive about a danger to which the movements to justice are exposed. To gain more justice the powerless should have power. But if the structure and orientation of newly gained power follow the same pattern as that of the dominant groups, then today's oppressed will turn into tomorrow's oppressors. History bears this out. I believe that reconciliation is Jesus' way to avoid this. And it is integral to proclamation.

Jesus identified with the aspirations of the people for a new age, but his strategy was different from the political messianism of his day There is a difference between Jesus' messianism or messianic servanthood and ruler-messianism

or political messianism.

His identification with the powerless was total as it is revealed on the cross. All who cry from the depths of suffering and despair find an ally in him.

This is the liberative solidarity that reorients our value system and power constellations and ushers in a new order. It is possible only if we enter into the life of others, especially the suffering, with openness and compassion. The spiritual resources for a new orientation should emerge from the collective experiences of the poor and the marginalised. Liberative solidarity is the channel of those resources. This is the only option left to us in this difficult situation of conflict and blind fury of religious passion.

The model comes with poignancy when we try to respond to ecological crisis. In other words to evolve an alternate form of development 'which is wholistic and more humane we need to listen to the experiences of the indigenous and tribal people -- their communitarian life and their bond with the earth. They are for science and technology, but not for a neutral kind of scientism that willingly allows itself to be used by the elite for producing armaments. They are for industry but not industry that destroys the

ecological balance and cause pollution. In short, they are asking for a system that accepts the interest of the poor as the central concern. For this we need to question and reject the accepted policies and the logic of the present economic order. This requires tremendous moral and spiritual courage. But then the Jesus who rejected the dominative power in solidarity with the poor beckons us to do it. Our task is critical, besides pointing to new directions.

IV Political Responsibility; Specific Tasks

In conclusion, I want to reiterate some of the concrete steps already mentioned about the Church's task:

a) The Church is called to strengthen the secular/civil base of politics. All religions should be challenged to evolve a theology that articulates the liberative and human values of their faith which provide a basis for responsible participation in the secular realms.

b) The Church should deepen its commitment to the poor and the marginalised, ensuring justice for all, especially the weaker sections. It should involve in, with other movements, the struggle of Dalits, tribals and women for their dignity and freedom. Mission should be reformulated as

liberative solidarity.

c) The State should be called upon to be accountable to justice. A prophetic criticism against the government when it perpetuates violence and oppression is unavoidable for responsible participation.

d) The Church should join with others in evolving a paradigm of development that is ecologically sound. It should reject a value system and life-style that destroy our culture. This also means strengthening those communities and traditions which affirm life and its relationships.

Notes:

1. James P Alter Ct. al., The Church a Christian Community, p. 35

2. A resolution passed by the Synod of the Church of South India in 1962 is as follows:

“The Synod believes that the social revolution now taking place in India is a manifestation of the eternal purpose and judgement of God in human history. It believes that the Church is created by God to be a people holy unto the Lord and to seek the establishment of Righteousness, Mercy and Love in human society. It therefore

calls the members of the Church of South India at this critical time to a serious and prayerful consideration of the implications of this belief for their worship, work and witness in a changing India.” (Rajah D. Paul, Ecumenism in Action p.100).

3. The Rashtryia Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a fundamentalist group within Hinduism which was mainly responsible for demolishing the Babri-Masjid in Ayodhya in December, 1992.

4. BJP : Bharatiya Janatha Party-- a political wing of the Hindu fundamentalists working closely with RSS.

VHF Vishwa Hindu Parikshit -- this is also a forum for Hindu fundamentalists dominated by Hindu sanyasis. All these organisations work hand in hand.

5. Voices from the third World, 153

6. Daniel D. Chetti, (ed.) Ecology & Development, (Madras: UELC/Gurukul & BTESSC, 1991), p. 96

7. Ibid.

8. Ashish Nandy, The intimate Enemy-Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism, quoted in Surendra, op. cit.

9. M. M. Thomas, “Current Issues in the Third World Approach to Modernisation,” in Bangalore Theological Forum, Dec. 1961, p.38

10. Leonardo Boff “Liberation Theology and Collapse of Socialism,” in Youth of India, National YMCA, Summer 1991.

11. Bastian Wielenga, “The Changing Face of Socialism and its Relevance to the Churches” in Christian Marxist Dialogue, Spring 1991, quoted in Thomas, op. cit.

12. Kothari, “Cultural Context of Communalism in India” in Economic and Political Weekly, Bombay, Vol. XXIV No. 2, Jan. 14, 1989.

Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission **by K. C. Abraham**

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Chapter 8: A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis

There was a time when we thought that ecological crisis was not a serious problem for us in the poorer countries. Our problem, it was assumed, was confined to poverty and economic exploitation, and the environmental issue was rejected as a “luxury” of the industrialized countries. Social action groups and peoples movements in the Third World countries understandably have shown relative indifference to the problem of ecology. But today we realize how urgent this issue is for rich and poor countries alike- in fact for the whole world. The threat is to life in general. The life of the planet is endangered. The ecological crisis raises the problem of survival itself. Moreover there is a growing awareness of the organic link between the destruction of the environment and socio-economic and political Justice.

The interconnectedness between commitment to the renewal of society and the renewal of the earth is clearly seen in the struggle of many marginalised groups all over the world. The indigenous people everywhere (Native Indians in the USA and Canada, Maoris in Aotearoa-New Zealand, Aborigines in Australia, tribal people in many countries of Asia), and many groups who have been traditionally dependent upon the land and the sea -- small farmers, fisher-folk, agricultural labourers -- have kept these two dimensions together in their movements for liberation.

A majority of the poor are also landless. Agricultural developments helps the rich landlords and not the poor. The poor in the slums of our cities are squeezed into small hovels and their struggle is simply for living space. Yet, to enhance and expand their comforts, the rich continually destroy whatever is left for the poor: their villages, their forests and their people. The stubborn resistance of the poor tribal women in the now famous Chipko movement against the Government’s decision to turn their habitat into a mining area, has brought to our consciousness the inseparable link between the struggle of the poor and ecological issues.

Today the cry of the poor in the Narmada Valley in India is not only to preserve their own habitat but to protect forests everywhere from wanton

destruction. The ecological crisis is rightly the cry of the poor. The experience of deprivation and exploitation is linked with environmental degradation and therefore, their perspective on these problems should be the starting point of our discussion. It is not a problem created by scientists or by a group of people who fancy growing trees around their houses. It is the problem of the poor. It is integral to their struggle for justice and liberation, and basically it is about preserving the integrity of Creation.

Of course, committed scientists and other ecologists have helped us to deepen our understanding of the ecological problem. In the past, nature was thought to be an object for ruthless exploitation by the “developers” and scientists for the “good of humans”. Little thought was given to the perils of environmental destruction. A sense of optimism prevailed among them about the capability of science to tame nature. Those who raised any voice of concern about it were branded as “prophets of doom.” But today more and more scientists are joining others with a, crusading zeal, to make people aware of the ecological disasters. Marshalling convincing scientific data, they tell us that the environmental degradation caused by massive pollution of air water and land, threatens the very life of earth -- fast depletion of non renewal resources, indeed of species themselves, the thinning of the ozone layer that exposes all living creatures to the danger of radiation, the build up of gases creating the greenhouse effect, increasing erosion by the sea -- all these are brought out through their research. Related to these are problems of rapidly increasing population, spread of malnutrition and hunger, the subordination of women’s and children’s needs to men’s needs, the ravages of war, the scandal of chronic poverty and wasteful affluence.

I do not want to dwell at length on these problems. They are now well known and much literature is available on them. My purpose is to highlight the theological and ethical issue involved in this problem and to suggest a possible response from the church and people’s movements. To do this we need to clarify for ourselves some of the perspectives on the ecological problems.

PERSPECTIVES

Growth Model Must be Changed

The ecological crisis is created by modern industrial and technological growth and modern life-style. A paradigm of development, the western industrial growth model, is almost universally accepted. It is a process whereby we use enormous capital and exploit natural resources, particularly the non renewal 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

creates imbalances between different sectors and allows massive exploitation of the rural and natural environment for the benefit of the dominant classes. Much of the profit oriented growth which destroys the eco-balance, is engineered and controlled by the multinationals of USA, Europe and Japan. We are told that Japanese multinationals indiscriminately destroy forests and other natural resources in the Philippines, Indonesia and other Asian Countries. Japan is able to preserve its own forests and trees because there are countries in the surrounding region that supply their needs to maintain their modern life-style!

Industrial pollution has risen alarmingly. The havoc created by the gas leak in Bhopal is vivid in our memory. Over use of fertilisers is turning our farmlands into deserts, and the fishes in our seas and rivers are dying. In Kuttanad area in Kerala a massive epidemic is destroying all the fishes.

Human demands for food and power are increasing faster than the resources, which are, in fact, dwindling. It is recognised that the negative impact of people on environment is the product of three factors: the total population, the amount of resources consumed by each person and the environmental destruction caused by each person. All these continue to increase, especially because of the new life-style of the rich, and the irresponsible use of natural resources which add a peculiar burden on the ecosystem.

A Conference on Ecology and development clearly states:

While all are affected by the ecological crisis, the life of the poor and marginalised is further impoverished by it. Shortage of fuel and water adds particular burdens to the life of woman. It is said that the tribals are made environmental prisoners in their own land. Dalits, whose life has been subjected to social and cultural oppression for generations, are facing new threats by the wanton destruction of natural environment.¹

We need to ask whether the present policies of the government will help us alter this form of development. The answer is likely to be that nothing short of a rejection of the dominant paradigm of development and a commitment to an ecologically sustainable form of development, will help avert the present crisis.

Ecological Crisis: A Justice Issue

Our ecological crisis should be seen as a justice issue. This is a fundamental perspective that distinguishes people's view on ecology from that of the establishment, and even of the experts. Political and social justice is linked to ecological health. "We shall not be able to achieve social justice without justice for natural environment; we shall not be able to achieve justice for nature without social justice" (Moltmann).² Several dimensions of this eco-justice are now brought to the fore through the experience of the struggle of the marginalised.

First, the connection between economic exploitation and environmental degradation is clear in the deforestation issue. The massive destruction of forests through avarice and greed results in atmospheric changes. The poor are driven out of their habitat for the sake of “development”. In a paper prepared by the Kerala Swatantara Matsya Thozilali Federation (Trade Union of Fisher People) it is said, because of the massive fish epidemic caused by the use of some pesticides, people refuse to buy fish today. This has resulted in making the fisherfolk jobless. Again, the use of mechanised trawlers in the fish industry has resulted in threatening all fish life, and the traditional fisherfolk have still not recovered from the loss they have suffered.

Second, justice is actualized in just relationships. Unequal partnerships and patterns of domination are unjust. It is obvious that today human relationship with nature is not that of equal partners, but of domination and exploitations. Unjust treatment of the planet by humans is one of the principal causes of the ecological crisis.

Third, the uneven distribution, control and use of natural resources are serious justice issues. It is estimated that 1/5th of the world population inhabiting the Northern hemisphere consume, burn or waste at least 40-50 percent of the world’s non-renewable resources. Further, natural resources needed to maintain the life-style of an average American is equal to what is required by 200-300 Asians. Imagine what will happen if we extend the same American life-style to people everywhere.

Fourth, the fast depletion of the natural (non-renewable) resources today raises the question of our responsibility to future generations. If we extend the five-star culture to all the countries and segments of people, then the pressures on these resources will become intolerable. Already, we are warned that we cannot go on exploiting the deep-level water. That will disturb the ecological balance. Someone had compared the function of deep water to the middle ear fluid that helps the human body maintain its balance. The question, therefore, is how to use natural resources in a way that sustains life and not destroys it.

Ethics of Care, Alleviation of Poverty

We need to discuss two related concerns. The first is the concept of justice itself. The logic of justice as developed in the West emphasizes rights and rules, and respect for the other. It can be applied only to human beings -- supposedly equally. It is a balancing of rights and duties. But to include the Cosmos in the justice enterprise, we need to affirm the ethics of care. Justice cannot be accorded except through care. Justice expressing compassion is the biblical emphasis. Prophets were not talking about balancing interests and rights, but about the caring, the defending of the poor by the righteous God. Defending the vulnerable and defenseless should also mean defending our weak and silent partner the Earth.

We can no longer see ourselves as names and rulers over nature but

must think of ourselves as gardeners, caretakers, mothers and fathers, stewards, trustees, lovers, priests, co-creators and friends of a world that while giving us life and sustenance, also depends increasingly on us in order to continue both for itself and for us.³

Secondly poverty is also a source of ecological degradation, and the alleviation of poverty by the poor through their struggle for justice is an ecological concern. We cannot separate these two concerns. Unless the poor have alternate sources of food and basic needs like fuel, they too will want to destroy whatever natural environment is around them.

Justice in relation to ecology has a comprehensive meaning. Negatively, it is placed against economic exploitation and unjust control and use of natural resources. Positively, it affirms the responsibility.

A New Sense of Interdependence

The ecological crisis has impressed upon our consciousness a new awareness about our dependence on the earth. We belong to the earth. We share a common destiny with the earth. This awareness has sharply challenged the modern view of reality and demands a revolution of previously held scales of values. The modern perception of reality thanks to the all-pervasive influence of western rationality, follows a mechanistic model. It is functional and dualistic- spirit /flesh, objective/subjective, reason/passion, supernatural/natural. But the ecological view is organic, in which the emphasis is on interconnectedness and mutual inter-dependence. It is to adopt the view of the so well captured in Martin Buber's famous distinction between I-Thou and I-It. All entities are united symbolically.

Sally Mcfague expresses this challenge thus:

Ecological perspective insists that we are in the most profound ways, "not our own" we belong from the cells of our bodies to the finest creation of our minds, to the intricate, constantly changing cosmos. The ecosystem, of which we are a part, is a whole: the rocks and waters atmosphere and soil, plants, minerals and human beings interact in a dynamic, mutually supportive way that make all talk of atomistic individualism indefensible. Relationship and interdependence, change and transformation, not substance, changelessness and perfection, are the categories within which a theology for our day must function⁴

We cannot here go into the implications of this rather provocative suggestion. Nothing short of a "paradigm shift?" is taking place in theology. It is not merely anthropocentric.

Challenge to Ethics

The ecological perspective has also challenged our notion of ethics. In fact, the ecological model of mutual interdependence can provide a new

orientation in ethics that can be source of human renewal. Our Lord asks us to learn from the birds of the air, the lilies of the field. Values that are essential for the survival of life are those of caring and sharing, not domination and manipulation; domination and exploitation can only lead to the silencing of nature and to the ecological death of both nature and humans. The new perspective affirms our interrelatedness one to another and nature. The scale of values that is essential for sustaining the interrelatedness and wholeness of creation is different from the dominant value system of modern society. One may state them as follows:

conservation, not consumerism

Need, not greed

Enabling power not dominating power

Integrity of creation, not exploiting nature

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Church's response is shaped by its understanding and interpretation of its theology. A crucial aspect to be considered is the relation between human and nature.

The Relation Between Humans and Nature

One may suggest at least three topologies that have influenced modern thinking on this: Humans above nature; humans in nature, and humans with nature. We can see biblical parallel for each of these. But our effort is to see which ones come closet to the central vision.

Humans above nature

This may be the hidden ideology of the scientific and technological culture of the period. Science was considered as power and not as a source of wisdom. "Modern Technics", wrote Bertrand Russel in the late forties, "is giving man a sense of power which is changing his whole mentality. Until recently, the physical environment was something that had to be accepted. But to modern man the physical environment is merely the raw material for manipulations and opportunity. It may be that God made the world, but there is no reason why we should not take it over". Perhaps, very few scientists today make such a claim so unambiguously, yet this confidence in science and technology and the instrumental, manipulative use of nature, is very much present in modern culture.

Attempts are made to provide a biblical basis for the development of technology in the West. They are primarily based on the exegesis of Gen. 1:28-30 and Psalms 18:6-8. During the late '60s, a best-seller in theology was *The Secular City* by Harvey Cox, and an influential book on mission was Arand Van Leeuwen's *Christianity In World History*. Both these books show a preference for the view "humans above nature." They provide a biblical and theological basis for the technological manipulation of nature

by humans. They unequivocally affirm that technology is a liberator, an instrument in the hands of God for releasing humans from the tyranny of natural necessities. They paid little attention to the biblical witness against this attitude;

The Earth mourns and withers
the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish together
with the earth.

The earth lies polluted Under its inhabitants;
for they have transgressed the laws
violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant

-Isaiah 24:4,5

Thus says God, the Lord
who created the heavens and stretched them out
who spread forth the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it.

-Isaiah 42:5

In the Bible, the planes of human history and nature are never set in opposition as these interpreters seem to be doing. The two planes are held together in the biblical witness of faith. Liberation, according to Exodus, is a struggle to possess the land. Faith in Yahweh, the Liberator, is also an affirmation that God is sovereign over earth.

In an interesting study on *Land in the Old Testament*, Walter Brueggemann points to the significance of land for Hebrew religious experience. The land as promise and as problem: promised land, alien land; landlessness and wilderness -- all these appear at different stages in the history of the Hebrews. There is, of course a tension between landedness and landlessness; the former becomes a cause of exploitation and the latter leads to total trust in Yahweh.

The Christian practice that directly or indirectly supported colonialism and capitalism comes out of this view of "humans above nature". Lynn White, the California Professor of History, holds this view responsible for the modern ecological crisis. His words are strong.

Especially in its western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. Christianity, in contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions, has not only established a dualism of man and nature, but has also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends... Hence we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence, save to serve man.

Humans in nature

This is a reaction against the first typology. It maintains that there is no distinction between humans and nature. One gets an expression of this view in the writings of some Romantic poets. Some of the environmentalists, in their facile enthusiasm, lend support to this. Biblical support may be found in the verse:

All flesh is grass
'and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.
Surely, the people is grass,
the grass withers,
the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.

- Isaiah 40: 6-8

Yet it is difficult to conclude on the basis of this verse that the biblical idea is to treat human life as grass. There is a mystery of their being, and there is a distinction between human and other creatures, but the difference is not superiority because it comes with an awareness of responsibility.

The command of God to Adam and Eve in Gen. 1:28-30 to have domination over creatures is problematic. In its original Hebrew, domination is a harsh word. It is to tame and control the forces of nature that are destructive and violent. Taken in isolation and purely in this context, that word gives a basis for a ruthless exploitation of nature. But in interpreting biblical images and words, we need to see them through the prism of our Lord's saving mission.

"In the light of Christ's mission," says Moltmann, "Gen. 1:28 will have to be interpreted in an entirely new way. Not to subdue the earth, but free the earth through fellowship with it!" We may ask what is our understanding of dominion? Is it not from one whom we call Lord, *Domino*, that is, Jesus Christ and Him crucified?"

Lordship, therefore, has a new meaning. It is responsibility for the other in love. The overriding emphasis in the Bible with regard to human relationship with nature is on human responsibility for nature.

Human participation is necessary for maintaining the Cosmos. Over against the threat of Chaos. "The Earth is the Lord's and all that fills it, the world and all of its inhabitants."

Because he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers -
Psalms 24:1,2.

Scholars point out that the Hebrew words for sea (*yam*) and river (*nahar*) are also the words for ancient, near-eastern gods of chaos. If humans break the covenant, disobey the laws of God and unjustly treat the neighbor, then, creation will return to its primeval chaos. To maintain creation, cosmos,

human participation of responsible love and justice is necessary.

Human participation is also needed to keep the earth fertile and productive (Gen. 2:5, 3:17-19). Man is called the gardener and tiller. Again, humans have no right to exploit and plunder the earth. Some of the symbols and practices that emerged in the history Israel clearly articulate this. Sabbath and jubilee year are two of them. Rest is a way of preventing over exploitation of the earth. Also, the drastic change in ownership is a poignant reminder that humans are merely trustees. They are called to maintain the integrity of creation. Human responsibility for the whole creation is to participate, with love and care, in God's continuing act of creation

Human responsibility and co-creatureliness is further emphasised with the affirmation that all creation, along with humans, long and groan for perfection and liberation. All distortions of creation, compounded by human violence, disobedience and greed, will have to be redeemed in Christ (Rev. 8:13-28). The final vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Rom. 21:1-4) is accomplished by God and human beings together.

The Church's Response

Although Christianity was born in a different cultural ethos where a holistic view of reality was in vogue, the Indian Church's theology and practice have been, with some notable exceptions, heavily influenced by western missionaries. With the result, at least in our Protestant churches, little thought was given to link faith with ecology. We are all inclined to view with suspicion any talk of nature in theology. Church practices sometimes adopted symbols and customs that arose out of our natural environment but seldom were they integrated with the mainstream thinking or practice.

However, the Church's record here is not altogether dismal. There have been bold experiments, responses which have the potential for challenging us. We need to critically examine them and affirm whatever is helpful and relevant. Mention must be made of a world consultation on "Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation" held in Seoul, Korea, in 1990 where representatives of Protestant and Orthodox churches gathered together to make affirmations and covenants on their responsibility to creation. Perhaps, it was the first time in the history of the churches that such a significant step was taken to express concretely the Church's response to the ecology crisis.

Three models

There are at least three models that are available in church's life and practice for its response to ecological concerns.

(a) *Ascetic, monastic model*: Perhaps, this is the oldest form of the church's response aimed at integrating some concerns relating to ecology as well as the crisis created by the misuse of the natural environment. Renunciation

was the key. Greed is identified as the source of the problem of ecology. By adopting a simple life-style they showed a way to suppress greed. "Small is beautiful" is the slogan coined by moderns who have been highly impressed by the monastic models of life. Living in harmony with nature and keeping their needs to a minimum, the monastic communities proclaimed the message that the earth is the Lord's and that it should not be indiscriminately used to satisfy human avarice and greed. It was also, a powerful protest against a wasteful life-style that is devoid of any responsibility to the world of nature.

We see a similar response in the characteristic Indian/Asian model of relating to the concerns of ecology. Our sanyasis and ashrams were centres where life in harmony with nature was consciously promoted. One is reminded of a scene in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*. When Shakuntala has to leave Kanva Mum's ashram in order to join Dushyanta's household, the plants and creepers of the ashram, and also its birds and beasts, mourn her imminent departure. Their hearts bleed at the idea of her separation from them.

In the Church, this model has been instrumental in calling people to their responsibility to lead a life that is in tune with nature. The problem is addressed to individual life-styles. While the values enshrined in this model are important, they are not adequate enough to effect structural changes and radically alter relationships that have assumed a systemic character. Today, we face a situation where individual greed is organized as structures, as capitalism, market economy. They are forces that are deeply entrenched in society. They have a logic of their own. A constellation of power -- ideology, multinationals, market and media control -- influence our collective life. Individuals at best can only raise a voice of protest. What we need is collective action and countervailing power that can alter the course of these trends. Certainly the monastic ideals could inspire us.

(b) Sacramental/Eucharist model: Life and all its relationships are brought to the worshipful presence of God and they are constantly renewed. All things are received as gifts; therefore, they are to be shared. The cup is offered, blessed and shared. Psalm 146 is a beautiful poem that affirms the cosmic setting of our worship. We praise God in the presence of and in harmony with all creation. They are together with us as we praise God.

Again, in the tradition of the Church, the human person, through his contemplation, realises his cosmic being. Scientists today say that the volume of each atom is the volume of each universe; Cosmic power can be absorbed by humans. Tribals are more receptive to the power of earth. Particularly in the Protestant tradition, we have neglected this tradition of cosmic contemplation as a source of renewal.

One of the problems with this model is on the level of practice. For many Christians, the meaning of the Eucharist is confined to ritual observance and not as a way of active engagement with the world. The body broken is rarely taken as an imperative for sharing. We need to recover its dynamic

character and motivate people to be open to God's creation and re-creation.

(c) *Liberative solidarity model*: According to this model, the Church is in solidarity with the weakest; with that part of the whole creation. It is by far a contemporary model, but its roots are in the Bible. Liberation theologians have forcefully articulated the biblical motif for liberation in Exodus and other passages. Salvation is liberation. But, particularly because of their immediate context, for them liberation is primarily political and economic. We today want to affirm that the liberation that is witnessed to in the Bible includes liberation for Creation. According to Paul in Romans, the work of the Spirit, freedom, extends to the total renewal of Creation. Christ's work of redemption takes in the whole universe (Rom. 8:19-23). Christ, the Lord of history, initiates a process of transformation that moves toward cosmic release (Eph. 1:1-10; Col. 1:15-20). The unity between the hope for the inward liberation of the children of God and the hope for the liberation of the entire physical creation from its bondage and oppression, is the theme in Roman. The work of the Spirit is to renew all of the earth. *Ktisis*, translated as Creation, includes not only women and men, but all created things, including demonic powers. It is in the search for liberation of all aspects of human life, histories, cultures and natural environment that we can truly affirm that salvation is the wholeness of Creation.

There is something common to the interpretation of liberation as a historical process in Exodus and the liberation process in Creation in Romans. The liberation in Exodus is linked to the cry of the oppressed, and in Romans the glorious liberty is promised in response to the groans and travails within us and in Creation. God has heard the cry of the poor, and God is taking sides with the poor. In the same manner, the renewal of earth comes in response to the cry of the poor and of the dumb creatures, and of silent nature. It is interesting to note that when God decided to spare Nineveh (Jonah 4:11), it was out of God's pity for the "more than 12,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left hand (the reference is to babies), and also much animals." God is not interested in preserving great cities for the sake of their skyscrapers, supermarkets, and giant computers!

We are committed to a vision of human wholeness which includes not only our relationship with one another, but also our relationship with nature and the universe. We are also committed to the struggle for the transformation of the poor, the weak, and the disfigured and over-exploited nature. Both together are decisive for our faith, mission and spirituality.

The covenant idea in the Bible has also influenced this model of liberative solidarity. Both the Abrahamic covenant set within the framework of history and the Sinai covenant which affirms God's continued care and commitment to the human structures and law, have assumed great significance in our theological construction and biblical interpretation. But the Noahic covenant and its cosmic setting are often forgotten. God is faithful in his promise to the whole of humanity and all of his creation. It is this broader meaning of covenant that is reflected in the World

Convocation organised by WCC on justice, peace and integrity of creation. It calls all the churches to make a covenant based on God's covenant for the well-being of his total creation

The convocation calls the churches to translate their response to God's covenant into acts of mutual commitment within the covenant community. Four areas have been selected for specific "acts of covenanting" They express concrete commitment to work.

- for a just economic order and for liberation from the bondage of foreign debt;
- for the true security of all nations and people;
- for building a culture that can live in harmony with creation's integrity;
- for the eradication of racism and discrimination, on national and international levels, among all people.

In India, churches should enter into an act of covenanting, and commit themselves to fight for the marginalised -- Dalits, tribals and women -- to build a just economic order, to commit themselves to sustainable development; justice, peace and the integrity of creation in our context.

A New Spirituality

We need to evolve a form of spirituality that takes seriously our commitment to the earth. Mathew Fox has coined the phrase "creational spirituality" and even initiated a new movement among the western churches. A deep awareness of God's gift and presence in creation is its hallmark. This spirituality is not in conflict with liberational struggle. But it is stated as an Important ground reality. "Awe is the starting point -- and with it; wonder. The awe of being is part of this amazing universe... The awe is not of a pseudo- mysticism about a state or a political party but of our shared existence in the cosmos itself. ⁵

In the Buddhist tradition, greed and acquisitiveness are identified as the source of bondage. Material progress is to be tempered by non-acquisitiveness and sharing. Aloysius Pieris wrote: "In the Asian situation, the antonym of 'wealth' is not poverty, but acquisitiveness and avarice, which make wealth anti-religious. The primary concern is not eradication of poverty but struggle against Mammon -- that undefinable force that organises itself within every person, and among persons, to make material wealth anti-human, anti-religious and oppressive".⁶ Unfortunately, in its development, Asian spirituality become preoccupied with individual moral behaviour or with forming an exclusive community -- a spiritual aristocracy. In both the cases, the spirituality of non-acquisitiveness lost its neighbourly thrust.

The spirit of non-acquisitiveness, of sharing, of harmonious relationship

between humans and nature -- these are the hallmarks of true Asian spirituality.

This is also the spirituality of the poor, derived from their closeness to the earth and the sea, and their communication mode of existence. It sustains them in their struggle. How else can we explain the staying power of the marginalised and oppressed who are being continuously crushed by the onslaught of violent forces? Alas, in our activist mode we pay little attention to this and learn from it.

Therefore, today a conscious effort should be made to express the biblical insights on creational spirituality. Materials for Bible study, worship and Christian education that help us celebrate, learn God's design for creation and human responsibility should be made available. "Steward" images that emphasize our responsibility, accountability and answerability ought to be studied. Many psalms praise God, the creator. Prophets see the vision of Shalom as the fullness of creation where harmony is the characteristic mode of existence -- beasts and humans dwell together, the lion and the child play together, swords are turned into plough shares. All these establish a connection between social justice and ecological degradation.

We should learn from our Lord himself: his closeness to the earth, asking us to learn from the birds of the air, lilies of the field; his own commitment to a kingdom that grows as a seed that germinates and sprouts, his response to the hungry, his breaking the bread and the wine -- finally, the salvation he achieved includes the liberation of all and we hope for a new heaven and a new earth. Yes, there are passages that talk about a complete destruction of all -- but they are spoken in a way which will help us turn to God and to reject, renounce our ways of violence towards one another and to the earth. To read in a fatalistic way is to miss the central thrust of the Gospel.

A New Scale of Values

An ecological perspective on theology and spirituality challenges us to adopt a new scale of values. A revaluation of the presently held value system is called for. A WCC Consultation on "Sharing of Life;" asks us to commit ourselves to the following, accepting a fundamentally new value system:

- to the marginalised taking the centre of all decisions and actions as equal partners.
- to identifying with the poor and the oppressed, and their organized movements.
- to mutual accountability and power.

In adopting a new value system, we need to follow two important guidelines. Decisive are the questions: whom are we listening to? Whose interest do we present? In the case of the Narmada Valley project, are we

listening to planners, bureaucrats and technicians or to those poor tribals who are displaced? In the fishermen's struggle, are we carried away by financial wizards who tell us about the importance of the export market and of competing with other countries?

Secondly, one of the basic elements in value formation is the use of power. In Jesus we see that the power values are transformed into bonding values.

The New Testament clearly shows that Jesus was confronted with two views of power opposed to each other: self-aggrandising power and enabling power.

The former is the power that dominates, manipulates and exploits. This is the power of the autocrats; it can also be the power of the ardent crusader for the Gospel; it is the power of the profit-conscious industrialist and it can be the power of a party boss who strategises against the opposition; it can be the power of an authoritarian bishop or clergy. Some use it blatantly, others subtly. Some use it for ends which are evil, others use it to achieve supposedly noble objectives. The latter is the power that serves, cares for others and builds up people. Its strategy is an end in itself.

The temptations of Jesus, his constant struggle with the disciples, the Last Supper, the washing of the feet -- all these vividly show his own conscious rejection of the power that manipulates and his willing acceptance of the power that serves, the power that strengthens our bonds. The bonding values are integral to the ecological view of reality.

Thirdly values are expressed in life-styles, practices, and structures. While we cannot agree upon a uniform life-style, a conscious and judicious rejection of extravagant and wasteful use of natural resources should be priority and possibility for all. We need to put a limit to our needs. A slavish acceptance of all that the consumerist economy produces and what the market dictates would be contrary to ecologically responsible living.

In this connection, it is important to raise the question of the responsible use of the Church's own resources like property and investments. Property development is an easy option to most of the urban churches. Here, we do not seem to follow any guidelines that express our responsibility to ecologically sound development. By this I do not mean the aesthetics of the building -- although in this area too we could do better! By commercially developing our church property, are we not endorsing the logic and value system that governs much of commercialisation which is ecologically harmful?

A few years ago, at St. Mark's Cathedral, Bangalore we addressed this issue. Situated as it is in the heart of the city, many commercial developers had an eye on this precious piece of land that belonged to the church. A lot of pressure was brought to bear upon the pastorate committee. Naturally, we decided to turn to architects and developers for advice. But, at that juncture a colleague of mine suggested that we discuss the "theology of the

building” as well. His suggestion was received with derisive laughter by company executives and business magnates of the congregation. Nevertheless, he made his point. “What is our Christian witness when we enter into such an activity?” he asked. “By the activity, he persisted, “can we raise any questions about the exploitative mechanism that underlines commercialisation?” The ecological dimension was not explicitly represented in the discussion. Perhaps today we should add that too when we discuss our plans for the “development” of church properties. The eviction of the poor for the sake of development even from church properties is common. What is most surprising is that, in matters like this, we seem to be uncritically accepting the logic of profit-oriented developmentalism.

A Concern of All Religions

Ecological concerns should be taken up as a common cause of people of all faiths. To protect our common home, we must mobilise the spiritual resources of all religions. United Nations Environment Programme has called all religions to celebrate together the “Environment Sabbath/Earth Rest Day” They have provided resources for worship drawn from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Sikhism and Islam. It begins with declarations -- appropriately described as “The Assisi Declaration” drawn up by representatives of different religions. They together affirm that “the religious concern for the conservation and ecological harmony of the natural world is our common heritage, our birthright and our duty.”

Listen to some of the excerpts from the prayers:
Supreme Lord, let there be peace in the sky and
in the atmosphere, peace in plant world and in the
forests; let cosmic powers be peaceful:
Let Brahma be peaceful; let there be undiluted
and fulfilling peace everywhere.
-Atharvaveda

May every creature abound in well-being and peace
May every living being, weak or strong, the long and the small
The short and the medium - sized, the mean and the great
May ever living being, seen or unseen, those dwelling far
off,
Those near by, those already born, those waiting to be born May all
attain inward peace.
-Buddhist Prayer

O God! The creator of everything!
You have said that water is the source of life!
When we have needs, you are the Giver
When we are sick, you give us health
When we have no food, you provide us with your bounty

-Moslem Prayer

Be praised, my Lord, for brother wind
And for the air, cloudy and clear, and all weather!
By which you give substance to your creatures!
be praised, my Lord, for our sister mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and produces fruits with colourful
flowers and leaves.
-St. Francis of Assisi

All these worship resources can be shared among people of different faiths.
They can unite on Environment Day in praying for the earth.

Worship is not the only possible common action by different religions.
They can unite in measures that prevent ecological degradation -- such as
deforestation, pollution of lakes and rivers, and so on. Every congregation
may be challenged to undertake a specific programme on environmental
protection in cooperation with people of other faiths in the area.

Notes:

1. Daniel Chetti (ed.), Ecology and Development, (Madras: BTE/SSC and Gurukul, 1991), p. 96.
2. Jurgen Moltmann, The future of Creation, (Philadelphia Fortress Press, 1979), p. 128
3. Sally Mcfague, Models of God, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 13.
4. Ibid., pp. 8-9.
5. Matthew Fox; "Creation Spirituality" in Creation, Vol.2, No.2, 1986.
6. Aloysius Pieris, Asia Theology of Liberation, (New York: Orbis, 1988), p. 75.

[return to religion-online](#)

Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary **Perspectives on Mission by K. C.** **Abraham**

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Chapter 9: Praxis and Mission - Implications for Theological Education

Theological education in India and in other countries of Asia is part of the missionary heritage. Missionaries started institutions -- Bible Schools, Colleges and others -- to train young people to spread the Gospel. William Carey started a liberal arts and science college for both "Christian and Heathen" students rather than strictly theological seminary for missionary students native or East Indian. But the college was considered a "Handmaid of Evangelisation". Carey predicted that the college would provide an Indian Christian Teacher preacher -- "full instructions in the doctrine he was to compact, and the doctrine he was to teach and acquire a complete knowledge

both of the sacred scriptures (Christian or otherwise), and of those philosophical and mythological dogmas which formed the soul of the Buddhist and Hindu systems.” Both apologetic and missionary motifs were present, even from the beginning. The instruction followed a western model of education. Mission was understood as evangelism or proclamation. As we realise notable changes have taken place in our understanding of mission as well as in the education philosophy. Mission is now understood in a holistic sense. It is participation in the transforming and liberative work of God in God’s creation. If we accept that perspective then the fundamental question is how can theological education help the church’s participation in God’s mission? To answer this we need to consider some other developments one, paradigm shift in theological thinking and two, a new understanding of the nature of pedagogy itself. Both may be briefly mentioned.

Two developments

1. Theology, it is affirmed, is contextual. Theological reflection is a response in faith to the realities of people, especially people struggles for freedom, for justice, for wholeness and well-being. A theology that does not

relate itself to these contextual realities becomes abstract and irrelevant. The church, of course, is committed to remain faithful to the essence of given faith traditions, but theological reflection is a task in which the church is called upon to give an account of this commitment in relation to many challenges, questions and aspirations of people at a particular time and age. This task cannot be done by reiterating some universal and abstract principles or credal formulae. They are important. They represent the articulation of faith by people in a particular context. We need to start from “below”, from the experience of people. From the perspective of the day to day struggles of the people for justice, for freedom and love, we interpret the meaning of tradition. This paradigm shift in theological reflection as given rise to different theologies people’s theology, Dalit theology, black theology and feminist theology. They all take the experience of suffering of a particular group of people as their vantage point of theological task.

2. In our understanding of pedagogy also there is a marked shift. Education was thought to be a process of merely disseminating some valuable information by experts to the empty and receptive minds of the learners. You hear

the amusing characterisation that education is inculcation of the incomprehensible by the incompetent to the indifferent. From this “banking concept” (Paulo Friere) of education we are now committed to a pedagogy whereby the teacher and the taught together enter into a process of gaining a new awareness of the condition of oppression around them and that awareness leads them to a commitment for change. The emphasis on context as well as liberation is common to theology and education. Liberation is a theological motif and provides the goal for theological education.

Some Important Concerns

a. Emphasis on Perspectival Change

Perspective is the way we look at things. We have indeed indicated the change of perspective in theology, mission and education. It can be summed up as liberative and ecumenical. Both these presuppose an intense awareness of the context in which theological education should be done. In fact it is the pre-requisite for a meaningful theological education.

Our context is pluralistic. There are trends and issues that are common to the Indian context. The elite domination, continuing

misery of the poor, rise of religious fundamentalism, impact of new economic policies, ecological crisis, and so on. But there are problems that are specific to each region. To assume that the context of the North-East and Kerala are the same is erroneous. In our analysis of the context, we need to pay more serious attention to these regional variations. There ought to be a cross fertilisation of the regional insights. The Board of Theological Education, senate of Serampore college, has undertaken the task of publishing a bibliography of original Christian writings in regional language. This will be a first step towards better communication between regions. The time has come for us to encourage the study of languages of regions other than one's own for research. Many of us do not pay any attention to what is in our regional languages. We are eager to study materials written in the European contexts. Perspectival changes should be reflected in our methodology. It is not enough to add a new course or branch of study to the existing curricula. When we are confronted with new challenges, we try to domesticate them by the practice of offering courses. Women's concerns or contextual approach should inform the way we teach theology or biblical studies. In the same way we cannot assume a mission perspective in theological

education if we merely include a course or branch of study in missiology. The transforming and liberative thrust of our education needs careful attention.

b) Praxis and Mission

Missional thrust is transformative. With a critical awareness of the oppressive structures in their situation, learners should be moved for action to transform them.

This is praxis. The question should be raised: How this change-oriented and committed form of learning can happen in our theological studies, if we take missional thrust seriously? We needed to reflect on theological praxis as methodology for our education.

Here liberation theologians have something valuable to offer us. They make a distinction between theory and practice on the one hand, and praxis on the other. The traditional pattern of theologising as in many other disciplines has been, first to enunciate a theory (as in biblical or systematic theology) and then apply it (practical theology, ethics, and so on). The assumption hidden in this procedure is that pure and true thought about reality can occur only when it is removed from act and practice follow theory: doing is an extension of

knowing.

Praxis-thinking challenge this assumption of western Christianity, which is the hidden assumption of much of our education system. It insists that thinking that occurs apart from critical involvement ends up in constructions of theories about existence that keep us from the real world. "Praxis is thought emerging in deed and deed evoking thought." To quote from a document:

Thinking is not now considered prior or superior to action; rather, it takes place in action. The Christian religion was founded not on a work, but on the word made Flesh. Faith is no longer simply "applied" or completed in action, but for its very understanding (and this is theology) faith demands that it be discovered in action. It is necessary to relate Christian theory and historical practice, faith and praxis. Some theologians are talking of a theology defined as critical reflection historical praxis. Practice refers to any action that applies a particular theory Praxis is practice associated with a total dynamic of historical vision and social

transformation. Through praxis, people enter into their historical destiny. Since praxis, changes the world as well as the actors, it becomes the starting point for a clearer vision of God in history.

(Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, eds. *Theology in the Americas*, New York: Orbis, 1982, p.435.)

This is praxis-theology. I can see someone raising an objection to this. It may appear that in our churches there is no lack of emphasis on experience or practice. Perhaps what we need is a criterion for judging which experience is authentic, and for this we need theory. The argument is valid. By praxis, we do not mean rejection of theory. On the contrary, we need rigorous theoretical reflection but it should emerge from the practice that is oriented to transformation. Otherwise, it will be an artificial construct which lends itself to domination of alien thought patterns.

Praxis is critical reflection on historical as well as contemporary experience. Theological praxis as distinct from theory alone should take seriously all experience in our church and our culture, critically examine them and reinterpret them if necessary.

There are liberative humanistic vision and values in the tribal Dalit culture which have become long forgotten. Or we are ashamed of them because of the influence of western rationality and Christianity that came to us through Western oriented doctrines on or life-style and thinking. We need bold and imaginative recovery of these elements for praxis theology that is methodology we need to develop.

The Biblical interpretations should also be shaped by praxis and contextual realities. We need Biblical research into the literary genre of the text and its immediate context. But we need better understanding of the text in terms its praxis for the people in that context. How has the text helped enhanced their vision of God's transforming act? Then there is a horizon meaning to which the text points. Can we arrive at a fusion between that horizon and the horizon of meaning for our liberative praxis? That is the crucial question.

(c) Formation

Theological education is also designed for ministerial formation. Piety and learning are two goals of Serampore College education. Piety is to be understood as a process whereby we internalise the faith -- its

vision and values -- which will decisively shape our life-style. Discipline, prayer, worship and contemplation are all part of this. Many aspects of this need to be considered.

I suspect that many of our student's piety before they come to theological studies is shaped by individualistic and other-worldly concerns. When they are exposed to newer challenge in the theological college they tend to react differently. Some even develop a form of double existence -- one good for seminary answer sheets and assignments and the other for pastoral ministry. They do not internalise the newly found enlargement of their faith. They still want to be babes in faith. A conscious attempt is to be made about developing a piety that is responsive to God's liberating and transferring act in our midst.

(d) Commitment

The cornerstone of theological education and the methodology outlined earlier is the commitment of teachers and students to the Gospel. The Gospel in the ultimate sense is a mystery and we cannot exhaust it by our response and interpretation. We commit to this ever deepening mystery in faith. But our response, however imperfect, should have a concrete shape. All

along I have maintained that liberative praxis, a justice-oriented action is that concrete form in our situation. We are called to commit to this form of witness with an openness to the newer challenges of the mystery of God's grace.

[return to religion-online](#)

Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission by K. C. Abraham

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Chapter 10: Globalisation and Liberative Solidarity

Globalisation is the magic word today. Economic development in the Third World countries, we are told, is possible only if they link up with the global economy through the global market.

Globalisation is also a cultural as well as political reality for many. Ecological crisis, information technology and other aspects of modern life know no boundaries. They are global issues. Therefore it is not surprising that theological thinking and mission praxis in recent years is influenced by globalisation. The euphoria with which it was greeted by many theological colleges in USA indicated its importance for theological education. This paper is an attempt to analyze the

phenomenon of globalisation and to raise some issues that are pertinent in facing its challenges. It suggests a model of Christian response, liberative solidarity, that is rooted in the experience and spirituality of the poor and the message of the cross.

1. Globalisation: An Analysis of the Phenomenon

Modern communication has converted the world into a “global village”. TV brings into your living room events in far off lands, drawing you closer to the gruesome war in Bosnia or the tribal massacre in Rwanda. Air travel is fast. You have your breakfast in one continent and lunch in another. And there is hardly a major city in the world which cannot provide you with a Chinese restaurant, a hamburger or a Japanese motor car.

Political and economic changes that take place in one corner of the world affect the life of people far away. Seldom do we realise that a drop of a few cents in the stock market in New York has drastic effects on the economy of major cities in the Third World. A decision of the USA not to purchase raw rubber can unsettle the economy of Malaysia, for, example.

We may briefly mention three aspects of this process as they are

pertinent for our discussion:

(a) The process is an inevitable consequence of certain historical as well as structural factors at work in the last 300-400 years. Travel across the sea provided opportunity for closer relations between countries. Travel was not for pleasure or adventure alone, but also for trade. Spices, minerals and other commodities of Asia and Africa created new trade routes from the West to the East. Soon they needed to be protected from competition from rival powers. Slowly colonial powers began to exert military and political control over most of the countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This colonial rule, as is well known, provided the cheap raw material for the industrial expansion in the countries of Europe and a ready market for their furnished goods.

b) The process of globalisation from the beginning was fraught with competition, conflict, domination and exploitation. Certainly there has been exchange of ideas and customs between peoples of different countries. And this has been mutually beneficial. But the ambiguous character of the process of globalisation is quite obvious.

Colonialism is perhaps the most blatant form of exploitation during this period of

globalisation. Several consequences of colonial rule are now well-known. It is now evident that the industrial development of the West would not have been possible without the cheap raw materials and labour from the colonies. Cotton, iron, gold and minerals of all kinds were taken out of the country, sometimes arbitrarily with the use of force or at other times with the enthusiastic support of the local elites. Not only that the colonies provided cheap materials but they became ready markets for products manufactured in the West. The textile industry is a case in point. Built into this practice is a process of double exploitation. And the historical roots of poverty in the Third World can be traced to this colonial exploitation.

- Colonialism has inflicted more serious damage on the colonized people. Frantz Fanon in his famous analysis of colonialism has brought out the condition of colonised minds. “Those who internalise the colonial mentality”, wrote Fanon, “suffer a systematic negation of personhood. Colonialism forces the people it dominated to ask themselves the question constantly, ‘in reality who am I?’ The defensive attitudes created by this violent bringing together of the colonized man, and the colonial system form themselves into a structure which

then reveals the colonized personality.”² Perhaps many erstwhile colonies have not recovered from this.

Science and technology have accelerated the process of globalisation. For one thing, it has created “rising expectations” about development, faster economic growth. While it has promised opportunities for expansion of human potential, it has also used new forces of destruction. Ecological crisis is the most serious crisis brought about by modern technology.

c) Today there is a sense of urgency when we talk about global realities. Nuclear threat raised the possibility of a total annihilation of the global. This threat has drawn us together. Ecological crisis has brought to our awareness the need for preserving this fragile earth which is our common home. Life is endangered and we need all resources to preserve it.³

Any consideration of globalisation therefore should keep in mind these three aspects: inevitable, ambiguous and urgent.

II Globalisation and Third World

The global village has provided new opportunities for the enhancement of life of our people.

No doubt we need to affirm the positive side of this development. But many in the Third World look at this process with apprehension. They look at the global village as an order or mechanism for greater exploitation and political oppression. In this discussion we enter into the modern period of globalisation.

When the Third World nations become independent of colonialism after long periods of freedom struggle, they embarked on massive efforts to develop their reserves and to eliminate poverty. Development by economic growth based on rapid industrialization was the magic word. Three ingredients of this programme were, local elite (rulers), external resources (aid from the developed world, multinationals) and trade. The goal was not only to eliminate poverty, but also catch up with the First World in modernization. But the net results of the past few decades of development have been well summarized in the cliché -- the poor becoming poorer -- the rich becoming richer.

On global level the gap between the rich nations and the poor nations has increased. The average per capita income of the developed world is \$2,400 and that of the developing countries \$180. The gap is widening. The U.N. tried to change this trend,

but failed. In 1970 the U.N. suggested that 7% of 1% of the total GNP of rich nations should be made available for the development assistance. But actual help declined from 52% of 1% in 1975 to 32% of 1% in 1976. This downward trend continues and what is more distressing is that the First world countries confirm that they have increased their military expenditure. The existing trade patterns are inimical to the well-being of developing nations. The aid that supposedly helps the growth of the Third World is always with “strings” attached and used as a tool for continuing the First World dominance over the economic growth of the Third World.

C.T Kurien points out that the countries of the Third World regard the 1980s as a “lost decade in terms of their development opportunities.” He writes,

The prices of many of the goods they export came down, the richer countries kept them out of their markets and the terms of trade turned against them. As is well known, many of them have come to be caught in the ‘debt trap’. Less well known is that the decade came to be one of net resource transfers from the South to the North.

And the gap between the rich and the poor countries (measured by percapita income) widened.

Kurien further notes

The integration of the global economy has brought to the fore a new set of actors who have played an increasingly Important role in it: the transnational or multinational corporations (TNCs or MNCs). These first attracted comment in the 1960s, grew rapidly in the 1970s and emerged as powers to be reckoned with in the 1980s. Some even argue that by the dawn of the next century they, rather than national economies, will be the principal actors in the emerging global economy and that we are already well into the 'transnational stage' in the development of capitalism.⁴

The TNCs role in the Third World has now been subjected to serious analysis by economists. These large corporations know no national boundaries and their products find a way to the remotest corner of the world. Between 300-500 TNCs control of the enormous portion of world's production, distribution

and marketing process.

The sales of an individual corporation is bigger than the GNP of many developing countries. According to the figures supplied by the UN in 1981, EXXON has sales of 63,896 million dollars and General Motors, 63,211 million. Whereas the GNP of Nigeria is 48,000 million, Chile 15,770 or Kenya 15,307.

The power of the global corporations is derived from its unique capacity to use finance, technology, and advanced marketing skills to integrate production on a global scale in order to form the world into one economic unit and a “global shopping centre.”

They do not bring large capital to the host countries, but they take out huge profits. They do not generate more employment, as their technology is not labor intensive. Profit maximization is their goal and not development. They decide where people should live, what they eat, drink or wear and what kind of society their children should inherit.

Their primary goal is to safeguard the interests of developed countries and not the developing countries. In the recent discussion on conserving the worlds biological diversity ⁵ the behavior

of MNCs has again been criticized by the Third World leaders. The Malaysian delegate to the UN General Assembly, 1990, made the following pertinent observation:

There are various instances where transnational corporations have exploited the rich genetic diversity of developing countries as a free resource for research and development. The products of such research are then patented and sold back to the developing countries at excessively high prices. This must cease. We must formulate mechanisms for effective cooperation with reciprocal benefits between biotechnopologically rich developing countries and the gene-rich developing countries.⁶

The local elites are also agents of globalisation their role in the development should be recognized. When the countries became independent the leadership was naturally transferred to the local elites. They have developed interlocking interests with the western industrial elite. The development model which the newly independent countries accepted has helped them and they exert

considerable pressure on the policy decisions of the Third World countries on globalisation.

The priorities are determined by the demand of the market-often the greed and no need becomes the controlling factor.

TV was considered a great symbol of modern development. But in an informal survey conducted by a sociologist it was revealed that the people who benefit most by TV are our industrialists. They have increased the sales of their products such as Maggis Instant Noodles and many kinds of junk food which are not essential to the life of ordinary people.

The growing inequality between the rich nations and poor and between the rich and the poor in each nation is a fundamental threat to global harmony. Globalisation and marginalisation go together. This contradiction needs special attention. This can be illustrated with the economic situation in India.

III Globalisation and the Indian Economy

In 1991 the Government of India introduced drastic reforms in its economic policies which have far reaching implications for the life of the country. The involvement of World Bank and IMF was

acknowledged as crucial in the structural adjustment. It was a deliberate move to take the country right into the process of globalisation. MNCs are allowed to come into the country in a big way by liberalization of the earlier stringent regulations with regard to the type of industry and the profits that they are allowed to take out of the country. It is perhaps early to evaluate the full impact of these policy changes. These reforms have helped to revive the sluggish economy and to discard some of the unproductive bureaucratic controls. But some of the inevitable consequences of these reforms are quite alarming. The indebtedness of the country (internal and external) has now reached a staggering figure of 90.6 billion dollars. C.T Kurien who has made a careful analysis of the trends in the present economy, has concluded has observed thus:

If the economic reform measures in India have therefore been sponsored by a tiny, though exceptionally powerful and influential minority which is pursuing them to safeguard and promote its own narrow interests, they are unlikely to be of benefit to the bulk of the people, in spite of claims that they are not only

necessary and inevitable, but also in the national interest. The impact of the reforms on the lives of sections of the peoples beyond this narrow minority, has already begun to be seen. On the basis of an examination of the relevant figures, one estimate shows that in the first year of reforms, “nearly 6 to 7 million people went below the ‘poverty line’ in contrast to an annual improvement of nearly 10 to 15 million moving above the poverty line over the last decade.” Therefore, in overall terms “it makes a difference in terms of a setback in poverty alleviation pace by nearly 20 millions.”⁷

Kurien and other economists are not saying that Indian economy is not in need of reforms, but they point out that the “thrust of any alternative reform measures must be towards the welfare of the largest segments our society.”⁸ At present these segments are excluded from the process of decision that affect their lives and their condition is deteriorating. These sectors are marginalised working class-unorganized labourers, and landless. They are the dalits and tribals.

Increasing marginalisation of

dalits, women and other sectors continues to be a problem. Our hope that their lot would improve is now shattered. No doubt the movement of the marginalized for justice and participation will be stronger. But resistance to them will be on the increase.

As we have seen, marginalisation is linked with globalisation. The advanced sectors have achieved considerably more expansion and led to the improvement of the traditional sector. As one report correctly observes, “much of rural development has simply been extension of urban development.” There is an urgent need for an alternate form of development that meets the basic needs of the rural people.

Among the marginalized groups struggling for justice, women is the largest. They are fighting many issues. Cultural prejudices, structures of patriarchy, economic exploitation and unjust laws and traditions are some of them. Organized movements of women are beginning to make some impact but they need to be strengthened. The church is also of male dominated structure. Rich resources and contribution that women can make to the life and ministry of the church are seldom made use of. Unfortunately prejudice against women are nurtured in our families. We tend to foster double standards in

sexual morals. Female feticide, dowry deaths and other glaring incidents are symptoms of deep-seated prejudices and discriminatory practices and customs.

IV Globalisation has Become the Vehicle of Cultural Invasion

The idea of progress is decisively shaped by western life-style and its structures. Air travel, color TV, super computers and space technology all are the symbols of progress. When a nation opts for TV it is not just the technology but all the cultural and social life that nurture it come with it.

Technology is power, and the power is never neutral. It becomes the carrier of those systems and ideologies (values and cultures) within which it has been nurtured. The tendency is to create a mono-culture. Prof. Koyama in his inimitable style provides a sharp critique to this in all his writings. By mono-culture we mean the undermining of economic, cultural and ecological diversity, the nearly universal acceptance of technological culture as developed in the West and its values. The indigenous culture and its potential for human development is vastly ignored. The tendency is to accept the efficiency with productivity without any concern for compassion or justice. Ruthless

exploitation of nature without any reverence for nature which is an integral value of the traditional culture.

M.M. Thomas in his recent writings has reflected on the impacts of modernization on the traditional culture. He writes,

The modernizing forces of technology, human rights and secularism are today directed by a too mechanical view of nature and humanity which ignores the natural organic and the transcendental spiritual dimensions of reality. No doubt, traditional societies emphasize the organic and the religious aspects of life in a manner that enslaves human beings to natural forces and human individuality to the group dicta. But modernization based on a mechanical world-view atomizes society to permit the emergence of the individual who soon becomes rootless and a law unto itself and since rootlessness is unbearable for long, the pendulum swings to a collectivism which is a mechanical bundling together of atomised individuals into an equally rootless mass

under mechanical State control.⁹

There are groups that strive towards a critical approach to Western values and technology. They want to retain humane values of tradition. They see the need for a holistic kind of development. They are for pluralism and diversity in cultures. They are for science and technology, but not for a neutral kind of scientism that willingly allows itself to be used by the elite. They are for industry, but not industry that destroys ecological balance and causes pollution. In short, they are asking for an alternate form of development that takes the interest of the poor as central and allows room for their culture and religion.

V Globalisation and Ecological Crisis

The pattern of development that is capital intensive and the life style propagated by the media together create a situation where ecological balance and sustaining power of the earth for nurturing life is being destroyed. The problem is further aggravated by the process of globalisation. In fact, ecological crisis is not merely a Third World problem. The whole planet is affected and perhaps this issue brings together concerned people of the South and North.¹⁰

Perspectives on this question differ.

The Third World perspective on ecological crisis raises the question of justice as an overriding concern. The life of the poor and the marginalised is further impoverished by the crisis. Shortage of fuel and water add peculiar burdens to the life of women. It is said that tribals are made environmental prisoners in their own land. Details, whose life has been subjected to social and cultural oppression for generations are facing new threats to them by the wanton destruction of the natural environment.

On a global level this concern about the gap in the control over and use of natural resources should be raised to gain a correct perspective on globalisation. The modern European person is the most expensive human species in this world. American people who represent about 6% of the earth's population melt, burn or eat over 50% of the world's consumable resources each year. Every 24 hours citizens of U.S.A. consume 2,250 heads of cattle in the form of MacDonald hamburgers. Extend this style to the entire world, what will be its consequences. It is these hard questions about the nature of development, the life-style and justice that have to be raised. In order to pursue this kind of life-

style we need to have easy access to the mineral resources and energy. Many a political conflict arises out of this need: We try to put an ideological garb over such conflicts. East/West conflict is now replaced by North/South conflict. What is at stake is the sphere of political dominance linked with control of resources. Global peace is possible only if we can diffuse this by establishment of a world order.

VI A New Look at the Global Village

What is the paradigm of the miracle of Global village we have in mind? People who write and talk about global village are people who have never lived in a village. It is therefore not surprising that their image of the global village is born out of their references of a technological, industrial culture. One of the prevailing tendencies in such a culture is to put everything in manageable, organized system. There is very little room for diversity. The clearly defined centre exercising control over the periphery -- that is why "melting pot" becomes a favourite image in the U.S.A. But what we see in the village is not so neatly organized, uniform structure. A village is a small, separate unit connected to other units. It is of different shape and diverse character. It is a mosaic and not a

neat uniform system. The global is very much present in the local. Diversity and not uniformity is its hallmark.

We simply assume that to gain an experience of the global we used to travel to foreign countries. This is not true. We may travel and see things but still miss the essential values that keep our life human. But the consciousness that our local life is bound up with realities and relationships that go beyond the given time and space is what makes us truly global. It is the basic openness to the other - it is affirming the other who is different but integral to our life. It is necessary to affirm the local as unique, but exists in the wider network of relationships. In other words, plurality is an essential aspect of the global. It provides the space for different identities to grow in dialogue. When that space is denied the marginal suffers most. The struggle of the marginal for identity is to be seen as a necessary process to realize the global.

Within each nation there are measures, laws that regulate the economic activity and distribution through taxation, minimum wages, and so on. But in international relations there is no regulative mechanism. The UN is powerless. They have indeed talked about a new economic order. Demands include reduction

of trade barriers, more stable commodity prices for raw materials, easier access to foreign technologies, better terms of aid and rapid expansion of industrialization. Some of these demands are legitimate, although there is very little hope anything will be changed. These demands however, do not challenge the existing international system and its assumptions; they want a greater share in the global economic pie. This is usually the demand of the bureaucrats and elites. What the poor people are asking/telling us is, unless we rethink the basic questions of lifestyle, the use of natural resources and the reaction between environment and development, we cannot address the question of a new economic order.

Globalisation, is not a neutral process. An alliance forged by the forces of domination for profit becomes the driving force of much of globalisation. The poor and the marginal do not find protection and security under it. But this process is inevitable, therefore a blind rejection of it seems to be realistic. How do we orient the forces of globalisation for the furtherance of justice? Can we seek a new global solidarity of the victims of present system to build a just global order?

VII The Search for Alternatives

The Third World perspectives on the global unity are made dear. The present global order controlled by the MNCs, neo-colonial forces and elites of the countries does not ensure the values of justice and plurality. The ecological crisis has further accentuated the problem of global injustice. The search is for a global order where life affirming values are preserved and strengthened. This would mean an economic system that is free of oppression. Kurien in the above study points out that today the powerful and all pervasive market has become “a tool of oppression”. “What they (people) need, therefore, is not greater market friendliness but ‘people friendly markets’. A people friendly market, he further states, is a social institution used, deliberately under human direction and control, the dictum ‘leave it to the market has no place here’.¹¹

Speaking in cultural terms, M.M. Thomas argues that a “post-modern humanism which recognizes the integration of mechanical, organic and spiritual dimensions, can develop creative reinterpretation of traditions battling against fundamentalist traditionalism and actualize the potential modernity to create a dynamic fraternity of responsible persons and people”.¹²

An alternative developmental paradigm should be supported by an alternative vision of human bond to one another and to the earth. It is important that this new vision emerges from the experiences of the poor and the marginalised. “It is our conviction that a new paradigm for just development must emerge from the experiences of the poor and the marginalised.”¹³

It is not our intention to give a blue print for alternative development. That can be evolved only by economist, political leaders and scientist who are committed to values that are necessary for human development. In this task we should learn from the experiences of the poor, for they are close to the earth and their techniques of preserving the ecosystem should be taken seriously. Those who live close to the land and the sea have developed a way of using earthly resources without destroying them. By polluting our water and destroying our forests we cannot develop. More important is the conviction that a set of values that are integral to human survival can be learned from the life-style and the world view of the marginal groups. They have lived in solidarity with one another and with the earth. Their communitarian value system is necessary for evolving a just and sustainable form of development.

This is the global solidarity that we propose for the future, giving a new direction to the process of globalisation. 'People friendly markets', 'enabling social changes' and 'post modern humanism' - are all attempts to give this orientation to globalisation.

VIII Towards Building a Just Global Order: Theological Considerations

Can theology be pressed into service towards building a just global order? Does theology deepen our commitment to a new global solidarity based on justice and peace? The vision for theologising should emerge from the experiences and traditions of faith of the people. Sometimes theologians turn such visions into rigid systems and absolute ideals. But the emphasis on contextual theology is an effort to ground theology in the immediate experiences of oppression and suffering of people.¹⁴

The faith articulation of women and indigenous groups struggling for their dignity and freedom has helped us in our search for a relevant theology. They are important for our task of building a global solidarity. A holistic view of reality and non-hierarchical form of community are integral to their vision of life. This vision has to be recaptured in our theology.

Some of our feminist writers and theologians who are committed to develop ecological theology are beginning to articulate this new vision of doing theology.

Holistic View of Reality

Our perception of the structure of reality changes as we become aware of new areas of human experience and knowledge. The dualistic model of classical understanding -- spirit/matter, mind/body -- is not adequate to interpret our contemporary experience. Moreover, our feminist thinkers rightly point out that such a dualist view of reality is largely responsible for maintaining a patriarchal and hierarchical model of society. A holistic model is closer to our life experiences, including our relation with nature. In fact, theologians who write about ecological concerns are united in their opinion that a holistic view of reality is basic to a responsible relation between humans and nature. An organic model of reality should replace a mechanistic model in our times. An organic model can interpret "the relation between God and world in ways commensurate with an ecological context". Sally McFague, taking into consideration the insights from contemporary cosmologists, has described the organic model in the following words:

The organic model we are suggesting pictures reality as composed of multitudes of embodied beings who presently inhabit a planet that has evolved over billions of years through a process of dynamic change marked by law and novelty into an intricate, diverse, complex, multi-leveled reality, all radically interrelated and interdependent. This organic whole that began from an initial high bang and eventuated into the present universe is distinguished by a form of unity and diversity radical beyond all imagining: infinite differences, and diversity that is marked not by isolation but by shared atoms over millennia as well as minute-by-minute exchanges of oxygen and carbon dioxide between plants and animals. All of us, living and non-living, are one phenomenon, a phenomenon stretching over billions of years and containing untold numbers of strange, diverse, and forms of matter -- including our own. The universe is a body, to use a poor analogy from our own experience, but it is not a human body; rather, it is matter bodied forth seemingly infinitely, diversely, endlessly, yet internally as one.¹⁵

Radical inter-relatedness and interdependence of all creation is of paramount significance as we perceive reality "By reality," Writes Samuel Rayan, "is meant every thing; the earth and all that it contains, with all the surprises it holds for the future; people and their creations; the conditions in which they live, their experience of life as gift, their celebration of

it, no less than their experience of oppression and death, and their struggles and hopes and wounds and songs”.¹⁶

Leonardo Boff goes further and affirms that “Ecology constitutes a complex set of relationships. It includes everything, neglects nothing, values everything, is linked together. Based on this we can recover Christianity’s most early perception; its conception of God.”¹⁷ For him “world is a mirror of Trinity.”

This provides a new perspective on Christology. Our tendency in modern theology to subsume all the new questions of theology under a framework that may be described as ‘Christocentric Universalism’ is perhaps not the most helpful paradigm. Too much weight is put on this. Christ-in-relation seems to be a better way of affirming the trinitarian concern of the process of transformation and renewal. A spirit-filled theology that responds to the pathos of people and their liberative stirrings should be evolved. The characteristic posture of the spirit is openness and an ability to transcend limits. The affirmation of the solidarity of the poor is the spirit’s creative activity. To discern the spirit’s working, we need ‘Christic’ sensitivity, but it can never be wholly interpreted by Christological formulations.

If radical interrelatedness is the characteristic of the reality and therefore of the divine, then openness to the other is the essential mode of response to God. The openness becomes the seed for creating new relationships and a new order.

The struggle today is for open communities. Again the awareness of the need for the communities is not new. But today we face a situation where the identity struggle of different groups is projecting the shape of communities as classed, each group defines its boundaries over against the other. The question is how can we build a global solidarity of open communities. A community of communities that accepts a plurality of identities in a non-threatening, but mutually affirming way is the core of our vision.¹⁸ In fact, the Church is meant to be this solidarity. Leonardo Boof writes:

The ecclesial community must consider itself part of the human community which in turn must consider itself part of the cosmic community. And all together part of the Trinitarian Community of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

We have a long way to go if we take this vision seriously. The

churches are so introvert that they are incapable of becoming a sacrament of this community of open communities in this world.

Mission has to take seriously this task of recreating communities: It means a critical awareness of the process and structures that are inimical to an open community. Forces that threaten life, practices that seldom promote justice and love, and above all an attitude of apathy towards change.

Liberative Solidarity: A Form of Global Mission

A holistic vision of reality is the basis for non-hierarchical open communities. But this vision of wholeness should have a concrete direction. In the prophetic vision of a community, compassion is the concrete dimension of it (Micah 6:5). It is solidarity that is liberative and life-affirming.²⁰ Justice and loving mercy are the words used by the prophet. Together they may be translated into liberative solidarity. The logic of justice as developed in the West emphasizes rights and rules and respect for the other. It is a balancing of duties and rights. But in the prophets justice includes caring. Justice expressing compassion is the biblical emphasis. Prophets were not talking about balancing interests and rights, but about caring, the defending of the poor by the

righteous God. This emphasis comes with poignancy when we consider our responsibility to the earth. It is a defenseless and weak partner of humans in creation. Caring love comes from compassion by standing at the place where the poor are and being in solidarity with them. It is this solidarity that makes us raise questions to the dominant models of globalisation.

It also points to a new direction for global community that celebrated sharing and hope. Jesus rejected the imperial model of unity, which in his time was represented by the Roman empire and the power wielders of Jerusalem temple. He turned to Galilee, to the poor and the outcasts, women and the marginalised. He identified with them. His own uncompromising commitment to the values of the kingdom and his solidarity with the victims of society made himself an enemy of the powers-that-be conflict was very much part of his ministry. It resulted in death. On the cross, he cried aloud, "My God, my God, why have you forgotten me?" It is a cry of desperation, a cry of loneliness. But it is a moment of solidarity -- a moment when he identified with the cries of all humanity.

In solidarity with the suffering, Jesus gave expression to his hope

in the liberating God who has his preference in defending the poor and the dispossessed. It is in this combination of total identification with the depth of suffering and the hope that surpassed all experiences that we see the clue to Jesus' presence in our midst and future he offers us. New wine, a new logic of community that comes from a solidarity culture was projected against the old wine, the old culture.

The promise of God's future in such a solidarity culture is an invitation to struggle, advocacy for the victims, and compassion. People who are drawn to the side of the poor come into contact with the foundation of all life. The Bible declares that God encounters them in the poor. With this step from unconsciousness to consciousness, from apathetic hopelessness regarding one's fate to faith in the liberating God of the poor, the quality of poverty also changes because one's relationship to it changes.²¹

The solidarity culture is sustained by spirituality, not the spirituality that is elitist and other-worldly, but that which is dynamic and open.

In our struggle for a new global order we need to mobilize the superior resources of all religious traditions, not only the classical religions, but the primal religious traditions as well. In fact, the classical religions tend to project a type of spirituality that is devoid of a commitment to social justice. There are, however, notable exceptions. We begin to see a new search for the liberational form of spirituality in these religions. See for example the writings of Swami Agnivesh and Asgar Ali Engineer.²² Tagore's words express this kind of spirituality:

Here is thy footstool and
there rest thy feet where
live the poorest, lowliest,
and the lost.

When I try to bow to thee,
my obeisance cannot reach
down to the depth where
thy feet rest among the
poorest, the lowest and the
lost. (*Gitanjali*).

But a distinct challenge comes from the Indian spirituality tradition. Its focus upon inferiority is to be considered important when we talk about a commitment for action. Amolarpavadoss in all his writings emphasized this . Freedom also means liberation from pursuit, acquisition, accumulation and hoarding of wealth (*arta*), unbridled

enjoyment of pleasures comfort (*kama*), without being regulated and governed by righteousness and justice (*dharma*), without orientation to the ultimate goal (*moksha*).²³

Mention has already been made about the spirituality of indigenous groups. Their holistic vision and communitarian value systems are essential for the emergence of a new global order. They are signs of freedom we long for. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (Paul). Our longing for a free and open order is a spiritual longing. Only when communities live with mutual respect, when they together eliminate all caste, atrocities, when they together remove and hunger, when all their religions sing the song of harmony, when they together celebrate God-given unity, then the Spirit is free. Towards that global solidarity let us commit ourselves.

This reflection on liberative solidarity can be conclude by mentioning two concrete expressions of it.

One, the emergence of dalit theology in India. Dalits are the oppressed groups, marginalised for centuries by the social and cultural systems. Today dalit consciousness based on a new found identity has provided the

impetus for a dalit theology, Prof. A.P. Nirmal describes the methodology as follows:

Dalit theology wants to assert that at the heart of the dalit peoples experience is pathos or suffering. This pathos or suffering or pain is prior to their involvement in any activist struggle for liberation. Even before a praxis of theory and practice happens, even before a praxis of thought and action happens, they (the dalits) know God in and through their suffering. For a Dalit theology “Pain or Pathos is the beginning of knowledge.” For the sufferer more certain than any principle, more certain than any action is his/her pain-pathos. Even before he/she thinks about pathos; even before he/she acts to remove or redress or overcome this pathos, pain-pathos is simply there. It is in and through this pain-pathos that the sufferer knows God. This is because the sufferer in and through his/her pain-pathos knows that God participates in human pain. This participation of God in human pain is characterized by the New

Testament as the passion of Jesus symbolized in his crucifixion.²⁴

Two, a few months ago I visited a Buddhist monk in the southern provinces of Sri Lanka. I had heard about his intense involvement in the struggles of people for freedom and justice. Three of us, theologians, sat at his feet listening in rapt attention to the stories of his involvement how at the risk of his own life he had to defend young activists. He was constantly in clash with the powers that be. At the end, one of the group asked him, "Sir, how do you explain the motivating power that sustains you in all these?" He thought for a moment and then said, "I do not know, perhaps I am inspired by the compassionate love of Buddha." And then looking intently on us he asked, don't you think Jesus also teaches us about compassion." I ventured to say, "Yes, but there is a big difference between the response of some of us Christians to our Christ, and your response to your Buddha." I do not see the same intensity of commitment to the passion of Jesus in our churches. That is the crux of the problem. Can compassion, another name for liberative solidarity, unite us?

Notes:

1. Mahatma Gandhi's famous strategy for creating an awareness

of the evil of the colonial rule was the call to boycott foreign made clothes and to wear clothes made from home spun materials.

2. The Wretched of the Earth (Harmandsworth: Penguin Books), 1988, p. 250.]

3. Numerous writings are available from scientists and ecologists. But is important to note that the churches have taken this up as an area of concern. World Council of Churches materials are made available to the churches for study and reflections. See Eco Theology (Ed. David Hullmann), (Geneva:WCC, 1994).

4. CT. Kurien, Global Capitalism and the Indian Economy, Tracts for the Times/6 (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1994), pp 57-58.

5. It is recognized that the tropics hold a rich reserve of the planets biological diversity. Variety of species that exist here are being eliminated by destruction of tropical forests. The UN has expressed concern over this and efforts are underway to preserve them, through the World Wild Life Fund, the World Bank and other agencies. But many Third World leaders argue how these efforts are neglecting the point of view of the South. Bio-diversity, it is pointed out; is destroyed by the pattern of development

adopted by MNCs and others in the North. They further observe that the farmers' wisdom and techniques of preserving the diversity should be recognized and taken seriously. See. Vandana Shiva and others, Bio-diversity - Social Perspectives, World Rainforest Movement, Penang, Malaysia, 1991.

6. Ibid., p. 11

7. C.T. Kurian. op. cit., p. 120.

8. Ibid., p. 123.

9. M.M. Thomas, The Nagas Towards AD. 200 and other Selected Addresses and Writings, (Madras: Centre for Research on New International Economic Order, 1992) p. 27.

10. See the recent publication of WG.C. Eco Theology (Ed. David Hullmann, 1994).

11. C.T. Kurien, op.cit., p. 123.

Also see, Amartya Sen, Beyond Liberalisation: Social Opportunity and Human Capability (New Delhi: Institute Of Social Science, 1994). This eminent economist compares India's policy for liberalisation with that of China and observes that the force of China's market economy rests on solid foundations of social changes that have occurred earlier, and India cannot simply

jump on to that bandwagon without paying attention to the enabling social changes in education, health care and land reforms - that made the market function in the way it has in China (pp. 26-27).

12. M.M. Thomas, op. cit., p. 27

13. K.C. Abraham (Ed.)
Spirituality of the Third World,
New York: Orbis Books, 1994,
p.1.

14. Speaking to a group of German pastors the other day I remarked that all theologies were contextual theologies and Karl Barth was a contextual theologian. Predictably my comment was that Barth had rejected a kind of contextual theology found in the liberal tradition. But they had to agree that Barth was concerned about the word in the European situation obtaining after the World War and the crisis of liberalism. Further it was pointed out that his own experience in his parish made a big difference in the manner in which he theologised. Kosuke Koyamas contribution in developing contextual theology in Asia should be acknowledged.

15. Sally McFague, The Body of God, (Fortress Press, 1993)
Special mention has to be made about Sally McFague's another Models of God (Fortress, 1987).

Also refer Jurgen Moltmann, God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God; (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985). Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins, (New York: Cross Roads) Felix Wilfred, From The Dusty Soil. (University of Madras: Department of Christian Studies, 1995) p.258 *f*.

16. J.R. Chandran (Ed.) Third World Theologies in Dialogue, Bangalore: EATWOT-INDIA, 1991, p. 47

17. Voices from the Third World, Vol. XVI, No. I p.115.

18. S.J. Samartha has expressed this concern in his discussion on pluralism.

“The new global context the Church has to define its identity and role in history in relation to, rather than over against other communities. What, for example, is the relationship between the Buddhist *sangha*, the Christian *ecclesia* and the Muslim *ummah* in the global community? When every religion has within it a dimension of universality it is to be understood as the extension one’s universality overcoming other particularities? In what sense can the community we seek become ‘a community or

communities' that can hold together unity and diversity in creative tension rather than in debilitating conflict?" (Samartha, *One Christ -Many Religions*; Indian edition SATHRI Bangalore, 1993, p. 13).

19. *Voice from the Third World*, Vol. XVI No. 1, p. 115.

20. Preferential option for the poor is the characteristic mode of response in the liberation theology. In some situations it may be misconstrued as patronizing attitude. Liberative solidarity has the advantage of the entering into a different relation with the poor. Their experience and their spirituality hold the key for a future order. To acknowledge our indebtedness to the poor is to seek a new future.

21. Dorothee Solle, On Earth as in Heaven, USA: Westminster, p. 16.

22. See especially Asghar Ali Engineer, Islam and Liberation Theology: Essays on Liberative Elements in Islam, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1990).

Here the influence of liberation theology cannot be ignored. All the religions are challenged to take seriously the emphasis on liberation.

One may quote the stirring words

of Deane William Fern at the close of his essay “Third World Liberation Theology: Challenge to World Religions in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, World Religions and Human Liberation, (New York:Orbis, 1992), p. 19.

“Liberation theology issues a call not only to Christianity but to the other religions of the world as well. Are these religions willing to show ‘a preferential option for the poor’? Can the communities of the poor which are irrupting throughout the Third World be the basis for a new “peoples theology” which seek to liberate humanity from all forms of oppression : poverty, servitude, racism, sexism, and the like? Can justice and spirituality become partners in a world embracing enterprise? Can the struggle for justice and belief in God come to mean one and the same thing? Herein lies the stirring challenge of third World Christian liberation theology.”

23. Theology of Development, (Bangalore NBCLC, 1979), p. 15.

24. KP.Nirmal (*Ed.*)A Reader in Dalit Theology, U.E.L.C.I., Madras, 1990.